

Hitched 1511

Chapter 1511

The moment the words left Lowell's mouth, a fist connected with his face! Wyatt was beyond furious.

"Call your partners! Tell them not to touch Diaz! Do you hear me?"

Lowell struggled, yelling for Dane. "Dane, help me! Wyatt is actually insane! Trust me, don't listen to his nonsense!"

Wyatt roared, landing another punch. "You're the crazy one! If you don't call your buddies right now, I'll beat you to death! I'll kill you!"

Dane quickly jumped in to pull them apart. "Wyatt, stop for a second. I need to ask him some questions."

Wyatt looked at Dane with bloodshot eyes, his voice thick with emotion. "Dane, it was him! He had Diaz kidnapped! He's a bad guy! They want to hurt you and Diaz! He wants to sell your organs! He even said they'd cut out Diaz's tongue!"

"I heard it! I heard everything! With my own ears! I'm not crazy! You have to believe me! I'm not crazy!"

Lowell was floored, completely speechless.

Dane was just as stunned, staring in disbelief.

It was hard to tell if he was more shocked that Wyatt wasn't crazy or by the news about Diaz.

Seeing Dane's hesitation, Wyatt's eyes welled up with tears. "Dane, you have to believe me. I love you guys. You're everything to me. There's a reason I pretended to be crazy!"

"I'm not crazy! I'm really not! I will explain everything later, but right now, we have to save Diaz! They're going to cut out his tongue! If we're late, he'll never be able to speak again! Please, you have to believe me..."

Hearing this, Lowell let out a quiet sigh of relief. It was all an act! The clue was right here with him!

Just as Lowell was about to say something, a sharp, searing pain shot through his ankle. Dane had stomped on his injured foot!

"Aargh!" Lowell screamed, nearly passing out from the pain.

Rain poured down in sheets. Dane stood in the downpour, picking up the dagger and pointing it at Lowell's eyes. "Make the call! Do what Wyatt said, make the call!"

Dane clearly believed Wyatt now and was suspicious of Lowell.

Gritting his teeth against the pain, Lowell took the phone. But in a stroke of bad luck, the battery had died!

Lowell scrambled to explain. "I lied

to you. The video is fake. It was AI-generated Diaz is

at Sutter as net

place,

he's fine. You can call Sutton if you don't believe me."

"I tricked you because..." Lowell glanced at Wyatt, then said to Dane, "I swear I never meant to harm you! at it tell

Sutton and while!

my boss to come and get me

Now that it was confirmed Wyatt wasn't crazy, this was a matter for Tarquin Bradford to handle. Even if he asked, Wyatt surely wouldn't talk Tarquin needed to be the one to do it. swñovels

Only then did Dane remember to call Sutton. He pulled out his old flip phone and dialed.

After confirming Diaz was safe and sound, Dane felt a wave of relief and looked at Lowell with a questioning gaze.

Wyatt was also confused, having no idea what Lowell was planning.

Lowell didn't explain, only saying, "I mean you no harm."

...

As soon as Tarquin got the news, he rushed over as fast as he could.

Dane had already brought Lowell back to his house, and Wyatt was there too.

The moment he saw Diaz, Dane rushed forward and threw his arms around him, bursting into tears.

Lowell's stunt had truly terrified him.

Diaz looked puzzled. "Dane, what's wrong?"

Dane just held him tighter, sobbing uncontrollably.

Seeing this, Lowell was filled with guilt. "..."

But the moment Wyatt saw Tarquin, he froze.

His eyes went wide as he stared at Tarquin. "You... you're..."

Chapter 1512

Before Tarquin could respond, Wyatt grabbed his wrist and dragged him toward the living room.

Dane quickly wiped his tears, but as he moved to follow, Lowell stopped him. "Let them talk alone for a bit."

Dane frowned. "They know each other?"

Lowell replied, "...They have a history."

Dane was shocked. "So you only got close to me to get to Wyatt?"

Lowell looked apologetic. "..."

Dane had genuinely treated him as a friend, but Lowell's intentions hadn't been pure; he'd approached him with an ulterior motive.

Dane's breathing grew heavy, his brow furrowed. "Who are you people?!"

Guilt-ridden, Lowell said, "I'm very sorry for using your brother and making you worry. As for everything else... we can talk later. We really don't mean you any harm."

Dane was speechless. "..."

Inside the living room, Wyatt was overwhelmed with emotion, pointing at a photo of Dane's father. "Him... he..."

Tarquin glanced at the old photo, then pulled out his phone. From an encrypted folder, he brought up a group photo for Wyatt to see.

Wyatt snatched the phone from his hand.

He looked back and forth between the group photo on the phone, the old picture on the wall, and Tarquin.

He did this several times before his gaze finally settled on Tarquin.

His eyes red, his lips trembling, he asked Tarquin, "What's... what's your name?"

"Tarquin. And this was my father, Kendrick."

Wyatt's breath hitched. "!"

He stared at Tarquin, his eyes growing redder. "Then what are you doing here?"

Tarquin answered truthfully, "I'm looking for something my father left behind." Wyatt immediately asked, "What is it?"

Tarquin's tone was serious. "Something that was more important to my father than his own life."

Wyatt's pupils dilated. After what felt like an eternity, he broke down. "You came! You came! You finally came! I've been waiting for you for over twenty years!" he wailed, sobbing uncontrollably.

Tarquin's heart tightened. He'd found the right person.

Wyatt gestured with his hands, his lower lip quivering with every word. "Twenty years! Over twenty years! I've been playing the fool waiting for you for over twenty years! You're finally here!" He broke down, the decades of suppressed grief finally pouring out of him.

Wyatt cried his heart out while Tarquin's face grew solemn. "You've worked hard."

Wyatt shook his head. "It wasn't

hard! I'm not afraid of hardship. I

was just afraid to end up like Dane's dad waiting until the day died. Without you ever showing up! I wouldn't have been able to rest in peace!"

"There's been this heavy weight on my chest this whole time..."

Tarquin pulled out a tissue for Wyatt and helped him sit down. "I know Dane's father

knew my father. Did you know him as well?"

Wyatt wiped his tears and looked at Tarquin. "You don't recognize me?"

Tarquin studied Wyatt for a few seconds, then shook his head. "No."

Wyatt sighed. "Right, right. The last time I saw you, you were just learning to walk.

You were so little, of course you wouldn't remember me."

Tarquin was surprised. "You've met me?"

Wyatt nodded. "I have! In Alerasia!"

Tarquin quickly asked, "Karl Town?"

Wyatt shook his head. "I was in downtown Alerasia. Mr. Bradford was in Karl Town. One time, he and your mother were out shopping with you, and we ran into each other. I even held you."

Tarquin's expression turned grave. "So you're the one who brought it back?"

Wyatt nodded. "Yes, that was me!"

Tarquin was silent. "..."

Wyatt's expression grew complex as he recalled the events of the past. "One day, over twenty years ago, Mr. Bradford came to me out of the blue. He said he had something he needed me to bring to Dilan that's Dane's father."

"He said the item was extremely important, more important than his own life!"

Chapter 1513

"He told me I absolutely had to deliver it to Dilan in person!"

"He also gave me a lot of money and warned me to leave Alerasia and never go back, saying it was very dangerous there!"

"He also instructed me not to tell anyone I knew him, and especially not to mention I was bringing something back for him!"

"He said if he had the chance, he would come back to get it from Dilan himself. If he didn't come, his son would!"

"He said that no one could take it except you or him!"

"I didn't know what it was, but he said it was more important than his life, so of course, I swore to protect it with my own!"

"Just as Mr. Bradford instructed, I went to my boss that same day, used the excuse of being homesick, and went through the formal resignation process."

"Then I took a ship across the ocean. The journey took nearly a month to get back to Border City! We even ran into pirates. I had to give them all the money Mr. Bradford gave me just to get away with my life."

"After I got back, I took the item to Dilan that very night, handed it over, and repeated everything Mr. Bradford had told me."

"Dilan and Mr. Bradford were very close. The moment he heard it was something more important than Mr. Bradford's life, he took it extremely seriously."

"He guarded that item constantly. It was only on his deathbed that he called me over and told me where it was hidden. He knew I had been faking my madness..."

"He passed the task on to me. He hoped I could take his place and continue to guard it for Mr. Bradford. I promised him I would!"

"I pretended to be crazy to protect myself, and to protect Dilan."

"...Over twenty years ago, not long after I returned from abroad, I suddenly got an overseas call. It was from my old boss, the restaurant owner in Alerasia."

"He asked me again why I had suddenly returned home, and also asked if I knew a Kendrick and an Elizabeth Gonzalez."

"I knew something was wrong right away. I lied and said I came back because I was homesick and that I didn't know them."

"Because Mr. Bradford and I hadn't met many times, no one knew we were acquainted."

"My boss then asked if I had brought anything back to Zhinora for someone else. I lied again and said no."

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"My boss said that something very important had gone missing back in Alerasia, and they suspected Kendrick and Elizabeth had stolen it and were searching for it."

"I was shocked. I guessed that what they were looking for had to be the thing I brought back!"

"I asked my boss, why did he think to call me?"

"My boss said it wasn't just me. The people in Alerasia were questioning every Zhinorian who had returned home around that time."

"He also said if I had any leads, I could tell him. The reward for information was \$10 million!"

"After hanging up, the more I

thought about it, the more nervous I got. If they were willing to spend that much money and go to such lengths to find a clue, it meant the item was vital!"

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"I was afraid someone would figure out I was the one who brought it back, so I just

decided to play the part of a madman!"

"If I was crazy, even if someone discovered I was the one who brought it back, what could they do to me?"

"The worst they could do was kill me, but a crazy person can't answer their questions anyway!"

"And if I was crazy, they wouldn't suspect the item was with Dilan, and they wouldn't go looking for trouble with him!"

"Later, before Dilan died, he

entrusted that thing to me. I made up my mind then and there that no matter what, I had to protect it,

protect it for the rest of my life!"

"I had to live up to Mr. Bradford's trust, and I had to honor my brother's dying wish!"

"I may not be a scholar, but I know what loyalty is. I couldn't let my friend and my brother down. I..."

Chapter 1514

As Wyatt spoke, his voice grew choked with emotion again. He looked at Tarquin with red-rimmed eyes.

"I'm an orphan. My parents died a long time ago. Back in the day, I used to cause trouble on purpose, just to make people afraid of me so they wouldn't mess with me."

"Everyone around me hated me back then, but Dilan... he was patient with me!"

"He said we were childhood buddies, that he knew I wasn't a bad person. Even after I cracked his head open with a brick and he got so mad we got into a huge fight, he still brought me food that night!"

"Dilan and I weren't related by blood, but he was my real brother!"

"Later, he got terribly sick, was on the verge of death. It was just then that we ran into Mr. Bradford. Mr. Bradford stepped in to help, paying for a doctor."

"The snow had blocked all the roads back then, so Mr. Bradford stayed at Dilan's house for over a month. That's how their deep bond was forged."

"Later on, after Mr. Bradford went abroad, he contacted Dilan and said he'd settled in Alerasia and could arrange a job for him there."

"Back in those days, forget going abroad, just getting out of these mountains made you a big shot! We all wanted to go out and make something of ourselves!"

"But Dilan's parents were in poor health and needed him, so he gave the opportunity to me."

"The job I had in Alerasia, Mr. Bradford arranged it for me through a contact. He looked out for me a lot, and I was so grateful to him!"

"So when he asked for my help, I didn't hesitate for a second!"

"He saved Dilan's life, so Dilan would have done anything for him! In your educated people's words, what's it called... 'eternal devotion' or something like that!"

"It's just... you guys came a little too late. Dilan's already gone..." His voice broke, and he buried his face in his hands, weeping bitterly.

Perhaps because he had held it in for so long, Wyatt poured everything out, speaking through his tears.

By the end, he was sobbing uncontrollably.

Tarquin sat across from him, a lump in his throat. A man who couldn't even properly say 'eternal devotion,' yet for the sake of loyalty, he'd played the fool for over twenty years...

Twenty years. How many twenty-year periods does a person get in one lifetime?

And it was the best twenty years of his life...

From his twenties to his fifties, never taking a wife, never making friends, acting like

a madman for over two decades, all to protect that one item.

All to honor the promises and the loyalty he held in his heart.

Tarquin was deeply moved, filled with a profound respect for him.

He was a man of honor and loyalty. He was a hero.

Dilan was a man of honor and loyalty, too. He was also a hero.

"I'm sorry we kept you waiting for so long."

Wyatt wiped his tears, his voice thick with sorrow. "You did keep us

waiting a very long time... But it's

okay As long as you came. Why didn't Mr. Bradford come?

Tarquin's expression grew heavy. "He passed away over twenty years ago."

Wyatt froze. A few seconds later, tears streamed down his face again, his lips trembling. "He... he... how did he pass away?"

Tarquin didn't hide the truth. "Because of that item."

Wyatt was stunned. "!"

Tarquin said, "You've done an incredible thing. A monumental thing!

! That item is a matter of our

entire nation's security you are a hero! And Dilan is a hero, too!"

Wyatt was shocked to hear this. He had guarded the item out of gratitude and brotherly loyalty. He had no idea it was connected to national security.

"What... what exactly is it?!"

Tarquin said, "The more you know, the more dangerous it becomes. won't go into detail right now. Once the crisis is over will come back and tell you myself. Where is the item now?"

Wyatt slowly collected himself. "In the mountains! Dilan put it in the mountains. After

he died, I never moved it. It's very safe there!"

A great weight lifted from Tarquin's shoulders. The item was still there. That was

what mattered.

Chapter 1515

However...

He'd noticed a long time ago that someone was watching him. If he went into the mountains to retrieve the item, it would be risky.

Tarquin thought for a moment and said, "To avoid tipping our hand, I can't go with you. Can you retrieve the item and bring it to the clinic?"

If they were going to put on a show, they had to go all the way. He was here to pick up Lowell, so to maintain appearances, he would have to take Lowell to the clinic first.

Wyatt hesitated, looking troubled. "The item is on a cliff face. The place is extremely hidden and dangerous. A person can't climb up there. An eagle carried it up. To get it down, we'll need an eagle to fly up and get it."

"But before I started 'acting' crazy, I released my eagle back into the wild. Getting it down now will take some planning."

Tarquin asked, "Can Dane's eagle do it?"

Wyatt frowned. "Dane doesn't know about this, and his eagle has never been there."

I'm afraid it won't understand the command."

"That's easy," Tarquin said. "I'll arrange it."

They had Evan. This wasn't a difficult problem.

Tarquin sent Evan a message, telling him to call him back when Elysia Thorne wasn't around.

Soon, a video call from Evan came through. The little guy started right off the bat, "If you did something to wrong Mom, I'm not covering for you! We might have a deal, but Mom always comes first in my book!"

Tarquin sighed inwardly. His bond with his son clearly took a backseat whenever Elysia was involved.

"This has nothing to do with your mother. I need Dane's eagle, Jove, to help me get something. You'll need to guide him."

Evan was curious. "What is it? Important enough that you need Jove on the case!" Tarquin said, "It's a secret for now, but it's very important to Dad. It's on a cliff face that a person can't reach. Only an eagle can retrieve it."

Evan's tone was breezy. "Easy peasy. Where's Jove? I'll talk to him."

"I'll have Dane add you in a minute. Once they get to the mountain, he'll start a video call with you."

After hanging up, Tarquin said to Wyatt, "You and Dane go with Jove. When you get to the spot, my son will communicate with him."

Seeing Wyatt's confused look, Tarquin explained, "My son, Evan, has a gift. He can communicate with animals."

Wyatt was surprised, but since Tarquin called it a gift, he didn't ask any more questions.

Tarquin added another reminder. "For safety, you should continue to act crazy for a while longer."

Wyatt nodded quickly. "Got it!"

In the yard, only Lowell and Dane remained; Dane had sent Diaz away.

When Tarquin and Wyatt came out, Dane hurried over. "Wyatt!"

Wyatt's gaze was gentle. He lowered his voice and said, "They aren't bad people. They're friends of Mr. Bradford I'll explain everyt

in

detail later. By the way, the show

must go on. In front of outsiders, I'm stiff the crazy guy!"

Dane stared at him, utterly bewildered.

Tarquin looked at Dane with a friendly expression. Because of the deep friendship between their fathers, he saw Dane as a friend.

He didn't say anything sentimental, just gave simple instructions. "First, add Evan's contact info. Then, take me and Lowell to the clinic. If any of Villagers ask what happened just say Wyatt had a sudden episode and hurt Lowell..."

"..." Dane was still dazed, unable to make sense of the situation.

He looked at Wyatt, who said, "Do as he says. After you drop them at the clinic, use the excuse of 'taking me back to the mountains and come with me to the back hills. I'll tell you everything on the way."

Dane could only nod, agreeing to take Lowell to the clinic first.

Chapter 1516

The moment Dane opened the door, a neighbor called out, "Dane, what's all the commotion?"

Dane's brow was furrowed, his expression heavy. "Wyatt got into a fight and hurt someone. I'm taking them to the clinic."

The townspeople started murmuring amongst themselves.

"That madman is completely off his rocker. Why does he always have to be fighting? He's nothing but trouble for Dane!"

"Can't he just stay out of trouble for once? Always picking fights!"

Hearing this, Wyatt grabbed a wooden stick and charged at them, raving like a lunatic.

The locals scattered in fear, shouting "He's crazy!" as they ran.

They arrived at the small town clinic.

A doctor examined Lowell and said the injury was serious enough to need an IV with antibiotics to prevent infection.

Dane said, "Ma'am, could you please start his treatment? I need to take Wyatt back to the mountains, but I'll be back soon. I'll cover all his medical expenses."

The doctor nodded with a sigh. "Go on, then."

After Dane left, the doctor turned to Tarquin and Lowell. "You both look like men of means. I hope you won't give Dane a hard time over this."

"He's a good kid. He only looks after Wyatt out of the kindness of his heart. Technically, what Wyatt does has nothing to do with him."

Lowell nodded in agreement. "We understand. We don't blame Dane. I guess it was just my bad luck."

The doctor continued, "Dane's had a rough life. His parents passed away early, leaving him to raise his younger brother all by himself. He had to be both a brother and a father to him. And as if that wasn't enough, he has to worry about a madman on top of it all... sigh..."

"It's only in the last couple of years, now that Dane's grown up, that things have gotten a little better for them. Before that, life was incredibly hard..."

The doctor, worried they might cause trouble for Dane, kept emphasizing how difficult his life had been.

Lowell and Tarquin listened in silence, exchanging a knowing glance.

At one point, while the doctor stepped out to tend to another patient, Lowell whispered to Tarquin, "Did you find it?"

"It's being retrieved," Tarquin replied.

Lowell stiffened. "Why aren't you with them?" he asked urgently.

Tarquin's brow tightened. "He's watching my every move. Wherever I am, his eyes are on me. My presence would only complicate things. Dane and Wyatt are smart; they won't mess this up."

Besides, Evan and Jove were also there.

The worst-case scenario was that they wouldn't retrieve it, but it absolutely would not fall into the hands of their mysterious enemy.

Surprised, Lowell lowered his voice even more. "What do you mean, he's watching you? You've spotted his tail?"

"Yes."

Lowell instantly became alert, scanning the room. "Who? Where?"

Tarquin didn't answer, instead glancing at Lowell's injured ankle.

This was, for all intents and purposes, an injury sustained in the line of duty.

Lowell's skills were certainly no match for Tarquin or Axel, but he was more than capable of handling Wyatt. If he hadn't wanted to be, he never would have been injured.

His fall down the slope was a deliberate move to get close to Dane. Today's

additional injuries were a pretext to get Tarquin to come here.

Now, everyone knew he had rushed over because Lowell was hurt. Not even their mysterious adversary would find a flaw in the story.

After all, Lowell's injuries were real. His ankle was swollen to the size of a grapefruit, his face was bruised, and a thin line of blood was visible on his neck.

"Any wishes for the new year?" Tarquin asked, abruptly changing the subject.

It took Lowell a moment to catch up. He then grinned and said, "Not really. I'm not short on time or money, I

don't have any particular hobbies

and I've got no wife kids, or friends or family... Hey! How about you give me one of your little ones? They're the only thing I'm interested in right now."

Tarquin shot him a withering look. "Not a chance. If you want one, make your own."

Lowell scoffed. "You're asking the impossible. I don't even have a girlfriend. Who's going to have a kid for me?"

"If you don't have a girlfriend, find one," Tarquin said.

"Can't find one."

Tarquin glanced at him. "Your bonus is doubled this year. And by the way, from now on, you're in charge of Dane's affairs."

Lowell was confused. "What do you mean, 'in charge'?"

Tarquin explained, "His father and my father were old friends. If it weren't for my father and the 8th-generation virus, their lives would have been much happier."

Wyatt wouldn't have to pretend to be insane; he could have been there to take care of Dane and Diaz.

Dane wouldn't have had the extra burden of caring for Wyatt; instead, he would have had another person helping him. His life would have been better, no matter how you look at it.

"And they've been guarding the 8th-generation virus for so many years. They are heroes," Tarquin continued.

Whether from a national perspective or because of the friendship between Kendrick and their family, he felt obligated to look after Dane and Wyatt for the rest of their lives.

Lowell understood his reasoning, but what he didn't get was... "Why am I in charge? Why not you?"

"It's inconvenient for me," Tarquin said.

"What do you mean, 'inconvenient'?" Lowell pressed.

Tarquin lifted his gaze to Lowell, Evan's words echoing in his mind. Evan had said Dane looked like a girl... He had paid special attention earlier, and indeed, the resemblance was there. He was a married man now; it wouldn't be appropriate for him to take care of a young woman.

Tarquin's lips moved, but he offered no explanation. It was Dane's private business, and it wasn't his place to expose it.

"Just do it if I tell you to. Why all the questions? If you don't want to, I'll find someone else."

Lowell immediately backtracked. "I never said I didn't want to! I actually like Dane, and now that I think about it, I feel pretty guilty about what I put him through. Don't worry, I've got it covered. I guarantee I'll make sure they live happily ever after!"

Tarquin remained silent. Seeing the doctor returning, he dropped the subject. About an hour later, Dane came back alone, carrying a large burlap sack. "Did you get Wyatt back to the mountains?" the doctor asked. "Yes."

"Sigh, I don't know what to say about him, always making trouble for you. What's that you're carrying?"

"I prepared a fresh lamb from the flock for them," Dane said. "It's the highest sign of respect we have here. I wanted to apologize for Wyatt."

The doctor sighed again. "I talked to them. They don't blame you. They just think they were unlucky."

Dane grunted in acknowledgment and carried the sack into the infusion room.

Wyatt had already told him the whole story. Now, when he looked at Tarquin, his gaze was different.

Although his father and Wyatt had lived in constant fear because of Kendrick's request, Kendrick had

saved his father's life. He was

life. He

theth.

family's benefactor And the son of a benefactor was a benefactor, too.

Dane was a man of deep feeling. There was much he wanted to say, but he knew this wasn't the time or place. He had to maintain the charade.

Steeling himself, Dane placed the sack at Tarquin's feet. "This is one of our own

lambs. It's been freshly butchered. I'm very sorry that Wyatt caused trouble again. On his behalf, I apologize."

Tarquin and Lowell knew the item had to be in that sack. Their hearts pounded, but their faces remained impassive.

Tarquin didn't speak, so Lowell responded politely, "You really don't have to. What happened has nothing to do with you. I know he's not well, and it was my fault for not being more careful. Please, take the Tamb back. We can't accept it."

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Dane didn't look at Lowell. Even though he knew the truth, it didn't stop him from holding a grudge. Deceiving him like that had been betrayal of his trust. Understanding the bigger picture was one thing, but feeling betrayed was only human.

However, Dane had no ill will towards Tarquin. He looked directly at him and said, "Take it. It's the only way to make things right. If you don't, I won't have any peace of mind."

The doctor chimed in, "Just take it. That's how Dane is. He hates owing people."

"You'll be giving him some peace of mind by accepting."

Lowell feigned reluctance. "Alright then. Thanks."

Dane said nothing, turning to pay the medical bill.

Another hour passed. After the IV drip was finished, Tarquin and Lowell drove away. Dane personally placed the burlap sack in their trunk.

After they left, the townspeople came over to gossip, all expressing sympathy for Dane. Everyone assumed Wyatt had caused trouble again, forcing Dane to spend money and give away a lamb. No one suspected a thing.

From a dark corner, a pair of eyes watched everything intently. Dane sensed it and spun around...

Chapter 1518

A figure quickly ducked out of sight, and Dane only caught a glimpse of his

retreating form as he vaulted a wall into the neighboring yard.

Dane's brow tightened. He ran over, shouting, "Thief! Hey, ma'am! Someone just jumped the wall into your yard! You should check it out!"

At the word "thief," a swarm of townspeople rushed over.

From over the wall, they could hear a woman's angry shouts, a dog's furious barking, and a familiar voice pleading for mercy.

Dane hurried next door, expecting to find a villain after the 'item.' Instead, he found his own friend, Kuban-the same young man he had asked to tend to Lowell's wounds at the clinic the day before.

Kuban was squatting by the wall, looking at Dane with an exasperated expression. "Dane, what are you yelling about? There's no thief!"

Dane's brow was deeply furrowed. Having just learned about the 'item' from Wyatt, he was on high alert. Something so important had drawn Tarquin and Lowell here; it was only a matter of time before the bad guys showed up too.

"Why did you run when you saw me?" Dane demanded.

"I was just trying to mess with you," Kuban said. "I thought if I jumped the wall, you'd follow. I was going to challenge you to a race, see if you could catch me. But you called me a thief! The lady and her dog are terrifying! I nearly had a heart attack!"

Seeing it was just Kuban, the crowd relaxed and began to chatter.

"You've got some nerve blaming Dane! A chase? That's just foolish. You're a grown man!"

"Yeah, acting like a five-year-old. That's something Diaz might do."

Kuban grinned. "Dane's had a rough day. I saw he was in a bad mood and just wanted to cheer him up."

The others just rolled their eyes, dismissed it as nonsense, and began to disperse.

Dane gave Kuban a long, unreadable look before turning to leave.

Kuban chased after him. "I was just joking around to cheer you up, but I ended up making you more upset. I'm the worst, aren't I?"

Dane was indeed more upset, because he wasn't as easily fooled as the villagers. Kuban hadn't been trying to cheer him up; he'd been spying on him. He had only come up with that lame excuse after being caught.

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Why would he be spying? It had to be related to the 'item.' The thought that his own friend might have been bought by the enemy made Dane's mood sink even lower.

Kuban was still talking. "Dane, I don't think this can go on. You can protect Wyatt but you can't keep paying for his mistakes! When he hurts people, not your fault."

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Dane feigned nonchalance. "He was my father's brother. Before my father died, he made me promise to take care of him."

"They were just good friends, not actual brothers," Kuban pointed out.

Dane frowned. "Good friends is enough. Blood doesn't matter. It's like with you and

me. If you were truly loyal to me, I'd walk through fire for you."

Kuban's eyes darted away, his expression uncomfortable. After a moment, he said, "I get what you mean. Well, from now on, from now on, we should both keep a closer eye on Wyatt, try to keep strangers away from him."

Dane didn't respond, just started walking home.

Kuban followed, asking, "I heard the two guys from today are the ones who funded

our new school and library. Why would they be so generous, you think?"

"I don't know," Dane said flatly.

"Do you think they're here for a reason?" Kuban pressed.

Dane looked at him. "What kind of reason?"

"I don't know, looking for someone, or something," Kuban said with a shrug, "just a thought."

Dane glanced at him. "I have no idea."

Chapter 1519

Kuban kept at it. "You've been spending time with the injured guy the last couple of days. Did he ask you about anything?"

"He asked about falconry techniques, and for recommendations on good food and fun places nearby," Dane replied.

"That's it?"

Dane stopped walking and fixed him with an annoyed stare. "What did you think he would ask me about?"

Kuban's lips twitched into a smile. "I thought maybe he'd ask you about some kind of 'baby'."

Dane didn't miss a beat. "Our eagles are our biggest 'babies'! He already asked about them."

Kuban nodded quickly. "Oh, right."

"Stop following me," Dane said, dismissing him. "I need to go home and look after my brother."

Kuban nodded eagerly. "Okay, see you later."

Dane walked off without another word. Kuban watched his back, a frown creasing his forehead. "..."

Dane felt the hostile gaze on his back but didn't turn around. He stopped by a neighbor's house first to call Diaz home.

Once they were back, Diaz asked, "Brother, did Wyatt get in trouble again today?"

Dane shook his head. "Wyatt is a good man. He's a hero."

"Then what about Lowell and Mr. Bradford?" Diaz asked.

"What about them?" Dane countered.

"Kuban came looking for me today," Diaz explained. "He was asking about them, asking if they were good guys or bad guys."

Dane's brow furrowed. "What did you say?"

"I told him the truth. I don't know if they're good or bad. All I know is that Mr. Bradford has been asking Grandpa to teach him some old form of hand-to-hand combat."

Dane was silent for a moment. He

knelt in front of Diaz, placing his

hands on his shoulders. "If Kuban

and Mrs Bradford

asks about Lowen't know And

again just say you

from now on, stay away from Kuban. Don't be alone with him."

"Why?" Diaz asked, confused.

"No reason. Just remember what I told you."

Diaz was obedient. "Okay, I'll remember."

Dane sent Diaz off to do his homework. He stood staring at an old photograph of his father, a growing unease settling in his gut. He had a terrible feeling that something very bad was about to happen.

On the sea, in a villa on a private island.

A tall man stood before a massive

stood

glass wall, admiring the giant fish inside. In the water, a

fearsome-looking fish, over two meters long, swam slowly. At first glance, it looked like an Amazonian catfish, but on closer inspection, it was something else entirely-something far more terrifying.

It moved with a deliberate slowness, its eyes locked on the man, as if waiting for a chance to strike. This was no ordinary fish. It was intelligent, cunning, and dangerous.

The man's eyes narrowed, a smile playing on his lips as he gave a slight wave of his hand.

His subordinate behind him understood the signal and made a quick phone call. Soon, a powerfully built man was thrown into the water. He was naked, his body a mass of muscle-clearly a trained fighter.

Seeing the giant fish, the man's face filled with terror. He struggled, trying to swim to the surface to escape. The fish flocked onto its target and shot forward like a torpedo. It didn't bite slegs instead, it circled around in front of him and, in ore swift motion, clamped itsjaws around his head, swallowing it whole. A fatal, decisive strike.

The water instantly bloomed red with blood. The man went limp, his struggles ceasing as he became food for the great fish in a matter of seconds. The feeding was a brutal, savage spectacle.....

The man watching from outside the glass shook his head and remarked with a sigh, "He still lacks finesse. A quick kill ruins all the suspense. How dreadfully boring."

His voice was low and pleasant, yet his tone carried a hint of disappointment, like that of a patient man let down one too many times.

Chapter 1520

The subordinate beside the man chimed in, "That was this year's underground

fighting champion. He didn't even last a minute against that thing. It's getting more ferocious."

The man shook his head. "No, the food is just too weak. If I threw Tarquin in there, the fish would be the one to die."

The subordinate immediately agreed. "Of course, he's no match for Mr. Bradford."

The man sighed wistfully. "Sooner or later, I'm going to catch Tarquin, throw him in there, and let you all witness what real excitement looks like."

With that, he turned and left the room, stepping outside. The vast, endless ocean stretched out before him. He settled into a rattan lounge chair to bask in the sun, facing the sea. His subordinate stood at a respectful distance behind him, not daring to approach.

A few cats, playing on the sand, saw him sit down and padded over with delicate steps, leaping onto his lap to be petted. The man was affectionate with them, stroking their fur gently and scratching them behind the ears.

On a small table next to his chair sat a cup of the same green tea Tarquin often drank. The man sipped his tea while playing with the cats. His hands were long and fair, clearly the hands of a wealthy man who had never known a day of hard labor. The watch on his wrist was a vintage, limited-edition Vacheron timepiece, identical to the one Tarquin always wore. Only two existed in the world, custom-made. Tarquin had one, and he had the other.

"What's the situation in Border City?"

Standing several meters behind him, the subordinate reported, "Our tail says that because Lowell was injured, Mr. Bradford went to the mountain village today. He stayed at the clinic while Lowell was on an IV drip, and they left as soon as it was done."

"Our tail was watching them the entire time and didn't see anything out of the ordinary. It really seems like Mr. Bradford just went to consult with Sutton."

The man let out a cold laugh, his hand slowly running over the cat's fur as it sat in his lap. His voice was calm and unhurried. "Impossible. I know Tarquin. He wouldn't go to Border City for no reason. With his abilities, dealing with the Punikun Family would be child's play; he wouldn't need to put in this much effort. This trip to Border City wasn't for Sutton."

The subordinate asked cautiously, "Do you suspect Mr. Bradford is looking for the 8th generation?"

The man neither confirmed nor denied it, simply letting out a long breath. "Tarquin's motives have always been difficult to guess."

"I'll tell our informant to keep a closer watch, then," the subordinate said.

The man's voice remained placid. "Our informant is no match for Tarquin. Trying to get anything on him is like trying to catch smoke in your hands. Tell him to forget about Tarquin himself. Have him quietly grab the people Tarquin has been in contact with and interrogate them."

"Understood," the subordinate nodded. "I'll relay the message."

In Border City, Tarquin and Lowell went straight back to their residence, not to Sutton's house. The moment they were inside, Lowell locked the door and ripped open the burlap sack.

Inside was indeed a freshly butchered lamb, skinned and cleaned. Lowell reached into the lamb's belly and, as expected, pulled out a black plastic bag.

He quickly opened it. Inside was a thick winter jacket. Unfolding the jacket, he found another, cleaner plastic bag to which he wiped his hands, opened the final layer and revealed a black box.

It was a small, rectangular box, about the size of a standard tissue box—a miniature safe.

“Tarquin!” Lowell exclaimed, his voice filled with excitement.

Tarquin stared at the box, his brow furrowed. It had a combination lock and was made of a rare, durable material, brute force would be

useless against it was high-tech for its time, even by today's O standards.

Tarquin picked it up for a closer look. On the back was a small note with two lines of text. Tarquin recognized Elizabeth's handwriting instantly: