

Hitched 1521

Chapter 1521

Looking at his mother's familiar handwriting, Tarquin felt his eyes sting.

He took a slow breath and tried entering a password. Incorrect!

He tried another one. Still incorrect!

Lowell started to panic. "Tarquin..."

Elizabeth's warning about only five tries couldn't have been a bluff.

Years ago, Elizabeth and Kendrick had risked life and limb to steal the sample and send it back to Zhinora.

Their goal wasn't to destroy it, but to hand it over to Zhinoran scientists for research.

After all, destroying this one sample was pointless; those ruthless foreign enemies would just create a new one.

Only by developing an antidote could Zhinoran scientists truly neutralize the threat.

But just in case, Elizabeth and Kendrick had taken precautions. They had rigged the box with a bomb!

If necessary, they would rather blow up the sample and the data than let it fall into the wrong hands!

The 8th generation virus was extremely contagious. If it ever leaked, the consequences would be unimaginable, completely uncontrollable!

Logically, the password Elizabeth and Kendrick set should be something only Tarquin could figure out.

But watching Tarquin fail twice in a row, Lowell was getting nervous...

Tarquin frowned, staring at the box in deep thought.

After a moment, he raised his hand again and, without hesitation, quickly typed in six digits.

Three seconds of silence, and then the box clicked open!

Lowell jumped, his palms slick with nervous sweat. Seeing the box open, he let out a huge sigh of relief.

"Oh my God, you scared the hell out of me!"

With his brows still furrowed, Tarquin opened the lid.

Inside lay a small, transparent vial filled with a beautiful, pale red liquid.

The vial was housed in a special syringe marked with the number '8'.

This was it. The 8th generation virus everyone was looking for!

Lowell's eyes widened, his breathing shallow. "Tarquin, is that it?!"

Tarquin didn't answer. His gaze was fixed on a micro USB drive next to the vial.

He ignored the vial, took out the drive, and plugged it into his laptop to see its contents.

The drive was also password-protected. Tarquin entered the same six digits, and it unlocked successfully.

Elizabeth and Kendrick appeared on the screen...

Elizabeth, wearing a beige dress that was fashionable two decades ago, sat before the camera with her long hair down. She was young, beautiful, poised, and elegant.

Kendrick stood behind her in a white shirt and a dark gray vest, his hair neatly styled. He looked dapper and refined.

Elizabeth looked into the camera and waved.

"Hi, Tarquin. I'm your mom, and this is your dad."

"I wonder if we're still around by the time you see this video."

"I wonder how old you are now, and if you've grown up to be the tall, handsome, and

brave man I always knew you would be!"

"And I wonder... have you gotten married? Started a family? Have you... forgotten us?"

"If we're right here beside you,

watching this video with you, then there's nothing much to say. Our family must be living a very happy life!"

"But... if we're already gone, then Mom and Dad want to say we're sorry."

"We're sorry that because of this virus, we had to leave you so early. We couldn't be there to watch you grow up, to protect you and watch

you,

over you, to witness every happy moment of your life..."

"Without us, your life must have been hard, right?"

"The Bradfords will torment you, those ruthless foreign enemies will be after you, you..."

As she spoke, Elizabeth broke down, turning to hug Kendrick's waist and burying her face in his chest, sobbing.

Chapter 1522

Kendrick gently patted her shoulder, his eyes shining with unshed tears as he looked at the camera.

"Tarquin, this might be the last recording your mom and I ever leave for you. It contains what we want to say to you, and the secrets of the 8th generation virus."

"Tarquin, you have to remember, Mom and Dad love you. We love you so, so much. We will always love you!"

"You are our greatest blessing, our flesh and blood, the person we love most in this world!"

"Risking our lives for this virus doesn't mean we abandoned you. We are protecting you, and protecting our fellow countrymen!"

"If you're watching this, you must already know how dangerous the 8th generation virus is."

"Someone wants to destroy us! They want to use biological weapons to control us!"

"Once the 8th generation virus spreads, our country and our people will either be annihilated or become slaves to foreign invaders, forced to do their bidding!"

"We would lose all our freedom and happiness. Our lives would become a living hell!"

"That's why your mother and I had to stand up and fight against these evil forces!" "I believe you can understand our choice!"

"And I believe that if the crisis hasn't been resolved yet, you will also bravely step forward to fight for the safety of our country and our people!"

"Tarquin, you are the son of Kendrick and Elizabeth. Our blood runs in your veins. You will surely be even braver than us!"

"Mom and Dad always taught you to protect our homeland. Why? Because we can't keep our family safe if our world is falling apart!"

"As citizens, it's our duty to defend this country! And as parents, it's the only way we can protect our home and our family!"

"Tarquin, you must remember: defending our nation is the only way to defend our home and protect the people we love!"

"Because we understand the importance of national security, we were prepared to die the moment we learned about the danger of the 8th generation virus!"

"We want our country and our people to be safe and sound, and even more, we want our son to be safe!"

"We don't want you to live in an enslaved nation!"

"Tarquin, whether for the greater

good or for our own family, your

mother and I had to stop thonet

villains. We don't know if we succeed, but we have to act!"

"You... you can understand us, right?"

Elizabeth, tears welling in her eyes, looked at the camera again.

"I don't regret taking this risk. My only worry is you. The Bradfords are so cruel, and

those foreign powers are so vicious..."

"My son, your mother loves you so

much. I wanted to watch you grow up, to see you succeed in your career, to see you confident and proud to see you get married and start a family."

"I want to see what kind of girl my son will choose as his wife."

"I imagine she must be beautiful, brave, kind, and wonderful. She must love you very, very much, just like I do..."

"I know life is full of regrets, but when I think about not being able to be with you as

you grow up, I feel so, so sad!"

"You are my biggest regret!"

"Without Mom and Dad, who will love you?"

"You're so young. Who can love you in our place?"

"But... we have no choice but to act. We have to be sorry, my son. We

have to break our promise. can't

be there to protect you and watch over you. We are so sorry.

In the video, Elizabeth and Kendrick were choked with emotion several times, unable to speak.

They knew their chances of survival were slim.

They were prepared to die. They weren't afraid, but they worried about their son!

Their son was their weakness, their greatest concern!

By stepping forward, they had done right by their country and their people, but they felt they had failed their son.

They knew all too well what he would face after they were gone.

As the sole heir to the Bradford family, he would be taken back to them, forced to

live with those monsters. His life would be miserable!

But if they had let the virus spread, their son would either die or become a slave to our enemies—a fate even more miserable.

Chapter 1523

But at least then, his mom and dad would have been by his side. At least someone would have loved him.

But with them gone, there would be no one left to love their son...

That's why they felt so guilty, so remorseful, so sad.

And they worried that their son would resent them for it.

Lowell, being the sentimental type, was already in tears. "

Kendrick and Elizabeth were heroes, deserving of everyone's gratitude.

But what about Tarquin?

He was the son of heroes, but he was also a victim.

It was because his parents had sacrificed themselves that his life had been so hard, forced to bear everything alone at such a young age, with no one to love him...

The video was still playing, but Tarquin, his vision blurred with unshed tears, hit the pause button.

He grabbed his cigarettes and a lighter and went outside to smoke, chain-smoking one after another.

The twenty-year-old recording had stirred up a deep longing for his parents, along with a flood of terrible memories.

There's no such thing as true empathy in this world. You never know how much it hurts until you're the one who's been cut.

Only he understood the unspeakable bitterness of those years.

So he understood his parents' apology.

But he didn't blame them. If he had been in their shoes, he would have done the same thing.

He hated the people who had masterminded this biological warfare.

He hated the mysterious figure, that traitor to their country!

His phone suddenly rang in his pocket, playing Elysia's custom ringtone.

She was video-calling him.

Tarquin swallowed hard around the tightness in his throat and declined the call.

After composing himself, he called her back-a voice call, not video.

He didn't want her to see his reddened eyes and worry.

Elysia picked up instantly. "Honey, are you okay?"

"Hmm?"

"Why didn't you answer my video call?"

Tarquin lied. "The signal's bad here, video would be choppy. Why are you calling at this hour? Got some free time?"

Elysia didn't overthink it.

"I just took a little nap and I dreamt about you. When I woke up, my heart was pounding. I was a little worried about you."

Tarquin was speechless. Maybe there really was such a thing as being in sync with someone.

He tried to sound casual. "What did you dream about me?"

Elysia murmured, "Nothing much. just dreamt you were standing all alone in a storm, and I couldn't tell

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where the rain ended and your tears began. It was devastating

A lump formed in Tarquin's throat. It took him a moment to reply.

"They say dreams are just our fears playing tricks on us. I'm actually really happy right now. And even if were sad, you don't need to worry. would only be because I miss you too much."

Elysia was easily comforted, letting out a sigh. "I miss you. So much."

Tarquin was touched. "I'm pretty much done with things here. I'll come find you when I'm finished."

Elysia was surprised. "You're coming to Oceanopolis?"

"Yeah. Are you coming to pick me up?"

"Really? When are you coming?"

Hearing the excitement in her voice, Tarquin smiled and asked teasingly, "Do you want me to come?"

Elysia replied instantly, "Yes!"

A handsome smile spread across Tarquin's face, happiness radiating from him.

"I can't give you an exact time yet, but it'll be in the next couple of days."

"Okay! I'll wait for you! Let me know before you come."

Tarquin asked, "Will there be a surprise for me?"

After his birthday, Elysia couldn't hear the word 'surprise' without her cheeks flushing deeply. "No!"

Tarquin sighed dramatically.

"Poor me. A guy travels thousands of miles to see his wife, and she won't even prepare a surprise for him."

Elysia pursed her lips, smiling. "Smooth talker! Just get here first. You'll find out if there's a surprise when you arrive!"

Tarquin's tone was doting. "Alright! Wait for me!"

Elysia replied softly, "Okay, I'll be waiting."

After a few more sweet nothings, they hung up.

Tarquin's mood had lifted considerably.

Elysia was his anchor. No matter the situation, she could always ground him.

Letting out a long breath, Tarquin headed back into the room to continue watching the video.

He wanted to know why his parents

hadn't immediately handed the virus

over to the state after bringing it back to the country.

He also wanted to know if they had mentioned the mysterious figure!

Chapter 1524

The recording continued to play...

After comforting Elizabeth, Kendrick began to recount the full story of the 8th generation virus.

"Back then, because of the pressure from the Bradfords, your mother and I had no place in our own country, so we had to settle abroad."

"A friend recommended Karl Town to us."

"Karl Town was tucked away in the suburbs, far from the chaos of the city. It was a beautiful, quiet place with great schools and hospitals."

"And most of the residents were Zhinorian, so it was a perfect fit for us. Your mother and I settled down here."

"The person who introduced us was an Alerasian named Nice Eilman. He was a friend I made while studying abroad."

"Even though he's Alerasian, I want you to remember him, son."

"Because he was a man who loved peace. A good man. He deserves the gratitude and respect of every Zhinorian."

"Without him, your mother and I would never have known about the 8th generation virus, nor could we have successfully obtained it and its data."

"And you wouldn't have been able to live in Karl Town for several years and grow up healthy."

"The truth is, Karl Town was just one big laboratory. The Zhinorians living in the town were the guinea pigs."

"The sinister organization behind it all used the town's superior living conditions to attract Zhinorans, and then secretly injected everyone with various serums."

"The hospital in town belonged to them. The doctors and nurses were all their people. No one ever had a chance to know the true state of their health."

"If you sought medical care elsewhere, they would bribe the doctors outside to give you a fake report."

"They would even drug you in the middle of the night and secretly inject you with new serums."

"Their favorite subjects were newborns. Almost every child born in Karl Town was injected with a virus serum on the day they were born, becoming one of their lab rats."

"Their goal was to develop a super-virus that only targeted Zhinorians!"

"They were waging biological warfare. They wanted to use a virus to control us, or to annihilate us!"

"Nice told us all of this. Before he did, we had no idea!"

"They operated with extreme secrecy and caution! If anyone discovered something was wrong, they would be quietly 'disposed of'."

"Nice deliberately led us to Karl Town, hoping that through us, he could stop these evil forces."

"He loved peace and didn't want to see a war."

"He knew about my and your mother's patriotism, and he knew about my family's influential

Bound. He believed we had the

ability to get the virus back to our country."

"The reason you lived in Karl Town for years without a single injection was because of his secret help."

"His father was a famous local biologist and a key figure in the virus research, so Nice had connections in Karl Town."

"And it was because of this connection that he was able to access the 8th generation virus and its data samples."

"The sample and data your mother and I obtained were stolen by him and given to us!"

"For that, he was brutally tortured and eventually died, along with his father."

"That's why I said you must remember him. Though he was not our countryman, he was a hero!"

Kendrick fell silent, his brow furrowed as if mourning his friend.

After a long moment, Kendrick spoke again.

"You must be wondering, if the government sent people to retrieve did we secretly

us, whe?

someone else to bring thief

back?"

Chapter 1525

"Because your mother and I were worried there was a mole. Nice had warned us to be extra careful."

"Besides, an official government rendezvous would be a high-profile target, with a greater chance of being discovered by Alerasia."

"So, we planned to find a reliable person to bring the real virus back to the country first. Then, we would take a fake one to meet the government contacts. This one."

Kendrick held up a small box to the camera.

It looked almost identical to the one Tarquin had found.

Kendrick opened it. Inside was only a single vial of liquid. "This is the fake."

"If everything went smoothly, after we returned to Zhinora, I would immediately go to Border City to retrieve the real one and hand it over to the government."

"If something happened to your mother and me, the real virus wouldn't fall into the wrong hands!"

"Tarquin, remember this: if your mother and I truly met with a mishap, we were either killed by the powers behind the virus, or there was a mole among the people sent to retrieve us!"

"Today, I will give this recording and the real virus to someone I trust completely, and have him take it back to the country immediately."

"In a couple of days, your mother and I will take this fake one and meet up with our contacts."

"Let's hope everything goes smoothly."

"But even if it doesn't, the fact that you're watching this recording means things are hopefully moving in the right direction."

"Tarquin, when you get the virus, don't just hand it over to anyone. You must deliver it personally into the hands of the highest authorities!"

"If you have a brilliant doctor by your side right now, even better. Keep it completely under the radar. Quietly give the virus to the doctor to develop an antidote, and the crisis will be completely resolved!"

Elizabeth wiped her tears and said to Kendrick, her eyes red.

"Tell him about the government's retrieval plan. If something really happens to us, our son will be able to figure out who the mole is!"

"The foreign powers are hateful, but a traitor from our own side is even more despicable!"

When a foreign country tries to harm you, it might be due to political conflict or territorial ambition.

But when your own people betray you, what is that?

It's pure evil.

If caught, death would be too good for them.

In the video, Kendrick and Elizabeth didn't yet know their ultimate fate.

They detailed the retrieval plan arranged by the government.

After explaining this, they emphasized again that if they died, the matter must be thoroughly investigated to expose the mole.

A single traitor could compromise the entire nation!

To ensure our country's survival, the mole had to be rooted out!

The recording ended with a collection of photos that Kendrick and Elizabeth had included.

They were all provided by Nice.

There were photos from inside the organization's front company, partial photos of the underground research base.

There were photos of them injecting

babies with the virus, and photos of

them breaking into homes Dx

night to draw blood content

There were even photos of them secretly disposing of bodies!

In addition to these scenes, there

were photos of the research team members at the time, and photos of the virus samples, labeled

sequentially from 1 to 8.

The video also showed photos of several prominent figures, many of whom were

still alive and active in various fields today!

They were all members of the evil organization!

And finally, there was an attached copy of the research facility's blueprints!

The entire video contained a massive amount of information!

After it finished, before Tarquin could speak, Lowell frowned and said angrily,

"We only knew the government sent people for the rendezvous. No one ever mentioned that Mr. Bradford and Elizabeth met up with them and gave them a fake virus something is very wrong here!"

Chapter 1526

"Tarquin, I think there was a mole in the extraction team!"

"The mole must have secretly contacted Mr. Bradford and Elizabeth. And Bradford and Elizabeth, not knowing they were traitors, met with them privately and handed over the fake virus."

"The mole didn't know the virus was a fake. As soon as they got it, they immediately arranged for Mr. Bradford and Elizabeth to be killed!"

"By the time the mole realized the virus was a fake, Mr. Bradford and Elizabeth were already dead. They had no way of finding out where the real virus was, so they had no choice but to turn their attention to you!"

Lowell analyzed the situation, clenching his fists in anger.

Tarquin's brow was furrowed, his face dark and grim, and a dangerous stillness settled over him.

If Lowell could see it this clearly, he could see it even more thoroughly.

There was no doubt. That had to be what happened.

The story they'd been told about the team sent to retrieve his parents-that they'd died in a car crash before the team even made contact was a lie.

The truth was, someone had met them, taken the virus from their hands, and, believing it to be real, had them murdered.

The mole and the mysterious figure were both culprits.

Unfortunately, there was no way to know which faction of the team his parents had met with. They had recorded the video before going to meet their contacts, so the footage offered no clues.

And if they didn't know who they met, they didn't know who the mole was.

Furthermore, his parents hadn't mentioned the mysterious figure at all...

Still, the video was packed with information. That final blueprint, especially, would be

a huge asset in their eventual counterattack. The photos of the members of those dark organizations also provided new leads for their investigation.

With a stone-cold expression, Tarquin copied the video to an encrypted file, pulled

out the flash drive, and placed it back in the small box. He lit another cigarette. The

atmosphere in the small, spartan room was heavy and oppressive.

Finding the virus was a good thing, but the story behind it was infuriating and heartbreaking.

After a long silence, Lowell spoke again. "Now that we've found the virus, what's our next move? Can we start the counterattack?"

Lowell had been furious before, but after watching the video, his anger had intensified. He was burning with a rage that made him want to hunt down the mysterious figure, catch the mole, and turn the tables. He wanted to go on a rampage.

But Tarquin, frowning, tapped the ash from his cigarette. "We wait." Lowell was baffled. "We've found the virus, and you still want to wait?" Tarquin's tone was firm. "We wait."

Finding the virus was only the first step. The crisis would only be truly over when they developed an antidote. Until then, he wouldn't make a reckless move, So

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people had already been sacrificed because of the 8th-generation virus; he couldn't allow any more mistakes. The torch had been passed to him, and he had to handle it with absolute patience.

Revenge was secondary. Resolving the crisis was the priority.

Until the crisis was averted, he would lie low and endure. After it was over, then it would be time to strike back. He would personally hunt them down and settle the score.

After a moment of thought, Tarquin stubbed out his cigarette. "Keep the discovery of the virus a secret for now. I'm packing my things and heading to Oceanopolis."

Lowell was stunned. "Now?"

"Yes." Tarquin took off his jacket and strapped the small box containing the virus to his waist, keeping it close to his body. "I'll go alone. You stay here under the guise of recovering from your injuries and clean up the mess. Take out all of his informants before you leave."

'His' referred to the mysterious figure. They knew he had planted spies all over Border City to watch them.

Tarquin knew that, given the man's personality, he wouldn't make a direct move against him easily. But he was surely suspicious about what had happened in Border City. After Tarquin left the man would definitely have his people interrogate Dáne and the others.

Tarquin wasn't worried about them leaking secrets, but he was worried they would be tortured. They had guarded the 8th-generation virus for so many years and had been implicated for too long. They deserved to live the rest of their lives in peace.

Chapter 1527

Leaving Lowell behind to handle the aftermath was to protect them.

Lowell understood Tarquin's meaning and nodded. "Don't worry about a thing. I'll handle everything here."

Tarquin finished packing, put on his jacket, and said with a cold face, "As soon as I'm gone, have the guards move in. Every last one of his spies-take them out."

"Got it. You be safe."

Just as Tarquin left, Lowell's phone rang. It was one of the bodyguards.

"Lowell, Dane's in trouble. A man named Kuban is using his brother to threaten him, trying to force information out of him."

Lowell's brow tightened. "Is Diaz hurt?"

"He's been kidnapped by Kuban's accomplices."

Lowell was seething. "What kind of watch were you keeping?"

"Kuban is a friend of Dane's," the guard explained helplessly. "He went straight to Dane's house. We were caught off guard and couldn't risk a confrontation."

Lowell frowned. "I'm on my way now. Find a chance to rescue the kid. Don't hold back. As long as Dane and Diaz are safe, you do what you have to do. Break bones you have to."

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He was filled with a burning rage and needed an outlet.

The mysterious figure was nowhere to be found, but his informants were all Zhinorians. Collaborating with the devil to harm their own countrymen what were they if not traitors? And there was nothing more despicable than a traitor.

As evening fell, just as Tarquin arrived at the airport, he received a call from a spoofed number. It was the mysterious figure.

"You'd barely left town when Lowell started taking out my informants. What's he so worked up about? Or is it you who's angry?"

The mysterious figure had kept a constant watch on Tarquin, who had always ignored it. This sudden retaliation was unexpected.

Tarquin was on edge, his tone harsh. "Tell your people to get lost. From now on, I find one, I deal with one."

The man's electronically altered voice chuckled. "What's all this? Feeling bold now that you've found the 8th-generation virus? Or did someone just piss you off?"

"Cut the crap," Tarquin said coldly. "If you have the guts, come find me yourself. If not, then back off."

The man chuckled again. "Oh, I'll definitely come find you once you have the virus. The question is, will you have the courage to tell me when you do?"

He was fishing for information. Tarquin couldn't be bothered and

was about to hang up when the man find

suddenly added, "Tarin, if Yust

the 8th generation virus, you a

tell me immediately. It's not just for my sake, but for your own as well."

"We have all the time in the world to play this game with each other, but some people can't afford to wait. m afraid if you tell me too late,

be

have been tortured to death by me."

"You care about him so much. If he dies because you failed to save him, if you don't

even get to see him one last time, you'll be devastated."

Tarquin's expression froze. "Who are you talking about?!"

The voice was dangerously smooth. "Someone you care about. Someone you

value. Someone you miss very, very much."

Tarquin froze.

"If you want more information about him," the man continued, "trade me a clue about

the 8th-generation virus. If you find it soon enough, you might even be able to save his life."

Before Tarquin could say anything, the line went dead.

Tarquin's brow was deeply furrowed, his breathing ragged. He tried to call back, but the number was virtual and unreachable.

His face darkened. For a moment,

he couldn't think who the man could

possibly be talking about. But he knew this wasn't a bluff to get the Virus from him, the man would have long ago prepared the perfect leverage. This person he was talking about had to be real.

But who was it?

Chapter 1528

The people he cared about... deeply cared about...

He could count them on one hand. Excluding Elysia and the children, who came into his life later, and his parents, who were long gone, and Lowell and Great-Uncle Keaton... that only left *him*.

But that made no sense. He suspected that *he* was the mysterious figure. He couldn't use himself as a threat against him.

But besides him, who else could it be?

Tarquin couldn't think. His mind was buzzing, unable to think clearly. After watching the video his parents left, he was suffocated with anger and grief. A lump was caught in his throat, choking him, making him feel unbearably sick. And now, this call from the mysterious figure had made him even more agitated. His hatred for the man had reached its peak. He wished he could teleport to his side and end this once and for all.

But thinking of the bigger picture, he could only endure.

Tarquin closed his eyes, picturing Elysia and the children. As their faces appeared in his mind, his chaotic emotions finally began to settle...

It was just after two in the morning when Tarquin arrived at the Hawkins family home

in Oceanopolis. Clayton Hawkins, hearing the news, quickly got out of bed and came out with a jacket thrown over his shoulders.

Seeing it was really Tarquin, Clayton was surprised. "Tarquin, what a surprise! Elysia didn't mention you were coming."

Tarquin managed a small smile. "It was a last-minute decision. I didn't want to wake you all, so I didn't call ahead."

"Is everything taken care of over there?"

"Yes."

"Are you hungry?" Clayton asked immediately. "I can go make you a late-night snack."

"I'm not hungry, Dad, please don't go to any trouble," Tarquin declined. "Are Elysia and the kids asleep upstairs?"

"Yes, they all went to bed early."

"Then I'll go up to see Elysia. You should get back to bed. We can talk more tomorrow."

"Alright, alright. You go on up and get some rest. If you get hungry later, just come downstairs. The kitchen is always ready to whip something up."

"Okay."

Anxious to see Elysia and not wanting to keep Clayton up, Tarquin went straight upstairs.

The new butler, an earnest man, said with a smile, "You can really see how much those two love each other. He rushes here in the middle of the night and is in such a hurry to see her."

Clayton chuckled. "He is very good to Elysia."

"The missus is very fortunate to have found such a loving husband," the butler said. "And you and Mrs. Hawkins are fortunate to have found such a wonderful son-in-law."

Clayton laughed. "Satisfactory, yes, but just between you and me, sometimes I get this strange feeling... that he's not good enough for my daughter."

The butler grinned. "Ah, I know this one. It's the classic father-in-law's curse. No man is ever good enough for his little girl!"

Clayton considered it and realized it was true. He chuckled. "Now that Tarquin's here, tell the kitchen to prepare some extra dishes for tomorrow."

"Will do."

Clayton returned to his room in a good mood and went back to sleep.

On the third floor, Tarquin had already tiptoed into Elysia's room. Elysia, not knowing

he was back, was fast asleep, her breathing even and steady.

Having rushed all this way, Tarquin was now terrified of waking her, even breathing cautiously. He stood by the bed watching her, his gaze soft and filled with love. His restless, agitated heart was now stirring with a different kind of longing. He wanted to kiss her, to hold her, to melt into her. He desperately wanted to slide into bed right then and there.

But he hadn't washed up yet.

Tarquin swallowed hard, his throat tight.

He gently caressed Elysia's cheek, then took off his jacket, carefully set aside the box from his waist, and grabbed a robe to head to the quest bathroom. He had stayed here over a month before, so he knew his way around, and he still had clothes here.

After a quick shower, Tarquin checked on the children before returning to the bedroom. He slipped into bed as quietly as possible and wrapped his arms around Elysia from behind. The moment he held her, he had to fight to control his

breathing as his body instantly reacted. But he didn't dare move, not

wanting to disturb her sleep.

Sensing something, Elysia yawned, turned over, and sleepily opened her eyes.

Chapter 1529

Seeing Tarquin, she froze for a second. "Honey?"

Now that her eyes were open, Tarquin responded in a husky voice, "Yeah. Did I

wake you?"

As if she hadn't heard him, Elysia reached out and touched his face. "It really is you. I'm dreaming about you again." She leaned in and gave him a soft kiss on the lips, then smiled a silly, happy smile, as if she'd just won the lottery.

After her kiss, she closed her eyes again and snuggled into his arms. "Hold me."

Tarquin's throat went dry, but he obediently held her tight. Elysia found a comfortable spot in his embrace and fell right back to sleep.

Tarquin was speechless. He thought she was awake, but she had just been dreaming. He fought back his urges, refusing to tease her, and just held her as he closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep with her.

The next morning, Elysia woke up and, midway through a stretch, sensed

something was off. There was someone behind her. An arm was wrapped around her waist.

She froze, instantly wide awake, and whipped her head around. Tarquin was watching her, his eyes narrowed in a smile.

Elysia's heart skipped a beat. What was happening? Had she woken up too fast? Or was she still asleep?

She closed her eyes and opened them again. Tarquin was still there.

Elysia quickly reached out to touch him. "Honey?"

"Yeah," Tarquin replied with a grin.

Her eyes widened. "Is it really you?"

"I'm as real as it gets," he countered with a smirk.

Elysia blinked. "I'm not dreaming, am I?"

Tarquin chuckled and pinched her cheek. "Feel that?"

After a few seconds of stunned silence, Elysia shot up in bed. "When did you get back?!"

Tarquin lay on his side, propping his head up with one hand. "In the middle of the night. I didn't want to wake you."

A huge smile spread across Elysia's face, and she threw herself on top of him. "But yesterday you said you didn't know when you'd be back!"

Tarquin lay flat on his back, letting her press down on him as he wrapped his arms around her waist. "Work went smoothly so I came back as soon as was done. Are you I

happy to see me?"

Elysia nodded vigorously. "Happy! Incredibly happy!"

His heart swelled. "How happy?"

Elysia leaned down and gave him a hard kiss. "So, so happy! I can't get used to you not being here! I missed you so much! I never want to be away from you for a single day again!"

An unabashed, boyish grin spread across Tarquin's face. At that moment, he would have moved heaven and earth just to keep that beautiful smile on her face.

"Then we'll never be apart again, I'll be your shadow. You can take me wherever you go."

"Okay! You said it!"

"I said it."

Elysia was truly overjoyed. "Did you miss me?" she asked.

"Yes!"

"How much?"

Tarquin's eyes narrowed. "Let me show you."

He rolled over, pressing her beneath him, capturing her lips with his as he lifted the hem of her nightgown...

At seven-thirty in the morning, the children started waking up one by one, but Tarquin and Elysia had yet to emerge.

Clayton, knowing how these things

worked, knew that a short

separation could make a reunion even more passionate than a honeymoon. He decided not to disturb them. He and Pamela Patel had breakfast with the kids and then took them out to play, giving Tarquin and Elysia a quiet house to catch up on their sleep.

But Elliot said, "Grandpa, Grandma, you guys go have fun. I want to stay home and read for a while."

Elijah immediately chimed in, "I don't want to go out either."

Clayton and Pamela didn't think much of it. "Alright, then. Call us if you need anything."

"Okay."

The grandparents left with Evan and the baby. Elliot and Elijah exchanged

a look, their small brows the

as they glanced towards the

third-floor bedroom. The two brothers had tinkered with their father's phone, so they knew the exact moment he had returned.

Chapter 1530

Because they knew exactly why Tarquin had gone to Border City, Elliot and Elijah were now on edge.

Elijah's brow was knotted with worry. "Dad left Border City so quickly. Does that mean he found the virus? Or did the trail go cold again?"

Elliot's expression was serious. "Let's ask him."

Instead of knocking on the door, the brothers sent a text message: [You came to Oceanopolis so suddenly. Is everything in Border City resolved?]

In the third-floor bedroom, Tarquin was gazing tenderly at the sleeping Elysia. Seeing his son's message, he replied: [I'll come find you to talk in a bit.]

Elliot responded instantly: [Okay. Grandpa and Grandma took Evan and the baby out. Elijah and I will be waiting for you in the small study on the second floor.]

Tarquin didn't reply. He placed a soft kiss on his wife's forehead and went to the bathroom. Ten minutes later, dressed and composed, he walked into the small study on the second floor.

Seeing him, Elliot and Elijah immediately greeted him, "Dad!"

Tarquin entered the room. "How did you know I was back? Did your grandparents tell you?"

The brothers didn't hide it. "We installed a tracking system on your phone. We know wherever you go."

Tarquin was speechless. He'd been outsmarted by his own kids.

Elliot couldn't wait any longer. "Did you find any clues about the virus?"

Tarquin placed the box he was holding on the desk and opened it for them to see. "I found the virus."

Elliot and Elijah were stunned. The two brothers stared wide-eyed at the red vial. "This is the real 8th-generation virus?"

"Yes."

After staring at it for a long moment, Elliot frowned. "We should get this to Great- Grandma immediately. In this world, she's probably the only one capable of developing an antidote."

Tarquin nodded. "We need to have someone deliver it to the mountains, and we have to make sure the mysterious figure doesn't find out."

"Do you have a plan, Dad?" Elijah asked.

Tarquin's brow furrowed, his expression grave. "The mysterious figure is always watching me, and he's been suspicious about our last trip to the mountains. If I go again, it will definitely attract his attention. He can find out that your great-grandfather and S great-grandmother are living in seclusion there. I can't deliver it myself. We need someone who knows the mountain environment and who we can trust completely."

Hearing this, Elliot and Elijah said in unison, "Great-Uncle Keaton!"

The two brothers had simultaneously thought of the scarred, formidable man. He was skilled, knew the mountains well, and was completely trustworthy.

Tarquin had already thought of him on the way back. He trusted him one hundred percent, but he had one reservation: Keaton hadn't grown up in that specific forest, and it wasn't exactly friendly territory for him. The deep wilderness was an unforgiving place-mysterious unpredictable, and full of hidden dangers. White came from there; who knew how many other beings like White, or

even more dangerous, lurked within,

waiting to strike?

It would be difficult for him to handle it alone. If something went wrong and the virus

was lost or leaked again, the consequences would be catastrophic. The 8th-

generation virus was too important to risk any mistakes.

"Dad," Elliot said, "Evan and I will go with Grand-Uncle Keaton."

Elliot had considered the same risks as Tarquin. With him and Evan accompanying him, along with White, they could minimize the danger. They had grown up in the mountains and knew the

environment. Elliot could act as the strategist with his calm and steady mind. Evan's skills would make him a great partner for Grand-Uncle Keaton, both of them serving as bodyguards for the virus. And Evan could communicate with animals, a skill that would be incredibly useful deep in the mountains. As for White, not only was he a powerful fighter, but he could also lead the way, eliminating the risk of them getting lost.