

Hitched 1741

Chapter 1741

Along with it, they pushed the absurd news of Koryon's "Zero-Win Championship."

Since they refused to honor their promises, they deserved to be the laughingstock of the entire world.

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After a lively family dinner, Tarquin looked at Elysia reluctantly.

"You stay home and put the kids to bed. I'm going to check on Keaton."

Elysia was fully supportive.

"Hurry up and go. See if you can get him to open up about his real feelings, and while you're at it, explain Shane and Winona's relationship to him."

"Alright."

Tarquin pressed a kiss to Elysia's forehead, said goodnight to the kids, and headed to The Blissful Pub.

When he arrived, Keaton was drinking himself into a stupor in a private VIP suite on the top floor.

Booker and Gale were there, too.

Seeing Tarquin walk in, the two men looked as if their savior had just arrived.

"Tarquin, thank God you're here. You need to talk some sense into him. If he keeps drinking like this, he's going to end up in the hospital."

Tarquin's gaze turned somber as he looked at Keaton. The man was currently tipping another bottle into his mouth, completely surrounded by a graveyard of empty glass.

Booker and Gale lowered their voices, taking turns explaining the situation.

"We have no idea what set him off today. Before we even got here, he called in six girls at once."

"And not a single one lasted ten minutes with him! Keaton tried to take them to the bedroom, but he couldn't even perform."

"The girls were all whispering that he's lost his touch. Said he couldn't even get it up."

Tarquin was speechless.

The two continued.

"We even tried bringing up Jess, but it didn't work. We warned him that if he took another sip, we'd call his sister down here. His response was to down an entire bottle of hard liquor."

"Look at the bruises on his face. It looks like he got into a fight, but no matter how much we press him, he refuses to say a word."

Tarquin glanced at Gale and Booker.

"You two head out. I'll stay with him for a while."

Booker and Gale nodded.

"Alright. Give us a call if anything happens. We'll be right over."

"Yeah."

After they left, Tarquin ordered a sober-up remedy from the staff. Then he stepped forward snatched the bottle right out of Keaton's hand and slammed it onto the coffee table.

Keaton was furious. "Are you out of your mind? Give me back my damn drink."

He reached for it, but Tarquin casually tossed the bottle straight into the trash can.

Enraged, Keaton cursed and tried to stagger to his feet to throw a punch.

"Do you have a death wish? Taking my drink? I'll kill you."

Tarquin ignored him. He took a seat in the armchair nearby, lit a

cigarette, crossed his long legs

and

simply watched Keaton in silence.

Keaton thrashed around for a good minute but couldn't even manage to stand up from the sofa.

He was far too drunk, his body practically melting into the cushions.

After a while of pointless struggling, he exhausted himself. Giving up on the insults,

his tone took a desperate turn.

"I'm losing my mind today. I need a drink.

going to die. If I drop dead

can you handle the guilt?"-

"Just give me the bottle. Name your price. I'll agree to anything."

Tarquin flicked the ash from his cigarette, remaining silent.

After a few moments of pleading, Keaton spiraled again, practically crying out. "You're all just messing with me, aren't you? You think I'm an easy target."

"Let me tell you, Shane. If it wasn't for Winona, I would have beaten you to a pulp."

"Don't think I held back from smashing your face because I'm scared of you. You think I'm afraid of you?"

"I'm afraid of Winona."

Chapter 1742

Keaton sounded completely justified, as if being afraid of Winona was a badge of honor.

He just kept rambling.

"Winona is obsessed with good looks. If I wasn't worried about making her sad by ruining your face, I would have aimed exclusively for it."

"And you, Winona. Just look at you. You could have any man you want. Why the hell did you have to go for some younger guy?"

"What's so great about a younger guy? How many of them are actually reliable?"

"They'll be all over you today, and dump you tomorrow."

"Hopeless romantics never get a happy ending."

"I tell you, but you won't listen. Hah. Would I ever try to hurt you? The truth hurts, don't you get that? I'm only saying it because I care about you. I wouldn't waste my breath on anyone else."

"Even if they begged me, I wouldn't say a word."

By the time the waiter brought in the hangover remedy, Keaton was still muttering to himself, crying between sentences.

The staff at the Blissful Pub were basically his loyal followers. They had never seen him in such a state. The waiter stammered.

"Mr... Mr. Bradford, the hangover drink."

"Can he drink it straight away?" Tarquin asked.

"Yes, it's warm, not too hot."

Tarquin ordered, "Get a few more guys in here. Force it all down his throat."

The waiter froze. "Huh?"

"Don't worry about it," Tarquin said. "If he gives you any trouble when he's sober, I'll handle him."

The waiter nodded quickly, called in two more employees, and together they pinned Keaton down, pouring the entire hangover remedy into him.

After making sure he swallowed it, the staff cleaned up the mess Keaton had made earlier before finally leaving the room.

Being force-fed the drink left Keaton feeling deeply wronged, and he sobbed even harder.

"You all just think I'm easy to bully..."

Tarquin watched him in exasperation. When Elysia had first told him that Keaton had fallen for Winona, he hadn't fully believed it.

Now, he was entirely convinced.

God was truly fair. Rich or poor, everyone had to suffer the agonies of love eventually.

Drinking himself into this pathetic state meant he was truly heartbroken.

"When did you fall for Winona?" Tarquin asked.

Keaton exploded instantly, his reaction intense.

"Who likes her? I don't like her at all."

Tarquin's eyes narrowed. "If you don't like Winona, who do you like?"

Keaton slurred, "I like beautiful women."

"Is Winona not beautiful?"

Keaton answered without hesitation. "She is."

"Since she is, why don't you like her?"

Keaton's eyes turned red. He choked up, acting as though he had suffered the greatest injustice in
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"She likes younger men. She likes pretty boys. I'm too old."

Tarquin had genuinely been feeling sorry

could him, but hearing that, bet

couldn't help but let out a burst of laughter

Keaton gritted his teeth. "What the hell are you laughing at?"

Tarquin composed himself and asked again.

"If she didn't like younger guys, would you like her?"

Keaton sniffled loudly. "No."

Tarquin was confused. "Why?"

"Because she doesn't like me," Keaton replied.

"Because she doesn't like you, you refuse to like her?"

Keaton nodded. "Yeah."

"What if she did like you? Would you like her then?" Tarquin pressed.

Keaton grew agitated, his lips trembling. It took him a long time to choke out, "No."

"Why?" Tarquin asked, genuinely curious.

Keaton looked even more aggrieved. "Because she likes pretty boys."

Tarquin sighed. They had just gone in a complete circle.

He tried to ask more, but Keaton shut down, alternating between throwing up and crying.

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Tarquin stayed at the Blissful Pub with Keaton all night.

Early the next morning, Elysia called.

"Are you still with Keaton?"

Tarquin glanced at Keaton, who was passed out on the sofa.

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"Yeah. He got incredibly drunk last night, I didn't want to leave him alone. I'll head back after he wakes up and a proper talk we have

"Winona just called me," Elysia said. "She wants to know if you're free today."

Chapter 1743

"Does she need something?" Tarquin asked.

Elysia let out a long breath.

"She's over three months pregnant now, and her bump is going to start showing soon. She can't keep hiding it from Ridley and Caroline forever. She plans to go home today and come clean."

"She's worried that once they find out the baby is Keaton's, they won't let her keep it. She wants you there to help reassure them."

"She wants you to promise them that even if Keaton finds out the baby is his later on, he won't try to take custody or make things difficult for her."

"Her parents know you and Keaton are close friends, and they trust you. If you say it, it'll give them some peace of mind."

Tarquin could understand that. After all, Keaton was notoriously opposed to commitment and had always firmly declared that he never wanted marriage or children.

In Ridley and Caroline's eyes, Keaton finding out about the child could only lead to disaster.

He would either force Winona to get an abortion.

Or, wait until the baby was born and snatch the child away from her entirely.

Neither scenario was good for Winona.

So her parents' concerns were completely justified.

"I'll wait for you at the Blissful Pub. When you leave the house, have the driver

swing by to pick me up, and we'll go to the Newsom estate together."

"Sounds good."

An hour later, Elysia arrived outside The Blissful Pub.

Keaton was still passed out. Tarquin gave the staff a few instructions before heading out.

He and Elysia traveled to the Newsom family home together.

On the way, Elysia asked, "Did you find anything out?"

"You and Winona were right. Keaton has fallen for her."

"How much?"

"A lot, I'd say. He drank himself into a stupor and cried his eyes out. He even called

in a few girls last night and couldn't perform with any of them."

Only when a man was truly in love did he lose all physical interest in other women. Elysia let out a long breath.

"I never expected someone as wild as Keaton could actually fall in love."

"He probably didn't want to fall either, but he couldn't help it. What's Winona's stance on this?"

Elysia shrugged. "Firm. She doesn't like him."

Tarquin sighed. "We'll just have to let nature take its course. Outsiders can't exactly fix someone else's love life."

...

At 10:00 AM, inside the Newsom residence.

Unsurprisingly, when Ridley and Caroline heard that Winona was pregnant-and that the baby was Keaton's-they were both shocked and terrified

As Winona was their only daughter, her parents naturally wanted her to marry and have a family of her own.

Under normal circumstances, they would have been thrilled to hear she was expecting.

But these circumstances were far from normal.

Caroline even started crying in panic.

"You're right, a baby is a blessing

and shouldn't be aborted. Having

child

of your own is wonderful news. But the father is Keaton, He...

Tarquin stepped in to clarify.

"I know Keaton doesn't exactly have the best reputation in your eyes. But please rest assured, give you word that Winona will not be

wronged in any way."

"Whenever Keaton eventually learns about the baby, he won't do anything to hurt her."

"If he does, you can hold me personally responsible."

Given Tarquin's status, his guarantee carried immense weight. Ridley and Caroline instantly felt better.

Winona, Elysia, and Shane all took turns comforting the older couple.

After a long time, her parents finally started to calm down.

Ridley sniffled and said,

"Since you've all put it that way, of course I have no objections. I..."

"I have an objection."

Keaton suddenly burst into the room like a madman. He was in such a rush that he

tripped and nearly fell face-first into the floor.

Tarquin caught him by the arm just in time.

Panting heavily, Keaton looked frantically between Shane and Winona.

"I forbid them from being together. There's something seriously wrong with this Shane guy."

Everyone stared at him in utter bewilderment.

Chapter 1744

Keaton was gasping for air, his emotions running wildly out of control.

"He's a player. He doesn't deserve Winona. I have proof."

Everyone remained dead silent.

His sudden intrusion was shocking enough, but hearing him accuse someone else

of being a player was truly mind-boggling.

More importantly, what right did he have to call anyone else a player?

Was there a bigger playboy in the world than Keaton Huber?

Before anyone could process the situation, Keaton whipped out his phone and initiated a video call.

The call connected almost instantly, and a young, blonde, blue-eyed Western woman appeared on the screen.

She was young, beautiful, and carried herself with an elegant charm.

She greeted them in slightly accented Mandarin. "Hello."

Keaton replied to her.

"Hello. Take a look at the guy standing in front of me. Is this the man who's been pursuing you?"

He pointed the camera squarely at Shane. The moment the girl saw him, her eyes welled up with tears. Her lips trembled before she finally managed to ask.

"You already have a girlfriend?"

Shane was stunned at first, but a second later, his face flushed red and he lunged to grab the phone.

Keaton dodged with sharp reflexes, holding the phone high out of reach and shouting.

"She's asking if you have a girlfriend. Answer the damn question."

Shane was absolutely livid. He kept swiping for the device, but Keaton kept it elevated and continued to yell.

"Why are you trying to grab the phone now? Do you think hanging up will erase the evidence?"

"You should be explaining yourself to Winona and to this beautiful girl. Tell them why you're two-timing them."

Shane's fury boiled over. "Stay out of my business. Give me the phone."

"Shane!" The girl on the screen suddenly cried out, her voice raspy. "I'll ask you one last time. Do you already have a girlfriend?"

Shane immediately jumped to defend himself. "No, I don't."

Hearing this, Keaton grew more agitated than anyone else in the room.

"You don't? Then make it clear right now. Who is it that you actually like?"

Through the screen, the Western girl stared at Shane with tear-filled eyes, looking entirely heartbroken.

Seeing that she was about to end the call, Shane quickly shouted, his face burning crimson.

"Linda, I like you. I've always liked you. I fell for you the first time I saw

you, you're the first give set

loved, and you'll be the last

Upon hearing that confession, Keaton looked even more ecstatic than Linda herself.

Without waiting for the girl to respond, he spun around and faced Winona.

"Did you hear that? Did you hear

him? He doesn't love you. His heart

belongs to someone else He's using you for your looks. He playing you."

"You got together with him without even doing a background check, and you dared

to bring him home to meet your parents? Are you out of your mind?"

"You're a grown woman, how can you trust men so easily? How naive can you be?" Winona just stared at him.

Before she could say a word, Keaton turned his frantic gaze toward Ridley, Caroline, Elysia, and Tarquin.

"You saw it too, right? There is something seriously wrong with Shane. He's complete trash."

"Elysia, you saw it. He just admitted out loud that he loves someone else. He doesn't love Winona at all."

"Tarquin, you witnessed it. Tell me, doesn't a guy like this deserve a beating?"

The entire room remained dead silent.

Shane was completely focused on the girl in the video, but just as he was about to speak again, Keaton abruptly ended the call.

Shane glared at him, but Keaton didn't hesitate for a second. He lunged forward and threw a heavy punch right into Shane's jaw.

"I knew you were bad news the

second I saw you. You've got a lot of

nerve you little punk coming all the

way to Jindale to play Winona, Did

you think no one would step up and teach you a lesson?"

Shane was already fuming that Keaton had dug into his private life and disturbed the girl he loved.

Getting punched in the face out of nowhere was the final straw. Blind with rage, he tackled Keaton, and a brawl broke out.

Chapter 1745

Keaton wasn't about to hold back; he was even more furious than Shane.

When they fought the night before, he had pulled his punches out of fear of upsetting Winona. But today, armed with what he believed was concrete proof of Shane's infidelity, he showed absolutely no mercy.

The two of them traded blows relentlessly, tangled in a vicious fight.

The chaos had erupted so suddenly that everyone was left stunned.

Other than Tarquin, no one even moved to break them up.

It wasn't until Keaton let out a sudden, agonized yell that the rest of the room finally snapped out of their daze.

Seeing both Keaton and Shane battered and bruised, Winona panicked. Forgetting her pregnancy entirely, she rushed forward to pull them apart.

By this point, Tarquin had managed to restrain Keaton by pinning his arms. Keaton desperately wanted to keep swinging at Shane but couldn't get his hands free.

Enraged, he yelled at Tarquin for taking Shane's side and violently yanked his arm, trying to break free.

In the wild struggle, his elbow accidentally slammed into Winona.

Losing her balance, she crashed hard against a chair.

"Ah!" she cried out in pain.

Elysia and Caroline gasped in sheer horror. "Winona."

The two women sprinted over to catch her, terrified. "Are you hurt?"

Keaton completely froze. He never meant to hurt Winona. His brow furrowed deeply,

his face paling in sheer panic.

"I... I..."

Seeing her fall, Shane immediately stopped fighting.

"Winona, are you okay? Is the baby okay?"

Keaton froze. He whipped his head toward Shane.

"What baby? Winona is pregnant?"

When no one answered him, he turned to Tarquin. "Winona is..."

Mid-sentence, the realization hit him like a freight train. His eyes widened to the size

of saucers.

"Winona is pregnant?!"

Still, no one paid him any attention.

Everyone's focus was solely on Winona, including Tarquin's.

Elysia helped Winona into a chair and immediately checked her pulse.

Winona's voice shook with fear. "Elysia, is the baby okay?"

After checking her pulse, Elysia let out a long breath of relief.

"It's fine. The baby isn't hurt. You and the baby are both perfectly fine. Just calm down. Take a deep breath."

Winona nodded frantically. Terrified that her stress would harm the child, she took deep, measured breaths to steady her racing heart.

The collective tension in the room broke, and everyone let out a sigh of relief.

Only Keaton remained completely shell-shocked.

Utterly floored.

His mind was reeling.

He stared at Winona, wide-eyed and disbelieving. "You're pregnant?"

It was only then that the group remembered he was still standing there. They all turned to look at him.

They had explicitly planned to keep the pregnancy a secret from him, worried he would demand she get rid of the child.

Now that he had discovered it by accident, they were all at a loss for words.

They glanced at Keaton, then collectively looked back at Winona.

Winona hadn't expected the secret to get out this quickly either. She

furrowed her brow, her lips parting. to speak, but before he could, Keaton demanded an answer.

"You're having Shane's baby?"

Winona was speechless. "I..."

Keaton panted heavily, grinding his teeth.

"He's clearly a piece of trash. He

doesn't even like you, and you

you out of your mind?et

actually want to have his kid? Are You

"Shut up."

Winona cut him off sharply, her face darkening. "Shane is my young cousin."

Shane gritted his teeth as well. "She's my family."

Keaton was stunned.

He whipped his head toward Elysia and Tarquin for confirmation.

Elysia nodded. "Shane and Winona are cousins."

Tarquin didn't nod or shake his head. He simply pressed his lips together, staring at

Keaton in absolute silence.

He was feeling secondhand embarrassment for the man.

Chapter 1746

Keaton was utterly mind-blown.

"But... doesn't the Newsom family only have one daughter? Since when is there a son?"

Winona rolled her eyes and explained impatiently.

"He's my aunt's son. He grew up overseas."

Keaton still couldn't believe it. He looked toward Caroline to confirm.

Caroline nodded.

"I am Shane's aunt, and Winona is his older cousin."

Keaton stared blankly.

His eyes were wide as saucers as he repeated the word in his head. Cousin. He's her cousin.

Just a cousin.

A sudden rush of immense relief washed over him. But immediately after the relief came the soul-crushing embarrassment.

"My bad. I completely misunderstood."

"Sorry about that, Shane. It was a misunderstanding. If you need me to, I can clear things up with Linda for you. Tell her you aren't a two-timer and that you don't have a girlfriend back home."

Shane was still furious.

"I don't need your help. And I'm not your cousin, so don't act like we're family."

He glared fiercely at Keaton, then turned around and walked out to call Linda and explain everything.

Keaton watched him leave, feeling entirely sheepish. Even after being snapped at, he didn't dare say a word back. All he could do was offer an awkward, apologetic laugh.

After all, that was Winona's family.

And he was the one who had made a massive fool of himself in the first place.

After Shane disappeared, Keaton turned back to face the rest of the room.

Everyone was staring right at him, each wearing a different expression of sheer disbelief.

Keaton had never been so mortified in his life.

The secondhand embarrassment was so thick he could practically dig a hole in the floor and hide in it.

But then his mind snapped back to the main issue. He quickly asked,

"If the baby isn't Shane's... whose is it?"

Everyone exchanged complicated looks before turning their eyes to Winona.

Winona stood up and looked at Keaton.

"Let's go outside and talk. Just the two of us."

Keaton blinked in surprise. "Alright."

The Newsom estate was an independent villa. As they stepped out, the two security guards stationed at the door looked at them anxiously.

Keaton had barreled past them earlier, and their failure to stop him was technically a dereliction of duty.

Winona reassured them, "Don't worry about it. It's nothing serious. You can go back to your posts."

Looking as if they had just been granted a pardon, the guards nodded eagerly and stepped away.

Keaton apologized awkwardly. "I was a little desperate earlier and just forced my way in. Sorry about that."

"It's fine."

Winona sat down on a bench near the koi pond and gestured for Keaton to join her.

She watched the fish swimming gracefully in the water, while Keaton kept his eyes fixed on her.

"I honestly had no idea Shane was

you. The only reason.

looked into him was because net

terrified you were getting

"When I heard today that he had a girl he liked overseas, I assumed you had run into another piece of trash. The theard you brought him home to meet your parents. panicked and acted impulsively..."

In his mind, meeting the parents was a massive step. It basically meant they were headed for marriage.

He had dated countless women in his life, and he had never brought a single one home.

Beatrix Sutton had met his parents, but she wasn't even his girlfriend.

So the thought of Winona bringing Shane home to her family had practically given him a heart attack.

Add the massive hangover from last night's binge-drinking, and his brain simply hadn't been functioning logically.

Winona wasn't angry. She spoke calmly.

"Shane and I should be thanking you. Thank you for caring about me, and thank you

for giving him the perfect opportunity to confess."

"He's liked that girl for a long time but never had the courage to tell her. You

essentially forced his hand today."

Keaton shifted gears. "A while back, when you went out of town to cancel your contracts was that because you found out you were

pregnant?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry. I thought you were doing it just to sever ties with me, and I was a total

jerk to you about it."

"It's fine. You didn't know. It's partially my fault for not telling you."

Chapter 1747

Keaton asked awkwardly, "Have you met someone you like recently?" Winona shook her head. "No."

"Then what's the deal with the baby? Was it an accident?"

"Yes."

Keaton frowned. "Who's the father?"

Winona turned to look at him. He genuinely hadn't suspected for a second that the baby was his.

When she didn't answer, Keaton assumed it was a sore subject and moved on to his next question.

"Does he know about the baby?"

Winona shook her head again. "Not yet."

Keaton knew she was pregnant, but since he didn't know the child was his, it technically meant the father was still in the dark.

Keaton pressed further, "Are you not going to tell him?"

Winona neither nodded nor shook her head. "I haven't figured out how to say it yet."

Keaton's expression darkened.

"The baby is his. He needs to take responsibility. Just tell him straight up. What's so hard about that?"

Winona sighed softly, deciding to be honest.

"I'm worried he won't want the baby. If he finds out, he might cause trouble."

Keaton was taken aback. "Why wouldn't he want it?"

Winona looked right at him and asked, "Do you want kids?"

Keaton froze for a moment. "I've never really thought about it."

"If you accidentally got someone pregnant, would you let her keep it?"

Keaton hesitated. He didn't say yes, but he didn't say no, either.

Winona frowned slightly. Seeing his reaction, any urge she had to come clean vanished completely.

What if he demanded she get rid of it?

This was Keaton. He had plenty of ways to force an abortion if he really wanted to.

She wasn't going to take that risk. Not even slightly.

Winona gently placed a hand over her lower abdomen.

"That man is a bit of a playboy, and there's no real emotional connection between us

anyway. I plan to have the baby and raise it on my own."

Keaton's brow furrowed tightly.

"They say it's incredibly difficult for a single mother to raise a child alone."

But Winona looked completely unbothered.

"It'll be fine. I'm financially secure, and my parents can help me raise the baby."

Keaton maintained his serious scowl.

"Do you have any idea how much this will destroy your career? You're an A-list actress at the peak of your fame. Getting pregnant out nowhere is career suicide. And being an unwed mother on top of that? The backlash will be catastrophic."

Winona nodded. "I know. And I'm willing to accept it."

Keaton couldn't wrap his head around it.

"You don't even love him. Why would you make such a massive sacrifice for him?" Winona replied gently.

"The baby is mine, too. It's not just his. I want to have this child, and it has absolutely nothing to do with him. I'm not sacrificing anything for his sake."

"But have you considered that having a child might ruin your chances of getting married in the future?" Keaton asked.

Winona smiled and shook her head.

"My last relationship put me through enough hell. I have no intention of ever getting married again. From now on, having my child in my life" be enough. I don't need a man."

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Keaton fell silent for a long moment before asking, "You've fully made up your mind?"

"Yes."

"It's not just a momentary impulse?"

"No."

Keaton let out a heavy sigh.

"Since you've made your decision, your friend, I'll support you. If you ever need help with anything, personal or professional, justask T do whatever I can."

Hearing this made Winona slightly uncomfortable. Because she didn't harbor any

feelings for him, she couldn't just easily accept his kindness.

But rejecting him outright would seem too deliberate.

After a long pause, she simply nodded. "Okay."

Chapter 1748

After their conversation, the two of them walked back to the living room together.

Keaton apologized to Ridley and Caroline once more before taking his leave with Tarquin.

Once they were outside the Newsom estate, Keaton asked, "Got a cigarette?"

Tarquin raised an eyebrow. "You didn't bring any?"

Keaton scowled. "I rushed out of the house today. Forgot them."

Tarquin handed him a cigarette. Just as Keaton was about to light it, he paused and glanced back at the house.

"Smoking out here won't affect Winona, right? Second-hand cigarette is bad for pregnant women and babies."

Tarquin stared at him flatly. "You're miles away from her. She'll be fine."

Still, Keaton hesitated. He dragged Tarquin a little further down the driveway before finally lighting up.

He took a few drags to steady his nerves, then fixed Tarquin with a dark look.

"You already knew Winona was pregnant, didn't you?"

Tarquin didn't deny it. "I've known for a while."

Keaton was furious. "Then why the hell didn't you tell me?"

Tarquin knew Winona still hadn't confessed to him. Before the two had even

returned to the living room, Winona had quickly texted Elysia, begging them to keep the secret going.

Tarquin's gaze turned sharp.

"What does Winona's private life have to do with you? Why should anyone tell you? You aren't her boyfriend."

Keaton's expression grew even darker.

"If I had known she was pregnant, I wouldn't have been so reckless around her.

What if I had actually hurt her today? What if I hurt the baby?"

Tarquin leaned against his car, one hand shoved coolly into his pocket, his handsome eyes narrowing in thought.

"I haven't even asked you yet. Why were you so frantic about Winona dating Shane?"

Keaton was stunned. "Shane is her cousin."

"That's not the point," Tarquin emphasized. "The point is, why do you care so much about who she dates?"

"Who said I cared?" Keaton shot back instantly.

Tarquin looked at him with mild amusement, his tone unhurried.

"The fact that you just humiliated yourself in front of her entire family isn't proof enough?"

Keaton was speechless.

Unable to find a valid counterargument, he quickly changed the subject.

"Did you already know Shane was her cousin, too?"

"I found out last night."

"Then why didn't you tell me? If you had told me, I wouldn't have made such an idiot of myself today."

Tarquin replied flatly,

"I planned to tell you last night. But

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you were blackout drunk, alternating between crying and throwing tantrums. I didn't get a chance to say a word just had to sit there and listen to you."

Keaton instantly grew defensive. "I was crying?"

Tarquin didn't waste time arguing. He pulled out his phone, pulled

and shoved it in Keaton's

face.

The video showed their conversation in the VIP room from the night before.

In the video, Tarquin asked, "If you don't like Winona, who do you like?"

A highly intoxicated Keaton slurred, "I like beautiful women."

"Is Winona not beautiful?"

"She is."

"Since she is, why don't you like her?"

Keaton's eyes had been red, sniffing as if he was the victim of a terrible tragedy.

"She likes younger men. She likes pretty boys. I'm too old... Waaah..."

Keaton watched in horror. He remembered absolutely none of this.

He knew he had gotten trashed, but the actual events of the night were a total blur.

Hubeyond belief, Keaton

lunged for the phone, but Tarquin merely stepped back, speaking calmly.

"Deleting it won't do you any good. I have it backed up on my email."

Keaton was livid. "What the hell is wrong with you? Backing it up? Are you trying to blackmail me?"

Chapter 1749

Tarquin smirked.

"I am trying to blackmail you. If you don't tell me the truth, I'll drop this into our group chat. Booker and Gale will laugh at you for the rest of your life."

Keaton cursed under his breath. "What truth do you want me to tell?"

"When did you fall for Winona? Answer honestly."

Keaton frowned, taking a deep, heavy drag of his cigarette. After a long silence, he finally answered.

"I haven't fallen for her. At most, I just have a little crush."

Tarquin wasn't buying it.

"Your actions lately say otherwise. It's far more than just a little crush."

Keaton flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"It's probably just guilt because I slept with her. I feel bad, so I want to treat her well. Make it up to her."

Tarquin scoffed. "You've slept with countless women. I've never seen you try to 'make it up' to any of them."

Keaton shot back without thinking. "How is she the same as the others?"

"Why isn't she the same?"

Keaton muttered, "She's Elysia's best friend."

"Blossom is Elysia's best friend, too," Tarquin pointed out. "I don't see you having a crush on Blossom."

Keaton had no response.

In truth, Keaton knew exactly how he felt about Winona.

She consumed his thoughts during the day, and haunted his dreams at night.

He didn't even have a physical reaction to other women anymore. It didn't matter how stunning their curves were; he felt absolutely nothing.

But the mere memory of Winona writhing beneath him, the scent of their passion in the air, was enough to make him fully hard.

There was no doubt about it—he was hopelessly addicted to her.

And it wasn't just raw lust. Seeing her with another man made his blood boil with pure, unfiltered jealousy.

If that wasn't love, what was?

But was this just a fleeting obsession, or genuine, profound love?

Was he just obsessed with conquering her, claiming her body for himself?

Even he didn't know the answer to that.

And because he didn't know, he was terrified of confessing to her, or to anyone else.

He couldn't treat Winona the way he treated his usual flings. He had to be careful. Incredibly careful.

Tarquin knew him better than anyone. He let out a long sigh.

"The fact that you're so terrified of hurting her that you refuse to confess proves you've already fallen in love. Man up and go after her property I'll support you. And if you win her over, you'll be in for a massive surprise."

"But... if you're still dead set on avoiding marriage and a family, then bury

tose feelings right now. Don't

toy with her Go find someone else, who's willing to play your games."

"Winona is a good woman. She's Elysia's best friend, and she's.

expecting mother now. You can't

ruin her life just for fun."

Keaton took another deep drag of his cigarette, looking thoroughly depressed.

Suddenly remembering something, he looked at Tarquin.

"Do you know whose baby Winona is carrying?"

Tarquin's eyes narrowed as he stared at his friend.

"I do. But I'm not telling you. That's Winona's secret. If you want to know, ask her yourself."

Keaton scoffed in annoyance.

"Fine, keep it to yourself. I don't care anyway. He's obviously a piece of trash."

"What makes you say that?" Tarquin asked dryly.

Keaton sneered.

"He knocked her up and doesn't even know it. If that's not trash, what is? I despise irresponsible bastards like that."

He threw the cigarette butt to the ground and crushed it under his heel.

"He better pray I never find out who he is. Because if I do, I have a thousand ways to ruin his life."

Chapter 1750

The moment they left the Newsom estate, Keaton called his real estate agent. He needed to buy back his villa in the Royal Manor, no matter the cost.

Yesterday, fully convinced that Winona was in a relationship and cutting him off completely, he had impulsively sold the house at a massive loss just to escape her memory.

He had intended to disappear from her life forever.

But today changed everything. Shane was just her cousin.

Even though Winona was pregnant, she was still single. That meant nothing was stopping him from pursuing her.

Over the next few days, however, Winona stayed at the Newsom estate. She didn't return to the Royal Manor at all.

Keaton went days without seeing her.

Even when he specifically organized a New Year's Eve party with their mutual friends, she didn't show up.

Driven half-mad by missing her, he found excuses to drive past her family's house, praying for a coincidental encounter.

But luck was never on his side. He didn't catch a single glimpse of her.

At night, lying alone in his massive, empty bedroom, he would stare at Winona's

profile picture on his phone, completely lost in thought.

He desperately wanted to message her, but what could he say?

How have you been these past few days?

Are you in a good mood?

Are you eating well?

Is the baby behaving?

But every time he typed out a message, he would hesitate and delete the entire thing.

He wanted her to know how he felt, yet he was terrified she would find out.

He feared that if this was just a fleeting infatuation, the fallout would ruin any chance they had of even remaining friends.

He had never taken love seriously in his entire life, but this time, he was treading on eggshells.

But missing her was sheer agony. It was absolute torture.

After enduring two weeks of this torment, Keaton finally cracked. He began racking

his brain for any possible excuse to see her.

And then, an idea hit him. He could use Shane.

In mid-January, armed with the perfect excuse, he quickly sent Winona a text.

[Are you busy?]

When she didn't reply immediately, he spent the next few minutes pacing his room, overthinking every possible reason why.

But the second her reply came through, a massive grin spread across his face.

Leaning against his headboard, the

thirty year old billionaire

his

like a lovesick t

Winona replied: [Not busy. Is something wrong?]

Keaton typed back rapidly: [Yeah, just wondering where Shane is right now?]

Winona: [He's not home. Are you looking for him?]

Keaton: [Yeah.]

Winona: [What for?]

Keaton replied: [Can you talk on the phone right now? It's easier to explain.]

A second later, his phone rang. Winona was calling him.

Keaton answered instantly. The moment he heard her voice, his heart began to pound against his ribs.

Despite his racing pulse, he forced his voice to sound perfectly casual. "What are you up to right now?"

"I just had a snack. I was planning to take a walk around the neighborhood to digest," Winona answered.

"Let's go for a walk together," Keaton said immediately. "I'll come pick you up."

Winona fell silent. Keaton asked carefully, "Is that not convenient?"

"It's fine. But are you looking for me, or are you looking for Shane?"

"I need to talk to Shane, but he's

ignoring my messages. I need youet

help with him," Keaton lied effortlessly.

"Are you still trying to apologize to him?" Winona asked.

"... Yeah," Keaton lied again.

"You really don't need to," Winona said gently. "It was just a

misunderstanding, and it's been

weeks. He's over it. Come

"I know, but... can we just meet up and talk?"

"Is it something you can't say over the phone?"

"Yeah. It has to be in person."

Winona hesitated for a moment. "...Alright. Where do you want to meet?"

Keaton's heart soared.

"Just wait at home. I'll come pick you up. It's freezing outside, make sure you dress warmly."

"...Okay, I will."

Winona hung up the phone and stared blankly at the screen. In truth, she really

didn't want to go out at all.