

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 81[571 words]

Chapter 81

Elysia glared, her voice tinged with concern, “How could you just take off on your own in a place you don’t know, you...”

Before she could finish, Evan sidled up to her and, with a smacking sound, planted a kiss on her cheek.

“Mommy, don’t worry. You know I’m super smart. I won’t get lost or cause any trouble. I just missed you so much since you were gone for so long.”

Elysia was at a loss for words. The scolding she had in mind dissolved in her throat.

Evan knew exactly how to play her.

Deciding not to reprimand him, Elysia asked anxiously, “Did you run into someone who looks like you while you were out?”

Evan guessed she was talking about someone specific.

He had, indeed, encountered him, and not only had he ruined their birthday cake, but he had also managed to douse him in a little... accident.

Thinking this, Evan earnestly replied, “Nope, the only person who looks like me is my brother, and he’s been in the private room the whole time.”

Relieved, Elysia breathed a sigh of relief and pinched Evan’s cheek. “From now on, you must talk to an adult before you do anything, okay? Do you hear me?”

“Yeah, yeah.”

But Evan’s agreement was only lip service, as he settled next to Elliot.

As the waiter brought in the dishes and Elysia was engaged in conversation with Blossom, Evan whispered to Elliot, “I just got back at that jerk Tarquin for Mommy. I peed right on his face.”

Elliot furrowed his little brow, glanced at Elysia to make sure she wasn’t listening, then whispered back, “Tarquin?”

“Yep!”

“What happened?”

“Well, I saw Mommy talking to that jerk Tarquin, and she looked super upset. He must’ve been bothering her again. Someone was delivering a birthday cake to his room, and I planted a little firecracker inside. Kaboom! Cake everywhere. Then, when Tarquin went to clean up, I ‘accidentally’ bumped into him, and, oh boy, did he get a surprise!”

Elliot frowned, his gaze shifting back to Elysia.

Did Tarquin cause that bruise on Mommy’s neck?

“Did you see him get physical with Mommy?”

“Nope, they were just talking, but both looked pretty upset. Mommy was definitely not happy, and he looked mean. He must’ve been scaring Mommy.”

“Did he recognize you?”

“Nah, I had my mask on.”

“Does he know it was on purpose?”

“No way, they think the cake explosion was just a prank.”

Elliot was silent for a few seconds before heading to the restroom. Once inside, he locked the door and quickly whipped out his high-tech smartwatch, which looked like any other kid’s toy but was packed with features

He hacked into the restaurant’s security system, copied the surveillance footage, and then cunningly erased the video evidence.

He knew Tarquin was a formidable man, and he couldn't let him find out about Evan.

After dealing with the security footage, Elliot returned to the table. The copied videos would have to wait for a more thorough inspection later.

"What's up, Elliot?" Evan asked softly, sensing something was off.

Elliot replied in a low voice, "Let's eat now; we'll talk tonight."

After dinner, they strolled through the nearby promenade before heading back to Elysia and the kids' place.

Blossom didn't want to part with Elysia and insisted on sleeping with her, playfully declaring that she was going to stick to her for the night.

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 82[640 words]

Chapter 82

Elysia had a heart full of thoughts she yearned to share with Blossom, and the idea of separating from her was the last thing she wanted.

*Tonight, you'll have to rough it with us in our little rented place," she said with a playful

pout.

"Rough it? This place is amazing—it must cost a fortune, Blossom replied, glancing around with wide, appreciative eyes.

The topic had caught Elliot off guard. He had chosen this spot, a luxurious two-bedroom vacation rental with a hefty price tag that ran into the thousands for just one night.

But he had told Elysia it was a mere two hundred a night.

Elliot quickly interjected, “Well, it is usually super expensive, but the landlord took a real shine to us and gave us a massive discount, so it’s just a couple hundred for the night.”

Blossom chimed in immediately, “You guys must have the luck of the Irish! If it were me, I’d let you stay for free—you all look like little cherubs. Staying here is bound to sprinkle some good fortune on the place, ha!”

Elliot’s mouth twitched in a forced smile. “Yeah…”

Birds of a feather flock together, he mused. Mom’s best friend didn’t seem to be the sharpest tool in the shed.

“Mom, you and Blossom should get some rest. We’re beat too, Elliot said, ushering the conversation toward a close.

“Sure thing, let’s go to bed,” Elysia agreed.

“Goodnight, Mom. Goodnight, Godmother,” the three kids called out before retreating to their room and closing the door behind them.

As soon as they were alone, Elliot booted up his laptop with a serious expression.

Evan peeked over, concern etched on his face. “What’s wrong?”

Emmett also huddled close, his big eyes brimming with curiosity.

“I wiped the restaurant’s surveillance footage today to make sure Tarquin couldn’t track you down. And I snagged a copy for us. Mom got hurt today, and I need to see if Tarquin was behind it,” Elliot explained as he clicked away.

Evan’s eyes widened in alarm. “Mom got hurt? Where? How?”

“I saw Mom talking to that jerk Tarquin when I stepped out, but I didn’t see him lay a finger on her. You think he hit her?” Evan’s breathing became erratic, his shock palpable.

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Had he known Mom was hurt, he wouldn’t have let Tarquin off so easily,

“Did someone hit Mom? Who hurt her? Is she in pain again?” Emmett’s voice quivered with urgency.

Elliot remained the calmest of the trio. “Let’s not jump to conclusions. We’ll check the surveillance first.”

The three of them crowded around the laptop, their heads touching as they focused on the screen. It didn’t take long to find the footage of Gage striking Elysia.

Evan’s temper flared instantly as he yelled, “He dared to hit Mom! I can’t believe he hit her! Bro, who is this bald creep?”

Emmett, watching the video of Elysia being choked, began to cry from anger, “He’s a big bully! A mean, big bully! He’s picking on Mom!”

The little guy shook with fury.

Elliot’s lips were a tight line, his eyes dark with rage. He didn’t speak immediately, instead, his fingers flew over the keyboard, and soon Gage’s details filled the screen. His profile was littered with scandalous headlines.

Gage, the notorious second son of the Slater family, was a piece of work. Ugly, lecherous, and incompetent, he relied on his connection as the uncle of the famed starlet Nola Slater to tie with the influential Bradford family, to throw his weight around in Jindale City.

He was known for pressuring beautiful women into unsavory encounters, and if they resisted, he’d resort to vile tactics to coerce them.

He hadn’t done a single good deed in his life, but he was well-versed in all manner of vices.

Evan was fuming with indignation.

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Chapter 83

That jerk Tarquin's been covering for this guy. No wonder Mom wants to divorce that scumbag. If he's protecting this bald-headed troublemaker, he's no good either!"

Tarquin sneezed loudly somewhere in the distance, as if on cue.

"And that woman, Isn't she the one who harassed Emmett at the airport? Birds of a feather flock together. They're all cut from the same cloth! No way I can let Mom take this lying down! I'm going to take them down! I'll blow the Slater family sky-high!"

Evan wasn't just talking big. He opened his suitcase, pulled out a few marble-like objects, and stuffed them into his pockets. He turned to head out and settle the score with Gage.

Elliot grabbed him and said, "Don't be rash."

"How can I not be rash? Look what he's done to Mom! Our dear sweet Mom, the one we'd treat with kid gloves because she's so precious, and he dares to lay a hand on her! He even had the nerve to choke her! Damn it! His whole family deserves to pay!"

Evan was so angry he was nearly in tears. He adored his mother too much.

Elliot said, "He's connected to Tarquin..."

"I know! And I'm not afraid of him. Nobody messes with my mom!"

"It's not about being afraid. It's because he's connected to Mom. If we make a big scene now, the past scandals could resurface. Without the truth about Mom's supposed 'adultery', bringing up old dirt will only lead to more insults. It's Mom

who will get hurt. again! Gossip doesn't hurt physically, but it can drown you. Otherwise, Mom wouldn't. have left the city she loved so much."

Elliot didn't want to escalate things, not before he had all the facts.

Evan was stomping his feet in frustration. "So what do we do? Just stand by and watch that creep bully Mom and do nothing? We can't avenge the past right now, but we can't just ignore what's happening to Mom, can we?"

Elliot, brow furrowed, said, "Of course we can't ignore it! I'll take care of this grudge today. Trust me, I won't let Mom suffer for nothing. Just give me a bit more time to figure everything out."

He couldn't let Evan get involved; his brother was too impulsive.

The full story behind Mom and Tarquin was still unclear, and now Gage was under Tarquin's protection. If they went after Gage, it could draw Tarquin's attention.

Elliot had been investigating the past events.

Tarquin had been abroad since marrying Elysia. He hadn't even come back for the wedding day. In those two years of marriage, he hadn't once met with Elysia. Yet during that time, he seemed to have treated her well, never skimping on her living expenses. And on the day he returned to the country, the first draft of the divorce settlement offered her a substantial sum. But then suddenly, he accused Mom of adultery and left her with nothing.

There had to be some misunderstanding...

And how could two people, who supposedly never met, have conceived them?

Evan was pacing anxiously. "But we already know what happened, right? That jerk Tarquin and the Thorne family bullied our mom!"

Elliot, still typing rapidly on the keyboard, suddenly stopped. His eyes went wide as he stared at the computer screen.

"I've got it, I've got it, I've got it!" he exclaimed, emphasizing his shock.

Evan and Emmett, tears forgotten, looked at him with red eyes. "What do you know?"

Elliot explained, “When Tarquin returned to the country, Mom went to the airport to pick him up. Not long after, Tarquin publicly accused her of infidelity. A month later, Mom found out she was pregnant.”

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Chapter 84

“So, Mom had the accident on the very same day! I have a wild guess. The day Tarquin flew back home, Mom picked him up, and they got it on at the airport, which led to us being conceived. But for some reason, they didn’t get a good look at each other, so they had no idea they had just hooked up with one another. And that’s where all the misunderstandings started.”

“Huh?” Evan and Emmett both stared at Elliot.

Their eyes said it all: they didn’t get it, not one bit.

Elliot furrowed his brow and continued, “So, that’s why Tarquin changed the divorce papers, and Mom just silently admitted to everything because she didn’t know that she had been with Tarquin. She thought she had actually cheated during her marriage.”

Evan and Emmett blinked, asking, “Then what?”

Elliot explained, “That could explain why Mom came back wanting a divorce from Tarquin, even though she had seen him several times but didn’t recognize him. Because she had not idea what Tarquin looked like!”

Evan, still puzzled, asked, “So you mean to say, Mom confused Tarquin and our dad, thinking they were two different guys, but actually, they’re the same person?”

“Exactly, that’s what I’m saying! Likewise, Tarquin didn’t know that Mom was his wife in

name.”

“Whoa, this is...” Evan scratched his head, “So, tell me, is Tarquin a good guy or a bad guy?” “If you look at it from his point of view, him saying Mom cheated isn’t exactly wrong.”

“How can you say that? Wasn’t he the one who slept with Mom? He’s the one who wronged her and then accuses her of cheating!”

“That’s because he doesn’t know that he was with Mom, just like she doesn’t know she

was with Tarquin.”

Evan got all muddled again, “So... so... do we still go after Tarquin for revenge?”

“Yes, we do. No matter what, he hurt Mom’s feelings, and that’s wrong!”

“Yeah, exactly!” Evan nodded vigorously. He was worried Elliot might suddenly say they shouldn’t seek revenge. Evan didn’t care about the details; anyone who made his mom sad deserved payback!

“But...” Elliot’s tone shifted, “We need to clear up two things first. One, Tarquin didn’t want Mom, and he was the one who initiated the divorce, so why is he reluctant to go through with it now? Two, what exactly happened back then? Why did they get intimate but fail to

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see each other’s faces clearly?”

Evan said, “The first point is the most crucial because that’s what’s eating away at Mom. She came back to finalize the divorce.”

“Right, now things are starting to make sense. Although they didn’t recognize each other, Nola picked on Emmett at the airport on the day we came back, and you went to settle the score. You ended up trashing Tarquin’s car, which got Mom and Tarquin tangled up again. Because of that, Tarquin had Mom taken, but we smoked ‘em out and got her to safety. Then, to get back at him for Mom, we snatched

some of his business deals and cracked his security system as a warning. Plus, I made sure no one could track Mom! This made Tarquin think that Mom was some big shot who was deliberately making her presence felt and had a target on his back. That's why he's been so fixated on Mom, tossing attitude her way! The other day, I accidentally overheard Mom talking with her friend, and she mentioned that Tarquin has been misunderstanding her intentions the whole time."

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Chapter 85

"But... I still don't get it. Why does he have that delusion? Is that like, narcissism or something? Mom isn't even trying to get his attention, and yet he acts like she's been following him around," Evan mumbled.

Elliot replied, "It's kind of narcissism but not exactly. Rich folks tend to overthink things way more than the average Joe."

"Why's that?"

"The richer you are, the more danger surrounds you, and the more enemies you have, which makes you super sensitive."

"How do you know all this?"

Elliot pursed his lips and said, "Because, I happen to be one of those rich people."

Evan's lips twitched. "So, are you always paranoid, thinking someone's out to get you?"

"Not really."

"Huh?"

"Because I keep a low profile. Other than you and Emmett, no one knows I'm loaded, not even Mom

babe in the So, no one's out to get me. To the rest of the woods."

world, I'm just

Evan paused. "...No wonder Mom always says to keep a low profile. There's wisdom in

that."

Wealth under wraps is another way to stay low-key.

Elliot continued, "Mom may not be a genius, but she's a good and honest person. Her advice is solid, and we should listen to her."

"Yeah, yeah, we should always listen to Mom. So, what's the game plan?"

Elliot let out a sigh and said, "First, we clear up Tarquin's misunderstanding so he stops pestering Mom and giving her grief. Then we dig into why he won't grant her a divorce. Once we figure that out, we can help Mom."

Evan grumbled, "Can't we just strong-arm him into divorcing Mom?"

That was still his go-to solution - brute force!

"We could, but it's not the best move. Don't forget, Mom hasn't mentioned the past to us, nor has she told us her real reason for coming back. If we push Tarquin, we might rip

open

Mom's old wounds and throw her back into the media frenzy. It's best to avoid that until we have all the facts."

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"Alright, so how do we clear up Tarquin's misunderstanding?"

Elliot furrowed his brow, looking all grown-up, "Let me think on that."

Meanwhile, next door.

Elysia was blissfully unaware that her sons were turning her world upside down,

She was handing Blossom her nightgown after her shower. It was a tad snug, showing off

Blossom's curves.

Blossom complained, "You've had three kids, and I'm still chubbier than you. That's just not fair."

Elysia chuckled, "You're not chubby; that's just baby fat."

Blossom was the cuddly type- petite, cute, and absolutely adorable.

She snuggled under the covers and said, "I just can't control my eating. I don't want to, either. My motto is: Life is short, so eating is crucial. Never deprive your mouth or legs. If you can eat two pieces of chocolate, never settle for one. If you can lie down, don't sit. Eat well, drink well, rest well- that's the way to live."

Blossom was a classic foodie who wasn't into working out.

Elysia climbed into bed, smiling. "With your love for food, you better treat Emmett right. That boy can cook like a dream, and sticking with him means feasting like a queen."

The mention of the little guy perked Blossom right up, "I know, I know! He showed me pictures on his phone yesterday. Oh my gosh, just looking at them made me hungry! And he even makes perfume. How can such a young kid be so talented?"

"Fashion sense definitely doesn't run in my genes," Elysia admitted.

Then Blossom asked, "They say giving birth is like a woman's trial by fire. Was it really painful when you had them?"

Elysia shrugged, "Honestly, I didn't even have a chance to feel it. I don't even know how it all went down. By the time I woke up, it was all over, so I missed out on the pain of childbirth and didn't get to snap those first precious moments."

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Chapter 86

Blossom was baffled, her brow furrowed in thought. “You passed out after work, and normally, if someone was to rescue you, they’d take you straight to the hospital, not drop you off in the middle of nowhere. But if you ran into some bad news, well, they didn’t hurt you or the babies. They just left you in the wilderness. It’s like they wanted you to fend for yourself, but that doesn’t quite add up either. If someone wanted to harm you, they wouldn’t bother letting you give birth, let alone perform a C-section and stitch you up afterward.”

It had slipped out during their daily walk that Elysia and the children lived in the woods. But Elysia had skirted around the details of her saviors and life in the wilds, mentioning only a quaint village at the foot of the mountains.

Elysia was just as puzzled, this enigma nagging at her.

The person who took her to the wilderness didn’t seem to want to harm her, but didn’t exactly seem to be helping her either. It was just... weird.

“Didn’t they leave any clues behind?” Blossom asked.

Elysia shook her head. “None.”

“And they never showed up again?”

“Not once.”

“That is so weird...” Blossom pondered for a moment, then shrugged. “Oh well, why rack your brains over it? The truth will come out sooner or later.”

Elysia nodded in agreement. That was often how things went; you could think until your head hurt and get nowhere. But the moment you stopped trying, the answers would hit

like a lightning bolt.

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“Enough about me and the kids. I want to hear about you and Winona these past years,” Elysia urged.

it's my mom

Blossom chuckled, "Same old, same old. But if I have to pick something, driving me up the wall with her matchmaking shenanigans! Can you believe it? A woman of her intellect, turned matchmaker! She's relentless! Between her and my aunt, it's like they're on a mission. I dread their visits. The second I see them together, I feel like it's doomsday..."

Elysia couldn't help but laugh. "I can't picture Hollis getting into the matchmaking business."

"Oh, the Hollis you knew is long gone. I swear my aunt has brainwashed her. Not only does she want me hitched, but she's aiming for blue blood! Like, seriously, why would any tycoon want to marry an average-looking, average-built, average-educated, average-job

woman like me? They'd have to be blind!"

Blossom's self-deprecation was ruthless, and she didn't stop there.

Back in the day, she'd get so mad at how slow I was, even cried over it. Kept wondering how two brainiacs like her and Dad could have produced such a dunce. She even toyed with the idea that I wasn't theirs. If it weren't for my striking resemblance to them, they might have dragged me to a paternity test by now. They used to lament about how two positives made a negative. If they weren't so caught up in their careers and getting on in years, they'd probably try for a do-over with a new kid.

Once I got a job, she stopped nagging, only to start her marriage crusade. All that smarts, and now she's turned into a full-blown matchmaker."

Elysia smiled, "Well, you've been out of school for a while. It is about that time to settle down, isn't it?"

"Not interested. I'm loving the single life. Why mess it up with a relationship? Best-case scenario, I land a guy like Zane - treats his wife like gold, faithful, a real gentleman. Worst case, I get stuck with a deadbeat. Why would I risk that? I'm happy where I am. I've got my job, my friends, my own little world. I can party when I feel like it or enjoy some peace and quiet. I can jet off on a whim or lounge in bed all day without anyone nagging me. I make enough to get by, splurge on treats when I want. But if I got married? Ha!! might end up supporting him, and there goes my snack money. Just the thought gives me the shivers!"

Blossom had a point..

Marriage could go either way: it could be your making or your undoing.

And the thing about men? You can't always tell a saint from a sinner right away.

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Chapter 87

09:48

Elysia leaned back in her chair, a contemplative look crossing her face.

“You know what they say, “Marry in haste, repent at leisure. But if you don’t get married and have kids while you’re young, you might live to regret it.

Blossom just shrugged it off with her usual carefree attitude. “Ah, let life worry about itself. Life’s too short to not enjoy the heck out of it. I just wanna be happy, that’s all that matters. And love? You can’t force that kind of thing. Look, I’m not against marriage. It’s just that my knight in shining armor hasn’t trotted up yet. When he does, trust me, you won’t have to nudge me—I’ll be the first one shouting from the rooftops that I’m getting married.”

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Blossom’s tone shifted gears as she turned to Elysia with a curious tilt of her head. “What about you, though? You planning on jumping back into the dating pool again?”

Elysia shook her head decidedly. “I’ve had my fill of the bitter taste of marriage, no second helpings for me, thank you. Besides, I’ve got my kids. They’ll be my company when I’m old and gray.*

Blossom scooted closer with a mischievous grin. “Well then, what’s yours is mine, right? From today on, I’ve got kids too. If I end up a spinster, you can bet I’ll be clinging to you and your three little munchkins.”

“Ha, you’re on. By the way, did Winona ever mention when she’s coming back?”

Blossom shook her head, her ponytail swishing “No clue. Winona’s been living the life, a real leading lady—her career and love life are both booming. The only thing missing is a baby. I heard her say once that Zane wants kids, but she’s too caught up with her career to even think about it. Good thing Zane adores her, or else they’d be at each other’s throats over it.”

“Yeah, deciding to have kids... That’s a conversation that needs both to be on board.”

“Exactly. But everyone’s pushing back timelines these days. Winona can afford to wait a few more years.

As Blossom's words trailed off, her stomach gave a loud, insistent growl. She laughed and said, "Time for a midnight snack."

"You and your belly. I could whip up something."

"No need, it's late. I'll just order in. I'll check on the little ones first. If they're still awake, I'll grab extra."

Tiptoeing over to the kids' room, Blossom gently pushed the door open. It was pitch black; the trio was sound asleep. She tiptoed back, closing the door behind her.

"All tucked in. Let's get this party started."

She ordered some BBQ skewers and a couple of beers, and they settled into an evening of eating, drinking, and laughter, much like the old college dorm days.

Meanwhile, at the hospital, Tarquin kept a vigil by Elijah's bedside, restlessly awake.

Gideon's men had crumbled under Lowell's tactics, spilling everything.

Gideon had sought out Elysia only after hearing about her potential to help Elijah with his bipolar disorder. Elysia wasn't lying; she truly didn't know Gideon.

The encounter of Elysia and Tarquin at the bar was a mere coincidence. Tarquin's men confirmed she had signed up for the bartending gig long before he decided to show up looking for Keaton.

In other words, Elysia had no idea he would be there when she applied for the job.

Tarquin had misunderstood her twice over.

But what about the smoke bomb in the basement, the elusive hero, the business rivalry, the breached security system, and the warning not to bully the little lady? Could it be that someone else, not Elysia, was the target of the message?

He pondered, his mind racing. The 'little lady' wasn't just Elysia; there was also his estranged wife, whom he'd never met and whose marriage he'd used to fend off Nola. And lately, she'd been pushing for a divorce, which he'd resisted.

Could the person behind the business sabotage be standing up for her?

Tarquin's expression darkened. Without a glance at the clock, he whipped out his phone and dialed the Royal Community.

"Get her on the line. I want to meet with her tomorrow!"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 88[592 words]

Chapter 88

He was determined to meet 'his wife' himself, to see if there indeed was such a powerful figure behind her!

The next morning, Elysia was jolted awake by the shrill ring of her cellphone.

It was Zane calling.

Blearily opening her eyes, Elysia answered, "Hello?"

"Elysia, it's me, Zane."

"I know. I saved your number yesterday. What's up, you need something?"

"Nothing major, just a bit worried about you. Sorry about last night. I had one too many and just woke up. You alright?"

Elysia knew he was referring to the altercation with Gage.

"I'm fine, don't worry about me."

"Gage hasn't been giving you any more trouble, has he?"

"No, he hasn't."

Zane let out a sigh of relief, "That's good to hear. Where are you at? You out of bed yet?"

"Not yet. Blossom's with me at this temporary place I'm staying at. But, yeah, we should probably get up."

"Well, send me your location. I'll come over and bring you guys some breakfast."

"Wait, you're coming over?"

“Yeah, is that not okay?”

“It’s not that. I know you’re busy, and if you’re just concerned about me, you don’t have to come. I’m really okay.”

Zane replied with a chuckle, “No matter how busy, I’ve got to check on you. Plus, I’m not busy today; it’s Sunday, my day off.”

Elysia was about to protest when Zane added, “Winona’s been looking for you for years. Now that you’ve finally shown up, if I don’t come to see you, she’d kill me. I’m visiting on her behalf.”

With that, Elysia had no ground to refuse.

“Alright, I’ll send you my location.”

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After hanging up, Blossom asked, “Zane’s coming over?”

Yeah, he says he’s coming on behalf of Winona.”

“Quite the survival Instinct he’s got. If Winona knew you were back and Zane didn’t visit, she’d definitely have his head.”

Elysia just smiled, “That’s what he said himself.”

Neither of them thought much of it. Since a gentleman was visiting, they quickly got out of bed to freshen up.

Elysia was unaware that Royal Community had tried to call her last night. Her phone showed no missed calls.

After drinking heavily, the mere thought of Royal Community issues was distressing. Under the influence, in a fit of irritation, she had blocked the number.

Now that the alcohol had worn off, she’d completely forgotten about blocking the call. So, the number from Royal Community was still lying dormant in her blacklist.

Blossom headed to the bathroom first, while Elysia went to check on the three little ones.

The trio were still sound asleep, having gone to bed late the night before, they hadn’t awakened yet.

Seeing the children, Elysia’s heart warmed. She tucked them in properly and started tidying up.

She and Blossom had not had the chance to clean up after last night’s drinking session.

Half an hour later, Zane arrived.

Elysia stood at the doorway, greeting him warmly into the house.

Unbeknownst to them, someone was taking photos from a distance, and these pictures would soon be in Tarquin's hands.

Lowell reported to Tarquin, "As per your instructions, we've been tracking Zane and captured these photos. No wonder we couldn't find Ms. Thorne's address; turns out she's staying at Wheatfield Homestay. The owner's son is a hacker, not famous, but with connections to some pretty skilled ones. Their cybersecurity is top-notch."

If their cybersecurity was that impressive, it must come with a hefty price tag.

Tarquin frowned, "I thought Elysia was broke? Where's she getting the money for such a fancy place?"

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 89[642 words]

Chapter 89

The landlady's special treatment only cost her 200 bucks for the night," the man said with a grin, tossing a wink in Tarquin's direction.

"Excuse me?" Tarquin raised an eyebrow.

"Mrs. Thorne's three sons, they're the landlady's darlings. She'd let them stay for free if not out of concern for Mrs. Thorne's feelings, afraid that not charging her would cause undue worry."

Tarquin eyed him skeptically. "...Really?"

"As true as the sky is blue. Don't believe me? Go ask her yourself," Lowell insisted with a chuckle.

Tarquin didn't know this was all prearranged by Elliot, nor did he give it much thought before he probed further, "Did you figure out the connection between Zane and Elysia?"

"Got it. She and Zane's wife, Winona, are besties from their college days, and Zane was the big man on campus, their senior. The trio's quite tight-knit. Oh, and we dug up some dirt on Ms. Thorne too. Turns out she's lived in Jindale City before. Ms. Thorne is the adopted daughter of the Thorne family, not exactly the apple of their eye. But she's a self-starter, academically brilliant. Blew her exams out of the water and got into Jindale University with flying colors. She was a star there too. Her professors and classmates all said she was a sweetheart-kind, helpful, and ambitious. If she hadn't dropped out to get married, she would've had a bright future. After she married, though,

rumors flew about her private life—allegations of an affair. Her husband caught her red-handed and divorced her, leaving her with nothing. Then she vanished, just like that, for six whole years. And then, the day her son wrecked your car, she pops back into the picture.”

Infidelity and left with nothing!

Tarquin’s thoughts suddenly turned to his own estranged wife, whom he’d never met.

But Elysia couldn’t be her; Elysia was already divorced, and his marriage was still technically intact. Besides, their names didn’t match.

“What’s brought her back into town?” he asked.

“No idea.”

“Any

y contact with Zane before she returned?”

Lowell shook his head. “There’s a few years there, a gap we can’t account for. But since her return, it doesn’t seem like she’s been in touch with Zane. We checked his phone, no calls to Ms. Thorne, not even a WhatsApp message until last night. Seems like their dinner at Jinpeach Restaurant was their first meet-up in years.”

Tarquin furrowed his brows. “So, there’s nothing shady about Zane and Elysia?”

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Huh? What do you mean?”

Tarquin shot him a displeased glance.

Lowell quickly added, “Got it, got it. But I doubt it. Zane and his wife seem to have a good. thing going. He’s known to be a devoted husband.”

Tarquin’s lips twitched, clearly wanting to change the subject. “Any connections between Zane and Gideon?*

“Nothing turned up. But Zane’s been trying to get close to you for business reasons. He showed up at Booker’s birthday bash last night, pulling strings to get your attention.”

A flicker of disdain crossed Tarquin’s eyes as he pondered.

Lowell continued, “You suspect Zane and Gideon might be in cahoots? Doesn’t seem likely. Combine their fortunes, and you won’t hit a billion. The last time our business was under siege, the player had tens of billions at their disposal. Zane’s just the son-in-law in the Newsom family—yeah,

they're loaded, and Winona's a hotshot celebrity, but Zane's assets are minimal. Right now, as the general manager of the Newsom Group, he's more an errand boy than a power player. The real shot-caller is still Mr. Newsom."

Tarquin remained silent for a moment, then instructed, "See if there's a project we could collaborate with Zane on. If there is, give him a shot."

This opportunity was a consideration of Zane's connection to Elysia. Although his suspicions of Elysia had lessened, he hadn't entirely ruled her out.

09

Hitched & Hitched Again: A Comedy of Marital Mayhem (Elysia and Tarquin) - Chapter 90[644 words]

Chapter 90

Tarquin couldn't quite pinpoint whether he wanted her to take care of Elijah or if he was trying to scope out her intentions. So, he paid extra attention to the people and events surrounding her.

"By the way," Lowell mentioned casually, "Professor Folly's daughter, Blossom Blythe, is pretty chummy with Ms. Thorne. Just last night, Ms. Blythe treated Ms. Thorne to dinner and didn't return home. She checked into the Wheatfield Homestay instead."

Tarquin's eyelids flicked up at the mention, his gaze shifting to Lowell. "Professor Folly's only child?"

"Yeah, I did some digging. Ms. Thorne, Ms. Blossom Blythe, and Ms. Winona Newsom were the inseparable trio back in school. Very tight-knit."

There was a silence before Tarquin murmured an acknowledgment.

The Blythe couple were two professors he held in high regard. His interest in ancient cultures ran deep, and the Blythes were experts in that field. He had visited them on multiple occasions.

He knew they had an only daughter, but he had never met her, nor did he know her name. He hadn't expected Elysia to be best friends with the daughter.

"Is Professor Folly still over in Border City?"

“Yep, they discovered some ancient tomb out there. The whole team’s gone to Border City. Might be a while before they’re back.”

Noticing Tarquin’s furrowed brow, Lowell continued, “You probably don’t need to worry about Ms. Blythe’s safety. She and Ms. Thorne are genuine friends. When the news of Ms. Thorne’s affair broke out, everyone familiar with her was bad-mouthing her, except Ms. Blythe and Ms. Newsom. They

actually hit back at the haters. They both faced a lot. of backlash online, took a lot of flak. Luckily, the Newsoms have deep pockets and managed to suppress the trending searches. That helped put an end to the whole ordeal.” “Let’s look into what Elysia was up to in the years she was out in the countryside before this,” Tarquin said after a pause.

She used to be a model student, but who knows if she’s changed? People do change over time.

His thoughts drifted to his wife, and he asked, “No word from her at the Royal Community?”

“Her phone’s been ringing off the hook, but no answer.” Lowell knew what Tarquin was thinking and reassured him, “But all things considered, I don’t think she’s related to the troubles we’ve had these past few days. If someone was trying to muscle in on our

business to get back at her, they would’ve acted again after you refused to divorce. But look, It’s been days, no divorce, and no more stunts.”

Tarquin’s expression darkened, and he remained silent.

Lowell’s point was valid, but if it wasn’t Elysia or his wife, who could the ‘little lady’ be?

Tarquin.” Benjamin had arrived for work.

Tarquin snapped out of his reverie and glanced at Elijah, standing up.

“Look after him for me. I’ve got to go. Call me the moment he wakes up.”

Elijah was familiar with Benjamin, so Tarquin was confident that Elijah wouldn’t throw a fit upon seeing him.

Benjamin, aware that Tarquin had spent the night at Elijah’s bedside, reminded him, “You better go get some rest.”

Tarquin grunted noncommittally and headed straight to his car, saying, “To the office.

Lowell sighed and said, “Tarquin, go home. You need some rest. You’ve barely slept properly in days.”

Between worrying about Elijah and work, he was running on fumes. Even an iron man has his limits. But Tarquin's response was a chilly, "To the office first."

He closed his eyes for a brief respite as Lowell reluctantly started the car.

Outsiders always said Tarquin was cold and ruthless, a heartless creature, but they had him all wrong. He was the epitome of a tough exterior housing a warm heart. He was the best father anyone could ask for.

And the best friend and boss too!