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Chapter 1681

Baby rushed forward and threw her arms around Elliot.

Holding her close, Elliot's face softened with affection. "Evan and I missed you too, Baby."

He then looked up, nodding a greeting to Tarquin, Emmett, and Elijah.

Tarquin had already heard the news on the way back, so seeing Elliot and Evan wasn't a surprise. It just broke his heart.

Bernard's passing had hit the two boys incredibly hard.

It was their first time facing the death of a loved one, and it had happened while he and Elysia were away.

"Mom..." Emmett and Elijah said, looking at Elysia and Evan with concern.

Elysia wiped her tears, then gently wiped Evan's away too.

"No more crying," she said softly. "You've been gone for so long, and we've missed you like crazy. We should be happy now that you're back."

Baby pulled away from Elliot and tugged on the hem of Evan's shirt, looking up at him with a pout. "Evan..."

Evan took a deep breath and managed a watery smile. "I'm okay, little sis. I just missed you all so much."

He scooped Baby up and spun her around a couple of times. "Did you miss me?" Baby nodded vigorously. "Yes, yes! I missed you a ton!"

Evan chuckled. "I brought you a present."

Baby's eyes lit up. "What kind of present?"

"I'll go get it for you," Evan said, then glanced at Emmett and Elijah. "And I've got something for you two, as well."

As the kids ran over to the couch to see their gifts, Elysia stood up and took a deep breath.

Tarquin walked over and wra

arm around her shoulders.

"They're just kids, honey. They still need their mother. It's only natural for them to get emotional after being apart for a while. Don't be sad."

A thick lump formed in Elysia's throat as she fought back tears. "But they've both

gotten so thin, especially Evan. He's lost so much weight."

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Tarquin knew it was because of Bernard's death, but he offered comforting excuse. "Evan was sick,

after

We'll fatten him up. He'll be

back to normal in

time

Elysia's thoughts turned to the scar-faced man. "Where's Grandpa Walter?"

"He went back," Tarquin said.

Elysia looked surprised. "Back? Back to the mountains?"

"Yeah."

"Why did he go back again?"

Tarquin lied smoothly. "He probably wanted to be with Bernard."

The truth was, he had returned to protect Quincy Walter and the old woman. With Bernard gone, the mountains had lost their guardian. Even though the remaining elders were formidable in their own right, it wasn't enough. The old man's return meant he was taking over Bernard's post. He had searched for Bernard for most of his life, only to find him and lose him two months later. The pain in his heart was indescribable. Returning to the mountains, taking up Bernard's duties, and living the life Bernard had lived was his way of coping with the grief and longing. After dropping the children off, he had immediately turned back. He called Tarquin to let him know and to entrust him with Evan's care. Evan was the person he and Bernard loved most in this world. He was their hope. Bringing justice to the Warner name and reclaiming their legacy now rested entirely on Evan's shoulders.

Elysia didn't suspect a thing. She sighed. "Well, maybe it's for the best that he's there with him. They're getting older, they can look out for each other is he feeling completely better now?"

Tarquin nodded. "He is. Since the kids are back, how about a big celebration dinner tonight?"

"Yes! I'll cook."

Tarquin smiled. "Great. I'll let you get to it. I have some work to take care of, but I'll come help when I'm done."

"Don't worry about it. Go do what you need to do."

Elysia glanced over at the children, a smile gracing her lips, before turning and heading to the kitchen.

Tarquin called Elliot into the study for a private conversation. "Was the journey back okay?"

Chapter 1682

Elliot nodded. "It was smooth. But the antidote is going to take a while to develop. Great-Grandma asked me to tell you that she'll contact you as soon as she has any

news."

Tarquin wasn't surprised. This was an eighth-generation bioweapon, with each version more potent than the last. Not long ago, a virus somewhere between the fourth and fifth generation had given the entire medical organization a massive headache. It was easy to imagine the destructive power of an eighth-generation virus. The more lethal it was, the harder it was to crack. An antidote wouldn't be ready anytime soon.

"About your mentor, Bernard..."

At the mention of Bernard, Elliot's eyes welled up again. "Bernard was poisoned!"

"Back in the day, after Bernard defeated the top fighters from seven different countries, those cowards got scared. They kidnapped Grandpa Walter and his mother to threaten Bernard."

"They gave him two choices: die, or throw the match."

"Bernard believed that throwing a match would be a disgrace to his country, no different from treason. So he chose to die."

"They injected him with poison, but Great-Grandma saved him."

"She's been helping him suppress the poison's effects all these years. But as he got older, his immune system weakened, and even she couldn't do anything more..."

Tears streamed down Elliot's face as he spoke. "Dad, Bernard died with regrets!" "He spent all these years searching for the people who murdered his master and his master's wife, but he never found them. He died without getting his revenge..."

Tarquin's heart ached. He reached out and wiped his son's tears. "He's gone, but we're still here. We'll get his revenge for him."

Elliot nodded furiously, his voice choked with sobs. "We have to! It's not just for personal reasons, it's about justice!"

"Walter told me... everyone knows Bernard as the legendary titan of the underground circuits the man who took on the world and won. But the truth is..."

"After faking his death and retreating to the mountains, Bernard was secretly working for the country the whole time! Walter said Bernard was an unsung hero! A true martyr!"

Tarquin frowned, wiping away another tear from Elliot's cheek. "I'm here. Dad will help you get justice for Bernard."

Elliot's voice broke as the names escaped him. "And... and Gerald and Howard..... I think... I think something happened!" He collapsed into a fit of jagged, uncontrollable sobs.

The iron wall Eliot had built around his emotions finally crumbled, the weight of the past few days crashing down on him all at once. For days, his nerves had been stretched taut. Evan was so young and had fallen ill from the grief of Bernard's death; Elliot had to comfort him? Great-Grandma and Quincy Walter were old; he didn't want them to worry, so he put on a brave face. Grandpa Walter had been like a brother to Bernard; his death was a devastating blow. So Elliot had to be even stronger for him, encouraging him to hold on. He had been on edge every single moment. But here, in front of his own father, he couldn't pretend anymore.

Tarquin's heart shattered. His Elliot was only five years old. He was just a child. No

matter how mature and composed he acted, he was still just a child.

With his own eyes red, Tarquin pulled Elliot into his arms, his voice thick with emotion. "You don't have to be strong in front of me, Elliot. If you need to cry, just cry. Dad will always be your rock. When you're tired, you can rest here. As long as I'm here, the sky will never fall. You can rest easy."

Elliot felt a fresh wave of grief and sorrow. "Dad..."

"I'm here," Tarquin responded softly.

Elliot cried in his father's arms for a long time before his sobs slowly subsided. He wiped his tears, his eyes still red, and looked at Tarquin. "Don't worry about me, Dad. You need to go comfort Evan. He was the closest to Bernard. This has hit him the hardest."

Chapter 1683

Tarquin nodded. "I know. I'll talk to him later tonight."

Elliot took a deep breath. "Have you and Mom been okay these past few days?"

"Everything's been fine, other than missing you guys terribly."

Elliot asked again, "Any progress with the mystery person?"

A flicker of something unreadable crossed Tarquin's eyes. He paused for a moment before saying, "I have a plan for that. You don't need to worry about it for now. I'll let you know when I need your help. For now, just focus on relaxing and spend more time with your mom. She thinks about you all day, every day."

Elliot nodded repeatedly. "Okay, Dad."

Parting was sorrowful, but reunion was joyous. Elysia was in high spirits and cooked a magnificent feast. The family of seven shared a happy dinner. Afterward, they spent more time together, laughing and talking. While Elliot and the others chatted with Elysia, Tarquin called Evan out to the mountain behind the house.

Just as Bernard used to, he played a game of chase with Evan, leaping from tree to tree, then hiding and letting Evan find him. After playing for a while, they went to the mountaintop to look at the stars.

As soon as they reached the peak, Evan suddenly said, "Dad, I miss Bernard again."

His voice broke, and he began to cry, his quiet sniffles turning into heartbreaking sobs. "Bernard said... he said when he died, he'd become a star in the sky to watch over me... but I don't want him to be a star! I want the real Bernard..."

"The one who could talk to me, teach me kung fu, play with me... the one who would hoist me onto his shoulders and make me feel like we were flying through the mountains!"

"I wanted him to live, to live forever! I didn't want him to die!" A jagged cry escaped him.

Tarquin's heart ached. He pulled Evan into a tight hug. "I know, son. I know everything. You love Bernard, and you don't want him to be gone."

Evan sobbed, "I know... I know life and death are a part of nature, that everyone... everyone dies in the end... but just didn't want Bernard to die..."

"Now that Bernard's gone, I'm so sad. My heart just keeps hurting..."

"I know I have to be strong and accept it. And I know... Bernard is probably

watching me, and he'll be sad if I'm sad, but..."

"Dad, I can't control it!"

"I can't stop being sad. Whenever I think of Bernard, I just want to cry. I want to see him, I miss him..."

"Dad, I miss Bernard so much. What do I do? I can't control it!"

Evan was crying his heart out, and Tarquin felt his own heart breaking. He held his son tightly, his voice

choked. It's okay. It's okay to cry. -You don't have to force yourself

be strong. Whenever you feel sad and want to cry, just let it out. Don't

hold it in."

"What Bernard feared most wasn't you crying; it was you not being able to accept

reality, you giving up hope."

"As long as you stay healthy, it's okay to cry."

"When your grandparents passed away, I was just like you are now? was devastated. I cried until I passed out. For a long, long time after that, Burst into tears just thinking about them..."

Evan clung to Tarquin. "Dad, I'm so, so sad. It feels like I'm going to die from sadness... My heart... right here, it hurts so, so much..."

Tarquin sniffled hard. "I know, son. I understand. My Evan is hurting so badly."

Evan was racked with violent sobs, his grief echoing through the silent forest as Tarquin held him.

Chapter 1684

A long time later, Evan finally pulled away from Tarquin's embrace. He roughly

wiped the tears from his face, his small chin lifted in defiance.

"I won't lose hope! I am Evan Thorne!"

"My mentor, Bernard, was the greatest titan the martial arts world has ever known! My other great-grandparents are all legends!"

"My dad is the smartest and richest man in the world!"

"My brothers and sister are rising stars who will all be amazing!"

"And I have the gentlest, most beautiful, most understanding, and most loving mom in the entire world!"

"So, even if the sky falls, I will never lose hope!"

"Besides, I still have to get revenge for Bernard!"

"I'm going to find the people who killed his master and his master's wife, the ones who poisoned him, and the ones who bullied Grandpa Walter. I'll hunt every single one of them down and make sure they rot for what they did to him."

"I'm also going to restore the honor of the Warner family! I'll make it the most powerful martial arts family in the world!"

"And I'm going to grow up to be a strong man, to be the pride of Bernard and my mom!"

Tarquin nodded firmly. "That's right! Our Evan is the best! You're already Bernard's pride, and your mom's and mine!"

...

The father and son stayed in the mountains for several hours. By the time they returned home, it was nearly eleven at night. Baby and Emmett were already asleep, but Elliot and Elijah were still waiting up for Evan. Elysia was also awake, waiting in her room for them.

When she saw Tarquin return alone, she quickly asked, "Where's Evan?"

"He went back to his room to wash up and go to bed," Tarquin said.

"Why were you two gone for so long? What were you doing on the mountain so late at night?" Elysia asked.

Tarquin lied. "I heard Bernard taught him a few new kung fu moves. I was curious, so I took him to the mountain to practice."

Elysia frowned. "In the middle of the night? Couldn't it wait until tomorrow?"

Tarquin chuckled. "Couldn't wait. It's a guy thing, you wouldn't understand."

Elysia pursed her lips, speechless. She wanted to go check on Evan, but Tarquin stopped her. "Don't go. He's exhausted. He'll be heading to sleep right after his shower. Go see him, he'll just get excited again. Let him get a good night's

you

rest. It's not like he's leaving. You can talk to him tomorrow."

His real concern was that she would see Evan's swollen, tear-stained eyes and become worried or suspicious. They had all agreed to keep Bernard's death a secret from her. After all, Bernard was gone. Telling her would only add to the sadness, with no benefit.

Worried about disturbing Evan's rest, Elysia sighed and stayed put.

After returning to his room, Evan went straight to the bathroom. He took a hot shower and changed into clean clothes. When he came out, he saw Elliot and Elijah.

Elijah, who already knew about Bernard, was frowning as he looked at Evan. After a moment's hesitation, he walked over and hugged him without a word. Everything he wanted to say was in that embrace.

Evan knew Elijah was worried about him. He gently patted his brother's back. "Don't worry about me. I'm sad

that Bernard is gone, but I won't stay sad forever, and I definitely won't

lose hope. My focus isn't on grief right now. It's on getting revenge for him."

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Elijah let go and quickly asked, "How are you going to get revenge? Have you found his enemies?"

Evan shook his head. "Not yet. But I've already talked to Dad. At the end of next month, I'm going with him to Thyania for a martial arts tournament."

Elijah asked, "Is that the friendly competition organized by Punikun's grandfather?" Evan nodded. "That's the one. Dad is deliberately competing against Punikun's father to get close to the Punikun family. Dad suspects they know something." Elliot, his brow furrowed, added,

Chapter 1685

"Back then, after Bernard defeated the top fighters from seven countries, his next stop was supposed to be Thyania. At the time, the martial artists there were shaking in their boots."

"But then, their attitude suddenly changed. They became arrogant and cocky, even publicly taunting Bernard, saying that if he dared to set foot in Thyania, he wouldn't leave alive."

"And shortly after that, something happened to Bernard."

"There must be a reason why the Thyanian martial artists suddenly changed their tune. Dad suspects they already knew something was going to happen to Bernard, and that's why they got so bold."

"No matter who the real mastermind behind Bernard's poisoning was, the martial artists in Thyania probably know something."

"Dad is worried that questioning them directly would tip them off, so he's using Punikun's father as an opening."

"The Punikun family is highly respected in Thyania's martial arts community. Dad suspects Punikun's grandfather knows the inside story from all those years ago."

"But for now, it's just a suspicion. We have no proof."

Evan frowned, his expression grim. "Whether they know the inside story or not, I have to be at that tournament."

He was burning with a desperate, clawing need to avenge Bernard. But he knew it wouldn't be easy. Bernard himself had searched for years without finding the culprit. So, he had devised a plan of his own. It was a bit risky, though... so he didn't dare say it out loud yet. He was afraid Tarquin and Elliot would stop him out of concern for his safety. Keeping the plan to himself for now, Evan said with a cold look, "Even if there's proof that the Thyanian martial artists know nothing, I still have to go to Thyania. Some of them have pissed me off!"

"How did they piss you off?" Elijah asked.

"They're providing electricity and internet to those scam compounds," Evan said, his voice sharp with anger. "I'm not happy about that!"

"The scam compounds are harming our people, which makes them the

masterminds. But that makes the others accomplices!"

"Bernard used to say that anyone who dares to harm our people, no matter how far

away, must be brought to justice! Not a single one can be spared!"

"And Mom always says that a good man should protect his country!"

Elliot and Elijah fell silent.

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Recently, an incident involving a famous actor, coupled with the case of a soldier's descendant, had pushed the scam compounds in Thyania and Mariana Land into the media spotlight. As more and more

victims came forward, people from their country were thoroughly enraged, filled with a deep-seated hatred for those operations. Because many of their compatriots had gone missing while vacationing in Thyania, and since the electricity and internet for the compounds were rumored to be supplied by Thyania, public opinion had soured on the country. The outrage was bound to have a huge impact. Whether for safety concerns or out of anger, celebrity concerts were being canceled, and tourists were canceling their trips in droves, dealing a devastating blow to Thyania's tourism industry.

Evan, with his innate sense of justice, deeply influenced by his great-grandparents and his mother, had an incredibly strong patriotic heart. If he had a chance to act, he would just stand by and watch. This martial arts tournament in Thyania was, for Evan, an opportunity. On top of that, his heart was shattered by Bernard's death, and he needed a way to vent his pent-up rage.

Elliot let out a heavy breath. "Next month, I'm going with you."

Elijah, frowning, also declared, "I'm going too!"

The brothers knew full well that they were just kids, and some things were beyond their control. But they could still do what was within their power. They would contribute as much as they could. Besides, they had a billionaire father in their corner, whom they could call on for support.

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Having made their decision, the three brothers immediately sprang into action. They

gathered around the computer and began to dig deep, researching all the

information they could find.

Chapter 1686

The next day, Evan was up before dawn.

The thought that Bernard was gone and the old master had left, that there was no one to join him for his morning training anymore, made a pang of sadness hit him. But he still climbed out his window just like always and went to the woods behind the house to practice his martial arts.

He had to keep going. He had to make himself stronger-strong enough to avenge Bernard.

As soon as he reached the woods, Evan saw a familiar figure.

The little guy was surprised. "Dad? What are you doing here?"

Tarquin, dressed in a dark sweatsuit, was leaning against a large tree with his hands in his pockets, waiting for him.

"I need to get some exercise in the morning, too. From now on, we'll do it together."

Now that Bernard and the old man were gone, he would come and train with Evan every day. He didn't want the boy to be lonely.

Evan's eyes lit up instantly. "Can you actually get up this early?"

Tarquin narrowed his eyes. "You looking down on your old man?"

Evan jutted out his chin, a mock-threatening look on his face. "Winter's coming. The mornings are going to get really, really cold!"

Tarquin smiled. "If you can get up, I can get up."

"Of course I can get up! Back in the mountains, I was always the first one up. Even Bernard didn't wake up earlier than me!"

"Then I can get up, too," Tarquin said with a grin.

Evan's eyes widened with excitement. "Let's make a bet! If you can keep getting up early, I'll owe you one favor. Anything you want, I'll do it."

A fond look crossed Tarquin's face. "Deal. And if I lose, I'll owe you one favor. Anything you ask for, as long as it's in my power, I'll do it."

"It's a deal!" the little guy exclaimed.

"A deal's a deal," Tarquin smiled.

The boy was thrilled. "Okay!"

Tarquin stretched his muscles. "Alright, let's do a couple of laps to warm up."

He started jogging, and Evan called out from behind him, "Dad!"

Tarquin turned back. "Yeah? What is it?"

Evan's little mouth moved, and he hesitated for a moment before saying, "I love you, Dad!"

As soon as he said it, he darted past Tarquin, disappearing into the distance in seconds.

Tarquin watched his son's retreating back, a smile playing on his lips.

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The father and son trained in the woods until the sun was fully up before heading home.

Breakfast was ready, and Elysia, Elliot, and the others were already awake.

The two of them went to their separate rooms, took a quick shower, changed into clean clothes, and went downstairs for breakfast.

For the next month, Tarquin woke up early every day to train with Evan in the woods, completely taking over the 'job' left by Bernard and the old master.

Elysia knew about it and felt for him.

"Evan's naturally active. He was always the first one up in the

mountains. Martial arts is his

passion, but you're forcing yourself

to go with him

must be hard

you."

on

Tarquin kissed her forehead and said softly, "You risked your life to give birth to them and you never complain about how hard it was. All I'm doing is spending some time with him. It's nothing. Besides, I'm his father. It's my duty to be there for him."

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Seizing the opportunity, Tarquin added, "At the end of the month, I need to take Evan to Thyania."

Elysia was taken aback. "Thyania? What for?"

"Thyania is hosting a friendly martial arts tournament," Tarquin explained. "Evan wants me to take him so he can see what it's like. You know how much he loves martial arts." swnövels

"But there's so much turmoil over there lately," Elysia worried. "It's not safe."

"Don't worry," Tarquin said. "I'll be with him. Nothing will happen."

Elysia still felt uneasy and didn't really want them to go. But she knew martial arts was truly Evan's passion, and she shouldn't stand in his way.

Chapter 1687

"Is it just you and Evan going?"

"Elliot and Elijah want to go too. I haven't decided whether to bring them along."

"...What are they going for?"

"Just to tag along for the fun."

Elysia was speechless.

Tarquin kissed her forehead again, reassuring her. "Don't worry. We're going to Thyania, not directly to Mariana Land. I wouldn't take the kids if I wasn't absolutely sure it was safe. Besides, even though this tournament is organized by the Thyanian Martial Arts Association, the Thyanian government is taking it very seriously. They've been working on security for a while now."

Elysia let out a long breath. "I support the kids chasing their dreams, but only if their safety is guaranteed. Thyania is too close to Mariana Land, and there's no real border between them. It's almost like one country. And those scam compounds in Mariana Land... it's not just scams, it's kidnapping and murder! It's too dangerous!"

"Don't be afraid," Tarquin comforted her. "I'll have bodyguards with us when I take the kids. You can rest easy."

If the scam rings dared to kidnap them while he was there, they truly had a death wish.

Elysia knew how capable Tarquin was and let out another breath. "As long as you can ensure their safety. Winona should be back around New Year's, and I want to stay in Jindale City to wait for her. I don't want to travel."

"You don't have to go," Tarquin said. "You're not interested in martial arts tournaments anyway. You stay here and wait for Winona. I'll take Evan."

...

Time flew by, and soon it was the end of December. The tournament was about to begin. The night before they left, Punikun's grandfather contacted Tarquin again, as if worried he might not show up.

Tarquin replied with just four words: "I'll be there."

The next day, after Elysia gave him a thousand warnings, Tarquin set off with Evan. Lowell, Elliot, and Elijah went with them.

They left in the morning and arrived in Bangkok that afternoon. Someone was there to pick them up from the airport, and after they landed, the group took a private car to their accommodations.

The three brothers pressed their faces against the car windows, looking out excitedly. They had been planning this for over a month and were filled with anticipation for their Thyania trip.

They saw plenty of tourists on the road, but not many Zhinorian faces. Most were Westerners. Due to the

recent bad press, few

were traveling to Thyania. They weren't stupid; there were plenty of fun places to visit and there was no need to risk it in Thyania. After all, you only get one life.

About half an hour later, they arrived at their accommodations. It had been arranged in advance-not a

hotel, but a private villa. The villanet

was surrounded by bodyguards who had been in position for a week. The staff inside were all his own people. too.

They had just settled in when Lowell's phone rang. After a brief conversation, he hung up and said to Tarquin, Tarquin, Punikun's

grandfather knows we've arrived ne

He's inviting us to have dinner with him."

Tarquin's eyes narrowed. "Accept."

He had come specifically for Punikun's grandfather, so of course he wouldn't refuse

a meeting.

As Lowell went to return the call, Evan said to Tarquin, "Dad, I have to go to the registration desk this afternoon to check in, so I won't be with you."

They had agreed before coming that Evan would compete anonymously to avoid any connection to Tarquin. This was to prevent the media exposure from affecting his normal life later on.

Tarquin nodded. "First, call your mom and let her know you're safe. Then grab a bite to eat before you head out."

"Okay, okay."

Chapter 1688

An hour later, the three boys headed out, accompanied by a married couple who were both top-tier bodyguards Tarquin had arranged beforehand. During their time in Thyania, they would stay with Elliot, Evan, and Elijah twenty-four-seven, pretending to be their guardians. Before leaving, the female bodyguard even gave the three boys a bit of a disguise so no one would connect them to Tarquin.

There were several registration desks for the martial arts tournament, and the closest one was only a ten-minute drive away. The check-in was to finalize the list of competitors, since not everyone who registered online would actually show up.

The bodyguard couple took the three boys to the registration area. After a short wait in line, they let Evan go up to sign in and get his competitor's pass himself.

When the Thyanian staff member saw Evan, he immediately stopped him, speaking to them in halting English, "He wants to compete?!"

The female bodyguard nodded. "Yes, he does."

The staff member frowned. "What's his name?"

Evan jumped in. "My name is Mr. Gage! I registered online! You can check!"

Mr. Gage?

The staff member pursed his lips and searched on the computer. Sure enough, his registration info was there.

Name: Mr. Gage

Gender: Male

Age: 5

Nationality: Zhinora

Noticing the man's expression, Evan asked, "What's the problem? You don't want me to compete? Your announcement didn't have an age limit! And what does martial arts have to do with age, anyway?"

"This is an official competition, not a playground," the man said dismissively.

"I'm not playing around," Evan shot back. "I'm here to compete with a very serious attitude."

"Step aside," the staff member said rudely. "Next!"

Evan gritted his teeth and snatched a pen from the desk.

The staff member jumped back,

instinctively moving to counterattack. But with

lightning fast reflexes Evan grabbed his raised wrist and slammed it down on the desk with a crack. Before the man could even blink, the tip was already pressed hard against his throat.

A slight push, and it would pierce his skin.

"Do I look like I'm playing around?" Evan asked, his little brow furrowed in displeasure.

The man swallowed hard, his life literally in Evan's hands. The other staff members were terrified, leaping up from their chairs

staring at Evan with wide they

were all members of the Thyanian Martar Arts Association trainee fighters themselves. To be so easily overpowered could only mean one thing: this kid was incredibly skilled.

The person in charge of the registration desk hurried over. "A misunderstanding, a misunderstanding! Calm down, little one. He didn't mean you can't compete. He was just worried you'd get hurt because you're so young."

Evan pulled the pen back and set it on the desk. "Age doesn't matter in martial arts."

"Right, right, age doesn't matter," the supervisor said with a placating smile. "I'll register you myself. What was the name?"

"Mr. Gage, from Zhinora, and proud of it," Evan replied.

"That name... who came up with that?" the supervisor asked.

"I did. Is there a problem?" Evan said.

The supervisor gave a strained laugh. "No problem. Uh, Mr. Gage, who is your master? Which school are you from?"

"I'm an independent competitor. I don't have a school," Evan said.

The supervisor looked at the female bodyguard behind him. "Is this your child?"

"Just register him under the independent competitor category," the female bodyguard said. "The other information is optional, isn't it? The registration fee was already paid online."

The supervisor had wanted to get more information on Evan, but hearing this, he had no choice but to drop it. They completed the process and gave Evan his pass.

As soon as the group left, the supervisor's face darkened. "That kid is no joke."

Another staff member commented, "The East is a powerhouse of martial arts. A lot of kids start training from a young age. It's normal for a prodigy or two to emerge. But no matter how good he is, he's no match for our Amoh!"

Chapter 1689

At the mention of Amoh, a look of pride appeared on everyone's face. Amoh was the seven-year-old grandson of the president of the Thyanian Martial Arts Association and was already famous in Thyanian martial arts circles. He was considered the most promising rising star in the country.

"Amoh will be competing in this tournament, right?" one staffer asked.

"Of course. The president wouldn't miss such a good training opportunity."

"I hope Amoh gets to face that Zhinorian kid in the ring. He can show him what a real master looks like!"

"I'm just worried he'll make the kid cry and we won't be able to get him to stop! Imagine him throwing a tantrum on the mat, hahaha..."

The group laughed, brushing Evan off despite the display of skill they had just witnessed.

...

That evening, Punikun's grandfather hosted a dinner at his home. It was billed as a private dinner, but there were quite a few outsiders present. Besides Tarquin, there were several Thyanian military officers and members of the Thyanian Martial Arts Association, including the president himself.

When Tarquin arrived, a martial arts performance was underway in the banquet hall. The moment they saw him, their brows furrowed, their hostility palpable.

The fact that Punikun's father had lost to Tarquin hadn't just damaged the Punikun family's reputation; it had cast a shadow over the entire Thyanian martial arts community. After all, a professional martial artist losing to a businessman was a total disgrace.

So, no one present tonight was happy to see Tarquin.

The two Thyanian martial artists performing exchanged a look. One began to retreat toward Tarquin while the other pursued, attacking aggressively. It looked like he was attacking his opponent, but his real target was Tarquin.

Tarquin stood in the doorway, narrowing his eyes, showing no intention of moving. Just as a fist was about to smash into his face, the attacker's knees suddenly buckled, and he dropped to the ground in front of Tarquin with a thud.

Everyone was stunned.

Tarquin, completely unfazed, turned calmly to Lowell. "Give him some money."

Lowell pulled out a stack of bills and tossed them onto the floor. "I didn't realize Thyania had such a tradition of bowing at my feet Here's a little something for the show. Don't spend it all in one place."

Lowell pulled out his wallet and handed some bills to the bowing martial artist.

The man's face darkened. Lowell added, "Go on, take it. Don't be shy. It's a tip from my boss. No need to bow again. Get up."

The bowing man was seething. He clenched his fists, ready to lunge but a sharp bark from Punikun's.. grandfather stopped him Gritting his teeth, the martial artist returned to his seat.

Someone next to him whispered, "What happened to you?"

"I don't know," the man hissed, his face pale. "My legs just turned to lead. It was like

I lost all feeling from the waist down!"

"But we were all watching. He didn't attack you. He didn't even move!"

Frustrated to no end, the man grabbed his glass and chugged a large gulp of wine.

"I'm telling you, I don't know what happened!"

After that little episode, the tension in the room thickened. Punikun's grandfather sized Tarquin up, a smile on his face that didn't reach his eyes He greeted Tarquin in ***

his eye

Thyanian, which a translator relayed.

"Mr. Bradford, welcome. Please, have a seat."

Tarquin responded politely and, under everyone's watchful eyes, sat down with complete composure.

Punikun's grandfather said, "I was quite shocked that you, a businessman, defeated my son. You must have trained under a master, received professional training, yes?"

"I've had training, but no master," Tarquin replied. "I'm just a businessman, not a martial artist."

Someone spoke up, their voice laced with displeasure. "No master, but you beat Punikun's father? Do all you Zhinorians lie so much?"

Tarquin turned to look at the man, his tone mild but his eyes ice-cold. "It's not that we like to lie. It's that you're all too pathetic."

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Tarquin's words immediately sparked outrage.

"How dare you be so arrogant on our turf? Have you got a death wish?!"

"This is Thyania, a place even your country's Martial King wouldn't dare to tread! If we're pathetic, what does that make you?!"

At the sudden mention of Bernard, a dark glint flashed in Tarquin's eyes. He said coldly, "I don't know what that makes us. All I know is that one of your former champion fighters couldn't even beat a Zhinorian businessman."

"You..." The men were furious.

Tarquin continued, "I hold no rank in the Zhinorian martial arts world, but Punikun's father was once a sensation in Thyania. And yet, he lost to me. That can only mean one thing: you Thyanian martial artists really are quite pathetic."

The crowd was speechless. This was a blatant insult to all Thyanian martial artists. They gritted their teeth and clenched their fists, ready to fight.

Tarquin ignored them, his gaze falling on Punikun's grandfather. "You invited me here. What did you really want to say?"

Punikun's grandfather's face was grim, his brows furrowed as he spoke in a cold voice. "I know you're proud of defeating Punikun's father. But he doesn't represent the Punikun family, let alone the entire Thyanian martial arts community. If you maintain this attitude, I'm afraid you won't be leaving Thyania in one piece."

Lowell's face darkened, and he was about to retort when a look from Tarquin stopped him.

Tarquin looked at Punikun's grandfather, his tone nonchalant. "What kind of attitude do you want me to have?"

"Drop your arrogance and have a proper discussion with us!"

"...A discussion about what?"

"Your match with my son severely damaged the reputation of our Thyanian martial artists," Punikun's grandfather said. "You need to take responsibility for that."

Lowell couldn't help but laugh out loud. "You guys were the ones who hyped it up, your guy was the one who lost, and now you want us to take responsibility? Is this how Thyanian martial artists operate?! You've got to be kidding me!"

Before they could get angry, Tarquin narrowed his eyes and asked, "How do you want me to take responsibility?"

Punikun's grandfather glanced at the association president, then said to Tarquin, "All you have to do is this: when you lose, you will drop to your knees and publicly beg for our forgiveness. And you will admit that you cheated during your match with Punikun's father."

Tarquin remained silent. This was almost identical to what happened to Bernard. The only difference was that they weren't asking him to throw the fight, likely because they didn't rate his abilities. They wanted him to put on a show. It was easy to understand why. He was just a businessman. No matter who beat him, it wouldn't be a glorious victory. If someone from the Punikun family beat him, it would only restore a bit of their family's honor; other martial artists wouldn't think much of it. Beating an amateur is nothing to brag about.

But if he lost, knelt before Punikun's grandfather, and begged for mercy while crying, it would be a huge boost to the Panikun family's pride. On the flip side, the Zhinorians would be utterly disgraced. It would be a sweet release for the frustrated Thyanian martial artists.

Tarquin scanned the faces of everyone present. "Is this the Punikun family's idea, or

the idea of the entire Thyanian martial arts community?"

"The key figures of the Thyanian martial arts community are all here," Punikun's grandfather said. The implication was clear: it was the will of the entire community.

Tarquin let out a cold laugh. "You people have brought true shame upon the name of Thyanian martial artists. The fact that I even came here today was a show of respect. As for your demands, I refuse."

At his words, several men shot to their feet. "You've got some nerve! Are you looking to die?!"

Tarquin remained seated, not a hint of fear on his face. "If you lay a hand on me today, it will be international headlines tomorrow. Martial artists are supposed to be honorable and righteous. For Thyanian martial artists to lure me here just to gang up on me... isn't that pathetic?"