

Hitched 681

Chapter 681

Ben's assistant stood there, gobsmacked and bewildered, a mix of shock and flattery washing over him. "What?!"

After all, they knew who Tarquin was. They'd seen him around more than a few times, but having him initiate a conversation? And with a smile? That was a first!

Tarquin didn't just baffle Ben's assistant; he had everyone he encountered scratching their heads in disbelief!

He struck up conversations with the elevator operators!

He chatted up families waiting in the hospital lobby!

He even made small talk with the elderly folks chilling in their wheelchairs at the entrance!

And, believe it or not, he didn't spare the janitors, exclaiming, "My son's mama is Elysia!"

"Elysia, oh, Elysia! The most perfect Elysia in the world!"

"I can't believe it's her. How did I get so lucky? Tell me, did I save the galaxy in a past life or what?!"

"Elysia! Haha! It's Elysia! I... hahaha... I'm so lucky! So happy!"

Soon, word spread through the hospital like wildfire: a tall, handsome man was going around, seemingly lost his marbles, mentioning 'Elysia' and bursting into goofy grins whenever he did.

Some of the older folks felt pity, saying, "Such a handsome, young man. Why has he lost his senses? What could've shocked him so?" There were even suggestions to the hospital staff to perhaps have Tarquin checked into the psychiatric ward for a thorough evaluation!

Ben was floored when he heard the news!

He gripped his assistant's hand so hard his knuckles turned white, his eyes nearly popping out of his skull.

"What did you say?!"

His assistant, trembling with fear, explained, "Mr. Bradford has been acting really odd today, telling everyone about Elysia being his kid's mom. He's not just greeting strangers; he's been grinning like a madman! It's like he's lost it!"

Ben's jaw dropped. "Elysia?!!!"

It finally dawned on him. He had just processed the paternity test between Elysia and Elijah!

Meaning, Elysia was indeed Elijah's biological mother!

"Oh, my Lord! Where is he?!"

Without waiting for an answer, Ben bolted from the lab, the lab coat still trailing behind him.

He was running so fast and fiercely that he nearly took a tumble but regained his composure and continued sprinting towards the elevator.

His assistant hurried after him, "Dr. Ben, where are you headed? We've got a surgery this morning!"

Ben, seemingly deaf to the question, turned and said, "Elysia is Elijah's mother! The heavens have finally opened their eyes! After all these years of tormenting Tarquin, it's finally raining sugar! I'm... I'm so damn happy for him! My brother has suffered enough..."

Ben, getting choked up, left his assistant dumbfounded.

Mr. Bradford has gone bonkers!

And now Dr. Ben's off his rocker too!

God, the assistant felt like he was losing his mind too!

But, seriously, who in the world is Elysia?!

Ben, after his brief moment of jubilation, began to blame himself, "How could I have screwed up last time? I've practically doomed my friend! Thank goodness Elysia didn't slip through his fingers, or I'd never forgive myself... I owe it to him to make things right for the rest of his life..."

His assistant, puzzled, thought, What? Be responsible for Mr. Bradford for life? That... sounds a bit odd, doesn't it?!

Meanwhile, Tarquin was in his car, furiously pounding on the steering wheel with joy.

No words needed: Ecstatic!

Three words: So very happy!

Four words: Absolutely over the moon!

Five words: Nearly dying of happiness!

Six words: So thrilled, I could fly!

A whole sentence: So happy, I'm nearly a lunatic!

After stirring up the entire hospital and getting back into his car, he looked at the paternity test report in his hands. He first celebrated by hitting the steering wheel, then murmured to himself about his incredible luck, and finally, his eyes welled up with tears...

They say real men don't cry easily, but he couldn't help himself.

After all these years, he'd never felt so overwhelmed, moved to tears, eager to shout from the rooftops:

Elysia is the mother of his child!!!

Elysia is the woman Tarquin had been searching for, for six whole years!

Envy me, be jealous, for I, Tarquin, am the luckiest, happiest, and most overjoyed man alive!

Truly...

What fortune, that it's her!

Chapter 682

Oh, what a stroke of luck, it's her!

Ha, it's her, it's really Elysia, how wonderful!

In his joy, he was also filled with regret. Thinking back on the harsh words he'd spouted at her, the anger he'd unleashed, he wished he could kick his own butt!

Why had he been so foolish?!

Thank goodness, there was still a chance to make things right!

He vowed to treat her well, twice as well as before!

He was going to spoil her, spoil her rotten!

"Ding ding ding..."

His phone suddenly rang. Lowell was on the line, talking work stuff, "Tarquin, are we still having that meeting today? It's time, and you haven't shown up at the office."

Without missing a beat, Tarquin blurted out, "Vacation!"

"Huh?"

"Pass it along, tell them I said everyone's been working hard lately. The whole company's taking a three-day paid leave! And get finance to approve some team-building funds. Whatever they spend on team building, we'll reimburse! Start the budget at six figures!"

Lowell was still in the dark about the paternity test results, and was stunned.

"A vacation, three days, and team building???"

"Yep! Oh, and also, announce that all Bradford Group ventures will be offering a 50% discount!"

Lowell was even more shocked, "Half price? Even on real estate?"

"Yeah, and if the old clients get upset, just compensate them the difference. Plus, waive the maintenance fees for all our properties for three years! Any losses, I'll cover personally from my account!"

Lowell's eyes bugged out. Wasn't this the same as throwing money away?

Good Lord, what in the world was happening?!

"Tarquin, is... is there some good news?"

Tarquin was ecstatic, "Huge good news! Get ready to toast to my happiness tonight. No, wait, not tonight, I won't have time. We'll schedule it later!" He wanted to spend the day with Elysia and had no time for anyone else!

"Right, if anyone asks what's going on, just tell them I'm over the moon today. If they're touched, tell them to wish me a lifetime of happiness!" After hanging up, Lowell was dazed. A lifetime of happiness? With whom?

Confused, Lowell relayed Tarquin's message.

And just like that, the entire Bradford Group went wild!

The relief and joy were akin to high school students being released after years of exam stress!

Tarquin himself was bubbling with happiness, unsure of how else to express his joy other than by spreading his wealth, wanting everyone to share in his elation.

If it weren't for considering Elysia's feelings, he would have announced it to the world by now!

He, Tarquin, was going to be a dad to Elysia's child!

With his heart racing, Tarquin went back to see Elysia, just as he started the car, a call from Benjamin came through, his voice choked with emotion, "Tarquin, I owe you an apology!"

He was right to apologize; his mistake had nearly doomed Tarquin to bachelorhood!

But Tarquin wasn't mad,

"Kicking you was punishment enough. Your mistake was understandable; I get it."

"Huh? What do you get?"

Tarquin frowned, changing the subject,

"Stop the nonsense. While I'm in a good mood, go hustle some sponsorships. Once this opportunity passes, it's gone."

After hanging up with Benjamin, Tarquin steered back to Sunshine Community.

He trusted Benjamin implicitly, knowing well that the mishap wasn't Benjamin's fault. The mix-up with the paternity test must have been the work of some schemer lurking in the shadows!

Elysia's first kiss with him had been in a bar, and he'd sensed something off even then.

That brief kiss had him thinking of Elijah's mother, prompting him to conduct the paternity test.

This schemer must have been watching from the shadows, for reasons unknown, not wanting him and Elysia to connect, thus tampering with the paternity results.

Benjamin, being just a doctor, was an easy target for this mystery person's games.

That's why the first paternity report falsely stated that Elysia and Elijah weren't related!

And that's why he'd been so harsh to Elysia afterward!

Thankfully, she hadn't been driven away by his actions!

Thankfully, today, sensing something off in her words, he'd gone for another test! Thankfully...

Chapter 683

As Tarquin basked in a mix of relief and seething anger towards the enigmatic stranger, he found himself back at Sunshine Community in just over twenty minutes.

Gently pushing open the door to his home, he noticed the absence of Elysia in the living room and proceeded to the master bedroom.

It was midday, yet the bedroom remained shrouded in darkness.

The curtains were still drawn, allowing only a sliver of light to sneak through and illuminate Elysia's face, showing her deep in slumber.

The sight of her immediately banished thoughts of the mysterious man from Tarquin's mind.

Today was their day, a moment solely for him and Elysia, and he'd be damned if anyone dared to interrupt.

Treading lightly, Tarquin closed the door behind him and approached the bed, gazing at her with a mix of caution and adoration.

This was Elijah's birth mother!

The woman he'd been searching for over six long years!

The one he had wronged, wanted to make amends for, tirelessly sought after, and now loved deeply - it was all her.

Tarquin's expression was a tangled web of emotions as he gently caressed her cheek, his hands trembling...

His feelings for her were complex, a blend of love and guilt.

Relief, self-reproach, and deep affection coexisted in his heart.

Discovering she was Elijah's birth mother filled him with joy, an overwhelming happiness.

But the joy was quickly overshadowed by endless guilt and sympathy, especially now, seeing her up close, intensified his feelings of remorse and compassion.

She had shared her past with him - how, after he had wronged her, she was scorned by her husband and cast out.

Following that, her pregnancy with Elijah had led to curses and insults from those around her.

And then, she was forced to leave Jindale City, her hometown...

He couldn't even begin to imagine what she had endured over the years.

Her struggles, her hardships, and the insults and humiliations she faced were all because of him.

And what had he done in return?

Upon their reunion, he had been harsh, argumentative, and verbally abusive, even going so far as to label her as promiscuous based on their past. How could he? How dared he?

The pain in Tarquin's heart was suffocating, as if an invisible hand was squeezing his heart, making it difficult for him to breathe.

With each breath, his heart ached sharply.

He despised his past self, wishing he could obliterate that version of him.

In a moment of emotional turmoil, Tarquin slapped himself across the face.

He was filled with regret and anger at himself.

The sound of the slap was loud, waking Elysia from her slumber.

Blearily opening her eyes, she immediately noticed Tarquin and the red mark on his face.

Elysia's pupils dilated, and she snapped to full alertness.

Sitting up abruptly, she asked, "What happened?"

Touching his reddened cheek, her heart ached for him.

"Did you do this to yourself? Why would you... are you bankrupt from a business failure? I have money, I can help..."

Elysia's mind always raced to financial solutions at the first sign of trouble.

Before she could finish her sentence, Tarquin pulled her into a tight embrace.

Sitting on the bed, with Tarquin kneeling beside it, he held her closely, burying his face in the crook of her neck, wordlessly seeking forgiveness. Elysia was completely stunned.

She could feel his strong heartbeat, his body trembling against hers, and then she noticed something else...

Her shoulder was becoming damp and warm. He was crying.

Tarquin was crying.

Elysia's heart raced, fearing the worst.

She quickly tried to console him, "Don't scare me, just tell me what's wrong. If it's a business loss, I can help. I haven't spent any of the money you gave me; it's all yours."

Tarquin tightened his embrace, his shoulders shaking more violently, his emotional turmoil evident.

How kind and innocent Elysia was!

And he had hurt her...

Elysia was deeply concerned, "If it's not about the money, is it about Elijah's mother? I told you she isn't coming back anytime soon. And even if she does, it won't affect us negatively. Trust me, if she returns, you'll be even happier."

His silence only heightened her anxiety.

"Please, talk to me. Don't scare me. Whatever the problem, we can face it together, solve it together."

Tarquin took a deep breath, his eyes brimming with tears as he looked at her, "I'm sorry!"

Elysia was baffled, "Huh?"

Kneeling by the bed, Tarquin apologized repeatedly, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry..."

Chapter 684

Elysia was utterly confused and clueless. Truth be told, she wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed and believed that as long as she didn't admit to anything, Tarquin would be none the wiser!

So, listening to Tarquin repeatedly apologize, she didn't realize he already knew the truth!

But having studied a bit of psychology, she could tell he was in a bad place.

He was hurting, deeply regretful, like there was a ton of guilt pressing down on his chest, impossible to shake off!

He was even more distressed than he had been the day before!

There's a saying that men don't easily shed tears, only doing so at the deepest sorrow.

And right now, he was genuinely heartbroken!

Elysia had no idea what had happened, seeing him like this for the first time. She was worried and panicked, her mind racing with wild thoughts, "Have... have you fallen for someone else? Or, did you get tangled up with another woman in some emotional mess?"

Had he gotten involved with another woman and felt guilty towards her?

Tarquin was momentarily stunned before he hurriedly defended himself,

"No, that's not it. I only have eyes for you. I swear, I..."

Elysia quickly cut him off,

"I don't need your oaths. I trust you! I'm just curious about what's going on with you. Why do you keep apologizing to me? Did you do something to wrong me?"

Tarquin looked into Elysia's earnest and naive eyes, his lips quivering, struggling to confess.

Elysia must have figured out that he was the one who had troubled her at the airport years ago!

She must also know that Elijah was her own flesh and blood, which explained her deep affection for him!

Why else would she want to see his scars, or why was she so upset when he accused her of misconduct, and why did she so confidently tell him last night that Elijah's mother would never return!

She knew everything, yet chose not to confront him about it!

Tarquin couldn't understand why Elysia, despite having moved past their previous issues and even started to develop feelings for him, still wouldn't confront the truth.

But he respected her decision!

He vowed never to make her sad or unhappy again!

If she didn't want to confront it, he would keep her secret!

With a sniff, Tarquin embraced her again,

"Don't worry, I'm fine. My apologies..."

He paused before saying, "are because I've made you worry, and I've hurt you in the past. I deeply regret it."

Elysia, in her innocence, thought he was referring to his recent bad attitude towards her, not connecting it to the incident six years ago.

She wrapped her arms around his waist, gently patting his back to comfort him,

"You were mean to me before, but I wasn't exactly nice to you either. We're even now, and let's not dwell on the past. We have our future to look forward to."

Tarquin hugged her tightly,

"Yeah, you're right! I'll make it up to you, I promise never to let you down again! Elysia, let's make it official, shall we?"

Elysia's heart raced, her cheeks burning. Even though they had confessed their feelings the night before, hearing him propose they officially become a couple sent her emotions soaring.

Tarquin then released her, gazing into her eyes with deep affection,

"Elysia, can we start as boyfriend and girlfriend? Be mine?"

Elysia blinked up at him, her face flushed and her heart pounding with nervous excitement.

Tarquin continued,

"I've never been in a relationship before, so I might not know how to be the perfect boyfriend, but I promise to learn. Whatever joy other women experience in love, I'll give you double. What they can't have, I'll also give you double! I want to make you truly happy. Give me a chance to love you properly, give us a chance, will you?"

Elysia's heart thumped wildly,

"I, I... then you can't tell the kids."

"Hmm?"

"We can date, but let's keep it a secret for now, just between us."

Tarquin, understanding her shyness and not wanting to make their relationship public yet, immediately smiled and agreed to her childlike request, "Alright, your wish is my command."

He looked at her adoringly, while she shyly avoided his gaze, blushing like a rosebud about to bloom.

Tarquin, moved by the moment, cleared his throat,

"Elysia, your boyfriend wants to kiss you. May I?"

He barely waited for an answer before his lips claimed hers, sweeping her off her feet and onto the bed, holding her close...

Chapter 685

At this moment, Tarquin's heart was overflowing with emotions, but his kiss was extraordinarily gentle.

So gentle, it was almost cautious!

It was like how a kid savors their favorite slice of apple pie, wanting to devour it all at once yet not wanting the moment to end, savoring it bite by bite.

Or like a collector admiring a rare and precious artifact, movements filled with tenderness, as if afraid that even a slight pressure would cause damage.

Elysia's eyes were closed, her eyelashes fluttering gently.

Tarquin's kisses were usually straightforward, but today's unexpected gentleness, reminiscent of a first kiss, was all the more enticing, all the more heart-stirring.

It used to feel like he was kissing her with his body, but today, it felt like he was kissing her with his heart.

Elysia, nervous, clutched at the sides of Tarquin's shirt, letting him kiss her.

In the bedroom, the air was charged with an unsteady excitement, the temperature gradually rising, becoming hotter and hotter.

Their breathing became rapid, bodies intertwined, souls entangled, passion seeping into their bones.

Desire blazed within Tarquin, his body burning up, his lower abdomen uncomfortably tight, soon losing control.

His kisses became more assertive, his hands wandering restlessly over her body.

Through the thin layer of fabric, his hand moved from her waist down towards her thighs, lifting the hem of her shirt, his hand making its way inside.

His palm directly grasped Elysia's waist, the delightful sensation making Tarquin's heart race.

Elysia let out a soft moan almost making him surrender then and there!

His desire was palpable, eager, the kisses becoming wild, his hand starting to roam upwards.

The sounds of their heavy breathing and soft moans filled the room...

Suddenly, Elysia's eyes, which had been tightly shut, flew open, grabbing Tarquin's wrist with a flushed face, looking at him breathlessly, "No, we can't."

Tarquin swallowed hard, wanting her yet not daring to force anything, beads of sweat forming on his forehead, the corners of his eyes reddening, "What's wrong?"

"I, I'm not ready, I..."

Suddenly, she thought of her estranged husband.

She didn't like him, but they were still not divorced, legally speaking, didn't that make Tarquin the other man?

No! That can't be!

She couldn't let him carry that label!

And it made her uncomfortable...

"I just remembered something, can you give me some time? Please don't be mad, I... I... It's not that I don't like you, or don't want to be with you... I have my reasons, I..."

Seeing her ramble on, trying to explain, Tarquin felt a pang of heartache.

Not wanting to hurt her meant he had to restrain himself.

He wanted her, but he had to hold back!

He wouldn't force her to do anything she wasn't ready for anymore!

Tarquin took a deep breath, laying on top of her without moving, knowing any movement could cause him to lose control.

"I'm not mad, if you don't want to, I won't touch you!"

Elysia's lips moved, unsure of how to respond.

Tarquin kissed her forehead, "I'll go to the bathroom for a bit, you stay here and relax."

He really needed to cool down, heading to the bathroom to take care of his frustration.

After Tarquin left, Elysia covered her head with the blanket, only her eyes peeking out. She felt both shy and sorry for him.

It wasn't that she didn't want to, she was an adult with natural desires...

But the sudden thought of her husband made it hard for her to proceed.

She felt awkward and guilty towards Tarquin.

Caught up in the whirlwind of love, she hadn't thought about the fact that she was still married when she agreed to date him. It just hit her now!

Chapter 686

She and Tarquin weren't even officially divorced yet. If Tarquin found out about them, what if it hurt him?

No way, she had to get in touch with the Royal Community's office pronto and get that divorce from Tarquin sorted!

Seizing the moment while he was in the shower, Elysia sat up, grabbed her phone, and dialed the Royal Community,

"Hello, I need to know when Tarquin can meet me? I'm in urgent need to get a divorce! If he refuses to get back to me, I swear I'll camp out at his office!"

The person on the other end said they'd pass the message to Mr. Bradford and hung up promptly.

Elysia frowned, worried. Did Tarquin have some serious issue?

There was zero love between them, they hadn't even met face to face yet, so why on earth was he dragging his feet on the divorce?

After stewing in her frustration for a while, Elysia calmed herself down and called the kids.

Blossom was home today, and the kids were all fine. They told her not to worry and to take care of her business.

Hanging up the phone, Elysia let out a sigh of relief, but the thought of Tarquin reignited her frustration.

When Tarquin came back from cooling off, Elysia was still brooding over the divorce.

Seeing him, her heart raced, filled with guilt, "I..."

Tarquin, in his pajamas and with his hair still damp from the shower, tossed the towel aside and climbed into bed.

Elysia shivered, nervous.

Tarquin snuggled under the covers, pulling her into his embrace, "Don't worry, I'm not going to do anything, just want to hold you." Elysia nestled in his arms, looking up at him, "You're not mad?"

"I can't bear to be mad at you."

Her heart fluttered at his response, and after a moment's thought, she sat up to face him seriously,

"We need to talk."

Seeing her seriousness, Tarquin sat up quickly, "As long as it's not about breaking up."

"I, I, I'm not divorced yet!"

Tarquin: "?!"

"

Elysia mustered all her courage to say,

"I didn't want to hide this from you. You have the right to know. My husband and I, we're still not divorced."

Tarquin was surprised, "I thought he was dead?"

"He's not dead."

Tarquin was even more surprised, "He's alive??!! "

"Yeah, he's alive and well. But there's absolutely no love between us, not a single bit. I don't like him, and he doesn't like me, I..."

Before Elysia could finish, Tarquin's phone rang. Glancing at it, he saw it was from the Royal Community.

Without a second thought, he hung up!

He tossed the phone onto the nightstand and turned back to Elysia,

"If there's no love, why not divorce? Is it because of the kids?"

He still thought the three little ones were Elysia's 'husband's' kids!

Elysia, mindful of Tarquin's status, didn't go into details, only saying,

"There were some unpleasantness, leading to the delay. I actually came back this time with the kids to get the divorce, but it's been dragging on."

"He doesn't want to divorce?"

"Yeah."

Tarquin frowned, "Why wouldn't he want to?"

"He... he didn't explicitly say he doesn't want to, I guess he's just too busy with work."

Managing the entire Bradford Group must be super demanding, right?

Tarquin's expression darkened, dissatisfied,

"However busy, there's always time for a divorce. Excuses! Give me his info, I'll handle it!"

If there's no love, it's better to end it sooner rather than later, and not keep Elysia tied down!

Chapter 687

Elysia shook her head vigorously, "No way, you can't contact him!"

"Why not?"

"I... I'm afraid he'll hurt you!"

Tarquin sighed, "You don't need to worry about that, I just want to have a calm chat with him."

"That's still not okay."

He and Keith had even come to blows before, seeing Tarquin would surely make him lose his cool even more!

After all, Tarquin's demeanor would definitely be less forgiving than Keith's!

Keith couldn't stand it, let alone Tarquin!

If he ended up hitting Tarquin, that would be the end of it!

Even though they both carried the Bradford name, one was a top CEO, and the other, a bankrupt businessman. How could he possibly compete?

Moreover, he was in the wrong. The other guy was the legally recognized husband by the state, and he was, at best, a...

If Tarquin got angry and decided to throw him in jail, throwing the book at him with a bunch of charges that could lock him up for decades... Elysia couldn't bear to think further; she was scared,

"I'll handle things with him myself. If I really can't manage, then I'll tell you."

"He..."

Elysia took the initiative, wrapping her arms around him and tumbling him onto the bed,

"Stop asking! I mentioned him to avoid any hard feelings over what happened just now, and to tell you it's not that I don't like you, or don't want to be with you... It's just that thinking about him made me uncomfortable, which is why I rejected you. As for him and me, I'll figure something out as soon as possible."

Tarquin's heart raced, "Are you really over him?"

"I am! I promise!"

Tarquin held her tight, sighing inwardly.

Her discomfort meant, as long as she didn't divorce, they couldn't be together?

This damn man, who the hell was he?!

Messing with his love life!

He had heard bits and pieces about him from Elysia before, how that scumbag treated Elysia poorly. After she was bullied, he not only lacked empathy but also kicked her out!

Ruining Elysia's reputation, breaking her heart!

Tarquin just wanted to find out who he was, then confront him, to stand up for Elysia. But Elysia was reluctant to say...

It seemed like she was really worried her husband might hurt him!

He didn't want to worry her, so he played along for now,

"You handle it first. If things don't go well, you come to me. Don't worry, he can't hurt me; I'm not afraid of anyone."

Privately, he was definitely going to dig around!

Elysia lay on top of him, her face pressed against his chest, "Okay."

After saying this to appease him, she kissed him.

Tarquin was flattered, momentarily forgetting everything else. He flipped over, pinning her beneath him, and teased her mercilessly.

But as the teaser, he was also the one who suffered!

Wanting but not being able to have, he took not one but four cold showers back and forth.

After every attempt to cool off, he couldn't resist kissing her again, reigniting his desire immediately.

He found himself running back and forth to the bathroom...

They didn't go anywhere, just staying in bed from noon, cuddling until evening.

By the time Tarquin came back from the bathroom for the last time, Elysia couldn't stand it anymore and refused to let him kiss her, diverting his attention with conversation instead.

Talking led them to drift off to sleep again.

When they woke up, it was already dark outside.

Waking up in each other's arms, they looked into each other's eyes at close range and smiled.

In that moment, their eyes and hearts were filled with nothing but happiness!

Tarquin wanted to kiss her again, but Elysia was quicker, blocking his lips with her hand, "No more kissing!"

A kiss would only lead him back to the cold shower!

Chapter 688

Tarquin could read her like an open book. Gently pushing aside her hand, he planted a soft kiss on her cute nose and forehead. "Hungry?" He shouldn't have mentioned it. Now that he did, Elysia realized she was actually starving.

They had been wrapped up in each other all day, not bothering to eat a thing.

"What would you like to eat? I'll whip something up for you."

Elysia made a move to get up, but Tarquin gently pushed her back down onto the bed. "What do you want to eat? I'll take care of it. You rest a bit more."

Elysia chuckled, "I'm not tired anymore. Let's do it together?"

"Alright, you can be my sous chef."

Both got out of bed, and Elysia, still donning his shirt, headed to the bathroom to freshen up. Catching her reflection, her cheeks flushed and her heart raced.

Her neck bore the marks of his affection, bold and intimate.

After freshening up, she found Tarquin busy in the kitchen, looking every bit the domestic god.

Seeing her, his gaze intensified.

Elysia, feeling somewhat self-conscious, glanced down and, with flushed cheeks, mumbled, "I'll go change."

Tarquin immediately stopped her,

"The clothes are still drying. No one else is here, keep it on. It looks good on you. I like it."

His shirt hung loosely on her, exuding that perfect boyfriend vibe.

Elysia walked over to the balcony where her clothes from yesterday were still drying. Indeed, they were damp.

With no choice, she braved it out and joined him in the kitchen. "What are we making?"

Tarquin, looking utterly smitten, replied,

"We haven't eaten all day, so something greasy might not sit well. How about I make you some chicken soup? I've ordered a few sides; they should be here soon."

"Oh, what can I do?"

He handed her a bunch of green onions and some parsley. "Wash these and set them aside."

Elysia rolled up her sleeves and got to work.

Tarquin was chopping tomatoes and occasionally looked up to steal glances at her, each time breaking into a goofy smile.

After a few repeats, Elysia couldn't help but ask, "What's so funny?"

Tarquin replied, "Just can't believe my luck, finding such a beautiful girlfriend!"

"Stop it and focus on cooking!"

Tarquin's laughter filled the kitchen, the very picture of happiness.

Just as the chicken soup was ready, the doorbell rang with their order. Elysia moved to answer it, but Tarquin insisted, "I'll get it."

She was dressed for his eyes only!

Even if the delivery was made by a friend, it wouldn't matter!

Tarquin brought in the order, and Elysia set the table with the soup and the sides.

A simple yet cozy meal.

Meanwhile, in apartment 1802 of Future Community, Keith lay on his bed, glued to his phone with a furrowed brow and a grim expression.

After being beaten up by Tarquin the day before, his caregiver wanted to rush him to the hospital, but he refused.

He despised the sterile scent of hospitals!

After getting treated at home, he'd been resting in bed.

Later, he sent a message, "Are they together now?"

The reply came, "Seems like it. He rushed for a paternity test last night and found out Ms. Thorne is indeed the woman he's been looking for. They've stayed in all day today, so judging by what I know of him, their relationship must have warmed up quite a bit."

Keith's face darkened. Their relationship warmed up?

It was understandable for Tarquin to fall for Elysia, but how could she reciprocate?

She fell for the man who assaulted her?

Was she foolish or just blindly in love?

A self-inflicted misery!

Fuming, Keith sent out a message, "Round up some men. I'll be needing them in the next few days..."

Chapter 689

Elysia didn't get home to Future Community until after 10 p.m.

Tarquin had been reluctant to let her go; parting with her felt like leaving a piece of his heart behind. But Elysia hadn't seen her kids in over a day and was missing them terribly.

Besides, she believed that even in a relationship, it wasn't healthy to be glued to each other's side every minute of the day. So, she insisted on going home.

As soon as their car rolled into Future Community, Tarquin's mood visibly darkened, his brows knitting together in displeasure.

The reason? Keith. The very thought of him was enough to sour Tarquin's mood.

Elysia mistakenly thought his unhappiness was due to their imminent separation and tried to console him,

"We'll see each other again tomorrow."

"... Yeah."

Parking in front of building number 10, Tarquin turned to her, his voice suddenly gentle and filled with affection, "Elysia."

Elysia froze, her heart skipping a beat at the sound of her name spoken so tenderly.

"What's up?"

Tarquin, still in the driver's seat, looked at her seriously, "Can you wait a moment before going up? I'd like to talk to you about Keith." They had been too caught up in each other since yesterday to bring up Keith, not wanting to ruin the wonderful time they were having. But now that they had a moment of calm, it seemed unavoidable.

Elysia, thinking he was still suspicious of her relationship with Keith, felt a twinge of annoyance but didn't want to start another argument over him. She replied calmly,

"I really don't like him! I'm serious!"

"I know, but I want to hear your thoughts on him."

Elysia was forthright in her response,

"I neither like nor dislike Keith. To me, he's just someone I know but don't have a close relationship with. I have no intention of getting involved with him."

"...Would you share your secrets with him?"

Elysia was confused, "What do you mean?"

Tarquin laid his cards on the table, "Yesterday, he told me you share everything with him, even the reason why I can't move in with you."

Elysia was shocked, "Keith said that?"

"Yeah! He seemed pretty proud of it, almost like he was showing off."

Elysia frowned,

"How dare he! Yes, he knows some things, but not because I told him willingly. He found out by accident! The last thing I want is for him to know anything about me. I don't like him, we're not close, why would I tell him everything?!"

Tarquin's brows furrowed, "Is he using this information to threaten you?"

"No, he always says he'll keep it a secret. I've been polite to him, not setting clear boundaries partly because of this. I'm worried he'll spill my secrets." After explaining, Elysia hurried to reassure him, worried he might be upset,

"I didn't keep secrets from you because I don't like you. I'm just not ready to share yet. Give me a bit more time."

She was cautious with her words.

Just as he was careful about his feelings for her, she was equally cautious from the moment she fell for him. Keeping her children a secret was her mistake, and she was anxious it might upset him.

Seeing her worry, Tarquin gently touched her face, comforting her,

"I understand. Don't worry, I can wait. When you're ready to tell me, I'll listen."

Elysia, feeling guilty, promised, "I won't keep secrets from you for too long."

Now that they were in a relationship, all she wanted was to see if they had a future together.

If they did, she certainly wouldn't hide her children from him.

Tarquin patted her head, "No rush."

Though he was curious about the secret she was keeping, knowing she cared for him made everything else seem trivial.

Elysia then asked, "Why would Keith tell you all this?"

Chapter 690

Tarquin frowned, "He must be lying on purpose, trying to rile me up, make me angry with you, and drive a wedge between us. Before I came to see you yesterday, he..."

He almost brought up the photos, but the thought of frightening her made him hold back.

After all, being stalked and photographed is a terrifying ordeal for anyone.

Tarquin quickly changed the subject.

"He told me he wants to pursue you, to take you and the kids away from me."

Elysia's eyes widened, "Keith? Pursue me??"

"Yeah."

"Did he say that when he was testing me last time?"

"No, it was yesterday."

Elysia was shocked, "How could that be?! We barely know each other. How could he think about pursuing me? And to take the kids!"

She looked utterly incredulous, paused, then continued,

"He's never shown the slightest interest in me. He treats me just like I treat him, with courtesy."

Tarquin's tone was icy, "That's why he's dangerous, cunning!"

"...But how could he possibly like me? It's just... impossible! You can't hide affection! If he really liked me, no matter how cunning he is, he'd slip up at some point, but he's shown no signs. I'm sure he doesn't like me!"

Tarquin was pensive. Elysia was right; affection can't be hidden, emotions are uncontrollable.

The things Keith had said didn't sound like someone who liked Elysia.

But he kept trying to stir trouble, even boldly stating he wanted to take Elysia and the kids away.

There was definitely something off about him!

Elysia continued to mutter to herself,

"But if he doesn't like me, why is he after me and the kids? What's his endgame?"

Tarquin didn't have an answer yet. Seeing Elysia anxious, he quickly reassured her,

"Maybe he knows I like you and said it just to upset me."

He knew Keith's real motive was probably more than that, but he didn't want to scare Elysia.

Because Elysia was easily frightened.

He told her these things mainly to let her know that Keith was not simple, not friendly, and his hostility towards Keith was justified.

As long as she could avoid Keith, that would be enough. He would handle the rest!

Seeing Elysia still somewhat skeptical, Tarquin pulled her into his arms,

"I'm telling you this because I want you to understand why I have such a big issue with him! I don't want to fight with you over him anymore. Lately, all our arguments have been because of him. I hope you can try to avoid him, not interact with him."

Elysia was still a bit nervous,

"But you guys didn't interact before, right? Why is he trying to upset you?"

"Maybe he's held a grudge since I punched him the first time we met."

Elysia:

Seeing her worried look, Tarquin decided to give her a passionate French kiss.

Talking about Keith wasn't meant to scare her!

After a deep kiss, Elysia was left dazed and confused.

Tarquin took the opportunity to say, "Even if it's just to make me happy, try not to deal with him anymore."

Elysia nodded with a flushed face, "Mhm."

Tarquin smiled indulgently and walked her upstairs.

In the hallway, Tarquin kissed her intensely once more before letting her go back to her room.

Then, with a scowl and a flicker of disdain and fierceness in his eyes, he turned and left.

Back in his car, he didn't leave immediately but sent out a message first, then lit a cigarette and sat waiting. Soon enough, Blossom came downstairs.