

Hitched 421

Chapter 421

Alright, there's been a rather curious development. Ms. Thorne's son publicly claimed that Ms. Slater is expecting. Whether it's true or not, the rumor has already skyrocketed to the top of the trending list. I suspect Ms. Thorne's call about heading to the daycare was sparked by this incident.

Tarquin frowned and refreshed the news feed on his phone, and sure enough, the top stories were all about the rumor. Online, there's no mention of Elysia's son, nor any photos of the child. The buzz is all about Nola being pregnant. Somebody even leaked Nola's hotel check-in records from the past month, alongside some blurry photos and videos. Truth be told, the woman in those images and clips is hardly recognizable, bearing only a slight resemblance to Nola in build.

But for the media, the truth hardly matters. What's paramount is whether the news draws eyeballs, generates clicks, and brings in revenue! Otherwise, a child's comment wouldn't have blown up to this extent! Now, the whole inte is slamming Nola, not just for being unmarried and pregnant, but because she's rumored to have been with three different men at hotels over three days. Public opinion is overwhelmingly negative, branding her shameless.

Seeing the top comments, Tarquin's thoughts immediately turned to Elysia. He had looked into Elysia's past, and six years ago, she was subjected to similar slander.

Driving, Lowell said, "Ms. Slater has been confined by Mr. Slater to reflect on her actions for the past month, not once stepping outside the Slater family estate. Someone's clearly spreading false rumors to slander her. I reckon she'll reach out for your help once she can't quell the rumors herself. But Ms. Slater's behavior today was unusual. I thought her call was about this scandal, but she didn't mention it at all."

To Nola, the bigger issue was that Elysia's son looks exactly like Elijah!

Lost in thought, Tarquin was interrupted by another call, this time from Elysia herself. Hesitating for a moment, he answered, "Hello?"

"Why did you take so long to answer? I'm freaking out here! You need to talk to the community guards; I have an emergency and need to take Elijah out of the neighborhood!"

Without Tarquin's permission, the community's security wouldn't allow Elysia to take Elijah anywhere. Elysia, not wanting to leave Elijah alone at home, had no choice but to wait for Tarquin's response.

Tarquin had planned to go home to be with Elijah, letting her leave on her own, but recalling Nola's words, he changed his mind. "Stay home with Elijah. I'll come to pick you both up."

"Pick us up? Where are we going?"

"Where do you need to go?"

"I'm going to my son's daycare."

"Alright, I'll come with you."

Elysia paused, "Why would you come?!"

Tarquin countered, "Why can't I?"

"It's not that... I... I need to go to the daycare for my son, and you don't need to come along. You should stay home with Elijah. How long until you're home?"

"...Ten minutes."

"Okay, got it."

With that, Elysia hung up. Tarquin listened to the dial tone, his brow furrowing in slight annoyance. He was used to ending calls, not the other way around. Stowing his phone away, he lit a cigarette and took a drag in silence.

Lowell peeked at him through the rearview mirror, aware of the paternity test situation. He too felt regret that Elysia wasn't the person Tarquin had been searching for. But what Tarquin was thinking now, nobody knew. After the results had been revealed, it was clear he was agitated, yet he hadn't opened up to anyone about his feelings. Thus, no one knew what was going through his mind or how he planned to deal with Elysia.

Guess we can't say, and we sure can't ask!

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Ten minutes later, they arrived at the base of their apartment complex.

Tarquin didn't bother going up. Instead, he called Elysia, asking her to bring Elijah down.

The moment Elysia heard he was still planning on heading to the preschool, her heart raced with panic. "What are you doing going there?!" she exclaimed.

"Come down!" Tarquin's voice was firm, leaving no room for argument, and with that, he hung up.

Elysia's breathing quickened. What if he went to the preschool and saw Elliot and Evan?

But she couldn't exactly stop him!

After a moment's thought, she quickly called Blossom. After a brief exchange with her best friend, Elysia felt a little calmer.

Elijah was already in the loop about the preschool incident and why Elysia needed to go there.

However, he hadn't mentioned Nola's involvement to Elysia yet, considering Nola was the one who found him years ago and was tied to past events.

Worried about Elliot's potential schemes, he decided to talk to Elliot first before discussing it with Elysia.

Following Elysia, Elijah went downstairs.

He also secretly messaged Elliot, informing him they were on their way to the preschool, and dad was coming too.

Downstairs, Tarquin was waiting in the car.

Upon seeing Elysia, his brow furrowed, his expression a mix of complexity.

"Ms. Thorne, Elijah," Lowell greeted warmly, opening the car door for them.

Elysia nodded in response, with Elijah hopping in first, followed closely by her.

The three of them sat in the back, Elijah sandwiched in the middle.

Elysia was visibly agitated, worried about her son and somewhat annoyed with Tarquin for insisting on going.

She didn't even glance at Tarquin.

But Tarquin, on the other hand, couldn't stop looking at her.

The tension between them was palpable.

Elijah held Elysia's hand the whole time, trying to offer some comfort.

...

Meanwhile, Nola commanded her driver, "Turn around, to the preschool!"

Her agent was taken aback. "I'm not sure if those reporters have left yet. Why are we going back there?"

"I have to take down Elysia today! I want her completely out of the picture, unable to recover!" Nola seethed.

Her agent was worried. "What exactly are you planning?"

Nola clenched her teeth in anger. "I'm going to take control of her kids to prevent her from making any moves! Today, I must expose those brats in front of Tarquin and reveal Elysia's true face!"

Convinced that Elysia had surgically altered her son to deceive Tarquin, Nola was furious.

Seeing her agent's mixture of fear and disgust, it was clear that without the connection to Tarquin, Nola, lacking in both brains and looks, wouldn't stand a chance in the industry.

The agent cautioned, "If you go through with this, you'll be kidnapping. Madam, maybe you should check the trending news online? The situation has escalated beyond control. Let's not stir up more trouble and handle the rumors online instead."

"Shut up!" Nola snapped ferociously. "Those online rumors are nothing compared to what I'm about to do. I must take down Elysia today!"

Had Aileen heard this, she'd have been furious. Just last night, she had advised Nola to ignore Elysia and focus on Tarquin, advice that was clearly forgotten today.

The agent, realizing the gravity of the situation, couldn't help but interject, "Even if you succeed in taking down Elysia today, how does that benefit you? Will Mr. Bradford suddenly start liking you?"

With a swift slap, Nola silenced her agent. "My relationship with Tarquin is none of your business!"

The agent, now with a burning cheek and watery eyes, was stuck. Placed by Aileen and with her own secrets held by Aileen, she had no choice but to endure in silence.

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"Nola, listen, I'm only saying this for your own good. Let's put Elysia on the back burner for now and focus on cleaning up the mess online. These rumors are getting out of hand. It's high time you call Mr. Bradford and have him sort it out-that's the real priority here."

But Nola wasn't having any of it. "Zip it, will you? Just stop talking!"

The agent felt a sting-not just on his face from the sharp retort, but a headache was brewing too.

"Alright, alright, your wish is my command. We're going after Elysia today. But we can't just go around kidnapping kids, right? That's illegal. We could try something else..."

"Pull over!"

At Nola's command, the driver swiftly parked the car by the curb.

With a fierce push, Nola shoved the agent out of the car. Before the car door was even closed, she had already dialed a number.

"Secure Elliot, Evan, and Emmett Thorne from class 3 at Sunshine Daycare!"

Watching the luxury car speed off, the agent quickly called Aileen.

"Ma'am, you need to rein in Miss Nola before she causes a real catastrophe!"

Meanwhile, everyone seemed to be converging on the daycare.

At the same time, Blossom had already taken the trio out of daycare.

It was something Elliot said that landed Nola on the trending page, making her the target of public backlash. Blossom was worried about Nola seeking revenge on Elliot.

She was also concerned about Elliot and Evan being spotted by Tarquin, so after discussing it with Elysia, they decided to take the kids home to lay low for a while.

However, they hadn't got far from the daycare when Nola's bodyguards intercepted them!

Without a word, one of the bodyguards knocked Blossom unconscious, tossed her into the back seat, and warned the kids, "Keep quiet, or it's lights out for you!"

With that threat hanging over them, he drove off with Blossom's car, his accomplice sitting in the passenger seat.

It took a moment for the reality of their situation to sink in for the boys-they might have been kidnapped.

Emmett was trembling and broke into tears.

Evan was ready to fight, but Elliot stopped him.

After confirming that Blossom was only unconscious, Elliot coolly inquired, "Where are you taking us?"

"Just stay quiet, and you won't get hurt," the bodyguard replied through the rearview mirror.

A threat? Really?

Evan was fuming and about to lash out again when Elliot squeezed his hand to calm him down.

Elliot then asked, "Did Aunt Nola send you for us?"

The bodyguards exchanged a glance, neither confirming nor denying.

One of them dialed Nola, "Miss, we have them."

Whatever Nola's response was, upon hanging up, one bodyguard instructed, "Head to the Marriott Hotel."

Elliot's eyes twinkled with understanding. He flashed a reassuring smile at Evan and Emmett, signaling them to stay calm.

Far from being nervous, he seemed almost delighted.

Evan, confused, called out, "Bro...?"

"Don't worry," Elliot reassured, "They're with Mrs. Slater. She's 'beautiful and kind-hearted.' She won't hurt us. Mrs. Slater wants to see us, and as it happens, I want to meet her too. We should be thanking Mrs. Slater for this opportunity."

The bodyguards paid no mind to a five-year-old's words.

Evan still didn't quite get it, furrowing his brows at Elliot.

Elliot, with a meaningful look, added, "We're going fishing with Mrs. Slater."

He emphasized the word "fishing," hinting at a plan to reel in the mysterious big fish that had always remained hidden behind the scenes.

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Hearing the word "fishing," Evan caught on immediately.

His eyes lit up with anticipation. "Are we going fishing today?"

"Yeah!"

"Will we catch anything?"

Elliot replied confidently, "If all goes according to plan, yes!"

Evan was even more excited. He and Elliot were equally intrigued by the mysterious figure they'd been hearing about and were eager to uncover who this villain might be.

Emmett got the gist too. Though he was tense, he wasn't as scared as before and stopped crying.

The trio sat quietly in the backseat as their bodyguard drove them to the Marriott Hotel.

The Marriott Hotel was owned by the Slater family.

Nola, making a detour, arrived first and immediately had the management shut down the hotel's surveillance.

With the cameras off, she was free to wreak havoc!

She planned to give the kids a good scare first, to vent her frustration. Those rascals had been driving her up the wall!

After letting off steam, she intended to summon Tarquin and Elysia for a confrontation.

"Lock down the top floor for me. No one goes up without my say-so! Today, I'm going to make a big scene," Nola commanded, strutting into the elevator in her high heels and sunglasses.

Aileen had been blowing up her phone, but Nola wasn't picking up or letting anyone disclose her whereabouts. Today, she was listening to no one. She was determined to take down Elysia and her offspring once and for all! When the trio arrived, Nola was waiting in the presidential suite.

Seeing them, she was livid, gritting her teeth, "You little brats! Congratulations, you've fallen right into my hands!" Elliot kept a tight grip on Evan and Emmett, calming Evan's impulsiveness and soothing Emmett's fears.

He ignored Nola and instinctively looked around for cameras.

Nola scoffed, "Don't bother! There are no cameras in here, and I've shut down the entire hotel's surveillance!"

Elliot was surprised, "You shut it down?"

Nola boasted, "This is our family's hotel. I can do whatever I want! And let me tell you, even if I were to kill you three right now, no one would find out!" Elliot narrowed his eyes...

On their way over, he had been considering how to deal with the surveillance for their "fishing" to be successful.

He hadn't expected Nola to have already taken care of it for him.

Well, well, well, good job.

With no cameras to worry about, Elliot relaxed a bit.

He looked at Nola, trying to understand her motive, "What did you bring us here for?"

Nola sneered, "I want to know, did Elysia give you all plastic surgery?!"

Evan's eyes widened in anger, "You're the mean one! Your whole family's mean! Call my mom that again, and see what happens, you witch! Watch your back!"

Evan wasn't as gentlemanly as Elliot. Not only was he skilled in a fight, but his tongue was just as sharp. He never let anyone insult his mom without a comeback!

If it weren't for Elliot's plan, he'd have already retaliated!

Nola slammed her hand on the coffee table, furious, "You dare talk back at the brink of death? Do you think you're invincible? Well, I've got news for you; your little scheme has been exposed. You're done for!"

Elliot squeezed Evan's hand to calm him down and asked Nola, "What scheme?"

"What scheme? Oh, please. Elysia turned you into look-alikes of Elijah, thinking she could pull a fast one? Just wait. I'll get Tarquin and your mommy here, and we'll see who's fooling whom in front of Tarquin!"

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"Prince for a Tramp?"

Elliot squinted his eyes with a smirk dancing at the corners of his mouth. "Your intellect does bring peace to my soul."

Nola howled, "I don't need your approval to know how smart I am. Your doom's at hand with me in the picture!"

Elliot didn't argue, merely asked, "So, when can I expect my folks to show up?"

"Like I'd let them come over now. They have no clue about your whereabouts. Before I blow your cover, we've got some scores to settle!"

"Right," Elliot thought, impressed despite himself at Nola's way of handling things.

Little did Nola know a twist was coming. She turned her wrath towards Evan. "Especially you, you little brat. You broke my hand that night, didn't you? And at the train station, you called me old and ugly, right?"

Evan stood his ground, "That was me! What are you gonna do about it?"

"Still got the nerve, huh? You won't stop until you hit rock bottom! You two, get this brat under control for me! I'll personally make sure to break his limbs and send him as a little gift to Elysia, that wretch!"

Evan was at his breaking point. He looked at Elliot, "Brother?"

Wasn't it time to take action? He was fed up with this vile woman!

Elliot, having figured out Nola's plan, whispered something to Evan. Evan frowned, clearly not pleased.

"Listen to me!" Elliot insisted.

Biting his lip, Evan obeyed and dashed into the restroom, followed by Nola's bodyguard. Elliot watched Nola with narrowed eyes...

Moments later, Nola and her bodyguard were knocked out cold.

Evan was frustrated, "Bro, why did we have to knock them out quietly? That wretched woman got off too easy!"

Elliot explained, "Our focus isn't on Nola today. It's on that mysterious figure lurking around. Knocking them out quietly is part of a bigger plan. You'll have your chance to vent, don't worry. If not, I'll create one for you."

Though disappointed, Evan nodded. "What's next? How do we lure out this mysterious figure?"

Elliot didn't answer immediately. He took Nola's phone and checked her messages with Tarquin. After confirming why Tarquin was heading to the kindergarten, Elliot scoffed and pocketed the phone.

"Daytime operations are risky, might expose our strength. Besides, that mysterious person might not show up during the day. We'll fish them out tonight. For now, let's soothe mom's worries and deal with Tarquin."

"Mom's easy to calm, but what about that loser Tarquin?"

"Simple. Just let him see us. Make sure to wear masks. First, we send Blossom home."

"And the wicked woman?"

"Leave her here. They won't wake up anytime soon. She'll only be useful tonight."

"Got it!"

Evan and Emmett didn't grasp the full scope of Elliot's plan, but they followed his lead without question. The trio sneaked into the underground parking to find Blossom still unconscious in the car.

Elliot called a ride to take them to Future Community.

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On the road, Elliot shot a text to Elijah, "Me, Evan, and Emmett are bringing Blossom home now. We'll be about half an hour. Try to delay Mom so she gets back after us. We'll chat more when we meet."

Elijah, still in the car, received Elliot's message and his eyes gleamed with a hint of mischief before he announced, "I need to use the restroom."

While Elijah took his detour to the restroom, Elysia stepped out of the car to call Blossom. To her surprise, Elliot picked up, "Hey, Mom."

Elysia was taken aback, "Elliot, why are you answering Blossom's phone? Where is she?"

Elliot replied calmly, "Blossom's catching some z's."

Elysia was even more surprised, "Wasn't Blossom supposed to drive you guys home? How did she end up asleep?"

"Blossom's been under the weather for a couple of days, chugging cough syrup like it's going out of style. Probably knocked her out."

Elysia was aware that Blossom had been sick, having called in sick earlier that day before rushing off to school due to an issue with Nola. Generally, cold medicine does tend to make one sleepy.

Elysia didn't think much of it and asked, "Where are you guys now?"

"We're on our way home. Blossom came to pick us up."

"Blossom's asleep, so how are you guys getting back?"

"We called a ride."

"...Oh, well, don't go anywhere once you're home. I'll be back soon, okay?"

Considering Elliot was with a driver, Elysia didn't pry further into Nola's situation, planning to ask once they met in person. After advising Elliot a bit more, she hung up.

Back in the car, Elysia told Lowell, "Skip the daycare. Head straight to Future Community. My best friend already picked up the kids."

"Alright."

Due to Elijah's extended bathroom break, they reached Future Community an hour later. As soon as the car stopped, Elysia told Tarquin, "Wait here; Elijah and I will go up and check."

"I'll come with," Tarquin said, stepping out of the car.

"You can't come!" Elysia blurted out, a bit too vehemently.

Her strong reaction puzzled Tarquin, "Why not?"

Elysia's heart raced, "Because... because..."

Seeing her struggle for an explanation, Tarquin furrowed his brows, his suspicions deepened by Nola's earlier revelations. "Is there a secret upstairs?" he asked.

Elysia's eyes widened, "No!"

"Do you not want me to meet your kids?"

His direct question caught Elysia off guard, her eyes widening even more as she vehemently denied, "Not at all!"

Tarquin looked at her thoughtfully for a few seconds before heading toward the building. Elysia instinctively grabbed him, "I told you, you can't go up!" Tarquin glanced at her hand on his arm, "Give me one reason."

"No reason. You just can't!"

"No reason? Now I'm even more curious."

"You..."

"Mom!"

Before Elysia could continue, she was interrupted by her son's voice. She turned to see the three little ones running happily towards her.

Elysia's heart leaped to her throat in panic! She stood frozen, her soul nearly jumping out of her body!

Thankfully, she soon realized that Elliot and Evan had disguised themselves, looking identical to Emmett, showing no resemblance to Elijah or Tarquin.

Elysia swallowed hard, trying to compose herself, "Why did you guys come down?"

"We came to pick up Mom and Elijah."

Elliot even casually greeted Tarquin and Lowell, "Hey, guys."

Tarquin observed Elliot thoughtfully. Lowell responded with a cheerful, "Hello there."

Elliot then turned to Elijah with a smile, "Elijah, let's go upstairs and play."

Elijah, already clued in on Emmett's talent, wasn't startled at all by the sight of Elliot and Evan's transformation.

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At the same time, he understood why Elliot had messaged him to buy time. It turned out to be so Emmett could do their makeup and fool their dad. Elijah nodded and said to Tarquin, "Dad, why don't you head home first? I'll come back later with Mom."

"I'll make sure Elijah is safe. You can go," said Elysia, quickly taking the four kids and heading home.

Tarquin watched them leave, his stylish brows furrowing slightly.

Lowell whispered, "Those three sons of Ms. Thorne seem pretty normal, don't they? Why did Ms. Slater insist you meet them? And what is Ms. Thorne so afraid of? Why was she so scared to go upstairs?"

Tarquin didn't know what struck him, but his frown deepened...

Upstairs.

As soon as Elysia got home, she hurriedly locked the door from the inside, as if she was scared Tarquin would suddenly barge in.

Elliot tried to comfort her, "Mom, don't worry. If we don't want him to see us, he won't get the chance."

Elysia sighed in relief, "Thank goodness you guys are smart, and thank goodness Emmett's makeup skills are top-notch!"

After saying this, she even went up to Emmett and gave him a big kiss, then asked, "Is Blossom doing okay?"

"Yeah, she's sleeping in her room."

Elysia opened the bedroom door to peek at Blossom, who was indeed asleep on the bed.

Elliot said, "Mom, let's not disturb Blossom's sleep. Let her rest."

Elysia didn't think much of it and closed the door again, quickly pulling Elliot aside to ask, "Elliot, tell me, how did you know Nola was pregnant?" Elliot honestly replied, "I didn't know."

"Huh? But today at daycare, you confidently announced she was pregnant in front of everyone."

"I said it on purpose."

Elysia was shocked, "Why? You don't like her?"

"It's not that I don't like her, but I don't want to explain it to you today. Can I explain it tomorrow?"

Elliot wanted to clear up the past events connected to Nola and the person who took Elijah away before he explained everything to Elysia.

Elysia looked at Elliot with a complicated expression, but Elliot added, "I know it's not good to spread rumors about someone for no reason, but trust me, Mom, I have my reasons."

Of course, Elysia trusted her son! If it were Evan, she might consider it a childish mistake. But Elliot was always thoughtful and wouldn't spread rumors without a reason.

She touched Elliot's cheek, "I know your nature. I'm not blaming you, and I'm willing to give you time to explain. I'm just worried about you... Nola is a big celebrity, and her reputation isn't great. I'm worried she might try to retaliate because of this."

Elliot smiled gently, "Don't worry, Mom. I'm either at school or at home. She won't have a chance to hurt me. She can't just kidnap me in broad daylight, right?"

Evan confidently added, "Mom, don't worry. I've got Elliot's back! I'll make sure he's safe!"

Elijah also said, "Mom, don't worry. If necessary, I can ask Dad to step in. We won't let anything happen to Elliot."

The kids reassured her one by one, and Elysia's worries eased. Still, she reminded Elliot, "Be careful not to be alone too much these days." "Okay, Mom, don't worry. Mom, I'm hungry. Can you make us some pasta? It's been a while since we had your homemade soup pasta."

"Sure!"

After sending Elysia away, Elliot quickly gathered Evan, Emmett, and Elijah back to their room. Now that they had managed to send Tarquin off and reassure Elysia, it was time to focus on the day's main event. To make sure their plan to lure out the mysterious person was foolproof, they needed to prepare in advance. All four of them had roles to play. It was time for them to act together.

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Elliot quickly shared the information they had gathered so far before diving into the plan. "While we're not 100% sure that Nola is connected to our mystery man, we've got to make a move tonight. If they're connected, we'll catch him. If not, we'll regroup and come up with a new strategy."

There were plenty of strategies floating around in Elliot's mind. Just days ago, he'd thought about using Elysia as bait to draw out the mystery man. However, Elliot was hesitant to involve his beloved mom in something so potentially dangerous, especially since their adversary seemed to have nefarious intentions.

Nola's sudden appearance, however, sparked an idea.

"Tonight, we split up. Evan and I will head to the Marriott Hotel to catch our guy. Emmett, you stay home and look after Blossom while covering for us. Elijah, you're on mom duty. We can't let mom or Blossom catch wind of what's going on."

Elijah, visibly worried, chimed in, "Just the two of you against him, are you sure?"

"Absolutely. Evan's got skills, and since our mystery man has interacted with us before without causing harm, I'm confident in our safety. Focus on keeping mom and Blossom in the dark."

"I can do that. Plus, I'll take control of the Marriott's surveillance systems. Once we get a visual on this guy, I'll dig up everything about him and keep you posted."

"Perfect. Let's all stay connected with earpieces tonight."

Emmett added, "Before you head out, grab the aromatherapy candles I've prepared. I've infused them with a sedative mom concocted. It'll paralyze him temporarily without him realizing, thanks to the scent masking the drug. Even the sharpest medic wouldn't detect it."

Elliot nodded in agreement, "Got it. We'll bring them."

"And how do you plan to lure him out?" Elijah inquired.

"Simple," Elliot replied, pulling out Nola's phone. "Nola's our bait."

He drafted a message:

I've uncovered the full story and your identity. Let's make a deal. Contact me by 8 PM tonight, or I'll expose everything about you and the incident from five years ago!

After sending the message from Nola's social media accounts, Evan looked puzzled. "And that's it?"

"That's it."

"Think he'll know what you're talking about?"

Elliot shrugged, "Not sure, but the person who sent Nola for Elijah back then will."

Elijah's excitement was palpable. "Brilliant! Nola's all over the news. He'll think she's desperate and looking for him!"

"Exactly. Tonight, we're bound to uncover something. No effort wasted."

Elijah's admiration for Elliot deepened, astonished by his intellect.

Suddenly, Elliot, struck by a thought, turned to Elijah. "Did Tarquin notice something? He had a strange look when he saw me earlier." "Huh?"

Elliot, with narrowed eyes, murmured, "Downstairs, his gaze... it was odd."

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Elijah pondered, "Do you think Dad recognized us? I doubt it. If Dad had truly recognized us, he'd be over the moon, dragging us straight to the clinic for a DNA test, not just giving us weird looks."

Evan chimed in, "He definitely didn't recognize us. Emmett's makeup skills are top-notch! Dad doesn't have X-ray vision!"

Elliot thought for a few seconds before asking Elijah, "Did he mention anything about a DNA test again?"

"Nope. After he asked me this morning and left, we didn't see each other until just now. He didn't bring up the DNA test, but he was acting a bit off. Mom didn't want him to go to the daycare, but he insisted on going."

Elliot explained, "He wanted to go to the daycare because of Nola. Nola got a glimpse of us and suspected Mom had us undergo plastic surgery, trying to pull a switcheroo. She excitedly contacted him to check us out at the daycare, but... His gaze was indeed a bit strange today when he looked at me, like he knew something. But what could he possibly know?"

Elliot couldn't figure it out after pondering for a while. So, he decided to set that aside for the moment and focus entirely on tonight's plan. The kids discussed some details inside the house until Elysia finished preparing their dinner, then they came out.

Suddenly, Elysia said to Elijah, "Elijah, I won't be coming back with you tonight. Blossom is still not awake and is very sick. I want to stay and take care of her."

Hearing this, Elijah instinctively glanced at Elliot. With Elysia not at home, it would be harder for Elliot and Evan to sneak out.

Before Elijah could respond, Elliot said, "Mom, you should go back. We'll take good care of Blossom."

Suddenly, a scream from Blossom rang out from the room, "Elliot, Evan, and Emmett!"

They rushed into the bedroom, and Elysia quickly asked, "What's wrong, Blossom?"

Blossom looked terrified, "I was attacked. Where are the little ones? Call the police, they..."

"Blossom, did you have a nightmare? We weren't attacked. You just fell asleep on the way back, and we took a rideshare home. See, we're all fine." Blossom blinked, still stunned, "Was it really just a dream?!"

"Yes! We didn't encounter any danger."

It was fortunate that Blossom, who wasn't the sharpest and had been sick these past few days, really believed she had a nightmare. With a sigh of relief, "Alright, as long as we're safe."

Successfully fooling Blossom meant they also fooled Elysia. They managed to get through the ordeal of being attacked today. And with Blossom awake by evening, Elysia decided to leave with Elijah. Before leaving, the kids exchanged a knowing look, waiting for night to fall.

At that moment, Nola had completely taken over the media. The top twenty trending topics were all about her news. As Elliot mentioned, everyone was confused by her updates, unsure of what she was trying to say. Many suspected she was panicking over a 'pregnancy scandal', desperately seeking help to manage the public outcry. Her posts had ignited everyone's curiosity, eagerly awaiting her next reveal.

Meanwhile, Tarquin was still downstairs. He was browsing the news on his phone, smoking a cigarette. Lowell was there too, having spent several hours together. But with Tarquin not suggesting they leave, Lowell didn't dare to bring it up himself. He had a feeling Tarquin was acting out of sorts today...

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After a short while, Elysia and Elijah made their way downstairs. Seeing Lowell, they were taken aback. "What are you guys doing here? When did you arrive?"

Lowell replied, "We came over with you."

Elysia was surprised, "You didn't leave?"

"Nope."

"Why not? Didn't we tell you to head out first?"

Lowell just chuckled, not really sure why himself, and helped open the car door for them to get in.

Elijah got into the car first, followed closely by Elysia. She couldn't help but ask Tarquin, "Why didn't you leave?"

Tarquin didn't respond, causing Elijah to nudge him slightly in dissatisfaction.

Tarquin pressed his lips together, "Was dealing with some work stuff in the car, lost track of time."

"...Oh. Wait, where's my phone? Ah, left it upstairs. Elijah, wait for me, I'll be right back."

Elysia hurriedly opened the car door and rushed back into the building.

Suddenly, Tarquin said, "Check Nola's location."

Elijah's heart skipped a beat, "!"

Noticing his reaction, Tarquin asked, "What's wrong?"

Elijah frowned, "Nothing!"

Before Tarquin could say anything else, Elijah, sounding upset, asked, "Why are you looking for her?"

"Just have a few questions to ask."

"What questions?"

Tarquin didn't directly answer but instead countered, "You don't want me to find her?"

Of course, he didn't. Nola was the one they had intentionally hidden away!

Elijah was visibly nervous, "I don't! You promised to pursue Mom, you should be focusing on her, not paying attention to other women!"

Tarquin glanced at Elijah's clenched fists, calmly explaining, "Her mother hasn't been able to find her since the incident today, she asked for my help."

Elijah was displeased, "The Slaters are influential; can't they find their own daughter without you? Besides, maybe she's hiding on purpose, not wanting to be found. You making a big deal out of it will only annoy people."

Tarquin looked at Elijah, surprised. Normally, Elijah would ignore this kind of situation, especially if it involved Nola, whom he didn't like. Today, however, he had said quite a lot, which was unusual.

After a moment of silence, Tarquin decided, "Then we won't look for her."

Elijah immediately relaxed his clenched fists, a detail Tarquin noted...

After a while, Elysia returned with her phone, and Lowell started the car, leaving the complex behind. On the way home, Elijah and Elysia chatted casually, both behaving normally.

Once home, Elijah, anxious to deal with surveillance footage from the Marriott Hotel, excused himself to rest and retreated to his room. Elysia also went back to Tarquin's bedroom. His bedroom had been taken over by Elysia, and now he was sleeping in the study.

Upon entering the study, Tarquin told Lowell, "Find Nola's location."

"Huh?" Lowell was momentarily confused. "I thought we weren't looking?"

"Do it quietly, without letting Elijah know."

Lowell was puzzled for a few seconds, then asked, "You suspect Elijah's involved in Nola's disappearance?"

Tarquin neither confirmed nor denied, simply stating, "Just check."

Lowell, still a bit bewildered, added, "It can't be that Elijah, to keep you focused on Ms. Thorne and away from Nola causing trouble, dealt with her? But that doesn't make sense. Our Elijah is always so cool and polite, and even though he doesn't like Nola, considering she once saved him, he wouldn't harm her. Plus, Elijah's only five, still a kid. He can't be that scheming."

Tarquin glanced at him, "Too much talk."

Scratching his head, Lowell said, "I'll get on it."

After Lowell left, Tarquin sat at his desk, lost in thought for a moment, then picked up his phone to text Elysia, "Got something to ask you. Should I come to you, or will you come to the study?"

Elysia, who was lying on the bed scrolling through news about Nola, sat up abruptly after reading Tarquin's message.