

Hitched 1481

Chapter 1481

Punikon's grandfather gave his approval.

"He wants revenge? Let him have it. It's a good opportunity to teach him that in the world of fighters, the strong rule!"

"And let it be a message to everyone else. No matter who you are, if you harm someone from the Punikon family, you will pay a heavy price!"

"Find a chance and take that kid Evan out! Once the hatred is deep enough, we won't have to worry about Tarquin backing out of the challenge!"

The fighter on the phone replied, "Understood!"

After hanging up, he turned to his partner.

"The old man gave the order. We can't touch Tarquin for now, but we can get rid of that Evan kid!"

His partner gritted his teeth. "Let's grab him and hand him over to Punikon. Let him have his fun!"

"Yeah! We'll go to the hospital and have Punikon lure him out. We'll make sure it's a one-way trip."

Past eleven at night, The Blissful Pub was still buzzing.

But since Elysia had to head back to Oceanopolis the next day, it wasn't a good idea to stay out all night, so she and Tarquin left early.

Winona and Blossom stayed behind. They were on Keaton's turf anyway, so there was no need to worry about them. Keaton would look after them.

On the way, Lowell was driving while Tarquin and Elysia sat in the back.

"I'm not going to Oceanopolis with you for the break," Tarquin said. "I'll arrange a private jet for you all tomorrow. Have a great time."

Elysia was surprised. "Is it for work?"

"Yeah, some things came up that I need to handle. It's time-sensitive, and I need to head down to Border City for a few days."

Afraid she wouldn't believe him, Tarquin added, "We've got a lot of new projects lately that I need to oversee personally."

Elysia's heart ached for him. "You work so hard for us," Elysia murmured, her heart aching for him. "Always carrying the weight of the world."

Tarquin smiled. "It's worth it. I'd carry it twice over as long as I get to come home to you."

Up front, Lowell cringed at the cheesy-sweet talk and quickly raised the partition between the front and back seats. Ignorance was bliss.

Once the partition was up, Elysia whispered, "You're turning into quite the smooth talker lately. Who are you and what have you done with my husband?"

"I read online that sweet nothings are the spice of a relationship," Tarquin said. "You're supposed to say them often."

Elysia smiled, snuggling into his embraces Well, I'll be heading back to Oceanopolis with the kids and my parents tomorrow. You have to take care of yourself while were gone okay?"

Tarquin stroked her hair gently. "I'm not a three-year-old, you don't need to worry about me. But I'll definitely miss you."

Resting in his arms, Elysia tilted her face up and playfully scratched his chin. "I'll miss you too."

Tarquin leaned down and gave her a kiss. They were as affectionate as a pair of newlyweds.

After getting home, Tarquin tucked Elysia into bed before quietly slipping into the study.

He made a call to arrange for the private jets for the next day.

One would fly to Silver City.

The other would fly to Border City.

Elysia and the children would fly to Silver City first to see Emmett's sister and grandfather, then continue on to Oceanopolis with Clayton Hawkins.

He and Lowell would fly directly to Border City.

While researching the Punikon

family, he had discovered an old master who had once fought Punikon's grandfather to a draw And that old master was from

Border City and still lived there now.

The old master had nothing to do with the real 8th generation virus, but Tarquin

could use the pretense of seeking him out to begin his search for the virus.

Everyone would think he was going

to Border City just to find a trainer for the upcoming challenge match.

No one would suspect his true purpose. Not even the mysterious man.

That's why when he saw the Punikon family's challenge today, he wasn't angry. He was pleased. This challenge gave him the perfect excuse to go to Border City.

Once he found the real 8th generation virus, he could finally settle the score with the mysterious man without any reservations.

Chapter 1482

The next day, Evan woke up before the sun was even up.

As usual, he was getting up early to train with his master.

But when he checked his watch phone, he saw the messages Punikon had sent him

last night.

[Evan, just because your dad beat my dad doesn't mean you can beat me. I challenge you to a one-on-one fight!]

[If you don't have the guts to accept, you're a total chicken!]

[If you dare to fight, come find me at the hospital!]

[Why aren't you answering? Are you scared? You coward, wimp, chicken, loser! Hmph!]

[If you don't reply, I'm gonna tell everyone. I'll let the whole world know that Evan is a coward who's too scared to accept my challenge!]

What?

Evan shot up in bed and reread Punikon's messages. Besides Punikon's texts, there were chat screenshots from other classmates. Because he hadn't replied, Punikon had already started telling everyone in their class that he was a coward.

Evan was furious. It was true what they said: being merciful to your enemy is being cruel to yourself. The last time Punikon bullied Emmett and Elijah, if he hadn't held back, would Punikon still have the nerve to be this arrogant? How dare he call him a coward! He was clearly asking for another beating.

Evan replied to Punikon, [I was asleep last night. You want a fight? You got it. I'm coming for you right now!]

Evan quickly threw on his clothes, brushed his teeth, and washed his face before heading out. He first went to find his master to report in.

"Master, I have something to do today, so I'm skipping training."

The scarred man asked, "What is it?"

Evan didn't hide it from him. "I'm going to challenge Punikon to a duel! He sent me a challenge last night that I didn't see, and now he's telling everyone I'm a coward, ruining my reputation!"

"I'd rather die than be called a coward! I have to teach him a proper lesson!"

Otherwise, my classmates will really think I'm scared of him!"

The scarred man was skeptical. "Didn't you two already fight? He couldn't beat you, yet he dares to challenge you again?"

"Someone's probably backing him up," Evan said. "He says it's a duel, but he's probably just trying to lure me over so his buddies can beat me up for revenge! Punikon is the real coward. He's a lousy fighter who loves to play dirty. Hiding behind someone else's muscle isn't how a real man acts! Anyway, I gotta go. I have to defend my honor. I'm leaving, Master."

The man knew Evan's personality. Calling him a coward was a line that couldn't be crossed. There was no stopping him, so the man decided to join him.

"I'll go with you."

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So Punikon called for backup? Well, he'd be Evan's backup. It was one thing if the two kids fought is their own, but if Punikon's backup dared to make a move, then he would too.

Just as they were about to leave, Evan's watch phone suddenly rang. It was Elliot.

"Hey, bro," Evan said, curious. "Why are you calling me this early? Is it urgent?"

Elliot asked back, "Where are you right now?"

"I'm with my master."

"Going to fight Punikon?"

Evan's eyes widened. "You know about it too? Did Punikon message you? Did he say I was too scared to fight and called me a coward?! I was just asleep last night, I didn't see the message! I'm on my way to find him right now. If he dares to ruin my name, I'll wreck him!"

"Don't go see him today," Elliot said. "His father passed away. If you go looking for

him at a time like this, it'll look bad for you."

Evan froze, completely stunned. "Punikon's father... died?!"

"Yeah."

"How?"

Elliot frowned. "The exact cause of death isn't clear, but it looks like a frame-up. The Thyanian side is already spreading rumors that Dad killed him."

Evan immediately shot back, "That's bullshit! Dad just disabled him, he didn't kill him! So he was killed by his own people?!"

Chapter 1483

Elliot's small brow furrowed. "Punikon's father was already an outcast in their family. Now that he's dead, they're pinning the blame on Dad. They're definitely planning to do something to him."

"If you go now, they'll just use you to stir up more trouble. Just ignore them for now."

Evan frowned. "Is Dad in danger?"

Elliot told him the truth. "Not for the time being. They've already issued a formal challenge to Dad, and the match is set for three months from now. Even if they want to hurt him, it will probably be after that."

Though reluctant, Evan obediently listened to Elliot. "I get it, bro. I won't go looking for Punikon today."

"Good. Train with your master for a bit, then come back. We're going to Silver City with Grandma and Grandpa today."

"Okay."

After hanging up with Evan, Elliot called Tarquin.

Tarquin was still in the study. He had been up all night, planning his route to find the 8th generation virus. He answered when he saw his son's name flash on the screen. "Hey, Elliot."

Elliot got straight to the point. "Dad, did you know Punikon's father is dead?"

"...I know. Don't worry, I've got it under control."

Elliot's lips twitched. "Dad, what exactly are you planning?"

Tarquin paused. "Hmm?"

Elliot frowned and said, "You had no history with the Punikon family. This all started because Evan and Punikon had a fight at preschool. If you didn't have something bigger in mind, things wouldn't have escalated this far."

Tarquin didn't hide it from Elliot. "I wanted to use this opportunity to look into your Bernard's matter. But I didn't expect it to lead to someone's death. The Punikon family is not to be trifled with."

"Bernard's matter is connected to the Punikon family?" Elliot asked immediately.

"Yes. If I'm not mistaken, the Thyanian Martial Arts Association must know some inside details. But asking them directly would tip our hand. The tournament in three months is a perfect opportunity."

"Avenging their master and his wife is Bernard's dream. If we have a chance to help him achieve it, we should."

Elliot nodded. "I understand. But with Punikon's father dead, every fighter in Thyania will have a grudge against you. This puts you in a very difficult position. You need to be careful."

Tarquin chuckled, his voice gentle. "Don't worry about me. They aren't skilled enough to hurt me. Besides, even if they make a move, it won't be for another three months. Are you all awake?"

"Just Evan. He went to train with his master. I'm still in bed."

The moment he'd opened his eyes, he had seen Punikon's provocative messages and the news of his father's death. He was worried Evan would bush off to settle scores, SO he had called him immediately. He was, in fact, still lying in bed.

"If you're not up yet, you should sleep a little longer," Tarquin said. "It's still early." "Okay. Bye, Dad."

After hanging up, Elliot found he couldn't fall back asleep. He got up, washed his face, and opened his laptop to continue his search for Gerald and Howard's whereabouts.

With his dad handling the Bernard situation, he didn't need to worry about it. But the matter of Gerald and Howard was on his shoulders.

When they had gone up the

mountain, Gerald and Howard

weren't there. They had stayed for a

month and still hadn't seen them.

After returning he had started

searching for any news of them, but so far, he had found nothing.

Elliot felt a growing sense of unease. He had a bad feeling that something had happened to them. His great-grandparents were not just their benefactors they were family He didn't want anything to happen to them...

Chapter 1484

But after searching for a while longer, Elliot still couldn't find a single clue. It was as if the two old men had vanished into thin air.

It made sense that Howard, a master hacker, would be hard to track. But he knew Gerald's identity, so why couldn't he find any trace of him?

His great-grandmother had said Gerald had some family business to attend to and needed Howard's help, so he'd taken Howard back into the city with him. But Elliot had checked on Gerald's family and found nothing out of the ordinary. There wasn't a single shred of evidence that Gerald had ever returned.

Elliot knit his brow, sitting silently in front of the computer for a long time. It wasn't until he heard noises outside his door that he let out a long sigh, closed his laptop, and got up to get ready for the day.

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Around eight in the morning, Clayton and Pamela Patel arrived at Number One Mansion with the children. Their plan was to head to the airport from there.

Elysia was almost done packing and told the kids to go check their rooms one last time for anything else they wanted to bring. When they heard Tarquin wasn't coming with them, the little ones were surprised.

"Why isn't Daddy coming?"

Elysia explained for him, "Your daddy's busy with work lately. He also has a business trip to Border City, so he doesn't have time to come to Oceanopolis with us."

At the sudden mention of Border City, Elliot and Elijah's eyes went wide. "!"

Realizing something, the two boys frowned in unison.

While everyone else was busy packing, the two brothers pulled Tarquin upstairs to

the study.

"Are you going to Border City?"

"Yes."

Elijah frowned. "Why didn't you tell us?"

Elliot's brow furrowed. "You're planning to go on this dangerous trip alone!"

Tarquin paused. "...An opportunity to go to Border City just came up, so I thought I'd go check things out."

"What opportunity?" Elliot asked.

Tarquin explained, "Last night, I

accepted a challenge from Punikon's grandfather.

Coincidentally, there's an old master in Border City who once fought him to a draw in the ring. Tean do Border City to learn a thing or two from him."

Elliot and Elijah understood his meaning instantly. Going to Border City to 'learn'

was a lie; finding the real 8th generation virus was the truth.

The two brothers looked at Tarquin, displeased. "It's a good excuse, but it's too risky for you to go alone!"

"We're going with you!"

"No," Tarquin refused. "You're not. You're going with your mom and grandparents to Oceanopolis."

He had chosen to go to Border City during the holiday break precisely so Elysia and the kids would be away. The real 8th generation virus was far too dangerous. He would take the risk himself, but he couldn't let his children join him.

Back on the mountain, his grandmother had warned him that if he ever found a sample of the virus, he had to handle it with extreme care. If a sample were to leak, would immediately spread through the air and cause mass casualties in a short amount of time. Of course, those closest to the virus would die first, and their deaths would be certain. He didn't want his children to take that risk with him.

Elliot also knew the dangers of the 8th generation virus. He refused to let his father

face it alone. "Let Evan, Emmett, and Baby go with Mom to Oceanopolis," he

insisted. "I'm going with you to Border City!"

"I'm going to Border City with you too, Dad!" Elijah added. "We can help!"

Tarquin knew the boys were just worried about him. He patted Elliot's head, then Elijah's. "I'm going to find the us, not steal it large group will only draw attention. Listen to me. Go with your mother to Oceanopolis. Taking care of her is the best way you can help me right now."

Chapter 1485

Elliot and Elijah's brows were tightly knit, their faces full of worry.

The 8th generation virus was dangerous enough on its own, and with the mysterious man lurking in the shadows, the situation was even more perilous. Things were calm now because the virus hadn't been found. The moment it was discovered, all hell would likely break loose.

They loved their mom, but they loved their dad just as much. They couldn't bear the thought of something happening to him.

Tarquin knelt, looking at his two sons with a fond smile. "I promise you both, I will not get hurt. My safety comes first, finding the virus comes second."

Father and sons looked at each other for a few seconds before Elliot and Elijah threw themselves into Tarquin's arms from either side.

"You have to come back safe and sound!"

"Don't you dare get hurt!"

Tarquin wrapped his arms around his sons, his heart swelling with emotion. A loving wife, caring children... he truly was a winner in life.

"I promise you, I'll be safe. I won't get hurt."

Elysia knocked and walked in, surprised to see the three of them hugging. "What's going on?"

As she got closer, she saw that both Elliot and Elijah's eyes were red. Her expression tensed, and she quickly moved to their side. "Elliot, Elijah, what's wrong?"

The two boys hadn't expected her to come up so suddenly and averted their gazes. "N-nothing, Mom. You and Dad can talk. We're going to pack."

Before she could say another word, they both scurried out of the room.

Elysia was baffled. "What's with them..."

Before she could finish, Tarquin stood up and pulled her into his embrace, murmuring, "I don't want to be apart from you."

Elysia blinked. "...So Elliot and Elijah had red eyes because they don't want to be apart from you?"

Tarquin lied, "Mhm. They were disappointed when they heard I couldn't go to Oceanopolis with you."

Elysia believed him. "They really adore you now."

"And you?" Tarquin asked.

Elysia smiled. "I adore you too! And I don't want to be apart from you either."

Tarquin held her tightly, resting his chin on the top of her head. "I don't want us to be apart either..."

Once he dealt with the 8th

generation virus and the mysterious man, they would never have to be separated again. If the virus was so dangerous, he would have taken her and the kids to Border City with him. But right now, he couldn't let them take that risk.

Elysia didn't know what he was thinking, but she could feel his melancholy: She said playfully, "I

hear Border City is famous for ion et

beautiful women, each one prettier than the last. You better behave yourself and stay far away from other girls! If I find out about any funny business, I'll really let you have it!"

Tarquin snapped out of his thoughts, his handsome eyes narrowing. "You give me too much credit Do you really think I'd dare? thad @wandering eye, I wouldn't I even need you to step in. The kids would take care of it for you."

Elysia grinned. "How come you're not telling me to stay away from other men?"

"I don't need to," Tarquin said. "When you've got a five-star meal waiting at home, you don't go looking for cheap takeout on the street."

Elysia pursed her lips. "I get that you're complimenting yourself, but what kind of man compares himself to a meal?"

Tarquin said without a hint of shame, "What's the big deal? I have no shame in front of my wife. As long as you like it, I can be anything you want. I can be a five-star meal, or I can be your big bad wolf."

Elysia was speechless.

She tilted her head up, looked at him for a few seconds, then stood on her tiptoes and gave him a soft kiss. "I love you~"

A jolt went through Tarquin's heart. He wrapped one arm around her waist, pulling her closer, while his other hand cupped the back of her head, turning his passive role into an active one. The kiss was passionate and deeply loving.

Chapter 1486

The kiss ended, leaving them both breathless.

The corners of Elysia's eyes were red. "You have to take care of yourself while we're gone."

"I know," Tarquin said.

"Make sure you actually eat."

"Okay."

"And get some proper sleep at night."

"Okay."

He didn't argue, just nodded and murmured a soft 'okay' to every instruction.

The more she talked, the more a sudden, hot sting of tears blurred her vision.

God, she was in so deep with this man.

The thought of being apart so soon, of not being able to see him tonight, actually made her want to cry.

And it was only for seven days!

She felt annoyed at herself for being so dramatic. Turning her head away to wipe a tear, she tried to make an excuse to leave. "Come on, let's go. My parents and the kids are waiting downstairs."

But Tarquin pulled her back into his arms, holding her tight.

"I'll miss you every day, every single moment."

His words warmed her heart. Outwardly, she teased him for being sappy, but inside she thought:

I'll miss you too, constantly.

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When the family arrived at the airport, their private jet was already waiting.

After sending Elysia and the children off, Tarquin boarded a separate jet bound for Border City.

Lowell was with him.

"Tarquin, everything's been arranged as you instructed. The world will think we're going to Border City to recruit allies."

"I've also taken care of things on the ground there. The old man still hates The Punikon Family's guts and is raring to go to Thyania with you to take them down."

"If the mystery man is really watching us, this shouldn't raise any suspicion."

Tarquin leaned back in the leather massage chair, his brow slightly furrowed and his eyes filled with a sense of loss.

Being suddenly separated from Elysia felt unnatural, leaving an empty space in his heart.

"Are you planning on never getting married?" Tarquin asked suddenly.

"Huh?" Lowell blinked, making sure Tarquin was talking to him before pursing his lips. "That's a sharp turn in conversation. You kind of threw me for a loop."

The casual topic helped Lowell relax.

He settled into the massage chair next to Tarquin and let out a long breath. "I haven't really thought about marriage. Whatever happens happens. You know, like you and Elysia. If fate brings it, you get married. If not, you stay single."

His philosophy was simple: don't resist it, but don't force it. "Why the sudden question?"

"It just made me think of the three of us when we were kids," Tarquin said. "If you think I had it rough, you and Axel had it way tougher. Now that I've tasted what happiness is like, I want you and Axel to be happy too."

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It was rare for Tarquin to be so sentimental. Lowell knew he was speaking from the heart and smiled. "Marriage is only happy if you find true love. If you don't, it's a prison."

Axel's happiness has arrived; I just don't know if he can grab hold of it. Ms. Blythe

is a great woman. As for me... I'm in no rush. I'll wait."

Tarquin spoke again, his tone shifting. "Under what circumstances would you betray our brotherhood?"

Lowell froze again and turned to look at him.

Guessing he was alluding to the mystery man, Lowell sighed. "No matter what

happens, I would never betray our bond. Unless you let me down first."

He and Axel were orphans. Without Tarquin, they wouldn't be who they were today.

Before they met Tarquin, they were fighting dogs for scraps.

After meeting him, they finally had food and a roof over their heads.

Back then, Tarquin had taken a lot of crap and swallowed his pride countless times

within the Bradford family just to keep them by his side.

So how could he possibly betray Tarquin?

Chapter 1487

It was a debt of gratitude, and a bond of brotherhood. He would die for Tarquin, so how could he ever betray him?

Unless Tarquin went down the wrong path, betrayed everything they stood for.

"And what if I don't let you down?" Tarquin asked.

"Then I could never betray you," Lowell replied.

Tarquin's brow furrowed as he gazed out the window, murmuring, "That's right. If there's no disappointment, why would there be betrayal?"

Lowell, who understood him best, watched him with a pang of sympathy in his heart.

He knew Tarquin was asking about the mystery man...

Lowell thought for a moment before saying, "Betrayal without disappointment can only mean one thing: that person was born rotten. They just hid it so well that everyone was fooled into thinking they were a good person."

"It's like the fable of the Farmer and the Viper. You can give a snake all the warmth in the world, but it's still going to bite you in the end."

"Some people live by loyalty and honor, while others would sell their own mother for a dime. It's just how the world works."

"But it's definitely not worth grieving over one evil person."

Whatever relationship the mystery man once had with Kendrick or Tarquin, he was evil now.

He was into smuggling, drugs, murder, arson-you name it. He was pure evil.

"By the way, Tarquin, there's something I don't get," Lowell said. "I remember he loved cats, but the mystery man is a cat abuser. How do you explain that?"

Tarquin's brow tightened. After a moment, he said, "I'll add that to my list of questions. When I find the 8th generation virus and go to confront him, I'll ask him to his face."

Worry flickered in Lowell's eyes. Confronting the mystery man meant a fight to the death.

But not confronting him was impossible.

The mystery man was a thorn in Tarquin's side that had to be removed, and it had to

be Tarquin himself who did it to quench his rage.

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At three in the afternoon, the private jet landed at the Border City airport.

A group of people was waiting for them.

Some were their own men, others were local officials.

They got into a car and drove directly to the old man's house.

On the way, Lowell cheerfully asked one of the local officials, "How's the old man's health?"

The official replied, "It's decent. No

major issues, just the usual aches and pains of old of old age. But his skills

are still sharp. A few young guys together are no match for him."

"He's pretty famous around here. Even without his own dojo, he's taken on a lot of students."

"Anyone nearby who wants their kids to learn martial arts sends them to him. That's how he makes a living."

"To this day, he still grinds his teeth whenever The Punikon Family is mentioned." "Didn't their fight end in a draw?" Lowell asked. "He didn't lose, so why the hatred?"

"It was a draw, but the old man

wasn't satisfied with the result," the

official explained. "He believes he

could have won, but The Punikon Family used a dirty trick that cost him the victory."

Lowell then asked, "I heard his financial situation isn't great?"

The official nodded. "It's not. The old man is an upright man. He's taught a lot of kids, but he rarely charges tuition."

"His wife passed away young, and he raised several children on his own."

"Now the kids are grown with families of their own, all with modest means. The old man lives by himself, a simple life."

"We've come to ask for the old man's help, and we certainly won't let him go unrewarded Lowell said. "We plan to provide some financial support to him and the local community."

The official was moved. "Thank you, thank you so much."

Lowell and the official chatted idly, but Tarquin remained silent the entire time.

His mind was occupied by someone else—not the mystery man, and not the old man.

It was the person he had truly come to Border City to find.

Chapter 1488

A little over an hour later, the group arrived at the old man's house.

The man's name was Sawuti. A true Border City native, he was seventy-one years old, thin and with a head of graying hair.

But he was full of vigor and in high spirits.

Upon seeing Tarquin, he greeted him proactively. "Hello, you must be Mr. Bradford?"

"Hello," Tarquin replied politely. "My name is Tarquin."

"Hello, hello. Welcome to Border City, and welcome to my home."

The old man smiled and shook Tarquin's hand. Tarquin reciprocated.

As Sawuti applied pressure, he suddenly sensed something and looked at Tarquin in shock. "?!"

Tarquin's expression remained calm as he met the old man's gaze without flinching.

"..."

After a moment, Sawuti released Tarquin's hand, his expression returning to normal as he ushered them inside.

"Come in and talk. I've brewed some tea for you."

Tarquin glanced at Lowell, a brief, unspoken exchange passing between them, before they followed the old man into the house.

The interior was sparsely furnished but spotlessly clean.

A stove stood in the middle of the room, a kettle on top with water bubbling at a rolling boil.

The old man warmly poured them tea.

"Try our local salted milk tea. It's all-natural."

Tarquin and Lowell accepted the cups politely. Lowell took a sip and praised it. "Mm, this is delicious. It really is true that things without all that processed junk taste the most authentic."

The local official immediately chimed in with a smile, "There are too many bizarre teas out there. They're expensive, they don't taste good, and worst of all, they're unhealthy."

Lowell nodded. "That's for sure."

The official added, "The sad thing is, you can't buy authentic tea like this in stores. We have good tea, but we can't sell it."

"I'll help you promote it," Lowell said immediately.

This was exactly what the official had been hoping to hear. He beamed, unable to hide his joy. "With big shots like you helping to

promote it, people are sure to buy it... our town

On behalf of the people line

I thank you."

"Every family here raises cattle and sheep. The milk is fresh, the tea is high-quality, and I guarantee we don't add any of that other junk."

Lowell took the opportunity to say, "Would it be alright if I went to see everyone's herds? I could take some videos to have my friends promote them online."

"Of course, of course! Are you tired? If not, I can take you for a tour right now."

"Not tired at all. Tarquin, you stay here and chat with the old man. I'm going to go have a look around."

Tarquin nodded. "Alright, go on."

Lowell stood up and, with a knowing look, led the local official out of the house, leaving only the old man and Tarquin inside.

Now, the old man got straight to the point. "Mr. Bradford, you didn't come all this way to become my student,

did you? Your skill,

skill it's greater than mine if you were to fight Puthaf you'd surely win!"

That was why the old man had been so shocked during the handshake.

As skilled martial artists, it was easy to sense an opponent's strength.

He didn't know the true depths of Tarquin's power, but it was clearly superior to his own.

Why would someone stronger than him travel so far to learn from him?

It didn't make sense.

The old man was old, but he wasn't a fool.

Tarquin calmly explained, "I don't know Puthai's true strength. You fought him to a draw, so you would know best."

"Besides, I've heard The Punikon Family is skilled with hidden weapons. I wanted to come and understand the situation from you."

The old man seemed to believe him. "Oh... I see."

"From what I know of Puthai, you won't lose. You're stronger than him! But you can't be complacent. You have to guard against his dirty tricks. That old bastard Puthai has no honor!"

Chapter 1489

"If he hadn't wounded me with a hidden weapon back then, I would have definitely won!"

"But I don't know where he hides his weapons, or how to defend against them. So I probably can't help you much."

"You must be familiar with Puthai's moves," Tarquin said.

"I am!" the old man declared immediately. "Back then, I couldn't stand their family's underhanded ways, so I dedicated myself to defeating them! I studied them extensively."

"Then you can help me. By knowing his moves and preparing in advance, I can guarantee a win."

The old man nodded. "If I can truly help you, I certainly will. Defeating Puthai has always been my dream! Even now, I wish I could get in the ring and fight him myself!"

"If you'd like to attend the match in three months, I'll arrange for someone to take you," Tarquin offered.

The old man's eyes lit up. "You would really do that?"

"Consider it done."

"Excellent! That's wonderful!"

Elated, the old man was ready to start explaining The Punikon Family's techniques right away.

"No rush," Tarquin said. "It's late today. We can start tomorrow."

"Alright. You've traveled a long way, so you must be tired. Get a good night's rest, and I'll explain everything to you tomorrow."

"Mm. I hear the mountain tribes who train eagles live not far from here."

"Are you interested in the mountain tribes?" the old man asked.

Feigning a casual tone, Tarquin said, "I saw some videos online of them hunting with eagles. I'm curious how they manage to tame such fierce birds."

The old man smiled. "Eagle training is their tradition. The nomads are a people who worship heroes. They capture the eagles, break them, and train them. For generations, they have lived side-by-side with eagles. Every family trains them."

"In fact, one of the children who studies martial arts with me is a boy from the highland tribes. He's only seven, but he's already learning to train eagles."

"These nomadic people share a deep bond with eagles. For their men, a life is only considered perfect if they have three things a beautiful wife in their youth, a fine horse in their middle age, and a hunting eagle by their side in their old age." C6ntent

"To a nomad, a hunting eagle is a soulmate, a companion for life....."

As the old man recounted the legends of the highland nomads and their eagles, Tarquin listened quietly, his eyes narrowed slightly.

His thoughts drifted back to when Kendrick was still alive...

None of this was new to him. Kendrick had told him all of it before.

The reason he had mentioned the mountain tribes was because Kendrick himself had a connection to them...

The true person he had come to Border City to find was a highland eagle hunter.

After a while, the old man added, "If you're interested in the hunting eagles, I can take you to see them. The nomadic people are very hospitable, and know them well. I can show you how they train the birds."

Tarquin nodded. "Good. Do all families still train eagles today?"

"Some of the younger generation

have moved to the big cities and

given it up," the old man said. "But those who remain in the tribe still train them."

"...I see."

Around six in the evening, Lowell returned with the local official.

They all had dinner together at a small local restaurant.

After the meal, Tarquin and Lowell went back to rest at a small guesthouse in town.

The place was remote; there were no luxury hotels.

The guesthouse they checked into was dirt cheap, but it was considered one of the better options in the area.

Tarquin had seen hardship before and didn't care about rough conditions.

As for Lowell, he had fought dogs for scraps as a kid. He could adapt to any environment.

Chapter 1490

After the local official had left, Lowell immediately asked, "Tarquin, the old man's reaction when he shook your hand seemed off. Did he figure something out?"

Tarquin's tone was calm. "He realized I'm stronger than him. He guessed I wasn't here to learn."

"How did you explain it?" Lowell asked, alarmed.

"I didn't tell him the truth. I smoothed it over."

Not telling the truth was a precaution against leaks. Besides, sometimes knowing more just puts you in more danger. The old man was safer not knowing.

Lowell let out a breath of relief. "The fact that he could tell you're more skilled than him means he has real abilities."

Someone who didn't understand martial arts couldn't possibly gauge another's strength from a simple handshake.

Lowell continued, "I spent today going door-to-door with the local official. I didn't see anyone suspicious."

"Just like our intel said, this place is poor, but the people are simple and honest."

"No one doubts our reason for being here. They all think we came to learn from the old man, and they're hoping we might help improve their economic situation."

"Find a channel to help them," Tarquin said.

Lowell nodded. "Okay, I'll arrange it tomorrow."

Tarquin picked up his phone and opened the photo gallery. "I'll stay here with the old man tomorrow. You find a way to get to the nomad settlement. Try to get a feel for the situation there, and focus on finding this person."

He pulled up a photo and showed it to Lowell. "This is a picture of him when he was younger. He should be in his fifties now. He used a fake name when he was abroad."

"I don't know what he goes by now; I haven't investigated yet."

Lowell's expression shifted rapidly. "He knew Mr. Bradford?!"

"Yes."

Lowell understood in an instant. "!"

On the way to Border City, he had asked Tarquin how they would find clues about the 8th generation virus. Tarquin hadn't answered at the time, and Lowell hadn't pressed.

Now, it was clear that the man in the photo was the clue.

The reason Tarquin hadn't investigated him yet was to avoid tipping him off.

When dealing with the 8th generation virus, every step had to be taken with extreme caution.

Lowell stared at the photo for a few more seconds. "I've got it. I'll find a

reason to go over there

tomorrow Gontent

The two talked a while longer before Lowell went to his room next door to sleep.

Tarquin took a quick, hot shower. After lying down, he started a video call with Elysia.

When she answered, she saw him half-reclining on the bed and asked curiously, "You're in bed already?"

"Yeah. What are you up to?"

"We just got back to the hotel. We haven't even washed up yet."

As soon as Elysia finished speaking, the little ones clamored to get on screen. "Daddy!"

Elysia turned the camera toward them.

"Daddy, are you getting ready for bed? Did you miss me?" Baby asked.

"Daddy, Daddy, is it fun over there?" Evan chimed in.

Elliot and Elijah wore solemn expressions. "Is everything okay?"

Tarquin smiled, first giving Elliot and Elijah a piece of reassurance. "Everything is fine. Don't worry about me. I miss you all very much. Border City is quite fun. I'll bring you here to play next time."

Elliot and Elijah quietly took a deep breath. "....."

Evan said, "I heard the girls there are really pretty."

Baby added, "I heard the food is yummy and the fruit is sweet."

Tarquin replied with a laugh, "The food is good, the fruit is sweet, and the girls are pretty, but they're definitely not as pretty as your mommy."

"Of course!" Evan said immediately. "My mommy is the prettiest in the whole world."

"Big brother, am I pretty?" Baby asked.

"You are," Evan said. "You and Mommy are tied for the prettiest in the whole world."

The kids chatted with Tarquin for a little while longer before giving the phone back to Elysia.

Tarquin hadn't seen Emmett and asked, "Where's Emmett?"