

Hitched 651

Chapter 651

Tarquin wanted to say he got them from his own florist, but realizing Elysia didn't know about the flower shop he had bought for her, he hesitated. Just like the 2% share he had acquired from Gideon to give to her, he hadn't found the courage to tell her yet.

Seeing the puzzled look on her face, Tarquin cleared his throat and tried to lighten the mood, "Good looks come for free, you know."

Elysia rolled her eyes, but Tarquin quickly added, "Why don't you relax? I'll handle dinner tonight and call you when it's ready."

He took off his coat, hung it by the door, and slipped into some house shoes before grabbing a bag full of groceries and heading into the kitchen.

He knew Blossom wouldn't be coming home tonight; she had told him herself. After their chat, they had agreed to be 'just friends', and Blossom was all for him pursuing Elysia.

Elysia watched his tall figure move, stealing another sniff of the roses and chuckling to herself, feeling a burst of joy.

She placed the roses on the TV stand and decided to join him in the kitchen to help prepare dinner.

Tarquin had already rolled up his sleeves and was tying on an apron.

Seeing Elysia enter, he didn't hesitate to ask for help, "Can you give me a hand?"

Without any fuss, Elysia stood behind him, each hand taking one of the apron strings and tying a neat bow at his back.

She then picked up an apron for herself, but just as she was about to tie it at her back, Tarquin stepped closer, his tall frame enveloping her.

Elysia's heart skipped a beat, her first instinct was to flee, but Tarquin's hands were firm on her waist, "Stay still."

Her breathing quickened.

The warmth of his palms sent tingles across her body, "What are you doing?"

"I'm helping you with the apron."

"I can do it myself."

"It's only fair. I don't owe you anything."

His hands stayed put, firmly on her waist, as his Adam's apple bobbed with nervous tension.

Elysia felt her heart pounding out of her chest, her face flushed with a deep red, half expecting him to embrace her.

But he simply secured the apron around her waist and went back to his cooking without another word.

Elysia was left wondering if he was acting strangely or if her thoughts were too impure.

Thankfully, Blossom's timely phone call gave her an excuse to escape.

"I need to take this call from Blossom. You carry on," Elysia said, taking her phone and rushing back to her room, while Tarquin watched her go, swallowing hard.

He knew he was close to losing control just now. His desire for her was growing stronger by the day.

Meanwhile, across the hall.

A nurse was tending to Keith's wounds, chatting away, "Ms. Thorne's husband sure is intimidating. You should have seen his look; scared me to death! That man doesn't seem like someone to mess with, Keith. I'd keep my distance if I were you. He doesn't seem too happy about Ms. Thorne talking to you."

Keith sat expressionless on the couch, a cold look in his eyes.

"How do you know he's her husband?" he asked suddenly.

The nurse paused, "Isn't he? I heard Ms. Thorne's kid calling him 'daddy'."

Keith's reply was cryptic, "For now, maybe. But not for long."

"Huh?" The nurse clearly didn't catch on.

Keith, with a calm demeanor, said, "Prepare dinner, please. I'll manage on my own."

The nurse hesitated, "Are you sure? You're still in a cast."

"I'll be fine."

Chapter 652

Keith got up, grabbing an alcohol wipe as he headed to the bathroom.

Once the bathroom door clicked shut, his expression shifted dramatically, as if he morphed into someone else entirely.

Standing before the bathroom mirror, his handsome eyes narrowed, his gaze turning chilling. His deep-set eyes seemed to harbor a monstrous beast...

He prodded the cut on his forehead with a finger, then, using the bloodied digit, scrawled 'Bradford' on the mirror.

And then, he crossed it out with a vehement 'X'.

...

Across the hall, Blossom was telling Elysia she'd be staying at her mom's place for the night, suggesting that Elysia could invite Tarquin over to stay.

Elysia's cheeks flushed even more at the suggestion. "Don't be ridiculous!"

Blossom chuckled, "What's there to be embarrassed about? You're both adults. Plus, he's into you, and you like him. Let me tell you, girl, opportunities like this don't come around often. He's a total catch, you know. If you hook up with him, you're the winner!"

Elysia, reddening further, retorted, "Stop it, or I'm hanging up."

Blossom's laughter grew louder, "Just kidding. Just wanted to let you know I won't be home tonight. Gotta go."

"Drink less at the dinner, and call me if you need anything."

"Yeah, yeah, got it."

After hanging up, Elysia exhaled deeply, touching her burning face.

Blossom really knew how to tease her, making her even more shy!

To an outsider, it might seem like she was playing wingwoman, setting things up on purpose!

Elysia stayed in her bedroom for a while longer to calm down before venturing out again.

Tarquin had also managed to cool off, now busy at the kitchen counter.

Walking into the kitchen, Elysia felt awkward, unsure how to break the silence. Then, Tarquin unexpectedly handed her a bunch of kale. "Wash these. I'll cook them in a bit."

Elysia paused, then replied, "Oh, okay."

With an unspoken understanding, they avoided bringing up the earlier awkwardness, and the atmosphere gradually returned to normal.

They cooked and chatted, talking about children, Blossom, and amusing incidents in their lives.

After laughing and sharing stories for over an hour, they prepared a full dinner with eight dishes and two soups.

Elysia called the kids to dinner, and they all scampered out.

Elijah was unusually cheerful, resembling a joyous, somewhat silly landowner's son.

Elliot, adopting a 'proud father' demeanor, watched Tarquin's attentive gestures towards Elysia with satisfaction.

Emmett and Evan kept their eyes on Elysia, sharing in her happiness.

The family of six enjoyed a lively dinner, more joyful and bustling than any holiday feast!

After dinner, Tarquin insisted on cleaning the kitchen alone, allowing Elysia to relax. But Elysia didn't just sit back; she tidied up the dining and living rooms while he was busy.

By the time Tarquin finished, Elysia had also done her part.

The house was spotless and cozy.

After dinner, Tarquin played LEGO with the kids while Elysia caught up on some TV shows on the living room couch.

Their glances occasionally met in the air; one would hastily look away, while the other's gaze was warm and persistent.

Nine o'clock came, and it was time for the kids to get ready for bed, but Tarquin hadn't left yet.

Elysia had been wanting to ask him to leave, but every time their eyes met, she found herself too nervous to speak. His intense gaze made her feel uneasy.

But it was getting late, and with the kids off to bed soon, it would be just the two of them. That wouldn't be proper.

Just as Elysia was about to speak up, Elijah suddenly asked, "Mommy, can Daddy stay over and sleep with us tonight?"

Chapter 653

Tarquin and Elysia were both momentarily stunned, speechless.

Despite the fire raging inside him, Tarquin hadn't actually considered staying over. He turned to Elysia, waiting for her to make the arrangements...

Elysia froze for a few seconds before quickly declining, "No way, no way, our couch is too small. It'd be a terrible night's sleep for everyone if we tried to squeeze in. He should head home."

After she said this, she hurriedly looked back at Tarquin. His intense gaze made her avert her eyes momentarily before she mustered up the courage to say, "It's bedtime for the kids, and you should be heading out too."

Tarquin: "... " He knew it. He knew she wouldn't let him stay.

He didn't respond but turned to the kids instead, "I've got an early start tomorrow, and it wouldn't be convenient to stay here. But, how about I finish the bedtime story before I go?"

At the mention of a bedtime story, the children immediately perked up, especially Evan and Emmett, "You know bedtime stories?"

"Yep, want to hear one?"

"What stories do you know?"

"What do you want to hear?"

Emmett eagerly replied, "Do you know any stories about Bigfoot?"

"I do!"

"I want to hear it! I want to hear it!"

Tarquin affectionately ruffled Emmett's hair and turned to Elysia, "I'll just finish a bedtime story for them, then I'll leave, okay?" Elysia: "..."

She had wanted to send him on his way now. His presence made her anxious, too anxious. She felt completely on edge around him.

His gaze was like a wolf eyeing a sheep!

It was as if he might pounce at any moment!

But seeing the eager faces of the little ones, her heart softened. Her lips moved slightly, and she finally relented, "Okay, fine. But it's already late, so just the Bigfoot story and then you have to leave."

"Deal!"

Tarquin agreed cheerfully, lifting Emmett up and leading the children to their room, "Bigfoot stories can be a bit scary, you sure you're not afraid?" "Not afraid!" the children chimed in unison.

Tarquin warned, "Well, don't blame me if you end up crying later."

The kids fell silent, but Elysia couldn't help but interject, "Don't scare them too much! It's late."

Tarquin turned back with a smile, "Just having a bit of fun. You sure you don't want to join in?"

Elysia hesitated for a moment, "No!"

After refusing, she refocused on the TV, trying to ignore them.

Tarquin's smile lingered as he watched her for a few seconds before heading into the children's room with the kids.

Hearing the door close, Elysia turned back once more...

She could hear the children bombarding him with questions, their voices overlapping in excitement.

They asked him who Bigfoot's parents were, what Bigfoot really looked like, if Bigfoot melted would that mean he died, and if he died, could he be reborn?

He answered each question with patience, his deep, soothing voice filled with affection and love for the kids. It was the voice of a doting father. Elysia listened quietly, feeling both comforted and saddened.

Comforted that the father and children were getting along so well, but saddened by...

Despite her best efforts over the years to fill the void in her children's hearts, she couldn't replace their father.

Deep down, the kids still longed for him!

Maybe they kept quiet about wanting their father because they didn't want to upset her.

Elysia sighed softly to herself, her eyes on the TV, but her heart was with them in the children's room.

She couldn't make out what Tarquin was saying exactly, but she could hear the kids' occasional exclamations, indicating a harmonious atmosphere.

A smile played on her lips, soft and gentle...

However, the clock on the wall had already struck half past nine, and the Bigfoot story was still going!

Chapter 654

The kids were all tucked in like clockwork, usually fast asleep by 9:30 PM. Elysia didn't want to wait until they were all asleep to send him away. She felt a bit safer with the kids still awake and bustling in their rooms. After turning off the TV, she got up and headed toward the kids' room, her hand raised to knock, but the sounds of their lively chatter softened her resolve. Without knocking, she turned back to her room.

After freshening up, she realized he was still going on! Elysia was puzzled. Was this really supposed to be a bedtime story? Who knew bedtime stories could be marathon sessions? Had he moved from tales of Bigfoot granddads to Bigfoot juniors?!

Elysia wandered aimlessly around the living room for a bit, then drifted into the study. She tried to focus on a book to calm her nerves, but his image kept intruding on her thoughts. After what felt like ages, there was finally some movement from the living room. Elysia quickly stood up and walked out, just as Tarquin was tiptoeing and gently closing the kids' room door. Seeing her, he put a finger to his lips in a shushing gesture. Elysia froze in place, not daring to move.

After closing the door, Tarquin turned around and walked towards her with light steps. Elysia whispered, "Are the kids asleep?"

"Yeah, managed to tuck them in."

Elysia was stunned. With the kids asleep, it was just the two of them now. She was already nervous, and now her anxiety spiked, making it hard to breathe. She pinched the soft flesh of her palm, forcing herself to stay calm and avoid his intense gaze as she hinted that he should leave, "You should go, it's late."

"Elysia," he suddenly said.

"Hmm?"

As soon as Elysia looked up, he leaned down and gave her a quick kiss! Elysia froze, her face tilted up, eyes wide in surprise. His kiss was fleeting, barely dipping into deeper waters before pulling back. It took Elysia a few seconds to snap out of it, her face flushing from pale to pink. She quickly averted her gaze, "You-you should go! No need to see you out!"

She tried to make a break for her bedroom, but Tarquin quickly wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her into the study and leaned in for another kiss. The initial kiss was just a prelude, an impulsive test. Now, this kiss was the real deal! He was as wild and domineering as ever, as if he hadn't kissed her several times today already, like a wolf starved for centuries, unable to resist devouring her in one gulp.

Breathing heavily, he pinned her against the door, one hand locking hers above her head, the other wrapping tightly around her waist, leaving no room for resistance. He missed her, almost to the point of madness! From the moment he knew she reciprocated his feelings, he wanted nothing more than to pounce on her. But, overwhelmed by his emotions in the afternoon, he dared not seek her out, afraid of frightening her. He held back, waiting until nightfall.

His arrival coincided with dinner, so he waited, not wanting to disrupt their meal. After dinner, there were the kids to attend to, so he continued to wait. Now, with the kids finally asleep and just the two of them left, he couldn't hold back any longer! This night was torture for him! Now, his body was in uproar, each kiss fueling his desire further, like a wolf that's tasted blood, craving more after the first sip. With a burning discomfort in his loins, he yearned to release it inside her... But he dared not go further! He could only intensify his kisses, devouring the sweetness of her mouth. He kissed her against the door, on the couch, her eyebrows, the tip of her delicate nose, her earlobes, and her neck...

Chapter 655

As Tarquin moved in, Elysia found herself completely overwhelmed, her brain starved of oxygen, everything turning blank within moments... A single passionate kiss nearly did her in!

She couldn't even recall how she ended up on the sofa.

All she knew was that his lips never left her, moving from her lips to her cheeks, to the tender lobe of her ear, down to her chin and neck, lingering at her collarbone...

She melted under his touch, her heart fluttering uncontrollably.

Limp beneath him, she had no strength to resist, only managing to clutch at the sides of his shirt, letting him have his way with her.

Tarquin was like a man starved, his hunger not sated but growing more intense with every moment!

The heat between them grew unbearable, nearly explosive, yet frustratingly just shy of ignition.

He was in agony, his movements becoming more forceful, eliciting a soft moan from Elysia, "Mmm..."

That sound nearly pushed him over the edge!

He paused, his gaze intense as he looked down at her...

Her eyes were closed, lashes fluttering, cheeks flushed with desire, her biting on her lip in a way that spoke volumes.

Tarquin's breathing became ragged, his Adam's apple bobbing fiercely!

He gritted his teeth and dove back in, kissing her with a renewed frenzy, even more passionately than before!

He couldn't hold back!

Not anymore!

Tonight, he was going to...

Suddenly—

"Waaaah... Mommy, I want Mommy! Waaaah..." Emmett's cries came from the next room.

Tarquin froze!

Elysia's eyes snapped open!

The voices of Elliot, Evan, and Elijah followed, "What's wrong, Emmett?"

"The monster, the monster's gonna get me, waaaaah... I'm scared, I want Mommy! Waaaaah..." Emmett had a nightmare.

Elysia was instantly alert, her panic evident as she looked at Tarquin, her face burning red.

Tarquin looked back at her, just about to speak when Elysia shoved him away.

She quickly got up from the sofa, hurriedly fixing her clothes, and dashed towards the door, stopping just at the threshold without turning back, she bitingly said before leaving.

"Get out! If you don't leave now, I swear I'll turn on you!"

Tarquin: "...

He glanced down at himself, offering a moment of silent sympathy, before suppressing his desire and heading to check on Emmett.

The door to the children's room was ajar, dark inside, but the light from the living room allowed him to see Elysia comforting Emmett.

Emmett clung to her neck, his body shaking with sobs, still mumbling about the monster...

Elysia's glare warned him: Leave now!

Tarquin's lips moved, but no sound came out, aware he might have pushed her too far tonight, feeling a bit guilty.

He hadn't planned to go this far tonight.

He just wanted to kiss her, but he nearly crossed a line!

He knew rushing things with her was too hasty, but he couldn't control himself, especially knowing she had feelings for him too, he felt bolder.

If Emmett hadn't woken up, perhaps tonight would have been different between him and Elysia...

Tarquin swallowed hard, his mouth dry, daring not to provoke her further, he headed to the kitchen.

Opening the fridge, he downed two bottles of ice-cold water in one go.

Then, reluctantly glancing towards the children's room several times before leaving.

Taking the elevator down, he lit a cigarette as soon as he got into his car.

He regretted telling the kids a monster story tonight; he should have chosen something heartwarming, something that wouldn't give them nightmares.

But as much as he regretted it, the thought of Elysia's mutual affection made him smile uncontrollably.

Upstairs, Keith stood by the window, watching his car, his eyes narrow with scorn and disdain.

The nurse approached, "Keith, aren't you resting yet?"

"I'm about to." He then added with a sigh, "Tomorrow will be a sunny day."

The nurse paused, "But the weather forecast said it's going to be cloudy."

Keith chuckled, "For me, it will be sunny."

The nurse was puzzled, unsure of what he meant.

Chapter 656

Across the street, after Elysia had tucked Emmett into bed, she hurried back to her own room for a quick shower. Stripping down, she caught sight of the red marks on her neck in the mirror, her cheeks burning with embarrassment. She wondered if it was the longing of her body as she got older or the fact that he was in her heart that made her nearly give herself to him tonight. If Emmett hadn't woken up suddenly, she might have crossed a line. She was surprised at how quickly her disciplined heart had become so restless. When he kissed her, she felt nervous, yet thrilled...

Elysia swallowed unconsciously, closing her eyes and tilting her face under the shower, hoping the water would calm her agitated heart. It took a while for her to cool down, reminding herself to keep in control. Even though they were fond of each other, they hadn't defined their relationship-it was definitely too soon for intimacy...

After getting ready for bed, Elysia checked on the kids again before finally laying down, by which time it was quite late. Out of habit, she glanced at her phone, finding several messages from him:

11:10 PM, [Got home. Did you manage to get Emmett to sleep?]

11:15 PM, [Went to grab some water from the fridge and found those potatoes and carrots you bought a while back have sprouted. Talk about resilience.]

Attached was a photo of the sprouting vegetables.

11:18 PM, [I planted them in a pot. Wonder if they'll grow?]

Another photo followed, showing them buried in soil.

11:35 PM, [Just got into bed after freshening up.]

11:36 PM, [Don't wake up early to make breakfast. Sleep in, I'll bring something over.]

11:40 PM, [Elysia, going to sleep now.]

11:45 PM, [My phone is on 24/7, call me anytime.]

11:46 PM, [For anything or nothing at all.]

11:48 PM, [Elysia, goodnight.]

He didn't mention the events of the evening, nor did he express his feelings directly, but his fondness for her was unmistakable. Elysia's heart raced with excitement, a feeling beyond words. She didn't reply to his messages, instead pulling the covers over her head, tossing and turning restlessly. "Ding"

Another message. She peeked from under the covers, it was him again.

[Elysia, are you asleep?]

Her heart fluttered at his message, but after typing a reply, she deleted it. Just the thought of their encounter earlier made her too flustered to engage in a normal conversation...

In Sunshine Community, Tarquin was propped up against his headboard, staring at his phone. Her silence left him anxious, his mind racing with reasons she hadn't replied. Restlessness had him pacing from his bed to the kitchen for water. He thought about calling her directly, but hesitated, fearing he'd wake her. Not wanting to disturb her rest, he tormented himself instead.

That night, he went through two ashtrays, took four cold showers, and made over a dozen calls to Lowell, brainstorming ideas for confessing his feelings. Sitting at his computer, he searched for advice on declarations of love, instructing Lowell to buy various items he thought might help. His mind was a whirlwind of scenarios involving Elysia's possible reactions, the thought of her surprised face making him chuckle to himself. Sitting alone, chuckling in his study, he looked nothing like the CEO he was, more like a lovesick fool.

The next morning, before dawn, Tarquin was already up, preparing breakfast. He remembered she loved his omelets, so he made them. He recalled her once mentioning how much she enjoyed his sweet porridge, so he made that too. He also whipped up some side dishes, fried heart-shaped eggs, and boiled her favorite sweet corn. After breakfast, he took another shower. At just past six, Tarquin, dressed in a tailored suit, adjusted his tie, slipped on his watch, and left with his homemade breakfast.

Elysia, like him, had a restless night. But unlike him, she managed to catch a few hours of sleep, waking up around five and starting her day, albeit a bit frazzled.

Chapter 657

Elysia had never been one to fuss over her wardrobe, but today was different. She rifled through her closet, discarding outfit after outfit until she finally settled on her third choice. To top it off, she even applied a hint of makeup, something she seldom bothered with.

Her kids, accustomed to seeing her in casual home wear, hair tousled and face bare, were visibly stunned.

"Mom, are you going out today?" one of them asked, their eyes wide with curiosity.

"Nope, there's smog today. It's not a good day to be outside."

"Then why are you all dolled up?"

Elysia fluttered her eyelashes, feigning innocence. "Aren't I always like this? Wasn't mommy pretty before?"

"Mom, you're always pretty, but..." their voice trailed off, taking in her appearance. Elysia was dressed in a long, white sundress that she usually reserved for special occasions. Her hair, though still loose, looked freshly washed, and she'd even put on lipstick, earrings, and a necklace.

The kids stared up at her, completely baffled.

Feeling a bit self-conscious under their gaze, Elysia admitted to herself that the high-necked dress was a strategic choice to hide a love bite on her neck. As for the makeup, she couldn't quite explain why; it just happened.

Seeking an excuse, she said, "I decided to skip making breakfast today. Got a bit bored and ended up playing with makeup. Nothing more to it." "No breakfast? Are we going out to eat?"

"No, we're staying in."

"Then what's for breakfast?"

"Your dad is dropping something off. Oh, and Elliot, Evan, you guys might want to freshen up your makeup from last night," she added, remembering how Tarquin had left, and the kids had wiped off their playful makeup.

Checking the time, Elysia felt a rush of nervous excitement, unsure when he would arrive. She needed a reason to go downstairs, so she announced, "You guys get ready. I'll be right back; just taking out the trash."

The children exchanged looks, suspecting their mom's efforts were all for their dad's benefit.

Downstairs, after disposing of the trash, Elysia couldn't help but glance towards the entrance, half-expecting to see him. Instead, she spotted Keith, dressed casually in a trench coat with a caramel scarf, petting a stray cat that seemed to adore him.

Feeling his gaze, Keith looked up and greeted her with a smile, "Ms. Thorne, headed out so early?"

"Just taking out the trash. You're out for a walk?" Elysia replied, maintaining a polite distance.

"Yeah, I like to start my day with some exercise. Just happened to run into this little guy," Keith said, nodding towards the cat.

Elysia cautioned him, remembering his recent injury, "You've been hurt; you should take it easy. Light walks are good, though."

Keith smiled, appreciating her concern. Their conversation meandered from his injury to general pleasantries until Keith hesitated, indicating he had something more personal to discuss.

Elysia, sensing the shift in tone, encouraged him to speak his mind. When Keith finally revealed his thoughts about Elijah's father, Elysia was left speechless, her eyes wide with shock.

Chapter 658

"Really? Are you serious?"

"Yeah, if you don't believe me, you can ask him yourself," Keith said confidently.

He then added, "I think this could really shake things up for you. You should think carefully about what to do next."

Elysia frowned, visibly agitated. If what Keith was saying was true, this could indeed have a huge impact on her!

Suddenly, Keith reached out and brushed something off her head. Elysia froze, her eyes wide with surprise as she looked at him, her frown deepening. "What the heck?!"

Keith paused, then carefully explained, "You had a bug on your head just now. I thought it might freak you out, so I went ahead and took care of it."

He pointed to the tiny insect on the ground. "See? It must have fallen from the tree."

Elysia, feeling a bit awkward, muttered an apology for her earlier tone.

Keith just smiled. "No worries, I was a bit forward."

With her mind preoccupied by Keith's revelation, Elysia had no desire to wait for Tarquin any longer. She said to Keith, "I'm going to head up." "I'm heading up too. Let's go together."

Without much further conversation, Elysia and Keith walked toward the apartment building.

Tarquin, who had just arrived carrying a lovingly prepared breakfast, caught sight of them just as he got out of his car. Elysia and Keith were walking side by side, hands in pockets, with Keith turning his head to say something to her, a big smile on his face.

Bystanders nearby chatted among themselves.

"Which apartment does that cute couple live in? They look amazing together, like celebrities."

"Must be new around here. Never seen them before. How do you know they're married?"

"It's obvious, isn't it? They're perfect for each other. And the way he looks at her? So tender it's practically dripping with honey. And her, all dolled up so early in the morning? Clearly for his eyes only. If they aren't married, they're definitely an item. Imagine how beautiful their kids would be." The spectators moved on, laughing and chatting, oblivious to Tarquin.

Tarquin's heart, initially warm with anticipation, turned ice cold, though his temper flared. He clenched his fists, tempted to confront them but remembered the last time and held back.

"Elysia!"

Hearing that familiar voice, Elysia stopped dead in her tracks and turned around. There stood Tarquin, dressed sharply in a dark suit, his brow furrowed and his expression dark with displeasure. Especially when he glanced at Keith, his gaze was sharper than a blade!

Elysia, fearing another confrontation, quickly told Keith, "You go ahead, I'll catch up."

"Alright," Keith agreed, shooting Tarquin a challenging look before he left.

Tarquin was fuming. Elysia approached to explain, "I just came down to take out the trash and bumped into Keith."

Tarquin stared at her, jealousy bubbling up uncontrollably. "Dressed up to take out the trash? And we took out the trash last night. What trash are you taking out so early in the morning?"

"I..." Elysia, embarrassed to admit she got dressed up for him, scrambled for an excuse.

Before she could find the words, Tarquin pressed on, "Are you sure bumping into Keith was an accident, or did you deliberately come down for a little morning date?"

Elysia stared at him in disbelief. "Why would you even think that?"

Tarquin, his face dark with jealousy, countered, "What am I supposed to think? You're all dolled up, with Keith, and you feed me some flimsy excuse. Do I look like a toddler to you?! If you like him, just say it!"

"You... you're being ridiculous!"

Elysia turned and stormed towards the apartment building.

Tarquin, seeing her leave, furrowed his brow and followed, trying to hold her hand. She pulled away. He reached for her wrist; she shook him off, clearly angry.

Tarquin had no choice but to grab her hand, leading her to a quiet spot to explain, "I didn't mean to make you mad. I just need to know if you like him." Everything the bystanders said hit too close to home. Elysia, all dressed up for Keith, made him jealous and insecure. He felt utterly vulnerable. He knew Elysia liked him, but the depth of her feelings was a mystery. He feared that whatever affection she had for him could easily be swayed by Keith.

Elysia glared at him, hurt and disgusted, trying to leave. "I don't want to talk to you!"

Tarquin blocked her path, trying to appease her. "I'm sorry for how I acted."

"I don't accept your apology!"

"What will make you accept it? Want to hit me?"

Before she could respond, he raised his hand as if to slap himself. Elysia quickly grabbed his arm. "Are you insane?"

Tarquin gave a wry smile. "Can't bear to see me hurt?"

Elysia pursed her lips and stomped on his foot-hard. Given she was in heels, Tarquin winced in pain.

Elysia snorted. "Serves you right!"

Tarquin merely sighed, acknowledging his fault. Why did he provoke her in the first place? Now, he had to make amends.

He looked at her, his voice soft. "Are you still mad?"

Elysia didn't respond but didn't walk away either. She decided to take this moment, while their kids were not around, to discuss what Keith had revealed earlier.

Chapter 659

Tarquin looked at her, his eyes softening, "Can we talk calmly once you've cooled down?"

Elysia muttered, "You were the one who got mad first!"

"So, I apologized, didn't I? I was too impulsive and my attitude was off. It just irks me seeing you with him, especially after I've told you to keep your distance."

"I explained it already, didn't I? I bumped into him by accident when I went downstairs. You just won't believe me!"

Tarquin's lips twitched, "Be honest with me, do you like Keith?"

Speechless and on the verge of snapping back, Elysia caught the earnest look on his face and swallowed her words, grumbling instead, "I don't! I've said it a million times!"

Relief washed over Tarquin, settling his restless heart. Though he still had his reservations about her looking so dolled up around Keith, as long as she didn't fancy Keith, it was okay.

He reached out, gently patting Elysia's head in a soothing gesture, "There, there, let's not be angry."

"Get lost!"

Tarquin chuckled, his mood instantly lifting. He had never known what it was like to truly care for someone until now. Joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness, all because of her.

"Let's go, I brought you breakfast. All your favorites."

Elysia stood still, "I have a question for you."

"What is it?" he asked.

Elysia hesitated for a moment before speaking, "Are you planning to rent apartment 1803?"

Tarquin was taken aback, "How did you find out?"

Their building, Blossom, housed four apartments per floor. The Blooms lived in 1801, Keith in 1802, and the other two apartments were 1803 and 1804. Since Keith refused to sell, Tarquin had negotiated with the other tenants and settled on 1803. Not for rent, but to purchase outright. It was currently being fast-tracked for renovation so he could move in right away. He hadn't told her because he wanted to surprise her once he moved in.

But now...

Seeing the frown on Elysia's face, Tarquin felt his heart sink, "What's wrong?"

Elysia, with her eyebrows knit tightly, questioned, "Why would you rent another place when you already have a house? Just to be closer to me and Elijah?"

"...You should cancel the lease."

Tarquin frowned, "You don't want me moving in?"

"No."

His heart sank further, "Why not?"

Elysia bit her lip, their relationship not yet defined, and she wasn't ready to expose the secrets of the children. If he moved in, Elliot and Evan's secrets could easily be revealed, complicating their lives.

Unable to explain, Elysia simply stated, "I just don't want you to move in right now." Tarquin, unable to grasp her thoughts, felt a mix of frustration and disappointment, "Give me a reason."

Elysia looked down, avoiding his gaze, "...There's no reason."

Tarquin's frustration mounted, his jaw tightening as he tugged at his tie, "And Keith? Did you ask him to move out too?"

"This is between us, Keith has nothing to do with it."

"How can he not be involved? Did he tell you about 1803? Is he the reason you don't want me moving in?!"

Aside from Keith's interference, he couldn't think of any other reason. Moving in next door meant they'd see each other more, which was a good thing, yet she was against it.

Elysia frowned upon hearing Keith's name again. True, Keith had informed her about 1803, but her decision was her own.

"Stop bringing up Keith. It has nothing to do with him not wanting you to move in."

Tarquin's expression darkened, "Then why can he live across from you, but I can't live next door?"

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"I'm not saying you can't, just... not right now. Can you give me a little more time?"

She was determined to clarify her relationship with him before bringing up the kids.

But now was definitely not the time!

They were just starting out, feeling each other out with no real commitments or even a clear admission of their attractions. The matter of her children had to remain under wraps for now.

Her kids meant the world to her; nothing would be revealed until everything was settled.

Tarquin's handsome face clouded over with frustration.

"I can give you time, but you've got to give me a reason. Why can't I move in yet?"

"I'll tell you... later."

"How long is 'later'?"

"I'm not sure."

"So, what, I'm just supposed to wait forever without any idea of where we stand?"

Elysia looked down, unable to respond.

Tarquin, his emotions getting the better of him, furrowed his brows and pressed on,

"Elysia, do you think this is fair to me? You won't let me move in, you won't tell me why, and you won't give me a timeframe. Are you just looking for excuses to keep me at bay?!"

"No! That's not it, I just..."

"Then what is it?" Tarquin interrupted, clearly upset.

Elysia frowned, wanting to explain but not knowing where to begin.

In his frustration, Tarquin blurted out,

"Keith can stay here, but I can't. Are you worried I'd cramp your style with Keith? Am I just a backup plan to you?"

Elysia, taken aback, quickly became defensive,

"Who said you're a backup? You can't just make accusations like that!"

"If I'm not a backup, then what's going on?!"

"I told you, I don't like Keith that way. There's nothing between us, but you won't believe me..."

"How can I believe you when you're all dolled up for morning walks with him? And now you're acting all cagey about me moving in. Are you trying to see how things go with Keith before deciding about me?"

"Believe what you want! My not letting you move in has nothing to do with Keith! And I'm not treating you as a backup!"

With that, Elysia ran off, tears in her eyes.

She had her reasons, her own struggles and pains that she couldn't yet share!

Without settling the future between them, she couldn't risk revealing her children. Thus, the reason for not letting him move in remained unsaid. But it hurt that without any proof, he'd suspect Keith. She trusted him unconditionally; why couldn't he extend her the same courtesy when she couldn't provide reasons?

It was one thing to misunderstand her, but another to not even have the basic trust.

Watching her run off, Tarquin wanted to follow but held himself back. He had his pride and stance too.

He took issue with not being allowed to move in and wasn't ready to compromise.

And today's events didn't feel like affection to him; instead, he felt sidelined, and it made him furious. Dark-faced, Tarquin returned to his car.

Opening the door, he saw the thermos of breakfast he'd prepared for Elysia sitting on the passenger seat. Irritated, he tossed it in the trash and drove off.

Unless Elysia gave him a satisfactory explanation, he wasn't going to back down.