

Hitched 1661

Chapter 1661

Beatrix pressed on. "And what if this baby was yours? Would you tell me to get rid of it, or let me keep it?"

Keaton's brow furrowed again, and his answer was sharp and decisive. "Get rid of it!"

Beatrix was taken aback. "...Are you really planning to be a bachelor forever? Never get married and have kids?"

"That's none of your business," Keaton said coldly. "I'm transferring the money now." After hanging up, he sent Beatrix five million dollars in several installments.

He then sent another text: [Don't you dare touch Winona!]

Beatrix gritted her teeth as she read the message, choosing not to reply.

Instead, she immediately forwarded the entire five million to Zane, along with a message of her own.

[Get moving. Winona has to suffer a miserable death. I don't want to see her face for another day!]

At the beachfront hotel, Winona had booked an ocean-view suite.

Wrapped in a thick cardigan, she sat alone on the balcony, letting the sea breeze wash over her.

She'd craved a glass of wine, but the thought of the baby in her belly made her swap it for a tall glass of sparkling water with a twist of lime.

This baby... She wasn't sure she would keep it, but for as long as it was inside her, she would be responsible for it.

Pregnant. She never saw this coming...

How did this even happen?

Was it because she'd made that grand promise to Janelle and Richard? Was this the universe's idea of a cosmic joke, giving her a baby to make good on her word?

This child's arrival was... surprising, unexpected, and utterly bewildering.

But at the same time, it was precious.

This was her first pregnancy. And even though she couldn't feel anything yet...

The thought of a tiny life growing inside her perfectly flat stomach felt like magic.

How big was it now?

It must be so small.

Like a poppy seed? Or a lentil?

Was it a boy or a girl?

Would the baby inherit her eyes, or Keaton's sharp, arrogant jawline?

No matter the combination, it would be a beautiful disaster.

If Keaton found out she was pregnant, how would he react?

Would he be furious? Would he demand she get an abortion?

What if she defied him and had the baby anyway?

Her career would definitely take a hit, and she couldn't give the child a complete family.

She and Keaton had no feelings for each

; forcing a rewarner

was impossible. The child would

grow

up to a single parent home,

But was growing up in a single-parent home so bad?

Then again, the child's father was constantly in the tabloids, dating this girl today and that one tomorrow. The endless scandals would surely tarnish the child's life.

So, maybe it was better to not have a father like that at all.

As long as the mother had money and could give the child more than enough love, wouldn't they be just fine?

So... what if she kept this baby a secret from Keaton and raised it on her own?

That didn't seem viable. What if the child grew up to be a spitting image of Keaton?

He would recognize his own child in an instant!

And then there was Beatrix...

Winona's brow tightened at the thought of her.

Beatrix's threatening words echoed in her mind:

'If you killed me, he'd kill you for revenge! But if I killed you, he'd never lay a hand on me!'

Whether there was any truth to that statement or not, Beatrix's confidence spoke volumes about her connection to Keaton.

If she had this baby, would Beatrix try to harm it?

Almost certainly.

Beatrix had started causing trouble

before anything had even happened between her and Keaton. If she found out about a baby,

wouldn't just stand by and do nothing.

So, for this child, Beatrix was a ticking time bomb.

If she wanted to have this baby, she'd first have to find a way to defuse that threat.

She couldn't let danger loom over her child before it was even born.

But with Keaton backing her, how could she possibly deal with Beatrix?

Ugh, what was she even doing, thinking about all this?

She hadn't even decided to keep the baby yet!

Winona's head throbbed. She looked down, gently stroking her flat stomach, her

emotions swinging between joy and despair.

Chapter 1662

"Ding"

Her phone lit up with a new message from Elysia.

[Hey, I'm home. Are you asleep yet?]

Winona picked up her phone and typed back.

[All settled in. Still awake. It's late, you should get some rest.]

Elysia replied instantly:

[Send me your hotel address. I'll have some good food sent over tomorrow. You're in a special condition now, you need proper nutrition.]

[Don't worry, I won't bother you. I'll have someone drop it off at the front desk.]

Winona's heart warmed. She sent a hug-and-kiss emoji, followed by her location.

Elysia replied, [Got it. Rest well tonight, Your Majesty. Await my food offering tomorrow.]

Winona: [Love you, Elysia!]

Elysia: [You can call me anytime you want to talk. I'm on call for you 24/7.] Winona smiled, a genuine curve of her lips. [I know. Kisses.]

She chatted with Elysia for a little while longer, her mood lifting considerably.

Staring out at the dark expanse of the ocean, Winona took a deep breath, then stood up and returned to the bedroom.

Whatever happens, happens. For now, her worries could take a hike. She and the baby needed their beauty sleep.

The next day, at the Huber estate.

Janelle woke up and found Richard's side of the bed empty.

She yawned and called out toward the bathroom, "Richard?"

"..." No response.

Curious, Janelle got out of bed and checked the bathroom. He wasn't there.

She freshened up, got dressed, and went downstairs. Before she could even ask about Richard's whereabouts, a maid rushed over, her face etched with worry.

"Ma'am, you're finally awake! You have to go see the master. He's been in the family chapel all night!"

Janelle froze. "He's been in the chapel all night? What for?"

"I don't know," the maid said, looking distressed. "He won't let anyone in. He seems to be in a very bad mood."

Janelle frowned. "But he went to sleep with me last night. When did he go to the chapel?"

"Around one in the morning, ma'am. He's been there ever since."

Janelle's frown deepened as she walked towards the private chapel on the estate.

Inside, Richard stood stiffly before the wall of Huber family portraits, his head bowed in solemn silence.

He heard the door open and, assuming it was a maid calling him for breakfast, was about to snap. But then he heard Janelle's voice.

"Richard."

Richard turned. Janelle was startled to see his eyes were completely bloodshot. "!"

She closed the chapel door behind

her, walked forward, and gave a respectful nod to the portraits of the Huber ancestors. Then she knelt beside Richard and whispered, "What's wrong?"

Richard sniffled. "My heart is just so heavy."

"Hmm? Why does it ache?"

Richard let out a heavy sigh.

Janelle asked quietly, "It's not about Beatrix's baby, is it?"

She knew how old-fashioned Richard was, how he viewed continuing the family line as his greatest duty. Even though he disliked Beatrix, if the baby had truly

been

been a Huber, it would have been a

joyous occasion for the family.

Content

Richard's eyes welled up with tears.

"I am a little disappointed that Beatrix's child isn't a Huber. But that's not the root of

my pain."

Janelle was confused. "Then what is?"

Richard sniffled again, his gaze fixed on the portraits of his forefathers.

"I had a dream about them. The Huber ancestors."

Janelle's eyes widened. "Oh? Did they miss you?"

Richard shook his head. "They were ready to disown me! They tore me apart for

failing the family name!"

Janelle: "...Why would they haunt you like that?"

Richard's voice-cracked with

emotion. "They called me a failure! Said I'd let the Huber legacy crumble under my watch. They told me I'd abandoned my duty that I was a total disappointment to the bloodline!"

Chapter 1663

"The descendants of the Huber family? That's just Keaton," Janelle reasoned. "Keaton isn't in any danger. He hasn't been hurt. Why would the ancestors say that

to you?"

"I can't figure it out either," Richard said. "So, tell me, do you think we made a mistake about Beatrix's baby?"

Janelle frowned. "You mean, you think Beatrix is carrying the Huber heir?"

Richard nodded. "Yes!"

Janelle pursed her lips and immediately shot down the idea.

"Impossible! Do you think Beatrix is an idiot? If she were really carrying a Huber baby, she would have gladly agreed to a paternity test from the start! None of last night's drama would have ever happened!"

"Besides, we ran multiple DNA tests. The proof is right there—it's Mr. Joubert's child, not a Huber!"

Richard looked distraught. "Then what did the ancestors mean? Why would they say I failed to protect the family's descendants?"

Janelle couldn't understand it either.

"Could Keaton be in some kind of danger? That can't be right; he's perfectly fine! Or maybe... you're just desperate for a grandchild. After confirming last night that Beatrix isn't carrying the family heir, you were so stressed that you overthought things."

Richard was silent.

Janelle figured that must be it. What you dwell on by day, you dream of by night.

She tried to comfort him. "Don't overthink it. Even if Beatrix's baby isn't ours, didn't Winona promise you? She said she'd make sure you get to hold a grandchild in your lifetime!"

Richard's spirits lifted at the reminder.

But his joy lasted only a few seconds before he said, "Do you think the ancestors appearing last night was a sign? What if Keaton and Winona have broken up again?"

"Don't say such things!" Janelle immediately scolded. "Can't you wish for something good for them for once?"

"Of course I want them to be happy," Richard said miserably. "I'm just worried. That dream unsettled me. Why on earth would the ancestors give me a dream like that?"

Janelle thought for a moment. "For now, just try not to worry. Go back to the room and get some sleep. It go to the hospital later to check on the kids. If anything is wrong, I'll come back and tell you."

After coaxing Richard back to their bedroom, Janelle left the house.

In truth, she was unsettled too. For the Huber ancestors to suddenly appear and
accuse Richard of failing to protect their descendants...

It was enough to make anyone's mind race.

The Huber descendants were Jessamine and Keaton. Jessamine was married now,
so the focus was on Keaton.

But Keaton was a thirty-year-old

man. Even if something bad

happened to him, it wasn't as inet

torstainself

could blame Richard for it He was a grown adult, responsible for himself.

If the descendant the ancestors were talking about wasn't Keaton, then who could it be?

Richard didn't have any other children!

If the ancestors weren't mistaken, then the problem had to lie with Keaton!

Could it be... that Keaton had a secret child somewhere?

And that child was now in danger?!!

A shiver ran down Janelle's spine. The thought terrified her.

Frowning deeply, she told the driver to take her to the hospital. She planned to see her son and Winona, and then find a chance to carefully bring the dream with him at might be the 21st century, but some things were just too strange to be dismissed as mere coincidence.

Chapter 1664

On the way, Janelle passed a small eatery called 'Limerence.'

She had the driver pull over and went inside herself to buy something for Winona.

'Limerence' was a new, trendy spot that specialized in artisanal bone broths, savory grain bowls, and various seasonal delicacies.

Not only was the food exquisite, but the ingredients were all top-tier. Every dish was a feast for the senses.

Rumor had it the owner was a young, wealthy foreigner with impeccable taste who personally approved every ingredient.

Aside from being incredibly expensive, the place was flawless. Though it had been open for less than a week, it was already the talk of the town among the wealthy socialites.

The only downside was that they didn't offer delivery; you had to queue up in person.

When Janelle arrived, the line was already long, filled mostly with the wives of the city's elite. After all, a simple order of two or three items could easily run into the hundreds, a price tag the average person couldn't afford.

Janelle ordered three of the signature broths and picked out a few other bites she thought Winona might like. As she found an empty seat to wait, a familiar voice called out.

"Well, well, if it isn't Mrs. Huber. What a coincidence. You're here to buy food too?"

Janelle looked up to see Mrs. Miller and her clique. She frowned inwardly, not wanting to deal with them, but social decorum demanded a polite nod.

The women sauntered over, their voices dripping with false sympathy.

"We were just talking about you. We thought that after such a huge scandal, you'd be too devastated to even get out of bed."

"We were even planning to stop by later to check on you, to offer some words of comfort."

Janelle frowned. "Comfort me about what?"

"Oh, don't pretend," Mrs. Miller said with a sly smile. "We've all heard about the Huber family's little... incident!"

"My, you were so happy a while back, shopping for baby things, touring maternity wards... The whole social circle thought the Huber family was finally expecting. But it turns out..."

"The Sutton family has some nerve, don't they? Passing off someone else's child as

a Huber. Trying to make your family raise another man's baby!"

"You're lucky you found out early. Imagine raising the child for a decade before

discovering the truth. How humiliating would that be!"

They had all assumed the previous pregnancy rumors were about Beatrix, so now

they were reveling in Janelle's perceived misfortune.

Mrs. Sewell chimed in, "Humiliation is one thing, but I worry about Mr. and Mrs.

Huber's health! Can they withstand such a blow?"

"We did warn you at the hospital,

dear. Don't celebrate too early. A pregnancy doesn't mean you'll get to hold a baby! You were so angry then, but it turns out we were right, weren't we?"

"Sigh, every wife in our circle wants to be a grandmother. But not all of us are blessed with such good fortune!"

"Whether you'll ever see a grandchild... well, that's in the hands of the universe now, isn't it? It depends on whether you've been blessed with enough merit in this life!"

The implication was clear: Janelle's inability to become a grandmother was a result of her bad luck and poor character.

Before Janelle could erupt, Mrs.

Sewell added, "We don't mean to be

harsh, but with a son like yours you

and Mr. Huber really shouldn't get your hopes up. The higher the hope, the greater the disappointment!"

Another woman scoffed, "Honestly, Mrs. Huber, you just have to learn to let it go. As long as you aren't embarrassed, you can make everyone else feel awkward instead."

The women covered their mouths, laughing openly.

Janelle's face turned crimson with rage. "So we can't have grandchildren, but you can? The pot calling the kettle black. I wonder who should really be embarrassed!"

The women just continued their taunts.

Chapter 1665

"At least we didn't go around looking at maternity wards!"

"And we certainly didn't broadcast to everyone that we were expecting a

grandchild!"

"But the main point is, our sons haven't declared themselves lifelong bachelors!"

"Mrs. Huber, don't blame us for laughing. In this lifetime, you are never going to hold a grandchild!"

"How dare you say I'll never have a grandchild?" Janelle seethed.

"It's just a fact," one of them retorted. "If the Huber family ever has a grandchild, I'll come crawling to your door to congratulate you!"

"That's right! We'll all come crawling!"

Janelle was furious. She slammed her hand on the table. "You..."

Speechless with rage, she shot them a final glare, turned on her heel, and stormed out, leaving her expensive order of broths and delicacies behind.

A staff member hurried after her. "Mrs. Huber, please wait. We are so sorry you had an unpleasant experience in our establishment."

"We will have your order delivered to your home later. Please accept this small dessert as a token of our owner's apology."

Janelle didn't refuse. She accepted the small box with a curt thank you, got in her car, and left.

Upstairs, a young man stood by the window, one hand in his pocket, his eyes narrowed as he watched Janelle's car drive away.

Only when it was out of sight did he look away. He pulled out his phone, found a photo of Winona, and a cold smile touched his lips.

"Winona. I'm back. Long time no see."

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In the hospital, Keaton was lying alone in bed, lost in thought.

His brow was creased, a heavy weight on his mind.

When he saw Janelle walk in, he quickly smoothed his expression. "Mom."

Janelle walked to his bedside. Noticing Winona was absent, she asked, "Where's Winona?"

Keaton saw the redness in his mother's eyes and frowned.

"She went home last night. Mom, what's wrong?"

Janelle didn't mention the encounter with the other women. She just asked, "Why did Winona go home?"

Keaton studied her expression. "She needed to rest properly. She wasn't sleeping well here."

Janelle asked cautiously, "You two didn't have a fight, did you?"

"No!" Keaton shook his head immediately. "Did you? Did you and Dad have a fight?" "Don't be silly," Janelle retorted. "Can't you ever wish us well?"

"Your eyes are all red," Keaton said. "Who upset you? Tell your son, and I'll go take care of them for you."

Janelle sighed. "The best way for you to be a good son is to get along with Winona. Is she coming today?"

"I don't know."

"You haven't contacted her?" Janelle asked.

"She left late last night, so she's probably still sleeping in. I didn't want to disturb her, so I haven't called."

Janelle checked the time. It was indeed likely that Winona was still asleep.

She turned her attention back to Keaton. "How are you feeling today? Still nauseous?"

"Much better," Keaton said.

Janelle remarked, "It seems your

nausea was all in your head. The moment it was confirmed that

Beatrix's baby isn't yours, you

stopped feeling sick. If that child had been yours, you'd probably still be throwing up."

Keaton remained silent.

He actually attributed his recovery to Elysia's custom tonic. He had woken up feeling queasy, but after finishing the medicinal brew, he'd felt much better.

"Elysia must be up by now. I'll call

her and ask if Winona is coming net

today, Janelle said pulling out her. phone to call Elysia.

As she did, Keaton discreetly sent a text to his driver waiting downstairs.

[My mom looks like she's been crying. What happened?]"

Chapter 1666

Right now, Elysia was at home making a pot of chicken soup for Winona.

When her phone rang with Janelle's name on the screen, she quickly answered. "Hey, Janelle."

"Elysia, you're up?"

"Yeah, I've been up for a while."

"Are you with Winona?"

Elysia paused. The mention of Winona made her uneasy. After all, Winona's pregnancy was still a secret from the Huber family.

She swallowed nervously. "Winona's still asleep. Did you need her for something, Janelle?"

"Oh, it's nothing major," Janelle said. "I just stopped by the hospital to drop off some food for her, but she wasn't there, so I figured I'd ask you."

Elysia forced a smile into her voice. "She's been a little worn out lately, so she went home last night to catch up on sleep."

"Where did she go?" Janelle asked immediately. "She can't be staying at Riverside Manor, right?"

"No, she didn't go back to Riverside Manor. She knows she can't stay there," Elysia reassured her. "Don't you worry about her. I'll have her call you back as soon as she

wakes up."

Janelle nodded on the other end of the line. "Okay, good, good. Let her get her rest."

After a bit more small talk, they hung up. Elysia glanced at her messages. She'd texted Winona half an hour ago with no reply. She was definitely still asleep.

She put her phone away and went back to prepping the ingredients for Winona's meal.

Back at the hospital, Janelle put her phone away, a little disappointed that she hadn't gotten to see or even hear Winona.

She handed the pastry box she'd brought to Keaton. "Here, you can have these. Lucky you."

Keaton had just finished reading a text from the driver and knew what had happened with Mrs. Sewell. A bitter taste filled his mouth, a mix of anger and frustration. But while he was angry at Mrs. Sewell and her cronies, he was even angrier at himself. He really couldn't make his parents proud; all he ever did was disappoint them.

Taking a deep breath, he asked nonchalantly, "What's this?"

"It's from that new pastry shop that just opened in Jindale City," Janelle said. "It's super popular. Give it a try."

Keaton glanced at the box. "Looks pretty good."

"Tastes even better," Janelle boasted.

Keaton picked one up and took a bite, nodding in approval. "Yeah, not bad."

"It just opened, but it's already the talk of the town among all the ladies," Janelle explained. "The line to get anything is insanely long. I bought these for Winona, but she wasn't here."

Keaton gave a playful nudge. "You're spoiling her, Mom. She hasn't even signed the papers yet and you're

already treating her like the favorite child. Besides, I thought

mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law were supposed to be natural

enemies. Why are you so nice to

Winona?"

Janelle scoffed. "That's just nonsense! There's no such thing as 'natural enemies.' It's a two-way street. If a mother-in-law treats her daughter-in-law with kindness the daughter-in-law won't treat her poorly in return. Relationships are built on mutual respect. "

Keaton smiled. "You're a good mother-in-law."

"Well, I need a daughter-in-law first," she retorted. "You have to actually let me *become* a mother-in-law."

Keaton suddenly felt a wave of emotion. "What if... what if I never get married? Would you and Dad really be unhappy forever?"

Janelle looked at her son, seeing the serious expression on his face. She

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answered just as seriously, "Of course not. We might always be hoping for a daughter-in-law and grandkids, but your happiness what's most important. As long as you're happy, that's all that matters."

The words hit Keaton harder than he expected. He reached out and pulled Janelle into a hug. "Mom, I don't know how I got so lucky to have you. If I had to do it all over again, I'd choose you as my mother every single time."

Janelle was taken aback for a second. "Of course I would!"

"Promise me," Keaton said. "That no matter what, you'll always be in my corner."

Janelle burst out laughing. "Alright, alright. Don't be silly. You're a thirty-year-old man, still acting like a little boy with his mom."

As he held her, his tone shifted abruptly. "Actually, Winona and I aren't together."

Janelle froze. "?"

She tried to pull away, but Keaton held her tight, refusing to let go. He couldn't bring himself to look her in the eye, so he just kept talking. "I'm sorry, Mom. Winona and I... we lied to you. We only pretended to be a couple to make you and Dad happy."

Chapter 1667

"Winona doesn't like me, and I don't like her," Keaton continued, his voice thick with emotion. "We're not getting married, we're not having kids, and she's never going to give you grandchildren!"

Janelle's voice trembled. "What... what are you saying?"

Keaton felt a thick lump in his throat. "I'm sorry, Mom. On behalf of both me and Winona, I'm sorry."

Janelle finally broke free from his grasp, her eyes red as she stared at him. "Tell me the truth. Did you and Winona have a fight last night?"

Keaton shook his head. "No. I'm telling you the truth because I can't stand to lie to you anymore." And he couldn't stand the thought of them constantly bothering Winona, putting her in an awkward position. As long as he kept up the charade, his parents would keep fussing over her. For Winona, their concern must feel like a heavy burden.

"I'm not in the mood for jokes right now," Janelle said, her voice sharp with pain. "I'm going to ask you one last time. Are you telling the truth?"

Keaton nodded seriously. "Yes."

Janelle's jaw tightened. "So... you don't have a child out of wedlock either?"

Keaton was a bit confused by the question but nodded again. "No!"

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure!" Keaton insisted. "Mom, you and Dad want a grandchild so badly. If I had one, don't you think I would have told you by now?"

That was the final straw. Janelle burst into tears, grabbing a decorative pillow and flailing at him with it. "You little monster! You're going to be the death of me! Your father isn't here right now, but you can bet if he found out, he'd kill you!"

Keaton didn't flinch, letting her vent her frustration. "I'm sorry, Mom."

Janelle sobbed as she swung the pillow. "Talk about a bad omen! Your grandfather must have been turning in his grave. He came to your dad in a dream last night and chewed him out, and now you pull this stunt on me today!"

The door opened and Tarquin walked in, freezing at the sight of Keaton being assaulted with a pillow. "?"

Seeing Tarquin, Janelle threw the pillow down and stormed out of the room in a huff.

Keaton immediately grabbed his phone and called the driver downstairs. "My mom is on her way down. She's really emotional and upset@ight now. Keep an eye on her, get her home safely, and make sure my dad stays with her."

Tarquin walked in as Keaton hung up. "What's wrong with Janelle? What happened?"

Keaton sighed and leaned back against the headboard. Ignoring the no-smoking sign, he lit a cigarette. "I told her the truth about me and Winona. She didn't take it well."

Tarquin studied Keaton for a

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moment, his brow furrowing. Keaton looked terrible; it was obvious he hadn't slept at all. Thinking about Winona's pregnancy, Tarquin let out a quiet sigh. He sat down on the edge of the bed, lit cigarette of his

own, and joined him. "Why tell her

now, all of a sudden?"

"Guilty conscience," Keaton said. "I just didn't want to lie anymore."

Tarquin remained silent.

Keaton continued, "The higher their hopes, the bigger the

disappointment. They thought Winona and I were actually dating, so they kept expecting us to get married and have kids. And they wouldn't stop bothering Winona. She shouldn't have to keep dealing with them."

"So you want to cut ties with her?" Tarquin asked.

"That's not it," Keaton explained. "It's just... there's nothing between me and Winona. She's not obligated to keep managing my parents' feelings."

Tarquin asked bluntly, "Do you have feelings for her?"

Keaton flicked the ash from his cigarette. "We've been over this. I don't like her, and she doesn't like me."

"Have you ever thought about being with her?" Tarquin pressed.

Keaton paused for a moment, then shook his head. "No."

Tarquin frowned, his tone serious. "Keaton, be honest with me. You don't have any feelings for Winona at all?"

Seeing how serious he was, Keaton grew suspicious and turned the question back on him. "First, you be honest with me. Did Winona say something to Elysia?"

Chapter 1668

"I'm asking you," Tarquin deflected.

Keaton stared at him in silence for a few seconds before answering seriously, "She's great. She has a good head on her shoulders, a great personality, she's smart, easy-going, not dramatic at all. Our hobbies line up, she's stunning, carries herself with such grace, and has this magnetic presence... she's exactly my type."

He paused. "But... I just want to be a real friend to her, someone she can confide in. I never thought about dating her."

Tarquin's lips thinned. "You slept together. How can you just be friends after that?"

Keaton sighed. "I really regret sleeping with her."

"Regret is useless. You can't turn back time," Tarquin said.

Keaton's brow was heavy with worry. "I know. That's why it's so frustrating. It feels like such a loss. A true friend is hard to find, you know? I really loved the way it felt to just be around her. With her, I could relax. I didn't have to rack my brain trying to figure out how to get her into bed, and I didn't have to be on guard about anything. We have the same interests, the same circle of friends, we could talk for hours. Plus, we've both been seriously burned by love before, so we get each other's pain points."

He let out another long sigh, full of regret. "I should have controlled myself that night. I never should have slept with her! It's such a damn shame!"

"The problem between you two isn't completely unsolvable," Tarquin offered. "Since you feel so good about her, why not try pursuing her? If you become a couple, you can still be each other's confidant. Then you wouldn't have any regrets."

Tarquin believed the baby inside Winona should be born. It would be a terrible waste to lose it. This was likely Keaton's one and only chance to be a father. If he missed this opportunity, the odds of him ever having a child were practically zero. Living in his own bubble of happiness, he felt that a child would make Keaton happy, too. It wasn't that you couldn't be happy without a child, but... from his personal perspective, Tarquin believed this child could make Keaton's life much more fulfilling.

Of course, the decision wasn't Keaton's to make; it was up to Winona. But... if Keaton started pursuing her now, the chances of her keeping the baby would be higher. At least she would see where he stood. That's why he hoped Keaton would go after her.

Tarquin added, "Just imagine a life with Winona. You two get along so well, you'd have a strong, loving marriage. And she and your parents already adore each other, so your family life would be peaceful. Then you have a kid, everyone is overjoyed... the whole Huber line would be smiling down on you."

Keaton looked at Tarquin suspiciously. "Are you here to play matchmaker? Did... did Winona tell you she likes me?"

Tarquin shot him a look. "No! She

hasn't said a thing, so don't get

ahead of yourself. This

is me talking

to you, because I think you two

would be good together."

Keaton sighed again. He had no idea Winona was pregnant. He took a drag from

his cigarette. "I don't want a relationship."

He meant a real, serious relationship.

"Is this still about Clementine?" Tarquin asked.

Keaton shook his head. "No, Clementine is in the past. I can talk about her now without feeling sad or angry. I'm completely over that hurdle."

"Then is it because of Beatrix?" Tarquin tried again.

Keaton paused. "Of course not! What happened between me and Beatrix had nothing to do with love."

"So your not wanting to get married and have kids has nothing to do with any woman?" Tarquin pressed.

Keaton nodded. "Yeah. It used to be

because Clementine hurt me so

badly Now... I think I've just gotten used to my freedom. I don't really want to touch love again."

Chapter 1669

Tarquin silently took a drag from his cigarette. As long as it wasn't because of another woman, there was still a chance. Otherwise, things between him and Winona would be even more difficult.

After a moment, Tarquin asked, "When you first heard Beatrix say she was pregnant with your child, what was your first reaction?"

Keaton let out a heavy breath. "I was surprised. Shocked, actually. I thought it was really mine."

Tarquin watched him. "Did you consider letting her keep the baby?"

Keaton shook his head without a second thought. "No. If it was really mine, I would have told her to get an abortion."

Tarquin stared at him.

Keaton took a drag from his cigarette and explained, "That child was just a tool for Beatrix to use. She didn't love it. And since I didn't even like the mother, the chances of me loving the child were slim to none. Think about it, if its own parents don't love it, how could it ever be happy? If you can't guarantee a child will be born into a world where it's loved enough, what's the point of bringing it into the world? Just to let it suffer?"

"...What if a different woman was pregnant with your child?" Tarquin pressed. "Would you let her keep it?"

Keaton looked at him, confused. "?"

Tarquin decided to be direct. "Let's say, Winona. If Winona was pregnant with your child, what would you do? Tell her to get an abortion or to keep it?"

"...I've never thought about that," Keaton admitted.

"Then think about it now."

Keaton actually did think for a moment, but his answer was evasive. "I don't like to get lost in what-ifs."

It was an answer that answered nothing.

Tarquin fell silent. He wanted to just tell Keaton the truth, but it didn't feel like the right time. For one, he didn't know what Winona wanted. And two, Keaton was stuck in this 'no relationships' mindset. If Keaton found out now, he might impulsively rush

to Winona and tell her to terminate the pregnancy, destroying any chance of a different outcome.

After a moment of silence, Tarquin glanced at the time and changed the subject. "How are you feeling today?"

"Much better. I'm getting discharged today."

"Elysia wanted me to tell you to stick with the tonic for a few more days. If you still don't feel well, let her know and she'll adjust the formula for you."

Keaton nodded. "Tell her thanks for me. Oh, and take this back to her. Let her try it."

Tarquin glanced at the food box. "Where'd this come from?"

"My mom bought it for Winona," Keaton said. "Apparently, this pastry shop is the hottest new thing. The lines are crazy long."

"Janelle really does like Winona," Tarquin remarked.

"The feeling's mutual. They'd get along great even without me in the picture."

Tarquin pressed his lips together, picking up the box and standing up. "Alright, I'm heading out. Call me if you need anything."

"Will do. See ya."

Tarquin got to the door but couldn't stop himself from turning back for one last comment. "Think carefully about your future. And think about you and Winona. If you have even the slightest feeling for her, you should go after her now. Don't wait until someone else snatches her up and you end up regretting it."

Keaton was left speechless. Tarquin had been acting like a full-on matchmaker, constantly pushing him and Winona together. This

wasn't like Tarquin at all. Benet

and Winona had known each other for ages. Why was Tarquin only starting this push now?

Could it be...

he

Did Winona just realize she had feelings for him today, and then asked Tarquin to come sound him out and act as her advocate?

Keaton was stunned, shocked by his own thought. Winona... likes him? Seriously?

Leaning against the headboard, Keaton's mind raced, a dazed look on his face. He considered every

angle and possibility, but the option

thing that never even crossed his mind was pregnancy. He would never, in a million years, have

imagined it. He had long ago made peace with the fact that he-and by

extension, the Huber family

line-would end with him.

Chapter 1670

Tarquin left the hospital, but instead of heading to the office, he drove straight home. He wanted to subtly sound Winona out, through Elysia, about the baby. Did she want to keep it or not? He couldn't ask directly, so his only option was to go home and talk to his wife.

On the way, he hit a traffic jam caused by an accident, coming to a dead stop right in front of a shop called 'Limerence.' Through the car window, Tarquin stared at the sign. Something about it felt familiar, but he couldn't quite place it.

A police officer informed the drivers that it would be at least an hour before the road was clear. Since this was the only way home, Tarquin simply pulled over and parked in a public spot. He put on a mask, turned off the engine, and walked toward the small shop.

He lingered at the entrance, his gaze fixed on the sign with a curious intensity before finally pushing through the glass door. As soon as he stepped inside, a strange feeling washed over him. His eyes were met with the stylized letter 'W' integrated into every corner of the decor. It was plastered on the walls at a glance, it was all he could see. A closer look revealed that the 'W' was part of the word 'Winona' printed in a subtle, elegant script, but the 'W' was so bold and prominent that it dominated the entire design.

A staff member greeted him warmly. "Good afternoon, sir. What can I get for you?"

Tarquin pulled his thoughts together and ordered the shop's popular love-themed signature cake, along with a selection of other small pastries. After ordering, he found a random seat and picked up a pamphlet about the shop. The owner was a dashing, thirty-year-old man from a prominent family with a long history in Koryon- old money, essentially.

As he was reading, Tarquin suddenly sensed a strange gaze on him. His head snapped up, his senses on high alert. All he saw was a female employee who had been staring at him. Caught in the act, she gave him an awkward smile.

Tarquin rose from his seat and walked over, his expression unreadable. The employee grew flustered. "Can I help you, sir?"

He stopped beside her and glanced around, seeing no one suspicious. "Just checking on my order," he said flatly.

"Oh, it's not ready yet," she said quickly. "Everything in our shop is made to order. It'll be a little while longer."

Tarquin didn't say anything else and returned to his seat. He frowned, his head lowered in thought. That strange stare... it hadn't come from the employee.

A hidden door to the stockroom opened, and a handsome young man stepped out. He cast another meaningful glance at Tarquin before heading toward the back kitchen. I t make this cake myself, he announced to the staff. "You all can handle the other orders."

Everyone watched as he rolled up his sleeves, tied on an apron, tucked his hair under a chef's hat and began crafting the cake with intense focus. The kitchen staff was baffled. Why was the boss suddenly getting hands dirty?

After a while, the cake was finished. The man stared at it for a moment, then took out his phone and

snapped a picture. He personalet

packaged it and gave an instruction to the employee "Tell the customer it's best enjoyed within two hours. The texture will be affected if he waits too long."

The employee was confused. This cake was clearly not one of the standard items they sold. It wasn't even in their system. What was their boss up to? If the customer had been a woman, they'd all suspect he was interested in her.

Not daring to ask questions, the employee took the cake out. "Sir, your order is ready."

"Thank you," Tarquin said, putting his phone away and getting up to leave.

On the second floor of the small shop, the man stood by the window, one hand in his pocket, a cigarette between his fingers. He watched with narrowed eyes as Tarquin walked away.

When Tarquin got home, Elysia had just finished preparing the soup for Winona. Seeing him back so unexpectedly, she asked, curious, "What are you doing home at this hour?"