

Hitched 571

Chapter 571

He knew sticking with Gideon for a lifetime wouldn't get him as much. After all, even Gideon himself didn't have this much! If he sold out Gideon now, those shares would be his.

Plus, Gideon would surely be done in by Tarquin, so he wouldn't have to worry about any retribution!

After much deliberation, with a thud, he knelt before Tarquin,

"Master Tarquin, I know who poisoned young Master Elijah!"

Gideon gasped, shooting up from the couch!

The Bradfords all turned in shock toward the man kneeling on the floor, "What?!!!"

Tarquin, frowning slightly, asked him, "You know?"

"Yes, yes! I know!"

"Speak!"

"It was... it was..." The confidant turned to look at Gideon.

Gideon, nearly spitting blood in fright, glared at the confidant, panting,

"You scoundrel! For a mere 20% of the shares, you dare to slander your own master?"

The confidant trembled,

"Master, don't blame me for being disloyal. If you wish for something to remain a secret, then don't do it at all. Even if I didn't speak up today, the things you've done couldn't be hidden forever. Sooner or later, it would've come out."

"You..." Gideon grabbed his cane, ready to strike, but Axel immediately grabbed his wrist.

Without a word, Axel forced him back onto the couch.

Tarquin glared harshly at Gideon, then turned to the confidant,

"Spill everything you know, and the shares are yours!"

The confidant hurriedly said,

"It was the master who poisoned young Master Elijah, not just this time but before as well!"

His goal was to keep Elijah sick, to divert your attention so you wouldn't focus on the company's affairs, making it easier for him to seize control from you.

Another reason was to make you suffer; he was unhappy being under your influence and used Elijah to hurt you, to get back at you!"

"You... you...!" Gideon was furious, a surge of anger causing him to cough up a mouthful of blood.

Tarquin glared at him again and continued to interrogate the confidant,

"Why aim to kill Elijah this time, when before it was only to make him sick?"

The confidant quickly said,

"It was an accident! The master only intended to make the young master sick this time; he didn't expect it to lead to death!"

Tarquin, eyebrows knitted, stared down at him, the confidant trembling with fear,

"I'm not lying, I'm telling the truth! If I were lying, you could kill me right now!"

Tarquin watched him for a few seconds more, then asked,

"Do you know what went wrong?"

The confidant replied, "It seems the poison was tampered with, like it was swapped out." "Swapped by whom?"

"I don't know."

Tarquin fell silent for a moment before asking, "Was the maid killed by you guys?"

The confidant's lips quivered,

"It was the master's orders. He feared you'd uncover something through her and wanted to quickly move past this incident, so he ordered us to kill her. The maid was just a scapegoat."

Tarquin watched the confidant for another two seconds, then shifted his gaze back to Gideon.

Gideon was panting heavily, his complexion terrible, as if his end was near.

"Keep talking, spill everything you know! Axel, take him to the study upstairs."

Tarquin rose to head upstairs, Axel hauling Gideon along.

Lowell stayed behind to continue the interrogation.

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Upon reaching the second-floor study, Axel tossed Gideon into the room, slammed the door shut, and stationed himself outside.

Now, it was just Gideon and Tarquin, grandfather and grandson, alone in the room.

Initially, Gideon was a mix of panic and defiance, but then he burst into laughter, "Yes, it was all me! Hahaha, I've been slowly poisoning Elijah over the years, at least seven or eight times. The poison was slow-acting, not lethal, but painful enough to make him suffer!

Every time he got poisoned, Elijah must have felt terrible, especially during the initial days when the poison was at its strongest. He'd sweat buckets and grimace in pain, haha.

But, oh, how naïve you were, always thinking his illness was due to his obsession with his mother!

And why did I poison Elijah? It's all because of you!

If he didn't have you as his father, he wouldn't have suffered so much!

So, yes, I am the culprit, but you're not innocent either. All the suffering Elijah has endured over the years is on you!"

Gideon knew exactly how to hit Tarquin where it hurt!

Tarquin, with a stern face and red eyes, clenched his lips tightly and glared at him for a long while before speaking, "You haven't changed a bit, always ready to do anything for your own agenda, even if it means harming your own flesh and blood!

Back then, you targeted your own son, and now, your great-grandson. Is power really that important to you? Is that all you live for?"

Gideon, with a scowl, retorted, "Of course, power is important. Without it, would any of you even consider me? If I had power, would you dare treat me this way?

And as for your father and Elijah, don't pin all their suffering on me! I wanted to harm them, true, but I never wished for their deaths!

They suffered because, like your father, you never listened to me! If you had not always opposed me, I wouldn't have thought of harming you!" "Hah!" Tarquin scoffed coldly, "So, you harm others, and it's still their fault?!"

Gideon glared back, stone-faced, "We're at this point now, so just say how you want to deal with it. Stop bringing up irrelevant matters!" Tarquin clenched his jaw tightly, holding back his rage for the moment, and cut to the chase, "Who switched the poison today?"

Tarquin was certain Gideon's confidant hadn't lied. Gideon, intent on using Elijah to control the rest of the Bradford family, wouldn't want Elijah dead. There had to be someone else pulling the strings.

And Gideon surely knew who it was.

Without hesitation, Gideon accused, "It was that scoundrel downstairs! He's the one who switched the poison!"

Gideon aimed to shift the blame to his confidant, but Tarquin was clearly not buying it.

"I want the truth!"

Gideon snorted coldly, "That is the truth. Take it or leave it!"

Before Tarquin could respond, Gideon arrogantly added, "I know you're furious right now, but remember, I have something you desperately want. If you dare harm me, I'll destroy it!"

Upon hearing this, Tarquin's face contorted with rage, veins bulging on his forehead as his anger spiraled out of control!

He jerked his tie loose and called out, "Axel!"

Axel pushed the door open and stepped inside, "Yes?"

"He's delirious. Make him see sense, make him understand his current situation!"

With those words, Tarquin rose, cigarette in hand, and left the room.

Chapter 573

Gideon's cockiness evaporated in an instant when realization dawned on him. He looked at Tarquin, panic and fear evident in his eyes, "Tarquin, you wouldn't dare touch me, would you? Aren't you afraid I'll really destroy it?! I...ugh...ahhh!"

Tarquin stood by the window at the end of the hallway, silently smoking a cigarette, listening to Gideon's screams without a hint of sympathy in his cold, stern expression. Sure, Gideon was his grandfather, but after all the harm he had caused-betraying his father, threatening his mother, and endangering his son-how could Tarquin see him as family?

Human hearts are made of flesh, and had Gideon shown even a shred of decency, things wouldn't have come to this point. Being kind to a heartless person is merely cruelty to oneself. Thus, Tarquin harbored no pity for Gideon. In Tarquin's world, his parents and his son were everything. Anyone who dared harm them was signing their own death warrant. Gideon had crossed the line three times! If it weren't for Gideon possessing something of great importance to Tarquin, he would have been history by now.

In the Bradford family, blood relations meant little compared to personal gain. Without mutual benefits, familial ties were worthless. Just like now, with Gideon's agonized cries piercing the air, the Bradfords downstairs could surely hear every scream, yet not one of them came to his aid. Assisting Gideon offered them no advantage; it might even provoke Tarquin's ire. So they stayed out of it, indifferent to Gideon's fate. Deep down, some probably wished for Tarquin to end Gideon, eyeing a piece of his wealth for themselves.

Tarquin had been naive as a child, not understanding why Kendrick insisted on severing ties with the Bradfords, even demanding his name be stricken from the family records and forbidding his recognition of ancestry. Only after the tragic deaths of Kendrick and Elizabeth abroad, and being forcefully brought back to the Bradfords by Gideon, did Tarquin begin to understand Kendrick. A person with a conscience couldn't blend into a circle filled with the heartless and ruthless.

Kendrick couldn't find happiness amidst the cold indifference of the Bradfords. That's why he chose Elizabeth over the family's legacy. To the outside world, Kendrick was a traitor, forsaking his kin for a woman. But only he knew his decision was right. He was a man full of life, living to appreciate the beauty of the world, not to be someone's pawn or puppet. He sought his own happiness, and Elizabeth was his joy-kind, genuine, and radiant, like the sun that chased away his darkest shadows, leaving only light.

Even in death, Kendrick had no regrets, cherishing the years of happiness he had lived... His only regret was dying too soon to protect them. In Gideon's eyes, Kendrick, Tarquin, and Elijah were mere pawns to secure the lineage and thwart any ambitions within the Bradford family. To Gideon, Kendrick wasn't a son, Tarquin wasn't a grandson, and Elijah wasn't a great-grandson. They were just pieces in his game to maintain control. Being born into the wealthy Bradford family was, ironically, a tragedy.

The door creaked open as Axel stepped out, his expression calm, "I think he's finally realized the gravity of his situation." Tarquin snapped out of his thoughts, extinguished his cigarette, and walked into the study. While the room bore no visible traces of violence, the air was thick with the scent of blood.

Chapter 574

Gideon slumped on the couch, looking like a broken doll, his limbs intact but rendered useless, his muscles severed, and one of his eyes gruesomely plucked out. Axel, with a twisted sense of consideration, placed the eyeball where Gideon could see it, ensuring it haunted him continuously. Fearing the sight might disturb Tarquin, Axel carefully bandaged the empty socket, showing a bizarre form of tenderness amidst the cruelty.

Terror painted Gideon's face as he stared at his own eyeball, his body trembling uncontrollably. The sight of Tarquin only intensified his fear, as if he were looking at a monster. Tarquin's face was a mask of indifference. "Don't think you're special. What you're going through is nothing compared to what Elijah faced," he said coldly.

Gideon gasped for air, his chest heaving, his lips quivering, but no sound came out. Tarquin glared at him, ice in his voice. "And you know very well, if it weren't for what you're holding, you'd have been gone by now. Don't test my patience. Destroy it, and see what happens."

Gideon's shaking worsened, a mix of rage and fear in his eyes. Seeing him subdued, Tarquin shifted the conversation back to the poison. "Who switched the poison?"

Gideon, still trembling, whispered, "I don't know."

Tarquin frowned, prompting Gideon to quickly add, "But I suspect the person who gave it to me. He reached out to me, claiming he had a poison that could make someone sick without killing them. He said it was virtually undetectable. Even if I used it on Elijah, you wouldn't have noticed. You'd think Elijah was just pining for his mother."

Tarquin's frown deepened. "Who is he?"

"I don't know. He's always been a mystery, never showing his face. I only know he's a man, probably not too old. He knows a lot about the Bradfords, my secrets, and even some of yours. He knew how much Elijah missed his mother, and that you've been desperately searching for her."

Tarquin's expression turned icy, his mind racing to the mysterious figure and the ominous 'New Year's gift' he'd mentioned. Could poisoning Elijah be his twisted present? Tarquin's expression darkened. "Tell me everything you know about him!"

Gideon looked uncomfortable. "That's all I know."

"Think harder!"

"...He's skilled and good at hiding his identity. After he contacted me, I tried to find out who he was but came up empty. I even tried to meet him in person, to catch him and see for myself, but it was a failure. He's too good, and he knows my secrets, so I couldn't confront him directly." Tarquin became even more convinced this was the man he was after. "You know anything else?"

"That's it... Wait, he mentioned a daughter."

"A daughter?"

"Yeah. Once, when I arrived for a meeting, he was on the phone. I heard him say, 'Daddy misses you too, pumpkin. Be a good girl and eat up, sleep tight.'"

Pumpkin? Tarquin's heart skipped a beat. Was this the 'pumpkin' Elliot had mentioned? A daughter - his pumpkin? Suddenly recalling a past conversation with the mysterious man, Tarquin grew anxious. "How do you know it's his daughter?"

"After the call, he looked at his necklace, and I saw a photo inside the pendant. A little girl, maybe about four or five, around Elijah's age. Must be his daughter."

Four or five, the same age as Elijah... Tarquin's breathing quickened. "What did the little girl look like?"

Chapter 575

"I didn't get a clear look before he put it away."

Tarquin was silent.

The last time they met, the mysterious man had told him:

"You know, you have a daughter you don't know about. If you don't want anything bad happening to her, let me go, heh."

At that moment, Tarquin was shocked, filled with doubts.

That's why he didn't dare to make a move that day and let him go!

Since then, he had been pondering over it. It wasn't impossible for Elijah's mother to have had twins, but without any leads, he remained skeptical.

But now, he was starting to believe it might be true!

Ding-a new message alert.

A message from an anonymous number: [Are you satisfied with your New Year's gift? Heh.]

Tarquin's brow tightened. It was him!

He quickly replied to the message, but the sender had already deactivated the account.

Tarquin's breathing grew heavier.

The one trying to harm Elijah was this mysterious man!

Could his daughter actually be his own?!

Was he really a father to a daughter he never knew existed???

Tarquin held his breath, a mix of shock and joy, excitement and anxiety!

If he really had a daughter, if Elijah really had a sister, it would be a cause for celebration!

But his daughter not being by his side, potentially in the hands of this mysterious man, was a major concern!

Tarquin tried to calm down and analyze the situation.

If the mysterious man wasn't lying, then this man's daughter could very well be his own!

Years ago, the mysterious man had taken Elijah and his sibling from their mother, sending Elijah to him but keeping the daughter for himself. What was his purpose?

If he took the daughter, it must have been to threaten him, but why was he so concerned about his "darling"?

Could it be that the "darling" was the mysterious man's own biological daughter, and his own daughter was raised somewhere else?

Tarquin racked his brain but couldn't figure out the mysterious man's intentions, growing frustrated.

His emotions running high, Axel noticed something was off, "Tarquin?"

Tarquin frowned and called Axel out of the study to instruct him,

"Have someone check all the girls in Jindale City about Elijah's age, especially those nicknamed 'Darling'."

Axel looked puzzled, "You're looking for the mysterious man's daughter?"

"She might be my daughter!"

A flicker of surprise and confusion passed through Axel's eyes, but he didn't question it further, merely asking,

"Does the girl have any other distinguishing features?"

Tarquin shook his head, "Not for now."

"...With so little to go on, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack."

Tarquin, with a furrowed brow, responded,

"If she and Elijah are twins, there must be some resemblance between them. Follow that lead."

"Alright, got it."

"Keep it discreet, don't let anyone find out, especially not Elijah for now."

"Understood."

Tarquin stepped outside to smoke a cigarette and calm down a bit more before adding,

"Move Gideon to the ground floor."

After extinguishing his cigarette, he went downstairs first.

When the Bradford family members saw Gideon's condition in the main hall, they were shocked, their eyes nearly popping out of their sockets! Everyone held their breath, filled with fear!

Tarquin got straight to the point,

"I'm giving you one day to move out of the mansion. I'll come to check tomorrow. If your stuff is still here, I'll have it all thrown into the dump." Gideon, upon hearing this, became agitated, "You... you want me to move out of the mansion?"

"Not just you, all of you! The main building, the east and west wings, the annex, clean them all out!"

"Tarquin, you..."

"Keep your opinions to yourself! If you can't, then you might as well lose your tongue!"

Gideon's eyes bulged, and he fainted from anger on the spot.

Moving out of the mansion was like being exiled from a palace in ancient times; it wasn't just about losing a house, it was the collapse of power and influence!

For Gideon, this was more brutal than physical torture-it was a fatal blow!

The rest of the Bradford family didn't care about Gideon's plight, but seeing how it affected them, they immediately became unwilling.

Chapter 576

"Tarquin, this has nothing to do with us. Why are you taking it out on us?"

"Exactly, and this old mansion has been in the Bradford family for generations, it's a shared asset. Isn't it a bit harsh to just kick us out? This place is worth a fortune."

Tarquin didn't waste his breath,

"Axel, if anyone has objections, have a word with them privately."

Axel casually tossed Gideon's eyeball onto the coffee table, his expression calm as he looked around at the members of the Bradford family, "Anyone want to chat?"

The Bradfords shuddered collectively, instantly silencing themselves, not daring to utter another word.

Lowell stepped forward, highlighting the crucial information they've managed to get out of Gideon's right-hand man, before asking,

"What about the 20% shares?"

This lackey, having been Gideon's accomplice in countless dirty deeds, was the epitome of scum! The thought of giving him 20% of the shares made Lowell cringe. Scum like him didn't deserve to be on top!

Tarquin was silent for a few seconds, then addressed Gideon's henchman,

"I'll give you two choices. First, you can die, and I'll give your share to your family. Second, you stay alive but you turn yourself in to the police. I'll take care of your family from here on. Choose!"

Without waiting for an answer, he walked away. He'd given him the choices, and frankly, he didn't care which one was picked.

Back in his car, Tarquin rubbed his temples. He had vented his anger, but the discomfort remained. His guilt over Elijah hadn't eased one bit; Gideon's words still echoed in his head. It was because Elijah had him for a father that the boy had suffered so much! If Elijah hadn't been his son, he'd surely be living a happier life. Comparing Elijah's life to the lives of Elysia's three sons, Elijah's was certainly unfortunate!

Tarquin's heart ached, and he was worried about his daughter, burdened with heavy thoughts. Suddenly, his phone rang. It was Elysia. Seeing her name flashing on the screen brought a softness to his eyes, Elysia... Just the name seemed to calm him down.

He steadied his mind and answered, "Hello?"

Elysia immediately asked, "Have you seen Elliot and Evan?"

"What's wrong?"

"Elliot and Evan are missing! I asked Emmett, and he thought they might have gone downstairs for some fresh air, but I've looked everywhere and can't find them. Did they go with you? Are they with you?!"

"... Yes, they're with me. I forgot to tell you."

Elysia's anxiety subsided, and after taking several deep breaths, she complained, "You could have at least told me, you scared me to death!" "I'll scold them later."

"You're going to scold them? What about you? Whether the kids decided to go with you or you took them, you should have told me! They're just kids and don't understand, but you do, don't you?"

Tarquin felt better being chastised, "I think I'm quite sensible."

"You... so thick-skinned!"

Tarquin chuckled, "Just kidding. I took the initiative to bring them over. They probably thought I had told you, so they didn't contact you. My fault, I apologize."

Elysia pursed her lips, "Let me talk to them!"

"... They're not with me right now, but don't worry, they're safe. I'll bring them back now."

Elysia calmed down for a few seconds before asking, "Did you find the culprit?"

" We'll talk when we meet."

After hanging up, Tarquin looked out the car window with a sigh. He had noticed the two rascals had followed him, but he had been too busy dealing with the situation to attend to them.

Putting away his phone, Tarquin opened the car door and stepped out. He walked straight to a large tree and looked up... The tree had borne fruit, two children, to be exact!

Chapter 577

Two little rascals were clinging to a tree branch, gazing down at him with eyes as clear and sparkling as dewdrops, their faces soft and plump like freshly baked buns. They were the very picture of cuteness, small and adorably chubby.

With every flutter of their long, dense eyelashes, it felt like a direct nudge to Tarquin's heart. He was utterly charmed.

There they were, the trio, in a silent standoff between the branch and the ground. Tarquin, with a heart full of warmth, felt a twinge of envy for their late father and softly called out, "Come on down, be careful."

Evan panicked a bit, "What do we do, bro? He spotted us!"

Elliot, ever the cool one, replied, "No worries, I actually wanted to ask him something. Let's go down."

Under Tarquin's watchful eyes, the boys began their descent.

Evan led the way, jumping down from a height of about ten feet, aiming to impress Tarquin with a cool landing. Instead, he found himself caught in Tarquin's arms, his attempt at looking suave completely thwarted and now enveloped in an embrace!

Frustrated and slightly embarrassed, Evan's face turned a shade of red, kicking his legs and protesting like a feisty little animal, "Let me down, you jerk, Tarquin!"

Tarquin, with a smirk, teased, "Jerk, Tarquin, huh? Is that for me?"

Huffing, Evan threatened, "Don't you dare hold me like I'm some kid. I'm way too precious for you... Ah!"

A gentle flick on the forehead from Tarquin, followed by a cheek pinch, left Evan both angry and embarrassed, his pride slightly wounded by the unsolicited affection.

Fuming, Evan blurted out, "Let go of me, or I'll have all your points deducted, every single one!"

Tarquin, puzzled, asked, "What points?"

"Not telling you!" Evan retorted with a pout.

"If you won't tell, guess I'll just have to keep holding you," Tarquin played along.

This only worked Evan up more, his eyes brimming with tears, "Let go! I'm going to tell my mommy on you!"

Hearing this, Tarquin quickly set him down, "You can't just say things like that."

Knowing how fiercely protective Elysia was, if she heard Tarquin had been rough with her son, there'd be hell to pay.

Seizing on this newfound leverage, Evan's pride swelled, turning away with a huff.

Tarquin, caught between frustration and fondness, turned to Elliot, "Need a hand coming down?"

"I'm good," Elliot replied, descending gracefully.

Though not as agile as Evan, Elliot had his basics covered and managed the tree with no issue. Once on the ground, he dusted off his clothes and cleaned his hands with a tissue, every bit the little gentleman, in stark contrast to Evan's wild antics.

Evan, who had wiped his hands on his clothes the moment his feet touched the ground, scoffed at the idea of using a tissue. Why waste a tissue when your clothes did the job just fine?

As Tarquin moved to help clean him up, Evan shot back, "Don't touch me! Touch me and I'll tell my mom you've been bullying me!"

Tarquin, with a hint of sarcasm, retorted, "And here I was, covering for you, or you'd be in for it when you got home."

Evan scowled, "What do you mean?"

Tarquin, with a playful smirk, revealed, "Elysia's been looking for you two. She even called me."

At that, both boys' eyes widened in alarm, and they hastily checked their smartwatches.

Chapter 578

They had secretly followed Tarquin, setting their smartwatches to silent mode to avoid detection once they arrived. Their minds had been preoccupied with Elijah's condition when they left the hospital, forgetting to inform Elysia.

Seeing their anxious expressions, Tarquin reassured them, "Don't worry. I told her you're with me and even said it was my idea, not like you two sneaked out or anything. She thinks I've already informed her when we left."

Evan pouted, his eyes rolling, caught in a dilemma of not wanting to admit Tarquin's help yet unable to deny the reality.

Elliot, on the other hand, was curious about Elysia's reaction, "What did Mom think about us being with you?"

"She's relieved, of course. She knows you're safe with me."

Elliot squinted, puzzled. "Mom would've freaked out before, but now she's actually calm. Seems like her view of you has really changed!"

"Let's get in the car. Elysia's waiting at the hospital, and we can talk more on the way there."

Obediently, Elliot and Evan followed Tarquin back to the vehicle, heading towards the hospital.

On the way, Tarquin inquired, "Did you guys follow me to find out who poisoned Elijah?"

Elliot admitted, "We overheard your conversation with Mom. We were worried you wouldn't catch the culprit and couldn't stand up for Elijah, so we came to check it out."

Tarquin, touched, affectionately ruffled Elliot's hair, "Elijah is lucky to have you guys."

Evan chimed in, "Elijah's our real brother! If someone messes with him, they're messing with us! Of course, we won't just stand by. We're going to avenge Elijah!"

Elliot's eyes flickered nervously at the mention of 'real brother.'

Tarquin, oblivious, added, "Elijah would definitely consider you his real brothers too."

Elliot, trying to hide his disdain, muttered under his breath before getting back to the point, "We couldn't hear everything you and Gideon discussed. Are you sure he was the one who poisoned Elijah?"

"Yeah."

Elliot frowned, "But Gideon doesn't have a motive to kill Elijah. And judging by his reaction after the incident, it might not have been him this time." "The long-term poisoning was his doing, but not this time. This was the work of some shadowy figure who's been supplying Gideon with the poison." Elliot was taken aback, "No wonder Mom said the poison was rare and hard to detect. It's that shadowy figure again!"

But something didn't add up. The shadowy figure wanted to lure Mom back, right? Knowing Elijah was her son, wouldn't poisoning him turn her against him? Or did he not care whether Mom loved or hated him? Did he have some leverage over her?

"Darn it! So he was the one trying to kill Elijah! Bro, we need to find him and make him pay!" Evan was furious.

Elliot, snapping out of his thoughts, nodded and then asked Tarquin, "Before that shadowy figure's decoy jumped, he mentioned preparing a New Year's gift for you. Was it this?"

Tarquin's face darkened, "Yes."

The car fell silent for a moment before Elliot continued, "The shadowy figure deserves to die, but Gideon's been poisoning Elijah for a long time. He's a murderer too. What are you going to do with him?"

Tarquin replied, "I dealt with him today."

Evan immediately asked, "Is that it? You're not going to hand him over to the police?"

Tarquin frowned slightly, "There's no solid evidence linking him directly, and the police can't convict him based on hearsay. Besides, I can't push him too hard."

Elliot sensed there was more, "Does he have something on you? Elijah mentioned you haven't taken down the Bradford family because you're investigating something."

Chapter 579

A shadow of gloom passed through Tarquin's eyes, and after a hesitant moment, he said, "My mother's ashes are in his possession."

Elliot and Evan were shocked, their eyes wide with disbelief.

Tarquin's expression was icy as he slowly continued, "When my parents died, I was just a kid. The funeral was entirely orchestrated by Gideon. When I refused to go back to the Bradford estate with him, he threatened me with my mother's ashes."

Elliot gritted his teeth. Gideon was a real piece of work!

Respect for the dead is a given, and yet he dared to use a mother's ashes to blackmail her own son!

Grandma should come back as a ghost and tear him to pieces!

Beyond anger, Elliot felt a pang of sympathy for Tarquin. He could relate. If someone tried to use his mom's ashes against him, he would be livid!

But even in his rage, he knew he'd have to keep his cool because those ashes were his Achilles' heel. He wouldn't gamble with his mom's ashes, wouldn't treat the matter lightly. He wouldn't show his full hand unless absolutely necessary.

Tarquin added, "Besides my mother's ashes, I need to investigate the real cause of my parents' deaths. They were murdered. Gideon might be an accomplice at best. The real murderer is likely someone within the Bradford family, but I haven't figured out who yet."

Elliot quickly asked, "Any leads?"

Evan couldn't help but interject, "Could it have been the work of that mysterious figure lurking in the shadows?"

Tarquin didn't confirm or deny, "It's unclear if there's a connection with the mysterious figure, but the real murderer is definitely a Bradford. Just no leads to pinpoint who yet. Too much time has passed, and evidence has vanished, making the search difficult."

Elliot frowned, "Could this mysterious person be a Bradford?"

Tarquin pondered. The last time he met with the mysterious figure, certain things were emphasized. Besides mentioning a daughter, the figure kept stressing that killing him would lead to lifelong regret. He also said that keeping his identity hidden was for Tarquin's own good, knowing would only bring pain and sorrow.

This suggested a close connection to Tarquin. Within the entire Bradford family, he only had a good relationship with his father, Kendrick. If the mysterious figure was Kendrick, it would indeed be shocking and painful.

But Kendrick had passed away long ago. And this mysterious figure clearly wasn't of Kendrick's generation. Even Gideon mentioned that the figure wasn't old.

So, the likelihood of the mysterious person being a Bradford was slim, as there was no one else in the family whose identity would cause Tarquin such distress.

Tarquin stated firmly, "It's possible, but we have no evidence linking him to the Bradfords yet."

Elliot's brow furrowed deeply with concern. This mysterious figure was a menace. Until they found him, peace would be elusive.

But who could he be?

Elliot was at a loss but turned his gaze back to Tarquin. Tarquin was staring out the window, lost in thought, his expression tense and troubled. Elliot felt even more sympathy for him now... He fully understood why Tarquin hadn't completely severed ties with the Bradfords or wiped them out. Years had passed, and even Tarquin hadn't managed to uncover his parents' killer. Elliot wasn't confident in catching the culprit either.

But he could probably help with the ashes. Gideon had been trying to reach 'Alpha' to use him against Tarquin. And Elliot was Alpha himself! Maybe he could use his identity as 'Alpha' to retrieve his grandmother's ashes.

As Elliot was contemplating this, Tarquin snapped back to reality, steadying his emotions before saying, "Let go of your anger over Elijah's poisoning. Don't think about revenge against Gideon just yet. Wait until we catch the mysterious figure."

Chapter 580

Evan's frown deepened, showing his reluctance, but Elliot nodded, "Got it."

The Bradford family was tangled up in something sinister, involving their grandmother's ashes and the killer who took out both their grandparents. Elliot knew better than to mess with the Bradford family too hastily, to avoid throwing a wrench in Tarquin's carefully laid plans and accidentally making things worse.

"Alright, let's shake it off. When we see Elysia at the hospital, just say I'm the one who brought you guys. Don't slip up."

Elliot and Evan: "..."

They had just arrived at the hospital when Lowell called.

Tarquin stepped aside to take the call, leaving the kids to find Elysia.

Lowell mentioned that one of Gideon's trusted associates had decided to ditch his 20% share in favor of staying alive and confessing to the authorities.

Tarquin made Lowell promise to take care of his family.

After discussing the aftermath for a while longer, Tarquin hung up and went to look for Elysia.

At that moment, Elysia was alone in the hospital room, not noticing Elliot, Evan, or Emmett's absence as she busied herself making the bed where the three little ones had slept the night before.

Tarquin leaned against the doorway, hands in his pockets, watching her move. She seemed to cast a spell over him; seeing her stirred a comforting flutter in his heart, smoothing over all his worries.

His heart felt like it was wrapped in warmth, touched by the gentle breeze of spring, soft and comforting.

All the shadows in his mind cleared, leaving nothing but clear skies.

For a moment, he felt a connection to his father.

Kendrick had always said Elizabeth was his sun, brightening his mood and filling him with hope for the future whenever he saw her.

Kendrick had described Elizabeth as his healer, soothing his wounded soul with her gentle, optimistic spirit, making him feel hopeful and happy. Tarquin had never fully grasped his father's deep love and reliance on his mother until now.

His mother was his father's sun.

Perhaps Elysia was his sun too.

Elysia, with her healing presence, seemed capable of mending his fractured soul.

Suddenly, he felt an urge to embrace her...

This thought made Tarquin's heart race with nervous anticipation.

He wondered, if he just went and hugged her, how would she react?

Would she cry out in shock?

Or would she turn around and slap him? After all, she had a penchant for aiming at his face!

"Goodness! You scared me half to death sneaking up like that. You could give someone a heart attack, you know? I thought I'd seen a ghost!"

Elysia exclaimed, clutching her chest, obviously startled.

Tarquin snapped back to reality, realizing he had somehow moved closer to Elysia without noticing.

Had she not turned around just in time, he might have actually embraced her from behind.

Tarquin felt a twinge of disappointment at the missed opportunity.

But seeing Elysia's reaction, he figured a hug might have earned him a slap after all.

He swallowed, the sense of loss replaced by relief at avoiding a slap.

"What's up?" Elysia noticed his flushed face, "Are you feeling okay?"

Tarquin coughed awkwardly, "I'm fine."

"Then why's your face all red?"

"It's hot."

"Hot? Where, are you running a fever?"

"My heart's hot."

Elysia was confused and slightly worried as she grabbed his wrist to check his pulse, frowning,

"Why is your heartbeat so fast?"