

Hitched 1331

Chapter 1331

If Victor ever found out it was his own granddaughter who stole the virus, I can't even imagine what he'd do.

He'd be heartbroken, that's for sure.

But you know what? He kinda brought this on himself. Spoiling your only granddaughter when you're old? Yeah, that never ends well.

She's gotten so out of control, she thinks the world revolves around her!

A doctor, but not a shred of medical ethics.

She knew exactly who Elysia was, and still had the nerve to stir up trouble.

Honestly, she has no clue about her own place in all this...

Back in his office, Benjamin picked up his phone and dialed Tarquin.

Tarquin was already at the company. After Elysia and the kids went to bed, he'd headed straight in. He'd been away for a while-even though Lowell was helping keep things afloat, the paperwork had piled up.

As soon as Benjamin answered, he was practically buzzing, "We got them all! Every single one took the bait!"

Tarquin barely looked up from his stack of paperwork-not surprised, not even remotely worried. He never went into a fight unprepared, and every move was pre-planned. Nothing unexpected would happen. No surprises, no slip-ups. He'd just let Sabrina dig her own grave. She'd walked right into his trap, and climbing out would cost her dearly.

But right now, he was more concerned about Lucian.

"When will the results from Lucian's paternity test be in?" he asked.

Benjamin replied, "The sample only arrived just before sunrise, so the soonest will be this afternoon. I'll call you as soon as I have the results. Oh, and I looked into Lucian's condition. He's awake now, but it's late-stage cancer. Doesn't have much time left."

Tarquin frowned. "How long, exactly?"

"Best case, maybe a year or so. Worst case, a few months."

Tarquin went silent for a moment, then hung up and went back to work, brow furrowed in thought. He'd wait for the paternity results before making any decisions about Lucian.

For now, there were still two huge stacks of files on his desk, all waiting for his approval. It felt like being a kid coming back from a month-long summer break, only to find all your homework waiting for you.

When Tarquin worked, he was laser-focused. The next two hours, he barely moved from his desk.

Lowell was there too. He was

ver

supposed to be off today, but since the kids needed some extra sleep and their ski trip had flopped, he came back in. Single, no real hobbies, nothing much to do at home—at least at the office, there were people to talk to.

But Tarquin's work pace was brutal. Forget chatting, the man barely took bathroom breaks.

Lowell was starting to regret coming in. If he'd known it'd be like this, he'd have stayed home and watched reruns.

And Tarquin's pace meant everyone else was scrambling, too. Every time he signed off on something, a new wave of tasks crashed down on the team. The whole office was in chaos.

People started messaging Lowell in the company group chat:

[Lowell, please tell the boss to take a break! If he keeps going, we're all going to drop dead!]

Someone even added a crying puppy meme.

Lowell read the messages, poker-faced, then tried to play it cool as he told

Tarquin, "Hey, maybe take a little break?"

Tarquin said nothing, just handed him a signed document. "This is urgent. Get the word out-I want to see a first draft this afternoon."

Lowell sighed and left, and a collective groan rose from the workroom.

The boss had only been in for half a day, but it felt like they'd worked two weeks straight.

One of the secretaries, looking absolutely exhausted, whispered, "Lowell, it's lunchtime. Doesn't the boss get hungry?"

With all the work, nobody had time to eat. If Tarquin went to lunch, maybe they'd get a breather too.

Lowell shook his head. "Just hang in there. If you're starving, grab some crackers or something from the break room."

An actual chorus of groans followed.

Lowell ducked back into Tarquin's

office, intending to remind him

about lunch. But seeing the stol

cloud on Tarquin's face, he chickened out.

Clearly, something-or someone-had put him in a bad mood.

As Lowell was trying to guess which unlucky partner was about to get chewed

out, Tarquin's phone suddenly lit up.

Chapter 1332

[Hey babe, you busy?]

Elysia sent a quick text to Tarquin.

The moment his phone buzzed, the deep crease between Tarquin's brows smoothed out, and his whole face softened. The change was instant-he looked gentle, even tender. Not only did he turn gentle, but he also tossed his pen aside, abandoned his work, and grabbed his phone to call his wife back.

Before hearing from his wife: work is life.

After hearing from his wife: forget work-wife is life.

"Did you just wake up?" Tarquin's voice was so soft it was almost unrecognizable.

Lowell, sitting across from Tarquin, could barely keep a straight face. See? There isn't a man alive who can't be sweet-they just save it for the right person, and Tarquin's sweetness was strictly a limited edition.

Lowell knew when to make himself scarce. As soon as he stepped out, he announced to the team,

"Congrats, everyone-you've all been pardoned. Pack it up, it's time for lunch."

People looked around, surprised. "The boss is taking a break?"

"Yep. Looks like you lot have suffered enough. An angel has come to save you all."

"Which angel?" someone joked.

Lowell grinned, "The boss's wife."

Suddenly, everyone perked up.

"It's lunchtime, so she's probably calling the boss home to eat. Think he'll actually go?"

"Oh, definitely! It's all over the internet-our boss is absolutely whipped! He adores his wife."

"Yeah, but he's also a workaholic. You guys remember how much he loves his job, right?"

"That was then, this is now," someone piped up. "Lowell, who does the boss love more: his wife or his work?"

A young woman chimed in, "I bet he loves his wife more!"

Lowell gave her a big thumbs-up. "You win! Right now, the boss only wants to be in love, not at work! If he didn't have to make money for his wife, he'd never be here he'd be glued to her 24/7!"

"He only dragged himself to the office this morning because his wife was tired and napping at home. Now that she's up, he's probably dying to go back."

People looked skeptical. "Is he really that bad?"

The next second, the office door swung open.

Tarquin strode out in an expensive tailored suit, glanced around, and told Lowell,

"I'll drive myself home. Cancel my afternoon meetings. I won't be back."

And with that, he hurried toward the elevator.

The team stared as the elevator display ticked down to the parking garage. When the doors closed, they finally let out a collective squeal.

"No way-Lowell called it! The boss really couldn't wait to get home to his wife!"

"Who would've thought? Our cold, aloof boss is actually a total softie at home!"

"This is the first time I've thought the boss was kind of pathetic-he's so whipped!" someone laughed.

Lowell grinned. "Oh, you have no idea. He isn't just obsessed with her he's actually scared of her, too."

Eyes widened. "Seriously?"

"Cross my heart," Lowell swore, hand over his chest.

Soon, word had spread: the boss was a total puppy, always glued to his wife, and even a little bit afraid of her. People joked the boss's wife was a real-life guardian angel, Saving them all from endless overtime. If you wanted to get ahead, don't cozy up to the boss-go make friends

with his wife!

...

At the Number One Estate, Tarquin pulled up early. In the living room, only Elysia and Winona were around.

Clayton and Pamela, early risers, had taken little Evan out for a walk and some grocery shopping so as not to wake the others.

The rest of the kids were still upstairs, catching up on sleep.

Winona had arrived about half an hour ago, rushing over the moment she heard Elysia was awake.

Blossom wasn't there—she was

vel

busy. The new school year was about to start, and as a pre-K teacher, she had to be back at

school for training.

After a month of rest and TLC, Winona was finally back to her old self!

Chapter 1333

It was still her-the stunning, icy, goddess-like Ms. Newsom, the superstar everyone in town gossiped about.

If anything, she looked even more untouchable than before. After surviving a major disaster, her eyes had taken on a colder, sharper edge, making her seem every bit the queen people said she was.

When she saw Tarquin, she actually got up to greet him. "Mr. Bradford," she said smoothly.

Her feelings toward Tarquin were complicated: a dash of nervousness, a hint of resentment, and a whole lot of gratitude.

The nerves? Well, that was thanks to Tarquin's power and the way he always seemed to get his way.

The resentment? He'd put Elysia through hell back in the day.

The gratitude? He'd made things right-Elysia was finally happy now, and lately, Tarquin had gone out of his way to help her out.

"Don't be so formal. Take a seat," Tarquin said, nodding politely. He was about to sit beside his wife, ready for a bit of cozy time, when his phone buzzed.

He glanced at the caller ID and was surprised to see Jessamine Huber's name flash up.

Elysia noticed, too. "Jess? You should pick up."

Tarquin answered right in front of her. "Hey, Jess."

Jessamine's voice was frantic. "Tarquin, do you have a minute?"

"Sure, what's going on?"

"It's Keaton-he's in trouble. Like, real trouble! Please help him, Tarquin, I'm begging you!"

Tarquin's brow furrowed. "What happened?"

Jess sounded like she'd been crying. "The butler told me Dad's about to lay down the law-old-school style. He's threatening to beat Keaton black and blue! I have no idea what Keaton did this time to piss him off, but Dad doesn't mess around when he gets like this."

"Keaton's so skinny, he can barely bench-press a carton of milk. I'm scared Dad's going to hurt him for real. But I'm stuck out in Border City for work-I can't get there in time. Please, Tarquin, could you go check on them? I'm so worried."

Jessamine was practically sobbing now. She was Keaton's older sister, and sure, she could knock him around herself, but that was sibling business. Underneath it all, she really loved the kid-just like any normal brother and sister.

And Jessamine was pregnant, too. Tarquin tried to reassure her. "Hey, take it easy. Mr. Huber might have a heavy hand, but he's not going to actually hurt Keaton. Do you know what set him off this time?"

Jess sniffled. "I think it's another relationship mess-something with Beatrix Sutton, but I don't know the details. I tried calling Mom and Dad, but they're not picking up."

"...I'll head over there now. I'll let you know what's going on once I find out."

"Thank you, Tarquin. Thank you so much!"

Tarquin hung up and turned to Elysia. "I need to go to the Hubers' place."

Elysia had picked up most of the story. "Keaton's dad's about to rough him up?"

"Yeah. Jess said it's because of Beatrix, but I'm not sure. I should check it out." Elysia raised an eyebrow. "Is it really that bad?"

Tarquin nodded, his expression serious. "When Mr. Huber gets old-school, it's for real."

Elysia frowned. "I'm coming with you."

Tarquin blinked. "You are?"

"I know psychology," Elysia said. "Maybe I can talk Mr. Huber down a bit. Plus, it's my first time visiting-maybe he'll go easy with an outsider there."

That actually made sense. Mr. Huber could be a real hard-ass, and even Tarquin didn't always get through to him. But Elysia's first visit might make him hold back a little.

Then Winona chimed in from across the room. "Well, it just so happens I have a gift in my trunk-perfect for the occasion. Mr. Huber's done me more than a few favors, so count me in. I'm no psychologist, but I know a thing or two about relationships. Maybe I can help."

Tarquin nodded. "Sounds good. Let's all go."

So the three of them piled into Tarquin's SUV-he drove, while Winona and Elysia settled into the back seat.

Elysia still looked skeptical. "Keaton's a grown man. Does his dad really still beat him?"

Tarquin glanced at her in the rearview mirror, a slight frown on his face. "When it comes to family discipline, Mr. Huber doesn't mess around."

And with that, they set off for the Hubers' estate, not knowing what kind of chaos they'd find waiting for them.

Chapter 1334

"No matter how old you get, you're always your dad's kid. If he thinks you've

screwed up, he's gonna lay down the law."

"But Mr. Huber hasn't really lost his temper in years. Whatever Keaton did this

time must've really crossed a line."

Elysia turned to him. "What do you think happened?"

Tarquin thought for a moment.

"Jess said it had something to do with Beatrix. So, relationship drama, probably."

"Mr. Huber's old-school, very traditional. Keaton, on the other hand, is all about

living wild and free. They argue all the time because their worldviews don't

match."

Winona piped up, "Who's Beatrix?"

Elysia answered, "I've met her-she's Keaton's fiancée. Their families are planning a big engagement party at the end of the year."

"But Jess said Keaton isn't actually into her. He only agreed to the engagement to keep his parents happy."

Winona raised an eyebrow. "Does Beatrix even like him?"

Elysia shrugged and looked at Tarquin. "What do you think? Does Beatrix like Keaton?"

Tarquin shook his head. "No idea. Keaton's never mentioned it."

Winona continued, "Isn't Beatrix that academic superstar with a bunch of degrees?"

"Yeah, she's got an impressive résumé," Tarquin confirmed.

Winona nodded knowingly. "I know her! No wonder Mr. Huber isn't a fan-she's definitely not his type."

Keaton always went for girls who were either drop-dead gorgeous, adorably

sweet, or had that untouchable ice-queen vibe. Beatrix, with her scholarly reputation, just wasn't his style.

Elysia frowned.

"If he didn't like her, he shouldn't have agreed to it in the first place. Sure, it's tough to say no to your parents, but saying yes and then backing out is even messier."

Winona pressed her lips together. "Looks like Mr. Huber really misjudged this one."

...

When the three of them arrived at the Huber estate, the entire house was shrouded in anxiety. People whispered nervously in the halls.

The master of the house was ready to give his son a serious beating-everyone was terrified.

When Elysia and Winona walked in, the old butler did a double take,

surprised that Tarquin had brought

them. But after a second, he

refocused on Tarquin, looking at him

like he was a knight in shining

armor.

"Mr. Bradford, thank goodness

you're here! Please, you've got to talk

to Mr. Huber. He's dead set on

teaching Keaton a lesson this time!

Mrs. Huber's fainted twice from

crying, but nothing's getting through

to him!"

Tarquin frowned. "What exactly happened?"

"I'm pretty sure it's got something to

do with Ms. Sutton, but I don't know

the details. As soon as the Suttons

arrived this morning, Mr. Huber

kicked all of us out of the room."

"The Suttons are here too?"

"Yeah. Mr. and Mrs. Sutton both looked furious-must be something about the

engagement."

Tarquin asked, "Where's Keaton now?"

The butler's eyes were red.

"He's in the chapel. Mr. Huber made him kneel there all morning, from dawn until

noon."

"Half an hour ago, Mr. Huber went in to talk to him. Who knows what was said, but

the next thing we know, he's threatening to use the family cane!"

"Mrs. Huber was so terrified she started pleading for Keaton, but Mr. Huber

wouldn't listen. She literally fainted, and he still wouldn't stop."

"You know the Huber family's old traditions-when they say 'family discipline,'

they mean it. I don't even want to imagine what shape Keaton's in by now."

The butler had been with the family for decades, practically raised Keaton himself.

His worry was palpable.

Tarquin's frown deepened. "And the Suttons?"

"They're still in the living room. I heard Mr. Sutton say they're not leaving until

everything gets sorted out."

Elysia couldn't help but jump in-

Chapter 1335

"Mr. Huber is hitting Keaton. Aren't his parents going to step in?"

"Ms. Sutton tried, but Mr. Sutton and Mrs. Sutton didn't. They're furious today."

Elysia just couldn't wrap her head around it. Weren't sons-in-law supposed to be like family? No matter how angry they were, could they really just stand by and let Keaton get beaten to death?

How much resentment did they have?

Did Keaton really do something so unforgivable?

"Mr. Bradford, Mr. and Mrs. Huber are both in the chapel. Only the Suttons are in the living room. Should you-?"

"We'll go straight to the chapel," Tarquin said.

"All right."

The old butler hurriedly led Tarquin and the others through the estate.

The Huber family chapel, just like the Bradfords', was a standalone building tucked away at the back of the grounds.

Even from a distance, they could hear the sharp crack of a wooden ruler slapping against flesh.

It sounded painful.

Tarquin, Elysia, and Winona all looked grim.

No exaggeration-Richard Huber really was beating Keaton within an inch of his life.

Mrs. Huber was outside the chapel gates, sobbing, pleading one second and threatening the next.

"...Richard, what's done is done! Even if you beat your son to death, you can't change the truth. I'm begging you, please stop..."

"...Richard Huber, I swear, if you kill my son, I'll die too! We'll both leave you to your own misery, do you hear me? I mean it..."

Tarquin stepped forward. "Janelle."

Janelle saw Tarquin and rushed over.

"Tarquin, you have to help! He's lost it-he's really going to kill Keaton, I swear..."

"I'll go in and talk to him. Elysia, Winona, stay with Janelle."

Tarquin strode toward the gate, but two guards blocked his way.

"Mr. Bradford, sir's orders-no one goes in without permission..."

Tarquin gave them a shove-not hard, just enough to knock them off balance.

"If Mr. Huber has a problem, tell him you couldn't stop me. I forced my way in."

With that, he pushed open the gate and headed for the chapel.

Elysia and Winona helped Janelle to her feet, calling her name.

Janelle finally noticed Elysia and Winona, quickly wiping her tears. "You... you're here too?"

"Jess called Tarquin, and we

"

happened to be with him," net

said. "When we heard what

happened to Keaton, we all came together."

Despite her distress, Janelle pulled herself together—she was a society matron, after all, and manners mattered.

She forced a polite smile, eyes still red. "I'm sorry to drag you into all this. And you're... Ms. Newsom?"

She recognized Elysia, but not

Winona the Huber and Newsomet

families didn't mix, though Janelle

had seen Winona

the news.

Winona introduced herself. "Hi

I'm Elysia's best friend-and also friends with Mr. Huber. Just call me Winona."

Hearing that Winona was Elysia's friend, Janelle immediately relaxed a little.

Birds of a feather flock together, she thought. Elysia was a good girl; her friends must be good too.

Janelle had seen all the headlines about Winona and Zane Livingston. She couldn't help but feel bad for her.

Such a beautiful, smart young woman-how did she end up with a husband like that, and a mother-in-law from hell?

Thinking of Priscilla, Janelle rolled her eyes.

She'd never met Winona before, but she'd definitely encountered Priscilla at a few ladies' luncheons.

They barely interacted, but honestly-Janelle couldn't stand the woman. Not one

bit.

Chapter 1336

Because in the few times they'd met, Priscilla couldn't help but run her mouth like she was some kind of lottery winner who'd just hit it big.

Every conversation with her was the same: brag about her precious son, trash her daughter-in-law.

She seemed completely oblivious to the fact that her son had married into the Livingston family, and all their fancy dinners and country club invites came courtesy of the Newsoms.

If you listened to Priscilla, though, you'd think it was the Newsoms who should be grateful her boy even looked their way!

She honestly believed Winona wasn't good enough for her son. To hear Priscilla tell it, Winona was nothing but a pretty face-a gold-digger who couldn't boil an egg, let alone clean a house, and didn't lift a finger for her in-laws.

She'd rant, "That little tramp won't last long. Just you wait-if she doesn't give me a foot rub or massage my shoulders, I'll make sure my son divorces her!"

What a piece of work.

Who did Priscilla think she was? The Queen Mother? Expecting foot baths and massages, threatening to have her son toss his wife out like last week's leftovers? Honestly, the woman had zero class. If anything, the Livingstons should be lighting candles in gratitude they landed someone like Winona!

She's gorgeous and sweet—if Winona were my daughter-in-law, I'd be over the moon. I'd spoil her rotten, treat her like a princess! No one would dare mess with her—not even Keaton. If he so much as looked at her the wrong way, I'd be the first to set him straight.

Thinking about Priscilla, I couldn't decide if I was more annoyed or jealous.

Even someone like Priscilla managed to snag a daughter-in-law.

And here I am—waiting, hoping, praying for a daughter-in-law of my own, but not even a shadow of one appears.

Sigh.

Poor Winona.

Honestly, I felt bad for myself, too.

She'd been unlucky in love; me, I couldn't seem to find a daughter-in-law no matter how hard I tried.

Janelle gave Winona's hand a gentle pat, her heart aching for her.

"Out with the old, in with the new, honey. There are plenty of good men out there

-don't let some jerk drain your spirit. The next one will be better!"

Winona managed a smile. Janelle really was something else.

One minute, she was tearing up over her own son. The next, she was comforting Winona.

Funny thing was, Winona had come here to console her!

"I'm not upset," Winona said lightly. "It's a long life. So I ran into a jerk-he's history as far as I'm concerned."

Janelle nodded emphatically. "That's the spirit! No point wasting tears on a loser. Let him do the crying for once."

Winona smiled again, and she and Elysia helped Janelle to a bench by the rose bushes.

"So, what's really going on with Keaton and Ms. Sutton?" Winona asked. Janelle let out a long sigh. "It's all Keaton's fault! Poor Beatrix didn't deserve it."

Winona and Elysia exchanged a

look. Most women from old-money families would swear their sons

could do no wrong, always blaming

the other party. But not Janelle.

"What did Keaton do?" Winona pressed.

Janelle's brow furrowed. "He's my son, but I'm not taking his side. Frankly, he deserved what he got if he never asked Beatrix, why agree to** the engagement in the first place? If he was just trying to keep us happy, that's no excuse for... for hurting her."

Winona and Elysia grew quiet. "Hurting her?" Elysia echoed.

Janelle's frown deepened, lips pressed tight. She seemed torn, struggling to get the words out.

"Did they... sleep together?" Winona asked gently.

Janelle clenched her jaw. "If it had been consensual, maybe it'd be different. But he he forced her My son. That bastard."

Winona and Elysia stared at her in shock.

Keaton had assaulted Beatrix?

Suddenly, it made sense why the Suttons were furious, why Richard was calling for old-school punishment.

This wasn't just a messy breakup this was criminal.

Chapter 1337

This is already a criminal offense. If the Sutton family decides to press charges, he could end up in prison for a long time.

A serious sentence, too.

Winona frowned. "Are you sure it was rape?"

Janelle nodded miserably. "They've got the video! My idiot son... He's really going to be the death of me, I swear..."

Janelle was a mess-angry, worried, and totally at a loss.

She was furious that her son could do something so monstrous.

She was terrified the Suttons would actually take this to court.

She desperately wanted to find a solution, but she just couldn't see a way out.

It was tearing her apart...

Elysia grabbed some tissues and wiped away Janelle's tears. "What are the Suttons saying right now?"

Janelle choked out, "They want the two of them to get married as soon as possible. After what happened-God knows if Beatrix is pregnant-they don't want their daughter branded with a shotgun wedding or, worse, as an unwed mother."

"Richard and I, of course, don't have any objections. We've been hoping Keaton would settle down."

"But that stubborn boy just refuses. He said he'll do anything to make it right with the Suttons, but he absolutely will not marry Beatrix."

"We don't even know if it's because he doesn't like Beatrix, or if he just doesn't want to get married, period."

"He won't say. He just keeps insisting he won't marry her, won't do it, no way."

"And the Suttons have made it clear-if he doesn't agree to the wedding, they're going straight to the police."

"If they slap him with a rape charge, his life is over. Completely over."

"Richard and I have talked to him privately, tried every argument we can think of. He's a grown man, he knows what's at stake, but he just won't budge!"

"He'd rather ruin his whole future, even risk getting beaten to death by his father, than marry Beatrix."

Winona frowned deeper. "Did he admit to raping Beatrix?"

Janelle nodded miserably. "Yeah, the evidence is all there. Denying it is pointless." Winona asked, "Can we see the video?"

Janelle hesitated, dabbing her eyes, then found the file and passed her phone to Winona and Elysia.

Tarquin was Keaton's best friend, and Elysia was Tarquin's wife-and her daughter Jessamine was close with both families. Winona, in turn, was Elysia's best friend. Janelle trusted them enough to show the video.

The footage was heavily blurred for privacy, but you could clearly make out Keaton and Beatrix's faces.

In the hotel room, Beatrix had just finished showering. The doorbell rang.

She answered, wrapped in a towel and robe, hair still damp. Keaton barged in.

He didn't say a word. He just pinned her against the door.

Beatrix's face flushed red as she pushed at him. "Keaton, what-what are you doing?!"

Keaton just grabbed her wrists, pinned them above her head, and yanked her robe off, tossing it aside.

Beatrix screamed in alarm, but Keaton smothered her cries with a forceful kiss.

He kissed her, hands roaming over her bare skin...

He forced himself on her right there, by the

crying otel door, while she kept e

crying and trying to fight him off

the way from the e

from the door to t door to the bed.

The whole time, Beatrix was sobbing, struggling...

Elysia and Winona watched, deeply uncomfortable, faces tense and drawn.

It was undeniable evidence. If this went to the police, Keaton would almost certainly be convicted.

They quickly shut the video off and handed Janelle her phone.

Elysia noticed something was off about Keaton in the footage.

She

if he was on

Som alcohol, or

Wool

whatever-but she had r no,

she

just asked quietly,

"Why was there a security camera in the hotel room?"

Chapter 1338

Winona wanted to say something her lips parted, but the words just wouldn't come out.

Janelle shook her head and sighed.

"Word is, someone set the whole thing up just to get it on camera. They caught Keaton and Beatrix in the act."

"That person sent the video to both our families-the Hubers and the Suttons- and tried to blackmail us."

"They threatened to leak the uncensored footage if we didn't pay up."

"If that video goes public, Keaton's looking at jail time, and Beatrix's reputation will get dragged through the mud. It'd ruin both our families."

"The blackmail's been handled, but now it's just us left to deal with the fallout."

"If Keaton and Beatrix got married, this would all blow over."

"But the problem is Keaton. He refuses to go through with the wedding..."

Winona finally spoke up. "If he doesn't want to marry her, it means he doesn't love her. Forcing them together won't bring anyone happiness. Besides, I think there's more to this than meets the eye."

Janelle frowned, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Winona took a moment, choosing her words carefully.

"Listen, Keaton's got a reputation as a ladies' man, sure. But he's not a scumbag. He's a flirt, but he's not a creep. He dates a lot, but he's never forced himself on anyone."

"All the girls he's been with-he put in the effort, charmed them. His relationships are short-lived, yeah, but he's genuine in the moment."

"He courts them, and when it ends, he's honest and generous. He's never cheated or juggled girlfriends."

"And honestly, the women he dates? They know what they're getting. They're not looking for forever, either-they want something out of it, too."

"To put it simply, it's a fair trade."

"He spends money for excitement, they get some perks in return."

"Plus, Keaton's family is loaded, he's got the body of a pro athlete, he's always hitting the gym, he's clean, and let's be real-he's handsome as hell."

"Dating him, even just hooking up, isn't exactly a bad deal."

"That's why, even with his reputation, there's always a line of girls waiting for a shot."

"But Keaton's nothing like Zane."

Now, Zane's a real piece of work. Or those guys who rough up their wives, or gamble and cheat-that's what you call trash."

"Keaton? At worst, he's...complicated."

"You can't call him evil-he's never done anything truly wrong. He dates properly, is upfront, and treats his girlfriends well."

"But you can't call him perfect, either-his longest relationship never made it past two months."

As Winona finished, Janelle just stared at her, tears streaming down her face. This was the first time she'd heard anyone say something nice about her son.

All those society ladies she knew-they'd shake their heads, purse their lips, and gossip about how hopeless Keaton was. Always whispering behind her back about how she'd never get grandkids, mocking her every chance they got.

And here was Winona, after watching that video, defending him.

Anyone else would have called her son a jerk after seeing that footage.

But not Winona.

Janelle was moved to her core. She gripped Winona's hand tightly. Why couldn't a girl like this be her daughter-in-law? Life was so unfair!

"Winona, do you think Keaton was set up?"

Winona nodded slightly. "Yeah, I just don't see him doing something like that. It's not in his character."

But since Keaton himself had already copped to it, she didn't want to push. She

just said gently, "I can't say for sure, but something just feels off."

Just as Winona finished speaking, Richard and Tarquin strode out of the old family chapel.

Richard was fuming. He barked at the staff, "No one's to go near him! No doctor, no painkillers, no food, no watert. Anyone who disobeys can pack their bags and leave the Huber family for good!"

The guards at the door nodded frantically, not daring to breathe too loud.

Chapter 1339

The Huber family's staff didn't know exactly what had happened, but you didn't need to be Sherlock Holmes to see it:

The boss was furious today. And not just your average mad-he was nuclear.

Janelle heard the commotion and rushed over.

"I'll go check on him. Please, let me in to see him," she pleaded.

"You're not going in either!" Richard barked.

Janelle's voice cracked as she cried, "What, you're just going to leave him in there to rot?"

"If he wants to rot in there, I won't even give him the chance! Our family has always been respectable-how did we end up with such a screw-up for a son?"

"If he refuses to marry Beatrix, then call the cops! Let them come and haul him off!"

Janelle nearly collapsed at those words, only staying upright because Elysia and Winona grabbed her arms just in time.

Janelle sobbed, "You can't do that! He's your flesh and blood! If the police take him, he's finished. His whole life-ruined!"

Richard's face was a stormy mix of red and pale.

"He did something this monstrous-I ought to disown him!"

"You... that's not right. Even Winnie says it's not right. Richard, we have to get the facts straight! Really look into this!"

"Winnie?" Richard shot her a look she hadn't expected. Winona froze for a second, then stammered, "Mr. Huber..."

Tarquin quickly introduced her, "She's Elysia's best friend. Also a friend of

Keaton's. She was here when Jess called, so she came along."

Richard studied her, his anger softening just a little as he remembered. "I know you. Nearly got yourself killed by that jerk. Poor girl."

Winona gave an awkward smile. "Bad luck with men, I guess."

Richard sighed heavily. "It's the Livingstons who didn't appreciate you. Surviving that, you're bound for better things. Life has a way of evening out. You'll be happy, just you wait."

"Thank you, sir. And Keaton-he's not like Zane. He's not a jerk. He'd never... you know, force himself on someone."

Richard exhaled, long and deep.

He wasn't a fool-he knew his son's flaws. Keaton was a flirt, sure, but he wasn't evil. Assaulting Beatrix? No way.

But the kid confessed. That was the real kick in the teeth.

He was mad at his son for being reckless, but mostly, he was furious that Keaton

was taking the blame for something he couldn't have done.

Why would he do that?

Just then, a maid sprinted in, panic written all over her face. "Sir! Something's happened! Ms. Sutton the is threatening to kill herself i living room!"

Richard and Janelle jumped, then bolted for the living room.

Elysia and Winona exchanged a look, eyebrows knitted in worry, and hurried after them.

Tarquin turned to the security

guards, voice, low and urgent. "Go

get a doctor for your young master, fast. If the boss fires you over this, I'll find you another job. But if you don't call the doctor right now, you'll be out on the street tonight-no questions asked."

The guards flinched. "We'll call the doctor right away, sir!"

Tarquin's tone eased. "Good. And when Keaton's better, I'll make sure he takes care of you."

With that, he hurried off to catch up with Elysia, heading for the main house.

Seeing Elysia and Winona's anxious faces, he said, "If she really wanted to kill herself, she'd be dead already. We wouldn't have time to get there. Don't panic."

That actually made sense.

Elysia felt a little better, but still pressed, "How's Keaton doing?"

"He's not going to die. But he won't be getting out of bed for a month."

Elysia's eyes widened. "They beat him that badly?!"

"Mr. Huber was really, really pissed."

"But when I saw the video, Keaton didn't seem like himself. Didn't Mr. Huber notice?"

Tarquin's expression darkened. "Wait-you watched the video?!"

Chapter 1340

Winona was no fool. The second she heard Tarquin's tone, she knew jealousy was eating him alive.

Honestly, Winona found it hilarious-stoic Mr. Bradford, of all people, was a total jealousy monster!

A guy who hardly ever dated, suddenly in love, and now? Wow. He'd get jealous over anything.

And it all started because she and Elysia had watched a silly video together. Winona quickly tried to defuse the situation, blurting out,

"Elysia, I'm gonna go hang out with Janelle for a bit. You take your time, no rush!"

She didn't wait for a reply, just clicked away in her sky-high heels, putting serious distance between herself and the drama.

Elysia didn't chase after her. Instead, she turned to Tarquin and asked, "Wait, you didn't watch it?"

Tarquin's face was stormy, like he'd been personally wronged. "No, I did not!"

Elysia blinked at him, confused. "Okay, you didn't. Why're you so upset? If you wanna see it, just ask Mr. Huber for the link."

"I don't want to see it!" he snapped.

Elysia was baffled. "Alright, then don't. Why are you so worked up?"

Tarquin clenched his jaw, looking like he could just about eat her alive. "I don't want you watching it either!"

Elysia stared. "It was just for context, you know?"

"You don't need to watch it for context!"

"It was censored, anyway."

"That doesn't matter!"

Elysia just stared at him, exasperated. "Are you picking a fight or something?"

"I'm not picking a fight!"

"Then what are you mad about?"

"I'm not mad!"

Elysia shot him a warning look. "If you keep talking to me like this, I'm not gonna speak to you at all."

Tarquin scowled, clearly not happy.

Elysia turned to go, but Tarquin grabbed her arm, looking utterly miserable. "I'm just jealous, okay?"

Elysia was stunned for a second, then burst out laughing.

"Are you three or something? What's there to be jealous about? I told you, it was censored. If it wasn't, Janelle would never have let us watch it. You're such a baby!"

"Mr. Huber offered to show me, but I refused!"

"Alright, alright, I get it. Mr. Bradford's got a jealous streak a mile wide. It's totally my fault today, I'll be more careful next time, okay? Please, your majesty, don't hold it against me."

Tarquin's expression softened a little. "Call me 'hubby.'"

"Yes, hubby dearest! Now stop being so sour!"

That playful tone made Tarquin's throat go dry, his whole body suddenly too

warm.

Before he could say anything, Elysia tugged him forward, switching to a more serious topic.

"Come on, let's go. Your buddy's in a mess and you're here sulking? If Keaton finds out, he'll chew you out for sure!"

"If he does, I'll just punch him," Tarquin grumbled.

"And what if I chew you out?"

"I'll just surrender and let you win."

Elysia blushed, kicking him lightly.

Enough with the banter-she got down to business. "Winona and both noticed there was something weird with Keaton and Beatrix. Didn't Mr. Huber see it, too?"

Tarquin shot her a look. "We'll talk about you watching the video tonight!"

Before Elysia could roll her eyes, he continued, "Mr. Huber noticed, but he's ticked off that Keaton confessed."

Elysia was stunned. "Wait, you mean Mr. Huber knows Keaton was set up?"

"Yeah. Keaton would never do something like that. It's obvious someone drugged him."

"So why did he admit it?"

"No idea. Keaton won't say."

Elysia frowned. "Who drugged him? Beatrix?"

Tarquin shrugged. "Not sure yet, but I'm betting she had something to do with it." Elysia shook her head in disbelief.

"But Keaton's told me before, he doesn't even like Beatrix-and she doesn't like him either. The engagement was just to keep their parents happy."

Tarquin nodded. "Either there's something else going on, or Keaton got played by the Sutton family."

"Got played? How?"

"They pretend it's just a fake engagement, but then set things up so he can't back out."

Elysia paused, frowning.

"That makes no sense. Keaton

doesn't like her, and she doesn't like

him. Even if she manages to trap

him into marriage, she'd just be making herself miserable. Isn't she digging her own grave?"