

Hitched 1351

Chapter 1351

Richard Huber stormed through the front yard, his face thunderous with anger.

The family mausoleum.

The security guards were still at their post by the door. When they spotted Richard and his entourage approaching, they immediately froze, panic written all over their faces.

One of them actually tried to make a run for the mausoleum, probably hoping to warn the people inside.

Richard noticed the move right away and shouted, "Hey, you! Stop right there!"

The guard froze mid-step, rooted to the spot.

Richard marched up, his tone sharp. "What are you so jumpy about?"

The guard trembled, staring at his shoes. "Sir..."

The mausoleum didn't even have a back door-there was no way for Winona Newsom to slip out. Of course the guards were nervous.

Richard had given strict orders: nobody was to set foot inside to see Keaton Huber. If they let anyone in, they'd be in deep trouble.

On top of that, they'd promised Ms. Newsom they'd alert her at the slightest sign of trouble.

And now, here they were...

Richard's eyes narrowed. He barked, "Well? Speak up! What the hell is that troublemaker doing in there now?!"

No one answered. Richard's scowl deepened as he strode into the mausoleum courtyard.

Janelle, picking up on the tension, didn't bother questioning the guards. She hurried after him.

Inside, Winona heard the commotion. She scrambled to the window, peering out -and nearly had a heart attack.

Richard was already through the front gates, his posse right behind him, heading straight for her.

In an instant, Winona sobered up, adrenaline chasing away her tipsy haze.

She smacked Keaton hard on the arm to jolt him awake. "Your parents are coming! With a crowd! How am I supposed to get out of here?!"

It was the middle of the night, and here she was-alone in a room with Keaton. If anyone caught them, the gossip would be brutal, no matter what actually happened.

And with Mrs. Windham and Mrs.

Mrs

Murphy in tow? Those two weren't bad people, but their mouths ran faster than a horse at the Kentucky Derby As soon as they left, the whole neighborhood would hear about it.

She could handle a little scandal herself she was used to rumors, being a semi- celebrity and all.

But her parents? They wouldn't

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survive the shame. Ever since the Zane Livingston fiasco, the Newsom family had been the butt of every joke in the country club circuit.

Keaton was still in a daze. He hadn't expected his dad to show up at this hour, much less with a whole squad.

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While he was trying to process, Winona sprang into action. She stuffed the remains of their takeout behind an old memorial plaque and kicked the empty wine bottles under the rickety cot.

But there was no way to hide herself-she was a whole person, not a pizza box.

The mausoleum didn't have any bright lights, but even the flickering candles couldn't hide a breathing, panicked woman.

Footsteps were getting closer. Winona's heart was pounding so loud she thought everyone could hear it.

She hissed, "Is there a back door?!"

Keaton snapped out of it. "No, but why are you freaking out? My dad's not going to do anything to you."

Winona didn't even bother to explain. She smacked him again, harder this time. "Stop babbling! Help me hide, now!"

Keaton's eyes widened-no woman had ever dared hit him before. But seeing how desperate she was, he let it slide.

"There's nowhere to hide a person in here... Wait, get on the bed. Quick."

Winona shot him a look. "You want me to hide in bed with you? If we get caught, it'll look even worse!"

"They won't catch us. Come on, do you want to hide or not? Sometimes you gotta break a few rules."

The footsteps were right outside the door now. Winona gritted her teeth, grabbed her purse, and dove under the covers, pressing herself against the wall.

The cot was barely big enough for one adult, let alone two. They were jammed in like sardines.

In her rush, Winona accidentally bumped Keaton's injured side. He let out a strangled yelp, cold sweat breaking out on his forehead.

She was about to whisper an apology when the door burst open and the whole group came crashing in.

Chapter 1352

"Where's that godawful stench of booze coming from? Have you been drinking?"

Richard stormed in, his voice echoing off the hallway walls.

Winona shrank closer to Keaton, barely daring to breathe.

Mrs. Windham and Mrs. Murphy both wrinkled their noses, fanning the air.

"Oh, mercy, that's not just a little whiskey," Mrs. Windham muttered. "Someone's been on a real bender."

Mr. Windham's eyes narrowed as he spotted something glinting near the fireplace a bottle, rolling on its side.

He picked it up, squinting at the faded label, and gasped, "Good Lord above! Is this... a 1935 Glenfiddich? That was Harold's pride and joy! He wouldn't even open it before he died. Keaton, you let him drink it?!"

Mr. Murphy, poking around, found a few more empty bottles. Reading the labels by candlelight, he blurted out, "A limited edition Russo-Boro vodka, an Imperial Collection Cognac-my God, Keaton, did you just plunder your grandfather's entire stash?"

Richard's eyes went wide as he glanced at the empty bottles, then rushed to the family altar where Harold's picture stood.

He barely needed to look. The collection of rare spirits Harold had hidden behind his photo-gone. Every last drop.

Furious, Richard spun around, shouting at Keaton, "You little punk! Those were your grandfather's wedding toasts for you!"

"He loved a good drink, but he saved those his whole life just for your wedding day!"

"That Glenfiddich from 1935? He wanted you to open it with your wife, when you shared your first toast as a married couple!"

"That vodka? For you and your bride to offer the guests at your reception!"

"And that Imperial Cognac? That was meant to honor your new in-laws!"

"From the second you were born, your granddad dreamed of seeing you married. Now, before you've even found a wife, you've gone and guzzled everything he saved for you!"

"You-ungrateful brat! How could you do this to your grandfather?!"

"Are you not afraid he'll rise up from his grave and come knocking on your bedroom door tonight?"

Winona's eyes went wide. Wedding toasts? All that was meant for Keaton's big day?

Oh, dear God.

That 1935 Glenfiddich? She'd split it with Keaton just hours ago!

Panic prickled under her skin.

Silently, she prayed, 'Ancestors set

the Huber family, if you're watching, I swear-Keaton told me to take it. He made me drink!'

'I had no idea those bottles meant anything special!'

'If Harold's spirit is angry, please, please haunt Keaton, not me—I'm innocent in all this.'

While Winona sat there in a cold sweat, Keaton just shrugged, a little tipsy and totally nonchalant.

"Doesn't matter," he slurred. "I'm never getting married anyway. No point letting good booze go to waste, right?"

Richard's face turned purple. "You, little-! How did I end up with a son like you? If I don't knock some sense into you, I'll never forgive myself-or your grandfather!"

He snatched the old wooden yardstick from in front of Harold's picture and marched toward Keaton, ready to lay down the law.

Janelle grabbed his arm, sobbing, "He's already hurt! You want to beat him to death? Is that what you want?"

Richard shook with rage. "Should

just let him off, after all this? Look at what he's done! Listen to what he's saying! He trashed his grandfather's legacy and doesn't even care!"

Winona was fuming too. Why did Keaton have to open his mouth about never getting married-now of all times?

If he couldn't keep quiet, he could at least apologize and try to calm everyone down!

But no, he just had to make things worse.

In a fit of frustration, Winona pinched Keaton under the covers-right on one of

his wounds, as luck would have it.

Chapter 1353

Keaton's eyes went wide with pain as he yelped right there in front of everyone, "Ouch!"

For a second, the whole family room went dead silent. Richard's temper just shot through the roof.

"Ouch, my ass! Did I even touch you? I'm a good ten feet away! You trying to pull a fast one on me now? If I don't smack you into next week, I'll call you Daddy myself!"

Janelle's sobs grew even louder, her voice cracking,

"Go ahead, hit him! Try it! Hit him one more time and I swear I'll file for divorce tonight, I mean it—"

Mrs. Windham and Mrs. Murphy rushed in to calm things down.

"Rich, for goodness' sake, Harold loved his eldest grandson more than anything. Sure, those bottles of whiskey were his pride and joy, but he never let any strangers touch them!"

"That's right. If his own grandson drank it, Harold wouldn't have minded at all."

Richard was still fuming.

"He doesn't get to drink it unless he's married! That whiskey wasn't meant for him,

it was for Harold's future granddaughter-in-law!"

The room was filled with shouting and chaos. Winona was huddled up next to Keaton, trembling like a leaf.

A few hours ago, she was a queen. Now she looked more like a stray kitten who'd wandered into the wrong yard.

She barely dared to breathe, her heart hammering in her chest.

If she'd known this was how things would go, she wouldn't have touched that whiskey if it was the last drink on earth!

No-if she'd known there'd be this much drama, she wouldn't have bothered checking on Keaton at all. Let him starve!

The only silver lining? Even though they'd seen the whiskey bottles, no one had noticed her hiding under the blanket.

The old wooden cot was jammed up against the wall in a dark corner. She was skinny enough to curl up beside Keaton and stay out of sight.

But-

Misfortune struck in the next heartbeat.

Mr. Windham suddenly piped up,

"Wait, hold on! There are two glasses! Look-two whiskey glasses right in front of Keaton! He didn't drink alone. Someone else is in here!"

Someone else...in...here...

The words echoed around the room like a thunderclap, rattling everyone to their

core.

The room fell eerily silent.

Keaton, who'd been playing it cool, suddenly looked a whole lot less calm.

Winona's heart nearly leapt out of her chest.

Glass, glass, glass... she chanted in her mind.

Two glasses!

God, she'd forgotten to hide the glasses!

She'd been so flustered earlier, she stashed the takeout bags behind the old family portraits, kicked the whiskey bottles under the bed against the wall, and even

veine

remembered to pick up the napkins off the floor... but the glasses had totally slipped her mind!

Oh God, she wanted to go home. She wanted her mom.

The silence in that room was

suffocating. You could pl

hear the wax melting on the candles by the mantle.

Every single pair of eyes was fixed on those two glasses on the rickety table.

It was obvious. Two people had been drinking.

After what felt like an eternity, Richard finally barked,

"Who were you drinking with?!"

Winona's heart was pounding so

Worri thought she might f Shops him in the side.

Keaton might rat her

Keaton: "..."

It hurts, but hell if I can show it right now!

He pressed his lips together, biting back the pain and refusing to speak.

Richard scanned the room, but the old house was too small for anyone to be hiding.

He turned to Keaton again,

"I'm talking to you! Who were you sharing Grandpa's special whiskey with?!"

Keaton took a breath before answering,

"I was in here the whole time. Who else could I have been drinking with, if not them?"

Richard glanced suspiciously at the family portraits and urns. "You drinkin' with the ancestors now?"

Keaton: "... Yeah, I was feeling down. Figured I'd share a drink with the old- timers."

Winona: "..."

Ancestors? Please, let's not!

Chapter 1354

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Richard looked at Keaton, clearly skeptical. "Who gave you the whiskey then?"

"I got it myself," Keaton replied, trying to sound casual.

"Oh, come on! You can barely stand! Be straight with me-which one of the guys outside helped you?"

Richard was eyeing the security guards by the door.

Keaton, not wanting to get them in trouble, dug in his heels. "I told you, I got it myself!"

"Oh, really? Then get up and grab another bottle. Go on, let's see it!"

"I... well, Grandpa's cabinet is empty, isn't it?" Keaton stalled.

"There's still plenty in your great-grandad's stash! Get up! Go fetch it!"

Keaton shook his head stubbornly, "I'm not getting up!"

He couldn't get up, of course. If he did, Winona would be exposed.

Richard's face turned an angry shade of red. "You're not getting up? Fine! You think I can't deal with you? If you don't, I'll bring every one of those guards in here and sort it out the old-fashioned way! I want to see which of them thinks my rules don't matter!"

Keaton clenched his jaw-he was caught.

The Huber family had a reputation for being tight-knit. The heads cared for their staff, and the staff, in turn, cared for them. Keaton knew if he took the blame, the guards wouldn't get punished. He couldn't let them take the fall for him.

And the Huber family's "old-fashioned way" wasn't just a phrase. When they said "family discipline," it meant getting smacked with a wooden paddle until someone fessed up or couldn't sit down for a week.

With no other option, Keaton gritted his teeth and turned to Mr. and Mrs. Windham.

"Would you two quit gawking at my misery and go find Gale already? He's been bewitched by some gold-digging vixen lately, and don't step in, your future

daughter-in-law's going to

vetone

bolt!

Forget about that Christmas

wedding-she'll be long gone, maybe

in seven or eight years if you're lucky."

Mr. Windham blinked in confusion. "What did you just say?"

Keaton pronounced every word clearly. "Some woman's got her claws in Gate, and he's falling for it. If you hurry, you'll find them together right now. Trust me, the minute she

starts a catfight with your future daughter-in-law, that's

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it-relationship over! That perfect daughter-in-law you wanted? Gone."

Mr. and Mrs. Windham's faces darkened. Without another word, they spun on their heels and hurried out, not even bothering with a goodbye.

Keaton then turned to Mr. and Mrs. Murphy. "And you two? You'd better go check on Booker. Wait too long, and he's going to turn up with someone else's kid and

call it your grandchild. That's right—a grandkid with no Murphy blood!"

Mr. and Mrs. Murphy froze, eyes wide, then rushed out just as fast as the Windhams.

The family hall fell silent for a moment.

Richard, barely sparing a glance at the departing families, snapped back to Keaton. "Don't think you can distract me with the Murphys' and Windhams' drama! You're not getting off the hook this easy."

"Unless you tell me right now who brought you that whiskey, I'm not letting this go. If you keep your

mouth shut, I'll drag every one omet

those guards in here and keep going until someone cracks! I want to

know who dared to ignore my orders and sneak you my father's best

whiskey!"

Winona, hidden under a blanket, was already panicking. Then suddenly, the

blanket was whipped away. She was exposed-completely!

Keaton sighed, resigned, and admitted, "She brought it."

Winona: " _ "

Richard and Janelle both froze, staring. "Wait-what?!"

That's when they finally noticed the young woman lying next to their son.

The two elders' eyes nearly popped out of their heads.

Chapter 1355

Winona locked eyes with Keaton's parents, her heart thudding so hard she swore everyone in the room could hear it.

Awkward didn't even begin to cover it.

This was a full-blown social disaster.

She wanted to disappear, to melt into the floor, to drag Keaton out and give him a piece of her mind—but his mom and dad were right there, watching everything unfold.

Keaton had totally thrown her under the bus, just to cover for the guard!

He'd gone on and on about Gale and Booker's drama earlier just to get the Windham and Huber families out of the way-so he could sell her out!

Winona was fuming, and before she could stop herself, she stomped her foot in frustration, right before getting out of bed. Something on the nightstand went flying.

It hit the hardwood with a dull thud, then rolled under the bed.

Keaton's eyes went wide-he knew exactly what it was.

But Winona's mind was in overdrive. She didn't even notice what she'd just kicked. She shot Keaton a death glare, cheeks burning, and awkwardly slipped out of bed.

She did her best to smooth her tangled hair and straighten her rumpled clothes, her face red as a beet.

"Uh... Mr. Huber, Janelle..."

Winona felt like she could dig a hole with her toes and crawl into a whole new house to avoid this.

Mortifying. Absolutely mortifying.

She had never been this embarrassed in her life.

Sneaking over in the middle of the night, finishing off someone's vintage Scotch, somehow ending up hiding under the covers, and now...

Getting caught red-handed by the parents.

What crime had she committed in her last life to deserve Keaton?

After her awkward greeting, the room went dead silent.

Richard and Janelle just stared at her. Richard wasn't even mad anymore. Janelle stopped crying.

After what felt like a lifetime, Richard cleared his throat.

When he finally spoke, his voice was nothing like the one he'd used to

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he

unded almost absurde na moment ago. Instell

gentle.

"Ms. Newsom, what... what are you doing here?"

Winona forced a smile and scrambled for an explanation.

"Mr. Bradford sent me. He said Keaton wasn't eating, wouldn't take his medicine, and, um, asked me to check on him."

"I happened to be free, so... here I am. And, uh... I might've had some of Harold's whiskey."

"Oh..." Richard suddenly looked enlightened. "So you're the one who gave Keaton the drink."

Winona nodded. "Yeah, I brought the wine, but he didn't want to drink it, so... I'm sorry, Mr. Huber."

"Oh, that's nothing, don't worry about it. A couple of bottles, who cares? It's really not a big deal."

Winona blinked. "But... wasn't that Harold's wedding whiskey?"

"Wedding whiskey, shmedding whiskey. It doesn't matter. Don't lose sleep over it."

Richard's 180-degree personality change left Keaton staring at his dad like he'd grown a second head.

"Dad, am I adopted or something?"

"Shut it!"

This time, both Richard and Janelle snapped in unison-their voices booming. Winona nearly jumped out of her skin.

Janelle was quick to reassure her, "Oh honey, don't mind us. We're yelling at that rascal, not you. Come on, Winona, let's step outside and have a chat."

Janelle wasn't crying anymore. She took Winona's hand like they were family.

They made their way to a bench in the chilly night air. Janelle, fussing over Winona's thin clothes, sent a maid off for a blanket.

Winona flushed, "Really, Janelle, I'm fine. I'm not cold."

Janelle shook her head. "You young girls-always dressing cute, never warm enough. Fall's tricky. Warm days, cold nights-you'll catch your death of a cold like this."

She tucked the blanket around Winona anyway, all motherly concern.

Then she got right to the point. "Winona, tell me the truth. What's going on with you and Keaton?"

Chapter 1356

Winona hurried to explain,

"We're just friends, honestly. With everything going on with Zane lately, Keaton's helped me out a bunch, and I'm really grateful."

"Today he got punched by Mr. Huber, so everyone's worried about him."

"Mr. Bradford said that you and he were bringing Keaton some food, but Keaton probably wouldn't eat if you guys brought it, so he asked me to come instead."

"Mr. Bradford figured Keaton's got his pride, and he wouldn't turn me down if I brought him dinner."

"I brought some wine, just hoping to get him to eat something, but then we got to talking and, well, ended up opening Harold's whiskey..."

"When you and Mr. Huber came in, and I saw Mrs. Murphy and Mrs. Windham too, I just didn't want them to get the wrong idea and start gossiping, so I thought hiding was the best move."

Seeing Janelle still looking skeptical, Winona emphasized,

"Seriously, Keaton and I are just friends. There's nothing else between us."

A maid came over with a blanket, and Janelle personally draped it over Winona's shoulders.

"You don't need to be nervous," Janelle said gently. "I just worry Keaton might give you a hard time. I hope he hasn't upset you."

Winona shook her head, "No, not at all."

After chatting for a bit, Winona said her goodbyes.

Janelle walked her all the way to the car and even arranged a driver to take her

home-no way was she letting Winona drive after drinking.

Once Winona had left, Janelle headed toward the family chapel.

The security guards immediately rushed over to apologize.

"We're so sorry, ma'am, we let Ms. Newsom in without asking, we—"

Janelle cut them off, looking more energized than ever.

"Good job! Double pay for everyone this month!"

The guards all stared at her in disbelief. "?!"

Was this their lucky day or what?!

Janelle walked into the chapel but doubled back suddenly, a thought striking her. She looked at the guards.

"So, what's really going on between Keaton and Winona? Do you guys know?" The guards all started talking at once, eager to spill the tea.

"I swear they're secretly dating!"

"Exactly! Ms. Newsom came to see Keaton in the middle of the night, didn't care about what people would say. That's gotta mean something, right?"

"She's clearly very worried about him! Her eyes were all red when she got here, and when she heard Keaton wasn't eating, she looked heartbroken!"

"And get this-Keaton didn't even tell her to leave! Anyone else, he'd have kicked them out for sure!"

"After she showed up, Keaton was like a different person-laughing and joking. It's obvious they're in love!"

"And the only reason Keaton won't marry Ms. Sutton is because he's into Ms. Newsom!"

"Trust me, ma'am, even if they're not together yet, they're definitely at that will- they-won't-they stage!"

Janelle's eyes lit up. "Really?!"

All the guards nodded enthusiastically. "Absolutely!"

Janelle couldn't help it—she burst out laughing. It felt like a new hope had dawned!

"If Keaton really ends up with Winona, I'll give each of you a big Christmas bonus!"

She happily strolled into the chapel, feeling lighter than she had in months.

Inside, she even took a moment to bow three times in front of the family portraits, offering her thanks to the ancestors.

She was convinced the old folks had

fier and Richard's endless for a daughter-in-lawne

y sent one their way!

After bowing, she didn't even look at her son. Instead, she turned to Richard and

said,

"Throw him out! We don't need him anymore!"

Richard blinked, surprised. "What?!"

Keaton glared. "Mom, who are you talking about? You want Dad out or me?"

"You!" Janelle snapped, her face

stern. "After everything you've putted lately,

ve decided I don't want you!

Out you go-whoever wants you can have you!"

Keaton was speechless. "...And what if nobody wants me?"

"Then you're on your own-sink or swim!" Janelle huffed.

Keaton stared at her, dumbfounded. "Mom, are you possessed or something?"

Janelle shot him a glare. "Zip it!"

Richard was just as baffled. Usually, whenever he even joked about not wanting their son, Janelle would raise hell-crying, threatening, the

whole nine yards.

Now, after a chat with Winona, she was suddenly ready to toss Keaton out herself?!

"What's gotten into you?" he asked.

"What's gotten into me? I said what I said! Out with him-I don't want this son anymore!"

Janelle was all action, calling over a couple of staff members and personally directing them.

"Take him outside right now! And you two-go pack up all his stuff, everything, and toss it out with him!"

Keaton was still in shock. "Mom, what the heck?!"

Chapter 1357

Janelle's tone was sharp-unyielding.

"Don't call me Mom! As of now, we're done. You and I? No more mother and son."

She crossed her arms and glared. "When you finally show up with a girlfriend— when you come back to actually talk about getting married-then you can call me Mom again. Until then, we're finished."

She barked at the security guards, "Well? What are you waiting for? Get on with it."

The guards exchanged nervous glances, not sure what family drama they'd walked into, but no one wanted to cross Mrs. Huber. They shuffled over to Keaton.

"Sorry, man. Orders are orders," one muttered apologetically.

"Hold it!" Richard's voice boomed across the foyer.

Sure, Richard was angry-furious, even-but Keaton was the only son of the Huber family. You didn't just toss out your only heir in front of all your ancestors' portraits. That was madness.

Richard grabbed Janelle by the wrist and pulled her out onto the front porch.

He kept his voice low. "What's gotten into you? Did Winona say something? Why are you so worked up?"

Janelle scoffed. "Are you blind? I'm not angry-I'm just pulling a classic 'tough love' move. You want a wolf, you gotta bait the trap."

Richard frowned. "What are you talking about?"

She shot back, "Did you even ask your precious son? What's going on with him and Winona?"

Richard sighed. "He told me they're just friends. They met through Tarquin and Elysia Thorne. She's just checking in on him, like any friend would."

"Apparently, they were both in a crappy mood today, so they ended up drinking together."

Janelle rolled her eyes. "Yeah, right. The guards told me Winona got all teary-eyed when she heard Keaton hadn't eaten or slept. She really cares about him."

"So you think Winona's into him?" Richard asked, finally catching on.

"I think there's definitely something there! At the very least, he treats her way better than he ever treated Beatrix Sutton."

She grinned slyly. "Love can grow, you know. Winona just got her heart broken- perfect time for our son to swoop in!"

"If I toss him out, maybe she'll pick him up, and things will move along nicely."

Richard scowled. "This is nuts! They haven't even taken the first step. And even if Winona wanted to take him in, her parents would never go for it."

"I mean, what parents would let their daughter bring home a grown man- especially one with Keaton's...reputation?"

Janelle waved him off. "Who said he

has to move in with her? He owns

the house next door! The one at Tanhe Manor-he's had it for years. I've been there. It's literally right next to Winona's place, just a white picket fence between them."

Richard blinked. "Seriously? That's some coincidence." Janelle grinned. "Call it fate."

"She already sneaks over to see him. Now that they're basically neighbors, do you think Winona's just going to ignore him if he's out on the street? No way! She's a good egg-she won't let him starve."

Richard nodded slowly. "Yeah, I suppose. But what about Beatrix?"

At the mention of Beatrix, Janelle let out a long sigh.

"The Sutton family tried to force him with a false accusation, and he still wouldn't

marry her. That says a lot—he really doesn't like her."

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"We need to get to the bottom of what happened at that hotel. If the Suttons set this up, we'll deal with it. If Keaton really did something wrong we'll apologize and make it right. But marriage? That's off the table."

Richard rubbed his temples. "Still, isn't this all a bit much? Throwing him out, disowning him... What if things don't work out with Winona?"

Janelle just huffed, "Oh, ye of little faith! If it doesn't work, then get ready—you'll have a bachelor for a son, and the Huber family line will end with him!"

"I'm not joking, Richard. Winona is this family's last hope!"

Richard mulled it over, face growing darker by the second. Then, with a determined stride, he marched back into the ancestral hall.

In front of the whole Huber clan, portraits and all, he called out to the guards: "Throw him out. The Huber family is done with him!"

Chapter 1358

Keaton was completely stunned.

"Dad, seriously? Grandpa, Great-grandpa, and all the ancestors are looking down on us right now—are you for real?!"

Richard's voice was ice-cold. "Do it. Now."

Keaton shouted at the top of his lungs, "You better think this through! I'm the last Huber! If you throw me out, it's game over for the Huber family tree!"

"You'll be the one the old Hubers curse for eternity! You can bet they're rolling over in their graves right now!"

"And you, Mom! You're just as guilty! Grandma and Great-grandma aren't gonna let this slide!"

Richard and Janelle's faces were ashen, but they yelled even louder, "Out! Get him out of here—far as you can! And don't let him step foot in this house again unless I say so!"

The house guards, terrified, rushed to drag Keaton out-and made sure to toss him as far away from the grand front porch as they could.

By 9 p.m., Keaton was slumped over a park bench in front of a pile of luggage, looking utterly pathetic.

Even the stray cats nearby were meowing at him like he was one of their own.

He never imagined there'd be a day his own parents would boot him out.

All because he didn't want to get married! Was that really such a crime? Seriously, talk about old-fashioned.

It was pretty obvious now-there was no way his family was coming to his rescue. So Keaton pulled out his phone and called Tarquin Bradford for help. No answer.

He tried Gale next. Gale picked up, but immediately started yelling,

"You've got some nerve calling me! My parents are chasing me down half the block, threatening to kill me!"

"You ratted me out for cheating—that's real brotherly of you, Keaton!"

"Seriously, what a privilege to know you. Thanks, man. Thanks to you and your whole damn family! Crap, they're catching up to me—gotta go—beep beep beep..."

Gale hung up on him.

Keaton rolled his eyes and tried Booker.

From the other end came Mrs. Murphy's wailing,

"If you bring that girl home and play daddy, your father and I will just

drop dead! Let the whole wolle

how you killed your parents heartbreak! Boo hoo hoo..

Booker's voice came on, panting,

"Keaton, you bastard! You sold me out!"

"You want to be some kind of anti-marriage hero? Screw you! I hope you fall

madly in love with some girl and she doesn't even know you exist!"

"I hope you're head over heels and she never gives you the time of day! I hope it makes you cry!"

Keaton started, "Booker, come on, can you just "

"Don't you 'come on' me! Lose my number, we're done! I don't even know you! Beep beep beep..."

Booker hung up, too.

Keaton slumped over his bench again, sighing, miserable, shivering in the night wind.

He knew he'd sold them out, but come on-Mrs. Windham and Mrs. Murphy loved to gossip! If they'd seen Winona, who knows what rumors they'd start? Getting them out of the way was for Winona's sake. He had to give them something juicy to distract them.

What, was he supposed to abandon a gorgeous girl and save his buddies instead? No way. That wasn't Keaton's style.

He was just about to try calling someone else when suddenly a car horn blared.

"Beep beep-"

He looked up. A red sports car screeched to a stop in front of him.

Winona, with her wild curls and oversized sunglasses, sat in the passenger seat, staring at him in disbelief.

Keaton felt mortified and tried to leap up, but his back screamed in pain and he broke out in a cold sweat.

The driver jumped out. "Sir!"

Keaton winced, his neck stiff, "Don't touch me hurts!"

Winona pursed her red lips, completely at a loss for words.

Honestly, out of all the spoiled rich kids she knew, Keaton was the only one who managed to get kicked out by his parents at thirty-after getting beat up no less.

Chapter 1359

And then, to top it all off, his parents publicly and unilaterally announced they were cutting him off!

Honestly, to end up like this... poor guy!

Just before they reached Tanhe Manor, the Huber family's chauffeur-who was driving her home-suddenly broke down in tears.

With snot and tears streaming down his face, he said,

"Ms. Newsom, I just heard-Keaton's been kicked out of the house by Mr. and Mrs. Huber. They want nothing to do with him anymore... and they've ordered that anyone who tries to help him will be cut off too!"

"He's still badly hurt, Ms. Newsom. If he's out there alone, something could happen to him. What if his wounds get infected again? Oh, God..."

"Ms. Newsom, please, just let me go back and bring Keaton to Tanhe Manor."

"Don't get me wrong-I'm not asking to bring him into your house. Keaton's got his own place at the manor."

"He really is down on his luck. If you don't help him, who else will?"

At first, she didn't believe it. After all, Keaton was the only heir of the Huber family.

If the Hubers disowned him, wouldn't that mean the end of their family line?!

But now, seeing Keaton herself, Winona really believed it.

Especially after remembering what the driver said: part of the reason Keaton got thrown out was because he snuck some of Harold Huber's whiskey.

She felt a pang of guilt.

Even though, honestly, it wasn't her fault!

Still, she had definitely helped herself to more than a glass or two...

After some thought, Winona ended up calling a cab.

She decided she'd take Keaton to the hospital first-get his injuries checked out and patched up before dealing with anything else.

Meanwhile, when Richard and Janelle heard that Winona had taken their son in, they were so happy they set off fireworks in the front yard!

Everyone else: "...". Oh boy, that's it for Mr. Huber!

Mr. and Mrs. Huber looked so delighted, lighting up the sky with fireworks. They really didn't want him back!

Mr. Huber had truly become the castaway of the family-now doomed to wander the world alone!

Richard and Janelle just rolled their eyes: "You guys don't get it at all!"

You can't win over a daughter-in-law if you're too soft on your son!

Meanwhile, over at Lucian's place, Tarquin had just arrived.

Keaton had called him earlier for help, but Tarquin deliberately didn't answer.

He knew exactly what Richard and Janelle were up to, and honestly, he approved.

The Huber family were good folks-they'd never let Winona suffer, no matter what happened.

As long as Winona wasn't mistreated, Elysia wouldn't have any complaints, so Tarquin wasn't about to butt in.

Ignoring Keaton was all part of the plan to make sure Winona would take him in herself.

As for why Tarquin was at Lucian's house so late? Verity Bradford's illegitimate son had just died.

It happened that night. After battling the virus for so long, his organs had finally given out there was nothing the doctors could do.

And the paternity test between Tarquin and Lucian had come back too.

Turned out, Lucian really was Tarquin's son.

That result alone proved there was a connection between Lucian and the so- called "mystery man."

After all, the illegitimate child had grown up under the mystery man's protection!

So Tarquin had rushed over to get to the bottom of things.

As soon as Tarquin got out of the car, Axel appeared.

He looked the same as always: black tracksuit, black baseball cap, black face mask. He radiated that same icy, dangerous vibe, with eyes sharp as knives.

"Everything's normal with Lucian. No suspicious visitors, and nobody's been watching him-except for me, of course. But I'm sure the mystery man's monitoring things remotely, so be careful what you say when you go up."

"Yeah, I'll go in alone. Wait for me down here," Tarquin said.

"Will do. One more thing-Lucian wasn't told about the death by the mystery man. It was a private investigator who let him know. No connection to the mystery man at all."

Tarquin raised an eyebrow. "How'd a private eye know about Lucian and the kid?"

Axel replied, "Years ago, when

Lucian first found out he had an illegitimate son, he hired a private investigator to look into it. The R only tracked the kid down when he came back to the States, and as soon as Lucian woke up, the PI gave him the news."

Tarquin frowned slightly. "...Got it."

Chapter 1360

Upstairs, Lucian was still awake.

When Tarquin showed up at his door, Lucian didn't look the least bit surprised. He ushered him in, set the kettle on, and poured two mugs of steaming black tea.

"I'm guessing you're here about Verity's son?" Lucian's voice was hoarse, his whole face tired and drawn.

Tarquin nodded. "I just found out he's your son."

Lucian's eyes went glassy with unshed tears. "Yeah, he is. Or-was."

"But... I never heard about you and Verity being together."

Lucian let out a long, shuddering breath. "It was never supposed to happen. It was an accident."

"After your father cut ties with the Bradfords, only Verity kept in touch. She'd visit him in Europe all the time."

"That kid-my son was conceived during one of those trips."

"There was a dinner, too much wine, and... well, one thing led to another. Suddenly Verity was pregnant."

"I didn't know about the baby. Not until someone came knocking, using the kid to blackmail me—threatening that if I ever talked about Hill Valley, there'd be consequences. That's when I found out he existed."

"I tried asking Verity, but she refused to tell me where he was or let me have anything to do with him. So I hired a private investigator, kept the search quiet. Only just found out where he was a few days ago. That's why I rushed off to the hospital."

Tarquin's brow furrowed. Whoever had threatened Lucian-that had to be the mysterious stranger. Only that person would want to keep Hill Valley's secrets buried, to poison Keith Garcia against Kendrick.

He pressed, "Do you know who threatened you back then?"

Lucian shook his head. "No idea. Never met him. He only called. Used a burner phone, too."

That was just the stranger's style-wary, secretive.

Tarquin tried again. "Would you... talk to me about Hill Valley now?"

Lucian exhaled slowly, shoulders sagging. "My son's dead. I've got nothing left to lose. What do you want to know?"

Tarquin cut straight to it. "The night Aiden bit my dad-was it pouring rain?"

Lucian nodded. "Buckets. The kind of rain that soaks you to the bone."

"Did my dad leave the house around seven or eight?"

"No. Your mom was devastated about Aiden, and your dad never left her side. Sat with her all night. I was there, too."

Tarquin fell silent, mind whirring. So his father hadn't dragged Aiden up the hill. Then why was Keith so certain he had?

The only explanation: someone who looked a lot like his father had done it, and Keith had gotten it wrong. But the stranger didn't really resemble his dad... unless it was an

accomplice, not the strange himself.

"Albert-did my dad have any brothers? Half-brothers, maybe?"

Lucian blinked, then shook his head. "Nope. I grew up with your dad, know him better than anyone. No brothers."

Tarquin's mind raced. So the stranger must have disguised himself to frame his dad. But why go to all that trouble?

The stranger had spent years grooming Keith, manipulating Lucian and Verity with the existence of the secret son-all because of his father.

What grudge did he hold against his father? Or... was Tarquin chasing the wrong lead entirely?

He pinched the bridge of his nose, then looked up. "Albert, do you know how my parents really died? I know they were murdered. Verity was involved, but she didn't mastermind it."

Lucian's expression hardened, and he let out a ragged breath. "It had

something to do with a researet

project. That much I'm sure of."