

Hitched 1671

Chapter 1671

Tarquin Bradford didn't mention he wanted to sound out Winona Newsom. Instead, he just held up the bag of pastries and a small cake box.

"I managed to wrap things up early at the office today, so I headed straight home. Picked you up some treats on the way."

Elysia Thorne was packing some homemade comfort food. Tarquin popped a piece of a pastry into her mouth.

"Have a taste."

"...That's delicious. Where did you get it?"

"A new spot that just opened up on the corner," Tarquin said. "Heard it's gone viral online."

Elysia glanced at the little cake, her brow furrowing slightly...

"What is it?" Tarquin asked.

Elysia frowned, staring at the cake. "This... I've seen this design before. I know I have."

"You've seen it before?" Tarquin asked, intrigued.

Elysia stared at it a little longer. "I feel like I have, but also... maybe not."

Tarquin was speechless.

After another moment, Elysia shook her head. "No, I must be mistaken."

She didn't dwell on it, looking over the assortment of treats. "I'll pick out a few of these to send over to Winona later."

Not giving it much more thought, Tarquin asked, "You're going to see Winona?"

"Not me. I'll have them delivered."

"Where is she now?"

"A hotel."

"Why's she staying at a hotel?"

"She wants some time alone."

"Why does she suddenly want to be alone?"

Elysia pursed her lips and turned to him. "My, you're full of questions today, aren't you?"

Tarquin chuckled. "Just curious. Are all these for her?"

"Yep."

"

"Send me her location. I'll have a driver take them over."

"Okay."

As soon as Tarquin got the location, he immediately forwarded it to Keaton Huber.

[Winona's current location.]

Keaton had just stepped inside his beach house, his shoes still on, when the notification pinged.

He stood in the entryway and texted back a single question mark. [?]

Tarquin replied: [If you want to see her, you can go straight there.]

Keaton wrote back, [Why would I want to see her?]

Tarquin didn't respond. Keaton texted again: [I'm not going to see her.]

He stared at his phone for a long time. When Tarquin still didn't reply, he finally took off his shoes and went inside.

Slouching on the sofa, he zoned out for a while, but he couldn't resist. He opened the location link Tarquin had sent.

Winona was close by, just a few minutes' drive away.

If Tarquin hadn't talked to him today, if he hadn't had that showdown with his mom, he probably would have gone to her.

And what would he do? A drink, a conversation—it didn't matter. He just craved her company; she had a way of cutting through his noise.

But liking to be around someone wasn't the same as being *in love* with them.

He had fallen hard once before, truly, deeply in love with someone... so he knew

what it felt like. And whatever he felt for Winona, it wasn't that.

Which meant he couldn't give her the future she deserved.

So, regardless of whether Winona liked him or not, he shouldn't lead her on. If he didn't love her, he needed to stay away.

He couldn't treat Winona like all the other girls...

As he thought about it, an

inexplicable frustration washed over

him. It felt like a heavy weight on his

chest, a pressure he couldn't

release, leaving him suffocated and

miserable.

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He closed the navigation app and tossed his phone aside. Grabbing a beer from the

table, he chugged half of it in one go.

After sitting alone for a while, he picked up his phone again and made a call.

"Send a couple of guys to the

Seaview Resort Hotel to protect

She's in room 1808. Just keep a discreet watch, don't let her know you're there.

Zane Livingston was still out there somewhere, which meant Winona was still in potential danger. Even he didn't love her, he didn't want anything to happen to her.

Chapter 1672

After arranging for bodyguards to protect Winona, Keaton tossed his phone aside again. He picked up his beer and stared at the distant lighthouse.

Even though its light wasn't on during the day, he'd always loved looking at it. Day or night, the lighthouse had a calming effect.

But... being back here, his mind was flooded with images from that night with Winona... Their easy conversation while they were sober. The satisfying clink of their beer bottles as they drank. The memory of Winona pinning him down, straddling him, teasing him... and the raw heat of their bodies pressed together against the floor-to-ceiling window...

Keaton's throat tightened, his breath hitching as the memory took hold. He finished his beer, threw the empty bottle into the trash, and went to get two bottles of whiskey. He started drinking alone.

His stomach was still a mess. He'd drink, then throw up. He was inexplicably on edge today, a deep, frustrating agitation. As if in defiance, he'd just keep drinking after getting sick. Drink, puke, repeat... He had no idea when he finally passed out.

When he woke again, it was evening. He sat up with a sharp groan, drenched in a cold sweat. He'd had a nightmare.

He dreamed that Zane had kidnapped Winona, holding a knife to her throat... He had screamed 'No!' with everything he had, but Zane had killed her anyway.

He'd rushed over and pulled her into his arms, screaming hysterically for a doctor. Winona had leaned against his chest, looking at him with despair and pain... She'd raised a hand to touch his face but was gone before she could say a word.

He'd cried, calling her name over and over, getting no response. He had felt so helpless, cradling her body while screaming at the universe for its cruelty.

The raw agony of the dream clung to him like a shroud, leaving him trembling even as reality settled in. Keaton's heart clenched painfully. He lifted a hand to the corner of his eye... and looked at his damp fingertips. He frowned, confused.

It was just a dream. Why was he crying? Besides, he didn't love her, so what did it matter if she died? If she died, she died...

Smack! Keaton slapped himself hard across the face.

What the hell was he thinking? He couldn't jinx her like that!

Keaton pressed his temples, forcing himself out of the dream's grip and back to reality. He called one of the bodyguards. "Is everything okay with Winona?"

Whatever the bodyguard said made him leap to his feet, his face instantly pale. He bolted for the door, shouting as he ran, "Why the hell didn't you tell me sooner! What were my goddamn instructions?!"

He didn't even stop for a jacket, bolting out the door in his slippers with his car keys in hand.

The bodyguard, hearing his fury, tried to explain. "Keaton, you told us to watch out for Zane, right? The guy who went in didn't look like Zane..."

Keaton was frantic with anger and fear. "Did I tell you to watch Zane?! I told you to protect. Winona! The point WINONA! Don't you people understand English?! If anything happens to her, I... you'll all have hell to pay..."

Cursing a blue streak, Keaton floored his sports car and screeched to a halt in front of the hotel. One of the bodyguards was already waiting by the entrance, He did a double-take when he saw Keaton' get out. Keaton was always so put-together, but today...

The bodyguard didn't have time to think, rushing forward. "Keaton, calm down. It

might not be what you think. Ms. Newsom should be fine, she—"

Keaton's eyes were bloodshot and wild. "'Should be'? I need to be certain! I need to know she's safe and sound-without a scratch on her!"

Without waiting for another word, Keaton stormed into the hotel lobby. The hotel manager saw the commotion, and moved to intercept him, but Keaton barked out his own name. The manager, hearing the name 'Keaton Huber,' froze and didn't dare stop him.

Keaton burst into the elevator, frantically riding it up to her floor. As he neared the room, he heard the sound of a woman's pitiful sobbing. "Winona!" he yelled.

Just as he shouted her name, the woman let out a sharp cry. "Ah-!"

Keaton's heart leaped into his throat. He kicked the door open with a single, powerful blow. A woman wearing only a man's white dress shirt was lying face down on the bed, her hands and feet tied.

Chapter 1673

A man wearing nothing but boxer shorts was standing over her, holding a whip. The sight hit Keaton like a physical blow; his vision clouded with a murderous, bloodshot haze.

"You motherfucker!"

With a roar, he launched himself forward and threw a punch. The man didn't even have time to react before he was knocked to the ground. Keaton pulled the duvet over the woman, then grabbed the man by the collar and rained down a flurry of punches on his face.

He was like a man possessed, hissing through clenched teeth, "You dared to hit her! You son of a bitch, you actually dared to hit her! I'll kill you—"

He was so enraged his lips were trembling, his eyes burning with a raw, murderous intensity.

"Keaton!" A bodyguard rushed in to pull him off.

Keaton violently shook him off. "Get lost!"

"Keaton, stop!" the bodyguard pleaded.

"Get the hell out!" Keaton roared.

The bodyguard swallowed hard, terrified. He had been with Keaton for over a decade and had never seen him this furious. This was pure, unadulterated rage.

Unable to pull him away, the bodyguard stood by anxiously. "Keaton! Ms. Newsom isn't in this room!"

Keaton landed several more hard blows before the words registered. He whipped his head around to look at the bodyguard. "What did you say?"

"Ms. Newsom isn't in this room," the bodyguard repeated quickly.

Keaton paused, then turned to look at the bed. The woman's bonds were now untied, and she was huddled in the corner, clutching the duvet to her body and sobbing in terror. When her eyes met Keaton's, she was so scared she couldn't even cry out loud, just shuddered with silent, choked sobs.

It was only then that Keaton got a clear look at her face. It wasn't Winona. Her hair style and color were just similar.

Keaton frowned. "Where's Winona?"

The woman had no idea who he was talking about and just shook her head frantically. "I... I... I don't know... *sob*..."

Keaton got up and searched the room.

"I already looked," the bodyguard said. "There's no sign of Ms. Newsom."

Keaton did his own thorough search. Seeing no sign of Winona, he finally

remembered he had a phone and called her. The phone rang for a while before she answered. "Hello?"

Hearing her voice, Keaton's heart hammered against his ribs. "Where are you?"

"I'm at Elysia's place. What's wrong?"

Keaton: "You're at Elysia's house?"

"Yeah."

"...And you're okay?"

"Of course. What's going on?"

Keaton let out a long breath, the tension draining out of him.

completely. The heart that hadal net

lodged in his throat finally dropped back into place.

Winona seemed to sense something was off and asked again, "Did something happen?"

Keaton glanced at the man he'd nearly beaten to death, then at the terrified, crying woman... His head throbbed.

"It's nothing. When did you go to Elysia's?"

"I just got here," Winona said.

Keaton let out another quiet sigh of relief. "Got it. I've got something to deal with, so I'll call you back."

He hung up and turned to the woman. "When did you two check in?"

She trembled. "Eleven this morning."

Keaton was speechless. So, Winona had already checked out and left before he'd even sent the

bodyguards over. That's why they

only knew a man had entered,

the

room, but had no idea the woman inside wasn't Winona.

Just as he was piecing it all together, the police arrived. The moment the woman

saw them, she started screaming for help.

"Officer, help me! Help! *sob*... This man suddenly broke into our room and just started beating up my boyfriend..."

"We don't even know him! He almost killed my boyfriend, boohoo..."

Keaton remained silent.

The police officer saw the bloodied

man

call the floor and immediately

called for an ambulance before Who called this in?

The woman on the bed said, "Me, me, me... I secretly called the police."

The officer then turned to Keaton. "Did you do this to him?"

Keaton gave a grim nod. "...Yeah."

The officer frowned. "Why did you break into their room and assault him?"

Keaton sighed. "...If I said this was all a misunderstanding, would you believe me?"

Chapter 1674

At Number One Mansion, Winona felt a flutter of unease after hanging up the phone.

"Mr. Bradford, could you call Keaton and check on him? I feel like something's wrong on his end."

"What's the matter with him?" Tarquin asked.

Winona shook her head. "I'm not sure, he just didn't sound right."

Tarquin handed freshly squeezed juices to her and Elysia. "I'll call him now. You two chat. Don't worry about him."

Tarquin stepped outside with his phone, and Elysia sat down with Winona on the sofa. She placed a comforting hand on Winona's wrist. "You look good. Everything's fine."

Winona took her hand, her expression serious. "Elysia, I want to have this baby."

Elysia was taken aback. "Are you sure?"

Winona nodded firmly. "Yes! I'm sure!"

"...Here's what I'm thinking," she continued. "I've already decided I'm not getting into another relationship, let alone getting married and having kids. Sooner or later, I'm going to be lonely. Having a child with me would be... nice."

"When I'm old, my child might not always be by my side, but I'll have someone to care about. No matter where they are in the world, I'll be thinking of them."

"When you have someone to care about, you don't feel so alone, right?"

Elysia nodded. "That's right. A child gives you a tether. When you have that, your heart feels full."

Winona went on, "I used to not understand you. How could you have a baby when you didn't even know who the father was? It's so hard for a single woman to raise a child!"

"But now, I think I get it. Being pregnant is this magical thing. It's like it awakens a mother's love you didn't know you had."

"If I weren't pregnant right now and you asked me hypothetically if I'd keep it, I'd definitely say no. But now that I know I'm pregnant can't bring myself to do so. The thought of not keeping him... it just breaks my heart. I know he's probably just a tiny little thing right now, not even a real baby, right?"

Elysia smiled. She understood exactly what Winona was feeling. After all, she had been through the same thing. "He's very small right now. It'll be around three months before he starts to look like a tiny baby. Winona, if you want to have him, I support you completely."

Winona smiled and nodded, then added, "But I'm not going to tell Keaton. I'm afraid he'll try to talk me out of it."

As the father, Keaton had a right to say something. Winona couldn't guess what his decision would be, and she didn't want to risk it.

"I'll have the baby first. It's not like I need him for child support. Besides, Janelle and Richard are reasonable people. Even if they find out about the baby later, they'll just be happy. They would never try to fight me for custody."

Elysia understood Winona's reasoning. Keaton had always publicly declared he would never get married or have kids. If he knew about this baby, he might not agree to let Winona keep it.

"Then let's not say anything for now. It'll save you the stress of him trying to change your mind."

Winona nodded. "Exactly! And I hear that stress can affect the baby's health and... well, even how cute they turn out! I need to stay happy!"

Elysia smiled. "What about your work?"

Winona shrugged helplessly. "It's definitely going to take a huge hit. I'll have to pay a penalty, too. I can't film now that I'm pregnant, so I have to break my contract. Oh well, so be it. The baby is what's most important."

Elysia sighed softly. "If the penalty is too high, you can use my money."

Winona smiled again. "Thanks! If I need it, I won't be shy about asking. Oh, and

besides Keaton, please help me keep this from my parents for now. I want to wait until I'm further along to tell them."

Chapter 1675

Elysia nodded. "Okay. So where are you planning to stay? Why don't you just stay here with me? I can take care of you."

Winona shook her head. "Let me handle my work stuff first. I have to go out of town for a bit, tonight actually."

"You're leaving town?" Elysia asked, surprised.

"Yeah, my agent has already called me over a dozen times today. I have to go deal with the contract termination in person."

Elysia was worried. "Can't you push it off? You're still in the early stages, you should be resting and taking it easy."

Winona said, "I can't. The longer I wait, the more complicated it will get. If I handle it now, I can minimize some of the losses. Don't worry, I'll take good care of myself and the baby."

Elysia frowned. "How long will you be gone?"

Winona thought for a moment. "It shouldn't be too long. A month or two at most, I think."

"But isn't Caroline's birthday in a few days?" Elysia asked. "You're not staying for her party?"

Winona said, "My parents think I'm busy and already booked a trip for themselves. I'll let the two of them have their romantic getaway. I don't want to get in the way. I'll just send my gift ahead of time!"

Outside in the yard, Tarquin couldn't get through to Keaton, so he had someone look into what was going on. Just as he got the report, Keaton's call came through. "You were looking for me?"

Tarquin's eyes narrowed. "Winona asked me to call you. She said she thinks something happened to you."

"She knows?" Keaton asked, surprised.

"She doesn't know the details," Tarquin said. "But she's very worried about you."

Keaton's lips moved, but no sound came out for a moment. "I'm fine. I'm already out of the police station."

"Did you settle things with them?" Tarquin asked.

"Yeah."

They had settled it privately. Keaton took full responsibility and paid the couple a hefty sum. They had happily agreed to drop the matter.

Tarquin said, "I heard you nearly beat the guy to a pulp. You're thirty years old. Why are you still acting like a hot-headed teenager?"

Keaton pressed his lips together. "You've got some nerve. This is att your fault! You're the one who, mener location. Why didn't you tell me she'd already checked out?!"

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Tarquin's eyes narrowed. "She's not my wife. I can't be expected to keep tabs on her 24/7. You, on the other hand, d, did you leave your brain ap home? Didn't you think to check who was in the room before you started throwing punches?"

Keaton sighed. "I was impulsive."

"Why were you so impulsive?" Tarquin pressed.

"I thought Winona was in trouble," Keaton said. "How was I supposed to know it was just a couple playing some kinky game?"

"And even if Winona was being hurt," Tarquin asked, "why would that make you so frantic?"

"I..." Keaton snapped, "You entrusted her safety to me, didn't you? I have to be responsible. If something happened to her, how would I explain it to Elysia?"

Tarquin called his bluff without missing a beat. "I didn't ask you to arrange bodyguards for her this time."

Keaton was speechless.

He couldn't win this argument, so he decided to end it. "Is there anything else? If not, I'm hanging up."

"If you like her, you have to go for it," Tarquin said. "She's at my house right now. Are you coming or not?"

"Hell no!" Keaton snapped and hung up the phone.

A moment later, a series of texts came through.

[Don't you dare say anything crazy to Winona. And don't start any rumors about us. I'm serious, I don't like her! If you say anything, will seriously get pissed at you]

Tarquin pursed his lips, ignored the message, and put his phone away before heading back inside.

Chapter 1676

Seeing him return, Elysia and Winona quickly changed the subject from pregnancy.

"Did you get a hold of Keaton?" Winona asked.

Tarquin nodded. "I did. He got into a fight with someone."

Winona was surprised. "What? Why?"

"Because of you," Tarquin said bluntly.

Winona was speechless. "?!"

Tarquin explained, "He found out you were staying at a hotel and was worried Zane might show up and hurt you, so he arranged for bodyguards. But you checked out early, and a couple moved into the room."

"When Keaton heard from the bodyguards that a man had entered your room, he lost it. He rushed to the hotel and kicked the door in."

"He happened to see the guy hitting a woman and thought it was you. He saw red and beat the man up."

Winona was stunned. "...?!"

Tarquin added, "Keaton wasn't hurt, and he's already settled things privately with the couple, so you don't need to worry."

"...Why didn't he mention any of this on the phone just now?" Winona asked.

"Probably didn't want to worry you," Tarquin said in a casual tone. "So, are you two dating?"

"What? No!" Winona exclaimed.

Tarquin said pointedly, "Oh? He's so concerned about you, I just assumed you two were secretly together. He doesn't treat you like he does other girls. He cares way, way too much."

Winona was silent.

After Winona left, Elysia immediately cornered Tarquin. "You knew they weren't together, so why ask? And I suspect you were deliberately trying to put in a good word for Keaton!"

"I want them to be together," Tarquin admitted.

Elysia was shocked. "What does it have to do with you whether they get together or not?"

"It has everything to do with me!" Tarquin said. "If they get together, Keaton will be happy, and you won't have to worry about Winona and the baby anymore. It's a win- win for everyone."

Elysia froze. "What baby?!"

"The baby in Winona's belly."

Elysia shot up from the couch. "Who told you?!"

Tarquin gently pulled her back down. "Don't panic. It's just me. I haven't told Keaton."

"How did you know?" Elysia asked again.

"I figured it out," Tarquin said. "Yesterday at the hospital, when you sent me to buy shoes, I sensed something was up."

Elysia was amazed. He could guess from that?!

Tarquin smiled. "You know, your husband is a pretty smart guy."

Elysia was at a loss for words.

Tarquin took her hand, his tone earnest. "Now that there's a baby, if they can be together, it would be the best thing for Winona, the child, and Keaton, right?"

Elysia couldn't deny it. It was true, but...

"Does Keaton even like Winona?" Elysia frowned.

"He says he doesn't," Tarquin replied,

"but his actions say otherwise. I think he likes her a little. And trust me, if he really falls for Winona, he'll clean up his act for good. No more other women."

"...But Winona doesn't like him."

"She doesn't like him now, but feelings can grow. There's no harm in us playing a little matchmaker. Even if they don't get together romantically, they can still build a family bond. As long as things don't get ugly between them, it's good for them and the baby."

Elysia let out a long sigh. He was right.

"How does Winona feel about the baby? Does she want to keep it?" Tarquin asked.

"Yes, she wants to have it and raise it on her own."

Tarquin quietly exhaled in relief. As long as she was keeping the baby, that was what mattered. The rest could be worked on over time.

"Since Keaton doesn't know about the baby yet, Winona will have to go through this alone for now. We'll make Keaton wait on her hand and foot later to make it up to her."

Chapter 1677

Elysia reminded him, "Don't you dare tell Keaton about the baby yet. Winona doesn't want him to know."

Tarquin nodded. "I won't. But we should try to push them together a bit. You should say more nice things about Keaton in front of Winona."

Elysia was silent. She suddenly thought of Zane. "By the way, Winona is going out of town tonight for work. She might be gone for a month or two. Can you arrange some bodyguards to protect her?"

Tarquin questioned, "She's traveling at a time like this? Shouldn't she be resting in the early stages of pregnancy?"

"Winona said she needs to terminate a few contracts with production teams and request a long leave of absence from her company."

Tarquin thought for a moment. "I'll have Tamsin go with her."

Elysia quickly asked, "Is that Axel's really capable female apprentice? The one who pretended to be the illegitimate daughter of the Newsom family before Winona came back?"

Tarquin nodded. "Yes. She's an excellent fighter and very good at taking care of people. And since she's a woman, she can live with Winona and provide close protection."

Elysia nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, yes! Tamsin is perfect. I'll give her a huge bonus for her trouble. I'll let Winona know."

Elysia called Winona to tell her about Tamsin. Tarquin also made a call to arrange things. Afterward, he sent a text to Keaton.

[Winona is going out of town tonight for a month or two. She's going to discuss terminating some contracts.]

The next second, Keaton's call came through. "Why is she terminating her contracts?"

Tarquin didn't mention the pregnancy. Since Winona was going to have the baby anyway, it didn't matter if Keaton knew right now or not.

"I don't know the details. If you want to know, you should ask her yourself."

Keaton frowned. "I helped arrange most of the roles she's taken recently. Is she suddenly terminating them because of me?"

"...Go ask her yourself."

Keaton was frustrated. He had no idea what Winona was thinking. That morning, when Tarquin acted as a

go between he thought it net?

because Winona liked him and had asked Tarquin for help. But if she liked him, why would she terminate her contracts? It felt like she was trying to cut all ties with him.

Could it be that Tarquin went back and told her he didn't like her, so she'd given up

and decided to draw a line in the sand?

While Keaton was lost in thought,

Tarquin said, "Stop overthinking it. You've got it all wrong. If you want to figure it out, you need to go talk to Winona and get your answers. By the way, her flight is at 9:30 tonight."

With that, Tarquin hung up. After being friends for over twenty years, this was as much as he could do to help. Whether Keaton could find his happiness was up to him now.

Keaton was still at his beach house. Listening to the dial tone, he frowned deeply. After a moment's hesitation, he stood up, changed into a fresh set of clothes, and grabbed his car keys on his way out.

At 9:00 PM, at the airport, Winona appeared in the departure lounge wearing sneakers, straight-leg pants, and a mid-length trench coat, with sunglasses and a mask covering her face. She was so well-disguised that only someone who knew her well could recognize her.

But even if no one recognized her, people still cast admiring glances her way. With her great figure and presence, she looked like a model turning heads on a runway, no matter how casually she was dressed.

Tamsin, in athletic wear and sunglasses, pushed a suitcase beside her, looking every bit the part of an assistant. It wasn't time to board yet, so the two found a quiet spot to sit down.

Chapter 1678

Tamsin had noticed it the moment they entered the airport: a strange gaze fixed on them. But it didn't feel hostile, so she ignored it.

About ten minutes later, they got up to go through security and prepare for boarding.

Keaton had been hiding in a corner. He had waited at the airport for over an hour and finally saw her, but he couldn't bring himself to approach her. He could only watch as Winona boarded the plane and disappeared from sight.

Keaton was frustrated, not with anyone else, but with himself. He knew he wasn't acting like himself today, but he didn't know why. He had rushed to the airport to talk to Winona, hadn't he? But when he saw her, all he could do was watch from afar, too afraid to go up to her.

What was he hiding from? Why couldn't he just be straightforward and ask her? If he didn't like her, he should just tell her plainly and clear everything up. But he chose to hide, feeling an unwillingness to make things clear, and he didn't know why.

Keaton couldn't figure himself out anymore, and it was driving him crazy. He watched as Winona's flight took off, then made a call to arrange things for her contract terminations in advance, to prevent her from being given a hard time or extorted when she brought it up.

After the call, Keaton drove back to the Huber estate.

The Huber estate felt like a tomb today, draped in a heavy, suffocating silence.

When the servants saw him, they rushed over. "Keaton, thank God you're back! Please, go see your parents!"

"Mrs. Huber has been crying ever since she got home, and not only could Mr. Huber not console her, but he started tearing up too. They haven't eaten a single thing all day."

A servant speculated, "I wonder if it's because of all the rumors outside? For a while, everyone thought there was going to be good news for the Huber family, but today, someone suddenly said we got our hopes up for nothing! All those people who were secretly jealous of us are now coming out to mock us! I suspect Mr. and Mrs. Huber were upset by all the gossip!"

Carter, the old butler who had worked for the family for decades, and the nanny who had watched Keaton grow up, both asked him, "Keaton, is Ms. Newsom pregnant or not? Is there any happy news for the Huber family?"

Keaton looked at their hopeful faces, a bitter taste in his mouth. "There's no happy news. The people outside are right. We got our hopes up for nothing." Everyone fell silent.

"Carter," Keaton said, "go get my father. Tell him I'm in his study, waiting. It's time for me to face the music."

"What?!" Carter exclaimed.

"Go on," Keaton said seriously. "I feel like I deserve a beating." With that, he turned and walked toward the study.

The Huber family's servants

watched him go, their faces filled with surprise and worry, their eyes turning red. "What's happening to our family? Just a few days ago everyone was so happy."

"He's in the study, waiting to face the music," Carter said. "He wants to take his punishment. We all miss Ms. Newsom. Whenever she visited, the whole house was filled with joy."

"

Carter, looking dejected, went to find Richard Huber. "Mr. Huber, Keaton is back."

Richard roared, "That damn brat! Where is he?"

After relaying Keaton's message,

Carter quickly added, "Mr. Huber,

Keaton doesn't seem right today. He looks exhausted and is in a terrible mood Maybe maybe you could wait a day to discipline him? Det him recover a bit..."

Richard gritted his teeth. He held himself back from storming over, just lashing out with his words. "If he wants to brood in there, then let him! Don't anyone tell him to get up. He needs to apologize to the Huber ancestors he's thirty years old and still acts like a child! Lying about everything! We've spoiled him rotten! Let him rot in that study until he learns his lesson!"

Janelle lay in bed, tears streaming down her face. Her lips moved as if to say something, but no sound came out. She was truly heartbroken today.

Chapter 1679

She hadn't been this upset even when she found out the baby in Beatrix Sutton's womb wasn't a Huber. Even when her son told her he and Winona never planned on having children, she was merely disappointed. But for her son to tell her he was never even with Winona, that all those sweet words were lies... it was too much.

The promised grandchild was gone. The daughter-in-law who was practically at their doorstep was gone. Most importantly, her son had extinguished all their hopes. It wasn't just that they didn't have a grandchild or a daughter-in-law now; it was that they never would.

How could she bear it? Her sorrow today was as deep as her joy had been just days before. She couldn't stop the pain, sniffing and crying.

...

Tarquin heard that Winona had left and knew Keaton was in for a rough night. If the two had talked things out at the airport, Winona wouldn't have had to travel at all. Keaton could have handled the contract terminations with a single phone call.

But Keaton hadn't talked to Winona. So now he was still in the dark, left to suffer. After all, when it came to matters of the heart, others could only do so much. He had to figure it out himself.

"You're dying to tell Keaton that Winona is pregnant, aren't you?" Elysia asked, seeing his troubled expression after she finished getting ready for bed.

Tarquin pulled her into his arms. "No. I wanted to tell him before because I was worried Winona might not keep it. Now that I know she's going to have the baby, I'm not in a hurry to tell him."

Elysia sighed. "It's better not to tell him. It would just make Winona angry if he didn't want it. Besides, this is their private business. Since Winona asked us not to say anything, we shouldn't."

"I know," Tarquin nodded.

Elysia snuggled into his chest. "Any news on Zane?"

"...The police are still looking for him. Nothing yet."

Elysia frowned. "He's a ticking time bomb. We don't know when he'll go off and hurt Winona!"

Tarquin stroked her hair comfortingly. "It won't be easy for him to get close to Winona. And even if he does, with Tamsin there, he won't succeed."

Elysia suddenly thought of Beatrix, her eyes widening. "We still have to watch out for Beatrix! Did you mention her to Tamsin?"

Tarquin gently pressed her back into his embrace. "I did. Don't worry, Tamsin was personally trained by Axel. She won't let any harm come to Winona."

Elysia let out a breath of relief. After a moment, she asked, "How is Axel doing? Blossom asks about him every time I see her."

Tarquin's brow furrowed slightly. "He's fine for now. It's just that the living conditions there are obviously not as comfortable as at home. He's roughing it a bit."

"Are you sure he'll be back before Christmas?" Elysia asked.

"Yes. Barring any surprises, he'll be back."

The two chatted for a while longer before Elysia sighed. "I miss Elliot and Evan. I wonder when they'll be back. I wonder if Evan's feeling better."

"They should be back soon," Tarquin said softly. "And don't worry about Evan's illness. Grandma is with him."

Seeing Elysia's brow furrow with longing for her sons, Tarquin switched into 'good husband' mode to cheer her up. "Want me to sing you a song?"

"I want to hear an old-fashioned ballad. Do you know any?" Elysia asked.

Tarquin smiled. "Whether I know one or not depends entirely on whether my wife

wants to hear one. If she wants to listen, then of course I do!"

Elysia's heart warmed. "Then sing."

Tarquin slipped into performance mode instantly. "Without her by my side, even the most beautiful scenery is dull and silent. The twilight shatters on the ground with

no one to answer... The first time I saw her, she was strolling under the stream-side bridge..."

His voice was incredibly beautiful. Especially when paired with the

melodious tune, it was like a spring breeze, a cool summer wind... Elysia

lay his arms, closing her eyes in in contentment, and slowly

to sleep.

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fred off

Life went on peacefully for two or three days, and then suddenly, Elliot and Evan

were back.

Chapter 1680

"Mommy!"

The afternoon sun was bright. Elysia was on the terrace studying a medical textbook when she suddenly heard Elliot and Evan's voices. She froze, thinking she was imagining things.

But a second later, "Mommy-"

Elysia's eyes flew open. She dropped the book and ran towards the door. When she saw Elliot and Evan downstairs, she was overjoyed. "Elliot! Evan!"

Both little boys' eyes lit up with surprise and they ran towards the stairs. "Mommy!"

Elysia flew down the stairs and threw her arms around her two little boys. "Why are you back all of a sudden? You didn't say anything, I would have come to the airport to pick you up."

"We wanted to surprise you, Mommy," Elliot said softly.

Elysia was ecstatic. "It's the best surprise! I've missed you both so, so much!"

"We missed you too, Mommy!"

Elysia held them for a long moment before she could bear to let go. "Let me look at you. Have you gotten taller? Put on any weight?"

She knelt down, one hand on Elliot's shoulder, the other on Evan's. Taking a good look, her heart ached. "Why are you both thinner?"

A lump formed in Elliot's throat. "..."

Evan's little lip trembled, his eyes turning red and filling with tears. He looked incredibly hurt.

Elysia didn't yet know what had happened to Bernard. She frowned. "What's wrong?"

Evan broke down, letting out a jagged sob as he threw himself back into Elysia's arms. "Mommy... sob... Mo-mo-mommy... waaaah..."

Evan was like a child who had suffered the world's greatest injustice, finally seeing his mother and letting all his sorrow pour out as tears. He sobbed and trembled, a little tear-streaked mess.

Elysia's heart broke. She held Evan tightly. "Mommy's here, Mommy's here. Tell Mommy what's wrong, Evan."

Evan was crying too hard to speak.

Elysia looked at Elliot, her own eyes red. "Elliot, what happened?"

Elliot couldn't hold it back either, his breath coming in short, jagged sniffs. "..

Bernard was gone. They would never see Bernard again. The most energetic, most playful, and most skilled Bernard was gone. No one would ever hoist them up on his shoulders or lead them on wild adventures through the woods again. No one would steal their great-grandmother's bedsheets to run around the woods pretending to be ghosts... That lively, cheerful, playful old man was gone forever.

He was dead. He had been poisoned.

Elliot's grief quickly turned to rage. He clenched his small fists, gritted his teeth, his eyes bloodshot and filled with a towering hatred.

Elysia sensed something was deeply wrong and felt a growing unease. She asked again, "Elliot, what on earth happened?"

Elliot sniffed hard, forcing down his grief and anger. He wiped his tears away. "Nothing happened. We just missed you so much after being apart for so long."

Elysia let out a relieved breath and pulled Elliot into her embrace too. "Mommy missed you so much too. So, so much. Let's never be apart again..."

After a while, Tarquin returned with Emmett, Elijah, and Baby. When Baby saw Elliot and Evan, she jumped with excitement. "Elliot and Evan! Elliot and Evan are back!"

The little girl, with her hair in two

pigtails, came bouncing over. Seeing

them crying, Baby froze, her own

little lip, trembling as if she was

about to cry too. Elliot, Evang Mommy, what's wrong?"

Elliot quickly wiped his tears,

managed a small smile, and patted Baby's head affectionately. "It's

nothing. We were just so excited

see Mommy after being away for so

long. Did you miss me, Baby?"

Baby nodded immediately. "I did! I missed you so, so much! Elliot, give me a hug."