

Hitched 991

Chapter 991

Tarquin flashed a doting smile and ventured, "Have you ever thought about finding your biological parents?"

Elysia sighed deeply.

"When I was a kid, sure, every time I felt slighted by the Thorne family, I'd think about them. I even considered running away to find them!

But I didn't know if I was abandoned or just lost. Too scared to seek them out.

If they had abandoned me, even if I found them, they wouldn't love me.

As I grew up, I stopped thinking about it, especially after having my kids. My life was filled with joy and contentment, my focus shifted to them entirely."

"And if... just if, you got news about them someday, would you consider looking for them?"

Elysia paused for a moment.

"It would depend, really. If they abandoned me, then there's no point in reuniting. I wouldn't bother holding any grudge; just live my life without crossing paths.

But if I was kidnapped, or lost by accident, and they wanted to find me too, then I'd be willing to meet them. After all, I owe my life to them." Who doesn't want to know their origins?

Who doesn't yearn to find their birth parents? But such matters can't be forced.

Elysia was living a happy and fulfilling life and had a relaxed perspective on this issue.

A flicker of something crossed Tarquin's eyes, unnoticed by Elysia, who then excused herself to the bathroom with her phone.

She emerged moments later, panic-stricken.

"Verity's dead?"

She had been with Jessamine all afternoon without a moment to check her phone, only now catching up on the news online.

The internet was awash with news of Verity's death, trending everywhere.

Tarquin nodded. "Car accident on the road, hit and killed unexpectedly."

This accident was surely no coincidence, but with the driver also dead, the trail went cold.

Josiah called that evening, finding no leads, leaving it classified as a tragic accident.

Tarquin wasn't surprised. A mastermind wouldn't find it hard to stage a perfect traffic accident.

With the trail gone cold, they would wait. The mastermind behind this would make a move eventually.

His focus, for now, was on Elysia's biological parents.

Elysia's origins were far from ordinary!

Unaware of his thoughts, Elysia still lamented Verity's death, "This is so sudden!"

"...It is. But she didn't die in vain; bad deeds eventually catch up."

"What about her son?"

"He hasn't come back yet."

"With Verity gone, shouldn't he be coming back?"

"Not necessarily."

If he doesn't come back, so be it. But if he dares, Tarquin was ready to detain him on sight!

Now, with more information on the mastermind, Tarquin planned to change his strategy.

No longer playing the long game, he intended to strike fast at anyone related to the mastermind, forcing them into the open.

Seeing Elysia frown, Tarquin lifted his hand, smoothing out the worry lines on her forehead.

"Don't worry about her son causing trouble. With Verity gone, her son won't be able to stir up any storms upon his return. It's getting late, you should get ready for bed."

"...Yeah."

Taking advantage of Elysia's absence, Tarquin made a call,

"Dig into the Hawkins family quietly, don't alert them."

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In the dead of night, when the world seemed to pause, Elysia and the kids were deeply asleep, enveloped in the comforting embrace of dreams. Tarquin, with the stealth of a cat, carefully slid out from under the covers and made his way to the study.

The glow of the computer screen illuminated his solemn face as he scanned through the messages. The audacity of those women to mock Elysia's origins! What right did they have?

To them, a background like theirs was nothing compared to Elysia's. After all, Elysia was the sole heiress to the Hawkins empire in Oceanopolis, led by the indomitable Clayton Hawkins!

The Hawkins name was synonymous with wealth and power, casting a longer shadow over Oceanopolis than even the Bradfords did over Jindale City.

There was a saying that circulated online: It wasn't Oceanopolis that belonged to the Hawkins family, but rather, the Hawkins family that owned Oceanopolis!

The reach of the Hawkins empire was vast, with Hawkins Sea-freight standing out as their crown jewel. Renowned globally, it dominated the maritime industry, its ships fortified with formidable defenses that even the most audacious pirates dared not challenge.

This invincibility stemmed from four key factors: their unmatched weaponry, Clayton Hawkins' fierce loyalty and protectiveness, their untouchable reputation, and a work of powerful alliances.

Clayton, the self-made patriarch, was known for his integrity and an unwavering resolve to defend his family's name at all costs. His patriotic spirit was legendary; he had openly declared his willingness to donate his entire fleet to the nation in times of need.

This mutual respect between the Hawkins family and the nation fortified their standing, earning them significant support and protection, making Hawkins Sea-freight an untouchable titan of the seas.

Their reputation for reliability was unmatched; barring natural disasters, they never failed to deliver, earning them the trust and favor of global magnates.

Clayton's extensive work meant that an attack on him would provoke a formidable response, a deterrent that made him the undisputed king of the

seas.

And there, in the heart of this maritime empire, was Elysia, Clayton's daughter.

So, those gossiping women, comparing their lineage to Elysia's? Utter foolishness.

Yet, this was just one side of Elysia's heritage. Elliot and Elijah's investigations into her mother's background hit a wall of encryption, hinting at mysteries and power equally formidable.

But Tarquin hesitated to discuss the Hawkins family with Elysia, not out of doubt about their status, but uncertainty about their relationship with her. He knew all too well the complexities and coldness of high society.

The possibility of Elysia having been abandoned or estranged from the Hawkins seemed slim, given Clayton's character and her being his only child. If her separation from the Hawkins was due to a mishap or malicious intent by others within the empire, her return could either be a blessing or a

curse.

After all, if the Hawkins household was anything like the Bradford's, a den of wolves, what good would returning do?

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Is it even worth going back?

Tarquin had spent the entire night in his study, poring over the information Elliot and Elijah had dug up about the Hawkins family, and then doing some digging of his own.

The findings were disheartening, a common ailment of wealthy dynasties - deception, betrayal, and greed above all.

Clayton was genuinely a good man, but the rest of the Hawkins clan was a different story altogether.

On the surface, the Hawkins family shimmered with glamour, but beneath that veneer, everything was rotting away, except for the shipping empire Clayton personally oversaw.

Now, the entire Hawkins clan had their eyes set on wresting control of the shipping business from Clayton!

Elysia, Clayton's only child, would undoubtedly become a target for these vultures if she returned now!

Much like how the Bradford family had their sights set on him!

Moreover, Clayton had never publicly acknowledged his daughter over the years. His official biography listed no children.

Aside from a missing person notice years ago, there was no indication he was searching for his daughter.

Was he giving up the search, or was there another reason...

Early in the morning, Tarquin suddenly received a call from Lowell.

Lowell was buzzing with excitement,

"It's like finding a needle in the haystack without even looking, Tarquin. I've got in touch with an elder of the Hawkins family, someone who knows almost everything there is to know about them. Should I speak with him first, or do you want to talk to him directly?"

"Is he reliable?"

"Absolutely, he's vetted. A hundred percent reliable."

"Send me his contact. I'll get in touch directly."

"Alright."

After hanging up, Lowell sent over the contact information, and Tarquin didn't hesitate to call.

The person on the other end picked up quickly, and without asking who Tarquin was, said,

"Ask whatever you want to know, but I won't do anything to betray the Hawkins family."

By his voice, the man was elderly, probably around Heath's age.

Tarquin was polite,

"I've got no intention of harming the Hawkins family. I just want to inquire about something. Did Clayton have a daughter?" "...Yes, but she went missing over twenty years ago, and her whereabouts are still unknown."

"How did she go missing?"

"She was lost at the docks. It's unclear whether she wandered off on her own or was taken by child traffickers."

"Why did Clayton stop searching for her? Did he give up on his daughter?"

"How could he possibly give up! They never had another child because they were still holding out hope for their lost daughter!" Tarquin was puzzled,

"But aside from the missing person notice two decades ago, there's been no indication that Clayton was searching for his daughter. He doesn't even mention her in his personal biography."

"That's because he feared someone would find out about his daughter's existence and get to her before he could, possibly extorting him. Given his fortune, if kidnappers got hold of his daughter, the likelihood of them killing her after getting the ransom is quite high.

He never stopped looking, always searching!

He built docks all over the world, partly for business, but largely in hopes of finding his daughter.

Since she went missing at the docks, he wasn't sure if she was still in the country or abroad, so he searched everywhere, discreetly, for over twenty years.

His wife has gone mad from missing their daughter. A perfectly sane woman has turned into someone others take advantage of at will." Tarquin was surprised,

"Clayton holds a significant position in the Hawkins family, and his wife comes from a notable background. How is she subject to mistreatment?" "Sigh, Clayton is often away, under the guise of business, secretly searching for his daughter across the globe.

His wife lives alone in Oceanopolis, somewhat out of her mind. The other women in the Hawkins household take their frustrations out on her whenever they please, physical abuse is common!

Being mentally unstable, she doesn't complain, and when Clayton or her family notices injuries, the household staff claim she did it to herself. She does have a history of self-harm."

The elder sighed, "Their branch of the family is on the brink of ruin."

Tarquin's brows knitted together in concern,

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Otherwise, Clayton had almost no chance of winning against those people!

If he lost, assassination awaited him.

And with his demise, Mrs. Hawkins wouldn't last long either.

Their lineage was doomed to ruin!

Tarquin asked with a stoic expression, "When is the Hawkins family holding the board meeting?"

"It's tentatively scheduled for early next month, the exact date is still undecided."

"...Got it, thanks."

After hanging up, Tarquin lit a cigarette.

The situation with the Hawkins family reminded him too much of the Bradfords, and he really didn't want Elysia going back there.

Going back would only add to her troubles.

But then...

As Tarquin was deep in thought, a knock suddenly came at the study door,

"Tarquin, are you in there?"

Hearing Elysia's voice, Tarquin quickly snuffed out his cigarette, adjusted his demeanor, and got up to open the door.

Seeing Elysia in her pajamas, her hair tousled, he spoke with a gentle tone,

"Why are you up so early?"

Elysia tilted her head up, blinking her big eyes at him, and retorted, "Did you stay up all night?"

"No, I woke up around four or five and couldn't fall back asleep, so I decided to sit in the study for a bit."

"Are you sure you're alright?"

Tarquin chuckled affectionately, pinching her cheek, pretending everything was fine,

"I'm fine, really. What about you? Is something up?"

Elysia, not thinking much of it, nodded excitedly, showing him her phone,

"Remember I told you I wanted to go and pay respects to mom? Well, I talked to Jess about it yesterday. She's quite knowledgeable about these things since she's dealt with many spiritual leaders due to Corbin.

She mentioned that Master Cloud at Compassion Abbey is very powerful, and it just so happens he's holding a service today. She managed to get me an appointment.

I want to meet with Master Cloud to have him bless mom's ashes. After the forty-nine days of prayers, we can bring her back to be laid to rest next to dad. What do you think?"

Tarquin looked down into her clear, dark eyes, feeling both grateful and pained.

Such a kind-hearted girl, why did life have to be so rough on her?

He wished Elysia had been born into a warm, loving, ordinary family!

The coldness and indifference of wealthy families were no place for someone like Elysia.

Tarquin didn't mention the Hawkins family situation for the moment, nodding in agreement, "You've put a lot of thought into this."

"Why are you being so formal? We're family. Are you free today? If you're busy, I can go by myself."

"I'm free."

"Great, I'll get ready and make breakfast. After we eat, we'll head out."

"Sounds good."

Elysia turned to head back to her room, then stopped and came back!

She leaned in close and sniffed him, "You've been smoking again!"

"...Just a couple of puffs."

"A couple of puffs, huh? Two months without touching me!" she declared, then huffed and left.

It wasn't that she was heartless; it was because Tarquin's smoking habit was too severe. Thanks to his fitness regime and a stroke of luck, his health hadn't deteriorated, but she had been trying to get him to quit. She discovered that threatening him was the most effective method!

She hadn't anticipated, however, the law of unintended consequences.

Two months was a cruel duration for someone like him!

The topic veered off, and the atmosphere suddenly changed.

Tarquin immediately followed her, "Isn't that punishment a bit harsh? How about two days?"

"No way! You promised you'd quit. Breaking your word is not what gentlemen do. Two months is lenient!"

"How about one week, then? Any more and you'll really be a widow."

"A widow? Please, I'm a wealthy widow with a brood of children. I'm not worried about finding a new husband. Out with the old, in with the new!" Tarquin's expression darkened. He swept her into his arms and strode towards the bedroom,

"Getting bold, are we? Thinking of finding a new husband! Out with the old, in with the new, huh? Fine!"

He carried her into the bedroom, kicking the door shut behind them and tossing her onto the bed before descending upon her.

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Elysia's eyes widened in panic.

"Hey! I was just kidding! I didn't mean it, really, let's not make a big deal out of it! We still have to run errands today!"

Every time they went at it, she couldn't get out of bed for a whole day and night.

"You can't even joke about that!"

Tarquin silenced her protests with a commanding kiss, a deep one as a form of punishment.

No matter how much Elysia flailed and struggled, she couldn't escape.

After the kiss, Tarquin asked, "Still thinking about finding a new husband?"

Elysia, dazed and breathless from his kiss, with her cheeks flushed a deep red, meekly surrendered, "No, not anymore."

"Still dare to threaten me with bedroom antics?"

"No, I won't."

"Take back what you said!"

"Mhm, I take it back."

Seeing her so compliant, Tarquin's mood lifted, a handsome smile playing on his lips as he gazed at her closely, admiring her trembling lashes.

All the dark clouds in his heart cleared away!

Elysia was his beacon of light; a simple word, a tiny gesture from her was all it took to heal him.

Keith's issues, the mysteries surrounding them, the drama with Gideon and Verity, not to mention the whole Hawkins family saga... Each one was a headache.

And then there was his mother...

But Elysia had this healing effect on him. She was like a summer breeze, a warm sun in winter, beautiful and radiant.

As Tarquin was lost in thought, suddenly, he felt a sharp pain on his shoulder!

His little "kitten" had shown her claws, biting him hard on the shoulder in protest.

After the bite, she glared at him defiantly!

Tarquin laughed, softening, "Don't worry, I know we have important things today. Just a kiss, I won't tease you." "You jerk!"

"Yeah, I'm a jerk. Elysia's husband is a jerk! Elysia married a jerk!"

"You..."

"Not mad anymore, right? Want to bite me again?"

He said, opening a few buttons at the top of his shirt to expose his collarbone and shoulder, inviting Elysia to bite.

Elysia's face turned even redder, her teeth clenched, "You scoundrel, put your shirt back on!"

Tarquin's smile turned devilish.

The couple playfully struggled in bed for a while before heading to the bathroom to freshen up together, then to the kitchen to make breakfast. After breakfast, they woke up the kids.

The little ones, excited to send blessings to Grandma Elizabeth, clamored to join,

"We're going to send blessings to Grandma, she'll be so happy!"

"I wanna go too, can I come along with Lan?" Baby asked.

Elysia looked at the soft plush bunny, nodding.

It was a gift from Keith to Baby, so it would represent Keith in sending blessings to Elizabeth.

Keith's life had been full of unresolved feelings, his love for Elizabeth as genuine as his affection for Baby.

And surely, Elizabeth had her own regrets.

After breakfast, the family of seven, carrying Elizabeth's ashes, headed to the church.

None of them knew for sure if there was another world out there, but as the saying goes: better to believe it exists than not.

It was a way to honor the memory of the departed and a means for the living to alleviate their grief.

Master Cloud at Compassion Abbey, situated atop Spirit Mountain, was their destination.

Due to the steep terrain, they could only drive halfway up the hill. The rest of the journey required climbing steps or taking a cable car. Tarquin planned for the kids to take the cable car, but they refused.

They believed climbing would demonstrate their sincerity, hoping to move the Saints and the Holy Mother, bringing good fortune to Grandma. They were so young; what did they know?

Yet, every action was driven by love.

Elizabeth had never met them, yet like Elysia, their love for her stemmed from Tarquin.

Their love for Tarquin made them love Elizabeth, embracing his affections.

Tarquin understood. Carrying Elizabeth's ashes, watching Elysia and their vibrant children climb, he felt deeply moved.

Silently, he whispered to Elizabeth: "Mom, rest in peace. I'm truly happy."

When the family reached the base of the hilltop, everyone except Tarquin and Baby was panting and exhausted.

Baby, the little princess, had grown tired a third of the way up, so Tarquin had carried her on his shoulders the rest of the ascent, sparing her the breathlessness.

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Elysia took a deep breath at the rest area, gazing at the steps ahead and said, "Legend has it that each of the 108 steps represents one of life's troubles. Climbing a step signifies entering a new phase and shedding a worry."

Emmett, tilting his head, asked, "So, if we climb all 108 steps, does that mean we'll be free of worries forever?"

Elysia chuckled, "Exactly."

The kids immediately called out to Baby, "Baby, come on down! We'll climb it together, and then no more worries."

"Okay!" Baby wiggled her little legs, "Daddy, daddy, let me go with Lan."

Tarquin, with a loving expression, let his little girl down.

Evan took the lead, Elliot watched their back, and Elijah and Emmett stood by Baby's sides, each holding one of her hands, guiding their sister up the steps.

Watching the loving scene of the five kids, Elysia's eyes brimmed with happiness.

She reached for Tarquin's hand, "Even with Mom gone, I'm here for you. I'll be by your side through all seasons, for the rest of our lives."

Tarquin turned to her, gently tucking a stray hair behind her ear and gripping her hand tightly, "That's a promise, for a lifetime!"

"Yes, a promise!"

They smiled at each other, their fingers interlocked, stepping onto the staircase together.

Climbing those 108 steps together, they aimed to leave behind all troubles and welcome a new chapter of happiness.

The ceremony wasn't complex, but it was time-consuming.

It was nearly noon when it ended, and Elysia and Tarquin met with Master Cloud, asking for his help in guiding Elizabeth's spirit. Leaving Compassion Abbey, it was already afternoon.

At the base of the hill, while Elysia was in the restroom, Evan sneakily spoke to Tarquin, "Dad, we're good brothers, right?" Tarquin: "...I'm your father."

"I know, but... just tell me you love me, okay?"

Tarquin squinted, "Spit it out, what's on your mind?"

Evan coughed lightly, "I need to take care of some personal business. You guys go ahead, and just cover for me with Mom, okay? Don't let her worry."

"What are you up to?"

"Just personal stuff."

"Like what?"

"Adults shouldn't pry into kids' business, can't say."

Tarquin glanced towards the woods. He had noticed someone following them since they started the ascent, but the presence was non-threatening. Axel mentioned it was a skilled individual.

It was probably the same person they encountered in the restricted area of Sage Hall.

Evan's bodyguard had also mentioned this figure appearing the night Evan visited Gideon, engaging but not with malicious intent.

After a brief silence, Tarquin said, "Can you ensure your safety? If anything happens to you, your mom won't let me off the hook." Meaning: Helping you comes with its risks!

Evan assured him confidently, "Don't worry, I'll be fine. If you don't help me, our 'ship of friendship' might just sink."

Tarquin: "... " Such a fragile ship.

"I'll help you, but your bodyguard must accompany you."

"Fine, fine, I'm off." Evan ran off.

When Elysia returned, noticing the kids were gone, Tarquin quickly explained, "Lowell took them back first. We'll take another car; I've got something to talk to you about."

With the kids out of sight, Elysia didn't dwell on Evan's absence.

Trusting Lowell with the children, she didn't think much of it.

As they got into the car, Elysia asked, "What did you want to talk about?"

Tarquin glanced at her, started the car, and pondered how to broach the topic of the Hawkins family.

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Today, Master Cloud shared his wisdom, saying: "Honoring one's parents is the foundation of kindness and the source of all blessings. It's like planting a field of fortune for oneself, deeply cherished by all saints."

After much deliberation, he decided it was time to share the story of the Hawkins family with Elysia. They were her biological parents, and she had every right to know they existed. Whether or not she wanted to reconnect with them was her choice to make.

No matter her decision, he was there to support her. If she wished to return, he'd be by her side. If she preferred to stay out of the family drama and not go back, he'd protect her and ensure the Hawkins

family couldn't find her. They would find other ways to honor the kindness Clayton and his wife had shown in raising her.

Ultimately, the choice was Elysia's, and no one could force her hand.

Nestled at the foot of Spirit Mountain, there was a picturesque lake. As the sunset painted the lake in hues of gold and amber, the view was breathtaking.

Tarquin drove to the lake's edge and parked. Taking Elysia's hand, they began a leisurely stroll along the shore.

Elysia could tell something was weighing heavily on his mind and couldn't help but ask, "Whatever it is, you can tell me."

Looking down at her with a gaze filled with tenderness, Tarquin felt a pang of sorrow. Under different circumstances, this would have been joyous news.

After a moment of silence, he finally spoke, "I've found your birth parents."

Elysia froze, "What?"

"You're the daughter of Oceanopolis's Clayton," Tarquin said gently.

Stopping dead in her tracks, Elysia's eyes widened in shock, her lips parting several times without a sound.

The news was so unexpected that she was completely stunned.

Tarquin tenderly tucked a stray lock of hair behind her ear, "The good news is, I've done some digging. Your parents are good people. It's still unclear how you ended up separated from them, but one thing is certain—you weren't abandoned. They've loved you and have been searching for you all these years."

Elysia's breathing quickened, "Are... are they alright?"

Her first concern was for their well-being, not their wealth. Despite her love for treasures, health always came first in her eyes.

Tarquin didn't sugarcoat it, "Not really."

Elysia's brows furrowed in concern.

Leading her to a gazebo by the lake, Tarquin sat her down and laid out the situation of the Hawkins family, including the current predicaments of Clayton and his wife.

Tears fell freely from Elysia's eyes as she listened. Despite the long separation and lack of deep emotional ties, the plight of the Hawkins family deeply upset her.

Her mother had lost her sanity, and her father was besieged by vultures!

She felt a deep empathy for her biological parents and was worried about their situation. At the same time, she was furious!

How could those women be so heartless as to bully her mother, especially when she was already unwell? And her father, the true founder of Hawkins Sea-freight, how could others shamelessly claim his legacy?

Did they have no decency? No conscience?

Elysia was distraught, tears streaming down her face, "They... I... I..."

Tarquin frowned, his heart aching for her. He wasn't surprised by her reaction; Elysia was kind-hearted and timid by nature. She'd be emotionally affected by such news even if it concerned strangers, let alone her own parents.

Gently wiping her tears, he knelt in front of her, holding her hands firmly, "I've already instructed my people to speed up the investigation into the whereabouts of that 15% share. Once we find it, I'll make sure it supports Mr. Hawkins. As long as Mr. Hawkins retains control of Hawkins Sea-freight, the rest of the family won't be able to cause any trouble. I'll also ensure he's informed about Mrs. Hawkins's situation in Oceanopolis. Given his feelings for her, he'll definitely take proper care of her."

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Elysia's voice broke with emotion, "But what if we can't find that person?"

Tarquin had already thought of a backup plan.

"If we really can't find them, then we'll just have to let go of managing Hawkins Navigation. But I'll still support them from the shadows, keep them safe from harm. I'll make sure they're well-off as a way to repay their kindness towards you."

As he spoke, Tarquin gently wiped away Elysia's tears.

"If you want to go back to Oceanopolis and reconnect with them, I'll be with you every step of the way. And if you dread the backstabbing politics of the elite and don't want to face the Hawkins family, then we won't go back.

Whatever you decide, I'm here for you, to support you. I'll always be by your side.

And don't feel burdened. We can find other ways to repay their kindness."

Tarquin didn't want her to compromise her happiness out of a sense of obligation.

If times got tough, they would just help from the shadows.

He had thought everything through for her, allowing her to follow her heart.

With tears still in her eyes, Elysia threw herself into his arms, "Honey..."

Tarquin quickly embraced her, "Hm?"

"You're so good to me."

Tarquin chuckled, soothing her like a child, gently patting her back,

"You're my wife. If I'm not good to you, who else would I be good to? Whether we go back or not is up to you. Just follow your heart, do whatever feels right."

Drawing in a deep breath, Elysia stepped back, her gaze firm, "I want to go back and find them!"

"Alright, if you want to go back, then we'll go back. We'll do it your way."

"When can we leave, can we go today?"

"Give me a moment to arrange everything. I'll let you know once it's all set."

"Okay! The sooner, the better!"

"Got it."

Tarquin held her close, kissing her forehead and then the top of her head, cherishing her with tender care.

It wasn't until the sun had completely set that he took Elysia's hand and led her back to the car, driving home.

...

Meanwhile, as the day turned to dusk, Evan had had enough.

He hopped down from the towering oak, crossed his arms, and faced the scar-faced stranger who had been tailing him.

"It's getting late, I'm heading home. I'm done playing cat and mouse. Let me be clear, you can't kidnap me, so drop the idea. And don't bother trying to worm my master's whereabouts out of me. I won't tell you. Anything else? If not, I'm off."

"How dare you! Even your master wouldn't dare speak to me in such a tone!"

Evan pursed his lips, "Do you have any other questions? If not, I'm leaving."

"Where is your master?"

"Can't answer that. Next question."

"Where exactly is your master?"

Evan sighed, "Do you not understand what I'm saying? I can't answer that. Next!"

"Take me to him!"

Evan paused, "...What's your beef with my master anyway? What do you want with him?"

"Adult matters, kid. Don't poke your nose where it doesn't belong."

"Fine, grown-ups should handle their own issues. Stop bothering me, a kid. I'm off, bye!"

With that, Evan walked away, the mysterious figure following at a distance.

It wasn't until Evan entered the protective shield of the Number One Mansion that the figure stopped, standing just outside the barrier, staring straight at Evan.

Evan looked back at him a few times.

Despite the stranger's odd demeanor, Evan had to admit, there was a thrill to their interaction.

It reminded him of the good old days with his master in the mountains, a sense of adventure and camaraderie he hadn't felt in a while.

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Evan returned to the Grandview Estate, and found Elysia resting in her bedroom.

She claimed she was just wiped out from the day's hustle, but Evan knew it was the Hawkins family's drama that had her stressed. Emmett and Baby had crashed as soon as they got home and were still asleep.

Tarquin was in the study, discussing a trip to Oceanopolis with Elliot and Elijah. Elliot was eager to go too.

"It's perfect timing since we're not in school right now. If you don't let us come, we'll probably end up sneaking there anyway."

Elijah immediately nodded in agreement, "Exactly!"

With their mom planning to return, they knew she intended to reconnect with their grandparents.

They wanted to meet their grandparents too - and stand up for them!

Evan burst in, all curiosity, "Where are we going? Where are we going?"

Seeing him back, Tarquin gave him a once-over, ensuring he was okay before saying, "We're planning a trip to Oceanopolis." "Why are we going to Oceanopolis?"

Right after Evan asked, Tarquin's phone rang with a call from Axel.

Tarquin didn't rush to answer, instead telling Evan, "Let Elliot and Elijah fill you in. I need to take this call."

Heading back to the study, Tarquin answered the phone. "There's been a development at Farmjoy Estate," Axel reported. Farmjoy Estate was a known hideout for a mysterious figure in Jindale City.

After their estate was targeted earlier, this mystery man and Keith had staged a deception, framing Keith for murder.

Tarquin had suspected that Farmjoy Estate was a diversion, hiding something the mystery man wanted to move out.

Since the man had fled abroad, Tarquin had Axel keep an eye on the estate.

And now, Axel had found something.

"There's a cellar beneath the man-made lake, stuffed with a ton of unreleased drugs. And there's a safe filled with dirt on the Hawkins family members from Oceanopolis."

Mention of the Hawkins family made Tarquin frown, "Is there anything on Clayton?"

"There's personal info on Clayton, no dirt, but there was a photo of Elysia taken two months ago in his file."

Tarquin was silent; Elysia was essentially Clayton's vulnerability!

Clayton, who adored his daughter and had been searching for her for years, would surely compromise if Elysia was threatened.

It seemed the mystery guy planned to use Elysia to blackmail Clayton, aiming to exploit Hawkins Sea-freight for profit.

Given he referred to Elysia affectionately, it was clear he knew she was Clayton's daughter long before.

He knew Elysia, knew Clayton, and had ties to the Hawkins family!

Maybe through Clayton, they could unveil his identity.

Tarquin's expression hardened, "Secure those documents; they'll be useful in Oceanopolis!"

"Got it."

Just as Axel was about to hang up, Tarquin, with a gleam in his eye, had an idea, "Spread the word that I'm heading to Oceanopolis soon."

Axel paused, "Spread the word? We're not keeping it under wraps?"

"No need for secrecy, just don't mention when."

Though Axel was puzzled by the strategy, he didn't question it, "Alright."

The next day, Axel understood why.

Verity's estranged son suddenly made a comeback!

He hadn't shown up even when Verity died, but the moment news broke of Tarquin's planned visit to Oceanopolis, he returned immediately.

And from the Hawkins family side, the originally scheduled July board meeting was abruptly moved up to three days later!

Clearly, if Clayton had been in Oceanopolis, they might've set it for the very next day!

Obviously, someone feared Tarquin's trip to Oceanopolis could disrupt their plans and brought back this estranged son to distract him, all while quickly dealing with Clayton's situation.