

Hitched 1441

Chapter 1441

Keaton put his phone away, pushed open the sliding glass door, and walked back into the living room from the balcony.

Alicia was still crying, tears streaming down her face, looking absolutely

miserable.

Keaton glanced at her swollen, red eyes and handed her a tissue.

"Come on, enough with the tears. Wipe your face. I'll take you to the hospital and have your injuries checked out first."

Alicia took the tissue, sobbing even harder.

"Babe, you have to stand up for me! I only hit her by accident, but she hit me on purpose!"

Keaton was blunt.

"I'll take responsibility for what you did to Winona, but as for standing up for you? That's not happening."

Alicia looked at him through blurry eyes, "Why not?"

Keaton replied,

"Because I'm your boyfriend, I'll take care of the consequences-Winona's medical bills, any time off work, and whatever emotional distress she claims. I'll cover it all, you don't have to worry."

"But fighting your battles for you? Not a chance."

Alicia felt even more wronged. "But she hit your girlfriend! Aren't you going to do something?"

Keaton said, "If she'd just hit you out of nowhere, I'd have her head on a platter. But she had a reason- because you threw the first punch."

"Girlfriend or not, you can't just go around hitting people."

Alicia protested, "I didn't just hit her for nothing!"

Keaton sighed. "Alright, here's your one shot at telling the truth. Spill it-what really happened between you and Winona?"

Alicia tried to wriggle out of it.

"I don't have anything against her! I acted out because of you! Why do you believe her and not me? I'm your girlfriend!"

Keaton's voice was calm, but cold. "I'm only going to ask one more time. What's really going on between you and Winona?"

Alicia's eyes darted, but she held her ground.

"There's nothing! I hit her because of a misunderstanding. I acted on impulse, that's all."

Keaton exhaled, his eyes narrowing.

"Alicia, do you think you're smarter than Winona? Or smarter than me?"

Alicia hesitated, "Babe..."

Keaton's tone grew even colder.

"I'm ten years older than you, you know. That's not for nothing. Winona's been in show business seven, eight years longer than

you-se aren't

survive that by being

clueless. Your little tricks aren't

footing either of us." .net

"And you tried to use my grudge against Winona as your excuse? That's bold, give you that Mustíve

had your Wheatres in

huh?"

Alicia could tell from Keaton's face that things were going south, and she panicked.

"Please, listen to me! You're getting it all wrong! I admit, I don't like her—I'm jealous, okay? But today, I swear, I didn't-"

Keaton cut her off. "Let's break up."

Alicia's eyes widened in shock.

They'd just made it official at four or five in the morning, and now, before noon, they were breaking up?

They hadn't even slept together yet!

If people found out, she'd be the butt of every joke in town.

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"Babe, don't scare me like this! I'm sorry, I'll go apologize to Ms. Newsom right now! Please, don't break up with me, love you can't live without you-"

She reached out to grab Keaton's sleeve, but he stepped out of reach. Keaton picked up his phone and, without hesitation, sent her \$30,000.

Half as a breakup fee, half for medical expenses.

He showed her the completed transfer on his phone.

"We're done, Alicia. From now on, you can't call me 'babe' anymore."

Alicia was in full-blown panic, her lips trembling.

She couldn't believe Keaton was actually serious-breaking up just like that!

And that thirty grand... Sure, it was a lot compared to what most people made in two years.

But for Keaton's girlfriend? It was peanuts.

Keaton was always generous-every ex of his had at least six figures spent on her.

And she only got thirty grand?

Alicia was furious.

"I don't want it! I don't want your money. I really love you, I just want to be with you, please—"

Keaton's eyes narrowed.

"If you really don't want it, I'll just take it back. And then you'll get nothing."

Chapter 1442

Alicia fell silent.

Keaton's words hit her right where it hurt.

"I honestly wasn't planning on breaking up with you, but I can't stand it when someone tries to play little mind games with me."

He gave her a long look before adding, "Since we did date, I'll give you a heads up-Winona's not someone you want to mess with. And her best friend? Even worse."

"If you go after Winona, you're basically making an enemy out of Mrs. Bradford. Don't say I didn't warn you."

With that, Keaton made it clear she should leave. He didn't even bother to offer her a ride to the hospital anymore.

Taking her to the hospital had just been his boyfriend duty. Now that they'd broken up-and not on good terms-he couldn't care less what happened to her.

Alicia tried clinging to him, but Keaton just shrugged and said,

"My mom's Winona's biggest fan. If she finds out you're here, she'll probably come over and give you a piece of her mind. And trust me, I won't stop her."

That did the trick. Alicia, freaked out, didn't dare waste another second. She left the Bradford Estate with her tail between her legs.

The moment she was outside, she whipped out her phone and called,

"Beatrix, I'm in SO much trouble... *sob sob* ..."

...

Meanwhile, Keaton wasn't just sitting around. As soon as Alicia left, he jumped in

his car and headed to the hospital to see Winona.

After all, she'd gotten hurt because of him, and he felt guilty about it.

Plus, he genuinely considered Winona a friend.

On his way, he made a quick call.

"Look into Alicia and her friends for me. See if there's any bad blood with Winona."

After hanging up, he updated his social media: "Single again, folks!"

Only four hours ago, he and Alicia had announced their relationship to the world.

His last post, at 5 a.m., had been: "Meet my girlfriend!"-complete with a cute selfie of the two of them.

Four hours later, they'd split. Possibly the shortest relationship in history.

Naturally, Keaton and Alicia shot straight to the trending topics. The comment section was wild.

People were used to Keaton changing girlfriends like he changed socks, so no one dared criticize him. Instead, all the blame landed on Alicia.

She became the laughingstock of the internet.

Alicia's manager had spent the entire night prepping for her big debut.

But before they could get anything off the ground, Alicia had crashed and burned.

With a breakup this fast, even the

investors who'd been intereset

backing Alicia started to

If she'd pissed Keaton off enough, that he dumped her, no amount of money could buy her a comeback. It'd just be throwing cash down the cash.down drain.

Even though Keaton wasn't a

get

celebrity himself, his influence in the

entertainment world was

undeniable.

If he wanted someone to make it big, they'd be a star. If he didn't, they'd never catch a break.

While everyone was still gossiping, Winona suddenly hit the trending topics too. Some paparazzi had snapped pics of her at the hospital. Blood on her forehead. The injury looked serious.

Concerned messages flooded Winona's social media.

Seeing all the comments, Winona posted an update:

"Don't worry, folks. Just got 'bitten by a dog.' Waiting for stitches~"

Of course, that "dog" clearly wasn't a real one. Speculation went wild about who

she was calling a dog.

Right in the middle of all the guessing, Janelle jumped in.

She reposted Winona's status and tagged Keaton:

"Get over here and explain yourself!"

Netizens were baffled: What did Keaton have to do with Winona's injury?

Keaton, still driving, hadn't even seen the message. So everyone flooded Janelle's inbox for answers.

Janelle didn't hold back-she spilled the tea with plenty of sarcasm.

Within minutes, everyone knew: Alicia had attacked Winona out of nowhere!

Alicia was the "dog" who'd bitten Winona.

Winona was completely innocent, just a victim.

The internet exploded.

Winona's fans were furious. Her friends from the industry were furious.

Even several big investors spoke out, publicly condemning Alicia.

Alicia's career? Over before it began.

She flamed out even faster than a clickbait influencer getting banned.

Chapter 1443

When Keaton arrived at the hospital and checked his phone, he finally saw the news blowing up online.

Honestly, he had nothing to say about his own mom's antics-he just ignored it.

After learning that Winona was out of surgery and resting in her room with an IV, Keaton headed over to find her.

He'd barely stepped out of the elevator when he spotted Janelle in the hallway.

Janelle had just left Winona's room. The moment she saw her darling son, she frowned and shot daggers at him with her eyes.

Toting her designer handbag, she marched over.

Keaton could tell she was in full "mom fury" mode, but there was nowhere to hide. He braced himself:
"Hey, Mom--"

Janelle didn't even respond. She grabbed his ear and dragged him around the corner, into the stairwell.

"Ow, Mom! Take it easy, I'm your actual son!" Keaton yelled.

Once they were behind the door, Janelle launched into a tirade.

"Don't call me 'Mom'! What did I do in my past life to deserve a son like you?"

"Look at what you've done! Winona needed three stitches. Three! Do you have any idea how much that hurts?"

"She's a celebrity, for heaven's sake! Do you know how much actresses care about their looks? She had to cut away some hair for the stitches! All because of you!"

"It's all your fault! Yours!"

The more Janelle spoke, the angrier she got-she even started smacking him. Keaton tried to shield himself, apologizing as blows rained down. "Okay, I know it's my fault! That's why I'm here to apologize to Winona. Please, can you stop hitting me now?"

Janelle finally stopped, catching her breath. "I don't care how you do it just make sure Winona forgives you!"

Keaton tried to reason with her, "Mom, can you calm down a bit? Winona's not your daughter-in-law, remember? I've told you a million times, there's nothing romantic between us. We're just friends."

Janelle nodded vigorously. "You're absolutely right! I don't want Winona as my daughter-in-law anymore."

Keaton blinked. "You finally figured it out?"

Janelle huffed, "Yep. She's way out of your league! If she dated you, it'd be like a rose growing out of a pile of cow manure."

Keaton stared, speechless. Nothing stings quite like your own mom roasting you.

Janelle went on, "When I caught you two together in the family chapel the other day, I was so happy! I really thought there was something between you. Factually wanted Winona to join the Huber family."

"I never cared she'd been married before. Compared to you, she's practically a saint!"

Keaton sighed. "Mom, could you not build her up by tearing me down?"

Janelle ignored him, plowing ahead.

"But the more I got to know Winona, I

the more I realized you two are a terrible match! She's just too good for you. look at her, then look at you, and honestly..."

The look of disappointment on Janelle's face was obvious enough that even a blind man could see it. She might as well have had "hopeless" tattooed on her forehead.

Keaton looked at his mom like she'd lost her mind. "Mom, did Winona brainwash you or something?"

Janelle rolled her eyes at him.

"Actually, should thank you! If it

weren't for you, I never would've

become a superfan for the first time in my life and such a successful one at that!"

"I went through the pain of bringing you into this world, raising you all these years,

and this-this is the best thing you've ever done for me!"

Keaton groaned. "Mom, that's a bit dramatic."

Janelle pursed her lips. "You don't get it! Ever since I became Winona's fan, I've felt more energetic every day!"

"A woman should be her own heroine—no more swallowing her pride or putting up with nonsense!"

"So you can stop chasing Winona. She deserves someone way better. I'm planning to ask her to be my goddaughter!"

"When she's feeling better, I'll head over to the Newsom family with a proper gift basket and make it official. No-why wait? I'll start getting ready now!"

With that, Janelle spun around and marched off. Keaton barely had time to call after her before she turned back and shot him a warning glare.

"And you stay away from Winona! Don't you dare mess things up for her again!"

Keaton was left standing there, completely dumbfounded, as his mom disappeared into the elevator.

Is this what happens when a fifty-year-old discovers fangirling? Terrifying.

Chapter 1444

Even his own mom didn't give him the time of day anymore!

Keaton was starting to realize that Winona was no ordinary woman-her influence on her fans was just too strong.

Ever since Janelle had become a die-hard Winona fan, she'd changed completely. She used to be the picture-perfect, elegant trophy wife, but now? She was so much more outspoken, and honestly... a lot fiercer.

Shaking off his worries about his mom, Keaton strode towards the hospital room.

At the door, he knocked a couple of times.

Tarquin opened it, saw Keaton standing there, and his face instantly darkened. Without a word, he stepped out, slammed the door behind him, and landed a solid punch right on Keaton's mouth.

The punch was no joke-Keaton's lip split, blood trickling down his chin.

He was utterly dumbfounded. First, his own mother had told him off, and now his brother had socked him in the face!

Talk about a rough day for this poor guy.

Touching his bleeding lip, Keaton stared at Tarquin, wide-eyed.

"Dude, are you nuts? What the hell was that for?!"

Before Tarquin could answer, Elysia came out, having heard the commotion.

Tarquin immediately softened, standing by her side. "Don't be upset, honey. I've already stood up for you."

When Elysia stayed silent, Tarquin leaned in, "Still not enough? Want me to hit him a couple more times?"

Keaton: ""Seriously?!"

So his brother was all about keeping his wife happy, even if it meant treating him like yesterday's garbage?

Elysia suddenly spoke, "Do you know why Alicia hit Winona?"

Keaton quickly replied, "I've got people looking into it, but nothing yet."

Elysia pressed her lips together.

"Then you should go. Winona's getting an IV and she said she doesn't want to see you right now. You just stress her out."

She shot a look at Tarquin, "You too. I don't need you here either."

With that, Elysia turned around and shut the door firmly behind her, clearly done with both of them.

The two brothers just stood there outside her room, looking defeated, before heading downstairs together.

Keaton grumbled,

"I get you want to make your wife happy, but couldn't you have just pretended? Did you really have to punch me?"

Tarquin shot him a glare,

"Winona started crying, then Elysia started crying... Honestly, that punch was me going easy on you."

When his wife cried, Tarquin's heart broke.

Keaton blinked in surprise. "Winona cried, too?"

"Yeah."

"Because of the stitches?"

"No, the wound's on her head, so they had to shave a patch of her hair. She was upset about her hair."

Keaton: "...She didn't cry when she got hurt, but losing a bit of hair made her cry? She really does love her looks!"

Tarquin rolled his eyes.

"Lucky the cut wasn't on her face.

She's a celebrity you know ifnet

got a sear there, you'd owe

her for

life."

Keaton just sighed and followed Tarquin out of the elevator. They stood outside in

the courtyard, lighting up cigarettes.

"I had no idea Alicia had it out for her! Alicia's not even in showbiz yet-who could've guessed..."

Tarquin flicked his ash. "You better clean up the whole Beatrix Sutton mess, now."

Keaton looked confused. "Beatrix?"

Tarquin pulled out his phone and played a recording of Alicia sobbing.

"Beatrix, you have to help me,

please. I only got into it with Winona because of you! If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have had a problem with her at all. Please, if you don't help me out of this I'll have to drag you too! Don't blame me—I'm desperate! The internet is tearing me apart... please..."

When the recording ended, Tarquin said,

"I've already questioned her myself. Alicia only got close to you because Beatrix

set it up."

"Beatrix promised her a million dollars and a shot at stardom if she managed to take Winona down."

Keaton: "..."

Tarquin forwarded the recording to Keaton, then pocketed his phone.

"Winona has no idea Beatrix's involved. If you want to tell her yourself, be my guest."

"Your business with Beatrix is your own, and won't force you to come clean, but you better handle it.

Otherwise, this is going to blow up your face

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Keaton's brow furrowed as he took a deep drag from his cigarette. "Yeah, I got it."

Chapter 1445

An hour later, in a private room at an exclusive club.

Beatrix followed the waiter in, calm and composed.

When she saw Keaton, there was no anxiety, no nervousness—almost as if she were meeting a colleague in a library. She wore her usual glasses, her look crisp and understated, like a rare snow lily blooming on a mountaintop.

She set her handbag down and quietly took the seat opposite Keaton.

Keaton didn't get angry right away. He just narrowed his eyes at her, his expression icy.

The waiter brought over a pot of coffee, poured them each a cup, and left. Only then did Keaton speak:

"Really trying to get yourself killed, huh?"

Beatrix knew he'd figured it out. She owned up to it, cool as ever.

"Alicia? I arranged for her to be there."

Keaton frowned. "Why? What's your angle?"

Beatrix picked up her coffee, took a slow sip.

"I don't like how she's always glued to you. Plus, Janelle and Mr. Huber adore her -she's a threat to me."

Keaton raised an eyebrow. "So tell me, how do you think I feel about you always watching my every move?"

Beatrix adjusted her glasses and looked him straight in the eye.

"You could kill me, if you want."

Keaton: "..."

Beatrix continued, "I'm not after your heart, Keaton. But I need the status of being Mrs. Huber. If you give me that, you're free to do whatever you want. I won't interfere."

"If you want me to stop watching you, there are only two ways: marry me... or kill me."

Keaton stared at her, silent for a few seconds. Then, suddenly, he let out a cold, short laugh.

"No wonder you're so fearless. You know damn well I'm not going to kill you. You're right-I won't. But that doesn't mean I'm completely powerless."

He pulled out his phone and, making sure she could see, dialed a number.

"Pull the funding. Not another cent goes into the project. Tell Professor Watson

and the rest of the team exactly why: this was Beatrix's doing."

As soon as he hung up, Beatrix shot up out of her chair. "Keaton!"

He calmly sipped his coffee. Within seconds, Beatrix's phone buzzed. She

checked the screen, frowned, and answered.

"Professor Watson..."

Whatever the professor said, it wiped all the color from Beatrix's face.

"I understand. I'll figure something out."

She hung up, her breathing quick and shallow.

"Why would you drag innocent people into this? What happens between us has nothing to do with them!"

"Professor Watson treats me like his

own daughter. He's spent years on this research he's so close to a breakthrough! By cutting the funding now, you're ruining him!"

Keaton remained unbothered.

"You're the one who dragged innocent people into this. You're the one putting him in danger."

Beatrix's chest heaved with anger. She was quiet for a long moment, then finally gritted out an apology.

"I was wrong. If you want me to apologize to Winona, I'll do it."

Keaton rolled his eyes. "Just stay away from her."

Beatrix bit her lip, her eyes shining with unshed tears. "... You like her, don't you?"

"None of your business."

Keaton's tone was sharp.

"You know exactly why I protect you. Stop pushing my limits, Beatrix. I won't warn you again."

He stood up to leave. Beatrix called after him, "What about the funding?"

"A promise is a promise. It's

and it won't be coming b t out yourself...Maybe t

next

time, you'll learn your lesson."

Beatrix was left speechless.

Later that afternoon, Winona was discharged from the hospital and returned to Tanhe Manor.

She'd only needed a few stitches-no need for an overnight stay.

Elysia had to pick her child up from preschool, but with Ridley and Caroline

keeping Winona company, she felt at ease.

After dropping Winona off at Tanhe Manor, Elysia headed home.

Ridley and Caroline both knew

Keaton had helped Winona a lot with the Zane situation. They were grateful So even with everything that had happened today, they couldn't bring themselves to blame Keaton.

Chapter 1446

But her parents couldn't help but worry about their daughter...

"Winona, you and Mr. Huber, you two..." her dad started gently.

Winona knew exactly what was on their minds. She grinned and waved a hand dismissively.

"Don't overthink it. Keaton and I are just friends. Sure, today's mess started because of him, but you can't really blame him-he didn't know Alicia was that kind of person."

Ridley frowned, concern etched deep in his face.

"He's a good kid in every way, except-well, relationships... Winona, why don't you just move back in with us for a while?"

Winona shook her head, her smile soft but firm.

"You guys know I like having my own place. Don't worry, really. I'll be more careful next time. Lesson learned."

"But-" her mother started.

"Alright, alright, I'm starving! Mom, Dad, could you guys make me something good to eat?"

Caroline perked up immediately. "Of course! What do you want?"

Winona rattled off a few favorite dishes-mac and cheese, roast chicken, maybe some mashed potatoes and sent her parents bustling off to the kitchen.

She flopped down on her bed, grabbed her phone, and opened the camera app to check the stitches on her forehead.

Ugh, thinking about the new bald patch made her groan.

Ding! Suddenly her phone chimed, making her jump.

She fumbled and-whack!-dropped it right on her face.

"Ow! Jeez, who the hell—" she muttered, rubbing her nose.

It was a message from Keaton. First, an awkward grimacing emoji, then:

[Back home yet? Mind if I come by?]

Winona typed back: [Not a good time!]

Keaton: [Alright, got it.]

A few minutes later, there was a soft tapping at her bedroom window.

Winona glanced over-was that a shadow outside?

Wait. A shadow?

Oh, crap. A person!

Her brain lagged a second, then she shot upright and hurried over to the window. They were on the third

floor Anyone falling from Kece would end up in the ER!

She pressed close to the glass and whispered, "Who's there?!" Keaton's voice floated in. "Open up, it's me."

Winona stared, dumbfounded, but carefully cracked open the window. Keaton was plastered against the wall looking like one wrong move would send him tumbling.

Once the window was open, Keaton swung himself inside as quickly as he could.

Winona didn't even try to stop him-if she pushed, she'd probably send him flying!

As soon as he landed safely in the room, she glared at him. "Are you insane? This is the third floor!"

Keaton brushed dust off his hands. "You said it wasn't a good time to come over, so the only way in was the window. Your folks are still here, right?"

Winona stared at him in disbelief, lowering her voice. "I said 'not a good time' because I didn't want to

see you right now! Not because

wanted you sneaking around like a criminal! Get it?"

Keaton put on a mock-hurt face. "Really? My bad, totally misunderstood. I thought you meant we had to meet in secret."

Winona rolled her eyes. "Why would we need to sneak around? What are we, teenagers caught making out?"

Keaton grinned, mischief in his eyes. "Aren't your parents here?"

"What, are they gonna chase you around the house or something?"

"Hey, you got hurt because of me. They probably hate my guts. If I knocked on the front door, Ridley might come after me with a carving knife!"

Winona just stared at him, at a loss for words. She finally asked, "So why risk your neck climbing up here?"

"You got hurt because of me I felt bad. I just wanted to check on you. Oh, and I brought you a little something."

He reached into his jacket, and Winona's heart skipped a beat. Her eyes went wide.

"Nope! I don't want it!" she blurted, almost instinctively.

Keaton looked surprised. "Don't want it? Come on, it's something good! Don't you even wanna see what it is?"

Winona shook her head, frowning. "Take it back. I really don't want it."

Keaton stared at her, looking completely baffled. "Can I at least know why not?"

Chapter 1447

Winona looked at the bottle of wine in Keaton's hand and felt a chill run down her spine.

Just thinking about that fiasco at the Huber family's ancestral home still made her scalp tingle. She'd made a scene at their family gathering—she'd downed their ceremonial wedding wine, got caught red-handed, and, to top it all off, she was busted hiding under their covers. That was the kind of embarrassment that stuck with you for life.

So now, when it came to Huber family wine, she wasn't about to risk it again.

Especially since this bottle was the real deal. On the open market, it would easily fetch a seven-figure price tag. Her little scrape wasn't worth such an extravagant gift.

Keaton, meanwhile, was still trying to sell her on it. "This wine's got history. It's the real stuff—you can't find it anywhere else."

Of course Winona knew it was good. She wanted it, sure, but there was no way she could accept.

She eyed him suspiciously. "Let me guess, is this another one of your grandpa's stash?"

Keaton shook his head. "Nope. We already finished off my grandpa's. This one's from my great-grandpa's collection."

Winona's mouth twitched. What was it with the Hubers and hoarding wine?

"So, you polished off your grandpa's, and now you're working your way through your great-grandpa's? If your dad finds out, he'll have your head!"

Keaton protested, "Hey, I didn't steal this! My dad gave it to me. He told me to give it to you."

Winona blinked in surprise. "Mr. Huber asked you to bring me wine? What for?"

Keaton explained, "After we finished off my grandpa's wine, my dad thought you were a fan. He pulled this bottle from my great-grandpa's stash as a peace offering—told me to apologize to you. He said, if I

come back with the wine, it means you didn't forgive me. And if you don't forgive me, he'd rather cut ties with me than have such a disappointing son."

Winona stared at him. "How is whether or not I forgive you any business of your family drama?"

Keaton gave her his best sad puppy eyes. "Dad says, if even someone as straightforward as you won't be friends with me, I must really suck. And if I suck that much, he's done with me. Says it's too embarrassing."

Winona was speechless.

Keaton set the wine down on the table. "So, c'mon. For the sake of my dignity- and so I don't have to run away from home again-just take it, will you?"

Winona's lips pressed into a thin line. "Fine, I forgive you for your dad's and great-grandpa's sake. But I can't take the wine. Give it back to your great- grandpa's collection."

Keaton shook his head. "No can do. Dad won't let me off the hook that easy."

Winona said, "Just tell your folks I said thanks, but no thanks. I appreciate the thought, but I'm not taking it. Tell your dad it's my gift to your great-grandpa instead "

Before she could finish, Keaton had already uncorked the bottle.

Somehow, he'd conjured up two wine glasses out of nowhere. He poured a generous glass for each of them.

Winona's breath caught in her throat. "Are you serious right now?!"

Keaton grinned, looking way too pleased with himself. "Trust me, my dad will be happier knowing you forgave his precious grandson. Come on, let's have a toast-my apology for everything today."

Winona gaped at him for a second, then hissed under her breath, "Are you insane? This wine is crazy expensive, and you just popped it open like it's a bottle of soda! Who's gonna pay for it now?"

"I will, I will!" Keaton said, still smirking. "My treat. Happy?"

Winona clenched her teeth. "You're out of your mind!"

She'd tried not to accept such an expensive gift from the Hubers, and now he'd gone and opened it. There was no way to return it now. Janelle". and Richard would definitely think she'd accepted it!

"Keaton, you absolute jerk! You-"

She grabbed a pillow and chucked it at him.

Keaton just laughed, dodging easily. "Hit me after we finish the wine. Don't let four

generations of Huber family effort go to waste."

Chapter 1448

"This bottle of whiskey? My great-granddad had it his whole life and never once brought himself to open it. Then he passed it down to my granddad, and he couldn't do it either."

"After that, it went to my dad. And guess what? Still didn't touch it!"

"And now it's landed with us. If we broke the bottle now, not only my great- granddad, but my granddad and my dad would all be rolling in their graves."

Winona: "..."

She was mad, sure-but wasting this kind of whiskey? She couldn't bring herself to do it.

This one glass? Worth a fortune.

And more than that, it was a collector's edition. Didn't matter how much money you had-couldn't buy another one like it.

She frowned and took the glass Keaton handed her. He quickly clinked his glass against hers.

"Listen, today, that was my fault. Ms. Newsom, please, be the bigger person and don't hold it against a lowly guy like me."

Winona shot him a glare but took a sip.

Keaton asked, "Well? How is it?"

Winona didn't deny it. "It's good. Really good."

Keaton looked pleased. "Some people's ancestors collected gold and jewels. Mine? They hoarded the best booze they could find."

"If it's a bottle that got passed down from my family, you can bet it's top shelf. Relax and enjoy."

With that, the tension between them eased, and they started drinking, glass after glass.

Halfway through, Keaton set down his glass and went over to the bed, propping up Winona's pillow for her.

"Let's not stand around. If you get tired, I'll feel even guiltier. Come on, lie back. We'll drink and chat. Let me fill you in about what happened today."

Winona didn't bother protesting. She wandered over, half-reclined against the pillow.

"So... you figured everything out?"

"Yeah."

Keaton dragged over her vanity chair and sat beside the bed.

"Not gonna lie—it was Beatrix stirring up trouble behind the scenes." Winona's eyes widened.
"Beatrix?!"

Keaton nodded. "She wants to be Mrs. Huber. I don't want to marry her. Lately you and I have been spending time together, and my folks really like you. She sees you as the competition now."

Winona frowned. "What's even going on between you two?"

Keaton shrugged. "Bit of a history, but no feelings."

"I don't like her. She doesn't like me either. She doesn't want to be Mrs. Huber because of me—she just wants the title.

But I can't give her

that."

"If I married her, any girl I dated after that would get called a homewrecker. I gotta

think about my future girlfriends, you know?"

Winona snorted, sarcastic as ever. "Wow, so considerate. Already worrying about all your future girlfriends."

Keaton grinned, eyes glinting. "Hey, call me a flirt if you want, but don't call me a jerk."

Winona rolled her eyes again.

"If you don't want her, why not just cut things off for good? Does she have something on you?"

Keaton shook his head. "Nope. But it's... complicated."

Winona eyed him, curiosity piqued. Just what was the story between him and Beatrix?

Before she could press further, Keaton continued, "If Beatrix wants to apologize to you and you want to see her, I'll have her come by only if you

don't want to see her, you don't have to."

Winona snorted. "Why would I want to see her? Just to get annoyed all over again?"

She narrowed her eyes, a sly look on her face. "So what if I wanted to get back at her? Would you stop me?"

Keaton considered it, then answered honestly, "...You can mess with her, but I need her alive and out of jail."

Winona: "So you're her guardian angel now?"

"Sort of, sort of not," Keaton said, dodging.

Then he pulled a stack of papers and a pair of scissors from his jacket, handing them to her.

Winona looked at him, suspicious. "What are you up to now?"

Chapter 1449

Keaton said,

"Anyway, you got hurt because of me. I have to take responsibility."

"Whether or not you want to get back at Beatrix, that's up to you. But this is my way of making it right."

"I pulled a few scripts for you-hot properties right now. Take a look, see if any catch your eye. If you find one you like, I'll bankroll the whole thing. You'll be the leading lady."

"You can even pick your co-star. Doesn't matter if they're from the industry or not just say the word, I'll make it happen."

Winona stared at him, stunned. She reached for the folder and flipped through it. Every script was in serious demand these days.

Keaton added,

"If you think you can juggle your schedule, take them all if you want. Or if there's a movie or a brand endorsement you're dying to do, just tell me. I'll set it up."

Winona: "..."

She could turn down whiskey, but these scripts? No way. She was an actress, and she loved her craft. She wanted to keep pushing her limits, keep surprising herself.

These were projects she'd always dreamed of, but never had a shot at. Now they were right in front of her, and she wasn't about to let them slip away.

She didn't bother pretending. She was straightforward:

"These are exactly what I want. I'll take them. Let me pick which ones and get back to you. Thanks, Keaton."

Keaton grinned, even more direct,

"I should be thanking you! If you turned me down, I'd never stop feeling guilty."

Then he picked up a pair of scissors and handed them to Winona. "You can look at the scripts later. For now, I figured you might want to blow off some steam."

Winona eyed the scissors, confused. "What's this for?"

Keaton explained, "Heard you had to chop off some hair to get stitches, and you cried about it. I figured I'd give you a shot at payback."

Winona: "?"

Keaton shrugged. "Hey, I'm vain too. But we're friends, right? Just... go easy on me, and please don't make me look like a total disaster."

Now she got it. Keaton was offering up his own hair as a peace offering.

Honestly, with a move like that, how

could she stay mad? No wonder everyone knew he was a flirt but girls still fell for him. He wasn't just good-looking or rich-he knew how to make a girl feel better how to hit the right emotional notes. He could check every box: looks, money, comfort, fun. Who wouldn't fall for a guy like that? Out of ten women, at least half would catch feelings.

Winona didn't take the scissors.

"Forget it. I'm over it. Let's just move on. We're still friends." But Keaton pushed,

"No way. I can't get that image of you crying over your hair out of my head Please, just take a few ships so can feel a little less guilty."

She hesitated, so he nudged her, "Come on, don't leave me hanging."

Winona sighed, "I don't even know how to cut hair."

Keaton just winked, "That's fine. Whatever happens, I won't hold it against you."

She paused for a moment, but when he insisted, she gave in.

"Okay, you asked for it. If it turns out awful, you're not allowed to complain." "Scout's honor!"

Winona took the scissors, planning to just trim a little off the ends, nothing drastic. She really wasn't upset anymore.

But-

Just as she brought the scissors to Keaton's hair, they heard Caroline's voice from the other room:

"I'm coming, I'm coming!"

Startled, both of them jumped.

Keaton jerked his head, and Winona's hand slipped.

Snip !

A huge chunk of Keaton's perfectly styled hair came off, right at the roots.

His suave laid-back look instantly transformed into a ridiculous, lapsed mess. Instead of looking like the star of a vintage film, he now looked... well, like someone who lost a bet at a frat party.

And the worst part? The middle part was way too wide. Not a little wide—a canyon. Bold, obvious, and absolutely impossible to hide.

Chapter 1450

Winona was completely at a loss, standing frozen, not sure what to say or do. "....."

Keaton broke the silence, "Your mom just scared the crap out of me. Are you done with the haircut?"

Winona pressed her lips together, searching for words, when suddenly Janelle's voice drifted in from the hallway.

"Hi, Mrs. Newsom, sorry to barge in. I just wanted to check on Winona."

Caroline replied warmly, "Oh, you're not bothering us at all! Come in, come in! You really didn't need to bring all these gifts, though. Ridley, Mr. and Mrs. Huber are here!"

Ridley called out from the kitchen, "Coming, coming! Sorry, I got caught up with dinner prep. Please, come on in, make yourselves at home."

Richard, ever the gentleman, said, "Please don't be so formal. We're just here to apologize-Winona got caught up in something because of our son."

Ridley waved it off, "Winona's just fine. Sorry you had to make the trip. Have a seat, let me get you some coffee."

Caroline added, "I'll go call Winona down."

Janelle smiled, "No need, really. Let her rest. I'll just pop up and check on her."

The parents were all so courteous and friendly, it felt a little like a Thanksgiving get-together.

Meanwhile, inside Winona's room, she and Keaton both looked at each other, eyes wide, totally shocked.

They hadn't expected Janelle and Richard to show up out of the blue.

Seconds later, there was a knock at the door!

Caroline called, "Winona, Janelle and Mr. Huber are here to see you."

Janelle called out, "Winona, are you resting?"

Winona and Keaton both panicked. One yanked a chair, the other jumped off the bed-they both scrambled for the door.

The chair screeched across the floor, and Winona thudded to the ground as she hopped off the bed.

Neither of them cared about the noise—they were just desperate to get to the door. In their hurry, Keaton bumped into Winona, and she accidentally stepped on his foot.

They both winced in pain, but no way were they making a sound.

Caroline asked, "Winona, what was that noise?"

Winona and Keaton held the door shut, hearts pounding wildly. Winona called out,

"Mom, I—I'm just getting changed! You and Janelle relax in the living room, I'll be down in a minute."

Caroline seemed satisfied. Janelle added kindly,

"No rush, Winona... She sounds so out of breath, poor thing."

Caroline laughed, "Winona's just excited to see you guys. She loves having you here."

When the coast was clear and everyone had gone downstairs, Winona quickly tocked the door and let out the breath she'd been

holding.

"That was terrifying!"

The Hubers had already almost caught them once before—if they got caught

again, there'd be no digging themselves out of this mess.

Winona glanced at Keaton's half-finished haircut and hissed, "You need to get out of here. Now!"

Keaton didn't need convincing. He hurried to the window, opened it, then slammed it shut again.

Winona glared, "What are you waiting for?"

Keaton whispered, "I can't go."

"Why not?"

"My dad's driver's downstairs. If I climb out, he'll see me for sure."

Winona rushed to the window and peeked out. Sure enough, there was a middle- aged guy in a suit, leaning against a sleek car, smoking.

"That him?"

"Yeah."

Winona felt her heart sink. "This is bad. If anyone finds out you're here, we are so busted."

A girl's room, a guy hiding out-if word got around, it'd be a disaster.

Keaton said, "Okay, just act natural. Go downstairs and keep them busy, don't let anyone come up here ty hide in the bathroom for now."

He darted into the bathroom, but almost immediately called out, "Winona!"

His voice was so loud it echoed

down the hall, catching the attention of all four parents chatting in the living room, bringing the lively conversation to a sudden, suspicious halt.