

Hitched 1781

Chapter 1781

Inside the car, Keaton looked at Winona's message and replied,

[I'd gladly do anything for you. You never have to thank me.]

Message sent successfully, Keaton's heart pounded.

Before Winona could reply, he gritted his teeth. "Pull over!"

The bodyguard driver was startled and quickly hit the brakes, parking by the side of the road.

Keaton pushed the door open, stepped out, and dialed a number.

The moment it connected, he blurted out, "Winona, I'm in love with you!"

Winona remained silent.

Keaton was in a panic, so nervous his palms were sweating.

Like a clueless teenager, he poured his heart out in a frantic rush.

"I mean it. I'm not joking. I'm in love with you, I love you so much!"

"I wish I could bare my soul to show you exactly how much you mean to me!"

"I don't even know when it started, but my feelings are real!"

"I admit, I was obsessed with your body. Ever since that night, I couldn't get you out

of my head. I wanted nothing more than to hold you in my bed every single day and lose myself in you..."

"But you have to believe me, my love for you is so much more than just physical attraction!"

"I love you. I love everything about you, and I love everything you love!"

"I... I... I don't know how to express it properly, but Winona, I really, really love you!"

"So much! I love you so much that I'm even jealous of myself!"

"Forget about just raising another man's child, I'd do absolutely anything for you!"

"I know my track record with relationships is garbage. I've been a player, my reputation is trash, and I don't deserve you! I... I..."

"I realized I loved you a long time ago, but I was too scared to confess. I was terrified it was just a fleeting phase and I'd end up hurting you."

"I never planned on telling you. During those days when I

misunderstood what you had net

withere Shane, was so angry, jealous and heartbroken!"

"I was a complete wreck, suffocating in misery, but I still didn't plan on confessing. As long as you were happy, that was enough for me."

"When I found out Shane was just your cousin, I was so thrilled I almost lost my mind!"

"But when Callum came back, I got scared again. I was terrified. I was scared to death!"

"I was terrified that if I didn't tell you how I felt, I'd lose my chance forever!"

"I was terrified someone else would

steal you away! I... just thinking about you living and sleeping beside another man made me so furious, so jealous, I felt like I

\$ going

crazy!"

"Just the thought of it was unbearable. If it actually happened, how was I supposed to survive?"

"More importantly, I wouldn't trust anyone else with you!"

"I don't know other men, but I just know you'd be wronged if you were with anyone else."

"But I know myself. To me, you are more precious than my own life!"

"If you're with me, I swear I will cherish you, protect you with my life, and give you everything I have!"

"So I have to fight for a chance. I need you to know how I feel!"

"Winona, can you give me a chance to pursue you?"

Winona fell silent again.

Although she had known for a while that he had feelings for her, hearing his sincere confession still made her heart race.

Had his feelings for her really reached this depth?

"Keaton, I..."

Keaton suddenly cut her off, his voice choking with emotion, like a fragile child.

"Please don't reject me outright. Please..."

His voice was hoarse, helpless, and pitiful.

Even through the screen, Winona could feel his profound insecurity and vulnerability.

It was as if the slightest touch would shatter him completely.

Chapter 1782

"Keaton, I..."

Terrified, Keaton interrupted her again, tears in his voice.

"I regret it so much. I really do. I shouldn't have been so reckless in the past. I shouldn't have let one heartbreak turn me into a complete mess!"

"If I had known I'd fall in love with you, I would have kept my hands to myself and protected my reputation."

"If my reputation were even a little bit better, I wouldn't feel so insecure right now."

"I didn't dare say I loved you. I didn't dare tell you, or your parents, or even my own mom and dad. I was terrified none of you would believe me..."

"I... I... I really do love you..."

Winona was deeply moved, a lump forming in her throat.

"I believe you! Keaton, I believe you! I believe your feelings are real!"

Hearing this, Keaton broke down even more, overwhelmed by a mix of being touched and feeling wronged. "I..... I..."

Winona said softly,

"If you were right here beside me, I would give you a hug."

"Keaton, listen to me. You aren't as terrible as you think, so stop putting yourself down."

"You're only thirty. You have a long life ahead of you. There's no need to feel inferior. Just keep looking forward."

"...I've seen how much you care about me and the baby. I know."

"As for you and me, and our future with the baby, can we sit down and talk about it in person in a few days?"

"My grandmother and my mom are still waiting for me. I need to go to the cemetery with them."

Hearing this, Keaton hastily wiped his tears. "Okay!"

Winona comforted him. "Don't be sad. When I get back, I have a surprise for you."

Keaton paused, stunned. "A surprise?"

Winona smiled. "Yes, a big surprise. Look forward to it."

Keaton's heart hammered against his ribs as his tears gave way to a bright smile. "Okay!"

Remembering something, he quickly added,

"I left the bodyguards there for you. Just tell your grandmother you ran into them by chance so they won't be scared."

"Got it. I'll hang up now."

"...Yeah."

Winona ended the call. Keaton stared at his phone, a goofy grin plastered on his face.

The bodyguard driver had been watching him from the car the whole time.

Seeing him cry one second and laugh the next, the driver was curious. Had it worked out?

When Keaton returned with his phone, the driver quickly asked,

"Keaton, did you confess to Ms. Newsom?"

"Yeah!"

"Did it work?"

Keaton shook his head. "Not yet."

The driver was puzzled.

"Then what are you so happy about? I saw you crying and then laughing, I thought

she agreed to be with you!"

Keaton looked incredibly proud and arrogant.

"She didn't agree, but she didn't

reject me either! Plus, she

complimented me

me! And she said she has a surprise for me!"

The driver was speechless.

If he was this ecstatic over not being rejected, how crazy would he go if she actually

said she loved him?

"Keaton... aren't your standards a little low?"

Keaton scoffed.

"What does a single guy like you

know?

my track record, it's a

sheepmiracle she didn't just UF

down on the spot!"

The driver had no words. Was the one who fell in love first always this desperate?

"But if Ms. Newsom didn't agree and didn't reject you, what does that mean?"

Keaton said,

"Who cares, what it means? The point is, she didn't reject me! If she didn't reject me, it means she

doesn't hate me! And if she doesn't hate me, it means I have a chance! That's a huge win!"

Beaming with joy, he grabbed his phone and sent a massive virtual cash gift to

several of his buddy group chats!

A bunch of guys immediately jumped out, asking what was going on.

He replied: [I've got great news!]

Gale Windham: [Damn! Keaton, are you pregnant?]

Booker Murphy: [Gale, did you leave your brain at home today? How the hell can a
guy get pregnant?!]

Callum Leblanc: [Keaton, be clear. What's the good news?]

Chapter 1783

Keaton: [It's a secret for now.]

Booker Murphy was speechless: [If it's a secret, why are you bragging about it in the chat?]

Keaton gloated: [I'm just happy! I wanted to share the joy with you guys! I want the whole world to celebrate!]

Everyone was left speechless. What kind of massive event had him this ecstatic? The whole world celebrating?

Meanwhile, Winona put her phone away. She looked down, gently stroking her baby bump, and whispered,

"Baby, that was your real dad on the phone. Do you like him? I know for a fact he's going to love you so much."

"Winona!" Caroline called out as she walked over, noticing the call had ended.

Winona smiled. "Coming."

She walked up to Caroline, linking her arm through her mother's, and asked,

"Mom, has the news about my pregnancy already spread among your socialite circles?"

Caroline frowned.

"What did you hear? Let me tell you right now, no matter what you hear, don't pay any attention to it!"

"We don't rely on them for anything, and our lives have absolutely nothing to do with theirs!"

"As long as they don't say it to our faces, they can gossip all they want behind our backs. We just need to live our best lives!"

"It's just like your dad says the best way to deal with those malicious women is to be happy! The happier you are, the madder they get! So if you want to get back at them, just live a wonderful life!"

Winona smiled and said,

"I know. I'm not mad at them. I was just a little curious about what they said that made Keaton act so impulsively."

Caroline quickly asked, "What happened with Keaton?"

Winona shrugged. "He wants to step up and be a father to my child."

Caroline's eyes went wide. "Step up as the father? Seriously?"

Winona nodded. "Of course."

Caroline asked, "Did you tell him the baby is his?"

Winona shook her head. "If I had, it wouldn't be called 'stepping up' anymore."

Caroline fell silent for a moment. "...Winona, tell me the truth. Does Keaton have feelings for you?"

Winona didn't try to hide it. She nodded. "Yeah, he just confessed to me."

Caroline paused. "...I knew there was a reason he was being so attentive! He... so are you two..."

Winona said, "I didn't say yes. We can figure things out later."

"But I am planning to tell him the truth about the baby."

"He's already willing to raise a child that isn't his, so he definitely won't force me to

get an abortion. I don't have to worry about that anymore."

"He's the baby's biological father. He has a right to know."

"Besides, I want to make Mr. Huber and Janelle happy. They've been incredibly kind to me."

"Look at them-they know Keaton, and I aren't together, and they have no idea this baby is a Huber, yet they still sent over piles of nutritional

gifts. They genuinely care about me."

"Richard and Janelle have always wanted a grandchild. If they knew was carrying the Huber family's in and blood they'd be overjoyed. I don't want to keep it from them anymore. What do you think?"

Caroline was quiet for a moment before letting out a long sigh.

"You're an adult now, and you can make your own decisions. Do what you feel is right. I'll support you no matter what."

Winona said, "But if I tell them, the baby might not be able to take the Newsom last name once it's born."

Previously, she had planned to raise the child on her own and never tell Keaton the truth.

When the baby was born, it would naturally take the Newsom surname. Grandparents and parents always placed a heavy importance on the next generation's surname.

Since the Newsom family was small and Winona was their only daughter Ridley and Caroline would have been thrilled to have the child share their name.

But if the Huber family learned the truth, even if they didn't demand it, Winona wanted to follow tradition.

Though taking the mother's surname wasn't unheard of, children generally took their father's name.

Chapter 1784

Caroline sighed, taking Winona's hand.

"Your dad and I aren't unreasonable people. If someone treats us with an inch of respect, we return it with a mile!"

"The Huber family has been great to you. We've seen it with our own eyes. Richard and Janelle truly treat you like their own daughter."

"It doesn't matter whose last name the baby takes. As long as you and the baby are happy, your dad and I are happy."

Winona leaned affectionately against Caroline's shoulder. "Thanks for

understanding and supporting me, Mom."

Caroline smiled.

"You silly girl, there's no need to thank your own mother. The baby situation is easy enough to sort out, but as for you and Keaton..."

"I'd be thrilled to have a guy like Keaton as a son, but as a son-in-law..."

Winona smiled and said, "Don't worry about me and him. I'll handle it myself."

Caroline sighed again.

"You've already been married to a scumbag once. I'm just terrified you'll end up with the wrong person again!"

Winona said, "Don't worry. Keaton's morals aren't twisted. No matter how much of a player he used to be, he could never be as rotten as Zane Livingston!"

Caroline nodded in agreement. "That's true."

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Richard Huber's birthday was on January 25th.

Though it was called a birthday party, it was more like a massive corporate gala.

Every year, they invited prominent families, corporate executives who partnered with the Huber family, and elites from various industries.

Because of the massive guest list and the sheer scale of the event, Keaton had returned early to help prepare.

As Richard's only son, he had been incredibly busy the past couple of days— genuinely busy. He had to oversee every little detail.

But no matter how swamped he was, it didn't stop him from texting Winona.

In the morning, he would wish her a good day and ask how she slept.

During the day, whenever he had a spare second, he'd message her to ask about her appetite, if she had any cravings, and what she was eating.

He even asked if the baby was behaving, if it was doing flips in her stomach, or if it had kicked her.

Because he sent so many messages, he worried Winona would find him annoying, so he told her,

[I'm only texting because I miss you. You don't have to reply to everything.]

Since Winona was just resting at home anyway, she would usually reply with a line or two whenever she saw his texts.

But he sent an overwhelming amount of messages. If she didn't check her phone for a little while, she'd come back to 99+ notifications.

This made Winona incredibly curious. [Aren't you busy?]

Keaton replied: [I am. I've been working myself to death these past two days.]

Winona asked: [If you're so busy, how do you have time to send so many messages?]

Keaton replied: [You are my

emotional support. When my head is spinning from work, thinking about you clears my mind. So, I'm always*** thinking about you.]

Winona fell silent.

She didn't reply again. Truthfully, Keaton really wanted to ask her if she could make

it back in time for his dad's birthday party tomorrow.

Richard and Janelle had even asked about her last night.

Of course he wanted her there. He missed her like crazy; a single day apart felt like years!

But she was currently at her family's place. If she couldn't make it, she'd definitely feel bad.

He didn't want to give her any extra pressure, so he held his tongue.

...

On the day of the birthday, January 25th.

Richard woke up early, washed up, and made his first stop The Huber Family Chapel to pay his respects.

He first thanked his parents for giving him life, then thanked the Huber ancestors for blessing the family with prosperity.

After paying his respects, he bowed his head in apology.

"Ever since taking the reins of the Huber family, I've worked tirelessly to manage our legacy."

"While I couldn't push the Hubers to the very top of the elite ladder, I've maintained the foundation you left behind!"

"Today, the Huber family is still a

massive powerhouse. Even if

aren't number one in the elite circle

we comfortably sit in the second

tier!"

"I believe I have done my duty to our ancestors regarding the family business!"

"However, have failed by raising a

son... Sigh. Keaton is a great kid. He

has good morals and respects his elders, but he refuses to get married!

Chapter 1785

"He doesn't want to get married, and he doesn't want to have kids, which means he can't carry on the Huber family line."

"I've tried everything to change his mind. I've racked my brain and used every method I could think of, but nothing worked!"

"Sigh. Life is just a cruel joke. Some destitute families can barely afford the roof over their heads, yet they have kid after kid!"

"Meanwhile, a family like ours with an actual empire to inherit doesn't have a single heir!"

"I've given up hope now. Children have their own destinies. He can live his life however he wants, as long as he's happy."

"If you must cast blame, ancestors, don't blame him. Blame me!"

"A father's failure to teach is his own fault! I am willing to shoulder all the blame and take any punishment meant for him!"

"I only ask that you watch over Keaton. Keep him safe, happy, and free from sorrow for the rest of his life..."

Leaning against the window of the chapel, Keaton listened in silence.

His heart ached, but there was nothing he could do.

In the past, he genuinely hadn't wanted to get married or have kids!

Now, he had finally found the woman he truly loved. Marriage was on the table, but having children of his own was not!

Since he had made up his mind to claim Winona's baby, he wasn't going to have any biological children.

Even if he and Winona actually got together, he wouldn't ask her to go through childbirth again.

Childbirth was far too painful and dangerous; he didn't want her to suffer.

Plus, bloodlines were a complicated, messy thing. He was terrified that if he had his own biological flesh and blood, he might subconsciously play favorites and break his promise.

He was afraid he wouldn't be able to stop himself from loving his biological child more, leaving Winona's current baby out in the cold.

So it was better not to have any at all!

He was a man of his word, and he intended to keep it!

For the rest of his life, he would only have this one child, and he would raise them as his own flesh and blood forever!

But by doing that, he was letting his father down...

Swallowed by guilt, it took Keaton a long time to pull himself together before he called out,

"Dad, are you done paying your respects? It's time to go!"

Hearing this, Richard took a deep breath and wiped his eyes. "Coming."

He bowed to his ancestors one last time, gathered his emotions, and walked out of the chapel.

Feigning lightheartedness, Keaton tried to cheer him up.

"Why are your eyes so red? Missing your mom and dad, or your grandparents?" Richard shot him a glare.

"A child's birthday is a mother's day of suffering. What's wrong with crying for my mother on my birthday?"

Keaton smiled and said,

"Nothing at all. I was just asking.

Now that you mention it, I miss met

grandmother too. Waitright here, I'm going to go pay my respects to her."

With that, Keaton turned and jogged into the chapel.

Standing before the memorials of the Huber ancestors, he lowered his voice and spoke.

"Grandpa, Grandma, Ancestors. Don't listen to my dad about this whole carrying-on- the-line business."

"My dad already did his job by

bet

having me. The fact that I don't want

to have kids is my own fault

nothing to do with him."

"If you're going to punish anyone, punish me. Leave my dad alone!" "He's been a great son to you. You can't just punish the innocent!"

"I know I won't be leaving an heir for the Huber family in this lifetime. I'm in the wrong, and I admit it. I'm a disappointing descendant, and I'm sorry..."

"What are you doing standing in here? Where's Keaton?"

Janelle's voice rang out from outside the chapel.

Hearing her, Keaton quickly wiped away his tears and walked out.

Janelle looked at her son, then at her husband.

"It's a birthday party. What's wrong with you two? Why are you both crying?"

Keaton sniffled and smiled.

"I missed Grandma, and he missed his mom. Neither of us could hold it back."

Janelle was speechless. "... You're both grown men, yet you're crying like babies." Keaton wedged himself between them, wrapping his arms around Janelle and Richard.

"Let's get going. My dad is the star of the show today, we can't be late."

Chapter 1786

The birthday party for Richard Huber was held at the Jinpeach Restaurant.

As Jindale City's premier dining establishment, hosting a banquet here was a pure symbol of status and power. Naturally, the guest list consisted entirely of the city's elite.

The Huber family had booked the entire venue, and a festive atmosphere filled the air. The massive screens in the restaurant displayed the Huber family's corporate history and key industries, alongside profiles of CEO Richard Huber, his wife Janelle, and the Huber heir, Keaton.

The event was magnificent, with rows of rare, exotic floral arrangements lining the halls.

By the time Richard, Janelle, and Keaton arrived, all the top executives from their companies were already present. Several lower-tier CEOs had also arrived early to network. Seeing the family, they eagerly crowded around to offer their greetings.

"Good morning, Mr. Huber, Mrs. Huber, Keaton."

Richard carried Janelle's purse as she linked her arm through his, smiling gracefully at the guests. Keaton trailed a half-step behind them, looking sharp and composed in a tailored suit. Gone was his usual playboy persona; every movement he made radiated sophistication and class.

The banquet officially started at ten in the morning. Since it was still early, guests were trickling in. The trio divided their duties: Richard handled the business

executives, Janelle entertained the socialite wives, and Keaton, as the heir, stood by the entrance to welcome arrivals.

Jessamine Huber had traveled abroad a month ago for her husband's affairs and was grounded by severe weather, unable to make it back.

At nine-thirty, Tarquin Bradford and Elysia Thorne arrived with their quintuplets. The moment they stepped inside, they commanded the room's attention. Tarquin was a picture of youthful success, Elysia looked stunningly gentle, and the five little ones were impossibly adorable.

Richard and Janelle greeted them personally, hugging and kissing the children with overflowing affection. The quintuplets sweetly called them by their first names, making the older couple beam with delight as they handed each child a generous check as a gift.

Blossom Blythe had tagged along with Elysia. With the kindergarten on winter break, she was bored at home and decided to crash the party for the free food.

After the initial greetings, Tarquin

joined Keaton to help welcome guests. Elysia and Blossom took the

quintuplets up to the second

play area

A group of wealthy socialites watched the children with deep envy.

"Kendrick and Elizabeth really lucked out," one woman sighed. "If those five were my grandchildren, I'd die of happiness."

"Forget five, I'd wake up laughing if I could just get one," another agreed.

Mrs. Sewell and Mrs. Miller scoffed dismissively.

"What's so great about it?" Mrs.

Sewell sneered. "They didn't enjoy a single day of while they were alive

and they met a tragic end They were only recently buried together."

"Exactly," Mrs. Miller added. "Who cares if they have five great grandkids? They never even got to see them."

The other women pursed their lips, choosing to sip their tea in silence rather than engage.

When Janelle returned to the group, someone immediately complimented Keaton.

"Keaton looks completely different today, Janelle. He used to be such a wild child, but now he looks like the perfect gentleman."

"I remember seeing him in the tabloids not long ago, still looking like a careless heartbreaker."

"I was just thinking the same thing.

He has the same handsome face but his entire aura has changed like he's a different person.

"It's like he went from a rebellious boy to a mature man overnight."

Chapter 1787

"Come on, Janelle, you have to tell us," one woman pressed. "What is your secret to straightening him out?"

Janelle chuckled. "He's barely a boy anymore; he's thirty! Honestly, Richard and I are just as surprised. We noticed he's become more grounded and mature, but we have no idea why."

"He rarely comes home, and we don't see him often. It just feels like he suddenly grew up out of nowhere."

Mrs. Wallace leaned in and lowered her voice. "Could Keaton be secretly dating someone? Love has a way of making a man grow up."

Mrs. Sewell let out a harsh, mocking laugh.

"Oh, Mrs. Wallace, when is Keaton not dating someone? The man never takes a break between women. He's a notorious romantic; the number of girlfriends he's had probably rivals the number of hot meals we've eaten. His reputation precedes him."

She took a sip of her drink, eyes glinting with malice. "But young girls are too immature to change a man. Only an older woman has that kind of power."

Mrs. Miller eagerly jumped in. "I've heard a lot of men these days have mommy issues. You better watch out, Janelle. Your son is a handful. What will you do if he brings home a woman old enough to be your sister?"

These women were experts in social warfare; everyone caught the stinging sarcasm, and the atmosphere shifted uncomfortably.

Janelle frowned, but Mrs. Miller offered a fake, honey-sweet smile. "We're just looking out for you, don't be mad."

A flash of annoyance crossed Janelle's eyes. She offered a tight, plastic smile in return.

"If you two have enough free time to gossip about my son, maybe you should spend it keeping an eye on your own husbands. Remind them to practice basic hygiene and stop frequenting shady clubs for cheap women. It would be a nightmare if they caught something out there and passed it on to you."

Everyone in their circle knew that Mr. Miller and Mr. Sewell were notorious for their sleazy escapades.

The color instantly drained from Mrs. Miller's and Mrs. Sewell's faces as they glared at Janelle in fury.

Maintaining her flawless smile, Janelle parroted their own excuse back to them. "I'm just looking out for you, don't be mad."

The tension in the air was thick enough to cut with a knife.

Mrs. Wallace, realizing her innocent comment had sparked a war, frantically tried to backtrack.

"What I meant earlier was, maybe Keaton finally found true love. A man will completely change his ways for the right woman."

She looked around the circle. "Have you guys seen his social media bio recently?"

"It used to say, 'Marriage is for losers.'"

"Now it says, 'Pursuing my queen.'"

"That screams a man in love who's ready to settle down."

The other wives quickly chimed in to smooth things over.

"I saw that! It was trending the other day. I wonder which lucky girl caught his eye."

"Whoever she is, it's wonderful news."

"Now that Keaton is ready to settle down, Richard and Janelle can finally relax. Who knows, maybe

We'll be attending a wedding and celebrating a grandchild by next year."

"You're finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, Janelle."

As the mood softened, Janelle

offered a polite, weary smile. "I wouldn't dare hope for

I'll be more than satisfied if he just gives a steady, happy life."

Mrs. Sewell couldn't resist twisting the knife again.

"You're right not to hope. The higher your hopes, the harder the fall. Remember that humiliating fake pregnancy scandal a while back? You got no grandchild, just a truckload of public embarrassment."

"No grandson, just a joke for the entire city!"

"Not everyone is blessed enough to hold a grandchild. From the looks of it, the Huber family is destined to end here."

Chapter 1788

Janelle's brow furrowed in anger.

"If our family doesn't have the blessing, does the Sewell family?"

Mrs. Sewell looked incredibly smug.

"Not right now, but we will. My son is a normal, healthy man. He'll get married and have kids eventually."

The underlying implication that Keaton was abnormal was clear as day.

Before Janelle could snap back, Mrs. Miller chimed in.

"I've always heard that having grandchildren is a reward for good karma. If you don't have enough good deeds to your name, you don't earn the right to carry on your lineage. Your bloodline just dies out."

"So really, you can't blame Keaton for refusing to settle down. The fault lies with the parents."

"Janelle, did you and Richard do something wicked in the past? Maybe God is deliberately punishing you by denying you an heir, making sure you die out."

Without giving Janelle a chance to explode, Mrs. Miller offered another sickly-sweet smile.

"Oh, don't be angry. I'm not insulting you. I'm just curious why your son is so dead set against marriage."

Janelle's face darkened, her breathing turning jagged.

How was that not an insult? They had just accused her and Richard of being morally corrupt.

She was so furious that words failed her, struggling to find a sharp enough comeback.

Given Keaton's lifelong stance on marriage, the bitter truth was that the Huber family likely would not have an heir.

Both she and Richard had resigned themselves to this reality, but it remained a deeply painful sore spot. Bringing it up was agonizing.

Mrs. Miller knew exactly where to strike to inflict the most pain.

Because it was Richard's birthday, Janelle couldn't cause a massive scene and ruin her own event.

Forced to swallow her rage, she shot Mrs. Miller a venomous glare and stood up to walk away.

Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Sewell exchanged a triumphant look and scoffed.

"Struck a nerve, didn't we? They definitely did something wicked to deserve this."

"I'll bet my life on it, the Huber family will never have a grandchild. If they do, I'll bite off my own tongue."

"Me too," Mrs. Miller agreed smugly.

The other wives exchanged awkward glances.

A few, disgusted by the sheer malice on display, got up and followed Janelle to
comfort her.

Keaton noticed his mother's

reddened eyes from across the

Winona's v What was whet

room. Just as he was about to step forward

rang out.

"I'm not late, am I?"

Keaton froze, his head snapping around.

Winona stood right behind him, a gentle smile on her face.

Her long, silky hair tumbled over her shoulders, framing her lightly applied makeup, She wore a soft blush pink under a beigetrench

dress

She looked flawlessly elegant and breathtakingly beautiful.

Keaton stared at her in a daze. "What... what are you doing here?"

Winona held up a sleek gift box. "It's Richard's birthday. Of course I came."

Keaton swallowed hard, his heart hammering against his ribs as he stumbled over his words.

"When... when did you get back to Jindale City? You..."

Tarquin stepped in, cutting off his stammering. He looked at Winona.

"Your timing is perfect. Go comfort Janelle. She's upset right now. Elysia and Blossom are upstairs with the kids and haven't noticed."

Winona's eyes narrowed slightly. She glanced at Janelle's retreating back, then swept her gaze over the cluster of sogleite wives Herlips pressed into a thin line.

She knew exactly what had happened. In a setting like this, women like Mrs. Sewell

wouldn't miss a chance to make Janelle miserable.

Winona called out, plastering a warm smile on her face. "Janelle!"

She intentionally projected her voice so that not only Janelle but all the gossiping

wives could hear. They turned to look at her.

Spotting Winona's slightly rounded belly, the women smirked and exchanged mocking glances.

Ignoring them entirely, Winona walked straight toward Janelle.

Surprised by the sudden appearance, Janelle hastily wiped her eyes and hurried over to meet her.

Chapter 1789

Richard also rushed over to greet her. "Winona, what a wonderful surprise."

Winona smiled brightly.

"It's your birthday, Richard. I had to come celebrate with you."

"My parents couldn't make it to Jindale City, so they asked me to bring this for you. They wish you a happy birthday and a long, healthy life."

Richard was thrilled, accepting the gift with both hands.

"I know they've been busy. Your father called me just last night. The thought alone means the world to me, but having you here in person makes me even happier." Janelle was equally overjoyed. She took Winona's hand, her face lighting up.

"We asked Keaton about you just yesterday, and he said you were too busy to come. I can't believe you showed up. You little trickster, surprising us like this."

Winona's smile softened with a hint of playfulness.

"I wanted it to be a surprise."

Noticing that Winona's hands were now empty, Mrs. Sewell couldn't resist an opportunity to humiliate her.

"Ms. Newsom, your parents sent a gift for Mr. Huber, but what about you? What did you bring him?"

Mrs. Miller immediately piled on with a mocking sneer.

"You're a grown woman. Surely you didn't come empty-handed."

"Didn't your parents teach you basic manners? Does the Newsom family lack basic etiquette?"

Janelle's brow furrowed defensively.

"Winona is part of the Newsom family, and they have already presented their gift. Even the hosts don't mind. Why are you being so critical? Are you just trying to embarrass a young woman?"

Mrs. Sewell rolled her eyes.

"Young woman? She's clearly showing. That baby has to be a few months along by now."

Mrs. Miller added sharply.

"I haven't heard any news of Ms. Newsom getting married. Who exactly is the father?"

Seeing them target Winona,

Keaton's face darkened the He

stepped forward to tear into

but Winona grabbed his arm

She pulled Keaton behind her.

Facing Mrs. Sewell and Mrs. Miller, she remained perfectly calm, a serene smile still on her lips.

"You're right," Winona said smoothly. "I am a grown woman, and I

absolutely should have

a

personal gift for Richard. My parents reminded me as well."

"But I really didn't know what to get him, so I figured... why not give him a grandchild?"

Mrs. Sewell and Mrs. Miller's triumphant smiles shattered. They froze. "Give him a what?"

Winona gently placed a hand on her baby bump, her smile radiant. "A grandchild." The two women stared at her in absolute shock, leaping to their feet.

Without giving them another glance, Winona turned to Richard.

"Richard, I didn't want to say anything earlier because it was still so early in the pregnancy and I wanted to be cautious."

"Once the baby was safe, I thought I'd wait for your birthday to give you the ultimate surprise."

"The baby I'm carrying is your biological grandchild. You're going to be a grandfather."

The entire room went dead silent.

Richard's eyes widened to the size of saucers, his jaw practically hitting the floor. "What... what did you just say?"

Winona chuckled softly. "You have a grandchild. You're a grandfather."

Richard was speechless.

Janelle stopped breathing entirely. Her wide eyes darted from Winona's face to her rounded belly.

Finally, she looked at Keaton. Her voice shook violently. "Keaton?"

Keaton was just as stunned, but his brain quickly scrambled for an explanation. He assumed Winona was acting to save his family's pride against the vicious socialites,

claiming him as a stand-in father.

Just as he was about to nod and play along, Winona locked eyes with him.

"You're not just taking the credit," she said firmly. "This is your own flesh and blood."

Keaton's brain short-circuited. "...Huh?"

Chapter 1790

Winona looked at him, her expression dead serious.

"I am carrying your child. You are the biological father."

Keaton's breathing turned ragged.

"Winona, are... are you feeling okay? Did you hit your head? Do you have any idea what you're saying?"

Winona rolled her eyes at him.

"I'm perfectly fine. I said the baby in my belly is yours. Yours, Keaton Huber."

She pulled a folded paternity test from her bag and shoved it into his hands.

"Read it yourself."

She had secretly arranged the test a while ago.

Keaton scrambled to take the paper, staring at it in utter disbelief.

Winona ignored his existential crisis and reached for Janelle's hand, gently pressing it against her bump.

"Janelle, feel this. The baby is kicking right now. I think they're excited to see their grandparents."

Even through the fabric of her dress, Janelle could feel the distinct, fluttering movement.

She was completely overwhelmed. Her hands shook violently.

"Winona, you... you aren't lying to us, are you? This... this is really our family's child?"

Winona's voice was soft but unwavering.

"I know I've played tricks in the past, but I am telling you the absolute truth. This baby belongs to the Huber family. I had a paternity test done early on."

"You know me. I would never joke about something this monumental."

"If this child wasn't Keaton's, I wouldn't have announced it in front of all these people."

"This is Keaton's child. This is your biological grandchild."

The baby kicked again, and Winona looked down with a gentle smile.

"Hey, little one. Do you know your grandma is touching you? Her hands are so

warm, aren't they? Can you feel how much she loves you?"

As the baby shifted gently against her palm, Janelle broke down into heavy, joyous sobs.

The entire banquet hall was plunged into stunned, absolute silence.

Suddenly, a roar shattered the quiet.

"Oh, my God!" Richard bellowed at the top of his lungs. "A 99.9999% DNA match with Keaton! This is my blood! The Huber family line continues! I have a grandchild! Hahaha!"

His booming laugh was so loud it made Janelle jump.

The baby seemed to react, delivering a sharp kick right against Janelle's hand. Thrilled but highly protective, she whipped her head around and glared at Richard. "Why are you yelling so loud? What if you scare the baby? They just kicked me!" Richard was vibrating with sheer ecstasy.

"They kicked you? Let me feel! Let me feel my grandchild!"

Janelle slapped his hand away instantly.

"Don't be ridiculous! The baby is still inside Winona's stomach!"

What kind of father-in-law reaches out to grab his daughter-in-law's stomach?

Realizing his massive faux pas, Richard snapped back to reality and hurriedly apologized.

"I'm so sorry, Winona. I... I... I just got too excited! I completely forgot myself!" Winona laughed easily. "It's perfectly fine."

"Keaton!" Richard roared again, his voice cracking from the strain.

"My boy! My wonderful son! You actually pulled it off!"

Janelle scolded him again.

"Keep your voice down, will you? All this shouting is going to terrify the baby!"

Richard's face was flushed crimson.

"Right, right, right. I'll lower my voice. I'll be quiet. I'm not excited, I'm not excited at all..."

A second later, he spun around and hollered across the room.

"Windham! Cormac! I'm going to be a grandfather! Hahaha!"

He practically sprinted over to his friends, grabbing Mr. Windham in a bone-crushing

hug before tackling Cormac Murphy.

Both men let out muffled groans, the air violently squeezed from their lungs.

Laughing so hard he was crying, Richard shook them.

"Windham, Cormac! God hasn't abandoned the Huber family! I have a grandchild!

I... I... Smack!"

Unable to contain his hysterical joy

Richard hauled off and slapped

right across the face, Hard."

crack echoed across the room.

Cormac winced in pain, his eyes bugging out in disbelief.

"What the hell is wrong with you? Why are you hitting me because you're getting a grandchild? I don't have a grandchild, my life is miserable enough, and How To getting assaulted! Booker.

Rubbing his stinging cheek with

watery eyes, Cormac tried to

stumble toward his son, Booker, but Richard yanked him back. "Did that hurt?"