

Hitched 1381

Chapter 1381

"Shut up!" Elysia finally snapped, cutting him off mid-sentence.

"I told you everything at the hospital last time, remember? You say you're doing this for me? No-you're doing it for yourself!"

"Don't pretend you're some kind of martyr, doing dirty things for others' sake, just to excuse your own mess!"

"You keep saying you love me. What exactly do you love about me?"

"If you'd ever thought about me for even a second, you wouldn't have done any of those disgusting things!"

"Lying to women, stealing the Newsom family fortune, human trafficking, plotting to poison people and then selling the antidote "

"One after another, these things prove just how rotten you are!"

"Your cover's blown. No one believes your act anymore. Just face it."

"All those horrible things you did? It's because you're vile, cruel, and selfish. Don't blame anyone else!"

"I'll say this one last time: stop saying you love me. It makes me sick!"

Without another word, Elysia hung up.

She didn't give Zane a chance to call back-she blocked his number instantly. But almost immediately, a text came in from an unknown number.

It was Zane again, trying with a new phone.

[Elysia, I know you're angry at me right now. I get it. You don't want to hear me out, but please, wait for me. I'm coming to find you.]

[I really do love you. I'll explain everything in person. I'll confess my feelings, I'll propose, just give me a little more time. I swear I can give you the future you deserve!]

Elysia stared at the message, gagging.

She'd barely caught her breath before she decided to call Tarquin. Why could Zane still call and text her?

Tarquin had left for work that morning, promising police would arrest Zane today.

But before she could dial, Tarquin's name flashed on her screen.

She answered in a hurry. "I was just about to call you. What's going on with Zane?"

Tarquin sounded tense. "What happened?"

"He just called and texted me from a random number, spouting his crazy crap. Didn't the police catch him?"

"...He got away."

Elysia's eyes widened. "He what?!"

"Yeah. I just got the news."

"How the hell did that happen?!"

She couldn't wrap her head around it. Tarquin's guys had been watching Zane,

the cops had been onto him for ages-how did he just disappear?

Tarquin explained, "There's a mole in the department. Zane got tipped off early. He took a hostage and with

the mole's help, escaped in a police car."

Elysia's stomach twisted.

"The people he hates most are you and Winona. He can't get to you-do you think he'll go after Winona?"

Tarquin's jaw clenched. He didn't answer right away, but the answer was obvious.

Winona had destroyed Zane's last chance at power. Tarquin and Elysia had gotten involved because of her. To Zane, Winona was enemy number one.

If he got the chance, he'd go after her-no question.

Zane on the run meant Winona was in real danger.

Tarquin tried

not

to let his worry show, not wanting to stress Elysia out even more. "Don't panic. The police have put him on every wanted list in the country. There are people overseas who want him dead too. He'll be hiding out, keeping his head down for a while."

"Besides, Keaton lives right next door to Winona. If anything happens, he won't just sit back and watch."

"Keaton might be a mess in the

romance department, but when it

comes to protecting a

you

can always count on him. He's more reliable than anyone."

Elysia was silent, but it didn't do much to ease her nerves.

Chapter 1382

After hanging up on Tarquin, Elysia just couldn't shake her worry. So, she headed over to Tanhe Manor.

She packed the self-defense gadget Walter had made his own take on pepper spray-and some ointment for injuries.

The pepper spray was for Winona.

The ointment was for Keaton.

When the doorbell rang, Winona answered, surprised to see Elysia standing there.

"Hey! What are you doing here? You didn't even text before coming over!"

Before Elysia could reply, she caught sight of Jessamine Huber sitting on the couch.

Jessamine spotted her too, immediately jumping up, both surprised and delighted.

"Elysia!"

Elysia blinked. "Jess? What are you doing here?"

Jessamine wiped her eyes, still a little teary. "I came to check on Keaton! And I wanted to thank Winona for looking after him these past few days."

Elysia remembered Jessamine was pregnant with her second child and quickly helped her sit back down.

"Take a seat-did you just get back from Border City?"

Jessamine nodded. "Yeah, I got to Jindale City at dawn, stopped by my parents' place first, and came here as soon as it was light."

Elysia said, "Honestly, I thought you'd just settle down in the States for a while, maybe come back after the holidays."

Jessamine shook her head, smiling. "No way. You know, you said something that really stuck with me-no one cares for your own kids like you do!"

"Why hand my own kid off to a stepmom when I'm right here?"

"I even canceled the fancy maternity clinic I booked in Alerasia. I want my baby to

be born right here in Zhinora, to be a true local."

"Let him grow up here, have his own roots, and actually feel like he belongs."

Winona chimed in, "You made the

right call. Have you seen how crazy things are in Alerasia lately? All those chaotic videos online are just the tip of the iceberg!

"It's total mayhem out there, danger everywhere."

"Even the locals don't feel safe, let alone us outsiders. Zhinora's definitely the safest place to be right now."

Jessamine nodded, "Exactly. Zhinora's pretty much the safest country in the world these days."

"Why would I want my kid to be born somewhere else just for a foreign passport? That's just nuts."

"I'm gonna take a page from your book, Elysia. No more chasing after all that nonsense. I'll just focus on raising my kid right."

"If he grows up to be someone special, he can serve our country. And if he's just average, well, he'll stay close and I'll enjoy every moment with him." fo

Elysia grinned. "That's right. No one loves your kid like you do. And it's always safer to raise them at home."

Jessamine used to want to have her baby in Alerasia just to snag the passport and the perks. Plenty of rich and powerful people were doing it.

But after talking to Elysia, she started to see things differently.

Trying to live abroad just for citizenship? That cost a ton, and all you were really doing was boosting someone else's economy.

And even after all that, you still got treated like an outsider-looked down on and discriminated against. What was the point?

It was better, she realized, to stay home and raise her baby in her own country.

Winona poured another glass of warm milk for Jessamine, handed Elysia some tea, and asked, "You came because you're worried about Zane breaking out, right?"

Zane's escape was all over the news-his face plastered everywhere. The whole country was on alert.

Elysia frowned. "I can't believe he actually managed to get away!"

Winona, lounging in her silky pajamas with her hair loose, somehow looked both relaxed and regal.

She shrugged, a stubborn gleam in

her eye. "If Zane really wants to come after me, let him. If he

manages to kill me well, maybe that's just how my story's supposed to end. I'll accept it."

Chapter 1383

She'd just barely escaped Zane with her life, and now...

All of Zane's crimes were out in the open for the world to see, but somehow, she still hadn't managed to dodge the fate of being killed by him.

If that wasn't fate, what was?

If the universe had decided that she was doomed to die at Zane's hands in this lifetime, well... what could she do but accept it?

Seeing Elysia's worried face, Winona just grinned, brushing it off with a shrug.

"Relax. I was just talking about the absolute worst-case scenario. Trust me, Zane's not going to take me out that easily!"

"I'm not exactly a pushover, you know? He can't just walk in here and squash me like a grape."

"Yeah, him being on the run could be dangerous for me, but hey, maybe it's not all bad news."

"Maybe it's the universe giving me a shot at taking him down myself, ever think about that?"

"Last time, if I'd killed him, I'd have been the one going to jail. I'd have had to make it quick—one clean shot, settle the score and move on."

"But this time? It's different. He's a wanted criminal now, all over the news. If he dares to show up and tries to kill me, and I take him out? That's self-defense. Hell, I'd be doing the world a favor!"

"Honestly, I think the universe is handing me an opportunity—maybe it wants me to finish what he started and finally get my revenge!"

Elysia: "..."

Jessamine: "....."

Anyone else in her shoes would be freaking out, terrified Zane would come back for revenge.

Not Winona. She was already plotting how to take him down for good.

If the internet could hear her now, she'd have a whole army of fans kneeling at her feet, chanting "Queen!"

Jessamine gave Winona a look of pure admiration. Say what you will, but Jessamine loved her attitude.

"Look, Zane's face is plastered all over every news channel. He's not sneaking in here anytime soon, not with the neighborhood security as tight as it is. He couldn't get past the gates if he tried."

"Plus, you're a celebrity. There are probably a dozen paparazzi camped outside just waiting to snap a photo of you. If Zane even pokes his head out, they'd probably report him before he ever gets close."

Elysia finally exhaled, nodding. Jessamine made a good point-getting to Winona wouldn't be easy for Zane.

And honestly? Winona's gutsy attitude was way better than if she was just sitting here, crying and scared.

"Tarquin said Keaton's security guys are everywhere around the Manor,"

Jessamine chimed in. "They'll watch out for you too."

"And Keaton's not moving out anytime soon, so if you need anything, just ask him. He's been

shamelessly bugging you for weeks-don't feel bad about

returning the favor."

Keaton really had been a handful lately.

First, Winona had found him half-dead by the side of the road, brought him home,

and taken him to the ER.

Then, after he moved in next door, he needed her for everything.

She had to worry about his meals.

She had to remind him to take his meds.

If he was down and wanted to talk, or grab a beer, or play video games, it was

always Winona he called.

She'd even tried to hire a live-in

helper, but Keaton had

like to every

option said he didn't like the guys and the women weren't his type.

So who was left? Only Winona.

To be fair, he'd helped her through plenty of rough patches before, so she didn't

really mind returning the favor.

Honestly, if it weren't for Keaton, she'd have moved out already.

The Manor used to be her and

Zane's "marital home." Zane had

lived here too, and just thinking

about it made her skin crawl. She'd

been planning to sell it and start over somewhere new.

But with Keaton still on the mend, she couldn't just up and leave. She'd at least

wait until his injuries had healed before packing her bags.

Winona reassured both of them, "You two really don't need to worry about me. I like being alive, you know-I'll be careful."

No sooner had she finished speaking than her video doorbell chimed. It was the building's security desk.

"Ms. Newsom, there's a Miss Sutton here to see you. Should we let her in?"

"Sutton? What's her first name?"

"Beatrix."

Winona blinked in surprise. Beatrix Sutton? What was she doing here?

Chapter 1384

Winona glanced at the security guard and asked, "What does she want with me?"

"She didn't say," the guard replied.

There was a brief pause before Winona said, "Just let her wait for me in the lounge. I'll be there in a minute."

After hanging up, Winona turned to Elysia and Jessamine.

"It's Beatrix-Keaton's fiancée. She's here to see me."

Elysia frowned in confusion. "What does she want with you?"

Winona shrugged. "No idea. She didn't say."

Jessamine scowled. "It's obviously about Keaton. Winona, don't go let me handle her."

Jessamine had a pretty poor opinion of the Sutton family these days.

The whole situation with the Suttons seemed like an orchestrated move to force Keaton into marrying Beatrix. On the surface, it looked like Beatrix got the short end of the stick, but honestly, Keaton was the one getting screwed over this time. He might not have really been kicked out, but those bruises were real-Richard nearly beat him half to death.

Jessamine, as Keaton's sister, was furious.

She'd always been neutral about Beatrix-not fond of her, but not hostile either. Now, though? She couldn't stand the woman. She was worried Winona would get hurt and wanted to go in her place.

Winona shook her head. "No need. Things are already tense between the Suttons and the Hubers. If she sees you, she might get emotional, and you need to stay calm for the baby. I'll go see what she wants."

"She has no reason to come after me. I'll be fine."

Elysia asked, "Want me to come with you?"

Winona smiled. "No, you stay here with Jess. I'll be right back."

She changed into something a little sharper, slipped on her heels, and headed out.

In the lounge by the gate, Beatrix sat primly on the couch, waiting. Her wire-rimmed glasses gave her a studious look. She was all delicate features and pale skin, thin and fragile-looking-the kind of girl who'd fade into the background of a college library, lost in her books.

When Winona walked in, Beatrix stood up and greeted her politely. "Ms. Newsom."

Winona flashed a vague, polite smile. "Take a seat. What can I do for you?"

Beatrix didn't waste time. "I'm here to see Keaton. But he won't talk to me."

Winona narrowed her eyes. "That's between you and Keaton. What's it got to do with me?"

Beatrix's tone was even. "I know you're living next door to him now."

"Yeah, I am. So?"

Beatrix got straight to the point. "Can you take me in to see him? Just for a minute?"

"No." Winona didn't hesitate.

Beatrix's brow furrowed. Winona explained, "I don't want to get involved in whatever's going on between you two."

"But, as one woman to another, let

me give you some advice. There are plenty

of good guys out there you

don't have to tie yourself to just one tree."

IMS

"Keaton really doesn't like you. Instead of wasting your time on him, maybe it's time to let go and find someone you actually click with."

"You're not lacking in prospects. You could easily find a great guy to settle down with."

Beatrix frowned again, her expression mostly unchanged, but her eyes turned icy sharp.

"You're telling me to give up on him so you can have him to yourself, right? You think just because he doesn't want me, he wants you?"

"If I can't marry him, you sure as hell won't either. Don't forget-you've already been married once!"

Winona's eyes narrowed.

"So, you didn't come here to ask for help. You came here to throw down the gauntlet?"

Beatrix stared coldly at her-no denial.

Others might be blind to it, but she

saw right through it. Richard and Janelle kicking Keaton out was nothing but a golden opportuni

for

Winona, and Beatrix wasn't about to lose to her.

She had the pedigree, the credentials, the top-tier education.

She was everything Winona wasn't She was the "good girl." Winona was just awed up actress. with a nice

face and a killer body. What else did she have to offer?

In Beatrix's eyes, Winona wasn't even in the same league.

Chapter 1385

"I've always been top of my class, ever since I was a kid. Academics, sports, debate you name it, I never let myself lose!"

"If there's something I want, I get it. No exceptions."

"I'll do whatever it takes. No matter the cost."

"So, whatever's going on between Keaton and me, you'd better stay out of it. Walk away. Don't make me do something you'll regret."

Winona narrowed her eyes, sizing her up with a smirk. "And what if I don't back off? What are you gonna do about it?"

Beatrix stared at her over her glasses, her voice icy calm. "You'll regret it. Big time."

Her tone wasn't loud, but it was cold enough to give anyone chills.

Looking at Beatrix, Winona couldn't help but think of Zane-people who wore one face in public and another in private. Zane put on that charming, gentlemanly act, but underneath, he was ruthless. And Beatrix? She looked like the quiet, bookish type, soft and reserved, but there was a steeliness in her gaze that said she was anything but harmless.

Winona let out a breath. What did I do in a past life to attract every two-faced psycho in the state?

"Honestly, I wasn't even interested in Keaton before, but now that you've brought it up, I think I'll get involved-just to spite you. I promise you, I won't let Keaton end up with someone like you."

Beatrix's jaw clenched, and she shot Winona a furious glare before storming off.

Winona watched her go, her own posture bristling with challenge. Did Beatrix really think she was some pushover?

She was just about to leave when Jessamine and Elysia came over.

"What did Beatrix say?" Jessamine asked.

Winona shrugged, helpless. "She thinks I'm trying to steal Keaton away from her. Came to throw down the gauntlet."

Jessamine and Elysia exchanged a loaded look.

Elysia had just heard from Jessamine that Richard and Janelle had their eyes on Winona for Keaton. Winona clearly had no idea. But Beatrix had already come knocking.

Jessamine huffed, indignant. "The nerve of her, coming here to threaten you. If she really cared about Keaton, she wouldn't be pulling this kind of stunt to manipulate him!"

"Seriously," Elysia agreed. "Does she think it's still 1950? Just because they slept together doesn't mean Keaton's going to marry her."

"If she'd really been the victim here, maybe Keaton would feel guilty. Maybe there'd be a chance. But she set him up-and Keaton doesn't feel an ounce of remorse. He'd never marry her now!"

If Jessamine had to pick a sister-in-law, she'd pick Winona in a heartbeat.

Sure, Winona had been married before. She had her share of tabloid rumors- after all, she'd spent over a year stuck in that PR nightmare, and the gossip about her was endless.

Beatrix, on the other hand, was all Ivy League credentials and a spotless reputation. But Jessamine knew that any friend of Elysia's had to be @good person, Elysia was way too discerning to hang out with just anyone.

So Jessamine was all for Winona. Who cared if she'd been married? Who cared about a few scandals? It's not like Keaton didn't have his own share of skeletons in the closet. Frankly, Winona was doing them a favor by even considering him.

Elysia frowned at the mention of Beatrix. "I heard from Tarquin that Keaton actually has evidence that could clear his name. He's known along that Beatrix set him up, yet he still pled guilty. I just don't get it why would he do that?"

Jessamine's eyes widened. "Keaton has evidence?"

Elysia nodded. "That's what Tarquin said."

Jessamine's annoyance grew. "Unbelievable! He's got evidence but still confesses? Makes us worry for nothing! No wonder Dad's mad at him. He deserves a smack for that."

Elysia asked, "Did you ask him why he pled guilty?"

"I did. He wouldn't say. Who knows what's going on in his head! That's it-I'm going to ask him again."

Jessamine moved to head upstairs, but Winona called her back.

"Jess, let me talk to him. We've been chatting a lot lately-he might open up to me more easily."

She didn't want Jessamine getting worked up over this. She'd already figured out Keaton's style: if you confronted him head-on, he'd just clam up. She'd tried that already.

She'd have to find another way.

Chapter 1386

Jessamine frowned, letting out a dramatic sigh.

"Honestly, Winona, you've really been through the wringer. It's just not fair to you." She leaned in, lowering her voice conspiratorially.

"Next time Beatrix comes looking for trouble, just ignore her. Or better yet, tell me. You're a public figure, so you can't cause a scene-but I'm happy to take care of her for you!"

Winona just smiled, not saying much.

Jessamine checked her watch. "Gotta run-lunch with Corbin Denton. Wish me luck!" And with a quick wave, she was out the door.

Elysia hesitated a moment, then turned to Winona.

"Hey, there's something I should probably tell you. Jess said Mr. Huber and Janelle are trying to set you up-with Keaton."

Winona's eyes shot wide open, totally caught off guard. "Are you serious?"

"I'm pretty sure. Jess isn't really the type to joke about this stuff."

Winona just shrugged, rolling her eyes.

"Well, they're going to be disappointed. Keaton and I? Not happening. We're both sworn singles. Marriage is definitely not in our plans."

Elysia just nodded. What could she say?

Winona had just had her heart broken; she wasn't likely to fall for anyone again anytime soon.

And Keaton? The guy had dated half the city, but it was always just for fun-never anything real.

Trying to get those two to fall in love and settle down? Yeah, good luck with that.

Winona seemed totally unfazed, which reassured Elysia. She hung out for a little while longer, then headed home.

Elysia had barely left when Winona got a text from Janelle: lunch was waiting downstairs.

For the past week, Janelle had been sending lunch over every single day.

Her excuse?

"Richard won't let me fuss over Keaton, but I still worry about my son. Can you be a dear and pass this along?"

So Janelle would drop off a big lunch at Winona's place, and Winona would bring it to Keaton.

Of course, Janelle always packed enough for two-"You need to eat too, honey. You're doing me a favor."

Winona hadn't thought much of it before. But after Elysia's little revelation, those lunch boxes suddenly felt a lot heavier.

Just as she was stewing over it, her phone pinged a message from an unknown number:

*You have half a day to think it over

If you don't leave Keaton, the

inter be calling you a

homewrecker by mongole

Winona pursed her lips. She didn't need to guess-this had Beatrix written all

over it.

So Beatrix thought she was an easy target? Please.

If Beatrix actually managed to end up with Keaton, Winona would eat her own shoe.

Not on her watch.

She didn't bother replying. Instead, she grabbed the lunch and headed next door.

Keaton was on the phone with Tarquin when she arrived.

"Zane's definitely going to try something with Winona. Keep an eye out."

Keaton smirked, his eyes glinting.

"Gotta hang it to Zane-the guy's come a long way from nothing. I he'd done things right, he could've been a real player. But since he's gone off the rails, well, he's not my problem."

The doorbell rang. Keaton glanced at the clock. Lunchtime. He knew who it was.

"Don't worry about Winona, Tarquin. She's under my protection. If Zane tries anything, he'll regret it."

He hung up and shuffled over to the door. His leg was still a bit stiff, but

thanks to Elysia Sdee??

M's

remedies, he was recovering fast.

He opened the door, totally unsurprised to see Winona with the lunch bag.

"Come on in."

Winona moved straight to the kitchen, unpacking the lunch onto the table.

"You hungry yet?"

Keaton eyed her, suspicious.

"You look like you've got something to say."

"I do. But it can wait. You want to eat first, or talk first?"

Keaton grinned, curious.

"Is it about you, or about me?"

Winona looked him straight in the eye.

"It's about us."

Keaton's eyebrow shot up.

"Us? What's going on with us?"

Chapter 1387

He paused for a second, then seemed to remember something. His eyes

narrowed. "Are you hungry?"

"Nope."

"How about we talk first, then eat later?"

"Sure!"

Winona strode right into the living room and flopped onto the couch.

Keaton, wearing straight-leg jeans and a crisp new shirt from the latest V collection, padded into the kitchen in his designer slippers-seriously, those things cost more than most people's cars. He came back with two cans of craft beer, handed one to Winona after popping the tab for her. She didn't hesitate, just downed the whole thing in one go.

Before Keaton could react, she snatched his beer right out of his hand and chugged that too.

He stared at her, stunned. "Whoa-Winona! What's going on? You okay?"

She looked up at him, and her expression had totally changed her eyes were red and glassy, like she was about to burst into tears. She looked so small and vulnerable all of a sudden.

"Keaton, just tell me the truth. Are we actually friends?"

Keaton's heart skipped a beat. He was a total sucker for a pretty face in tears. "Of course we are! Why would you even ask that?"

She pressed on, "Then did you know your parents are trying to set us up?"

Keaton hesitated. "Yeah, I know."

Winona glared. "And you never thought to tell me?!"

He shrugged, looking sheepish. "I didn't think it was a big deal. It's not like we're actually going to date or anything. They're not forcing anything, just let them dream. It's not affecting us."

Winona huffed, "Not affecting you, maybe. But it's a disaster for me! Beatrix came after me today!"

Keaton blinked. "She did? When?"

"This morning! She called me a homewrecker. Said I was stealing you from her!

She even threatened me—told me to stay away from you or else!"

Keaton frowned, doubtful. "Seriously?"

She pulled out her phone, scrolled, then shoved it in his face.

He squinted at the messages. "...Alright. I'll talk to her."

Winona shook her head, frustrated. "What good will that do? I already tried explaining she doesn't believe me! She's convinced I'm after you, and anything you say will just make it worse!"

"If she spreads this online tomorrow, I'll get roasted alive! The press doesn't care about the truth, only clicks. I'll be branded a cheater. Even if they don't blackball me, my career will take a hit!"

"Keaton, I thought we were friends. But if this mess ruins what I've worked for, I swear I'll lose it!"

"Yeah, I could quit and still live just

fine, but acting-this is my dream!

Pet

Ever since was a kid, I wanted to win an Oscar, a BAFTA, everything! If Beatro wrecks, all that you're responsible-" Her voice cracked, and finally she burst into tears.

Keaton panicked. In all the years he'd known her, he'd never seen Winona cry. He scrambled for a box of tissues and handed them over.

"Winona, don't cry. Please. I promise I'll handle Beatrix, okay?"

She looked up at him, tears clinging to her lashes. "How? You already admitted to

assaulting her. Do you think you have any credibility with her now?"

"She's only acting this way because you let her! If you'd denied it, if you'd exposed what the Sutton family did to you, she wouldn't dare threaten me—or keep clinging to you!"

Keaton fell silent, brow furrowing.

Winona pressed, voice shaking, "What really happened between you and Beatrix?"

Why did you take the blame for something you didn't do?"

Chapter 1388

Keaton's face suddenly turned grim.

Normally, he was all jokes and grins, but now his expression was weighed down, as if something serious had just flashed through his mind.

It took him a moment to pull himself together. When he finally did, the mischievous glint was back in his eyes as he squinted at her and said,

"This is between me and Beatrix. I can't really talk about it, but trust me I'll handle it, okay?"

"I promise, I won't drag you into this. Just give me a sec, I need to make a call."

Before heading out to the deck, he handed Winona a napkin and tried to cheer her up, "Come on, stop crying. You're about to turn into the ugly duckling over here."

Winona watched him step outside, frowning. She'd been sobbing her eyes out and he still wouldn't tell her what was going on!

What in the world was between him and Beatrix?

Was it really that top secret?

Her phone suddenly buzzed, the ringtone slicing through her thoughts.

She glanced at the screen: Janelle was calling. Swiping away the tears, she steadied herself before answering, "Hey, Janelle."

Janelle didn't waste a second. "Winona, did Beatrix come after you?"

Jessamine had just told her that Beatrix had shown up, and Janelle was clearly rattled.

"I'm fine, Janelle. She just wanted to talk, that's all," Winona replied quickly.

Janelle's voice was tight with frustration. "She's unbelievable! After everything that's happened between her and Keaton, I know my son's innocent. I'm furious with the Suttons, not her!"

"I'm a woman too, I get what she's feeling. No matter what happened, she's the one who got hurt here. I always wanted to make it right for her. And now she's got the nerve to come after you?"

"Don't worry, Winona. If she tries to mess with you, Richard and I will have your back, you hear me?"

"We've already had the Huber family's PR team put out a statement. The engagement between our families ended ages ago. Beatrix is not, and has never been, my future daughter-in-law. She doesn't have anything to do with the Hubers anymore!"

Janelle knew exactly what Beatrix was up to-trying to paint Winona as the "other woman." That kind of scandal could wreck an actress's career overnight.

The Hubers had kept quiet before, trying to work things out with the Suttons behind closed doors. But as

soon as Janelle heard that Beatrix

was causing trouble for Winona, both she and Richard had had enough.

Kon

They could take the hits themselves, but lay a finger on their chosen daughter-in-

law? Not a chance.

They didn't care what Keaton

thought. As long as the Hubers made their position clear, if Beatrix tried to trash Winona in public, the

tide of public opinion trix

turn against Winona.

They had to nip this crisis in the bud.

just

After Winona got over her shock, she felt a warm rush of gratitude.

Other than her own parents-and maybe Elysia and Blossom-no one else in the world would stand up for her like Janelle and Richard did.

"Winona, don't you worry, and don't let her scare you. If the sky falls, Richard and

I will hold it up for you. We won't let Beatrix bully you, not on our watch..."

Janelle kept going, and Winona felt her nose start to tingle.

She couldn't help but think of Priscilla. People always say you don't know what you're missing until you see the difference.

If only Priscilla could be more like Janelle...

But never mind—there's no "if" in real life. Janelle could never have raised a jerk like Zane, anyway.

And the thought that she might not end up with Keaton, that she might let Janelle down, made her heart ache just a little.

After a moment, Winona managed to smile and say,

"I'm fine, Janelle. Just because she calls me the other woman doesn't make it true. She has to prove it, and I know she can't. You and MoHuber don't need to worry about me

"Ugh, this whole mess is Keaton's fault, that knucklehead..."

Janelle spent another few minutes venting about her own son before finally hanging up.

Winona was about to put her phone away when a breaking news alert caught her eye.

Keaton had just shared an article about the Huber-Sutton engagement falling apart, and added his own comment:

Chapter 1389

I'm single, and I love it!

And just like that, the news blew up all over social media.

Everyone online suddenly turned into Sherlock Holmes, tossing out theories left

and right:

"Remember when the Huber family kicked Mr. Huber out a while back? It's gotta be because he dumped Beatrix and called off the engagement!"

"The Huber family got pissed, cut him off, and tried to force him into a marriage alliance!"

"Now that they realize they can't push him around, they're backing off, and the black sheep of the family is suddenly the golden boy again!"

A bunch of women were as excited as if it were Christmas morning- congratulating Keaton on regaining his single status, while at the same time, trash-talking Beatrix with every nasty comment you could imagine.

Winona scrolled through the news, eyes wide in shock.

She never expected Keaton to go public about his relationship with Beatrix. He had to know, the moment he did, the internet would tear Beatrix apart.

He'd even confessed to assault just to protect Beatrix's reputation-there had to be something between them. So why didn't he care now if people went after her?

He shielded her so fiercely, and yet, he was the one who threw her under the bus. What the hell was going on?

Winona couldn't make sense of it. Watching Keaton through the glass window, she saw his back turned to her, standing on the balcony, smoking.

His cigarette was barely halfway done when his phone buzzed. He glanced at the screen-Beatrix.

Keaton didn't look surprised at all. He picked up, "Yeah?"

Beatrix's voice was shaky, tense, like she was holding back tears. "You've fallen for Winona, haven't you?!"

Beatrix wasn't stupid. Keaton's public announcement was obviously meant to defend Winona, to keep people from calling her a homewrecker.

If a guy goes this far to protect a woman, what else could it be but love?

Keaton didn't say a word, and Beatrix got even more upset.

"First of all, don't forget what's between us!"

"And second, don't forget that Winona is the girl your best friend Callum Leblanc likes! Bros before-well, you know! How could you do this to Callum?!"

Keaton frowned, a spark of annoyance in his eyes. He flicked his ash, his voice cool and detached.

"First of all, there's nothing between us."

"I confessed to the assault to

Pour reputation to help you

get by with the Suttons, to look out for you."

"Why did I look out for you? Not for your sake. You're smart, you know the real reason."

"And second, whether or not I like Winona has nothing to do with you or Callum." "Who I, Keaton, care about is my own business. No one else's. Least of all yours." "Beatrix, you're a woman, I don't want to argue with you, but you need to know your place."

"I know all your little secrets. Just

stick to being Sutton's princess, stay out of my life and leave my friends alone."

"If you mess with Winona again, you'll have more to cry about than you can imagine."

"If you think I'm just bluffing, go ahead-try me."

With that, Keaton hung up.

He tucked his phone away, took another drag, eyes fixed coolly on the city lights, his handsome face unreadable.

After a minute, he stubbed out his cigarette and headed back into the living room.

Facing Winona, he said with a cheeky grin, "Handled! Don't worry, she won't dare mess with you again."

Winona eyed him suspiciously. "You and Beatrix..."

Keaton cut her off right away,

"Boundaries, Winona. Personal lives are personal. Even best friends don't get to pry."

Winona: "..."

Whether she played hard or soft, Keaton wasn't spilling a word.

Clearly, he was going to take net

this

secret to the grave.

Still, all those tears weren't for nothing-at least Keaton made it official! Now, when Beatrix goes out, she's not even 'Keaton's fiancée' anymore.

If she ever tries to show off again, she's got no one but herself to blame!

Chapter 1390

"Come on, let's eat before everything gets cold."

Keaton reached out a hand to her. Winona didn't hesitate-she grabbed his wrist and got to her feet.

As they headed to the dining room, Winona said,

"You went public with your thing with Beatrix. Aren't you worried she'll come after you?"

Keaton grinned, way too confident. "She wouldn't dare."

"See? I told you, being my friend is a win for you. Remember to hype me up when you introduce me to your single friends."

Winona nodded, "Absolutely, no problem."

"Oh, and about Zane-I heard. Don't worry. I've got your back. If he tries anything, I'll make him regret it."

Winona didn't bother with pleasantries. "Thanks. But about us, you should clear things up with Janelle. The more hope she has, the bigger the letdown. Tell her to set her sights elsewhere-she needs to stop obsessing over me."

"You can tell her Zane broke my heart so bad, I'm done with love forever."

Keaton nodded, "Leave it to me. But seriously, when will you introduce me to those friends of yours? I'm back on the market, ready for romance."

Winona rolled her eyes. "You're still recovering, barely able to walk around the block, and you're already plotting a love life?"

Keaton shrugged. "I can start dating now and take her out when I'm fully recovered."

Winona snorted. "You'll need more than a week to bounce back. At your usual breakneck dating pace, you'll probably break up before you're even out of bed. What's the point?"

Keaton pursed his lips. "You don't get it. Just set it up, you owe me. Throw one of your legendary house parties, invite all your girlfriends, and I'll pick."

Winona shot him a look. "What, you think you're some kind of king holding a royal ball?"

She headed into the dining room and set out lunch-grilled cheese sandwiches and a big bowl of tomato soup.

"Snap out of it, Romeo. Food's ready!"

...

The Sutton family.

Everyone was gathered in the living room, throwing dirty looks at Beatrix.

Sophus Sutton's face was thunderous as he snapped,

"You gave it your all and still couldn't bag the Mrs. Huber title. That's what you call success?"

Sophie, who used to back her up when they were guests at the Hubers', now scoffed coldly,

"I told you, the higher the hopes, the harder the fall. She's just like her

mother all talk can't get an

done."

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Beatrix's older sisters chimed in with their own barbs.

"I said it from the start-this whole thing with the Hubers was a pipe dream sure, Mr Huber's got charm, but their family's loaded and powerful. He was never going to pick her."

"Let's be real, he only agreed to the engagement to use her as a convenient shield."

"And then she went around spreading that story about him assaulting her-where does she even learn these tricks?"

"Oh please, like mother, like daughter. Bad apples don't fall far from the tree."

They were mocking Beatrix's mother.

Beatrix was Sophus's illegitimate daughter, the result of one of his many affairs. Her mother died- before Beatrix was a month old, so Sophus had no choice but to bring her home to the Suttons

The family loathed Beatrix's mother, and by extension, they loathed Beatrix too.

No exaggeration-Beatrix grew up on the receiving end of their cruelty.

It wasn't until she started getting straight As and bringing the Suttons some good press that she was grudgingly accepted.

Her moment of glory came when she managed to get engaged to Keaton.

For a while, even Sophie, her harshest critic, treated her decently.

Her sharp-tongued sisters stopped mocking her to her face.

But after today's Huber family scandal blew up, all the pent-up resentment in the

Suttons erupted at once.