

Hitched 381

Chapter 381

She knew that trying to snatch Elijah from him was like trying to steal a steak from a lion's mouth-risky business! But she wasn't scared. After all, nobody gets out of this world alive, so why not be bold? Go for it!

Tarquin had no idea what was going through her mind. Seeing her silent, he reminded her again, "Elysia, it's lunchtime."

Elysia sniffled, her thoughts retreating as she looked away from his face, "I'm not hungry. You go ahead."

She didn't want to engage with him, not in the slightest. But she knew that if she wanted to sneak Elijah away, she'd have to deal with him.

Tarquin tried to persuade her, "You have to eat something, at least a little."

"I've got no appetite. I don't want to eat. I'll stay with Elijah; you guys go ahead!"

Tarquin's expression turned complex as he looked at her, "Is it because you're worried about Elijah, or are you mad at me?"

Elysia furrowed her brows and turned to face him, "Why should I be mad at you?"

"...I was wrong about what happened back then. I'm sorry."

"Sorry? Do you think your 'sorry' means anything? Everyone can say 'sorry,' it's worthless. And after doing what you did, saying sorry is pointless." Tarquin's face flushed with embarrassment, "...So, you're finally acknowledging it was you back then?"

Elysia continued to deflect, "I'm just speaking up from a woman's perspective. What's done is done; apologies are useless now. You'd have to feel the same pain she did for it to count as an apology!"

Tarquin frowned deeply, "If I could, I would take on ten times, a hundred times more pain than you, just to make up for the hurt you went through! However you want to hurt me, I'll take it!"

Elysia stressed, "Not me, her!"

Tarquin, puzzled by her stubborn denial, said, "Elysia, is it that hard to admit it was you?"

It wasn't hard, but the consequences were something she couldn't bear. Admitting it would only ensure he'd never let her and Elijah go! And it might even expose the three little ones!

Elysia refused to look at him, adamantly denying, "If it was me, it was me; if it wasn't, it wasn't!"

Tarquin stared at her for a few seconds, his eyebrows knitted, before saying in a deep voice, "I had a paternity test done for you and Elijah. The results will be out tomorrow."

Elysia froze, her heartbeat accelerating. She knew he would do something like this! Her fists clenched involuntarily, teeth gritted, "Then talk to me tomorrow!"

"...Elysia, what are you so afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of anything!"

"If you're not scared, why won't you admit it?!"

Elysia snapped, "What right do you have to say it was me? What proof do you have? Forget it, I don't want to argue. Just leave me alone." "Elysia..."

"Please, just go!"

Tarquin stood rooted to the spot, unmoving, until Elysia said coldly, "I need to review Elijah's medical records. I need a quiet environment. You being here is distracting. Please, leave!"

Tarquin knew she genuinely didn't want to talk or even see him! Though he felt a surge of anger, he restrained himself, "I'll go, but you have to eat." He placed the lunch he'd bought from Jim's Diner next to Elysia, practically dragged her to the bathroom, and made sure she washed her face and hands. He then forced her to eat a little before leaving.

He didn't say much more; he was waiting for the paternity test results to come out tomorrow. He planned to have a serious conversation with her with the report in hand!

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In the sterile whiteness of the hospital room, Elysia sat vigil by Elijah's bedside, her eyes red and swollen from crying. She was desperate to whisk him away before the results of the paternity test came in. She knew that once Tarquin got the confirmation, he'd never let her leave, let alone take Elijah with her. He'd watch her like a hawk, trapping her in a gilded cage.

The thought of living with a man she loathed was unbearable. How could she, unhappy and trapped, ever hope to create a happy environment for her children? A strained marriage could never provide the nurturing ground her children needed to grow up healthy and happy. She firmly believed that a happy single-parent family was far better than a miserable two-parent one.

But how could she possibly escape with Elijah?

Even if she couldn't take Elijah right away, dodging the paternity test would buy her some time.

What could she do?

Her phone rang, piercing the silence of the room. It was Elliot.

Wiping her tears, Elysia glanced around to make sure Tarquin wasn't there before answering, "Hello, Elliot."

"Mommy, have you been crying?" Elliot's sensitivity caught her off guard.

Trying to hide her distress, Elysia lied, "Don't worry, mommy just got emotional seeing Elijah."

She didn't want to burden her children with her troubles. They were too young to understand or help, and it would only worry them.

Elliot frowned slightly, "Is Elijah's daddy making things hard for you?"

"No," she quickly replied.

"Has Elijah woken up?"

"Not yet, but don't worry, his condition is stable now, he's going to be alright."

"Yeah. Mommy, you really don't like Elijah's daddy, do you? You don't want him to recognize you?"

Elysia bit her lip, "I don't like him at all! And I definitely don't want him to recognize me. But you shouldn't worry about adult stuff, mommy will handle it. Just be good and listen to Blossom at home, okay?"

"Okay," Elliot agreed, then added, "Mommy, no matter what happens, we'll always be with you. Whatever you decide to do, we'll understand and support you. Believe me, no one can tear us apart."

Moved to tears by her son's words, Elysia's resolve strengthened. After Elliot comforted her, the call ended, and the plan to protect their family took shape.

Later, Evan, through tears, declared, "We can't wait any longer. We should storm the hospital now, rescue mommy and Elijah, and flee far away! If that jerk Tarquin tries to stop us, I'll take him down myself. No one makes our mommy sad, not even if he's the king of the world!"

Emmett, also crying, agreed, "I'm with Evan. We need to go to mommy now. She's too scared and sad."

Elliot, trying to be the voice of reason, suggested a different approach, "If we're going to fight, we might as well have taken Elijah from the start. We've talked about this; a head-on approach isn't the best for mommy or Elijah."

"I know, but what do we do now? Mommy is so upset, and we have the means to fix this. Why should we let her suffer?" Evan sobbed.

"Temporary pain for long-term happiness," Elliot replied, laying out a plan to intercept the paternity test results, ensuring their mom wouldn't be forced into a life she didn't want.

Their resolve solidified, the siblings prepared to face whatever challenges lay ahead, united in their determination to protect their family's happiness.

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As dusk fell, a chilly breeze began to howl, casting an eerie shadow over the hospital.

Benjamin was holed up in the lab, working his fingers to the bone on a paternity test. Tarquin had dropped off the samples earlier that afternoon, but then Elijah had taken a turn for the worse. Benjamin had been by Elijah's side, fussing over him until he was called away for an emergency surgery. Now, with time ticking away, he was scrambling to get the paternity test done.

If the results weren't ready by tomorrow, Tarquin was going to have a fit.

So, there he was, burning the midnight oil, when suddenly, the lab lights flickered.

Then, they flickered again!

Before Benjamin could figure out what was going on, a gust of cold air swept through the lab, and the lights went out completely, startling him!

A nurse came running, "Dr. Benjamin, there's a patient in Room 8 throwing up non-stop, it's pretty bad. You need to check it out." Benjamin got up in a hurry. "I'll go take a look. Have someone check the lab's electrical system. I've got work to finish here tonight." "Okay."

As Benjamin hurried off to the ward, a shadowy figure slipped into the lab through the window.

Evan whispered, "Bro, I'm in."

Elliot, orchestrating from afar, instructed, "Good. Do exactly as I showed you. There's someone by the lab door, so be careful and keep it down." "Got it."

Meanwhile, in the shadows of the hospital, a sinister figure lurked. He glanced towards Elijah's room and then back at the lab, chuckling to himself, "My boy's doing quite well!"

In her room, Elysia received a message from an unknown sender.

Little Elysia, need a hand with the paternity test?

Elysia frowned. Who are you?

Remember, it's not about who I am, but what I know. And I know your secret. I can help you.

Elysia's heart raced. Could it be him? The mysterious person from the other night, who had also sent her information about the paternity test?

This person knew too much, not just about the past, but her current thoughts as well. His offer of 'help' seemed more like a threat - suggesting she either kill Tarquin or leave him incapacitated.

Elysia's brows knitted together in determination.

I don't need your help. I won't kill or harm anyone!

But think about it, once the paternity test comes out, you'll be nothing but his canary. Even if he tires of you, he'll let you go but keep the kids. If you eliminate him, you'll be free.

Elysia replied, I can handle my own affairs. I will not resort to murder!

Just as she sent the message, Tarquin's voice startled her from behind.

"Who are you texting?"

Elysia quickly hid her phone. "It's none of your business."

If he saw the message now, she'd be exposed even before the paternity test results came out.

Tarquin, suspicious by her guilty demeanor, demanded, "Let me see your phone."

Elysia glared back. "Why should I? It's private!"

"I want to see who you're chatting with, what you're planning."

"It's my personal business!"

He bluntly asked, "Are you plotting to run away?"

Elysia, caught off guard, denied it. "No, I'm not!"

"If that's the case, show me your phone. As long as you're not planning to leave, I won't make things difficult for you."

Elysia's breathing became erratic with nervousness.

"Are you crazy? I said I'm not running away! I just want to be with Elijah."

Tarquin, driven by fear of losing her, became even more suspicious. As he reached for the phone, Elysia instinctively protected it. Just when it seemed she couldn't hold him off any longer, Elijah suddenly woke up.

"Mom... Mommy?!"

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Elysia's breath hitched, and she quickly turned around to see!

There was Elijah, looking at her in astonishment. She pushed Tarquin aside and stumbled over to Elijah.

Shaking all over, breathing heavily, "...Elijah."

Elijah was both shocked and overjoyed,

"Mom? Is it really you, Mom? You didn't leave? Am I dreaming?"

Tears streamed down Elysia's face as she pulled the little guy into a tight hug,

"It's really me! Mom didn't leave! Elijah isn't dreaming! Mom won't go away anymore! I won't leave!"

Elijah's breathing became rapid, "Mom..."

"Yes, sweetie, Mom's here!"

"Mom... Mom..." Elijah buried his head in Elysia's embrace, sobbing uncontrollably.

Like his dad, he usually had a cool demeanor, rarely spoke much, but now he was crying a river.

No matter how tough he seemed usually, in front of Mom, he was always just a little boy.

Elijah cried, Elysia cried, mother and son embraced, weeping together.

It was their first day of reunion, the emotions overwhelming!

Tarquin stood aside, frowning slightly, feeling like an outsider.

Who was the child's parent after all?

Hadn't she been reluctant to acknowledge her son? And now, why the tears?

Just as Tarquin was about to speak, Elijah beat him to it,

"Dad, could you please leave us alone for a bit? I want to talk to Mom, just the two of us."

Seeing his son's pleading eyes, Tarquin couldn't bear to refuse. He gave Elysia a meaningful glance and nodded before leaving.

As soon as Tarquin left, Elysia began to cry with guilt,

"Elijah, I'm so sorry, darling. I didn't know about you... I truly didn't..."

Elijah, sniffing, his little shoulders shaking, felt utterly wronged.

He had never really expected an apology from Mom, but he had missed her terribly.

But he knew Mom hadn't intentionally abandoned him!

"I know... Mom, don't cry. I'm not blaming you. I'm just... just so happy! I finally have a Mom." Finally have a Mom?

For other kids, having a mom was nothing out of the ordinary, but for him, it was a luxury. Poor child...

Elysia was heartbroken,

"It's all my fault. I've been so foolish. I didn't even know you existed. I thought there was only Elliot and Evan, never imagined there could be you.

I haven't been a good mom. All these years, I haven't taken care of Elijah, haven't paid attention to him, let him live alone outside, enduring all hardships. It's all my fault, I'm so sorry, Elijah..."

"Mom... I... I know about what happened between you and Dad back then. I don't blame you at all. You're the best mom in the world!

It's not your fault. It was Dad and the person who separated us!

And... Mom, don't be sad. Dad has been good to me these years. I haven't been too miserable, just missing you a lot.

I... I... I've really missed you so much, Mom... I've missed you terribly..."

Hearing this, Elysia's heart shattered, sobbing uncontrollably,

"If I had known about you earlier, I would have come to find you! I would never have abandoned you, never! My heart aches so much! It's so painful!

I'm so angry with myself! How could I be so foolish, not even knowing how many children I have, not noticing when one is missing! Stupid! So stupid!

I've literally been brought to tears by my own foolishness!"

Elysia hugged Elijah tightly,

"Mom will never leave you again! No matter what happens in the future, Mom will always be with you, Elijah! Not even death will part us!"

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Elijah hurriedly said, "No, no, don't let Mommy die."

"Of course, Mommy won't die, and she won't leave Elijah!"

"Okay... okay..."

The mother and son hugged each other and cried for a long time.

After calming down, Elysia wiped her tears and gently wiped away Elijah's as well, firmly telling him, "From now on, Elijah won't be without a Mommy anymore. I'll always be here with you! We'll never be apart again!"

"Yeah!"

Elysia choked up, "Elijah, knowing I have you made me feel so guilty, but also incredibly happy."

Elijah's cheeks were rosy, "I... I'm so happy too."

Elysia hugged Elijah again, and while Tarquin was away, she cautiously asked, "Elijah, would you like to come with Mommy?"

"Go? Where?"

"Away from Jindale City, anywhere else. We can go with Elliot, Evan, and Emmett."

"What about Daddy?"

"He... he'll stay in Jindale City."

"But if I leave, he'll miss me."

Elysia was silent...

Elijah, holding her hand gently, asked, "Mommy, do you not like Daddy?"

His question was direct, and Elysia didn't hide the truth, "Yes, I don't."

"Because he hurt you back then, do you hate him?"

"I used to, but having you guys made that hatred fade. Now, I just plainly don't like him."

"What about Daddy don't you like?"

"...I don't like his bad temper, and I don't like how he always acts so superior. Basically, Mommy won't be with him."

Elijah murmured, "Daddy likes Mommy. He's been searching for you all these years. He knows he was wrong back then."

Elysia shook her head, "He doesn't even know what I look like, how could he really like me? I think his effort to find me is just to take responsibility for what happened, to ease his own conscience."

Elijah fell silent...

Elysia, not wanting her son to be sad, was about to say something when Elijah suddenly asked, "People say time brings people closer. Can Mommy give Daddy a chance?"

She couldn't!

But facing Elijah's pleading eyes, she couldn't bring herself to say something so harsh.

"Elijah..."

"I know this is a tough ask for Mommy, but... Daddy has taken care of me for so many years. I can't just abandon him. I hope Mommy can give him a chance. If after some time Mommy still doesn't like him, I'll accept it. I'll go with Mommy, and we can still keep in touch with him now and then."

Just knowing her son was willing to go with her made Elysia very happy, but...

"I'm just worried he's obsessed. Once he finds out I'm the one he's been searching for, he won't let me go." "Don't worry about that, Mommy. During the time you're with Daddy, I won't let him find out who you are."

"But, he's already done a paternity test. The results come out tomorrow."

Elijah slightly furrowed his brow, "I'll figure something out."

"How?"

"Don't worry, Mommy. I'll handle it, making sure he won't find out."

"Really?"

"Trust me, Mommy, it'll work! And during this time, I absolutely won't pressure Mommy into suddenly liking Daddy."

Elysia let out a sigh of relief, "Okay! Mommy promises you!"

Elijah's eyes lit up, "Mommy agrees to stay for a while and give Daddy a chance?"

"Yes! Mommy promises Elijah!"

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Elijah hugged Elysia tightly, his excitement palpable. "Thanks, Mommy."

Elysia, with a doting smile, gently ruffled his hair. "Silly boy, you're my little treasure. No need to thank me, okay?"

Just then, Elijah's stomach growled audibly.

Elysia chuckled. "Are you hungry?"

Elijah nodded shyly, "A bit."

"Let's see what we've got in the fridge. I'll whip something up for you."

"Okay."

Living in a high-end apartment, Elijah had everything he needed at his fingertips-a kitchen, a study, a bathroom, and all the essentials for daily life.

As Elysia headed to the kitchen to prepare something for Elijah, he took the opportunity to think about the paternity test.

He checked his smartwatch, noticing several messages and missed calls from Elliot, Evan, and Emmett.

Glancing towards the kitchen, Elijah decided to call Elliot back.

Elliot answered immediately, "Elijah, you're awake? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, don't worry about me. I'm fine now."

"That's a relief. Did you see the messages we sent?"

"I did. I've already talked to Mommy. She's agreed to stay for a while and give things a try with Dad. If it doesn't work out, she'll leave then." "Is Mommy really okay with this?"

"Yeah! I wouldn't force her if she wasn't. She's in a good mood now, actually making me some food."

"That's great to hear. As long as she's happy, we're relieved."

"But Mommy said, during this trial period with Dad, she doesn't want him to know her identity, so we need to sort out the paternity test issue."

"Don't worry about that," Elliot reassured. "Evan and I took care of it last night."

Hearing this, Elijah felt a wave of gratitude, "You guys are amazing. Thank you."

"No need for thanks. We're brothers, and we do this for each other, for Mommy, and for our family."

Feeling incredibly fortunate, Elijah was about to continue the conversation when Tarquin entered the room.

The results of the paternity test were in!

Not wanting to discuss it in front of Elijah, Tarquin asked Elysia to step outside the room.

With a slight frown, he held up four envelopes. "The paternity test results are here."

Elysia's heart skipped a beat!

She glanced nervously back at the room.

Were the results tampered with in time, or was her secret blown?

Being exposed could make escaping later a near-impossible feat.

Clutching her hands tightly, Elysia fought the urge to snatch the envelopes and tear them to shreds, her gaze fixated.

Tarquin, noticing her tension, offered a gentle out, "If you don't want to see them, you don't have to."

Elysia, confused, looked up at him.

It wasn't the reports she feared, but their potential revelations.

The threat of exposure hung over her, threatening to cage her like a canary, strip her of her freedom, and shadow her children's happiness. "Elysia, I'm not trying to pressure you, I..."

"Just open them!" Elysia cut him off, refusing to back down until the very end.

Tarquin, frustrated by her stubbornness yet soft appearance, sighed. What a paradox she was.

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She was clearly so smitten with Elijah, yet she stubbornly refused to admit she was the woman from back then.

By not admitting it, wasn't she essentially denying being Elijah's mother? She knew full well about Elijah's fixation on finding his mother, how desperately he wanted her back. How could she bear to let him keep yearning? What was she thinking?

Tarquin was still in the dark, oblivious to the fact that the mother and son had already recognized each other. He was foolishly harboring doubts. "You even considered Elijah's feelings? He may call you Blossom, but he's never given up hope on his real mom. If he knew you were his birth mother, he'd be over the moon, he'd be..."

"I don't need you meddling in my business with Elijah. Are you going to spill the beans, or not? If not, I'm going back inside!" Elysia interrupted him again, frowning.

Tarquin's brow furrowed; the atmosphere between him and Elysia was nothing like he had imagined over the years. He thought once he found her, she'd be angry, resentful, tearful, blaming him for his past sins! But he never expected her to keep denying it! Even he, the one at fault, was willing to admit it, yet she, the victim, stubbornly refused. Why?

Tarquin couldn't understand it and finally said in a heavy tone, "If this is the only way you'll admit it, then fine, I'll spill it! To stop you from making more excuses, I'll do it right in front of you! Look, I had four paternity tests done, all here. The envelopes are still sealed, so the reports inside are definitely genuine, not forged by me!"

Without giving Elysia a chance to respond, Tarquin tore open one of the envelopes. Elysia's heart leaped! Her breathing became erratic! She watched nervously as he slowly pulled out the report, her heart rising with it!

No, no, no! She prayed silently for a miracle that the report would say she and Elijah weren't related. Elysia's palms were sweaty with anticipation. After reading the report, Tarquin looked up at her with a furrowed brow, paused, and then asked, "Want to see?"

Elysia snatched it from him, glanced at it, and her eyes widened in shock. The test showed a 99.999999% probability of a maternal relationship with Elijah! Her heart pounded fiercely. Had Elijah not had a chance to tamper with the results? It was all out in the open now!

Without saying another word, Tarquin opened another envelope, and unsurprisingly, the result was the same. He handed the second report to Elysia and proceeded with the third, each confirming his belief. He had always known she was the one he was looking for! So when the reports confirmed their maternal relationship, he wasn't surprised at all.

Truth be told, neither was Elysia... She was just scared! She had known all along that she was the one he was searching for, so the outcome of the tests was no mystery to her. But, she had always clung to a sliver of hope! She wished for a miracle, for the tests to be wrong, to remain unrecognized! But hope is just hope, and reality doesn't always follow.

Holding the three opened reports, Elysia's anxiety turned into desolation. Before seeing the results, she was nervous and terrified, clinging to that sliver of hope. Now that she saw them, all hope was gone, and she felt a strange sense of acceptance. She didn't want him to discover the truth, but she was powerless to alter reality. If change was impossible, then acceptance was the only option. It was time to face the music and lay everything out on the table.

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After what felt like an eternity of tension, Elysia finally let her guard down. She took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, casting an indifferent gaze toward Tarquin. That look sent a shiver down his spine, filling him with anxiety and worry. When she was scared or nervous, it merely pained him. But her sudden calmness? It downright terrified him.

Her demeanor screamed a kind of resignation, as if she was ready to face anything... Was she really that averse to confronting the past? Or was it him she didn't want to face?

Tarquin's lips parted, words teetering on the edge of his tongue, but nothing came out. Furrowing his brows, he shifted his gaze away and proceeded to tear open the fourth envelope. He knew the results would likely be the same. Whether he opened it or not didn't matter, but he chose to do it anyway...

Firstly, because since there were four reports, they all deserved to be opened in her presence. Secondly, her indifferent attitude had thrown him off balance, leaving him at a loss for words and unsure how to face her. Opening the reports gave him a moment to gather his thoughts, a way to vent and mask his inner turmoil.

"You better think about what you're going to say next. I said it was you, and you just deny it!" Before Tarquin could finish, he froze!

Not mother and son?!

The fourth report threw a curveball, showing a 0% DNA match between Elysia and Elijah, denying any maternal link! How could this be? It made no sense! This wasn't the result he expected!

Tarquin, with a furrowed brow, reread the report several times to make sure he wasn't mistaken. With a dark expression, he turned towards Benjamin! This report was Benjamin's doing!

"What's going on?!"

Benjamin, trembling, managed, "I-I don't know!" It felt so unfair. Why did everyone else's paternity test confirm the relationship, but his didn't? Oh, the look on Tarquin's face was terrifying!

Tarquin, with a storm brewing on his face, pressed, "Why is it that when others do it, it's one result, but yours is different?"

Benjamin, on the verge of tears, insisted, "I really don't know!"

Sensing the anomaly, Elysia snatched the report from Tarquin's hands! Seeing the "not mother and son" result, her eyes widened in shock! Her eyes rolled in disbelief... Could Elijah have tampered with the results?! Regardless of who was behind it, this outcome was a win for her!

Elysia's spirits, which had hit rock bottom, soared high again! Her previously calmed cells were now buzzing with activity, and her dulled senses sharpened! Her defensive stance reignited with a fiery passion! She thought she'd have to confront him directly, but now, it seemed unnecessary! Holding the report like a trophy, Elysia's attitude did a complete 180. Looking up at Tarquin, she said, "What's there to question? It only proves what I've been saying all along! I told you, I'm not the person you've been looking for!"

Tarquin, with a scowl, questioned, "Then how do you explain the other three reports?"

Elysia's mind was racing, not missing a beat, she retorted, "I don't know, but I do know Dr. Benjamin is top-notch, he wouldn't make a mistake! He's your close friend; he wouldn't tamper with the results. His report is the most credible! As for the others, who knows if they've been tampered with!"

Tarquin turned to Benjamin with a menacing look, causing Benjamin, poor guy, to nearly burst into tears, eager to make his stance clear.

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"Cross my heart and hope to die, I didn't mess with anything! This report is identical to the last one because I did it myself, no second pair of hands involved!"

Elysia backed him up, "I believe in Dr. Benjamin!"

Benjamin was so touched he almost wanted to give Elysia a big hug and cry it out.

Tarquin frowned deeply. Of course, he trusted Benjamin, but he also trusted the other three people!

Yet, his gut told him she was the one. It had to be!

There must be something fishy with this paternity test!

It's possible Benjamin goofed up somewhere in the process!

Tarquin turned to Elysia, "We've got four reports, and three of them point to you and Elijah being related. You still want to argue?"

Elysia stood her ground, "This isn't something you can solve with probability. If there's even one mistake, that means there's a problem!"

Tarquin stared at her for a moment, his expression turning dark, "We're redoing the test. Take new samples."

Pfft- Elysia nearly spat blood in his face!

She had just narrowly dodged a bullet and was quietly celebrating when he decided to twist the knife!

Damn it!

Elysia protested, "Redo what? I don't agree!"

She didn't want to go through the test again, especially if Elijah didn't have a chance to mess things up this time.

She suspected Elijah had sabotaged the test.

Tarquin eyed her, demanding, "Why not? Redoing it means either a strand of your hair or a vial of your blood. No big loss for you. If you're innocent, you should agree without hesitation!"

Elysia retorted, "Why should I? Are we best buddies, that I need to sacrifice my hair or blood to ease your mind?"

To be frank, I've got a bone to pick with you. I'm not a saint who'll cater to your feelings despite my grievances. You're not my anything; I don't have to jump every time you say so!

Let me tell you, our laws require consent for a private paternity test. You conducting one without my consent already breaks the law. I haven't sued you to let you off easy, hoping you'd back off and stop harassing me! And I did it for Elijah's sake, but don't push your luck! Even a cornered rabbit will bite!"

She ranted non-stop, ready to leave after her piece.

Tarquin's lips were pressed tightly together, foregoing pointless chatter, "Do you want to do this the easy way, or should I?" Crap!

Elysia was immensely frustrated, her rant falling on deaf ears.

She snapped, "Do you not understand human language?!"

Tarquin, tired of talking, grabbed her wrist to take a sample.

Elysia resisted fiercely, protecting her head while yelling, "Let go of me, you jerk!"

"Crack-"

Elijah suddenly burst into the room.

He frowned, clearly displeased, "Let go of my mommy!"

Tarquin paused, releasing her, "Elijah, why are you out here?"

Elysia quickly hid behind Elijah, whispering, "Are you cold, Elijah?"

Elijah first glared at Tarquin, then turned to Elysia with a gentle voice, "I'm not cold, mommy. The pot is boiling; you should check on it. I'm hungry." "Oh, right." Elysia hurried back to the kitchen.

Elijah then turned to Benjamin, "Uncle Benjamin, you go ahead too. I want to talk to daddy alone."

"Sure, sure." Benjamin quickly made himself scarce, not wanting to stay a second longer.

In the hallway, only Tarquin and Elijah, father and son, remained.

Elijah frowned at his dad, visibly upset with him.

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Elijah finally persuaded his mom to give him a chance, and what does he do? Embarks on a foolish quest, that's what!

Elijah blurted out, "Dad, do you plan on staying single forever?!"

"...No."

"Well, it sure looks like it! If you keep treating mom like this, you're gonna die alone, man!"

Tarquin just scowled in response.

Elijah, clearly frustrated, continued, "Regardless of whether she's my mom or not, your attitude is all wrong! Have you ever considered, if she really is

my mom, the way you're scaring her off is not going to make her like you, let alone stay with you?! She's already got a beef with you over what happened six years ago, and instead of trying to make it up to her, you're just being all stubborn. What's your plan here, to keep her or scare her away?!"

Tarquin bit his lip, his face darkening as he said, "I tried to talk to her reasonably, but she flatly refuses to admit anything. I had no choice but to bring out the evidence."

"And then what? After you prove she's my mother, what's next?"

"I'll apologize, beg for her forgiveness."

Elijah was dumbfounded. How could someone so smart be so clueless about love?

"Dad, that's like slapping mom and then offering her a candy bar. Do you think mom's a toddler that's easy to coax?"

Tarquin sneered, "With her intelligence, she's barely two and a half."

"You're not even three!" Elijah shot back mercilessly.

Tarquin's awkward attempt at a smile twitched, "..."

Elijah went on, "If the mistake was yours in the first place! If it's you who wants to spend the rest of your life with mom! If you've already decided she's the one! Then you should be lowering your pride! What you should be doing is not proving her identity to her, but figuring out how to win her over, how to make her fall for you!"

Tarquin's expression darkened, "I've already settled it in my heart that it's her, but I need her to admit it first, then we can start to communicate normally."

"In theory, maybe, but in reality, mom's not cooperating with you, she's totally against everything you do. Maybe it's time for a new approach?" Before Tarquin could reply, Elijah, frowning, added, "I'm starting to think, all these years you've been searching for mom, it wasn't really out of love. You just feel guilty!"

Tarquin was taken aback, "It's not..."

"It is! You just want to find her to make up for your past mistakes, to ease your conscience!"

If not, he would have recognized mom long ago! And he wouldn't be so adamant about making mom admit it!

"If you really loved mom, you'd only think about making her happy, you'd try your best to show her your good side, find ways to make her like you. Instead of repeatedly trying to confirm it, especially when she's clearly against it! The same person, if she's mom, dad loves her. If she's not, dad doesn't. Does dad think that's true love? If you truly love someone, no matter how many identities they have, you should love them all the same, right?"

Tarquin, his breathing heavy, looked at his son, speechless. All these years, he had been searching for her, trying so hard to find her. He thought he was in love with her. If not, why would he be so concerned about her well-being? Why would he be so desperate to treat her right? But maybe his son was right. Maybe it was just guilt, wanting to make amends. Amends, not love.

"Dad." Elijah suddenly stepped forward, taking his hand and looking up at him, "You once said, blood isn't that important, what matters is how we treat each other. The Bradfords might share your blood, but you guys don't treat each other well. Mr. Lowell and you aren't related by blood, but you're as close as brothers!"

