

288: Waiting for His Return

The sunlight filtered through the thick black curtains, casting a beam on his face. James opened his eyes, realizing he had survived the toughest night.

The bruises and dried blood on his body had already crusted over. He got up to wash off, stepping into the shower.

After finishing his shower, James, as usual, turned on the TV and set the remote aside. He went to make himself something to eat.

As he was about to eat his instant noodles, a sharp whistle from the TV caught his attention.

He slowly raised his head, his eyes falling on a beautifully animated scene, a serene depiction of cherry blossoms in full bloom.

Petals danced in the wind, covering the ground in vibrant colors. The background music was warm yet tinged with a sense of sadness.

The camera moved, following the petals as they fluttered across the screen. The view shifted from the sky to the ground.

In the depths of the cherry blossom grove, two small figures appeared: a girl running ahead, a boy chasing her.

The boy had a whistle in his mouth, blowing as he ran.

The girl's laughter, sweet as a bell, rang through the air. "Brother, catch up with me!" she called back.

James stared at the screen, frozen in place. His fork dropped from his hand, and he didn't even notice.



The scene continued, the two siblings running joyfully, the whistle echoing between them.

"Wait for me, sister!" the boy called repeatedly, both of them running towards a large cherry tree.

Under the tree, their mother sat on a picnic blanket, gazing at them with a tender smile.

They ran around the tree, laughing without a care, their joy filling the air.

But the scene began to change, and soon the boy was gone.

The girl started calling for him, running through the grove, shouting for her brother to come back.

But by the time she had circled the entire cherry blossom forest, their mother was gone too.

The girl was left alone, tears streaming down her face, her cries echoing in the empty grove.

The camera zoomed in on her, her sorrow etched in every feature.

Years seemed to pass as the petals continued to fall. The little girl had grown into a woman.

She hung a wish tag on the cherry tree, inscribed with words:

"Sorry, forgive me."

"I'll wait for you to come back."

The tears of the grown woman fell on the tag as she gazed into the distance, toward the end of the cherry blossom forest, still waiting for



her brother to return.

As the short film ended, James couldn't hold back the tears anymore.

He buried his face in his hands, sobbing uncontrollably.

After he cried it out, wiping his tears, he realized that the words "VEG" had appeared at the end of the video.

He could now confirm that the video was made by his sister.

She had forgiven him and was waiting for his return.

With that thought, James could no longer stay calm. He shut off the TV, changed his clothes, and rushed out the door.

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At the shooting range, Caitlin and Zora were both preparing their air rifles, ready to start.

Caitlin fired two test shots to get a feel for the gun, but neither hit the target at 10 meters.

Zora, on the other hand, hit all three of her shots, and her scores were good.

She noticed Caitlin missed twice, and a sense of smugness spread within her. Clearly, Caitlin wasn't her match when it came to air rifle shooting.

After the test shots, both Caitlin and Zora focused their attention on the competition.

In the audience, Sebastian sat next to Zeke.

The tension between them was palpable. Sebastian shot Zeke a cold look



and said with a warning tone, "You lost to me last time. We agreed you'd leave the US. Why are you back?"

Zeke smirked, unrepentant. "Last time was a fluke. If we compete again, I might not lose."

"Still want to compete with me?"

"Why not? I'd love to have a rematch with Mr. Vanderbilt." 

Sebastian's gaze darkened. He wasn't in the mood to indulge Zeke's provocations, especially since racing was a sore subject. After the accident, his family had strictly forbidden him from racing again.

Zeke, however, was relentless. "What's the matter, Mr. Vanderbilt? Too scared to compete? Or should I just concede for you?"

"Concede? That word doesn't exist in my dictionary."

Sebastian and Zeke exchanged glares, the rivalry between them growing more heated.

Meanwhile, the first round of the competition was underway. Caitlin and Zora both fired their 40 shots, and the results ended in a tie.

Wendy, watching from the sidelines, clapped excitedly. "Caitlin, you were amazing! I wish I could shoot like you!"

Benjamin stepped forward, offering, "It's not that hard. Come over here, I'll teach you!"

"I don't want to..." Wendy protested, but Benjamin was insistent, pulling her to the training area to give her a quick lesson.

On the other side, Zora removed her ear protection and coldly sneered, "I



didn't expect Caitlin to be so good at shooting."

Zora was surprised by Caitlin's skill; she was much stronger than Zora had initially thought.

"Thank you, Miss Harris," Caitlin said politely, though she was secretly holding back her full strength. She'd intentionally kept her ability in check.

Caitlin didn't want to win by too much, as Zora's competitive nature would never let her drop the issue if she lost. A tie would hopefully prevent Zora from coming after her again.

The spectators, including Sebastian, were impressed by Caitlin's performance. They could tell she was more than capable, but only Sebastian knew that Caitlin had been holding back.

If she had gone all out, Zora wouldn't have stood a chance.

"Now, the final round of the competition begins. Let's see who comes out on top," the announcer called.

Zora, frustrated by the tie, insisted, "There's no need for a final round. Let's end it here. I have things to take care of!"

Caitlin had already received a message that she needed to leave the shooting range, but Zora blocked her way.

"Caitlin! We didn't finish the competition. If you don't finish the final round, you can't leave!"

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