

Hitched 441

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The man in black smirked at the stunned Tarquin before swiftly disappearing into the hotel lobby. Axel, quick on his feet, was about to give chase when Tarquin abruptly said, "Let him go!"

Axel skidded to a halt and turned back to Tarquin.

Lowell, fidgety and impatient, asked, "Tarquin, are we not going after him?"

Tarquin's brows were furrowed, and his expression dark as he watched the direction the man in black had taken. He then turned and got into the car.

Axel and Lowell followed suit, with one taking the driver's seat and the other the passenger seat.

Unable to contain his curiosity, Lowell bombarded Tarquin with questions, "What's going on, Tarquin? Why aren't we chasing him? You seemed really worked up back there; what did he say to you? And, did you recognize him?"

All Lowell got in response was the crisp sound of a lighter.

Tarquin lit a cigarette, taking a drag with a heavy frown.

Seeing this, Lowell dared not push further.

It took the entirety of the cigarette for Tarquin to steady himself. As he lit another, he finally spoke, "We're playing the long game here."

"The long game?"

"Yeah."

Lowell was confused again, "But who are we trying to catch? And if he's the bait, shouldn't we be tailing him? If we lose track of the bait, how are we supposed to catch anything?"

"I have a plan," was all Tarquin said, then turned to Axel, "Head to Future Community."

Without questioning, Axel started the car and drove towards Future Community.

Unable to hold back, Lowell asked, "What are we doing at Future Community now? Going to see Ms. Thorne's son?"

Tarquin nodded, and Lowell continued, "Ms. Thorne doesn't like it when you're around her son. If you show up this late, won't she be furious?" Tarquin's reply was cold, "Doesn't matter."

Lowell was at a loss. He had no idea what was going on.

Who was that man in black?

What had he said to Tarquin to shock him so much?

Who was Tarquin planning to catch using him?

And after letting him go, why were they now heading to see Elliot and Evan? What was the plan?

Lowell desperately wanted some answers. Could someone please fill him in?

Frustrated, he glanced at Axel, who was driving in silence, seemingly unfazed and uncurious.

How could he remain so calm and collected?

...

At Future Community.

Elliot and Evan had just returned to their bedroom under Emmett's watchful eye when Blossom suddenly showed up.

"What's going on with you two? You're always in the bathroom every time I come over. Got a stomach bug or something?"

Both boys shook their heads.

Blossom squatted down, checking both Elliot and Evan's bellies, "If you're feeling sick, you have to tell Blossom, okay? Don't just bear with it, got it?" "Yeah, yeah," they nodded in unison.

Evan even reached out to touch Blossom's forehead, "Blossom, are you still feverish? Are you feeling alright?"

Blossom smiled, "Blossom's fine, sweetie. A little sickness can't take down Blossom. I'm all good now. Oh, and you guys don't have to wake up early tomorrow. Your mom asked me to call in sick for you. No preschool tomorrow."

Due to concerns for their safety following an incident with Nola, Elysia decided to keep the kids home for a few days.

Hearing they didn't have to go to preschool, the kids were thrilled and nodded eagerly.

After Blossom left, Elliot quickly called for a 'brother meeting.'

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Since Elijah couldn't be there in person, he joined the conversation online.

Elliot started, "Even though it's a bummer we couldn't unmask the mystery guy today, it's not like we came out empty-handed! At least we've confirmed that the dude who took mom to the hospital that day, kidnapped Elijah, and dumped us and mom in the middle of nowhere is our mystery man! And clearly, we're just pawns to him. He won't hurt us for now; his sights are set on Tarquin and the rest."

Elijah, frowning deeply, chimed in, "He must have a beef with dad! Should I... should I give dad a heads-up to watch his back?"

Elliot, knowing Elijah's concern for Tarquin, advised, "That's up to you. If you want to warn him, go ahead, but make sure you're careful with your words. Don't let mom's situation slip."

"Got it."

Elliot then added, "He also dropped a major hint tonight. He wants to pursue mom, said he wants to whisk her away to be his bride..."

Before Elliot could finish, Evan, Emmett, and Elijah cut him off.

The trio was vehement, "In his dreams! If he thinks he can take mom away, he's got another thing coming!"

"I'm not on board either! He's not good enough for mom!"

"Yeah, our mom's a goddess bathing in sunlight, while he's just a creep lurking in the shadows. We can't let mom end up with him!"

Elliot agreed, "I'm against it too. He's not into mom because he likes her. He said he doesn't care about that; as long as his 'darling' approves, it's all good."

The other three in unison asked, "Who's 'darling'?"

Elliot shook his head, "No clue. He gave away too little for us to track down. But it's clear, whoever this 'darling' is, means a lot to him."

Elijah voiced his thoughts, "I think we need to find him ASAP. He's a threat to mom."

Elliot concurred, "Even though he won't hurt mom, he's been harassing her."

Evan frowned, "But he slipped away this time, and we didn't get a good look at him. He probably won't fall for it again. How do we find him?" Elliot, with a thoughtful look, said, "There are still ways to..."

Before Elliot could finish, sudden noises came from outside the room.

The young detectives instantly went on high alert!

Evan, with a puzzled look, tiptoed to the door, flung it open, and flicked on the living room lights.

"Blossom?!"

Blossom, holding a glass of water and looking bewildered, stared back, "What's up, I mean... Evan?"

Evan relaxed, scratching his head, "I heard some noise in the living room, thought we had a burglar."

Blossom reassured, "Our neighborhood's security system is top-notch. No burglars can get in. I just accidentally bumped into a chair. Got thirsty and came out for some water."

"Why didn't you turn on the lights, Blossom?"

"My bedroom light was on; I could see where I was going. But you, why haven't you washed your face? I almost mistook you for Emmett there."

In the afternoon, to fool Tarquin, Emmett had put makeup on Elliot and Evan, which they hadn't removed yet.

Evan replied, "I'll wash it off in a bit."

"Alright, better head to bed soon. I'm off to rest too."

"Goodnight, Blossom."

Returning to his room, Evan whispered, "It was Blossom."

Elliot nodded, "It's getting late. Let's all get some rest. As for the mystery man, I'll think of another way to track him down."

As soon as Elliot finished speaking, Elijah suddenly exclaimed, "Found him!"

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Elliot and his gang were taken aback, "Found him?"

"It's Dad, of all people!"

"Huh?"

Elijah said, "I just discovered that the folks trying to break into the hotel's work today were two groups: a mystery guy and Dad!"

Elliot frowned, "So, Tarquin knew about our plan tonight."

Elijah speculated, "He must've seen the post you made using Nola's account and put two and two together."

Elliot muttered, "No wonder I felt something off about him today."

Evan had a sudden realization, "I knew someone was tailing us tonight! Right when we left the complex and hopped into the cab, I sensed something fishy. It must've been him watching us, and I just overlooked it!"

Elijah added, "Dad tried to hack into the hotel system but didn't manage to find out what you guys discussed with the mystery person. But he's definitely onto us for using Nola as bait to fish out the mystery guy! And he's surely caught on to your skills! No surprises there, Dad's gonna want a chat."

Just as Elijah finished, Elliot's smartwatch pinged with a message.

Elliot glanced at the screen and murmured, "He's made his move."

The other three were tense, "What do we do now?"

Elliot took a deep breath, "Well, since he's onto us, there's no point in playing dumb. Let's just lay it all out. It's also high time he knew, even if he's no fan of Mom, he can't mess with her. Our mom's got backup!"

"Right!"

Elliot texted back Tarquin, setting up a meet downstairs.

Given Evan's disdain for Tarquin, to prevent any rash actions upon seeing him, Elliot decided to meet Tarquin alone.

Elliot was wired, allowing the other three to eavesdrop on the conversation.

In the car downstairs, it was just father and son.

Elliot faced Tarquin, fearless.

With his makeup still on, he wasn't worried about Tarquin spotting anything amiss.

Tarquin regarded the young lad before him, his expression complex.

Despite being accustomed to oddities, the feats of this little guy still left him astounded.

After a brief pause, Tarquin finally asked, "Do you know why I'm here to see you this late?"

"I can guess."

"Alright, then let me ask you. You went through all the trouble to meet this man in black. Do you know who he is now?" "Not yet."

"And do you know what the man in black has to do with Nola?"

"Well, five years ago, it was this man in black who contacted Nola, told her where to find Elijah, and then had her bring Elijah to you." "The man in black said so?"

"Yeah."

Tarquin furrowed his brows, "And how did you know he had a connection with Nola before meeting him?"

Elliot, cool and collected, responded smoothly, "Elijah told us Nola saved him back then. We wanted to help Elijah find his mom, so we started with Nola. We eavesdropped on her and learned that a stranger had contacted her, leading her to accidentally save Elijah. Just today, Nola came to visit us at the daycare, and we used that opportunity to lure out the mystery man, hoping to get info on Elijah's mom."

Elliot's explanation was seamless, leaving Tarquin without a lead. He pressed on, "Did you manage to find out anything about Elijah's mom?" Elliot shook his head straightforwardly, "No."

"No? What did you guys talk about in that room for so long?"

Elliot shared, "He was surprised to meet us instead of Nola. He was curious about our identities, kept saying he wanted to pursue our mom."

Tarquin's brows knitted further, "He never mentioned Elijah's mother?"

Elliot countered, "What exactly do you want to know?"

"Everything! I want to know everything about Elijah's mother."

A flicker of something passed through Elliot's eyes as he selectively shared, "He knew about the incident at the airport six years ago. He knew Elijah's mother was carrying your child. So, after Elijah was born, he took him away. Then, he contacted Nola and through her, successfully delivered Elijah into your hands."

Tarquin's brow furrowed deeply, "Why would he do that?"

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"I have no clue."

"And what about Elijah's mom? After he took Elijah, where did she go?"

"I don't know that either."

"Is it that you don't know, or he didn't tell?"

"He only cared about Elijah, never bothered about Elijah's mom."

"So, you're saying after he took Elijah, he didn't harm Elijah's mom?"

"Yep."

Tarquin let out a slow breath, his concern for the man in black targeting the mother was palpable. The fact that the man in black didn't go after Elijah's mom meant there was a good chance she was still alive.

Elliot squinted his eyes, noticing how much Tarquin seemed to care about his mom, and couldn't help but say, "Elijah said you don't really care for his mom. You're just feeling guilty and trying to make it up to her."

Tarquin snapped out of his thoughts to look at the little guy, silent for a moment before suddenly asking, "Do you guys want me to be your dad?" Elliot, with an air of aloofness, responded, "Never thought about it. We've been with mom from the start. We only have room for her in our hearts, not a dad. A dad is, well, optional to us."

"Did your mom ever talk about me?"

"She did!"

"Did she ever say anything about liking me?"

Elliot pursed his lips, clearly disapproving, "I can tell you for sure, our mom doesn't like you. Her relationship with Elijah has nothing to do with you. You always wonder if our mom got close to Elijah because of you. And the whole 'Elijah wanting you to pursue our mom' thing, my mom doesn't even know about it. If it weren't for Elijah asking, my mom wouldn't even consider giving you a chance. Honestly, my mom doesn't think highly of you, and neither do we. In our eyes, you're not good enough for our mom."

Tarquin was left speechless... Being bluntly criticized by a five-year-old was indeed a bit embarrassing.

Tarquin didn't want to dwell on the awkward 'relationship' issue with Elysia anymore, so he changed the subject, "Why did Nola react so strongly when she saw you guys?"

Elliot shook his head, "I don't know, she probably realized we're smarter than average kids and got a bit shocked." Ordinary people would indeed be shocked to discover their uniqueness! Out of a million kids, you wouldn't be able to find another like them.

Tarquin then asked, "When you first came to Jindale City, and I detained your mom, were you the ones who rescued her?"

"Yes."

"And the reason I couldn't find any info on her, did you guys protect her identity and whereabouts?"

"Yes."

"Breaking into the Bradford Group's work, sending a warning about bullying the girl, was that you?"

"Yes."

"And the sudden peace talk, investing 5 billion in the Bradford Group, was that also you?"

"Yes!"

Tarquin was dumbfounded... Elliot explained, "You kept pestering our mom. We didn't want you to keep looking into her and bothering her, so we decided to pay off the disaster."

Tarquin looked at Elliot, both shocked and impressed. Elysia's sons were as clever as Elysia was... not. Elysia was kind of clueless, but her sons were each sharp as a tack! They must have inherited their father's good genes!

Tarquin suddenly envied that man, to have such genius sons, what luck and pride!

"Do you guys know much about your dad?"

Elliot squinted, eyeing him, "...Not much."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"...Probably in hell, if I had to guess."

"Huh? Dead? That's a pity!" Tarquin said with genuine regret. If he were alive, just by having these genius sons, he'd be the proudest and most formidable man in the world! But alas, fate was cruel, and he died! Such glory and wealth, and he missed it. What a tragic man!

Tarquin pondered for a moment, then looked at Elliot with a spark in his eyes. "Elliot, let me tell you something..."

After Tarquin spilled the beans, the usually calm Elliot got furious! The little guy, with his eyes wide open, both shocked and angry, his face turning red as he pointed accusingly, "You're an adult, and you're using my mom to threaten a five-year-old kid. Don't you have any shame?!"

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Tarquin squinted his eyes, an air of indifference about him, "It's just fair trade, that's all."

Elliot glared back, "Fair? How is this fair?!"

Tarquin remained unflustered, "You can always choose not to agree. The choice is yours."

At this, Elliot was nearly apoplectic with rage, his cheeks puffing out like a pufferfish, "I can choose not to agree? Can I? Really? Do I even have a choice?!"

The audacity of his stepdad, proposing a bargain, and threatening to spill their secrets to Mom if he didn't agree! It was like grabbing him by the throat!

He couldn't even bear to think what their sweet, clueless Mom would do if she found out. Would she drop dead from the shock?

Telling Mom he was a financial wizard with billions in cash stashed in the bank? Or that Evan was not only a fighter but also a whiz with explosives and high-tech weaponry? And to top it off, reveal that they had exposed Nola online and even 'kidnapped' her? He shuddered at the thought!

Just imagining Mom's reaction to all this made his skin crawl! Others might not get it. Why couldn't they just be proud of their skills and tell their Mom? Only they knew the reason!

Their Mom was a scaredy-cat, the type to be haunted by a ghost movie for months, and so easily worried that a little trouble could keep her up all night. The first time he made a significant amount of money, a mere hundred thousand, she had fainted from shock! Afterwards, she was anxious for so long, convinced it was some new kidnapping scheme by traffickers, fearing he'd been targeted!

They had to go to great lengths to ease her worries. So, they had kept their abilities a secret all these years, preferring her to live a happy, worry-free life rather than boast about their feats.

Tarquin watched Elliot, his gaze softening. The boy's current demeanor was more fitting for a child his age. When not angry, the kid appeared too calm, too mature.

Seeing him with his eyes brimming with tears and glaring in anger, Tarquin raised an eyebrow and teased, "Crying?"

Elliot roared, "I'm not crying!"

"Angry?"

"No, not angry!"

He was indeed furious, furious that his vulnerabilities had been exposed! Angry at himself for not foreseeing this trap set by his stepdad!

Yet, as the little guy was on the brink of tears, Tarquin, this 'heartless' stepdad, suddenly felt a wave of happiness. He found himself quite amused. His smile reached his eyes as he chuckled.

Elliot got even more worked up, sounding like a little tiger with his high-pitched voice, "What are you laughing at?!"

Tarquin, still smiling, said, "You get angry just like your mom, Elysia. When she gets mad, she's like a little tiger too."

"You, you dare call my mom a tiger! She's not! My mom is kind and gentle, not a..."

"Pig."

Tarquin finished Elliot's sentence for him.

Elliot's lips pursed as he stared in stunned silence, his anger reaching a new peak, then miraculously calming down. His expression shifted from surprise to anger, to calm, and finally to scorn.

He actually called his mom a pig.

Alright then, with Tarquin's emotional intelligence, he'd either never realize Mom was the one he'd been searching for or if he did, he'd be heading straight to a funeral pyre trying to win her back!

Now he mocks her intelligence, calling her a pig. Wait until he realizes she's the one he's been longing for. Even if he turned into a pig himself, she wouldn't give him the time of day!

So, no big deal, not angry. Sure, he's got the upper hand now, but let's see how long that lasts.

"Phew..." Elliot exhaled slowly, finally regaining his composure.

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Back to his usual self, Elliot squinted his eyes, giving Tarquin a meaningful look.

Tarquin was puzzled, wondering how the kid had suddenly regained his composure. Just a moment ago, he was clearly upset, so why had he not only stopped being angry but also smoothed down his ruffled feathers? Had the anger made him silly?

Tarquin reached out and ruffled Elliot's hair. Elliot, clearly disgusted, protested, "Don't touch me!"

Tarquin wasn't offended, just curious, "Why are you so scared of your mom finding out about your talents? For any parent, that would be a huge source of pride. And Elysia, with her love for all things shiny, if she knew her son was a little tycoon, she'd be over the moon."

No surprises there, just shocks! Elliot replied coldly, "This is between me and my mom, it's none of your business! She loves us, even if we're fools, we're still the apple of her eye! I agreed to share resources with you. Once I find out anything about that mysterious person's whereabouts and identity, you'll be the first to know. But on one condition - you can't upset my mom anymore! And you can't spill our secrets to her! Especially not about our deal with you!"

Tarquin nodded, "Deal!"

Elliot gave him another hard look, pushed the car door open, and left. Watching his small figure through the car window, Tarquin felt a pang of loss... If Elysia's kids were his own, how lucky he and Elijah would be! He'd have a bunch of genius sons, and Elijah would have some formidable brothers! Alas... They were Elysia's and some other man's children, having nothing to do with him.

Tarquin couldn't help but feel a wave of sympathy for Elliot's late father. After letting his thoughts wander for a while, he lit a cigarette, pushing the thought of Elliot's unfortunate dad out of his mind, then his thoughts drifted to the mysterious person... His expression hardened, his brows furrowed, a frosty look on his face.

Back at home, Elliot was met with his brothers' outrage.

"That jerk dared to use our mom as leverage, I'm so mad!" Evan exclaimed.

Emmett added, angrily, "Bullying kids, how shameless!"

Elijah had been silently fuming, unable to believe how thick-skinned their dad could be! Threatening a five-year-old, how disgraceful! Elliot, now calm, reassured them, "It's okay. He just wants information on the mysterious person. We were going to investigate anyway."

Evan muttered, "Such a loser and clueless. Can't do his own digging, has to rely on others!"

Elliot felt a bitter twist in his heart but kept silent. Was he really being manipulated so easily? He was far from clueless. With just a few words, he could get what he wanted without lifting a finger, reaping the benefits. Those who can make others work for them are hardly fools.

"By the way, Elijah, he only knows about my wealth and Evan's skills. He doesn't know much about Emmett, nor does he know you're a top-notch hacker. If you want to keep it that way, you can," Elliot reminded Elijah.

Elijah responded, "If he doesn't know, I won't tell him. My mentor, just like the sage from the mountains who helped you, prefers to remain a mystery. If the need arises, I'll tell Dad then."

The mention of Elijah's mentor made Elliot offer, "Next time you talk to him, ask if he needs help finding that girl. If necessary, I can lend a hand too. The more, the merrier."

Despite Tarquin's kindness over the years, Elijah's world remained fragmented. Grateful for someone who genuinely cared for his brother, Elliot was ready to assist, considering it a way to repay Elijah's mentor for his guidance.

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"Alright, next time the coach logs on, I'll ask him," I said, trying to sound casual about it.

The conversation drifted among us brothers for a while longer before we called it a night. After a marathon gaming session, it was definitely time to catch some sleep.

But Elijah couldn't sleep.

He took off his headset and looked out the window at the dimly lit sky, his brow furrowed with worry.

He was concerned about his dad.

Even though he wasn't sure of the mysterious person's ultimate goal, it was clear his dad was on the hit list!

The enemy was in the shadows, and his dad was in the open. Elijah was worried.

Half an hour later, Tarquin came back.

He figured Elijah hadn't slept yet and gently pushed the door to enter the room.

Elijah was still sitting by the window. Seeing Tarquin, he frowned even more.

Tarquin walked over to him, affectionately ruffled his hair, and then sat down to ask, "Can't sleep?"

Elijah looked at him with concern.

Tarquin said, "I know you heard me talking to Elliot while you were wearing your headset, didn't you?"

"...Yeah."

"Worried about dad?"

Elijah bit his lip, "Someone wants to kill you."

Tarquin smiled softly, "Over the years, there have been plenty who've wanted to take dad down, but here I am, alive and kicking. Don't worry, I can handle it."

"But you don't even know who it is. How can you handle it?"

"Just because we don't know now doesn't mean we won't find out. Dad's no pushover. No one can just come and squeeze him."

As he spoke, Tarquin gently stroked his son's cheek, "Elijah, you know I always keep my word. I promise you, as long as you're okay, dad will be too. I'll always be here for you."

His Elijah needed him, so no one was going to hurt him!

He was going to stay healthy and be there for his son, always.

His life, since Elijah came into it, wasn't just his own anymore!

He was Elijah's father, his warrior, his forever rock. So, he had to do his best to protect himself!

Elijah and Tarquin locked eyes, and seeing his father's determination, Elijah finally let out a breath. His tense nerves began to relax.

"A real man keeps his promises. You need to stay safe. I need you."

Tarquin was moved, "You too need to stay safe. Dad needs you too."

They say kids need their parents, but parents need their kids just as much, if not more.

Who needs whom more is a tough call!

After a sentimental moment, Tarquin chuckled and pinched Elijah's cheek, "I'm jealous you've made such great friends so young. When I was your age, I only had Mr. Lowell and Uncle Axel.

Mr. Lowell was a chatterbox, a scaredy-cat who cried at the drop of a hat. Far from taking care of me, I had to keep him cheered up.

And Uncle Axel? Ice-cold. He could go three days without saying a word if no one talked to him.

I worried he'd lose his ability to speak and turn mute, so I had to go out of my way to find things to talk about.

Having those two around... heh, was a blessing indeed."

Tarquin teased himself but was clearly in a good mood.

This joy seemed to double when he thought of Elliot. Chatting with Elliot always lifted his spirits.

Now, looking at Elijah, his happiness was through the roof.

Elijah muttered, "They're not just my friends. They're my brothers! Blood brothers!"

"Right! Brothers for life! You need to be honest and take care of each other."

Elijah pouted and rolled his eyes at Tarquin.

He had just said they were blood brothers, and yet his dad had missed the point!

Silly dad. So clueless!

Thinking about his dad 'pressuring' Elliot, Elijah added, "I don't mind you using Elliot and Evan to find that mystery guy, but you better treat their mom right! And don't forget, you promised to try and win her over."

At the mention of Elysia, Tarquin's expression turned somber, "Elijah, I've confirmed it now. Elysia is not your biological mother."

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Elijah was clearly exasperated and rolled his eyes. "Who wants such a clueless dad anyway? Take him away!"

With his usual seriousness, Tarquin replied, "You asked Elliot and Evan to help you find your mom. You must really miss her. But what if, after Elysia and I get together, she suddenly comes back?"

Elijah shot back, "And what if you find my mom, and she's already with someone else? What then?"

Tarquin frowned, "Then I guess I'd have to make it up to her in some other way."

Elijah retorted, "Likewise, if she comes back after you've already gotten together with my mom, then make it up to her in some other way. Stop using her as an excuse. Your relationship with Elysia has nothing to do with anyone else. It's between the two of you!"

Frustration evident, Elijah pressed on, "Don't you even want to try? I'm not forcing you, I just want you to give it a shot."

Mr. Bradford internally resisted the idea but outwardly reassured, "No, I've made a promise to Elijah, and I won't go back on my word."

Elijah, pleading earnestly, said, "Dad, what Elliot told you is true. Mom's not into you, but I talked her into giving you a chance. It wasn't easy to get this opportunity. Can't you step up a bit?"

Tarquin was speechless.

With a stern look, Elijah assured him, "You'll thank me for this in the future. Believe me."

Tarquin squinted, "What do you mean?"

Elijah didn't elaborate. Instead, he thought of Nola, "Now that Dad knows the truth about how Nola saved me back then, it's best to keep your distance. Even if it hadn't been her, someone else would have brought me to you. She's not really my savior in the true sense."

Tarquin's brow furrowed at the mention. Knowing the truth hadn't made him think any less of Nola; his focus was on the mysterious figure who had orchestrated everything from the start, five years ago.

"Dad, you should focus all your energy on Mom. If you win her over, both you and I will be happy. Our happiness is in your hands!"

Tarquin was irked yet couldn't voice it out, merely nodding, "I understand."

Suddenly, a thud from outside interrupted their conversation, followed by Elysia's sharp hiss of pain.

Elijah, concerned, rushed out to check, with Tarquin following closely.

At the bathroom door, Elysia, dressed in a modest cotton nightgown with her hair down, was rubbing her forehead, hissing in pain. Elijah fretted, "What happened, Mom?"

Elysia, dazed, responded, "No, did I wake you? It's just a headache. I turned too quickly and bumped into the doorframe."

Tarquin, hands in pockets and rolling his eyes, thought, "How can someone still walk into doorframes!"

Elijah, worried for her, called out, "Dad, Mom hit her head!"

Tarquin, sarcastically, offered, "Great, she might as well knock herself out. I'll cover the funeral expenses."

Elysia, through gritted teeth, retorted, "Thanks, but no thanks! I plan on living a long life!"

She turned to re-enter the bathroom and – bang – hit the frame again! Despite the pain, under Tarquin's disdainful gaze, she stubbornly claimed, "It doesn't hurt! Not at all!"

With a dark face, she retreated into the bathroom.

Elijah and Tarquin exchanged looks, both puzzled not just about Elijah's affection for her but also what that mysterious figure saw in her. Tarquin thought, if it weren't for Elijah, he'd gladly hand her over himself.

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"Daddy, Mommy's hurt. How can you not care about her?!" Elijah frowned, his voice tinged with accusation.

Tarquin turned to look at his son, a thought crossing his mind: Ignorance is bliss.

This was the most direct impression he had of Elysia. Clumsy and naive, yet she had given birth to sons who were nothing short of geniuses, each one more devoted to her than the last. Even Elijah treated her like she was his entire world, cherishing her beyond measure. It was like a fool being adored by a group of giants; the fool, blissfully unaware, yet somehow blessed.

Not wanting his son to be upset, Tarquin playfully ruffled his hair, trying to soothe him, "I was just teasing her. When she comes out, I'll check if it's bad, and if it is, I'll put some ointment on it."

That seemed to satisfy Elijah, who seriously reiterated, "Daddy, you need to step up your game and win Mommy over."

Tarquin couldn't help but inwardly sigh; winning her over was off the table. He swiftly changed the subject, "Elijah, have Elliot and Evan ever mentioned their daddy to you?"

"What about it?"

"They're both so smart, must have gotten it from their dad. I'm curious, what kind of man is he?"

Elijah scowled, "Smart when he needs to be, but oh, so foolish at other times!"

If he weren't, he'd have realized Mommy was the one he's been looking for all along!

Smart yet foolish?

Tarquin, intrigued, was about to ask more when Elijah cut him off, "Don't ask me, I don't want to talk about it."

As soon as Elijah finished speaking, Elysia emerged from the bathroom. The little guy immediately ran over to her with concern. Tarquin, curiosity yet unsatisfied, followed and asked half-heartedly, "Does it still hurt? Need to see a doctor?"

Elysia, seeing right through him, retorted, "No need!"

Then, squatting down to Elijah's level, she asked gently, "Those dark circles are quite something. Did you sleep poorly last night?"

Elijah fibbed, "Woke up a few times, but don't worry, they weren't nightmares."

Elysia, heart aching, tenderly caressed his face, "It's still early; go rest a bit more. I'll call you when breakfast is ready."

"Okay, Daddy can help you make breakfast."

The little guy shot Tarquin a look, who then 'hmmmed' in agreement for show.

After Elijah returned to his room, Elysia quickly said, "You should go sleep too. Don't need any help!"

She wasn't keen on being alone with him. But Tarquin didn't head back to his room. Instead, he followed her to the kitchen, not to assist but to lean against the doorway, handing Elysia a bank card, "Here."

Elysia, just putting on an apron, turned with a look of surprise, "What for?"

"There's a million in there, for you."

Feeling somewhat guilty for using Elliot and Evan to track down some shady figures, Tarquin decided to compensate Elysia with some money for the trouble it brought her and the boys.

Elysia's eyes widened in shock, "How much?!"

"A million."

Elysia, stunned, blurted out, "Why are you giving me so much money?!"

"As a thank you for looking after Elijah."

Heart racing, Elysia hesitated to accept the card, blinking rapidly, "Aren't you bankrupt? Where did you get so much money?"

"Just take it, and ask fewer questions."

Despite her reservations, Elysia couldn't help but probe further, "You didn't sell the house, did you?"

Tarquin pursed his lips, and Elysia, thinking he had indeed sold the house, immediately showed concern, "Are you out of your mind? Despite the market being down, this house in our neighborhood could easily fetch 1.5 million! Selling it for a million is ludicrous! And where would you and Elijah go if you sold it?"

Chapter 450

"I haven't sold the house."

That was Elizabeth's last gift to him, and not even bankruptcy could make him part with it!

"You didn't sell the house? Then where did all this money come from?"

Tarquin couldn't be bothered to explain, "Do you want it or not?"

"Of course I do! But... this isn't ill-gotten wealth, is it?"

Tarquin, speechless, retracted his hand to pocket the card, deciding not to give it anymore.

Elysia snatched it quickly, "I said I want it!"

She clutched the bank card tightly, like a dog guarding its bone.

Tarquin looked at her with disdain, "The PIN is six zeros."

Elysia stared at the bank card in her trembling hands, her heart racing, "Is... is there really a million in here? You're not pulling my leg, are you? A million! Oh my God! Have I... have I suddenly become a millionaire? This isn't a dream, is it?"

After saying that, she pinched Tarquin hard.

Tarquin glared in pain, "What the heck?!"

Elysia looked at him with her big, sparkly eyes, "Did that hurt?"

"No kidding! What if I pinch you back that hard?!"

"Hah!" Elysia laughed, "Pain means I'm not dreaming. Oh my God, I've made it. I'm a millionaire! Haha..."

Tarquin just rolled his eyes, seizing the moment to ask her, "Who's your son's father?"

He was really curious about the man who could father such an outstanding son.

Elysia's smile froze immediately!

Her brows furrowed, and she asked defensively, "Why do you want to know?!" "Just curious."

"Keep your curiosity to yourself. Don't pry into my business!"

"...I'm not curious about you, I'm curious about your son's father."

"Don't be curious about my son's father either. It's none of your business!"

Elysia snapped, pocketing the card, and turned her back to him to start making breakfast.

Clearly, she was done talking to him.

Tarquin, watching her back, grew even more curious.

Elliot seemed resistant whenever their dad was mentioned.

Elijah also wasn't keen on talking.

And Elysia had this attitude!

If one won't talk, two won't talk, and three won't talk... what, was that man really that unwelcome?

Dead or not, being so disliked must be tragic!

Tarquin thought, turning to head to his study, planning to catch up on some sleep.

He had only promised to help Elysia with breakfast to appease his son; he wasn't actually going to help her.

But then, the next second...

"Ouch! Ah-" Elysia suddenly cried out.

Overexcited by the million, she was a bit careless and accidentally cut her hand!

Tarquin quickly grabbed the first aid kit to help her clean the wound.

The bank card fell to the floor, and Elysia tried to pull her hand back to pick it up.

Tarquin held onto her wrist, not letting go.

Elysia, panicking, "My money, my money!"

Tarquin, annoyed, "What's more important, your money or your hand?"

"The money!"

Tarquin was speechless, scolding, "Stay still! It's not like it's lost if it falls to the ground! Pick it up later!"

After treating her wound and bandaging it, he finally let her go.

Elysia, once free, quickly bent down to pick up the card, clutching it tightly in her hand, relieved.

Tarquin, watching her act like a true miser, was utterly disdainful.

She was a real money grubber!

Turning to look at the potatoes on the kitchen counter that hadn't been fully chopped, he felt a headache coming.

After just declaring he wouldn't help, now he had to do it himself!

Stuck with this silly woman, truly his 'fortune'!