

Hitched 591

Chapter 591

For Keaton and his band of misfits, this was an unexpected delight!

But they were also confused, "What's going on, Tarquin?"

"Let's call it a night," Tarquin said without turning his head, striding away.

Keaton paused for a moment before calling Benjamin, "Is there something up with Elijah again?"

Benjamin was just as puzzled, "Elijah's fine."

"Then why was Tarquin in such a rush?"

Benjamin replied, "I was wondering that myself! All I said was that Elysia got a small cut, and he started freaking out..."

Keaton couldn't help but roll his eyes. Tarquin was hopelessly head over heels!

He wondered if Tarquin would sweat bullets and seek vengeance on a whole mosquito family if Elysia got a mosquito bite.

Keaton then asked, "Did you send him back?"

"No! He decided to go on his own."

Keaton raised an eyebrow and chuckled.

After hanging up, he told the others, "Well, this drama wasn't for nothing. Let's plan a get-together and have Tarquin perform a live kiss scene, three minutes long!"

"

Meanwhile, Tarquin arrived at the hospital when it was pitch dark outside.

He hurried to the door of Elysia's room, turned the knob, and tried to push the door open.

But...

The door was locked from the inside, and he couldn't open it.

Tarquin knocked, "Elysia, open up!"

Elysia was about to take a shower when she heard his voice, her heart skipped a beat, then started pounding wildly.

She wasn't sure yet if he had fallen for her.

But she felt he must be interested!

But she didn't like him back!

She hadn't figured out how to face him, and besides, it was too late, and she was alone in her room.

It wasn't proper for a man and a woman to be alone together at this hour, so she really didn't want to see him.

Elysia held her chest, standing still, planning to pretend no one was inside.

But then Tarquin's voice came through again, "Elysia, I know you're in there, open up!"

Elysia's lips twitched, out of options, she wrapped herself tighter in her robe and cautiously asked through the door, "What do you want this late?" "Benjamin said you were injured!"

"Injured? I'm not injured."

"He mentioned you got a small cut and even bled."

Elysia glanced at her now-healed finger, confused. Was that even considered an injury?

"It's healed, like a mosquito bite, it's nothing."

"Open up, let me have a look."

Elysia's heartbeat quickened, "Well, it's really late, it's not appropriate for you to come in! Let's talk tomorrow! I'm going to bed!"

After saying that, she even pretended to turn around, stomping her feet to create the illusion that she was walking away, then leaned on the door to listen.

Her childish act made Tarquin press his lips together, unabashedly calling her out, "I know you're still at the door, I have something else to discuss, it has to be tonight!"

Realizing she was caught, Elysia's lips twitched, "What is it? Just say it."

"Open the door! I'll come in, we'll talk face to face."

"I told you, it's too late, just say it, I'm listening."

Tarquin: "..."

Seeing she was determined not to open the door, he turned and left.

Elysia, hearing his footsteps fade away and the elevator's doors open and close, hurriedly peeked through the peephole.

Tarquin was nowhere to be seen.

She cautiously opened the door a crack, then stuck her head out to look both ways.

The hallway was empty; Tarquin had indeed left.

"Phew..." Elysia sighed in relief, finally at ease.

She locked the door, feeling safe to head to the bathroom for a shower.

Standing under the spray, she was utterly baffled.

How could he have fallen for her?

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He had no clue she was the one he'd been searching for all along; ironically, he spent most days complaining about how slow she seemed!

And let's be real, as a single mom juggling three kids, she was far from living the dream. In today's world, raising just one child was a challenge, let alone three!

Money? Education? Skills? She had none of those.

So, who in their right mind would take a chance on her?

Could it be that she got it all wrong?

Maybe his interest wasn't in her; maybe he thought she was into him? That revelation hit Elysia like a lightning bolt.

He assumed she was crushing on him, wanting a future together!

Thus, his over-the-top reaction upon realizing she intended to take Elijah away and wasn't exactly his biggest fan made all the sense in the world!

Oh boy, if that was the misunderstanding, it was a colossal one!

She cared for him, sure, but it was more out of guilt for wanting to whisk Elijah away from him, not because of some romantic feelings!

A misunderstanding was far simpler to resolve than unrequited love.

They could clear the air and go back to being cordial, just like before.

With that thought, Elysia felt a weight lift off her shoulders.

The idea of being liked by someone she didn't have feelings for was nothing but trouble!

"Thud!"

A sudden noise from the living room startled her, sending her heart racing!

Quickly turning off the shower, she wrapped herself in a towel, straining to hear any further sounds.

But silence followed.

Had she imagined it?

She had locked the door; it was supposed to be secure. Benjamin had assured her the hospital's rest area was as safe as a five-star hotel, promising a peaceful night's sleep.

It must have been her imagination.

Still, to play it safe, Elysia grabbed a hefty shampoo bottle for protection and cautiously stepped out to investigate.

The moment she entered the living room, a towering dark silhouette by the window made her freeze.

Her heart stopped. Before she could take a closer look, panic took over, and she screamed at the top of her lungs. Tarquin had just climbed in!

Locked out, he had resorted to breaking and entering. Whatever it took to clear the air about their quarrel that day.

He couldn't stand a night of tossing and turning over this.

But, he hadn't anticipated catching Elysia fresh from the shower.

The towel she had hastily wrapped around herself left little to the imagination, showcasing her elegant collarbones, bare shoulders, and slender legs, all damp from the shower.

Caught off guard, Tarquin couldn't help but let his gaze wander a bit too freely.

The realization she was barely covered underneath sent a jolt through him, prompting a hard swallow.

That's when the pain hit. Distracted, he didn't see the flying shampoo bottle until it was too late.

"Elysia, wait!" he called out, as she made a dash for the door, desperately screaming for help. "Thief! Help, there's a thief!"

He had to stop her. The thought of her being seen in just a towel was unbearable. He couldn't allow it. "Elysia, stop!"

But fear had taken over, and she wasn't listening, only running faster towards the door.

In his haste to calm her down, Tarquin accidentally grabbed her towel instead of her arm.

And then-

Disaster struck!

The towel slipped away, leaving Elysia exposed, and Tarquin utterly speechless, caught in the headlights of a major mishap.

Chapter 593

The surprise was too sudden and too alluring!

Tarquin forgot to avert his gaze, staring at her unabashedly. The intense visual impact ignited a fire within him instantaneously! A fire that raged uncontrollably within his being, scorching every nerve, every cell, and overwhelming his rationality! His blood began to boil, his cells rallying for action! A heat surged towards his lower abdomen...

He was aroused! Swollen! His body lost all control, his mind void of reason, filled with dreamy images of them entangled together. In his dreams, their clothes were disheveled, they kissed passionately, rolling around in bed, sometimes he was on top, sometimes she was. Their bodies merged as one, reaching the heights of ecstasy with his heavy breathing and her soft moans, only to plummet from the bliss again and again! They possessed each other with wild passion, venting their desires. He exerted himself on her, and she reveled beneath him...

"Snap!" Elysia slapped him across the face.

That slap woke Tarquin up, erasing the steamy images from his mind. Somehow, Elysia had snatched the towel from him, wrapping herself up again. Her eyes red with anger and hurt, she glared at him, "Pervert! Whimper..." She ran back into the inner room, slamming the door with a bang.

Tarquin snapped back to reality, desperately trying to quell the fire within, rushing to the inner room door. He wanted to push the door open to explain, but Elysia had locked it from inside. All he could do was apologize from the doorway, "Elysia, I'm so..."

"Get lost!"

"Don't be mad, it wasn't on pur..."

"Go away!"

"Elysia, I..."

"Just go!" Her voice was choked with sobs, clearly upset.

Tarquin was both anxious and panicked. He didn't mean for this to happen; he didn't want to upset her! He only wanted to climb through the window to talk things out, not expecting this turn of events! He... She...

Scratching his head in frustration, Tarquin turned and headed to the kitchen. Elysia was too angry to listen to anything now. She needed time to cool down. And so did he!

Entering the kitchen, he grabbed a bottle of cold water from the fridge, gulping down half of it in one go. After a brief pause, he finished the rest. After drinking, he went to the bathroom intending to splash some water on his face to fully calm down. But then he saw Elysia's lingerie.

His gaze was fiercely assaulted once again! Tarquin wasn't one to make a fuss over such things, but this was Elysia's! It had been worn by her, and he couldn't help but let his mind wander! The restless part of him stirred again, and Tarquin quickly looked away, leaving the bathroom. Back in the kitchen, he grabbed another bottle of cold water, standing in the living room, lost in thought.

Once she's calmed down, he wanted to tell her it wasn't intentional. Would she believe him? She was brought to tears, clearly really upset. Was it over for him? Would she even let him live to see another sunrise?

Keaton said women needed to be coaxed. But how could he coax her? Should he let her hit him as much as she wanted? No way! She didn't care about his face at all. If she wanted to hit, she would, so letting her slap him a few times wouldn't make her feel any better. Get down on his knees for her? Durian, keyboard, instant noodles, let her choose? That wouldn't work either! A man's knees are precious, he can't just kneel for anything. It's too humiliating, a blow to his pride! Should he try to cheer her up with money?

Chapter 594

It definitely wasn't going to work. Sure, she might be a bit of a penny-pincher, but she had her principles. Money couldn't smooth this over! What about roping in Elliot, Evan, and Emmett to talk some sense into her? Even worse! If Elliot, Evan, and Emmett caught wind of this, they'd probably go ballistic!

If only Elijah were awake, getting him to sweet-talk her might actually stand a chance.

Tarquin was nursing a headache. He should have known better than to sneak in through the window tonight! He'd rather toss and turn all night than deal with this mess!

Just as he was at a loss, the doorbell chimed, "Ms. Thorne, are you asleep?"

It was Benjamin's voice.

Tarquin scowled, visibly annoyed. Coming around this late to see Elysia, didn't he know to keep a distance?!

He drained his bottle of water in one go and tossed it into the bin with perfect aim.

With a frosty demeanor, he strode to the door and opened it, asking Benjamin in a none-too-pleased tone, "What do you want with her at this hour?" Benjamin was taken aback, "When did you get back?"

Tarquin had headed straight to Elysia's place upon his return, unbeknownst to Benjamin. Without offering any explanation and blocking the doorway, clearly not intending to let him in, Tarquin pressed, "What do you want with her, exactly?"

"...Elijah's lab results came in tonight, I thought she should take a look."

Tarquin's expression shifted, "Is there a problem with the report?"

"I couldn't spot anything amiss, but better safe than sorry, right? Better have Ms. Thorne check it out, she's sharper than I am."

"...She's already resting. Hand it over, I'll pass it along."

Benjamin was puzzled, "She's asleep? Then why are you still in her room? What are you doing there?"

Tarquin, still unyielding, frowned and warned coldly, "Don't come looking for her late at night again! You might not mind the gossip, but she does. She's not as thick-skinned as you. If it's urgent, come to me first, and I'll relay the message."

After shutting the door with that, Tarquin took the report inside.

Benjamin was baffled: "?"

So, it's scandalous for him to visit Elysia late at night, but not for Tarquin? Isn't he a man too? Shouldn't he avoid giving the wrong impression? So domineering. To those not in the know, they might assume he was Elysia's husband!

Grumbling to himself internally but knowing Tarquin wouldn't harm Elysia, Benjamin didn't overthink it and turned to leave.

Yet, before he could get far, Tarquin called him back, "Actually, better you give it to her."

"Huh? Why? You just said..."

"Quit yapping, get inside!"

Now Benjamin was utterly confused, still trying to figure out Tarquin's angle when the man was already knocking on the inner door, "Elysia, could you come out for a moment?"

The way Tarquin's voice softened when addressing Elysia was a stark contrast to his earlier tone with Benjamin-it was so gentle it could almost squeeze out droplets of honey! Talk about playing favorites!

Inside, Elysia was cocooned within her blankets, having transformed herself into a human pupa. As soon as she had come in, she hurriedly dressed in a camisole and a long robe for a semblance of security before diving into bed. Frustrated and embarrassed was an understatement!

She had cursed him out in her mind a thousand times over! Calling him every name under the sun, every insult she could think of had been directed at him!

Hearing his voice only fanned the flames of her anger. She was about to tell him off when she heard him mention, "Elijah's lab results are in. Benjamin just brought them over, says he can't make heads or tails of it, wants you to have a look."

Benjamin: "???"

Before he could object, Tarquin shot him a silencing glare.

Chapter 595

Benjamin had just swallowed his words when Elysia's voice echoed through the house, "Dr. Benjamin?"

Tarquin shot him a look that screamed 'speak up' without uttering a single word.

Benjamin rolled his eyes, exasperated. What was this, some kind of weird game?

He licked his lips and replied to Elysia, "Uh... Ms. Thorne, I'm here."

Hearing Benjamin's voice confirmed to Elysia that Tarquin wasn't lying.

"Give me a sec, I'll just change and be right out."

"Alright."

No sooner had Benjamin responded than Tarquin was dragging him out the door, practically shoving him into the hallway.

"Your part's done. Go get some sleep. And remember what I said, steer clear of her at night! If you absolutely must see her, come to me first! You're old enough to know better!"

With that, Tarquin slammed the door shut, leaving Benjamin dazed and alone in the hallway.

A few minutes later, the bedroom door finally opened again.

Seeing Elysia again made Tarquin's back break out in a nervous sweat.

The image of her not dressed flashed through his mind, and he quickly forced himself to focus. Now was not the time for wild thoughts!

Elysia, now in jeans and a hoodie, shot him a glare before looking around for Benjamin.

Not seeing him, her gaze returned to Tarquin, "Where's Benjamin?"

"He had to leave. Urgent stuff."

Elysia frowned, "And Elijah's blood test results?"

"Right here."

Elysia walked over to the coffee table to grab the report, flipping through it on the spot.

Tarquin quickly poured her a glass of chamomile tea, hoping to soothe her, "Take a seat, have a look."

Elysia ignored him, scanning the report carefully before coldly stating, "Elijah's bloodwork is fine!"

Turning on her heel, she started to leave, but Tarquin caught her arm gently, "Elysia..."

"Don't touch me!" she snapped, causing Tarquin to retract his hand as if burned, looking utterly helpless and pitiful.

Elysia glared at him angrily before striding towards the inner room. Tarquin quickly stepped in front of her, blocking her path.

No matter how she tried to sidestep him, he mirrored her moves, steadfastly blocking her way, refusing to let her pass.

Frustrated to the point of teeth-gritting, Elysia demanded, "What's your deal?!"

Tarquin, eyes downcast and furrowing his brows, apologized, "I'm sorry."

"I don't want to talk to you!"

"I messed up."

"Move!"

"Can you just give me a chance to explain?"

"No! I don't want to hear it! I don't even want to see you! Just go!"

Tarquin didn't budge, and Elysia, out of sheer frustration, tried to push him away!

But even with all her might, she couldn't move him an inch. In a fit of rage, she bit down on his arm!

Tarquin winced but remained still, letting her bite. She could hit him, curse him, as long as she didn't ignore him.

Elysia bit down hard until the taste of iron filled her mouth before finally letting go, baring her teeth at him in a feral grin, warning,

"Move, or I'll bite you again! And trust me, I've got sharp teeth!"

She hoped to scare him off, but instead, Tarquin asked, "Where do you want to bite next?"

Elysia was dumbfounded.

Tarquin rolled up his sleeve, exposing his forearm, "Go ahead, bite anywhere. Your call."

Elysia was speechless, her face flushing with anger, "Are you insane?!"

Tarquin looked apologetic, "If it'll make you feel better, go ahead. Heck, eat me if that helps."

"You..."

"Look, I won't let you go back inside unless we clear this up.

Elysia bit her lip, furious, "You want to apologize, is that it? Well, I don't accept! Happy now?"

"...I didn't expect you to forgive me. I just wanted you to know, I didn't mean to do it."

Chapter 596

"You're doing this on purpose!"

"I'm not."

"You are!"

"I swear I'm not."

"You so are!"

"I..."

Elysia's eyes brimmed with tears, her frustration making her stomp her foot. "You don't even see your mistake, and you're apologizing? If you're not doing it on purpose, then I'm the one who's wrong for being mad, right?!"

"That's not what I meant..."

"Then what do you mean?" She demanded, her eyes red, looking like she might burst into tears any second.

Tarquin felt his nerves fraying, forcing himself to go along with her. "Alright, alright, I admit it, I did it on purpose. Just calm down, please don't be mad."

That only made Elysia angrier. "I knew you did it on purpose, and you still had the nerve to deny it! You jerk! I don't want to talk to you anymore, I don't even want to see you, just go! If you don't leave, I'm calling the cops!"

Hearing this, Tarquin quickly added, "I only admitted it so you wouldn't be mad, but honestly, I didn't do it on purpose, I..."

"You're starting with your excuses again! You just can't admit you're wrong! You ass!"

Tarquin was at a loss, frowning deeply, not sure if he was angry or just frustrated, his breathing all over the place. He had never felt so suffocated and speechless. Nothing he said was right!

In desperation, Tarquin yanked at his tie. "Elysia!"

She paused, lifting her chin defiantly. "What are you yelling for?!"

Grinding his teeth, Tarquin said, "Just remember what I'm saying, and remember it well. If I ever make you mad again, I'll be a dog! I'll kick my own butt!"

Elysia was puzzled.

After saying that, Tarquin undid his tie and unbuttoned the top two buttons of his shirt. He finally understood why Keaton always said, you can't reason with a woman when she's angry, nor argue about who's right or wrong!

An explanation is just an excuse, and excuses are the start of being in the wrong...

Like now, how do you explain?

If you say you didn't do it on purpose, she gets mad!

To appease her, you admit you did it, and she gets even madder, even wanting to cut ties with you!

Then you quickly explain you only admitted it to appease her, and she accuses you of making excuses, saying you can't admit you're wrong! What was he supposed to say?

Ignore her? Let her stew?

No way! He couldn't do that; it would break his heart! Today had already taken a toll on him, yet he spent all day thinking about her! Besides, he was indeed at fault tonight, wasn't he?

Reluctant to upset her further, unable to reason with her or make her understand, in the end, he was the one who suffered!

So, why bother upsetting her?

Having never dealt with women before, he lacked experience, but today was a real eye-opener!

Earning money is hard, food can taste awful, but appeasing a woman is the hardest!

Lesson learned; he'd never make her angry again!

Whether intentional or not, if he ever made her mad again, he'd punish himself!

Tarquin took a deep breath, trying to calm down, remembering Keaton's advice: Forget about who's right or wrong when she's angry, just apologize first!

He steadied himself and said to Elysia, "You're right, I'm a jerk! I have no shame! I'm sincerely apologizing now, can you forgive me?"

Elysia was still furious. "No!"

"So, what can I do to make you forgive me?"

"I'll never forgive you! I don't want your forgiveness! You've gone too far!"

Tarquin paused, then with utmost seriousness asked, "What if I strip down for you, would that make it up to you?"

Chapter 597

Elysia's cheeks suddenly flushed a deep red, her eyes wide with shock as she stared at him. Was this not outright harassment?!

Fuming, Elysia swung her hand in a swift motion, landing a slap across his face, "Whack!"

Tarquin, taken aback, grabbed her retreating hand indignantly, "Why did you hit me again?!"

"You're shameless! You're harassing me!"

"When did I ever harass you?!"

"The stuff you just said, that's harassment!"

Tarquin, his face darkening, couldn't comprehend,

"You saw me undressed and felt like I took advantage of you, making you upset. Now, I'm offering you the chance to see me, to even the score. How is that harassment?"

He thought he was making a sacrifice!

Did she think anyone could just look at him whenever they pleased?

Elysia, her face still red, retorted,

"Who wants to see you, anyway?! You are harassing me! You're just shameless! Let me go!"

Tarquin held on tight, unable to grasp what had upset her so much, but he knew he couldn't just let her go.

She was so worked up; releasing her now would only lead to more slaps.

Learning from past mistakes, Tarquin decided not to argue further, saying,

"I was just speaking off the cuff. If you don't agree, let's pretend I never said it. Just calm down first."

"Let me go first!"

"I'll let you go once you've calmed down."

"You..."

Seeing her temper flare even more, Tarquin added,

"I'll let you go, but you can't hit my face again. Anywhere else is fair game."

Elysia glared silently, and Tarquin explained,

"Getting hit in the face is visible to others, it's embarrassing! And it's not good for your reputation either. People will start saying Elysia is some wild she-beast."

"You're the wild beast! Don't you know why I hit you? Why would I hit anyone else? I hit you because you deserve it!"

Tarquin admitted, the first slap of the evening was indeed deserved.

But the second slap? He felt it was unjust, and his right cheek silently protested.

He didn't mean to harass her by suggesting they strip; he genuinely wanted to solve the issue.

Tarquin kept his grievances to himself.

"I'm not saying you can't hit me, just keep it private. Can't you spare my dignity? That's all I ask. If you can do that, I'll let you go."

Elysia understood his point. Of course, she knew not to hit the face in anger.

But in the heat of the moment, who thinks about where to hit?

"If you don't want to get hit, don't provoke me!"

Tarquin immediately responded, "Rest assured, I won't provoke you anymore."

So hard to please!

Seeing her slightly calmer, Tarquin released his grip.

Indeed, Elysia didn't swing at him again, but she also ignored him, sidestepping him to head inside.

Tarquin quickly caught her arm again, "Let's talk."

"I have nothing to talk about with you!"

"...I offered to let you look back, and you didn't want to. What can I do to make things right?"

"Just stay away from me. If I don't have to see you again, I won't be upset."

"Sorry, can't do that."

He had been anxious and restless just a few hours without seeing her; how could he possibly stay away forever?!

Elysia, furious, "If you can't do that, then don't bother asking for my forgiveness. Let me go!"

She struggled fiercely, like a little wildcat provoked, biting and kicking.

With her in this state, communication was impossible, and Tarquin just wished she'd calm down a bit.

Chapter 598

The moment she felt his grip, she let out a sharp gasp of pain, even before he had truly exerted any force. Yet, as soon as Tarquin loosened his hold, Elysia immediately tried to wriggle free again.

Left with no choice, Tarquin simply hoisted her up in his arms and carried her straight to the bedroom, tossing her onto the bed before looming over her. Instantly, Elysia became compliant!

Her eyes widened, her voice trembling, "What... what are you doing?!"

Tarquin, pinning her down, swallowed hard before issuing a stern warning, "You better listen to me. If you don't, I can't guarantee I won't lose control tonight."

"What kind of losing control?"

"Like, assaulting you!"

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Why don't you test me and see if I dare?!"

Elysia took a deep breath, clearly defiant but didn't dare to challenge him further, biting her lip as she glared at him.

Tarquin frowned, "Stop biting your lip!"

He had always found that habit of hers irksome. Every time she bit her lip, he felt an irrational fear that she might actually draw blood.

Elysia retorted, "I'm biting my own lip!"

Tarquin responded, "That's why you shouldn't!"

She could bite his, for all he cared.

Elysia couldn't fathom his thoughts but chose not to provoke him further, reluctantly releasing her lip. Her slightly parted lips seemed all too tempting to Tarquin, who covertly swallowed before letting her go and turning towards the door.

He had to leave; staying any longer might truly lead him to lose control. He wanted to kiss her. Badly.

As Tarquin walked away, Elysia quickly got off the bed and rushed to lock the door. Just as she was about to close it, a strong hand appeared in the gap, effortlessly pushing the door open. Tarquin stepped in, holding a bottle of iced tea.

After entering, he kicked the door shut. Elysia, frightened, scampered back to the bed, wrapping herself tightly in the covers, leaving only her bright, wary eyes visible.

Before he could speak, she blurted out, "If you... if you dare assault me, I'll fight you with everything I've got!"

Tarquin, suppressing a smirk, walked to the foot of the bed, opened the iced tea, and offered it to her, "Have some tea, cool down a bit."

Elysia eyed him warily, not moving.

"Do you want me to feed you?" Tarquin's gaze narrowed slightly.

Elysia quickly took the iced tea from him, sniffing it first. Finding nothing amiss, she took a cautious sip, then realizing her thirst, gulped down several more.

If only he had known this would calm her down, he would have done it sooner.

After drinking half the bottle, Elysia placed the rest on the nightstand and retreated back into her blanket fortress, only her eyes peeking out, watching him cautiously.

Tarquin sighed softly, patiently explaining, "Believe it or not, I need to tell you. I came through your window tonight to talk about what happened today. I didn't know you were in the shower. I saw you running out in a towel and tried to stop you, worried someone else might see. I didn't mean to... you know, grab your towel. It was an accident."

Elysia furrowed her brows, half-doubting his words.

Tarquin continued, "If I had really wanted to assault you, you wouldn't have stood a chance. By now, I would have... well, let's just say, it wouldn't have been just a look."

As images flickered through his mind, Tarquin swallowed hard again.

Chapter 599

Elysia bit her lip, visibly annoyed. "

"That's so dominating and forceful, it's really irritating!" she thought, clenching her fists in frustration. But deep down, she knew it was true. If he really wanted to do something to her, she'd be powerless to stop him.

In the heat of the moment, her rationale had flown out the window. She was convinced he did it on purpose. After all, he had sneaked in through the window!

There she was, taking a shower, and in came this guy, sneaking through her window. And when she tried to run, he grabbed her, and even pulled off her towel... Of course, she'd think he was up to no good. It had to be intentional!

Elysia pouted, grumbling, "Intentional or not, you're still in the wrong!"

"Yes, I admit I was wrong! That's why I said you could have your revenge, didn't I?" Tarquin replied.

Elysia pursed her lips and glared, ready to erupt again. Tarquin quickly explained, "I wasn't trying to be a creep. If I were, I wouldn't have asked for your opinion. I don't get why you got so mad after hearing it. If I knew it would backfire, I definitely wouldn't have said it. I was just trying to cheer you up, not make you angry or anything shady."

His face was a picture of sincerity, but Elysia couldn't help but complain, "Who cheers someone up like that?"

Tarquin said, "I've never really interacted with women before, so I guess I don't know how to make someone feel better. I'll learn."

Elysia's lips moved, but she said nothing more. Tarquin added, "Even though it wasn't on purpose, the situation was my fault, so I'm sincerely apologizing. Tell me what you want to make it right."

Elysia hesitated for a moment, then saw her chance and said, "I want to take Elijah in after he's discharged from the hospital!"

"Done! No problem!" Tarquin agreed readily. Climbing through that window was all about telling her this.

He figured Keaton was right; there was no point in getting mad over this. If she wanted to take care of Elijah, then he'd let her have her way. As for her taking Elijah away from Jindale City, that was his call to make!

Elysia was surprised, "You agree?"

"Yeah."

"Elijah will come to Future Community with me after he's discharged?"

"Yeah."

Elysia's face lit up with unmistakable joy. Seeing her reaction, Tarquin let out a silent sigh of relief. She was actually easy to appease; he just hadn't gone about it the right way.

Tarquin then asked, "I agree to let you take care of Elijah. Can we move past the towel incident now?"

Elysia coughed lightly, feigning generosity, "For Elijah's sake, I'll let it slide! But if there's a next time, I'll fight you tooth and nail! Also, let's... just pretend this never happened. Don't ever bring it up again, and don't you dare tell anyone!"

Hearing this, Tarquin finally felt at ease! This ordeal was finally over.

"Of course, this is under the condition that I allow Elijah to come live in Future Community. If you back out, I'll take back what I said."

Tarquin didn't nod or shake his head, "After Elijah is discharged, you can take him to Future Community, but he can't stay there forever. Once I catch the culprit, Elijah should come back to live with me."

Elysia frowned at first, then thought it over. She didn't like the idea of giving Elijah back, but for now, she'd take the first step.

"Once you catch the culprit, and after Elijah has fully recovered, he can come back to you."

"Alright."

With that, the two reached a temporary agreement. Elysia was pleased, and her mood improved significantly. Her good mood rubbed off on Tarquin as well. But then, Elysia suddenly said,

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"Okay, look, there's something I've got to get off my chest. I care about you, sure, because I think you're a decent person, and you've been good to Elijah. But that doesn't mean I like you romantically. At most, we're friends."

Upon hearing this, Tarquin's brief moment of good spirits evaporated instantly.

Frowning, he looked at her. "Friends?"

"Yeah, I mean, we've had our ups and downs in the past, but that's water under the bridge now. If you're open to it, we can totally be friends."

Tarquin's face darkened. "I don't want to."

Elysia was taken aback. "You don't?"

His expression was grim, his tone firm. "No, I don't."

Elysia pouted. "Fine by me! I'm not exactly dying to be your friend either!"

Hmph, look at him being all high and mighty!

Better off not being friends. That way, when she takes Elijah and leaves, she won't feel sorry for him.

Tarquin, seeing her all huffy, wanted to say something but hesitated and eventually gave up.

"Do you not like me?" he asked.

"Yeah, didn't I just say that? My care for you is just what friends feel for each other, not romantic. I don't like you that way!"

Tarquin's breathing was uneven. "Why not?"

"I just don't, okay? No reason."

"Am I really that bad in your eyes?"

"You're okay, but just because you're not bad doesn't mean I have to like you. There are plenty of decent guys out there. Love is all about chemistry." "What if I've fallen for you?"

Elysia was shocked. "How could you possibly fall for me?!"

"Why can't I?"

"I'm a single mom with three kids, struggling to make ends meet! What's there to like? My life's a mess?"

Before Tarquin could respond, Elysia continued,

"Don't entertain such unrealistic thoughts. It's pointless and a waste of energy."

Tarquin felt a tightness in his chest as he looked at her, his voice a bit heavier.

"What I like about you is my business. I'm asking you, what if I've fallen for you?"

Elysia didn't hesitate. "I'd steer clear of you, that's for sure."

Tarquin's heart sank. "Why?"

"Because I don't like you back. If you fell for me, it would be nothing but trouble. You'd probably end up bothering me without realizing it, and I'd find it annoying. I'd avoid you. Think about how you treat Nola?"

Tarquin felt a pang of despair.

She was oblivious to his feelings, and while part of him was relieved, it was overshadowed by profound sadness.

She truly didn't like him. Not one bit.

She wouldn't even allow him to like her...

Elysia sensed something was off and looked at him nervously. "You haven't really fallen for me, have you?"

He did. Deeply. Beyond control.

But he couldn't admit it now, hesitating before finally saying,

"No, it's not that. It's just... I don't dislike you. You're a good person, you've raised your kids well, you've been great to Elijah, you have strong values, you're kind and honest, and you approach life with positivity and optimism..."

Despite insisting he didn't like her, he inadvertently listed all her virtues.

Elysia was puzzled.

"If you think I'm so great, why won't you be my friend?"