

Hitched 371

Chapter 371

Before Elysia could even utter a word, Tarquin continued, his voice thick with emotion.

"You can blame me all you want, lash out at me, yell, or even plunge a knife into my heart if that'll make you feel better. I won't resist. All I want is for you to be happy. But you can't be this cruel to Elijah!

Do you have any idea how much he misses you?! When the wind blows, he thinks of you. When it rains, when thunder roars, when snow falls, or when hailstorms hit, you're the first thing on his mind!

He worries you might forget your umbrella on a rainy day, that thunder might frighten you, or that you might get too cold when it snows or hails!

On countless chilly nights, Elijah stubbornly refuses to go inside and sleep, choosing instead to wait outside, hoping the first thing you'll see when you come back is him!

Do you know how he's been coping since the day he started missing his mommy? Do you understand the agony of yearning for someone day and night?

He's waited and longed for you for so long, only to call you 'mommy' for a couple of days before you decide to leave him again! Elysia, doesn't your heart ache at all?!"

The more Tarquin spoke of Elijah, the more evident his disdain for Elysia became.

He believed Elijah was abandoned by Elysia!

He felt sorry for Elijah!

He knew how much Elijah missed her, just as he did!

The torment of missing someone without the chance to see them, the constant yearning, was just unbearable!

Elysia was stunned into silence.

"You've got it all wrong. Elijah misses his biological mother, not me! At best, I'm just his Blossom!"

Tarquin ground his teeth. "Who's mistaken here, you or me, unwilling to face the truth?!"

Elysia frowned. "Why wouldn't I want to acknowledge it? If Elijah were my own, I'd be over the moon! There's no question of not wanting to acknowledge him."

Tarquin responded bitterly, "I've only ever been with you. Tell me, if Elijah isn't your son, then whose is he?!"

Elysia was taken aback. "What do you mean you've only ever been with me? Don't talk nonsense!"

Tarquin fixed her with a steely look, each word heavy with significance. "In my entire life, there's only been one woman, and that was six years ago in an airport lounge! Elijah and I, we've both been missing her every day!"

Elysia's breath hitched, shock written all over her face.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump!

Her heartbeat thundered in her ears, deafening.

Tarquin wasn't done. "When Elijah suddenly said he wanted you to be his mom, I was puzzled. He loves his mommy so much, how could he just not want her anymore because of you? I didn't think much of it then, but now it all makes sense. Elijah must have realized you're the mother he's been longing for, that's why he asked you to be his mommy!"

Elysia's heart raced, her head shaking in denial.

No, no, no, if Elijah were hers, how could she not know?

She would have known if she'd carried him for nine months!

And if Elijah was sure she was his mother, why wouldn't he tell her?

Just this morning, Elijah was crying because she was leaving. Why didn't he just tell her the truth to make her stay?

If Elijah had told her they were mother and son, she would never leave him!

Liar, liar, he must be lying to keep her from leaving!

Elysia's mind was in turmoil, refusing to accept it.

"I don't care how many women you've been with, but nothing happened between us, and I'm not Elijah's mother. Just go! Don't make me call the police!"

Inside, Elliot was getting anxious. He knew the truth about Elijah could no longer be hidden.

Creak-

The door opened from the inside, and Elliot stepped out.

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"Mom, come here."

Elliot, with a mask on, took Elysia's hand and led her back inside.

Tarquin tried to follow them, but Elliot stopped him, "Wait out here!"

Tarquin was left standing at the door as Elliot brought Elysia into the house.

He guided Elysia to the study, first making her sip some warm tea to calm down, then handed her a pill.

Elysia was confused, "I'm not sick, Elliot. What's this for?"

"Just take it, Mom. We need to talk."

Elliot knew his mom's mental fortitude well; he wouldn't dare to tell her the truth without preparing her first!

Even though puzzled, Elysia trusted her son and swallowed the pill.

"What did you want to talk about?"

It was then Elliot felt brave enough to say,

"Mom, I've found out about the past. I know why you suddenly wanted to leave today, and I also know that the man outside is my dad."

Elysia leapt up, shock written all over her face,

"Who told you that?!"

Elliot gently pulled her back down, fibbing,

"I accidentally overheard you talking to Blossom about the past. That's how I found out."

Elysia panicked,

"Elliot, I'm sorry, I... I lied to you. Your dad... he isn't dead. He's..."

"It's okay, Mom. You did nothing wrong." Elliot cut her off, then added, "He's just biologically related to us. We don't like him. We only love you, Mom." Hearing this seemed to ease Elysia's anxiety. She tentatively asked,

"What else do you know?"

Elliot carefully chose his words,

"I also found out about how six years ago, at the airport, he wronged you by accident, and then you were vilified, before moving to the countryside to live through tough times while pregnant with us."

Mentioning the past choked Elysia up.

Before she could speak, Elliot looked at her tenderly and said,

"Mom, you've worked so hard these years."

Hearing her son acknowledge her hardships broke Elysia's defenses.

All the suffering and hardships seemed worth it at that moment!

What could be more touching for a mother than hearing, "Mom, you've worked hard"?

"Mom didn't have it tough, not at all. If anyone has, it's you... Stuck with such a foolish, incapable mom. You started facing difficulties right from when you were in my womb. You didn't get to taste anything good, which is why you were all so tiny and skinny when you were born..."

Recalling the first time she saw her children, tears began to fall from Elysia's eyes.

They were so tiny, looking malnourished like little refugees, a clear sign of nutritional deficiency.

Being pregnant with triplets meant they were bound to be smaller, but her lack of nutritional intake during pregnancy, coupled with her constant hard work to earn money, resulted in the babies being born small and frail, their skin wrinkly, resembling little old men.

Elliot, ever so understanding, wiped her tears away,

"We weren't suffering. We're happy, Mom. We're lucky to have you as our mom."

Elysia sobbed uncontrollably,

"I'm the lucky one. Thank you for being my sons..."

In that moment, Elliot seemed more the parent, and Elysia, the child.

Elliot's eyes were merely red, but Elysia had already become a mess of tears.

As he gently wiped her tears, he reassured,

"The hard times are over. We'll take good care of you from now on, Mom. You won't have to suffer anymore."

Elysia cried not out of sadness, but from being deeply moved.

After she calmed down a bit, Elliot brought up Elijah,

"I also heard your conversation with Elijah's dad earlier. He wasn't lying. You really are Elijah's biological mother."

Elysia's eyes widened in shock again, "How can that be?!"

"It's true, Mom. You don't believe him, but you believe me, right? I wouldn't lie about something this serious. Elijah has already done a paternity test."

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Elysia stared at her son, his earnest expression leaving no room for doubt that this was no joke. Her breath caught in her throat!

She couldn't believe it. "How is this possible? How could Elijah and I...?"

Elliot tried to soothe her, "Mom, just take a deep breath, alright? For us, this is good news. It means we've got another brother, and you've got another son!"

"I know, I know... I get that it's supposed to be good news, but how could I possibly be Elijah's mother? If I am, why didn't I know about his existence? I mean, he would have been in my womb for over nine months. How could I not know? Could Elijah have made a mistake? Are you sure it's me?" The shock was overwhelming, and Elysia found it hard to accept.

Elliot explained calmly, "Mom, when you were pregnant with us, times were tough, and you didn't go to the hospital for check-ups. Then you passed out during labor. You didn't even know how you managed to give birth to us, let alone how many babies were actually inside. We're triplets, and I suspect that Elijah was taken away right after birth, which is why you didn't know about him."

Elysia was stunned, her heart pounding like a drum!

Elliot's explanation made sense. She had fainted on the street close to her delivery date and woke up in a cabin in the woods, with her children already born. Losing one, even two, without her knowledge seemed plausible now!

Gradually accepting the truth, Elysia panicked, "Elliot, are you sure Elijah is really our blood brother?!"

"Yes! Elijah is our blood brother, and he's your son too! Let me show you something."

Elliot pulled out a photograph to show Elysia. It was the result of a DNA test between Elysia and Elijah, a digital copy. The report showed an astonishing 99.99999% similarity in their DNA, confirming their mother-son relationship!

Elysia's breath hitched, nearly suffocating from excitement!

She tried to speak, but her lips moved without sound, trembling uncontrollably. Elliot held her shaking hand firmly, as if he could read her thoughts, and said exactly what she needed to hear, "Mom, congratulations, you've got another son. Our family has grown stronger, and now we're a happy family of five! And you know what? Elijah loves you, too. He knows you didn't mean to leave him behind, so he doesn't blame you at all. He loves you just as much as me, Evan, and Emmett do!"

Elysia burst into tears, sobbing uncontrollably...

Elijah was her son! Her own flesh and blood!

Her Elijah, who had been out there all these years, longing for her day and night, and she had been clueless!

How could she have been so oblivious?

Elijah resembled Elliot and Evan so closely. She had even suspected it, so why didn't she think of a DNA test?! To be this clueless, she felt like a complete failure!

Thinking about Elijah's past struggles, about the curses and verbal assaults from the Bradfords, Elysia's heart ached!

And to think of the psychological issues Elijah developed from missing her too much, she wanted to slap herself!

She internally scolded that stranger, calling him a deadbeat dad to her children. Now, reflecting on it, what right did she have? Wasn't she just as guilty?!

Elijah had grown so much, and she had not fulfilled any of her responsibilities as a mother!

What kind of formula did Elijah drink as a baby, what were his first words, when did he start crawling, sitting up?

When did he start walking, talking, calling out 'mommy' and 'daddy'?

What was Elijah's favorite food, toy, color, game?

She knew nothing! She wasn't there for any of it!

Not there when Elijah missed her, not there when he was sick, not there when the Bradfords cursed him!

She was not a good mother!

She felt like a complete failure, drowning in her tears...

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Elliot furrowed his brows, standing steadfastly beside Elysia, lending his petite shoulders for his mom to lean on. He consoled Elysia like a little grown-up, "Mom, never doubt yourself. In our hearts, you're the best mom in the world, the most outstanding, the coolest mom ever!"

Elysia pulled Elliot into a tight embrace, her tears flowing freely.

After a while, Elysia dried her tears and got up to look for Elijah.

Elliot asked, "Mom, are we still leaving today?"

"No, we're not leaving! And even if we did, I'd have to take Elijah with us. I can't leave him behind!"

Elliot nodded, then asked, "What about after we find Elijah?"

Elysia choked up, "I need to apologize to Elijah, tell him that mom is back, and he won't have to wish for it anymore. I'll never leave him again! Plus, I'll protect him. I won't let anyone bully or badmouth him again!"

She might have been naive, but she wasn't powerless! All these years in the wilderness, she didn't just delve into psychology; she also dedicated herself to learning herbal medicine! She could heal, she could harm! She knew how to make medicines, she knew how to concoct poisons! She didn't care about the Bradfords' status or who they were; if they dared to hurt her Elijah again, she wouldn't spare a single one of them!

What Elliot really wanted to discuss was the situation with Tarquin, so he asked again, "So, what's the plan for dealing with our stepdad? It seems like he's already set on you. Are you going to keep denying it?"

Mentioning Tarquin made Elysia much more somber. She didn't know what to do... Even if she kept denying it now, when he comes with a DNA test, she'd be speechless. But admitting it means he'd never let her go, let alone let her take Elijah with her! She didn't want to live with him at all. She wanted to be with her kids, to cut ties completely! Right now, she only cared for her children and money, not a man!

Elysia took a deep breath and let it out slowly, "Let's deal with seeing Elijah first, and take it one day at a time. But you three must be careful, don't let him find you. If you get caught again, it'll break my heart."

"Don't worry, mom, we won't let him find out."

"Okay!"

After Elysia left, Elliot frowned slightly. Mom still wanted to keep Tarquin in the dark, not letting him know she was the one he's been searching for. But without a doubt, Tarquin had probably already arranged for a DNA test today, with results due by tomorrow! Mom's verbal defenses would crumble in the face of the DNA report. How could he help mom keep this secret? Elliot was worried; it was a tricky situation.

Elysia didn't see Tarquin outside the door as she left. She wasn't concerned about where he was, picking up her phone to call Blossom. She told Blossom she wasn't leaving today, that she was going to see Elijah, and asked her to look after Elliot, Evan, and Emmett.

Just as she finished, she received a call from Benjamin, "Ms. Thorne, you should come to the hospital quickly, Elijah's condition flared up again!" Elysia's eyes widened, her heart jumping to her throat, "Elijah's in the hospital?!"

"Yes! He's been unconscious, but his emotional turmoil is intense! It's like a stress response; we can't manage it!"

Elysia's heart pounded, "Did you see the new prescription I wrote this morning?"

"New prescription? No, I haven't."

"That was prepared in case of his stress responses! I'm sending you a copy right away. For now, try to get him to swallow one of those brown pills I gave you earlier. If he can't take it, crush it and mix it with water."

"Alright, alright."

Hanging up, Elysia didn't waste a second, hailing a cab to the hospital. Holding back her distress and anxiety, she quickly typed out the prescription and sent it to Benjamin. After a long wait without a reply from Benjamin, and stuck in traffic, Elysia, burning with urgency, made a call to Lowell.

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Thankfully, Lowell picked up quickly.

"Hey, Ms. Thorne, Tarquin and I are at the hospital; Elijah's here too."

"I know, how's Elijah doing right now?"

Lowell sounded tense, "I'm no doctor, and I'm out of my depth here, but I saw Dr. Benjamin and some other doctors surrounding Elijah, giving him medication."

"Are you in his room?"

"No, I'm standing outside."

"Get in there! I'm starting a video call!"

Elysia couldn't wait any longer, knowing how quickly Elijah's condition could turn critical! That was her Elijah, her own son; she couldn't let anything happen to him!

As soon as Elysia dialed the video call, Lowell immediately answered,

"Ms. Thorne, I'm in the room, what do you want to see?"

The camera shook, and Elysia saw Tarquin standing grim-faced in front of the bed, a mix of tension and helplessness in his posture. He was a father, but not a doctor. With his son ill, all he could do was worry.

Elysia didn't want to see him, "Point the camera at Elijah."

Lowell complied, and the camera now showed Elijah on the bed, his complexion ghostly pale. The little guy was convulsing, with beads of sweat on his forehead, and his brows furrowed as if in severe discomfort.

Elysia's tears started flowing uncontrollably... She shivered, forcing herself to calm down! Rudely wiping away the tears that blurred her vision, she choked out,

"Hand your phone to Dr. Benjamin; he knows what I need to see."

"Right away." Lowell quickly handed the phone to Benjamin.

Benjamin, being a doctor, knew where to focus! He showed her Elijah's eyes, then the medical test results.

Elysia pinched the soft flesh of her hand to force herself to calm down, enduring immense grief as she went through Elijah's indicators one by one, then instructed Benjamin,

"Do you have a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner nearby?"

"Yes!"

Whenever Elijah fell ill, the hospital's best doctors would gather, including both conventional and traditional Chinese medicine practitioners!

"Good, keep the camera on Elijah, I'll direct. Have the practitioner start acupuncture on Elijah now! Also, get someone to prepare the new medication I sent you, and have the conventional doctors prepare a minor injection..."

After nearly an hour of remote control, Elijah's condition finally stabilized.

Elysia was drenched in cold sweat, her palms wounded from the pressure. After ending the video call, she leaned back in her seat, gasping for air. The taxi driver reminded her, "Miss, we've arrived at the hospital."

Elysia immediately sat up, paid the fare, and rushed out to see Elijah. As she exited the taxi, the driver couldn't help but say,

"Miss, you are an exceptional doctor, so dedicated to your patient, not resting even when you're not at the hospital."

Elysia replied, "He's not my patient; he's my son. And I'm not a doctor; I'm his mother."

The pride in the first part was matched by the self-doubt in the second. She was Elijah's mother, feeling like she was failing at the job!

Tarquin had once said that Elysia was more tears than tactics, and he was right. From the hospital entrance, she stumbled towards the ward, tears never ceasing. She didn't wail or make much noise, just continuously shed tears. Her tears were like pearls off a string, or like a dam burst, unstoppable and overwhelming!

Images of Elijah kept flashing through her mind... Elijah weak, Elijah pale, Elijah frowning in displeasure, Elijah in the throes of his illness. And Elijah on stormy, thunderous nights, refusing to sleep away from her out of worry. And just this morning, hugging her, crying, begging her not to leave...

Elysia's tears were endless, her heart nearly breaking! She was wracked with guilt and self-blame, berating herself as much as she pitied Elijah! And just then, as if fate was testing her, someone thoughtlessly cursed her Elijah!

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Here's the refined translation, adjusted for cultural and linguistic accuracy:

"Is he dead or what?"

"Even if he's not, he won't last much longer. When Elijah was brought in, he was shaking so badly, he looked like a ghost. Scared the life out of me. I swear, that kid must be cursed or something."

"If that's the case, when he dies, we can't bury him in the family plot. Bad luck for future generations!"

"Family plot? He wishes! That disgrace, born without a mother's love, deserves nothing but to rot in hell!"

A son pays for his father's sins. It's divine retribution. His dad did enough evil; it's only right he suffers for it. Deserves every bit of this agony!

Just wait, he's going to be tormented by his illness until it kills him. Serves him right! Ha! Ah-"

Allegra was in the middle of her tirade against Elijah when suddenly, someone grabbed her hair from behind and yanked her to the ground hard! Shocked to see Elysia as her attacker, Allegra exclaimed, "Are you cra—"

"Smack!"

"How dare-"

"Smack smack smack smack smack!"

Elysia slapped Allegra repeatedly, not giving her a chance to speak further, stopping only when her own hand started to hurt.

Fuming, Elysia glared at Allegra, her eyes bloodshot with rage.

Allegra, clutching her face, was utterly stunned!

So were the other women of the Bradford family!

After a recent family reunion went south thanks to a wolf attack, many Bradfords ended up in the hospital, and now, hearing about Elijah's condition, they came to gloat.

Hoping for Elijah's demise, they whispered curses against him.

But Elysia, overhearing them, couldn't bear it.

Even if she didn't know Elijah was her own son, she'd still have given them a piece of her mind. But knowing the truth? That he was her child? How could she hold back?

She'd just found out today that Elijah was her flesh and blood, and here they were, cursing him. If not them, who else was there to confront? An aunt might endure, an uncle might turn a blind eye, but not Elysia!

"You're insane! Do you even know who she is to dare lay a hand on her? You must have a death wish!"

One of the younger women from the Bradford family snapped at Elysia.

With a cold glare, Elysia made her move first.

She grabbed the woman by the hair and unleashed a fury, yelling,

"I don't care who you all are, and I don't want to know. All I know is you cursed my Elijah, and for that, you all deserve to die! You're the ones who should be dragged through hell, suffering pain and disease!"

The woman was no match for Elysia, screaming for help.

Seeing their comrade in trouble, the rest of the women charged in.

"You wretch! Have you lost your mind? We'll teach you a lesson today!"

But these pampered ladies were no match for a woman hardened by five years in the wilderness.

Soon, the hallway was filled with the screams and curses of women.

"You uncivilized maniac! Ah, ah—"

"How dare you pull my hair, my hair, it hurts, it hurts..."

"Ah ah ah, is my face ruined, am I bleeding? She dared disfigure me! Waaaah..."

When hospital security and the medical staff arrived, they were stunned by the sight.

A group of high society ladies lay on the ground, wailing and screaming, no different from common brawlers.

Elysia, in her simple tracksuit, fists clenched, eyes blazing with fury, warned,

"This is just a warning. Do it again, and I swear, I'll kill you!"

The ladies, cowed by her intensity, didn't dare make a sound until Bradford family bodyguards arrived. Only then did they start howling with outrage.

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"Beat this crazy woman until she's down! If she dies, I'll take the responsibility!"

"I want her face ruined! Rip her hair out and make her bald!"

"She slapped me? Swell her face and cut off her hands!"

The Bradford family's bodyguards moved towards Elysia with menacing intent.

Elysia, her eyes bloodshot and teeth clenched, glared back, needles hidden up her sleeves, ready to be unleashed.

She was like a cornered animal, eyes blazing with fury.

"Come on, then! Come at me! You've pushed me to my breaking point! Curse my child, and you're dead!"

But as her words hung in the air, a shadow loomed over her, quickly engulfing her figure.

Tarquin stepped in, one arm around her shoulder, the other intercepting a bodyguard's punch.

With a crisp snap, he broke the bodyguard's hand!

The man screamed in agony, but realizing it was Tarquin, he clamped his mouth shut, too terrified to utter another peep despite the beads of sweat forming on his forehead.

Seeing Tarquin, the other bodyguards retreated several steps, hiding behind their employers.

The gaggle of high-society ladies clamped their mouths shut at the sight of Tarquin, not daring to breathe too loudly.

Tarquin's eyes, frosty, swept over the crowd before softening as they landed on Elysia.

"Why get your hands dirty? Just tell me who you want to deal with. Doesn't it hurt?"

Seeing Tarquin, Elysia's already high-strung emotions soared even higher.

"Elijah... Elijah..."

"Elijah's fine. His condition's stabilized, he's resting now."

Hearing this, Elysia's tension melted away, and she collapsed like a string cut from a violin.

Tarquin caught her in an instant, his expression cycling through a myriad of emotions, all converging on concern.

"Elysia!"

The Bradford ladies were just as anxious, realizing Tarquin's interest in Elysia. If anything happened to her under their watch, they were doomed.

But, it was them who had been beaten, so why did she faint?

Except for Allegra, the women quickly explained,

"We didn't lay a finger on her, she was the one attacking us."

"Look at my face, it's swollen, and she ripped out a chunk of my hair. I'm practically bald!"

Tarquin ignored their pleas, his attention solely on Elysia.

Benjamin was there too, quickly assessing Elysia before reassuring Tarquin,

"Don't worry, Ms. Thorne just fainted from being overwrought. She'll come around in a bit."

This reassured Tarquin, and the Bradford ladies breathed a sigh of relief.

They then shifted the blame,

"Tarquin, this wasn't our fault. She went berserk and attacked us first."

"Yeah, we just heard Elijah was ill and came to visit, but she jumped us without a word. Look what she did to us!"

"We're all battered, and she doesn't have a scratch."

Tarquin tenderly brushed Elysia's hair behind her ear, ensuring she was truly unharmed, before scooping her up.

His demeanor changed as he faced the women, his gaze turning icy,

"I'm here to back her up, not to play judge. If your feelings are hurt because she fought back, that's on you! Stay out of her way from now on, and keep out of sight! Any complaints, keep them to yourself!"

The women were left speechless...

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Tarquin carried Elysia back to Elijah's hospital suite with utmost care. Elijah's suite was more than just a room; it boasted an adjoining family room, a small kitchen, and a private bathroom, ensuring comfort not just for the patient but for the visitors as well.

With a gentleness that belied his sturdy frame, Tarquin laid Elysia down on the sofa bed in the family room, fluffing up pillows and tucking the duvet around her with meticulous attention. He then summoned the attending nurse to check on Elysia once more, ensuring her comfort and safety above all.

Despite Elysia's protestations about not being a delicate flower, especially when compared to the high society ladies of the Bradford family, her lack of martial prowess was evident. She might have escaped facial injuries, but her body told a different tale with its bruises and contusions. The nurse captured images of the injuries for Tarquin, whose face turned an ashen shade of anger at the sight.

He immediately reached for his phone and dialed Gideon Bradford, rattling off orders with a tone that brooked no argument, "Send them abroad, today. They're never to return. My decision is final."

Gideon, well aware of the situation's gravity, attempted to intercede, "Come now, Tarquin, they're your kin. You share the same Bradford blood. Isn't forgiveness a virtue? Let's not be hasty over an incident that didn't result in any lasting harm."

"Forgiveness is God's domain. My role is far simpler - ensure justice. They can flee or face the consequences. And tomorrow, being the perfect day, will see matters settled, one way or another."

"Giving up on your own flesh and blood over an outsider? Driving them from their home forever?" Gideon's voice was heavy with disappointment and disbelief.

"Who's an outsider, and who's family?" Tarquin's laugh was cold, a sound devoid of any warmth. "Blood ties mean nothing to me. If they did, my parents wouldn't have died far from home, abandoned. It's simple — those who stand by me and Elijah, they're my true family. The rest are just shadows."

This was the ethos Tarquin lived by, a belief etched deep into his very essence from a young age. The concept of blood ties held no allure for him, particularly when those who were supposed to be closest to him had shown their true colors time and again.

Gideon tried to argue, but Tarquin cut him off, "They have one day to make their choice. And let this be clear — I protect my own fiercely. Elysia is under my protection. Cross her, and you cross me."

After ending the call, Tarquin took a moment to calm the storm within him before returning to Elysia's side. He sat there quietly, caressing her hand, his eyes full of concern and affection.

"How could you be so reckless?" he mused to himself, almost tenderly. "You're as light as a feather, yet you throw yourself into the fray!"

He knew she had been upset about something at the hospital, likely coming to find him for support. "Why would you not come to me first?" he questioned, though she couldn't hear him. "Do you not know I'd fight the world for you?"

His thoughts were interrupted when Elysia suddenly opened her eyes, finding Tarquin's hand still lingering near her collar, which he had partially lowered in his concern to assess her injuries.

Their eyes met, shock on one side, mortification on the other.

Elysia's response was swift as she slapped away his hand and sat up, her own hand connecting with his cheek in a resounding slap, "What are you doing?!"

The sound echoed through the room, marking a profound moment of misunderstanding in the stillness that followed.

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Tarquin was at a loss, his feelings a mix of concern and frustration.

"Look, don't freak out. We're in Elijah's hospital room. You passed out from getting all worked up, so I carried you back here. I swear I didn't do anything inappropriate. I just wanted to check your injuries," Tarquin tried to explain, his voice a blend of reassurance and slight impatience.

Elysia, however, wasn't having any of it. She clutched the collar of her hospital gown defensively, eyeing him with a mix of suspicion and downright fear.

Her demeanor was as tense as it had been during the altercation earlier. It was clear she was on edge.

Tarquin couldn't help but feel both heartache and helplessness at her reaction. "I'd never hurt you, you know. You don't have to be on guard around me. How are you feeling? Anything out of sorts? Should I get a doctor to check on you?"

After a brief moment, Elysia's frown deepened as she asked, "Where's Elijah?"

"Outside," Tarquin responded simply.

Without another word, Elysia threw off the covers and rushed out to see Elijah.

Finding Elijah still unconscious, his face pale and his small hand marked by a poorly inserted IV needle, Elysia's heart broke. She trembled as she touched his hand, then his face, her tears flowing freely...

This was her Elijah, her precious son, her most vulnerable child.

"Elijah, I'm so sorry. Mommy's here now, and I'm not going anywhere. Please wake up and see me," she whispered internally, her silent cries filling the room with sorrow.

Her tears pained Tarquin. He wanted to comfort her, to hold her, but he didn't dare. He wanted to offer her a tissue to wipe her tears, but he was too afraid to upset her further. All he could do was awkwardly try to comfort her with words.

"Don't worry. Benjamin said Elijah's condition is stable now. He just needs some rest," he attempted to reassure.

"Seeing you this upset will only make Elijah sad. Please, don't cry," he added, his voice soft.

"Your tears are breaking both Elijah's heart and mine..."

"Get out!" Elysia suddenly snapped.

Tarquin froze, confused.

Her eyes, red from crying, bore into him. "Can you just leave us be for a while? I don't want to hear you. I don't want to see you. I just want some quiet time with Elijah, okay?"

"Okay," Tarquin conceded with a heavy heart. What else could he say or do?

Outside, Keaton, Lowell, and Benjamin were huddled together like the neighborhood gossip group, eagerly exchanging juicy bits about Tarquin's latest saga.

The moment Tarquin stepped out, the trio straightened up like soldiers snapping to attention, their previous banter replaced by an awkward silence. But the change in Tarquin's aura was palpable; the moment he was away from Elysia, his demeanor turned icy, a clear sign he wasn't in the mood for any nonsense.

He glared at them, his gaze demanding an explanation for their whispers.

Benjamin and Lowell remained silent, but Keaton blurted out, "We were just talking about Elysia and Elijah. The way Elysia cares for Elijah, I'd never believe she wasn't his biological mom if you told me otherwise!"

Tarquin's expression softened slightly at that. "Well, she is," he stated firmly.

Despite Elysia's denials and the absence of a new paternity test, Tarquin was convinced in his heart of hearts-she was the one.

Chapter 380

Tarquin stepped out to the end of the hallway for a smoke break, with Keaton tagging along.

As soon as they were outside, Keaton asked, "Did Elysia smack you one?"

Tarquin's face was stone cold, but Keaton couldn't help but laugh, "Man, that slap mark on your face looks painful."

"So what if she hit me? It's none of your business!"

"All right, all right, take pride in your battle scars! I can't compete; no one's hitting me."

After a bit of teasing, Keaton got serious, "So, it's confirmed then? Elysia's really Elijah's mom?"

"Yes!"

"But didn't Benjamin say the DNA test results aren't out yet?"

Tarquin frowned, "My gut's never wrong."

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Keaton sighed, "Well, if you're so sure. Don't you think you owe me one? If I hadn't masterminded dropping your drunk self at Elysia's place, would any of this have happened? Would you have found her? I don't think so!"

Tarquin turned to him, "Guess I owe you big time. How about I treat you to a dinner?"

Keaton squinted, "A dinner? Whose dinner?"

"Yours."

"Damn! If I had the chance to feast at my own dinner, that'd be something!"

Tarquin flicked his cigarette ash, "Feast first, then the deed, and the burial - I'll take care of it all!"

"Heh, you're a real pal, thanks, man."

Tarquin ignored him, and Keaton pursed his lips, "Come on, it was just me playing Cupid with a drunk you and a lady. And here you are, not even mad at Elysia for hitting you!"

"How can you compare? I'm worried about her hand hurting."

"And what if I hit you?"

"I'll break your hand!"

Keaton, "...Alright, alright, you win!"

"You're the winner!"

"No, you're the champion!"

Their banter sounded just like kids, but it was clear Tarquin was in a good mood. And why wouldn't he be? After six years, he had finally found the woman he was looking for. Even if she was cold to him, he was happy.

Keaton suggested, "Since Elijah's okay now, how about we hit the bar tonight?"

"No can do."

"Huh?"

"Got to spend time with the kid's mom."

With that, Tarquin stubbed out his cigarette and headed back to the ward.

Watching his retreating figure, Keaton was speechless. When it came to matters of the heart, Tarquin had his priorities straight!

Keaton flicked his cigarette, thinking about Tarquin's extinguished stub, reflecting, Indeed, when a cold man falls, he falls hard! Men who don't easily

fall in love, once they do, it's all or nothing. They are the most loyal yet the most vulnerable. Tarquin was the embodiment of such a man!

Keaton exhaled deeply, hoping against hope that Tarquin had not made a mistake. His dear friend's world, riddled with scars, deserved some healing.

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Tarquin returned to the ward, hesitant to disturb Elysia and stood outside the window, gazing inside with deep affection. It wasn't until lunchtime that he finally entered, reminding Elysia, "Time to eat."

Elysia, now more composed, glanced up at Tarquin, her brows furrowed in determination. Upon confirming that Elijah was her son, she had made a bold decision. She would take Elijah from Tarquin and leave Jindale City with him!

Though selfish, she was committed to her plan. Emotionally, knowing Elijah was her son, she couldn't bear to abandon him. Logically, with her expertise in child psychology and a profound knowledge of traditional medicine, she believed Elijah would be safest with her.