

Hitched 841

Chapter 841

The boat rocked precariously, like a dandelion puff caught in a gust of wind, offering no semblance of stability or safety.

Elysia was terrified of the dark, and even more so of water. Every time she stood by the shore, an irrational fear gripped her, making her believe that something sinister was about to leap out from the depths below.

She glanced outward twice before quickly retracting her gaze, shrinking into herself, shivering uncontrollably.

She was scared. Scared of the engulfing darkness of the night, scared of the vast, all-consuming ocean!

Scared of Keith, whose eyes were blinded by hatred, harboring demons in his heart!

But what scared her most was the thought of something happening to Tarquin...

She couldn't bear the thought of spending her life with Keith; she just wanted to be with Tarquin.

She dreamt of raising their kids together with Tarquin...

Images of Tarquin and their children, their faces, their laughter, flooded her mind, causing a sharp pang in her heart, blurring her vision with tears. She missed them, missed them terribly.

She wished for Tarquin to appear before her the next second, to throw herself into his arms and tell him how frightened she was...

Meanwhile, by the seaside,

Tarquin stood gazing into the pitch-black ocean, his brow furrowed, an aura of anger surrounding him.

Axel stood beside him,

"They left from here, by boat, still out there on the sea. No information on the vessel; it's likely a local fisherman's private boat. Our guys are still searching the area, but no news yet."

Looking for someone in the vast night sea was like searching for a needle in a haystack!

After Elysia was abducted, they had traced the clues to this point.

Axel continued, "The local fishermen say the weather's been rough these past few days, big winds, big waves. The small private boats they have can easily capsize. They won't stay out past dawn; they'll have to come in to avoid the storm.

According to the fishermen's estimates on their location, they have quite a few places they could dock. It's uncertain which one Keith might choose, but I've got people on lookout at each."

Tarquin remained silent, pulling out his phone to check the map.

After what seemed like an eternity, a sudden thought struck him, tightening the lines around his eyes as he zoomed in on the map for a closer look.

He stared at it for a long while in silence, then turned on his heel and strode towards the car, his steps quick and determined.

Reaching the vehicle, he climbed into the driver's seat without a word.

Axel, puzzled, hurriedly got into the passenger seat.

The car hadn't even fully started before it was already speeding off!

Axel turned to Tarquin, who was driving with a steely gaze fixed on the road ahead, his expression dark and intense.

Axel was deeply concerned about his current state. From the moment Elysia was taken, Tarquin had been on edge, not a moment of rest, not a bite of food, nor a sip of water had passed his lips!

He barely spoke, uttering less than ten sentences the whole day, most of them brief exchanges with Elliot, Evan, Emmett, and Elijah.

He hadn't told the kids about Elysia's plight.

He lied, saying Elysia had to stay a couple of days with a student who was facing severe issues.

He wouldn't go back; he'd stay with Elysia.

The kids believed him, none the wiser, with Lowell staying with them at home.

Axel was worried but knew better than to voice his concerns. Tarquin was like a brother to him; he knew him too well.

At this moment, Tarquin was a mix of raging anger and crippling fear.

Part of him wanted to exact revenge on Keith, while another part was terrified for Elysia's safety, all his emotions bottling up inside.

Keith had crossed a line this time, taking Elysia, the person Tarquin cherished above all else!

Abducting Elysia was an affront worse than ripping out Tarquin's heart!

Chapter 842

In the wee hours, the sea turned treacherous as a fierce wind picked up.

The small boat struggled against the increasingly violent waves, coming dangerously close to capsizing several times.

The skipper's face was etched with concentration as he gestured frantically to Keith.

It was then that Elysia realized the skipper was mute; he was using sign language to communicate with Keith, indicating that the wind was getting stronger and a heavy rain was imminent. Continuing their journey on the small boat would be perilous.

Keith, unfazed as if he had anticipated the change in weather, glanced at his watch and simply said to the skipper, "Stick to the plan."

Nodding, the skipper resumed his efforts to steer the boat through the turbulent waters.

Keith moved to the other side of the boat, bringing over two sets of diving gear. "Do you know how to put these on?" he asked Elysia. Frowning, she replied, "We're going in the water?"

"Yeah, it's too risky to stay on the boat with the storm picking up. We'll be safer in the water."

Elysia instinctively retorted, "Safer in the water?"

Keith patiently explained, "I'll take you to a safe place. It's too difficult for the boat to get there, but we can swim."

Elysia was hesitant to enter the water; she was afraid even in broad daylight, let alone at night.

Keith, sensing her fear, gently reassured her, "I'll be with you. There's nothing to be afraid of. I've got you."

Just then, a bolt of lightning tore across the sky, followed by the deep rumble of thunder directly overhead, causing Elysia to shiver in fear.

The worsening weather indeed made staying on the boat a dangerous proposition, prompting her to quickly don the diving gear as Keith had instructed. Ever since becoming a mother, she had become extremely cautious about her own safety.

Before she could mentally prepare herself, a wave crashed over them, plunging her into the water.

Panic-stricken, Elysia thrashed about in the water, her eyes tightly shut. Despite wearing a diving suit and being immediately caught by Keith as she fell, she was terrified, feeling as though her soul was about to leave her body.

In her panic, she repeatedly called out for Tarquin in her mind, her source of comfort and security.

Meanwhile, on a seldom-traveled road, Tarquin pushed his car to nearly 200 mph. The road was rough, and the high speed made the car nearly overturn several times.

With a furrowed brow, Tarquin's gaze never wavered from the road ahead, his heart aching with worry.

He was unaware of Elysia's current situation, but he knew her well enough to understand her fear of water. Being taken by Keith via a water route must have terrified her.

With his lips pressed tightly together and his face tense, Tarquin floored the gas pedal, wishing he could make the car fly.

When the road ended, he sharply turned the steering wheel and slammed on the brakes, executing a perfect drift to stop the car.

Tarquin stepped out into the pouring rain and strode forward. Axel quickly followed suit.

The area was overgrown with weeds, clearly untouched, with no path forward or sight of the sea. Yet, the sound of waves crashing against the shore was unmistakable.

Thunder boomed overhead as the rain intensified.

Axel, puzzled by Tarquin's intentions but knowing he never acted without reason, silently followed him through the rain.

After about ten minutes, they finally caught sight of the tumultuous sea. A flash of lightning briefly illuminated the churning waves, highlighting the danger lurking within.

Axel's phone suddenly rang. After a brief conversation, he turned to Tarquin, "There's been a sighting along Route 5. A small boat seems to be trying to approach the shore but hesitates, continuously drifting. It's too far to see how many people are on board, but it looks suspicious. Should we head over? It's a half-hour drive."

Chapter 843

Tarquin frowned, a moment of silence before he said,

"Tell them to stay on high alert, no need to dive in after him. We'll question him once he's ashore."

A flicker of surprise passed through Axel's eyes. It was somewhat unexpected.

Why not approach now, especially with that boat showing up near pier five at this hour? Highly suspicious.

Axel didn't press Tarquin for his thoughts, simply relayed the message and hung up.

The rain was pouring down, and Tarquin stood there, letting it drench him, not moving to take shelter or return to the car.

Axel stood beside him, quietly keeping him company.

Time seemed to stretch on until suddenly, there was movement not far from them.

Two figures emerged from the sea!

Keith: "How are you doing? Are you okay?"

Elysia didn't respond, instead she started to cough violently as she shed the heavy gear, having swallowed water.

Axel was taken aback, clearly not expecting Keith and Elysia to surface here!

Before he could recover, Tarquin had already bolted towards them!

Without giving Keith a chance to react, he kicked him away from Elysia and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her close, "Elysia!"

Keith was taken aback!

This spot, only he knew about it!

How did Tarquin find it???

Keith's brows furrowed, a cold look in his eyes, as he got up to retaliate.

Axel rushed over, grabbed his wrist, and flipped him over his shoulder!

Keith grunted as he hit the ground, and before he could catch his breath, Axel's fist was coming at him again.

Keith quickly dodged, realizing the situation was dire. He gave Elysia one last look before diving back into the sea with a splash. Without a second thought, Axel dove in after him!

The sea swallowed them both in an instant!

The rain continued to pour, but Tarquin paid no mind to Keith, holding Elysia tight as if he wanted to merge her into his very bones. "Elysia, it's me, it's okay now, it's me!"

It took a moment for Elysia to stop struggling and recognize him, "Tarquin?"

"Yeah, it's me!"

Elysia paused, and then the next second, she burst into tears, like a child who had finally found her family after feeling lost and scared. She stopped fighting him, instead clinging to Tarquin's waist as if afraid he would vanish again.

"I was so scared, Tarquin, I thought I was going to die, sob sob sob..."

She was terrified something had happened to Tarquin!

Terrified she'd never see him again!

Terrified of the stormy night and the pitch-black depths of the sea.

She was scared, terrified!

Hearing her tremble as she called his name, telling him all her fears, Tarquin's heart was breaking.

He held her tighter, his voice choked with emotion,

"It's okay, I'm here..."

He tightened his grip, his tone gentle.

The day and night Elysia had been taken by Keith, Tarquin's emotions were indescribable.

He was scared, scared for her fear!

Elysia cried out in her vulnerability, "Tarquin!"

Tarquin quickly responded, "Yeah."

Elysia called again, "Tarquin!"

Tarquin assured, "Yeah, I'm here."

Elysia's cries grew louder, her voice filled with a child-like vulnerability as she repeatedly called his name, seeking reassurance that he was truly by her side.

Tarquin patiently responded, again and again.

With one arm wrapped around her waist and the other cradling her head, he enveloped her with his broad frame, offering her the sanctuary of his embrace.

Chapter 844

Elysia's voice broke mid-shout, suddenly going silent.

Exhausted and overwhelmed by her emotions, she fainted.

Tarquin, panicked, quickly scooped her up in his arms and hurried to his car.

Once they were in the car, he fired up the engine, cranking the heater up to full blast before wrapping her tightly in a blanket he grabbed from the trunk.

Then he rushed back to the driver's seat and drove her straight to the hospital.

He wasn't worried about Axel. Axel knew how to handle himself without getting into trouble.

As for settling scores with Keith, that could wait until Elysia was safe and sound. Right now, he'd love nothing more than to get his hands on Keith, but Elysia came first, always.

He arrived at the nearest hospital with Elysia, and it took nearly an hour to get her settled.

By the time Axel showed up, Elysia was already receiving IV fluids.

She was dressed in a clean hospital gown, her eyes closed, a frown creasing her forehead, her breathing uneven - clearly shaken up by the recent events.

Tarquin sat beside her, cradling one of her hands in both of his, pressing it to his lips, eyes red as he watched over her.

His clothes were still drenched, dripping water onto the floor.

The nurse, noticing Axel's gaze lingering on Tarquin, chimed in, "You're his friend, right? Please convince him to change. He could catch a cold. We've tried, but he won't listen. He won't leave his wife's side for even a second. Talk about true love."

Axel nodded politely without saying a word and entered the room.

"Go take a shower and change. I'll stay with her," he offered.

Tarquin turned to him and asked, "What about Keith?"

"He got away."

The downpour was heavy, the night pitch black, and the terrain unfamiliar to him, allowing Keith to slip away.

Tarquin's frown deepened, but he said no more.

He carefully tucked in the blankets around Elysia, stood up, and took the clean clothes his bodyguard had brought over to the bathroom.

He had refused to change earlier because he couldn't bear to leave Elysia's side, even for a moment. But with Axel there, he could finally relax a bit, daring to let her out of his sight.

After a quick shower and change into dry clothes, Tarquin immediately returned to Elysia's bedside, steadfast in his vigil.

Axel broke the silence, "Just got a call from the guys near Route 5. They caught someone on a small boat, a mute, who admitted Keith had taken his boat out to sea before donning diving gear and disappearing underwater. Beyond that, he's not saying much, playing dumb."

Tarquin wasn't surprised, his voice cold, "He was just a decoy, meant to distract us."

Axel couldn't help asking, "How did you know Keith would land there?"

"Only from there could he make the quickest getaway back to Spirit Village!"

"Spirit Village?"

Tarquin exhaled heavily, "It was my mom's dream to create a paradise where she could retire. If things had gone differently, Keith might have helped her realize that dream. I suspect he's keeping the treasure there, in Spirit Village!"

Spirit Village was a place Tarquin had only pieced together today.

He remembered Elizabeth's dream vividly; she had spoken of it often. A tranquil haven for her retirement years.

But until now, he had no idea she had already picked out the spot.

Had he known sooner, he would have brought Spirit Village to life for her.

In the recent days, while searching for the treasure, he had been scouring maps for beautiful, secluded villages.

It was only today, as Keith attempted to flee by water with Elysia, that he stumbled upon the name Spirit Village on the map.

Chapter 845

Seeing the place, something about it struck a chord of familiarity within him.

It wasn't until a moment of deep reflection that he recalled the name "Spirit Village" from amongst Elizabeth's belongings.

Putting together Elizabeth's dreams and his own obsession with her, it wasn't hard to guess where the treasure was located!

"You head to Spirit Village first, take someone with you. Once you've settled Elysia, I'll follow immediately!"

"..." Axel wasted no time, turning on his heel and leaving.

Meanwhile, Keith had regrouped with his own crew.

Seeing him in a state, they were surprised, "What happened?"

Keith's lips were pressed tightly together, he was panting heavily, gritting his teeth, "Back to town, quick!"

"Back to the village?"

"Yes!"

"What about Miss Thorne? She's been looking forward to meeting her."

Keith frowned, "Next time!"

Sensing his mood was off, his men didn't dare to probe further and quickly started the car.

Keith leaned back in the rear seat, ignoring the wound on his thigh, closing his eyes to quell his rage.

He hadn't expected Tarquin to ambush him there!

And if Tarquin had discovered that place, he must have also found out about Spirit Village!

Without a doubt, Tarquin had already sent men there!

The treasure was in Spirit Village!

He couldn't worry about Elysia now; he had to get back to the treasure first, figuring out how to move it somewhere safe.

He couldn't let Tarquin find the treasure first!

It was his; Tarquin couldn't take her away!

After a while, Keith opened his eyes, tearing his pants to reveal the wound on his thigh.

Annoyed, he looked at it; it was a nasty cut, long and deep, almost to the bone, still bleeding profusely.

Keith grabbed a towel, biting down on it as he opened the car's first aid kit, taking out alcohol and a suture kit to treat himself!

His men glanced at him through the rearview mirror, shuddering at the sight.

Such a big cut, and only someone as tough as Keith would dare to stitch it up himself!

"Should we... make a stop at the hospital?"

A cold glare from Keith was enough to silence the driver, who didn't dare to make another sound.

Those who followed Keith didn't know exactly what he had been through.

But they all knew two things about Keith.

One, he was ruthlessly cold-blooded, harsh to others, and even harsher to himself!

Two, he loved his daughter more than anything; nothing was more important than his little girl!

Keith gave all his love and tenderness to his treasure, leaving none for outsiders, not even for himself!

...

No sooner had Axel left, Tarquin received a call from Lowell,

"Tarquin, finally got a lead on Keith's identity. He's from Border City, part of the Inkster family!"

Tarquin frowned, "Border City? The Inkster family?"

Never heard of it!

"Right, his father's name is Phineas Inkster. Keith is the youngest Inkster, originally named Quinlan Inkster. He has two older brothers and a sister, but now they're all missing."

"Missing?"

"Yeah, as in their fate is unknown. No one's seen them alive, nor found their bodies."

"...Is it related to the Bradford family?"

"Don't know, but from what we've dug up, the Inskters had no prior connections or dealings with the Bradfords. However, the year the Inksters went missing, Gideon had visited Border City."

Meaning, the Inksters and the Bradfords had no relationship, no interactions, no acquaintances.

But, the mysterious disappearance of the Inkster family might have something to do with the Bradfords.

Chapter 846

Tarquin furrowed his brows, his intuition about Gideon being a classic wrong 'un was too sharp to ignore. The mess with the Inkster family? It reeked of Gideon's handiwork.

Gideon, that scumbag, wouldn't think twice about throwing his own flesh and blood under the bus, so why spare a thought for strangers?

Keith had been plotting for years, all to settle a score with the Bradford clan!

Tarquin caught himself nervously biting the inside of his cheek. Born into the Bradford family and entangled with Gideon-it felt like a curse from a past life!

"What was Gideon doing in Border City back then?"

Lowell replied, "He was launching new housing developments. Bought several plots in Border City and took a keen interest in the projects there, even overseeing them in person for a while."

"Did he have any dealings with the Inkster family during that time?"

"Nothing turned up. The Inkster's neighbors said they never heard them mention the Bradford family, nor seen anyone from the Bradfords visiting. Even the Inkster's relatives and friends claim there was no connection between the two families. The Inksters were true-blue Border City folks. Phineas and his wife were both educators, one an art teacher and the other a preschool teacher. They lived a modest but comfortable life, far from the Bradford's league of wealth. Plus, the land Gideon bought was miles away from the Inkster's place, not even remotely linked to any demolition

concerns.

But ever since Gideon left Border City, the Inkster family just vanished into thin air!

At first, neighbors thought they'd gone on a trip, but when they didn't return, everyone assumed they'd moved."

Tarquin's frown deepened. "Didn't their relatives look for them?"

"They did, even reported them missing, but the police found zilch. The Inksters' whereabouts became a mystery, and their relatives feared the worst. Then, out of the blue, over a decade later, both the Inkster and the Blackwood elders received a hefty sum of money and a letter.

The letter claimed the Inksters were engaged in confidential work for the nation, unable to surface or fulfill familial duties, hoping for understanding and peace of mind."

"And who was the letter supposedly from?"

"Phineas and his wife. We never saw the letter, but the Inkster elders were convinced it was Phineas's handwriting."

Was Phineas still alive?

Tarquin asked, "Any word from Phineas since then?"

"Nothing. Even when old Mr. Blackwood passed away two years ago, Phineas's family was nowhere to be seen. Now, there's all sorts of rumors about the Inksters-most believe Phineas had some unique talent that caught the state's eye, leading them to be 'frozen' for some top-secret mission."

Tarquin knitted his brows tighter,

"What about Keith? Has he been in touch with the Inkster or Blackwood relatives?"

"Nothing we've found suggests that. Keith hasn't even been back to Border City."

Tarquin inquired, "He disappeared for a while during the holidays, where did he go?"

"No clue. Keith's movements are a mystery, but it's clear he hasn't visited the Inksters or the Blackwoods. Probably off hunting down some treasure!" Tarquin clenched his jaw, the thought of his daughter in Keith's hands driving him to the edge.

After a pause, he asked, "Anything odd about Gideon after returning to Jindale City from Border City?"

"I snooped around a bit, nothing out of the ordinary. He even attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Border City developments, acting as if nothing was amiss."

Was it that he hadn't done anything, or was he just that indifferent about his actions?

With a steely expression, Tarquin instructed Lowell to send over all the details they'd gathered.

The call had barely ended when Elysia let out a sharp scream!

Chapter 847

Tarquin's heart raced, "Elysia!"

Elysia bolted upright with a gasp, her breathing heavy, her face painted with fear!

Clearly, she had been jolted awake by a nightmare!

Tarquin quickly grabbed her hand-still attached to the IV drip-and pulled her into a comforting embrace.

"It's okay, it's okay, just a bad dream, Elysia. You're safe."

It took Elysia a moment to realize that the terrifying events were just a dream, not reality.

And she had been saved by Tarquin!

She quickly pulled away from Tarquin's embrace, her eyes scanning him in a frantic worry,

"Are you alright? Are you hurt? Did Keith hurt you?"

Tarquin shook his head, "I'm fine, no injuries."

Only after confirming Tarquin was truly unharmed did she relax a bit, but within seconds, her heart was in her throat again.

Sitting up in her hospital bed, she clutched Tarquin's hand tightly, her words tumbling out,

"Keith is after you, do you know that? He's got a vendetta against the Bradford family, against your father. He's talking about paying back debts, about making you pay for the harm your father and the Bradfords have caused him. He wants revenge!

And our daughter, she's with him!

It was him who took Elijah and our daughter from me. He gave Elijah to you, but our daughter has been living with him!

He even tried to force me into marrying him, planning to take away Elliot, Evan, Emmett, and Elijah, wanting to keep us trapped by his side! He's gone mad, Keith has lost it!

His vision is clouded by hatred, he's surely plotting something to harm you!

But he didn't tell me his plans, what do we do?

Tarquin, how will you escape this? How do we get our daughter back? I...I..."

Her body shook with emotion, her face a mask of desperation, on the verge of tears.

Tarquin pulled her back into his arms, soothing her,

"He won't find it easy to hurt me, look at me, I'm still here, Elysia. Don't underestimate your husband's strength."

"But he, he..."

"No buts. My life belongs to you and our kids. No one else has the right to take it! There have been many who wanted to harm me; one more or one less Keith doesn't make a difference. Don't worry about him."

"..."

"Listen, take a deep breath..."

Tarquin guided her, hoping to calm her down first.

Once Elysia's emotions had somewhat stabilized, Tarquin continued to reassure her,

"You don't need to worry about me or our daughter. Given Keith's attitude towards her, she's not in immediate danger. Plus, we've already located where Keith is hiding our daughter, Axel is leading a team there as we speak."

Elysia's eyes widened in surprise, "You know where our daughter is?"

"Yes."

"Then why aren't you going to find her yourself?"

Tarquin wiped away her tears and tucked her disheveled hair behind her ear,

"Once you've finished your infusion and I've taken you home, I'll head straight there."

He needed to ensure Elysia was safe back at Number One Mansion, his stronghold, a place Keith couldn't infiltrate even if he tried.

Besides, Elliot, Evan, Emmett, and Elijah were there; they could keep Elysia company while he was gone.

His daughter was important, but so was Elysia.

After the ordeal with Keith, Tarquin wouldn't allow a second mishap.

Only once Elysia was settled could he leave with a peace of mind to find their daughter.

It was then that Elysia noticed the IV needle in her arm and without a second thought, yanked it out. Tarquin's eyes widened in shock.

Chapter 848

Elysia rubbed her nose and frowned, stating,

"I'm a doctor myself, I know my own body. I haven't eaten in over a day, and the shock was just too much, that's why I fainted. My body's fine. We need to go find our daughter, right now!"

With that, she threw back the covers, ready to jump out of bed!

She was determined to go with Tarquin to find their daughter, not wanting to wait another second!

But Tarquin stopped her, "You can't go!"

Spirit Village was Keith's stronghold, and for them, venturing in was sure to be dangerous!

Besides, Tarquin had only just rescued Elysia from Keith's clutches; he couldn't possibly take her into enemy territory and risk it all over again! What if, in the chaos, Keith managed to take Elysia back?

However, Elysia insisted,

"I have to go! Keith won't tell her I'm her father; at best, she'll see you as an uncle and won't go with you!"

She's been raised by Keith; she's bound to be attached to him. Even if you find her, you won't be able to bring her back easily.

If we force her, it'll scare her and leave a lasting, terrible impression!

But she's been waiting for me. Keith told her I'm her mother, so she won't be afraid when she sees me, and she'll be willing to come back with me." Tarquin felt a pang in his heart, his own daughter preferring Keith, recognizing him as a father figure.

It was a bitter pill to swallow.

But sadness aside, Elysia was right.

Compared to him, their daughter was likely more attached to Keith, and even if he found her, she might not be willing to leave with him!

After some thought, Tarquin agreed to Elysia's suggestion.

He decided she would wait outside the village, not letting her enter.

He wished Elysia would rest a bit longer before setting off, but she couldn't wait a second longer!

Not knowing her daughter's whereabouts was agonizing for her.

Now that she knew, she was desperate to see her daughter immediately!

Understanding her, Tarquin made arrangements, and after ensuring Elysia ate some food and snacks in the car, they set off to Spirit Village to find their daughter!

Before leaving, he made sure she had a hearty meal of sandwiches and cookies in the car, watching over her as she ate.

After all, a person needs their strength, and he wouldn't be at ease until she had some food in her.

Once Elysia had eaten and seemed more spirited, Tarquin finally asked her,

"Keith mentioned a feud with my father?"

He was almost certain Keith held a grudge against the Bradford family.

But what did this hatred have to do with his own father?

Elysia furrowed her brows and recounted the events at Hill Village to Tarquin.

Without hesitation, Tarquin exclaimed, "Impossible!"

Elysia looked puzzled.

Tarquin explained, "I know what kind of man my dad was. He had strong principles, was kind-hearted, and gentle. He would never do something as cruel as neglecting a child."

The idea of Kendrick dragging a child by the leg into the dangerous mountains on a stormy night was something Tarquin couldn't accept.

In the entire Bradford family, except for Kendrick, he might believe it of anyone else. But Kendrick? He refused to believe it!

Tarquin continued, "My mom was intelligent and kind-hearted, not blinded by love. The man she chose had to be virtuous and principled. There were many who pursued her, but she chose my dad, proving his character was sound.

Moreover, when you truly love someone, you love everything they love, even to the point of irrationality.

Just like how I loved Elliot and Evan before I knew they were mine, or how I still love Emmett even though we're not related by blood."

Chapter 849

Because I love you, and you love them, I find myself instinctively loving them too.

Dad adored Mom, and since Mom loved Aiden, he must have found himself liking Aiden too, subconsciously, sincerely.

So I'm certain, the one who hurt Aiden years ago, it couldn't have been Dad."

Elysia, of course, believed Tarquin, her face etched with confusion,

"I've heard you praise Dad's character before, so I didn't believe it either. But when I asked Keith, he was so sure! He said he'd recognize Dad even if he turned to ashes, that it was Dad who dragged him up the hill that night."

Tarquin frowned in thought; it couldn't be Kendrick!

But Keith wouldn't lie to Elysia without reason.

Where did the problem lie?

If Keith mistook someone for Kendrick, it meant that person must have closely resembled Kendrick, at least in appearance and build.

But who could it be?

Kendrick didn't have any brothers.

Could someone have intentionally disguised themselves as Kendrick to mislead Keith?

But Keith was so young at the time, what was the point in misleading him?

"What happened after he was taken to the hill?"

Elysia shook her head,

"Keith didn't say, but I guess it must have been something terrible, or he wouldn't say Dad pushed him into the abyss!"

Tarquin's brows furrowed tighter, "..."

Elysia continued, "He hates Dad; he thinks Dad took Mom away from him and then failed to cherish her, leading to her early death. He believes all the misfortunes that befell him and Mom later were Dad's doing.

But since Dad passed away early, he's directed all his hatred towards you, wanting to torment you, to make you suffer every conceivable misery before killing you."

At this, Elysia shivered with fear, trembling uncontrollably.

Tarquin snapped back from his thoughts, pulling her into his arms to comfort her before asking,

"Did Keith mention any grudges against the Bradford family?"

At this, Elysia's expression changed, she untangled herself from his embrace, turned to look out the window, and stayed silent for a long while before turning back to him, grinding her teeth,

"Gideon is a monster! The Bradfords are all beasts!"

Tarquin: "?"

Elysia's emotions surged, her breathing unsteady,

"Keith said he was once happy, very happy, like the three little ones I've raised, until Gideon suddenly appeared..."

Years ago, in Border City.

Back then, Keith was just a few years old, and he wasn't called Keith; his name was Quinlan.

His parents had wished for him a life of ease and peace.

The Inkster family wasn't wealthy, but they lived a content and happy life.

Phineas and his wife were wise in raising their children, turning out several sensible kids. Quinlan, the fourth child, was especially well-behaved from a young age.

Being well-behaved was one thing, but he was also incredibly handsome, with big, double-lidded eyes, long and dense eyelashes, looking like a pristine porcelain doll.

Neighbors far and wide adored him!

Quinlan's good looks came from his parents.

Phineas, tall at over six feet, stood erect with well-defined features and glasses, his demeanor and conduct reminiscent of a scholarly champion from ancient times.

Kelsey Blackwood, of average height and slender build, was exceptionally beautiful!

She was the kind of beauty who would stand out even among celebrities; anyone who saw her would take a second look and compliment her attractiveness.

But beauty can be both a blessing and a curse!

The nightmare for the Inkster family began because Kelsey was too beautiful...

Chapter 850

That day in Border City was exceptionally cold.

Gusts of wind howled, and a relentless snowfall blanketed the town all day long.

Yet, Phineas and Kelsey's hearts were ablaze with warmth!

It was Phineas's birthday, a day that also marked a milestone in his career.

Phineas had devoted years to his art, working tirelessly, yet he remained largely unnoticed, a mere background figure in the art world.

But on his birthday, he received an unexpected invitation from his idol.

His idol was a renowned master painter, known for his profound skill and unique style, and an unyielding spirit.

He earned his living through art but never compromised his standards for money.

Once, a wealthy collector offered a hefty sum for a portrait of his mistress, but the painter flatly refused, stating he wouldn't paint for such a cause.

His reasoning was straightforward and blunt: mistresses disgusted him, unworthy of his work.

He likened each of his pieces to a child he had nurtured and finding a "home" for them meant entrusting his "children" to a new family.

He couldn't bear the thought of his 'children' being in the hands of those with dubious morals!

Online opinions about this painter were divided; some accused him of pretentiousness, arguing his pride came with fame and fortune, curious if he'd still refuse commissions without money.

Others admired his integrity, asserting his character remained unchanged through times of hardship, calling him a breath of fresh air in the art scene. But regardless of personal views on his character, no one could deny his artistic talent!

To Phineas, he was a true artist. Being personally invited to his private exhibition was an honor in itself!

The master had even offered to display one of Phineas's own pieces alongside his, a gesture that filled Phineas with immense surprise and joy. This recognition was akin to a fan's dream come true!

Moreover, this opportunity could catapult him to fame, securing his place in the art world!

This could mean a significant leap in both reputation and earnings for Phineas.

He felt like a hidden gem finally discovered, ecstatic beyond words!

Naturally, Kelsey shared in his happiness!

Their love had blossomed from school uniforms to wedding dresses, a deep and genuine bond.

Kelsey was genuinely thrilled for her husband's success.

To celebrate, Kelsey spent the day preparing a special birthday cake and several of Phineas's favorite dishes.

She dressed up, donning a beautiful dress and heels she hadn't worn in ages, and together with their children, headed to Phineas's studio to surprise him.

Phineas, a part-time teacher, had his own studio situated between the city and the suburbs, offering ample space, a serene environment, and affordable rent.

The family had planned to celebrate there.

As soon as Kelsey and the kids arrived, Phineas rushed over and lifted her in his arms, exclaiming, "Honey, I've made it!"

He spun her around in front of their kids, planting kisses on her.

Kelsey's cheeks flushed with embarrassment,

"Stop it, the kids are watching. Act your age."

Phineas's laughter filled the room, reminiscent of his carefree youth, his face beaming like a delighted child.

He put Kelsey down, showered the kids with affection, and invited them to play.

Together, Phineas and Kelsey set the table for dinner, sharing whispers and laughter, their cheeks rosy with joy.

The couple's affection for each other was palpable, their children's laughter echoing through the room, creating a scene of pure happiness despite the snowstorm raging outside.

Keith once said, if only this moment could last forever...

Unfortunately, wishes don't always come true.

As Phineas closed his eyes to make his birthday wish, the studio door suddenly burst open!

