

Hitched 771

Chapter 771

Tarquin's voice was icy as he spoke, "Elysia has been a blessing to the Thorne family, a stroke of luck you guys didn't even deserve. And yet, you squandered it, destroyed it with your own hands. I should have been showing you respect, but now, all I want to do is make you suffer."

Blake's face drained of color.

Juliet, overwhelmed by emotion, let out a shriek and burst into tears again...

It was as if fate had dealt the Thorne family a winning hand with Elysia, and yet, they had played it so terribly wrong.

Seeing their despair and agony, Tarquin felt a twisted sense of satisfaction.

He casually pushed his suitcase, which rolled smoothly over to a group of tough-looking men who were clearly there to collect a debt.

"Tell your boss," Tarquin said coldly, "I'm offering five million for their sorry lives. I don't care how much they owe you or what you want to do with them, but they need to stay alive."

Death would be too kind, too easy an escape for them after over two decades of tormenting Elysia. They deserved to suffer for at least four decades

more.

Getting directly involved in their punishment was beneath him - leaving it to their creditors was the perfect solution. It ensured they'd have no good days ahead and kept them far away from Elysia.

Blake and Juliet, terrified, began to beg for mercy.

"You can't do this to us, the Thorne family. After all, we raised Elysia. We might not have been perfect, but we did our part, we..."

Tarquin's glare silenced them instantly, "If I hear another word, you'll wish you had no tongue! My Elysia is no longer any concern of yours." Blake and Juliet were speechless.

Tarquin extinguished his cigarette in the ashtray and stood up, heading for the door.

"Oh, son-in-law, you can't just abandon us," Blake called after him, shamelessly trying to cling to Tarquin.

Lowell kicked him away, "Get lost!"

Wishing for a son-in-law's support without even having a daughter's affection to offer in return - absurd.

After Tarquin left, the Thorne family was roughed up by the debt collectors and shoved into a van to be taken away.

Blake and Juliet were filled with regret. If only they had known who Tarquin really was, they would have never alienated Elysia.

Elysia, with her kind heart and strong family values, could have been easily appeased.

Winning her over would have meant securing Tarquin's favor as well.

The thought of having the wealthiest man as their son-in-law had once thrilled them beyond measure.

But now, facing their grim reality, they were filled with despair and regret so intense, it was almost unbearable.

If only they hadn't discovered this shocking truth; the ignorance would have been bliss compared to this torment.

Fearing further consequences and looking at Daphne, who was still unconscious, Juliet, in desperation, suggested, "We can't let them take us. We'll be tortured to death! Especially Daphne, she's young and beautiful, she... maybe we should contact him, he owes us, he'll surely..."

"Shut up!" Blake hissed. "You want to make a deal with the devil? Are you out of your mind?"

"Then what do we do? Maybe we should reach out to the Newsom family. Their daughter hasn't come home; aren't they worried at all? They..."

Blake, seething with frustration, whispered fiercely, "You idiot, just keep your mouth shut!"

Juliet broke down into sobs.

Before Blake could say anything more, the driver suddenly slammed on the brakes, nearly sending them flying forward.

Their van was suddenly surrounded by a group of men wearing matching uniforms.

Chapter 772

News spread quickly among the Bradfords - they had found Daphne!

The mood in the Bradford household soared with excitement. After days of tension and worry, they were finally able to rejoice, each more thrilled than the last.

"Fantastic! We've finally found her! Daphne's return will blow Elysia's cover as the mistress! Let's see how Tarquin will handle this mess!"

"And as for his bunch of illegitimate children thinking they can claim a piece of the Bradford fortune... Not a chance!"

"The Bradfords are a family of high standing and principles. We never tolerate mistreatment of the rightful spouse in favor of a mistress. The wife is the wife, and a mistress is just that—a mistress. If Elysia dares to cause trouble for Daphne, I'll personally make her regret it!"

The Bradfords were filled with righteous indignation, buzzing with energy.

Gideon, with the 10% stake in his mind, also breathed a sigh of relief. With Daphne found, he felt more at ease.

He immediately made arrangements to keep the Thornes well-fed and comfortable for the time being, saving them for later use!

The only downside was the Thorne family's debt of over twenty million in high-interest loans-millions domestically and even more abroad! Twenty million was a substantial amount!

Their intention was to use Daphne to undermine Tarquin, not to clear the Thorne's debts!

But with Daphne as their only leverage against Tarquin, what if the debt collectors went after her?

Considering the damage the Thorne family could inflict on Tarquin, the Bradfords bit the bullet and settled the debt, viewing it as an investment in their cause against Tarquin.

"Let's blow this wide open! Make sure the entire elite circle knows Tarquin neglected his lawful wife for his mistress, even fathering several children with her!"

"Yes! We have to spread the word that Elysia is the mistress! Being labeled a mistress invites scorn from everyone. No matter how powerful Tarquin is, he can't silence everyone. Let's see how Elysia can face the world after this!"

"Hmph, let's see Tarquin try to add those kids to the family registry now!"

"So, our priority is to make this scandal as big as possible-the bigger, the better!"

With their target set, the Bradfords began devising a plan to shake things up.

...

Meanwhile, at the hospital, Tarquin was oblivious to the fact that the Bradfords had taken the Thornes under their wing.

As soon as he returned to the hospital, Elysia pulled him aside to inquire,

"How did it go? Is it all taken care of?"

"Yes, they've been taken away. That's the end of it for them."

Elysia, assuming it was the police who had taken them, frowned and said,

"They brought it upon themselves-gambling, borrowing at high rates, extortion... any of those would warrant a sentence."

Tarquin affectionately ruffled her hair,

"Today, in front of me, they promised never to bother you again. You're completely done with the Thorne family. Just kick them out of your heart; you only need room for me."

Elysia chuckled, "What about the kids and Blossom Winona?"

"Think of them occasionally. I want to be the one who resides permanently in your heart."

Elysia laughed, "...You're competing with two girls and a few five-year-olds for jealousy."

Tarquin attempted a kiss, but Elysia dodged.

After all, it could be awkward if someone saw them in the hallway.

Tarquin playfully grabbed her hand, "I just want to be your number one."

Elysia, remembering the events of that night, blushed deeply and pulled her hand away, muttering, "Childish!"

She turned and walked back into the room, with Tarquin following her with a silly grin.

Elysia was sensitive and timid, but indeed, she was easy to appease.

Chapter 773

Lacey thought that with the Thorne family hauled off by the cops, all their troubles had evaporated. She felt at ease, finally. But the kids were sharp as tacks, sensing something was off right away.

That evening, seizing the moment Lacey went to freshen up, they cornered Tarquin for the scoop on the day's events.

When it came to sharing, Tarquin was all about keeping it real.

He laid it all out, leaving no stone unturned.

The kids were livid!

Evan was the most fired up. "I knew something was off with Mom today, her eyes all puffy and red. So it was the Thorne crew stirring the pot!

We hadn't even gone after them yet, and here they are, showing up uninvited! It's like they're asking for it! Bro, it's time we settled the score with the Thorne family!"

Elliot, propped up in his hospital bed, knitted his brows in concern.

He'd been keeping a mental tally of the grudge against the Thorne family, waiting to wrap up a few loose ends before taking action. But they'd beaten him to the punch!

It was their father they'd upset today!

But the brothers had yet to have their say!

"It's time," Elliot declared with a grimace, "to make a plan!"

Tarquin jumped in, eager, "Count me in for a piece of the action."

Elliot shot him a glance, hearing the bathroom water stop, signaling Lacey's imminent return. He lowered his voice,

"You're on lookout duty. Let's get Mom to bed early tonight."

Tarquin was torn between elation and disappointment.

Tucking Lacey in? That was a sweet gig!

But playing bedtime buddy meant missing out on the kids' scheme.

Tarquin had wanted to bond with his sons over this, but after mulling it over, he decided on Lacey. After all, cuddling her to sleep trumped everything else.

And he'd make sure the kids were covered, arranging for their protection from the shadows.

So he committed with a, "You got it!"

By nine, the kids were feigning sleep.

Tarquin tactfully escorted Lacey to the guest room for the night.

Then, in the 'father and sons' group chat, he dropped a message, [Mission accomplished.]

Instantly, the kids sprang to life, gathering around Elliot's bed to strategize.

With Tarquin keeping Lacey occupied, they had nothing to fear from her unexpected interruptions.

Evan, itching for action, said, "When do we move? Just White and me will do. I'm on this."

But Elliot, voice low, shared a new twist,

"It's not like what step-dad said. The Thorne crew isn't with their usual muscle. They're holed up in Gideon Bradford's estate."

Evan was baffled, "How did they end up mixing with the Bradford crowd?"

Elliot's expression darkened, "The Bradfords reached out to them. I did some digging. The Bradfords have been on the hunt for Daphne! Today, they intercepted the Thornes, whisked them away, and even settled over twenty million in debts for them."

Evan was astounded, "They cleared a twenty million debt for the Thornes? Are the Bradfords that close with them?"

"Not at all."

"Then why would the Bradfords pay off their debt?"

Elijah, frowning, explained,

"The Bradfords weigh their investments heavily. If they're pouring over twenty million into the Thornes, it means they see value in them far beyond that amount!"

Evan was puzzled, "But we looked into the Thornes before. Aside from their shady deals, they're pretty much worthless, no business acumen. What could the Bradfords possibly gain from them?"

Elliot exhaled slowly,

"If I'm right, the Bradfords probably don't know about Mom's stand-in marriage situation."

Chapter 774

The three little ones all turned their heads in unison, eyes wide with curiosity.

Elliot said calmly, "The Bradford family only cares about their own interests. In their eyes, Dad wanting to add us to the family tree is just a move to divide the inheritance. Thus, our existence is a threat to their piece of the pie, naturally, they're against it.

But mere objections won't do. So, they play the card of our legitimacy. If we're considered illegitimate, then Dad trying to make us official would hit a roadblock.

To the Bradfords right now, our mom is the homewrecker, and Daphne is considered Dad's legitimate wife."

The trio pursed their lips, Evan, always the sharp-tongued, said, "Are the Bradfords idiots?"

Elliot explained, "Back in the day, Gideon insisted Dad marry Daphne, but the Thorne family pushed our mom to take her place secretly. Of course, this had to be kept under wraps. Probably, aside from the Thornes, our mom, and us, no one else knows the truth."

Emmett, with his baby voice, asked, "Dad doesn't know?"

Elliot curled his lip in disdain, "If he knew, he wouldn't still be in the dark about his marriage status, would he?"

Evan was shocked, "He doesn't know? But he and mom recognized each other ages ago, didn't they?"

Elliot said, "He probably just remembers mom as the girl he hassled at the airport six years ago. As for the fact she's his wife? Clueless.

If he knew, he would've brought up the whole stand-in bride issue with the Thornes today. But he didn't say a word. He still has no idea who his real wife is."

The other three: "..."

Some pursed their lips tighter, others rolled their eyes so hard they could've fallen out, their disdain for their clueless father off the charts.

It was somewhat understandable for mom not to figure it out since, well, her wits aren't her strongest suit.

She still doesn't grasp Dad's real identity, so mistaking him for someone else is par for the course.

But Dad not realizing? That just paints him as a fool!

"Is he so love-struck that all he can think about is wooing mom?" Evan couldn't help but mock.

The other three were speechless, "...."

Dad was indeed a hopeless romantic, his IQ plummeting in the name of love.

Apart from speechlessness, the kids could only conclude: without us brothers, this family would be a mess.

Evan, unable to hold back, asked, "Didn't deadbeat Dad ever look at the marriage certificate? Mom's name and photo must be on it."

Elysia had indeed never seen the marriage certificate; she only knew her husband was Tarquin, a fact well-known to the kids.

But what baffled them was how Tarquin could've missed it too.

Elijah said in a deep voice, "Dad couldn't care less about his so-called wife. I bet he only knows her name is Daphne and nothing more. He's probably forgotten he's even married."

Emmett asked, "Should we tell him?"

Elliot paused before saying, "Here's what I think: the Bradfords are using Daphne to stir trouble, a losing battle! Why not turn their scheme against them, let them fight amongst themselves, and we win on both fronts..."

After Elliot laid out the plan, Elijah and Emmett nodded in agreement, "Sounds good!"

Evan felt a twinge of regret, "If we go through with this, we won't get to rough up the Thornes. I really wanted to give them a piece of my mind." Elliot comforted him, "Don't worry, there'll be other chances."

At ten o'clock at night, after Tarquin had tucked Elysia into bed, he hurried out to join the 'meeting'.

But it had already ended!

Evan, Emmett, and Elijah had all gone back to their rooms to sleep.

Hearing the noise, Elliot opened his eyes, and Tarquin asked, "Is the plan all set?"

Chapter 775

Elliot shot a look at his dad, lips pursing in disdain, "Kid stuff, pops. Stay out of it."

With that, he closed his eyes to sleep.

Tarquin was left speechless, sensing the disdain but clueless about the cause.

The night passed without incident.

The little rascals slept soundly through the night, not a peep from any of them.

Even Evan behaved himself.

Tarquin grew more puzzled and, once Elliot was awake, he couldn't help but ask, "Weren't you guys planning to settle the score with the Thornes? What happened to that?"

Elliot's response remained, "It's kid stuff, dad. Mind your own beeswax. Worry about your own issues."

Thinking of his rocky marriage, he was speechless.

But he couldn't spill the beans yet, not wanting to jeopardize their plan.

In the following days, the Bradfords were on the brink of insanity!

After finally tracking down Daphne and clearing over twenty million in debt, the family of three vanished into thin air that very night!

The Bradfords searched frantically but to no avail. Instead, they received debt collection calls and a video of the Thorne family, now hostages. The captors claimed Blake owed them ten million, threatening harm if not paid.

Weighing their options, the Bradfords chose not to involve the police, grinding their teeth as they transferred ten million to the kidnappers. Shortly after, a second debt notice arrived for twenty-five million, complete with Blake's fingerprints, again with the threat of violence if unpaid. Furious yet considering Daphne's importance, the Bradfords begrudgingly transferred another twenty-five million.

But on the third day, a demand for a whopping one billion landed on them!

This pushed the Bradfords over the edge. No amount of wealth justified such extortion.

"This is blatant blackmail. Paying this billion could lead to endless demands!"

"With the Thornes' modest means, losing twenty million in gambling was already a stretch. How could they possibly owe so much? This has to be a scam. We can't keep bleeding money into this pit."

"But if we don't pay and they harm Daphne, who will we use to leverage Tarquin and Elysia? If those wild kids officially become Bradfords, it's not just money at stake. And all the millions we've already paid will have been for nothing!"

"If push comes to shove, we can drop Daphne. Tarquin and Daphne's marriage is legit. Exposing their marriage certificate should be enough to brand Elysia a homewrecker!"

"That makes sense, but who can expose their marriage certificate? Do you think Tarquin will give us a chance? The reason we kept Daphne hidden was to avoid Tarquin's interference."

"So, what now? Keep paying? A billion dollars! That's a hefty sum from each family! Paying off the Thorne's debt is infuriating just to think about!" Amid the chaos in Gideon's villa, where everyone's arguments gave Gideon a headache, he finally made a decision, "Enough! We'll pay the billion. I'll cover five hundred million, the rest of you can split the remaining amount."

Given the stakes involved, the families were forced to pool their resources, each taking a significant hit.

Gideon was willing to cough up five hundred million because he still had his eyes on that 10% stake.

Compared to securing that stake, this amount seemed trivial.

But to negotiate with Tarquin about the shares, he first needed to solidify those kids' status as illegitimate offspring. Only then would he have the leverage to talk business.

Chapter 776

At that moment, Blake Thorne was hiding out in an abandoned high-rise with Daphne and Juliet.

After the thugs took him away that day, he had considered going for a Hail Mary move!

Throw caution to the wind and somehow reach out to the Newsoms for a bailout.

But then, halfway through, someone intercepted them!

This person wasn't just polite to them but also cleared their massive debt back home.

Blake wasn't sure what was happening but seized the moment to claim he had an even bigger debt abroad, wondering if his mysterious benefactor could clear that, too.

Turns out, they did!

Clearly, this person was loaded.

That night, they were whisked away to a mansion so lavish it made their heads spin, and Daphne even got a top-notch doctor to come see her.

The staff called them "sir," "madam," and "miss," treating them with the kind of respect reserved for royalty.

The only catch was that no one would spill the beans about who was behind all this or why.

Late at night, Blake received a text message.

It revealed two things.

One, their mysterious benefactor was filthy rich.

Two, this was all a setup; they were being used for some ulterior motive and would be discarded once they'd served their purpose.

Blake didn't doubt the authenticity of the message.

The wealth was obvious, and as for being used, well, there's no such thing as a free lunch. The care and the clearing of debts had to have a catch. So, Blake figured he might as well get something out of it before they were thrown to the wolves.

That's why he, along with his wife and daughter, slipped away from the mansion.

Miraculously, they left without anyone noticing a stroke of luck, courtesy of Elliot.

Once settled in their new hideout, Blake used the contact given by Elliot, a stranger, to reach out to Gideon.

And so began a game of cat and mouse, with Blake shamelessly extorting money from the Bradfords time and again!

When the final transfer hit, Blake was ecstatic. Greed got the better of him, and he wanted more. Unfortunately, that's when the Bradfords tracked them down.

Blake and Juliet played the victims, claiming they had been kidnapped by loan sharks.

The Bradfords, having their plates full with Tarquin and Elysia, didn't delve into the extortion claim and instead placed them in a villa under heavy guard.

Then, the Bradfords announced a grand banquet, inviting the who's who of society along with influential media.

The Bradfords were looking to vent, and this banquet was their outlet.

They were itching to see Daphne outshine Elysia, setting the stage for a dramatic confrontation in front of everyone, accusing Tarquin of infidelity and fathering a child out of wedlock.

What a daydream!

Tarquin, however, was unfazed when he heard about the banquet. The Bradfords were unusually united, keeping a tight lid on their plans, leaving Tarquin in the dark about their motives.

Under normal circumstances, a family would celebrate new blood with a feast, but the Bradfords clearly had no love for Elliot, Evan, or Emmett. This banquet had a hidden agenda.

That evening, Tarquin received a call from Keaton Huber.

"The Bradfords' banquet seems ominous, likely bad news for you."

Smoking in the hallway, Tarquin replied, "I couldn't care less. Let them play their games and see what comes of it."

"Tarquin, something just occurred to me. Are you divorced yet?"

"What divorce?"

Keaton was speechless.

"Have you forgotten you're married? Legally, you have a wife, regardless of whether you've met her. If you don't divorce, doesn't that make Elysia..."

He left the word "mistress" unsaid, but Tarquin got the message.

Tarquin's breathing stopped for a moment, his expression rapidly changing.

He had indeed forgotten!

He'd been so focused on Elysia's husband that he forgot about his own unmet wife!

He had been longing for Elysia to divorce, yet he needed one himself!

"The Bradfords throwing this feast, could it be related? If this gets out, it won't look good for you, Elysia, or the child," Keaton said. Tarquin's expression darkened.

He ended the call and immediately dialed Royal Community, "Any news on that woman who's been trying to divorce me?"

"She's still looking for you to sign the papers."

"Contact her. We divorce!"

"Now? The registry office is closed."

Tarquin frowned, "Tell her, tomorrow, 8:30 AM, at the registry office. She must be there!"

Chapter 777

The moment Tarquin hung up the phone, a wave of guilt washed over him as he returned to the hospital room.

Both the child and Elysia were sound asleep, and he found himself sitting at the edge of the bed, staring at Elysia with a tumultuous heart.

If he just came clean, told Elysia about his previous marriage, that he had no feelings for his ex, he was certain Elysia would believe him. He'd argue he didn't intentionally hide his past; he genuinely forgot about that person, and he was sure Elysia would understand that too. But what rattled him was the realization of how carelessly he had cast Elysia into the role of 'the other woman'!

If the Bradfords decided to make a fuss about this, he'd be at a complete loss.

No matter the reason, the stark reality was that he was still legally hitched, and here was Elysia, with him and their child.

The backlash would inevitably fall on Elysia.

Tarquin furrowed his brows, frustrated with himself.

He professed his love for her, yet due to his oversight, he had plunged her into a severe crisis!

Thankfully, there was still time to set things right!

Leaning down, Tarquin gently kissed Elysia on the forehead, tucked her in, and hurried out of the room.

To ensure no stone was left unturned, he had to arrange everything tonight so he could initiate the divorce first thing in the morning.

As long as he was officially divorced, the Bradfords would have no grounds to stir up trouble!

This way, he could minimize any harm to Elysia and their children.

After ensuring a nurse was there to look after Elliot, Tarquin drove away from the hospital, heading to Royal Community.

Royal Community was where their marriage had begun, and where their marriage certificate lay tucked away.

Only with that in hand could he proceed with the divorce as planned.

On the way, he dialed Royal Community, "Have you reached her yet?"

"...No luck yet. Calls go unanswered, and texts are ignored."

"Then keep trying. If we can't get through, send someone to find her! Dig up the earth if you have to, but she must be at the registrar's office by 8:30 AM tomorrow!"

After hanging up, Tarquin tossed his headset into the glove compartment, pulling at his tie in frustration.

When he wasn't paying attention, she was all about getting a divorce.

Now that he's in a rush to get one, she's vanished?!

Soon enough, Elysia was woken up by the nurse.

"Ms. Thorne, your phone's been buzzing. Is it something urgent?"

Shortly after Tarquin left, the nurse came over. Despite setting her phone to vibrate, the continuous buzzing finally woke her, given her recent state of exhaustion.

Elysia quickly sat up, grabbed her phone, and saw it was Royal Community calling. Instantly alert, she answered, "Hello?"

"..." The caller scheduled her for a divorce appointment at the registrar's office at 8:30 AM the next morning.

Elysia's heart pounded with excitement, "No problem! I'll be there on time."

"..." The caller repeatedly confirmed if she would indeed show up.

Miss an appointment?

Ha! This was the moment she had been dreaming of; there was no way she'd miss it!

"If he could get the registrar's office to open tonight, I'd be over there in a heartbeat to get this divorce!"

"Tell him to rest easy. As long as he doesn't stand me up, there won't be any hitches on my end! Oh, and the marriage certificate should be with him. Please remind him not to forget it."

After hanging up, Elysia was over the moon!

She was finally getting a divorce from Tarquin!

Sleep was the last thing on her mind now. She got out of bed, intending to share the good news with Tarin.

But he was nowhere to be found. The nurse informed her,

"The gentleman had to leave for an urgent matter tonight. If you need him, you might want to give him a call."

Elysia was surprised, "Did he mention what it was about?"

"No, he didn't."

Elysia glanced at the clock; it was nearly eleven at night.

Chapter 778

It had to be work-related.

Elysia didn't give it much thought, nor did she interrupt him. She planned to announce the news after their divorce tomorrow, aiming to surprise him!

Meanwhile, Tarquin, having confirmed the appointment at the city hall for 8:30 AM, finally felt at ease.

If he couldn't get through to the Royal Community again, he was ready to mobilize a search party!

One way or another, that marriage was going to end tomorrow morning!

Upon returning to the Royal Community, Tarquin began the frantic search for their marriage certificate.

But after a thorough search, it was nowhere to be found!

The Royal Community got back in touch with Elysia to inquire about the whereabouts of the marriage certificate. Elysia was baffled,

"Isn't the marriage certificate with him? I've never seen it."

She had always assumed Tarquin kept it. During her two years living in the Royal Community, she never came across the marriage certificate. After hanging up with her, the Royal Community relayed to Tarquin,

"Ms. Thorne also has no idea where the marriage certificate might be. She thought it was with you."

Tarquin's expression darkened. She was eager for a divorce; there was no reason for her to hide the marriage certificate.

Where could it have gone?

In the two years of their marriage, he was barely home. Since returning, he had only visited twice: once for a divorce discussion and another time when she sought him out for the same reason before the holidays.

He had paid little attention to their marriage, let alone the marriage certificate.

After another fruitless search, Tarquin arranged for a duplicate marriage certificate to be issued first thing in the morning, followed by the divorce papers.

At the same time, Gideon was informed of Tarquin's return to the Royal Community.

His confidant reported, "Master Tarquin has returned to the marital home, likely suspecting something and planning to divorce."

Gideon scoffed,

"With Daphne in our custody, how can he possibly divorce? Times have changed; divorce now requires mutual consent and personal presence. As long as Daphne doesn't show up, he won't be able to divorce."

Gideon, feeling quite pleased, sipped his tea,

"The Thorne family is still quiet, right?"

"All quiet. Don't worry, we've deployed extra security. Not even a fly could get in or out!"

Gideon nodded, "Is the banquet all set?"

"Ready. The hotel staff are working overtime to prepare. We're expecting a big turnout from the elite circle tomorrow; it'll definitely be lively." "And the media?"

"All arranged."

Gideon was content, "As long as tomorrow's banquet goes smoothly, we'll control the narrative."

"Don't worry, it will. But what if Master Tarquin and Elysia refuse to attend?"

"Hmph! They have no choice but to attend. Tomorrow's spectacle is specifically designed for them; it wouldn't do for them to miss it. Don't worry about that; I have ways to ensure their attendance."

"Understood. And the Thorne family? They're still in the dark about why we're involving them. Should we give them a heads-up?"

Gideon pondered for a moment,

"Let them know. After all, they're part of tomorrow's show! Hint at what's expected of them at the banquet, so they know how to act." "Right!"

Soon, the Thorne family was hit with the astonishing news!

Daphne was in utter disbelief, "What are you saying? I was supposed to marry Tarquin??"

Blake and Juliet were equally stunned, "The CEO of the Bradford Group, Tarquin?"

The emissary from Gideon nodded,

"Yes, our very own Master Tarquin. So, Ms. Thorne is legitimately Mrs. Bradford." Mrs. Bradford?

Good Lord!

The Thorne family was so shocked they could hardly believe their ears!

Chapter 779

Mrs. Bradford, what stature does that title hold?

Second to none and above thousands, she's the most revered woman in the entire elite circle!

She's the esteemed wife of the CEO of the Bradford Group!

The matriarch of the prestigious Bradford family!

The spouse of the wealthiest man in town, Tarquin!

Oh, heavens!

Why not just strike them down? They've actually handed this position over to Elysia on a silver platter!

How could Elysia, that snake, ever match up!

Had I known it was Tarquin she was marrying, I would've taken my shot, disability or not!

But wait, Tarquin isn't disabled. We saw him just a few days ago, looking fit, handsome, with a demeanor that radiates aloofness and nobility. Just one glance and you're hopelessly in love!

And they willingly gave such a man to Elysia?

Daphne couldn't hold it in any longer, bursting into tears,

"Mom, Tarquin was supposed to be mine! He's not meant for that wretch Elysia..."

Juliet's heart was bleeding too!

But before her daughter could finish, Juliet quickly covered Daphne's mouth, terrified she'd spill the beans about the swap!

It was clear, up to this point, the Bradford family still believed Daphne was Mrs. Bradford.

They were unaware of the swap!

If the Bradford family found out, they might not even have a chance to discuss before the Bradford family decided to take matters into their own hands. They were not a family to mess with!

Juliet, silencing her daughter from spewing nonsense, excused themselves and dragged her back to their room, leaving Blake to converse with the Bradford family members alone.

Once inside, Daphne was a mess of tears and sobs,

"Mom! I was the one meant to marry Tarquin! The title of Mrs. Bradford was mine, not Elysia's!"

"I know! Just calm down. Who would have thought Tarquin was the groom back then? If we had known, we would have never let that harlot Elysia marry him! She's got it too good!"

"She doesn't deserve it! She doesn't!"

Mother and daughter were gritting their teeth, filled with regret and frustration.

Half an hour later, Blake came in.

Wearing a worried expression.

Juliet quickly asked, "What did they say?"

Blake, frowning, sat down,

"The Bradford family is in the dark about the swap. They don't even know Elysia's connection to us! They approached us to use Daphne against Elysia!"

Mother and daughter were puzzled, "Against Elysia, what do you mean?"

Blake explained, "The Bradford folks think Elysia is the other woman and want to use Daphne's status as the legitimate wife to suppress her." The revelation startled them, and Juliet panicked,

"But Daphne isn't the legitimate wife! Did you clarify with the Bradford family?"

"No, with the kind of influence the Bradford family wields, and after they've spent so much on us, even hosting a grand gala, if I had told them the truth, they might have decided to eliminate us immediately to vent their frustration!"

"So, what do we do now? They've found us. We can't run. If we don't tell them now, it'll come out during the gala!"

Blake thought for a moment before saying, "If push comes to shove, we play along!"

"What do you mean?"

"The Bradford folks mentioned that they chose Daphne initially because she was deemed astrologically compatible with Tarquin. Wealthy folks eat that stuff up. So, maybe we can..."

After Blake's convoluted explanation, Juliet agreed, "I think it's a plan!"

"If this works, Tarquin might just dump Elysia and marry Daphne!"

Hearing this, Daphne quickly dried her tears,

"Will he really marry me? Can I really become Mrs. Bradford?"

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"Absolutely! After all, the Bradfords didn't choose you for your family's status or wealth, but for your unique personality - that's your ace in the hole! If our plan works out, you won't just be Mrs. Bradford by chance, you'll be Mrs. Bradford by destiny!"

The mother-daughter duo was ecstatic, buzzing with excitement as if Daphne had already secured her title as Mrs. Bradford.

"So tomorrow, we do it..."

The Thornes and the Bradfords, seemingly allies tied by common interests, were in fact each plotting their own schemes!

Both families were eagerly anticipating tomorrow's lavish gala, each for their own ulterior motives!

Tonight was destined to be a sleepless night.

Elysia and Tarquin were also wide awake, not with anticipation for the gala, but for what tomorrow held.

They were looking forward to their appointment at the city hall, to divorce!

Early the next morning, just after five, Elysia was already on the phone to the County Clerk's Office.

She feared Tarquin might have a change of heart about the divorce, so she wanted to confirm their appointment one more time.

But before she could dial out, the County Clerk's Office called her first.

Tarquin shared her concerns, worried something might go wrong on her end!

After confirming their plans once more, they both felt relieved.

Tarquin couldn't resist messaging Elysia, "I miss you, Elysia."

Just one night apart, and he missed her.

Elysia, phone in hand, saw his message and couldn't help but smile, calling him back immediately.

Tarquin picked up instantly, "You're up early?"

"Yeah, why are you awake so soon?"

"Got some errands to run."

"I heard from the caretaker that you left early last night. Haven't finished what you needed to do?"

"Almost, I should be done by noon. Then I'll come see you."

Elysia thought he was heading to the Bradford's gala and didn't think much of it, softly replying, "I'll wait for you."

Tarquin squinted, asking, "You sound happy. Any good news?"

"How can you tell I'm in a good mood?"

"I can hear it in your voice."

Elysia laughed joyfully, "I am in a great mood today! Wait till you get back, I have a huge surprise for you! A wonderful surprise!"

After successfully getting a divorce, she could openly be with him, which would surely make him overjoyed!

Tarquin was looking forward to it!

Seeing her so happy, he didn't have the heart to tell her about his marital status, as it wasn't good news.

He planned to come clean face-to-face after the divorce.

Each harboring their own 'happy' news, they chatted sweetly for over an hour before reluctantly ending the call.

Even the caretaker couldn't help but notice, "Ms. Thorne seems in such a good mood today."

"Yeah! Happy!"

Finally proceeding with the divorce, Elysia was naturally in high spirits!

Eager to start her new life, Elysia couldn't wait any longer. Before the kids were even awake, she was out the door, heading to the city hall to line up. City hall was a place of stark emotional contrasts.

Newlyweds bubbled with joy.

Those there to divorce, however, carried a mix of emotions, often somber, even in cases of amicable separations.

But Elysia was an exception; she was a divorcée in high spirits.

To her, Tarquin was just a stranger she was married to on paper. Divorcing him didn't bring her any sadness, in fact, she was secretly thrilled. Once divorced, she could start anew!

Tarquin wasn't as eager to arrive early; he disliked waiting. But he was punctual.

At half-past eight, Tarquin showed up at the city hall's entrance right on time.