

Hitched 761

Chapter 761

After Blossom had picked out her drink, Tarquin went ahead and ordered them some snacks.

Blossom, curious, asked, "More food, huh? Planning on making this a long chat? What about Elysia?"

That's when Tarquin chimed in, "She's upstairs sleeping. Didn't catch her husband today."

"Oh? Why not? That jerk still not willing to give Elysia a break?"

Tarquin shot back, "Her husband, he's got ties to the Bradford Group?"

"The Bradford Group? What's that scumbag got to do with them?"

It was clear she had no clue.

Tarquin probed further, "Did she ever mention anything else about him?"

Thinking for a moment, Blossom recalled, "Oh, right, her husband's into guys!"

"Into guys?" Tarquin was taken aback.

"Yeah! Elysia told me. I bet that jerk's dragging his feet on the divorce just so he can keep Elysia as his beard. To cover up his thing for guys." Tarquin frowned, all too familiar with the term "beard."

A beard is a woman married to a gay man, someone used as a cover-up, a victim sacrificed for the sake of secrecy.

Beards are helpless, pitiable.

They're either deceived their whole lives, never receiving love from their husbands, or they discover the truth and are left in despair.

If Elysia's deadbeat husband truly preferred men, that would explain his reluctance to divorce.

But that meant Elysia was the one suffering.

Annoyed, Tarquin's brow furrowed as he sent off a message to Lowell,

"Check who in the company is gay, ASAP!"

Putting away his phone, Tarquin calmed down for a moment before showing Blossom Daphne's information,

"Do you recognize her?"

Blossom glanced at the photo and her info for a while before shaking her head, "Don't know her."

Blossom and Winona Newsom had only met Elysia in college, aware only of her three terrible relatives, nothing more.

Since the Thorne family didn't reside in Jindale City, she'd never met them.

Winona, however, had encountered the Thorne family once, a memory Blossom vividly remembered.

It was a Saturday, and Elysia was working her usual part-time job at a local café.

The Thorne family barged in demanding money from her, with Winona happening to be there.

That day, following a dispute over Zane, Winona had argued with her parents. They disapproved of Zane, calling him a social climber unsuitable for a lady of Winona's stature, insinuating he was after her wealth.

Winona, sharp yet hopelessly romantic, had fallen hard for Zane, determined he was "the one," regardless of anyone's opinion.

In the throes of love, she couldn't stand any criticism of Zane, leading to a fallout with her parents.

She stormed out, seeking solace with Elysia at the café.

As the Thorne family stormed in, demanding money and hurling insults, calling Elysia ungrateful, Winona was shocked.

While most parents support their children's education, the Thorne family was the opposite, not only refusing to contribute but also demanding money from Elysia!

Elysia, still a student, obviously had none to give.

When Elysia refused, the Thorne family threatened to cause a scene at her school, ensuring everyone knew of her "ingratitude."

Winona's sense of justice was outraged.

Ignoring Elysia's protests, she generously handed over a thousand dollars to the Thorne family.

The scene that followed was chaotic...

The Thorne family left, pleased with the money, while Winona, rejecting Elysia's attempt to repay, tore up the IOU and tossed it in the trash. She then, in her seven-centimeter heels, chased after the Thorne family, leaving the café behind.

Chapter 762

Winona was someone who didn't mess around. She wore her heart on her sleeve, and if someone crossed her or those she cared about, they'd better watch out.

Messing with her sisters? Oh, hell no!

It didn't matter who you were, not even if you were the adoptive parents. No one got a free pass!

When Winona lost her cool, the Thorne family found themselves on the receiving end of her wrath. She didn't just stop at a verbal lashing; she called the cops on them, accusing them of extortion and assault.

The Thorne family was left licking their wounds, but they weren't going down without a fight. They protested their innocence in front of the officers, their pride unwavering even in the face of adversity.

The Newsoms might not have been old money, but they were loaded. Ridley and Caroline Newsom were livid when they saw their darling daughter injured and the Thorne family still daring to argue. They immediately got their lawyers involved, determined to pin the extortion charges on them. Seeing they had bitten off more than they could chew, the Thorne family finally showed fear, apologizing and begging for mercy through their tears. Winona hadn't intended to throw them behind bars; she just wanted to give them a scare, a little payback for Elysia. After warning them to never bother Elysia for money again, she not only reclaimed the ten grand they had taken but also managed to squeeze a hefty sum out of them for "medical expenses."

All that money? She handed it over to Elysia.

After that ordeal, the Thorne family didn't dare show their faces around Elysia's school again.

Mention Winona, and the Thorne family would shiver in fear. Winona had made a name for herself; she was their nightmare.

Thanks to her, Elysia could finally enjoy her college life in peace.

Blossom only found out about the whole saga later on. So, when she was looking at Daphne's photo, she didn't recognize her. But when Tarquin finished recounting what had happened today and Elysia's state afterward, she immediately said,

"This woman must be Elysia's sister!"

"Sister?"

"Yeah, the daughter of Elysia's adoptive parents! Elysia only gets that mix of sadness and anger when she talks about them."

People usually stirred anger in her, but the Thorne family was different...

Because there had been love, there was also grief.

Elysia had lived with the Thorne family for twenty years, initially seeing them through rose-colored glasses, loving them with all her heart. Their journey had reached this point because, over time, Elysia had accumulated enough disappointments.

Every disappointment was a wound.

Eventually, battered and heartbroken, she had severed ties with them completely.

But the love and the pain had been real, which is why seeing the Thorne family now brought more sorrow than anger for her. Blossom said, "Elysia was adopted by Blake and Juliet. Not long after she was born, her biological parents mysteriously vanished, leaving her an orphan. As it happened, Blake and Juliet couldn't conceive, so they adopted Elysia. Then, the next year, they had a daughter of their own..."

Even though Blossom had never met the Thorne family, she knew plenty about them. Talking about the harm they'd caused Elysia made her visibly angry, her hands shaking and her eyes red with emotion.

"Winona and I often wish we could wield a huge sword and take them out for good! They've gone too far! It's a miracle Elysia made it through with them. Given that toxic home environment, I wouldn't have been surprised if Elysia turned into some kind of vigilante..."

Tarquin listened quietly from across the table, his expression solemn.

He seemed to have started smoking at some point, one cigarette after another...

By the time he and Blossom parted ways, the ashtray was overflowing.

He usually refrained from smoking in public, his manners impeccable, but today was different. Hearing about the injustices and pain Elysia had suffered, he lost his composure.

Outwardly calm, his heart was in turmoil.

He had long been acquainted with the darker sides of human nature, not easily shocked or surprised. Yet, what had Elysia done to deserve such malice? Why should someone as kind as her endure such intense hatred?

When Tarquin returned to his room, he found Elysia curled up in bed, crying in her sleep as if caught in a nightmare.

Chapter 763

"I didn't do it, I swear... Please, don't hit me... Dad, stop, it hurts, it really hurts..."

Tarquin's brow furrowed with concern as he rushed over and wrapped his arms around her, "Elysia!"

It was as if a jolt of electricity shot through her, her body trembling violently as she fought back, "Don't hit me! Get away from me!"

But Tarquin held her tight, his heart breaking into pieces.

Those damn Thorne family monsters!

"Elysia, it's me! Wake up-" Tarquin clung to her, calling out, hoping to snap her out of the nightmare.

After a struggle, Elysia's eyes fluttered open, tears veiling her vision.

She looked around, timid and cautious, her eyes wide with the fear of a little girl who's just experienced something terrifying.

"Elysia..." Tarquin's heart ached for her.

Elysia stared at him for a moment, as if recognizing him for the first time, and then burst into tears, burying herself in his embrace as if seeking refuge,

"I had a nightmare, a terrible nightmare..."

Tarquin felt a lump in his throat, his eyes swelling with tears, overwhelmed with empathy.

He hugged her close, trying hard to keep his own emotions in check, his voice husky with comfort,

"Don't be afraid, I'm here now. No one will ever hurt you again! You have me, you have the kids, we'll protect you... It's okay now..."

Elysia cried in his arms, a horrific dream dragging her back into her past.

What she had endured as a child was a blur, forgotten and obscured.

Since she could remember, she had already been covered in bruises and wounds. To her parents, disciplining her was as routine as dinner. Her face often swollen, her body a canvas of blues and purples.

Blake lashed out at her when work went south.

Juliet hit her when money was tight and she couldn't afford her favorite dresses or jewelry.

Daphne's mischief and poor grades would somehow always end up being Elysia's fault in the eyes of Blake and Juliet.

It seemed that whenever someone in the Thorne family was upset, Elysia was their target.

Living on leftovers, wearing Daphne's hand-me-downs, even being punished to stand or kneel outside in thunderstorms and snow - it was all too

common.

As a child, she didn't understand what domestic abuse was, or that she could seek legal protection. She endured it all alone, hiding her tears in secluded corners.

She couldn't cry out loud, couldn't let the Thorne family see her tears, for it would only bring more violence.

As she grew, so did her awareness to protect herself. School issues even brought police attention once.

The Thorne family, under various pressures, finally refrained from hitting her for no reason, turning instead to relentless verbal abuse.

Mocking her as a bastard, a slut, a worthless dog, an ungrateful wretch...

Despite everything, they allowed her to attend school, though with even more disdain.

No tuition, no living expenses, not a dime for her to spend.

From middle school to university, she survived on scholarships and the kindness of others.

She studied with desperate intensity, knowing education was her only escape from that cold, indifferent home.

But brilliance wasn't her gift; relentless effort was her only path...

Receiving her university admission letter, she cried for hours, a mix of pain, relief, and joy flooding through those tears.

She had once truly loved the Thorne family - they were her parents, her family. How could she not?

But after each betrayal, her heart withered.

Now, she felt nothing but indifference towards the Thorne family. The love she once had was eradicated by their own hands, leaving no trace behind.

Yet, seeing Daphne sometimes reignited those old feelings of pain and injustice...

So, she still felt sad, still felt heartbroken, still ached inside.

Chapter 764

Elysia found solace in Tarquin's embrace, her tears eventually subsiding as she took a deep breath and revealed to him, "The woman we saw today was my sister, from the family that raised me. We haven't seen each other for years, and seeing her out of the blue overwhelmed me... I... I've had a troubled relationship with them."

Tarquin held her tighter, planting a gentle kiss on her forehead, his hand soothingly stroking her hair. He offered her silence - a comforting, accepting silence. If Elysia needed to share her pain, he was there to listen, to be her sanctuary. And if she chose to keep her scars buried, he wouldn't pry, wouldn't force her to relive her anguish.

Sniffing, Elysia opened up to him, "When I was eight, I came home from school, backpack and all, only to be met with a slap from my dad that sent me crashing to the ground. I couldn't help but cry from the pain, which only fueled his anger, prompting him to hit me harder.

My mom came out, saw me, and joined him as if I were the plague. I later found out my sister had broken her arm playing that day, and coincidentally, it was the anniversary of the day they took me in. They took out all their frustration and anger on me.

At ten, I was punished for doing well on a test, something that made my sister, who had failed, jealous. She threw boiling water at me, and instead of consoling me, our parents scolded me for outshining her and inciting her jealousy. My rebuttal earned me a night kneeling in the pouring rain.

When I was fifteen and got accepted into a prestigious high school, they told me education for girls was useless. They wanted me to work in a factory to support them in old age. Refusing made them label me ungrateful in front of the whole village.

By eighteen, they tried to sell me off for money to a man with mental challenges, convincing me to marry him and bear his children. It was my teachers and the school that saved me.

When I turned twenty..." Elysia trailed off. That year, they had forced her into a marriage of convenience.

That was the year she lost all hope, fulfilling their wishes by marrying in her sister Daphne's place, severing all ties and repaying their so-called kindness. But she hadn't mentioned how this arrangement had entangled Tarquin.

Changing the subject, Elysia spoke of her love for Emmett, "Do you know why I love Emmett so much? He's like me, growing up without parents. I've been soaked to the bone in the rain; I don't want that for Emmett. I want to be his shelter, to give him all the love and protection I can muster.

I hope when he grows up and learns he's not my biological child, he remains positive and optimistic. His childhood memories should be filled with love and happiness, not like mine..."

To grow up without biological parents wasn't the fear; it was growing up in an environment devoid of love that was truly terrifying.

Tears welled up in Tarquin's eyes as he tenderly kissed Elysia's forehead and eyes. He despised the Thorne family for their cruelty, the injustice fate had dealt Elysia, and even himself for inadvertently adding to her miseries.

Holding her close, he finally spoke, "They don't deserve to be called your family. You don't need to yearn for their love. They may not love you, but we do. The kids and I, we'll cherish you always!"

At his words, Elysia nestled closer into his arms, her voice breaking, "Tarquin, after I divorce, let's get married."

Tarquin's heart skipped a beat at her proposal. Elysia continued, "My childhood home was a house of horrors, far from a sanctuary. I was so unhappy. I've always dreamt of a happy, loving home, one filled with laughter every day."

Chapter 766

It was just after six in the evening when Elysia, having freshened up and steeled herself emotionally, and Tarquin made their way back to the hospital to be with their son.

No sooner had they stepped out of the hotel's grand entrance than they were confronted by the Thorne family!

Somehow, the Thornes had gotten wind of their whereabouts and had descended on the hotel in force.

Not only had the immediate family shown up, but they had also brought along a dozen menacing-looking brutes with them!

Upon seeing Elysia, Blake and Juliet Thorne displayed none of the surprise or joy one might expect from parents seeing their daughter after six years. Instead, their eyes widened in astonishment at the sight of Tarquin, whose striking looks and noble demeanor clearly set him apart from the ordinary.

Unfamiliar with Tarquin and emboldened by their numbers, the Thorne family didn't take him seriously.

"So, who's this? Your new boyfriend?" they sneered at Elysia.

Elysia, who had just managed to compose herself, felt her emotions crumbling at the sight of Blake and Juliet. After all, they had once been a significant part of her life, the people she had loved and called mom and dad.

Tarquin, sensing the tension, narrowed his eyes at the Thornes, gripping Elysia's hand tightly for support.

"It's none of your business!" Elysia snapped, her brow furrowed.

The Thornes bristled at her defiance.

Juliet scowled, but before she could retort, Blake erupted, "Insolent girl! Is that any way to speak to your parents?!"

Elysia had once been as meek as a kitten around them, taking any abuse without a word. But now, she dared to talk back!

"The nerve!" Elysia scoffed. "Whose parents? Who's your daughter? I cut ties with the Thorne family long ago. We're nothing to each other now!"

Juliet gritted her teeth, "After all the years we've raised you, you think you can just sever ties like that? We took you in before you were even a month old, raised you through hard times. Even a dog knows to show gratitude!"

Blake didn't mince words, "Enough with the chatter! Elysia, if you want to cut ties, fine, but pay up first! Settle every penny we spent raising you. Otherwise, I'll spill all your dirty secrets to him!"

Elysia knew their visit boded no good. "Looking for money? You've got the wrong person! You have no right to demand anything from me. As for my past, I've already told him everything. There's nothing left for you to say."

Daphne, unable to contain herself, cut in, "He knows? Yeah, right!"

She couldn't believe that a man as handsome as Tarquin would be interested in someone like Elysia, who had once sold herself in marriage to an ailing, older man for money and had a history of infidelity. Unless he was in the dark about her past.

Turning to Tarquin, Daphne sneered, "Did you know she married an old cripple for his money? That she cheated on him during their marriage? She's been with so many men, she might look innocent, but she's nothing but a tramp. Did you know?"

Daphne was convinced no man of Tarquin's caliber would stay with Elysia once he knew the truth. She was certain she was the only one worthy of a man like Tarquin. Even if he didn't see her that way, she wouldn't let Elysia have him.

Jealousy seethed within her as she saw them together.

"And Elysia, this wretch, even had a bastard child-"

Elysia, incensed by the insult to her child, raised her hand to strike, but Tarquin caught her wrist.

Confused, Elysia looked at him. "Why are you stopping me?"

"I don't want you to hurt your hand," Tarquin replied coolly, his gaze turning icy as he fixed the Thornes with a menacing glare.

Sensing the situation turning against them, Blake hastily called over their thugs, threatening, "I'm not going to lie to you. I've gambled away a fortune, and these men are here to collect. They're dangerous, willing to do anything. I've told them if I can't pay up, they can take my daughter as payment. So, you either give us the money, or they take Elysia away!"

Chapter 767

A few bulky thugs were eyeing Elysia and Tarquin with a menacing look. It was clear Blake wasn't lying; they were here to collect a debt! Pay up or hand over someone as collateral!

Blake used to be just an average Joe, playing cards, sipping beers at the local pub. But after hitting it big with a lottery windfall, he transformed overnight into a wealthy man, and his vices only grew worse!

Gambling became an addiction, and within a few years, he had squandered all his money and racked up a massive amount of debt with sky-high interest rates.

Their return to the country was driven by their inability to stay abroad any longer due to financial troubles.

But as soon as they landed back home, local loan sharks were already on their tail!

Facing the impossibility of repayment, Blake was ready to gamble with their lives until he heard from Daphne that Elysia had been spotted!

He concocted a plan to shift the debt onto Elysia.

Elysia could either pay up or pay with her body!

After all, in his twisted logic, since Elysia was "tarnished" and they had raised her, it was only natural for her to bear the family debt.

Elysia trembled with rage. Six years had passed, yet the Thornes were as vile as ever!

Just as she was about to suggest calling the police, Tarquin suddenly spoke up,

"You want money, huh? I've got it. How much do you need?"

Blake's eyes lit up at the mention of money, "Ten million, do you have that?"

"Sure do," Tarquin replied with ease.

The Thorne family was ecstatic, but Elysia glared at them,

"What are you talking about? He said ten million, not a thousand! Even if you had it, you shouldn't give them a dime! Why should they get your money? They..."

Tarquin gently pulled her aside and whispered,

"Elysia, you should head back first."

Elysia was anxious, "If we're going back, we go together! This is outright extortion, we should call the cops!"

Tarquin nodded,

"I know, and we will call the police, but even then, it will take time to sort this out. The kids are waiting at the hospital for us to join them for dinner. Go back to them; I'll handle this."

"But..."

"The kids miss you. Plus, Benjamin mentioned he'd change Elliot's bandages today. Don't you want to see how his wound is healing?"

Elysia frowned, torn between her concern for the situation and her desire to return to her family.

Tarquin reassured her, "Don't worry, our money needs to be spent wisely. I'm not going to give them a cent. My offer was just to buy us some time until the police arrive. I've already called them."

"But what about you, with all those men..."

Before Elysia could finish, her phone rang. It was Elijah,

"Mommy, when are you coming back? We miss you. Emmett is crying. Can you please come back soon? He won't eat until you return..."

Tarquin's eyes narrowed, knowing the call was his doing, a gentle nudge to persuade Elysia to leave.

He reassured her again,

"I've already alerted the police. I'll stay to cooperate with them. There's no need for you to stay. Go back to the kids..."

It took a while for Tarquin to finally convince Elysia to leave.

With Tarquin staying behind and promising to deal with the debt, the thugs didn't stop her, and neither did the Thorne family.

As soon as Elysia left, Tarquin's demeanor changed drastically; his face turned ominous, almost as if he became a different person!

He turned to face the Thorne family, his eyes cold and menacing!

The Thorne family gulped in fear!

Just as Blake attempted to speak, Tarquin pulled out his phone and made a call,

"Prepare ten million in cash. Deliver it to the OmniAuspice Hotel!"

Chapter 769

Juliet instantly shielded Daphne, raising her voice in protest, "No hitting! So she said some mean things, we can apologize, or let you hurl insults back, okay?"

Tarquin frowned deeply, "So it's always been Elysia who took the beatings?"

That was indeed the case, and Juliet along with Blake remained silent.

With a dark expression, Tarquin stated, "When you guys lay hands, it's a slap across the face, but my people? They might just break her."

Blake gasped, wanting to retort but didn't dare.

Anyone casually throwing around millions clearly wasn't to be messed with.

Gritting his teeth, Blake raised his hand and slapped Daphne hard!

The slap was so forceful it knocked her to the ground!

Daphne fell, sitting on the floor, covering half her face in disbelief, "Dad! You hit me?!"

This was the first time Blake had hit her; it had always been Elysia before.

Juliet rushed to her daughter's side, fuming at Blake, "Are you insane? Why would you hit your own daughter?!"

Blake, too, was heartbroken and snapped, "All she does is spew insults. It's because she's been spoiled rotten. A slap will teach her a lesson, make her think twice before speaking recklessly!"

Juliet, tears welling up in her eyes, responded, "But that's no reason to hit someone. An apology would have sufficed, look at her face, it's swollen. She's grown so much, and I've never laid a hand on her, how could you?"

"That's your chance then, you hit her!" Tarquin said coldly.

Juliet was taken aback, "What?"

Tarquin declared, "One slap is definitely not enough, keep going."

Juliet was shocked, "You want a mother to hit her own daughter? How could you be so heartless? Yes, she was wrong to insult your son, but she's already been slapped!"

Tarquin, cutting to the chase, warned sternly, "If I'm not satisfied with how this is handled, none of you are leaving this room!"

Blake, fearing the loss of the money at stake, wanted to quickly appease Tarquin to leave with the cash.

He could only vent his frustration on Juliet, "I've always said not to spoil her! You never listened, and look where that's gotten us! She needs to be disciplined! Hit her! If you don't want all three of us to end up dead here, you better do it!"

Daphne was terrified, "Dad! Mom..."

Seeing her daughter's pitiful state, Juliet couldn't stop her tears, "I, I can't do it."

Tarquin signaled his bodyguard with a glance. The bodyguard stepped forward, forcibly grabbing her hand to strike!

"Smack! Smack! Smack!"

With each slap, Daphne and Juliet wailed out loud.

The room echoed with the crisp sound of slaps and the heart-wrenching cries of mother and daughter.

The atmosphere was grim, unsettling.

Daphne's face hurt!

Juliet's hand hurt, her heart ached even more!

Blake watched, his eyes brimming with tears...

For Juliet, having to physically discipline Daphne was more painful than death itself!

For Blake, watching his daughter take hits without being able to do anything was unbearable. He wished he could gouge out his eyes.

They had struggled to have Daphne, and they had never had the heart to lay a hand on her!

Even when Daphne was mischievous as a child, they would vent their frustration on Elysia instead!

"Stop, please stop! I'm begging you..." Daphne screamed, Juliet cried out for mercy, but Tarquin remained indifferent.

He just sat back on the couch, legs crossed, smoking a cigarette with an impassive expression.

They had always chosen to hit Elysia, sparing their own daughter, but today, he'd make sure they had their fill!

By making Juliet strike with her own hand, and Blake witness it all, he aimed to inflict pain.

To make them hurt, make them feel the agony!

Chapter 770

After what seemed like an eternity, Daphne's face was swollen, her lips bleeding, and she had passed out!

Juliet's hands were swollen from hitting, and she was sobbing so hard she could barely breathe, her heart shattered into pieces!

It was only then that Tarquin called a halt.

Ignoring her own throbbing hands, Juliet wrapped her arms around her daughter, crying as if her soul was tearing apart.

Red-eyed, Blake asked, "Can we leave now?"

Tarquin flicked his cigarette ash, barely glancing at him through lifted eyelids.

Leave? Not a chance.

What came next was designed to cut to the bone.

Tarquin declared, "For insulting my son, you owe a million! For insulting my partner, another million!"

Blake was livid, "You've beaten my daughter to a pulp, and now you're demanding money?!"

"If you don't want to pay, her tongue will suffice," Tarquin retorted coldly.

Blake gasped, the thought of forking over money he had just secured was like signing his own death warrant!

Turning to the enforcers demanding debts, Blake said, "He just said this ten million is mine, it's my money! If he takes it, I won't have anything to pay you with! Help me get the money out, and I'll throw in an extra half-million for you!"

Blake hoped to enlist these debt collectors to stand up to Tarquin.

But before they could act, Tarquin's bodyguard had the lead collector in a chokehold!

A single wrong move, and his neck could be snapped!

Realizing they were outmatched, none dared to move.

Swallowing hard, Blake resignedly opened his suitcase, pulling out two million for Tarquin.

As quickly as it had been packed, it was now painfully slow to withdraw.

No sooner had Blake taken out two million, Tarquin continued,

"For Elysia's broken arm at 8 years old, blaming her without reason, deduct a million!"

"When the Thorne family made her kneel in the rain all night at 10, another million!" "At 15 years old... deduct a million!"

"...another million!"

"...a million!"

"...a million!"

Before Tarquin could finish listing their crimes, the ten million was gone!

Tarquin signaled his men to take all the money, while Blake clung to the suitcase, his eyes wide with terror,

"This is our money, you can't just take it!"

The bodyguard disregarded him, forcefully taking the suitcase full of money.

Juliet sat on the ground, holding her unconscious daughter, wailing like a banshee, as if her heart had been ripped out.

Blake sat down too, feeling utterly hollow, his eyes the very picture of despair.

The joy at seeing the money was now matched by their utter desolation.

Having and then losing was worse than never having at all; the pain was more excruciating than a slow cut.

This was Tarquin's intention all along!

To lift them to the heights of joy, only to brutally drag them down again!

Only now did Blake realize the trap; Tarquin had never intended to give them the money.

It was all for Elysia's sake!

Before Blake could react, Tarquin added,

"You think you've only lost ten million? The Thorne family has lost half its economic empire! I care for Elysia, what's mine is hers. Had you truly cared for her, a hundred billion would have been nothing!"

Blake was staggered, "A hundred billion? Just who are you?"

"Tarquin."

Blake's eyes nearly popped out, "You're the CEO of the Bradford Group? The richest man alive?"

Tarquin nodded, delivering the final blow,

"Congratulations, you were almost the father-in-law to the wealthiest man. Sadly, you were just a bit short!"

In that moment, Blake felt as if he had gained and then abruptly lost something monumental.