

Hitched 661

Chapter 661

Elysia, with her eyes rimmed red, took a moment to compose herself in the hallway upstairs before daring to enter her home. She didn't want her kids to notice anything amiss and start worrying about her.

Upon her arrival, the kids immediately bombarded her with questions about when their stepdad would come over. Elysia forced a smile, made up an excuse about him suddenly being tied up with work, and then turned to head into the kitchen, trying to hold back her tears as she prepared breakfast.

After the morning chores were done, she locked herself in her bedroom, dove under the covers, and wept in silence. Her heart ached unbearably. He had actually accused her of keeping him as a backup plan! In his eyes, was she really that despicable? Despite explaining that her encounter with Keith was purely coincidental, he refused to believe her, suspecting her of secretly dating Keith. She had reiterated her lack of interest in Keith numerous times, yet he persisted with his doubts and accusations.

Had she done something to blur the lines with Keith? And then there was his reluctance to move in with her. She knew it was unfair to him and felt guilty about it, but she couldn't expose the kids to such a significant change without being sure about their future together. If he had just agreed, she would have found a way to make it up to him. Even if he initially disagreed and got angry, she could understand. But accusing her of stringing him along while keeping things unclear with Keith? That was just low. In his eyes, was she really such a fickle-hearted person?

Both Elysia and Tarquin were in agony. After their unpleasant parting, Tarquin returned to his company only to find out a key project had been halted due to a mistake made by a project manager under the influence, leading to a government stoppage. This meant not only a hefty fine for breach of contract but also a blow to the company's reputation and future dealings. Tarquin's rage was palpable, shocking even Lowell, his right-hand man. The entire atmosphere at Bradford Group was tense, with everyone on edge, working diligently to avoid further issues.

Throughout the day, Elysia kept to herself except for meal times, her heart heavy with sorrow. Tarquin, on the other hand, drowned himself in work, skipping meals and maintaining a stern demeanor that clearly communicated a "do not disturb" warning. Lowell, despite his best efforts, couldn't persuade him to take a break, nearly getting frozen by Tarquin's icy glare.

As the night deepened, neither of them could find sleep. Their relationship had barely started, yet they were already tasting its bitterness. Elysia lay in bed, her attention glued to her phone, hoping for a message from him. Each time her phone buzzed, she would quickly check it, only to feel dejected when it wasn't from him. She considered reaching out but didn't know what to say, her pride and hurt feelings keeping her from breaking the silence. Meanwhile, Tarquin spent the night in his office, unable to focus on work as thoughts of Elysia consumed him. He stood before the floor-to-ceiling windows of his office, overlooking the lights of Jindale City, smoking a cigarette - a habit he hadn't indulged in for a long time. The more the night wore on, the more he missed her, finding it impossible to concentrate. He contemplated reaching out to her numerous times, but each time, he held back at the last second, unwilling to appear weak or to concede to her demands, which would mean not moving in together.

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He wanted to move in, to be there with her and Elijah every single day, and he wasn't about to back down. The nights were long, both torturing themselves and each other. They endured like this for three straight days.

Tarquin had spent three consecutive days at the office, his aura growing darker by the hour. He was like a robot devoid of emotions, just burying himself in work, clearing the pile-up of tasks that had accumulated over the holiday season! The pace was too much for the employees; three executives were already out sick, and the rest were mentally begging for a break. But with the boss burning the midnight oil, no one dared to take a day off. They just kept their heads down and worked on! All they could do was silently pray for a miracle to brighten up their boss's mood.

During these days, Elysia was down in the dumps, the sparkle in her eyes dimming more with each passing day. Dark circles had formed under her eyes, and she looked more haggard as days went by. Merely mentioning him would bring tears to her eyes.

Blossom and the kids all sensed something was off, and they tried to mediate. Blossom talked to Elysia, while Elijah and a few of the kids tried to reason with Tarquin. But both of them were tight-lipped, refusing to speak a word about it! Since no one knew the real reason behind their silent battle, any advice was of little to no use, having almost no effect at all.

The cold war continued, with both sides torturing themselves and each other.

Until the morning of the fourth day, Tarquin suddenly received a series of photos. The photos were sent from an anonymous account, all featuring Elysia and Keith. There were pictures of them walking shoulder to shoulder, Keith opening the door for Elysia as they exited a building, and even enjoying the

sunset together. There was even a photo where Keith was affectionately patting Elysia on the head. In some photos, Keith was looking at Elysia, in others, Elysia was looking up at Keith, and then there were those where they were gazing into each other's eyes.

Seeing these photos, Tarquin's lips thinned, his face turned ashen, and his facial muscles twitched in anger! The emotions he had been suppressing for days surged to his heart. Completely losing control, he threw the documents he was holding, grabbed his car keys, and stormed out!

He didn't even bother to put on a coat, just wearing a thin black shirt. Lowell, worried he might catch a cold, chased after him with his coat, but Tarquin had already vanished into the elevator.

At the crack of dawn, Tarquin showed up at Blossom's doorstep. With a scowl, he raised his hand to knock. But just as his hand was about to touch the door, he hesitated. His approach was fierce, filled with rage, but standing here, about to see her, his anger was subdued by longing.

He had refrained from seeing her these past days, and it had been tough! He missed her, truly missed her! If it wasn't for his stubbornness, he would have come to see her already! He didn't want to be in a cold war with her, to upset her, to go days without seeing her. He stayed at the office for three days, thinking of her every moment! If he didn't immerse himself in work, he wouldn't have made it through these days!

Not wanting to scare her with his dark mood, Tarquin steadied himself for a good while before he finally rang the doorbell. While waiting for Elysia to answer, he reminded himself: Those photos must have been sent by Keith, Keith trying to stir trouble again. He couldn't fall into Keith's trap! He could ask Elysia about those photos, but he shouldn't lash out at her. He had to keep his temper in check, not to frighten her! This was the girl he liked, after all. Scaring her would hurt him more than anything!

However

When the door opened, and he saw Elysia, cheeks flushed, breathing uneven, and Keith looking disheveled, his mental fortifications crumbled instantly!

Chapter 663

Elysia and Keith together were like waving a red flag in front of a bull, and Tarquin was the bull on the verge of charging!

Just catching a glimpse of their picture together was enough to set him off, let alone this situation.

Early morning, when most people were still enjoying their dreams, Keith was already inside Elysia's house!

Elysia, with her hair in disarray and cheeks flushed, seemed surprised at first, then shocked, and finally visibly panicked upon seeing him, as if caught in a guilty act.

Keith, standing behind her in a thin white shirt with several buttons undone, revealing hints of his chest muscles and the shirt creased from what must have been a passionate encounter, was breathing as erratically as she was.

The scene was too suggestive not to raise eyebrows and sent a rush of adrenaline through Tarquin!

It was a direct challenge to every nerve, every cell in his body!

The suppressed anger within him broke free, the fury intensifying and blazing within him more fiercely than before!

He stood outside the door, lips pressed tightly together, his facial muscles tense, and the veins in his neck bulging from the overwhelming emotions! He looked chilling, like a wrathful spirit risen from the depths of hell - downright terrifying!

Elysia eyed him cautiously...

She couldn't guess his thoughts, but in those few seconds, her emotions were on a roller coaster.

Upon opening the door and seeing him, she was taken aback. They hadn't seen each other in three days, and she hadn't expected him to show up today.

Then came the surprise!

Despite their ongoing cold war, seeing him filled her with an inexplicable joy. They had been at odds for three days, and she had missed him terribly, every single day, her longing intense. So, her first reaction wasn't to continue their silent battle but to feel excited, happy.

Unfortunately, this flicker of 'surprise' vanished too quickly for Tarquin to notice.

After the surprise, she became nervous. She hadn't put on any makeup, was dressed casually, and looked a mess - she worried he might find her unappealing.

Her nervousness then turned into panic thinking about Elliot and Evan also being unprepared. She became increasingly anxious and uneasy. Seeing the heavy aura of displeasure around him now made her fear his reaction...

"Mommy?" Suddenly, Evan's voice came from behind.

Elysia's heart skipped a beat, and she hurriedly turned around to see Evan running towards her, her heart leaping to her throat.

Evan was without makeup, and if Tarquin saw him like this, it would be disastrous!

With a "thud!" Elysia quickly shut the door, leaving Tarquin outside.

Tarquin felt his heart sink to the lowest depths!

Thankfully, Elysia, worried about upsetting him further, managed to say, "You... just wait for a moment, I'll come out to you soon."

After speaking, Elysia quickly ushered the kids back to their room.

She told them their dad was here and asked them to stay in the room until Emmett could get Elliot and Evan ready.

After briefing the kids, she dashed back to her bedroom and reemerged dressed in a beautiful, beige cinched-waist dress, her hair neatly done.

Her eyes sparkled with life again, as if a person who had been listless suddenly regained their vitality.

She hurried to the door, seemingly eager to see the person waiting outside.

Chapter 664

Keith stood in the living room, a frown creasing his brow as he watched her. Yet, she didn't even glance his way, as if she had completely forgotten he was there... and that she and Tarquin were in the midst of a silent battle.

Brimming with excitement, she ran to the door, quickly adjusting her clothes and hair, taking several deep breaths before finally opening the door. Her cheeks flushed, she stuttered at Tarquin, "Why, why are you here without telling me first?"

At that moment, Tarquin was seething, too furious to utter a word! He didn't respond to her, just shot her a glance before immediately looking towards Keith, his gaze as sharp as a dagger, filled with menacing intent.

Elysia noticed this and, afraid he might act impulsively and start a fight, quickly stepped outside, "Let's talk." As she went out, she also closed the door behind her.

Keith's gaze lingered, witnessing all the demure gestures Elysia displayed upon seeing her beau; it was clear as day to him. He was certain, Elysia had truly fallen for Tarquin! Keith's frown deepened, a layer of frost seeming to cover his eyes...

Outside, Elysia and Tarquin stood face to face. Before he could ask, Elysia began explaining today's incident, "This morning, the gas was cut off in our area, and Keith came over to check on my situation. Just then, my bathroom's water pipe burst, and Keith came in to help fix it... That's why he was at my place."

She wasn't lying. When Keith knocked on her door to ask about the gas, there was a sudden 'bang' from the bathroom! She rushed to check, finding the water pipe had burst, water gushing out. In panic, she tried to stop the flow and called the property management, completely overlooking Keith. It wasn't until the property management staff arrived that she even noticed him... She hadn't even had the chance to ask Keith if his injured arm got wet before Tarquin showed up.

Tarquin, upon hearing this, a flicker of surprise crossed his eyes, "Fixing the pipe?"

"Yes! If you don't believe me, you can go check. Not just Keith is there, but also the property management staff, they're still fixing the bathroom. You can also ask Elijah, the kids can vouch for me, I'm not lying."

Elysia finished, cautiously glancing at him as if afraid he wouldn't believe her. Tarquin looked down at her, believing her! So, his anger subsided a bit. But, he couldn't believe it was all just coincidence!

Today he received those photos, and when he arrived in a rage, he saw the scene unfold before him... If he hadn't retained a bit of his rationality, if Elysia hadn't turned him away, they would have definitely argued again! The result of an argument would be, after three days of cold war, their relationship would further deteriorate!

So, today's series of events seemed less like coincidences and more like someone had planned them from the start! Who could that be? The answer was obvious.

Tarquin lifted his head, subconsciously glancing towards the door, his eyes dark and deep. He couldn't allow Keith to continue causing trouble. If this went on, his relationship with Elysia would be in jeopardy. Today, he had to understand Keith's motives!

Chapter 666

Keith had barely cracked the door open when Tarquin came at him with a powerful kick. Unprepared, Keith was sent flying back several feet, crashing into the hall's decorative stand. The ceramic ornaments it held shattered upon impact, littering the floor with sharp fragments.

One particularly nasty piece cut deep into Keith's hand, causing blood to stream down instantly. The darkness that Keith had been hiding in his eyes surfaced immediately. Seeing Tarquin slam the door shut behind him, Keith got up and rushed at him, ignoring his own injuries.

Both men were seething with anger. Tarquin's fury stemmed from Keith's provocations and Elysia's attitude towards Keith. Keith's rage was purely from jealousy-Elysia's affection for Tarquin was more than he could bear.

The room was filled with the sounds of their violent clash, with objects breaking all around them. Keith, despite having one arm in a cast, refused to back down. But his injuries put him at a clear disadvantage, making him an easy target for Tarquin's wrath. It wasn't long before Keith was battered and bruised.

Licking the blood from the corner of his mouth, Keith let out a derisive laugh, provoking Tarquin into delivering another brutal punch. This one seemed to shatter the bones in Keith's face.

Collapsed on the floor, coughing up a mouthful of blood, Keith looked up at Tarquin and continued to laugh. His bloodied smile was haunting, a stark contrast to his usual refined and cultured demeanor. Normally, Keith was an educator who taught both physical education and art, radiating a scholarly aura. But now, he looked more like a bloodthirsty fiend.

With blood trailing down his chin, Keith taunted Tarquin, "Is this all you've got? Beating up a guy with one good arm? You're pathetic. And you think you can protect Elysia and the kids like this? The game's just getting started, buddy."

Tarquin, taken aback by the mention of a game, demanded, "What game?"

Keith, grinning wickedly, replied, "The game between you, me, Elysia, and the kids. A fun game."

Tarquin's brow furrowed. "What's your real purpose in getting close to Elysia?"

Keith's smile grew eerie as he confessed, "I want to steal her from you."

Tarquin's face darkened. "Steal Elysia?"

Keith showed no fear, still smiling. "Yes, I want to take Elysia and the kids away from you, make them mine."

Tarquin, grinding his teeth in anger, pressed, "So, you're doing this to get at me?"

Keith laughed, "I like Elysia. I think she's wonderful-beautiful, smart, a great mother, and she would make a great wife. I want to win her over."

Tarquin pressed his foot against Keith's chest. "You think you can win her? You're delusional!"

Lying on the floor, Keith looked up at him, still smiling provocatively. "You think I can't? At least she allows me to stay close to her. We see each other every day. But she won't let you move in. If you ask me, I think my chances are better than yours."

Tarquin's eyes darkened with jealousy. This was a point he couldn't let go of.

Keith continued, "She has her reasons for not letting you move in, reasons she hasn't told you. But she told me. I know why."

Tarquin was taken aback. "What?"

Keith's voice was full of smug superiority. "If you don't believe me, you can ask her yourself."

Tarquin's brow furrowed even more deeply.

Keith added, "I know the reason, but I won't tell you because I promised her I'd keep it a secret. I'm telling you this to show you that she trusts me with her secrets, while she keeps you in the dark. So, when the time comes for her to choose, who do you think she'll pick?"

Tarquin's breathing grew heavier, a sense of crisis creeping into his heart. The reality was undeniable- she allowed Keith to stay close but wouldn't let him move in. She had secrets she shared with Keith but not with him. Despite her supposed dislike for Keith, why would she confide in him?

Chapter 667

Tarquin Bradford was practically dragged out of Keith's place by Elijah.

Elijah, worried that Tarquin might have done something impulsive that could backfire, made a special trip to check on him.

He wasn't surprised to find them fighting.

But...

"Daddy, are you okay?"

Elijah stood in the hallway, looking up at Tarquin with a worried expression.

He didn't know what was wrong with his dad, but he could sense that something was off. The air around Tarquin seemed heavy with tension and melancholy.

Though he bore no physical injuries, his expression was one of deep pain, as if he'd been hurt on the inside.

It had been a long time since Tarquin looked this way.

With a furrowed brow, Tarquin remained silent, causing Elijah to grow more concerned. Finally, Elijah tugged at his arm, "Daddy..."

Tarquin snapped back to reality at that!

Seeing the concern in his son's eyes, he quickly forced himself to shake off his thoughts, "Daddy's fine, don't worry."

After ruffling Elijah's hair in a comforting manner, Tarquin scooped him up and headed toward Elysia Thorne's place.

Just as he was about to knock, the door swung open.

Elysia, about to head out in search of them, was taken aback upon seeing them, "!"

The sight of Elysia caused Tarquin's brows to knit together even more tightly, his gaze lingering on her with a complex expression for several seconds before he handed Elijah over to her and turned to walk toward the elevator.

Elysia, holding Elijah, called out, "Hey!"

Tarquin didn't stop, stepping into the elevator and disappearing from sight...

Elysia frowned, turning back inside with Elijah in her arms.

Elijah, with a worried frown, said, "Daddy seems upset."

"I can tell. You guys stay home for now; I'll go check on him."

After putting Elijah down and grabbing a jacket, Elysia hurriedly changed her shoes and rushed out the door.

She could tell something was off with Tarquin, not just anger, but as if he was internally wounded.

She was worried about him.

Unfortunately, by the time she got downstairs, he was nowhere to be seen, his car gone.

Worried about him driving in such a state, Elysia frantically tried to call him, only to find his phone turned off.

Elysia was anxious, anxious for the whole day.

Because she couldn't reach Tarquin all day.

It wasn't until around 7 pm that she received a call from Keaton Huber,

"Elysia, it's Keaton. Are you free right now?"

"Hm?"

"If you are, could you come down to Blissful Uncle's Bar? Tarin's here."

Elysia quickly asked, "Did something happen to him?"

Peeking into a private room, Keaton saw Tarquin downing a full glass of liquor as if it were water.

Keaton sighed,

"His mood's been off all day, drowning himself in drink, and we can't seem to stop him."

Elysia panicked, "He's been at the bar all day?"

"Yeah, he called us for a card game during the day and then for drinks in the evening. He hasn't eaten anything all day." Elysia replied urgently, "I got it! I'm on my way!"

She hung up and immediately called Blossom Blythe, explaining she had to step out and asking her to watch the kids. Fortunately, Blossom had just come back and was downstairs with the kids, secretly enjoying ice cream.

After making arrangements for the children, Elysia quickly put on her coat and left.

At Blissful Uncle's Bar, everyone sat around the table, all wearing concerned expressions and hardly daring to breathe. Tarquin's reckless consumption of alcohol, treating it like water, had stunned everyone.

It was clear to anyone that Tarquin was in a bad mood, no, a terrible mood, the kind that's reached its absolute worst.

Chapter 668

They wanted to say something, to intervene, but they couldn't muster the courage.

They wanted to join him in his drinking spree, but the fear held them back.

The whole vibe in the private room was exceptionally somber. They were simultaneously sympathetic, curious, and frightened.

Just what had gotten into Tarquin tonight?

He had been the one to set up this whole gathering today. Earlier in the day, everyone had been teasing him about that 'three-minute make-out session' with Elysia.

But as the day wore on and his mood took a nosedive, everyone tiptoed around him, carefully spending the day at his side.

During the day, he was just moody and sullen, but stable, silently playing cards while everyone else just went along with it.

But as night fell, he began to drink like a man on a mission, which terrified everyone.

Seeing Keaton walk in, Booker quickly leaned in to whisper, "Any luck? Did you get ahold of her?"

"Yeah, just wait," Keaton said.

Given his state, it seemed only Elysia's presence might calm the storm.

Forty minutes later, Elysia rushed in, out of breath and with beads of sweat on her nose.

Keaton, upon seeing her, lit up as if he'd seen a savior, quickly getting up to greet her, "Elysia!"

All the wealthy young men in the room turned their gazes towards her, stunningly taken aback by her beauty.

Sure, they'd seen plenty of beautiful women, even those of natural grace.

But someone of Elysia's caliber was rare even for them!

Dressed in simple black leggings and a white cropped puffer jacket, her long hair casually draped over her shoulders, and her face bare of makeup, she was breathtakingly beautiful!

It wasn't just her features or her face shape; there was an indescribable allure to her, something about her aura that was unique and captivating! They had wondered what kind of woman could possibly match up to Tarquin's looks.

Now, they had their answer. Her and Tarquin, a perfect match!

But Elysia didn't spare them a glance, her eyes fixed on Tarquin amidst the crowd.

However, Tarquin wasn't looking at her; he was busy pouring himself another drink.

From afar, Elysia could almost smell the alcohol on him.

He was still wearing the black shirt from when he helped fix the pipes at home, now with the top two buttons undone, lounging back in his chair, exuding a sense of defeat.

Elysia's heart clenched at the sight; something was wrong.

As Tarquin lifted his drink, she rushed over, snatching it away, "Stop drinking!"

Tarquin, annoyed at being interrupted, looked up with a dark scowl, "Are you looking for trouble?!"

But then, recognizing the figure before him, his expression shifted from surprise to shock.

Staring at Elysia for a moment, he quickly softened, explaining,

"I didn't know it was you. I thought it was one of them."

Everyone else: "...". So, Elysia can intervene, but we're just looking for trouble. What do they call it? Bros before...oh, never mind.

Elysia set the glass on the table, frowning at him, "If you've got something on your mind, spit it out! Why drown yourself in drink? Who's going to deal with you if you get sick?"

Tarquin, leaning back, scowled at her, his frustration growing.

His worries, could he even voice them?

And if he did, could she offer any solution?

Keith gets to be close to her, but he can't! Keith gets to know her secrets, but he's kept in the dark!

Why?!

Chapter 669

Wasn't she into him?

Yet, she blatantly ignored his wishes, constantly mingling with Keith, their bond seemingly deeper than what she shared with him!

Did she harbor feelings for Keith as well?

The more Tarquin mulled over it, the more unsettling his emotions became, fueled further by the alcohol coursing through his veins, morphing into resentment.

Gritting his teeth in frustration, he grabbed the glass Elysia had just set down and downed its contents in one go.

Then, in a swift motion that left no room for Elysia to react, he stood up, cupped her face in his hands, and kissed her.

The act was so sudden, it caught everyone off guard, shocking them that he'd dare to kiss Elysia in such a public setting!

Elysia, taken aback, blushed furiously, her heart pounding in her chest.

She was shy, not one to engage in public displays of affection, and she struggled to break free.

But Tarquin, seemingly out of control and oblivious to everyone around, had eyes only for Elysia, as if they were the only two in the room.

He tried to deepen the kiss, but Elysia bit his tongue in resistance!

Pain shot through Tarquin, making him release her.

Breathing heavily, Elysia was a mix of flustered and furious.

Tarquin frowned, looking straight at her, "Tell me the truth, do you like Keith?!"

Elysia was stunned at first, then her anger flared up. How many times did she have to explain herself?

Why wouldn't he believe her?

Not wanting to argue in front of everyone, she pushed his hands away and turned to leave.

Tarquin pulled her back into his embrace, determined not to let her go.

His stern gaze bore into her, his eyes screaming 'we need to settle this today.'

With her face tight with frustration and anger, she glared back at him, her eyes brimming with grievance and fury.

He kept questioning her, refusing to trust her.

Making a scene and even kissing her in front of everyone, he showed her no respect.

Just as she was about to speak, the room went silent.

Elysia's words were cut short when Tarquin, in a surprising move, slapped himself hard across the face with her hand, then sealed her lips with another kiss.

This kiss was overwhelming, leaving no chance for resistance, lasting for what felt like an eternity before he finally let her go and stormed out of the room without a word.

Kissed and ditched!

The room was buzzing with confusion.

Elysia gasped for air, dizzy from the kiss, her mind blank.

By the time she regained her composure, Tarquin had vanished, along with Keaton.

Only unfamiliar faces remained, cautiously watching her, cautiously offering comfort,

"Ms. Thorne, would you like something to drink? Maybe it'll help you calm down."

With her cheeks still flushed, Elysia said nothing, biting her lip as she fled.

She hailed a cab, retracing her steps back home, though her emotions had drastically shifted.

On her way there, she was worried about him, but now, resentment filled her heart.

How could he kiss her like that in front of everyone?

Did he have any respect for her at all?

Arriving home with a heavy heart, Elysia forced a smile to reassure Blossom and the kids before heading off to freshen up.

Blossom left for her parents' house again that evening; her cousin had come to visit Jindale City and was staying there. With her parents away, Blossom wanted to keep her cousin company.

After tucking the kids into bed, Elysia curled up under her covers, nursing her sorrows alone.

The sudden ring of her phone startled her. Hesitantly, she reached for it, seeing Keaton's name on the display.

A call from Keaton was bound to involve him.

Despite her frustration, after a moment's hesitation, she sat up and answered, unable to detach herself from her concern for him. "Hello, what's up?"

Keaton's voice was anxious, "Ms. Thorne, can you get ahold of Tarquin?"

Chapter 670

Elysia frowned, "I haven't been in touch, what's happened to him?"

Keaton's voice was heavy, "He's gone off the radar. Disappeared after leaving the pub and no one knows where to. We've all been looking for him, checked everywhere possible, but there's no sign of him."

Elysia began to worry, "Have you tried calling him?"

"Yeah, tried that. He's not picking up, no replies to texts either. He was in a bad mood today, we're all a bit concerned. Could you try reaching out to him?"

"...Alright, I'll let you know if I hear anything."

After hanging up, Elysia hurriedly dialed Tarquin's number, not even upset with him anymore.

After several unanswered calls, she sent him a message,

[Where are you?]

[Keaton and the others are looking for you, worried sick. Reply when you see this.]

After a long wait without a reply from Tarquin, she couldn't help but say,

[I don't have feelings for Keith, not one bit! Don't be upset over him!]

With no response, she continued to send messages,

[Don't frighten everyone. They're worried about you, and so am I. Let's pretend whatever happened at the pub tonight never did. Get in touch as soon as you see this.]

[...]

Elysia sent many messages, all sinking without a trace!

She clutched her phone, waiting until well past midnight.

Still no word from Tarquin, she was too anxious to sleep, her mind racing with all sorts of dreadful scenarios.

At one moment, she feared he might have encountered some trouble, or worse, been kidnapped.

Then she worried, with his mood so off, if he might have considered harming himself.

The more she thought, the more terrified she became, eventually calling Keaton to suggest involving the police.

Keaton reassured her, "You don't have to worry about that. There's no way he's been kidnapped or would harm himself."

Who'd dare kidnap him, are they looking for trouble?

And who could possibly manage to kidnap him?

Harming himself is even less likely; he would never abandon Elijah like that!

Keaton said, "He's just in a bad mood, I'm worried he's slipping into depression, that's why we need to find him fast! He's been emotionally off lately, ecstatic one day and as depressed as if he's been through a breakup the next. Very fragile, huge swings in mood."

Elysia: "..

Keaton tentatively mentioned, "He seems to really care about that Keith guy."

After a pause, Elysia explained,

"Keith is ElliotEvan Emmett's teacher, lives right across from us. I don't like Keith, but he always overthinks."

Happy she was willing to chat, Keaton then said,

"It's because he likes you, that he overthinks. Tarin likes you, you do know that, right?"

Elysia's lips moved, silently agreeing.

Keaton continued,

"The more he likes you, the more he's bothered by other men around you. Keith is like a thorn in his side; he's very sensitive about Keith. Even normal interaction makes him jealous, especially since Keith isn't exactly easygoing.

Elysia, hear me out, if you like him too, you guys should clear the air soon. Don't let others affect what you have.

It's a rare blessing in life to have mutual feelings with someone you like. If you're lucky enough to find it, don't let it slip away! Love is supposed to be beautiful. You should be enjoying the sweetness of love, not its bitterness. Life is short, you've got to seize the moment, enjoy and cherish."

Elysia, blushing, stammered, "He... he never said he liked me."

He had never confessed his feelings to her.

Keaton bluntly said, "He's scared."

"Huh?"

"He was afraid because you didn't like him back before, scared he'd frighten you by confessing. Now, he's unsure how deep your feelings are for him, afraid he'll scare you off by confessing. He likes you, very cautiously so."

