

Hitched 1611

Chapter 1611

Elysia Thorne: "...Do you eat this much every time you have a snack?"

"Yep!"

"But I don't see you gaining any weight."

Winona Newsom grinned proudly. "It's amazing, right? God must love me! I eat all I want and don't gain a pound! The girls at the office are practically turning green; they're dying to know my secret!"

Elysia asked, "Have you noticed any other changes in your body? Can your stomach handle all that food?"

Winona spoke while eating. "Totally. I haven't felt the slightest bit of discomfort. In fact, I think I'm probably healthier now than I've ever been."

"I used to always feel run down. I didn't sleep well, my appetite was just okay, and I had a lot on my mind."

"Now, I could eat a horse, and I'm out like a light within half an hour of my head hitting the pillow. I wake up the next morning bursting with energy. I feel like I'm eighteen again!"

As she spoke, she slurped up a huge mouthful of noodles. "The spicy ramen from this place is incredible, especially their handmade noodles. If you and Blossom ever get a chance to visit, I'm definitely taking you to the restaurant to try it."

Elysia was speechless.

Tarquin Bradford narrowed his eyes at the phone screen. Seeing Winona eat with such gusto gave him a lot to think about.

Keaton Huber hadn't been eating or sleeping well lately. He'd even wake up in the middle of the night to dry heave, and he'd lost five or six pounds in a week. He was completely listless.

Then he looked at Winona: eating well, sleeping well, full of energy.

He was starting to wonder. Could what Benjamin Lawson's cousin said be true? Was he experiencing her pregnancy symptoms?

Was Winona pregnant?

And was he suffering from a case of sympathy pregnancy?

Tarquin played it cool, quietly pulling out his phone to search: *how long after sex to get pregnant?*

Just as he took out his phone, Winona suddenly greeted him. "Oh, Mr. Bradford is there too. Hello!"

Tarquin looked up again. Elysia had moved her phone, and the camera had caught him in the frame.

"Hello," Tarquin replied.

Elysia asked him, "Did you take Keaton to the hospital?"

At the sudden mention of Keaton's name, a strange look flickered in Winona's eyes. She kept her head down, pretending to eat, but her ears were pricked up, listening intently.

Tarquin said, "We went. He's a bit malnourished. When I left, he was on a nutrient

drip at the hospital. Richard and Janelle are there with him."

"Still can't keep anything down?" Elysia asked.

Tarquin nodded. "No, he has no appetite. If he forces himself to eat, he just throws it back up. If he doesn't eat, he dry heaves. They ran tests, but couldn't find anything Wrong."

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Winona couldn't help but chime in. "It's impossible for someone to just stop eating for no reason. Are you sure they checked for the right things?"

"They did a full workup," Tarquin said. "Everything came back normal."

Winona frowned, her expression tinged with worry. "That doesn't make any sense. You should get a second opinion, try a few different hospitals."

Elysia was also getting concerned. "If things don't improve, I'll go see him tomorrow. I'll give him a check-up myself."

"That could work. Benjamin mentioned that environmental or psychological issues could also cause these kinds of symptoms."

"That's a possibility. Psychosomatic nausea is different from pathological nausea. You should come with me to the hospital tomorrow."

"Okay."

Elysia then turned back to Winona. "Winona, don't you have to come back at the beginning of next month?"

November 6th was Caroline's birthday.

Winona nodded. "Of course. I have to be back for my mom's birthday."

"Let me know when you book your flight. Blossom and I will pick you up from the airport."

"Okay!"

They chatted for a little while longer before ending the video call.

Elysia asked Tarquin again, "Is Keaton really okay?"

Tarquin managed a small smile. "I'm not lying to you. He just can't eat and keeps throwing up, which has led to malnutrition. Other than that, there's nothing wrong with him."

Elysia pressed her lips together. "He and Winona are polar opposites, then. You saw Winona she's eating like a champ."

Tarquin said, "Benjamin's cousin told

me that Keaton's symptoms sound

like morning sickness. She said some women have a huge appetit during pregnancy, while their husbands are the ones throwing up day and night."

Elysia's immediate reaction was to ask, "Is someone pregnant with Keaton's baby?"

Chapter 1612

Tarquin shrugged helplessly. "I don't know. He says no. By the way, Elliot called today."

Elysia immediately perked up. "What did he say? Is everything okay?"

Tarquin didn't mention Bernard, only saying, "Evan had a fever a couple of days ago."

Elysia's expression changed instantly. "A fever?!"

"Yeah, but Elliot said not to worry. It was just a common fever. They'll wait until he's fully recovered before coming back. You'll need to call the school and get them a few more days off."

Panic seized Elysia's heart. "How did he get a fever?"

"They said it rained in the mountains a few days ago, and Evan got caught in it."

"Was it a high fever?"

"...No, not high."

Elysia's heart ached. "No wonder I've been having so many nightmares lately. I knew it wasn't just about Winona, that something else bad was happening! And it was Evan getting sick!"

"You know, Evan might be mischievous and love to get into fights, but he's terrified of getting shots and taking medicine! Every time he got sick before, I had to coax him into taking it."

"And whenever he's sick, he gets super clingy. He can only sleep at night if I'm holding him."

"I'm not there with him now... I wonder if he's able to sleep at all..."

Elysia was sensitive, and her eyes reddened as she spoke.

Tarquin's heart went out to her. If she was this upset just hearing that Evan was sick,

how devastated would she be if she knew Bernard had passed away?

Tarquin pulled her into his arms, comforting her. "Don't worry. Elliot and his grandparents are all there with him."

"It's normal for kids to get sick. People grow up through bumps and bruises. They can't go through life without ever getting sick or falling down."

"You, on the other hand, need to start taking care of yourself."

"You haven't been yourself lately. You've lost weight. When Elliot and Evan come back and see you like this, they'll be heartbroken. And they'll definitely blame me for not taking good care of you."

"Emmett, Elijah, and Baby have all asked me privately several times what's wrong with you. They're all very worried."

Elysia was taken aback. "They asked you about it?"

"Yeah. The kids may be little, but they're perceptive. They can tell you've been in a bad mood lately. They've been taking turns. interrogating me."

Elysia felt a pang of guilt. "With Elliot and Evan away, I've been a little worried about them, and on top of that keep having nightmares... I know I haven't been myself"

Tarquin didn't dare mention Bernard. He just said, "You're worried about Elliot and Evan, and you're worried about Winona. It's normal to have nightmares. Just try not to overthink things."

"Elliot and Evan are with their grandparents. They're safe."

"And Keaton wouldn't dare bully Winona, so no matter what's happened, she won't be the one getting hurt. You don't need to worry about her either."

"Just relax and live your life. If you don't pull yourself together soon, Emmett, Elijah, and Baby are going to have my head!"

Elysia looked up at him, about to speak, when the voices of Emmett, Elijah, and Baby drifted up from downstairs. "Daddy! Mommy!"

Elysia quickly composed herself and called back as she headed downstairs.

Tarquin followed behind her.

Emmett and Baby bounced excitedly. "Mommy, look! We got awards!"

"Really? Let me see."

Elysia took them. They were little certificates from their preschool, the kind every kid gets.

But Elysia still knelt, kissing Baby, then Emmett, and then Elijah, showering her children with praise.

"You guys are amazing! So super smart!"

Elijah said, "Mommy, I made a new friend at school today, too. And I was the one who went up to him first."

"You did?" Elysia asked, surprised.

"Mhm!"

Elysia was thrilled. "Our Elijah is so amazing!"

Elijah was in school now, but he was still a little withdrawn. For him to take the initiative to make a new friend was a huge step.

A shy flush crept up Elijah's cheeks at the praise. "Are you happy, Mommy?" Emmett and Baby also looked at her with wide, hopeful eyes.

Chapter 1613

A lump formed in Elysia's throat. The children were showing off their certificates, and Elijah was telling her about his new friend, all just to cheer her up.

She was their mother, yet her children were the ones comforting her.

Elysia was both touched and filled with self-reproach. "I am. Mommy is so, so

happy. Tonight, Mommy is going to cook a special dinner just for you."

"Mommy hasn't been feeling her best lately because she's been worried about Elliot and Evan. I'm sorry for making you three worry."

Emmett asked, "Is Mommy all better now?"

Elysia smiled. "I'm all better."

Baby asked, "Mommy, when are Elliot and Evan coming back? I miss them."

Elysia said, "They'll be back soon. They miss Baby very much, too."

After chatting with the children for a few moments, Elysia turned to Lowell. "Thank you for picking up the kids. Why don't you stay for dinner? I'll make extra."

Lowell quickly refused. "No, no, that's okay! I've still got work to do at the office. I should get going, Elysia."

With that, Lowell said goodbye to the little ones and practically bolted out the door, as if his life depended on it.

Elysia turned to Tarquin. "What's with Lowell?"

Tarquin countered, "Why was he the one picking up the kids today?"

Elysia said, "He called me at lunch and said he wanted to do it, so I didn't have to go this afternoon. Didn't you know?"

Tarquin's lips thinned. "If I'd known, he wouldn't have looked so guilty when he saw me. Ditching work to pick up the kids!"

Elysia was speechless.

Elijah said, "Daddy, you're not allowed to dock Uncle Lowell's pay!"

Emmett quickly chimed in, "Daddy, are you going to dock Mr. Lowell's pay?"

Baby hugged his leg, her voice small and sweet. "Daddy, please don't dock Mr. Lowell's pay..."

Elysia laughed. "Looks like all of Mr. Lowell's spoiling hasn't been for nothing." Tarquin picked Baby up and gave her a kiss. "I won't, I won't. Go on and play." Elijah went back to his room, while Baby and Emmett played with Lan in the living room.

Elysia and Tarquin went to the kitchen to make dinner together. Tarquin took the lead as head chef, with Elysia as his assistant.

"Lowell really adores those kids," Elysia said. "He's going to be a great father someday."

A week ago, the kids had gotten a call from Lowell and told him they hadn't seen him in a while and missed him terribly. Lowell came back that very night.

He showed up late with a backpack full of little souvenirs from Border City for the kids.

They had all just gotten ready for bed, and Tarquin had asked him why he'd come by so late. Lowell's answer was, "I was in a hurry to see the kids..."

With the little ones in school during the day, he couldn't see them. So, any chance he got in the afternoon, he would go pick them up from preschool.

He truly adored children, which was why Elysia was so sure he'd be a good father.

But Tarquin pursed his lips. "He'll probably be a bachelor for life and end up needing

my kids to take care of him in his old age."

Elysia was curious. "Why would you say that?"

Tarquin thought of Dane, then summed it up simply "He has

terrible taste. He has a hard net

enough time finding a girlfriend, let alone getting married and having kids."

Elysia, who didn't know what had happened in Border City, pouted. "Lowell can't be worse than Axel, can he? If Lowell has a hard time finding a girlfriend, what's Axel going to do? He's cold as ice, keeps everyone at arm's length!"

Tarquin sighed heavily. Thinking about their love lives was giving him a headache.

Elysia teased, "Look at the friends

you hang out with. Some are

practically allergic to women, oth

are always surrounded by them.

None of them are normal

Tarquin grinned. "I'm the only normal one, which is why I'm the only one with a wife

and they're not."

Elysia glanced at him and smiled softly.

Suddenly, Tarquin's phone rang. It was Keaton.

He wiped his hands and answered. "Hello."

Keaton's voice was frantic. "Tarquin, you need to get to the hospital, now! I'm in

deep trouble!"

Chapter 1614

When Tarquin arrived at the hospital, Janelle had just been moved from the emergency room.

She lay quietly on the hospital bed, unconscious.

Richard Huber sat beside the bed, guarding her. His face was dark with an emotion that was either extreme worry or pure rage.

Keaton, looking frail, was kneeling beside the bed, his face a mask of guilt.

Tarquin was stunned by the scene. On the phone, Keaton had only said there was trouble, not what it was.

Entering the room, Tarquin asked softly, "Mr. Huber, what happened to Janelle?"

Richard looked up, his eyes bloodshot. "The shock... she fainted from the anger." Tarquin said, "...She was fine when I left. What could have made her so angry all of a sudden?"

Richard shot a cold glare at Keaton, his voice filled with fury. "Ask this son of mine! It's all because of him! The mess he's made! What a disaster!"

Keaton remained kneeling on the floor, silent.

Tarquin frowned, then turned back to Richard. "Why don't you stay with Janelle? I'll take Keaton outside for a chat."

Richard waved a dismissive hand. "Get him out of here! I don't want to see him. Out of sight, out of mind!"

Tarquin was at a loss.

He walked over, pulled Keaton to his feet, and led him out of the room. As soon as they were in the hallway, Tarquin demanded, "What the hell happened? Did you tell them about Winona being pregnant?"

Keaton let out a long, weak breath. "Let's go downstairs. I need some air."

They went down to the small hospital garden and sat on a bench.

"You got a cigarette?" Keaton asked.

Tarquin handed him one and lit one for himself.

Keaton put the cigarette to his lips, took out his phone, and pulled up a photo, handing it to Tarquin.

Tarquin glanced at it and was taken aback. "Beatrix Sutton is pregnant?!" "Yeah."

"Is it yours?"

Keaton neither nodded nor shook his head. "I don't know. But she says it is."

Tarquin frowned. "Have you done a paternity test?"

Keaton tapped the ash from his cigarette. "Not yet. But the dates line up."

"I don't get it," Tarquin said. "Weren't you always careful?"

"That night she drugged me," Keaton said wearily. "I wasn't in my right mind. I might not have been."

Tarquin was quiet for a moment. "...So you think the baby could be yours?"

"It's hard to say."

"...What does Beatrix want?"

Keaton's face was a mask of frustration. "She's using this baby to force me to marry her. If I don't, she says she'll abort it."

"The worst part is, she didn't talk to me. She called my parents directly! And she told them everything... including the fact that Winona isn't pregnant..."

Janelle and Richard had been under the impression that Keaton and Winona were secretly dating. They had been over the moon thinking Winona was pregnant. Then, an hour ago, Beatrix had called them claiming she was carrying Keaton's child.

Beatrix had laid it out plainly: if Keaton didn't marry her, she would abort the baby and send it to them. The fetus was already well-formed. If Keaton refused to marry her, she would send the Huber family the remains of the child. She also told them to forget any other fantasies they had claiming Winona was never pregnant and she and Keaton were never together. It was all a lie Keaton had told.

After hanging up, Janelle and Richard had immediately confronted Keaton, demanding to know if he was really dating Winona and if she was actually pregnant. Seeing their agitated state, Keaton hadn't dared to answer. But his silence was as good as a confession. The shock and anger were too much for Janelle, and she collapsed on the spot. Richard, heartbroken for his wife and furious at Keaton's recklessness, was beside himself with rage.

After hearing the story, Tarquin frowned. "If Beatrix wants to use the baby to marry

into your family, shouldn't she at least confirm that the baby is actually yours?"

Chapter 1615

"She won't show her face. She's given the Huber family one week to think it over. In a week, we either meet her to sign the marriage license, or we wait to receive the remains of the abortion."

The blatant threat infuriated Tarquin. He asked, his face grim, "If she's so sure the baby is yours, why won't she agree to a paternity test?"

Keaton was agitated. "I asked. She won't explain. She just said the Huber family can choose not to believe her. Just give her a straight answer, and then wait for the package to arrive."

Beatrix knew perfectly well that Richard and Janelle were soft-hearted and desperate for a grandchild. They wouldn't dare take that risk. And Keaton, being a dutiful son, wouldn't risk it either. The sight of a dead fetus would utterly destroy his parents; it might even kill them.

"...So what are you going to do?" Tarquin asked coldly.

Keaton ran a hand through his hair. "I don't know. But there's no way I'm marrying her. As for the baby... sigh..." He couldn't figure out a solution.

He had never thought about having kids before, but seeing how much his parents longed for a grandchild made him soften a little. It might be nice to give them a descendant. But marrying Beatrix? Absolutely not.

Tarquin took a drag from his cigarette and said slowly, "Whether the baby is yours or not, you're the one who gave Beatrix the confidence to act this way."

Any other woman, even if she were genuinely pregnant with Keaton's child, wouldn't dare threaten him so brazenly. Keaton was a flirt who was all smiles around women, but he had a temper. When dealing with enemies, he was ruthless. He could easily bring the Sutton family to ruin. For Beatrix to be so audacious meant she was confident that no matter what she did, Keaton wouldn't lay a hand on her.

Keaton smoked his cigarette, not refuting Tarquin's words. He knew, deep down, that Beatrix was so bold precisely because she was banking on him not hurting her.

Keaton didn't elaborate on his history with Beatrix, and Tarquin didn't press. He just asked, "Where is Beatrix now? Shouldn't you try to talk to her in person?"

"She's in hiding," Keaton said.

"Hmm? Why hide?"

"Probably afraid I'll force her to have

an I

tion. And even if I found h

there's nothing to talk about. She's burned

her bridges on the

Tarquin didn't understand. "She doesn't even like you. Why is she so desperate to marry you?"

Keaton flicked his ash. "She wants the status of being Mrs. Huber."

Before Tarquin could ask, Keaton explained, "The title of Mrs. Huber would solidify her position within the Sutton family."

Tarquin's brow furrowed slightly. "Is she not doing well in the Sutton family?"

Keaton paused before answering. "She's the illegitimate daughter of the Sutton family. She's not exactly welcomed with open arms there."

Tarquin was speechless.

The Suttons were not in the same social circle as the Bradfords or the Hubers, and they had no business dealings. Tarquin had never paid much attention to them. He had no idea Beatrix was an illegitimate child. When Keaton had first told him he was getting engaged to Beatrix, all he knew was that she was the young daughter of the Sutton family, a highly educated woman.

At the time, Keaton had said they were just pretending to be together to appease their parents, so Tarquin hadn't bothered to learn more about her. An illegitimate daughter who was an outcast... that would explain her desperation to latch onto

Keaton. With her status, she couldn't hope to marry into a family better than his. In high society,

open minded parents like Richard and Janelle were rare. Most prominent families insisted on marrying within their own social class.

Chapter 1616

"Can money make her go away?" Tarquin asked.

Keaton shook his head. "She wants one thing: to be Mrs. Huber."

Tarquin frowned. "I have no connection to her. It's awkward for you to get involved, so how about I go talk to her?"

Keaton's brow tightened as he shook his head again. "I can't hurt her."

Tarquin's face hardened. "... You need to be prepared, Keaton. If you don't handle this right, something terrible could happen to Janelle and Mr. Huber."

Just hearing the truth had made Janelle faint.

If she saw a stillborn baby, the shock could literally kill her.

Keaton took a hard drag from his cigarette. "Damn it..."

This was a real crisis, even worse than the pregnancy drama from the past few weeks. He couldn't see a good way out.

Maybe it was the anxiety, but before he'd even finished the cigarette, Keaton started heaving again.

His stomach was empty, so he just dry-heaved.

Worried he'd catch a cold, Tarquin helped him back to his hospital room.

Janelle was in the room next door. She had woken up and was sobbing.

Keaton wanted to go comfort her, but Tarquin stopped him. Out of sight, out of mind. Seeing him right now would only make Janelle angrier.

He got Keaton settled, then stood in the hallway and called Elysia.

Elysia had just finished dinner with the kids and was cleaning up in the kitchen. She answered the phone with immediate concern.

"What's wrong with Keaton?"

Tarquin explained the situation with Beatrix. Elysia was completely floored. After a long pause, she finally asked,

"Is Beatrix really pregnant with Keaton's baby?!"

".....Keaton isn't sure. The dates line up, but he hasn't done a paternity test. Beatrix refuses to do one until after they have a marriage license."

Elysia frowned.

"Why wait until after they're married? Is she hiding something?" Tarquin sighed softly.

"She's hiding from Keaton now and won't see him. Her stance is firm if

he doesn't marry her she'll have an abortion and send the... fetus to Janelle and Mr. Huber."

Elysia flared up. "Is she insane? Is the baby just a tool to her?"

"To put it brutally," Tarquin said, "yes, it is."

Elysia said angrily,

"When I first met her, she wore glasses and had this whole cold, nerdy-girl vibe. I just thought she was a bit distant, maybe hard to get along with. I never imagined she

could be this cruel!"

"What do the problems between adults have to do with a child? That's her own flesh and blood! Even if she doesn't want to have it, she shouldn't use it like this!"

"And what does Keaton not wanting to marry her have to do with Mr. Huber and Janelle? Sending them the aborted baby... she's trying to kill them!"

Tarquin was angry too, his brow furrowed.

"She tried threatening Keaton with a rape accusation last time and it failed. This time, she's going all in."

Elysia frowned.

"...So what now? What's Keaton planning to do?"

"He hasn't figured out a solution yet," Tarquin said. "Janelle fainted from the shock. She just woke up and is still in her room crying."

"Keaton is still dry-heaving."

"Jess is pregnant, so we haven't dared to tell her about this. I'm not coming home tonight. I'll stay at the hospital to look after them."

Elysia was supportive.

"Okay, you stay there and be with them. Don't worry about things at home. Call me if anything happens. If you really need me, I'll come over."

"You don't need to come," Tarquin said. "You stay home and take care of the kids. I can handle it here. Benjamin is also at the hospital tonight so can call him if there's an emergency."

Elysia let out a long breath.

"Okay, then I'll come see Janelle tomorrow morning after I drop the kids off at school."

"...Alright."

After hanging up, Elysia couldn't resist video-calling Winona.

Winona was, of course, eating. She was holding a huge slice of tiramisu, savoring every bite.

Chapter 1617

"Hey, Elysia! Miss me already?"

Elysia sighed. "Janelle fainted today."

Winona froze. "What happened to Janelle?!"

Elysia recounted the story about Beatrix. Winona was stunned silent for a long moment before finally speaking.

"So someone really is carrying Keaton's baby! I guess couvade syndrome is real after all!"

Just that afternoon, they had been joking about it. Both she and Elysia had thought Keaton was just sick, that there was no such thing as sympathy pregnancy symptoms.

And now, tonight, the bombshell of Beatrix's pregnancy dropped.

Elysia said,

"We don't know for sure if it's Keaton's. We can't just take her word for it. She won't even let him get a paternity test. I think something's fishy."

After a moment, Winona picked up the thread.

"Yeah, something's definitely fishy. If it was really Keaton's, she'd let him get the test without any fuss."

"But you have to admit, Beatrix has guts, threatening Keaton like this. It seems like their relationship is more complicated than we thought."

"Last time, Keaton had proof against her, but he was willing to go to jail for a false rape charge rather than expose her!"

"And now she's daring to use a baby to threaten him. She's only this bold because Keaton lets her be! What is the story between those two?!"

Elysia frowned.

"I asked Tarquin, but even he doesn't know."

Winona felt a pang of regret. "..."

That night when he told her Clementine's story, she should have seized the chance to ask about Beatrix. But afterward, all she could think about was jumping him, and she completely forgot.

Elysia added,

"Tarquin said that part of the reason Janelle fainted was because of you."

"This whole pregnancy scandal that's been blowing up... you were the star!"

"Janelle thought you and Keaton were together, that you were the one pregnant with his child. She was over the moon!"

"Then today, Beatrix told her it wasn't true. That you weren't with Keaton and you weren't pregnant."

"Her dream was shattered, and then she got threatened. It was a double blow, which is why she reacted so strongly and just fainted."

Winona was shocked. "Me, pregnant with Keaton's baby?! Why would Janelle think that?"

Elysia shrugged helplessly. "I'm not entirely sure of the details."

Winona muttered, "...No wonder Janelle kept texting me, reminding me to rest and sending me pregnancy meal plans..."

"I just thought she was sending me healthy recipes because she wanted me to take care of myself. I had no idea she thought I was pregnant. This is.

Panic began to set in for Winona. If Janelle thought she was pregnant

with Keaton's child did that mean she knew they had slept together?

If she knew, how could they ever act normal around each other again?

Her head was spinning. Pushing thoughts of Janelle aside for a moment, she asked,

"How is Janelle doing now?"

Elysia sighed.

"Tarquin said she's been crying ever since she woke up. This whole thing has hit her really hard. I'm going to see her tomorrow morning after I drop off the kids I'll get more details then."

Winona frowned. "I'll call and try to comfort her in a little while."

"That's a good idea."

The two friends talked for a bit longer before hanging up.

The tiramisu in Winona's hand had lost its sweetness. She set it aside on the table and found Janelle's number.

But after thinking it over, she didn't dial.

Instead, she found Keaton's number, wanting to ask him first if he had told anyone what happened between them.

But after another moment's thought, she didn't dial that number either.

She curled up on the sofa, her mind racing.

Thinking of Keaton made her anxious.

Thinking of Janelle made her worried.

And thinking of Beatrix just pissed her off.

After stewing for a while, Winona's brow furrowed. She decisively booked a red-eye flight back to Jindale City.

Chapter 1618

The next morning.

Keaton, leaning over the side of his bed, dry-heaved for what felt like an eternity. Weakly, he called out,

"Tarquin, get me a glass of water to rinse my mouth. Hurry, my mouth tastes disgusting."

The door to the hospital room swung open, and a familiar scent washed over him...

Keaton's heart skipped a beat as he realized what was happening. His head snapped up.

Standing in the doorway was Winona, wearing a trench coat, her long brown curls flowing, a mask and sunglasses hiding her face. She was stepping in on towering stilettos.

One hand rested on her suitcase handle, the other tucked into her coat pocket.

She exuded an air of sophisticated confidence.

Even though she was all covered up, Keaton recognized her in an instant.

He froze completely, his heart starting to race with a confusing mix of panic and excitement.

He stared at her wide-eyed, completely at a loss for what to say or do.

Winona said nothing. She pushed her suitcase into the room and closed the door behind her.

She took off her sunglasses and mask, walked over to the water cooler, poured a glass, and handed it to him.

Keaton quickly took it, and then... nothing. He just stared at her like an idiot.

Winona pressed her lips together. "Didn't you want to rinse your mouth?"

Keaton nodded quickly, tilted his head back, and chugged the entire glass of water. Winona blinked. "... Did you want to rinse your mouth, or were you thirsty?"

Keaton looked flushed. "Right. Sorry. I guess I was more parched than I thought."

"Are you still thirsty?" Winona asked.

"N-no, I'm good."

"Then lie back down. We need to talk."

"Oh." Keaton obediently lay back down like a good little boy.

His presence was completely overshadowed by hers.

Winona pulled a chair over to the bedside and sat down, her tone calm.

"It's been less than three weeks. How did you get so thin?"

Keaton answered honestly,

"I don't know. I just feel like throwing up all the time, but the doctors said all my tests are normal."

Winona's beautiful eyes narrowed. "Is it really sympathy pains?"

Keaton's mouth twitched awkwardly.

"No, don't listen to them. What are you doing back here all of a sudden?"

"Elysia told me Janelle fainted," Winona replied. "I was worried about her, so I came back to see her."

Keaton sighed. "This whole thing is my fault..."

Winona's eyes lifted as she cut straight to the chase.

"I hear Janelle thought I was pregnant with your child. What exactly did you tell her?"

Keaton's jaw worked for a moment before he came clean.

"I didn't tell her about that night. I didn't tell anyone! My parents misunderstood about you because..."

"You remember that day I climbed through your window? The day you let me cut your hair to blow off steam."

"My dad's driver saw me in your

room and secretly told my dad. When I climbed back into my own bedroom, my parents were waiting for me."

"They demanded to know what I was doing in your room and asked if I'd taken

advantage of you."

"They caught me red-handed, so I

couldn't deny it

deny it. I had to lie and say

we were sengootherwise

they my legs." would have broken

"Because of that, when they saw the video of us at that dessert shop for pregnant

women, they assumed you were pregnant with my baby."

"The whole thing blew up so fast. was afraid to tell the truth because I thought it would kill my parents, and I didn't want them to be humiliated. So just kept putting it off

"I was trying to find the right way to handle it, but I couldn't, so it just dragged on until now."

"I was going to come clean yesterday, but then those two gossips showed up and

started taunting my mom, so I chickened out again."

"And then Beatrix suddenly showed up out of nowhere..."

"I'm sorry. I used you. Whatever you want to do to me, I'll take it."

Winona looked at him, her red lips pressed into a thin line, her expression neutral.

"Is there anything else you're hiding from me?"

Keaton shook his head vigorously. "No, I swear, that's everything!"

Winona didn't get angry or yell at him. Instead, she asked,

Chapter 1619

"The baby in Beatrix's belly is it yours or not?"

Keaton frowned. "...I don't know."

Winona asked again, "Have you figured out how to solve this?"

Keaton shook his head again, frustrated. "Not yet."

Winona let out a long breath.

"Ask her to meet you. Tell her you'll go get the marriage license today."

Keaton's eyes widened.

"I'm not going to marry her! Marriage is not a game. I can't marry her!"

Winona gave him a look. "Can't you lie?"

Keaton looked totally confused. "Huh?"

Winona didn't offer an explanation, her gaze remains steady.

"If you want to handle this Beatrix situation properly, you'll listen to me. Ask her to meet you today."

Keaton asked eagerly, "Do you have a way to fix this?"

Winona just said,

"Just get her to meet you. It would be best if you could get her to come to the hospital. I'll talk to her."

Keaton looked like a big, eager golden retriever.

"If you can fix this for me, I swear, you're a lifesaver."

Winona pursed her lips. "I don't want to be your saint."

Keaton immediately asked, "Then what do you want to be? My queen?"

"Don't start with the 'Queen' nonsense. I'm not looking to adopt a grown man, and I'm certainly not looking for a subject."

Just as Keaton was about to

She stood up and turned to leave.

Winona said, "I'm going to see Janelle now."

Keaton's hand shot out and grabbed her wrist.

Winona glanced down at his hand, her brow furrowing in displeasure.

He immediately let go, looking small and pitiful.

"That... that night... we..."

Winona smoothed her long hair and stated, "Forget it. As far as I'm concerned, it never happened."

Keaton was speechless. "..."

As Winona walked out of the room on her high heels, she paused at the door and looked back.

"The whole secretly dating'

story-we keep up that act for now

Once is better, we'll find a

chance to come clean Contear .net>

"But we can't fake the baby part. In a minute, I'm going to tell Janelle I'm not

pregnant, so don't you dare slip up."

"And one more thing. I came back to

deal with this, but not for you. I

came back because I care about Janelle. I can't stand to see her sad So don't flatter yourself into thinking I'm here for you."

With that, Winona turned, walked out, and closed the door.

The moment she was out of Keaton's sight, she let out a long breath and took a deep gulp of air.

It was the first time they'd seen each other since they slept together, and it was still a little awkward.

If she weren't such a good actress, she never could have pulled off being so calm.

But her last words hadn't been a lie. She really wasn't here because of Keaton.

She was here for Janelle.

Janelle treated her like her own daughter.

So she loved Janelle, and she couldn't stand seeing Janelle being manipulated by Beatrix.

Who the hell did that woman think she was, using a baby to climb the social ladder?

All she talked about was abortion and sending a dead fetus.

Wasn't that her own flesh and blood?

As a mother, how could she say something so heartless?

Having an abortion was one thing. But to go through with it just to use the remains

to get revenge? That was monstrous.

If the Hubers had been some kind of monsters who had pushed her to the brink, then maybe her cruel actions could be understood.

But what had the Hubers ever done to her?

What had Keaton done?

What had Janelle and Richard done?

She had framed Keaton, and he hadn't even held it against her!

Janelle and Richard had been nothing but generous to her. Even knowing their son had been framed they still gave the Sutton family a huge amount of compensation.

Not only was she ungrateful, she was shameless.

A woman like that deserved to be put in her place.

Keaton might have some complicated history with her, but she didn't.

In other words, Keaton might indulge her, but she sure as hell wouldn't.

As for why she was stepping up...

She had figured it out on the flight back. Janelle treated her like a daughter, so it was her duty to stand up for her.

If she didn't take Beatrix down, she didn't deserve to be called a queen.

Chapter 1620

Winona took a calming breath and walked toward the next room.

Beatrix was secondary; comforting Janelle was the priority.

Getting so upset was bad for her health, and Winona couldn't let her stay in that state.

Before she reached the door, Tarquin came out of Janelle's room.

Winona greeted him first. "Mr. Bradford."

Tarquin was a little surprised to see her. "When did you get back?"

"I was on a red-eye last night. Just got in," Winona replied.

Tarquin let out a breath of relief.

"You're back just in time. We haven't dared to tell Jess about this, and I'm not very good at talking to Janelle. It's good you're here to comfort her."

"Jess is pregnant, we shouldn't worry her," Winona said. "I'll take care of Janelle."

"Okay. Does Elysia know you're back?"

Winona shook her head.

"I got in late last night, so she was probably asleep. I didn't want to bother her. I'll tell her in a bit."

"She's coming to see Janelle after she drops the kids off."

"She mentioned that last night. How is Janelle doing right now?"

"...Not great. She and Mr. Huber were up all night."

Winona frowned. "I'll go in and see them now."

"Alright. I'll have some breakfast sent over in a bit. Try to get them to eat something."

"I will."

Tarquin went to find Keaton, and Winona pushed open the door to Janelle's room.

Janelle and Richard were surprised to see her. "Winona?!"

Both of their eyes were red and they looked exhausted. Winona's heart ached for them.

"Janelle. Mr. Huber."

Richard quickly stood up.

"Why are you back? When did you get here?"

Winona walked toward the bed.

"I heard last night that Janelle had fainted, so I bought a ticket and came right away. I just arrived."

Richard was shocked. "You just landed in Jindale City?"

"Yes, I came straight from the airport."

Richard gestured for her to sit. "Quick, sit down and rest."

Janelle took her hand, her eyes welling up with emotion.

"We made you worry. You must be exhausted after flying all night. You should have gone home to rest first."

Winona sat on the edge of the bed, slipping into her role as the comforting daughter- figure.

"I was worried about you and wanted to see you right away. And I wanted to come and apologize to you and Mr. Huber."

"I'm so sorry for getting your hopes up for nothing..."

"When we went to that dessert shop, we were actually buying something for Jess."

You misunderstood. I'm not pregnant..."

Janelle already knew. She sniffled, her eyes red.

"It's not your fault. It's that bastard Keaton! He's the one who lied to us!"

"If he hadn't lied about you two secretly dating, we never would have believed so easily that you were carrying his child! That worthless Son of a bitch, he even dared to lie to his own father and me!"

Richard was fuming.

"As soon as he's well, I'm going to teach him a lesson he won't forget!"

Winona thought, *What's the point of letting him get better then?*

She offered a placating smile and quickly said, "He wasn't lying. We really are dating."

Janelle and Richard froze. "?!"

Winona blushed.

"We've been together for a while

now. It was my idea to keep it a secret from the public because was worried it would affect: Career

Janelle and Richard were both baffled.

"But Keaton already confessed. He said he was lying to us."

Winona explained,

"That's because he was afraid of making me angry. He thought I'd blame him for

telling the truth without my permission."

Janelle and Richard were speechless. "..."

Winona held Janelle's hand.

"Janelle, you and Mr. Huber can't

just listen to Beatrix's side of theet

story She doesn't know anything She's just spouting nonsense.

The older couple stared, stunned, for a long moment.