

Chapter 5521

Charlie was aware that Stephen Thompson had once been his father's most trusted confidant, implying meticulous plans made in the past. Despite his years with the Wade family, he'd devoted more energy to fulfilling his father's directives.

Considering Felix Cole's likely inclusion in his father's scheme, it stood to reason that Stephen Thompson had some knowledge of him.

Thus, Charlie turned to Maria, stating, "I haven't delved into the specifics with Butler Thompson before. It seems today I'll have to."

In that moment, Charlie's mind raced with strategies to unearth the truth. Every facet of the past, each arrangement his father had set in motion, whether it was through subtle influence on Stephen Thompson First, Charlie resolved to uncover it all.

Turning to Maria, he declared, "I'll seek out Butler Thompson now."

Maria inquired, "Young Master, may I accompany you?"

Without hesitation, Charlie affirmed, "Certainly!"

Together, they ventured from his parents chamber, hopeful of rendezvousing with Stephen Thompson to unravel the enigma.

Upon reaching the grand hall, Lord Wade, the elderly patriarch, sat sipping tea in solitude.

Observing Charlie's emergence, he queried with intrigue, "Charlie, have you made headway sorting through your parents effects?"

"Still in progress," Charlie affirmed, then inquired, "Grandpa, where might Butler Thompson be?"

Perplexed, Lord Wade responded, "He mentioned an urgent matter and departed to attend to it. Are you in search of him?"

Charlie nodded, affirming, "Yes. If he's unavailable, I'll reach out to him."

Subsequently, he extracted his mobile and dialed Stephen Thompson First's number, only to be met with a disheartening message, "Sorry, the number you dialed has been turned off..."

In Charlie's experience, Stephen Thompson never powered down his phone, it was a hallmark of his professionalism as a seasoned butler. This abrupt departure and phone outage struck Charlie as profoundly irregular.

Nonetheless, he kept this discovery to himself, informing Lord Wade, "Grandpa, I'll depart for Aurous Hill morning. When you see Butler Thompson, inform him I need to speak with him. Ask him to call me."

Lord Wade nodded, inquiring, "You attempted to reach him just now and couldn't?"

Charlie nodded once more, stating, "It's off. Perhaps his phone's battery died."

"It's peculiar," Lord Wade mused, "I can't recall a single instance in the past two decades when Stephen's phone ran out of charge."

Charlie offered a faint smile. "There's always an exception. Grandpa, rest well."

Lord Wade added, "Oh, and before Stephen left, I instructed the guest room to be prepared. If you tire, retire early. The old estate has no staff on duty today. If you require anything, don't hesitate to inform me."

With a grateful smile, Charlie exchanged a knowing look with Maria, and they retreated to the previous study.

Stepping inside, Maria couldn't help but speculate, "Young Master, could it be that Butler Thompson anticipated your inquiries and deliberately shut off his phone?"

"It's a possibility," Charlie conceded with a sigh. "His sudden departure without a farewell... It leaves me with the feeling that seeing him again might prove quite challenging. He's astute, realizing he can evade notice for a while, but not indefinitely. Turning off his phone tonight and pretending nothing occurred, it's not a sustainable approach. Unless he's already decided never to resurface after this departure."

Maria was taken aback. "Now that events have unfolded, what could Butler Thompson possibly be concealing from the Young Master? After dutifully carrying out the tasks entrusted to him by the Young Master's father for so many years, why vanish without a word now? Did he foresee the Young Master's inquiries upon seeing those photographs?"

Shaking his head, Charlie pondered, "I can't fathom his thoughts. Yet, based on my knowledge of him, his allegiance to the Wade family is unwavering. There must be a motive for his abrupt exit, perhaps entwined with my father's grand design."

Maria suggested, "The Young Master possesses a profound understanding of reiki. There are various means to coax forth a person's most guarded secrets. Butler Thompson's departure now suggests he fears the Young Master might employ reiki to compel revelations of his hidden truths."

Charlie sighed, "Let it be. He must have his reasons and challenges. I trust he wouldn't act against the interests of the Wade family. If he's facing difficulties, I must respect that. If he's unwilling to share now, we'll wait until he's ready."

With that, Charlie returned his focus to the photo album, delving deeper. Subsequent images showcased Charlie's parents in myriad locales.

Draped in mountaineering gear, they explored southern China, ventured to Morvel Bazin's initial training grounds and traversed Myanmar, Bangladesh and India. Their journey culminated with a return to China from India, concluding at Shiwan Mountain. Two of the mountain peaks held significance in Morvel Bazin's training regimen. The extended route from Myanmar westward to India suggested Morvel Bazin's path in pursuit of opportunities upon leaving. Having secured his chance and extended his lifespan to five centuries, Morvel Bazin ultimately retreated to Shiwan Mountain.

"Surprising, isn't it?" Maria marveled. "The Young Master's parents meticulously traced every step of the Master's journey."

Charlie nodded, "Likely the handiwork of the 'Preface to the Apocalyptic Book'."

Maria pressed further, "Upon the Young Master's visit to the United States, do you plan to follow the Myanmar-to-India route?"

"In principle, yes," Charlie affirmed, "But I'll proceed one step at a time, first gauging if any leads on Felix Cole emerge stateside."

Maria spoke earnestly, "The Young Master's path, though possibly different, was once trodden by me. The groundwork has been laid in those countries. If the Young Master chooses that route, I can offer valuable assistance."

"Understood," Charlie acknowledged. "Let's discuss specifics upon my return from the United States."

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Meanwhile, at the Lama Temple.

Cloaked in black, Stephen Thompson stood reverently before Lily.

She disclosed, "Stephen, Charlie attempted to reach you."

With a sigh, Stephen Thompson confessed, "If I depart without farewells, the Young Master will hold it against me..."

"No," Lily assured solemnly, "Charlie has a comprehensive outlook. He understands there must be a compelling reason for your unannounced departure. Moreover, I don't want you to vanish from his life forever. It's simply best for now if you avoid contact with Charlie. When the timing is right, you will reunite."

Respectfully, Stephen Thompson first inquired, "Madam, what should be my next course of action?"

Lily smiled, "Stephen, you needn't concern yourself. I will make the necessary arrangements. A boat awaits and tonight, I shall ensure you depart China discreetly. You have served me faithfully over the years. Now, you can find solace on the shores of Tahiti, returning only when the moment is right."

Chapter 5522

Late at night, a cargo ship embarked from Bohai Bay, carrying Stephen toward Tahiti in the South Pacific.

Stephen stood at the ship's stern, gazing at the receding lights of the port in the night, a swirl of emotions in his heart.

Although he was Charlie's father's confidant, twenty years ago, Bruce had given him two specific tasks.

One was to ensure Charlie's safety should anything happen to him, and the other was to strictly adhere to the security plan and follow Lily's directives.

Over the years, while Stephen had served as the Wade family's butler, he had, in reality, been following Lily's instructions in all matters.

For more than a decade, even Lord Wade remained oblivious to whether his grandson, Charlie, was alive or deceased. This was because, prior to Bruce's tragic accident, he hadn't specified when Stephen should inform Lord Wade about Charlie's wellbeing. Lily had been the mastermind behind the scenes, orchestrating everything. Only when Lily deemed the time was right did she instruct Stephen to disclose Charlie's situation to Lord Wade.

Lord Wade grappled with a sense of unworthiness toward his son and daughter-in-law.

Moreover, his grandson had faced a troubled fate. To compensate for Charlie, he had acquired Emgrand Group and bestowed upon Stephen a 10-billion-dollar black card to deliver to Charlie. Subsequently, the events that unfolded became common knowledge.

Though Stephen felt reluctant to leave Eastcliff abruptly, he understood that a temporary departure was the best course for now. The only regret he carried was not bidding Charlie farewell.

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At that very moment, Charlie lay alone in the guest room of the old Wade family estate, restlessly shifting and turning.

Stephen's unannounced departure urged Charlie to dig deeper into the matter. Stephen wasn't working for his grandfather, nor was he working for his father. If Stephen had been serving his father's interests, he wouldn't have left today.

In fact, he would have aided Charlie in unraveling the mystery surrounding Cole's identity and whereabouts.

After all, Cole was likely a friend of his father's, and Stephen had been his father's loyal subordinate. There was no need for secrets between them.

The only conclusion was that Stephen was actually serving a third party, one unknown to Charlie.

The mysterious third party had no intention of letting Charlie uncover their existence through Stephen. That's why they vanished suddenly, leaving Charlie with no clues or avenues to follow up on.

What confounded Charlie was the identity of this third person.

Fortunately, various signs indicated that this third person was definitely not an adversary, which offered Charlie some relief amid his uncertainties.

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The following morning arrived with a gentle glow of sunlight, casting a warm ambience within the Wade residence.

Charlie left the guest room, clutching the photo album in his hands, and made his way to the main hall. There, Lord Wade awaited his presence.

As Charlie emerged, Lord Wade addressed him, "Charlie, Miss Clark mentioned that she went out to grab some breakfast and will return shortly."

Surprised, Charlie inquired, "She went alone?"

Lord Wade nodded in confirmation, stating, "I couldn't reach Stephen, and there are no servants left at the old house. I offered to go, but she ventured out before I had the chance."

Charlie nodded, though a trace of concern lingered in his thoughts. Morgana had always sought to capture Maria, and now Maria was without a bodyguard. Her solitary outing left him somewhat uneasy.

As he mulled over these thoughts, Maria swung open the door and entered, her hands laden with bags of breakfast goodies. A bright smile graced her face as she spotted Charlie.

"Young Master, you're up," she chimed. "Come, have some breakfast. I've picked up a variety of Eastcliff's finest morning treats."

With a quick glance at Lord Wade, she added, "Grandpa, let's dig in!"

Lord Wade acknowledged with a nod and a polite smile. "Thank you for your efforts, Miss Clark."

Then, lowering his voice, he inquired of Charlie, "Charlie, why does Miss Clark refer to you as 'Young Master'?"

Charlie pondered briefly before offering a smile. "She has a fondness for ancient culture."

Lord Wade chuckled softly. "I'm getting old and might not grasp the preferences of the younger generation."

He leaned in closer to Charlie and whispered, "But Miss Clark does exude an air of grace, even if she is a tad younger. She'd be a fine match for you, I dare say."

Charlie agreed, matching Lord Wade's smile. Inside, he thought, "If you knew Maria's true age exceeds three centuries, you'd probably be shocked."

With that, they proceeded together to the dining room, where Maria unveiled the breakfast spread she had procured. Charlie handed the photo album to Lord Wade, then turned to him with a question, "Grandpa, do you recall seeing this photo album before?"

Lord Wade furrowed his brow. "Where did you find it?"

Charlie explained, "It was in my parents' old study."

"That's peculiar..." Lord Wade mused. "I've gone through your parents' study countless times, and I'm familiar with every item in there. I've never come across any photo albums."

Charlie gestured towards the album and probed, "Are you sure you've never seen this one before?"

Lord Wade inspected the photo album handed to him, then shook his head definitively. "This is my first encounter with it, and I can confidently affirm that it wasn't among the possessions in your parents' study."

Charlie felt a growing sense of bewilderment. For twenty years after his parents' passing, Lord Wade had maintained the old house in its current state. He should be intimately familiar with every item in it. If he claimed no recollection of the photo album, it suggested that it had been introduced later.

Thinking back to Stephen, Charlie surmised that this was likely something Stephen had brought over the previous day. It appeared that Stephen knew precisely what he was searching for and had left these clues behind for Charlie to discover.

This only bolstered Charlie's conviction from the previous night—Stephen must have been working for someone else, and that someone was likely the same individual behind the two nuns at Greenwood Temple.

With these thoughts swirling in his mind, Charlie grew increasingly eager to unravel this enigma.

He looked to Lord Wade, who held the photo album, and asked, "Grandpa, would you mind opening it and seeing if any of the photos inside seem familiar?"

Lord Wade nodded, a touch perplexed. He opened the album and perused its contents carefully. After a thorough examination, he turned to Charlie with a shake of his head. "I've never laid eyes on these photos before."

Charlie pointed to the image featuring Cole and his father and inquired, "Grandpa, do you recognize the person beside Father in this photo?"

Lord Wade scrutinized the picture for an extended moment, then responded, "I don't recognize him, and I've never heard Bruce speak of him. I suspect this photograph was taken in the United States. Could he have been a friend from there?"

Charlie, who didn't recognize the man either, nodded in agreement. "It's quite possible."

Suddenly, Lord Wade recalled something and reminded Charlie, "By the way, Charlie, you brought Hogan back from the United States some time ago. He had a close relationship with your father before his passing, and he's spent a considerable amount of time in the United States. Perhaps you could consult him."

Charlie's eyes brightened with newfound hope. He had previously requested that Hogan spend quality time with his family in Hong Kong, awaiting Charlie's call. But in the rush of recent events, he hadn't considered reaching out to him.

At this critical moment, he hadn't even thought of Hogan! Charlie exclaimed, "Grandpa, you're absolutely right. I'll take a photo and send it to Uncle Hogan to see if he recognizes him."

Chapter 5523

Without wasting any time, Charlie promptly forwarded the photo to Uncle Hogan through WeChat, accompanying it with a recorded message, "Uncle Hogan, can you identify the individual standing next to my father?"

Uncle Hogan's response was swift, a voice message crackling back, "Young Master, I've met the man in the picture before. His English name is Peter Cole. Though I can't claim great familiarity with him, I know he's a Chinese antique dealer with close ties to your father."

As soon as Charlie learned that Uncle Hogan was acquainted with the man, he wasted no time in dialing him up. As the call connected, he inquired with urgency, "Uncle Hogan, could you furnish me with a detailed introduction of this Peter Cole?"

Uncle Hogan obliged, "Peter Cole hails from a family entrenched in the overseas antique trade, primarily centered in Europe and the United States. Aside from the

US, they have a presence in the UK and France. They've garnered some renown in the European and American antique circles."

He appended, "The photo you sent is of Peter Cole's emporium in New York. It's said to be the first establishment the Cole family set up, so it's rather modest and unassuming."

Charlie probed further, "Uncle Hogan, when was the last time you crossed paths with Peter Cole?"

Uncle Hogan reminisced, "It's been quite a while. He dropped by a few times when I had my roast goose joint in Chinatown. Then, it seemed he thought I'd left New York, and we lost touch."

Curiosity piqued, Uncle Hogan ventured, "Young Master, are you planning to seek out Peter Cole?"

Charlie responded calmly, "I intend to. When I'm in New York, my first stop will be his antique store. It'd be a stroke of luck if you could help me locate him."

Without hesitation, Uncle Hogan offered, "Young Master, let me accompany you. I know New York well, and I've met Peter on several occasions."

Charlie inquired about Uncle Hogan's availability, to which he quickly assured, him, "No problem at all. I was planning to report to the Young Master in Aurous Hill. My family matters are sorted now."

Charlie mulled it over before deciding, "Very well, then. What time can you depart?"

Uncle Hogan confirmed, "Anytime suits me, even today. I'll start arranging the flight tickets."

Charlie grinned and intervened, "Uncle Hogan, there's no need for such trouble. I'll ask Mr. Lombardo to arrange a private plane for you to Aurous Hill. We'll rendezvous there."

Uncle Hogan cleared his throat, a touch awkward, "Young Master, Mr. Lombardo has already provided my lodging and expenses. I'll head to Aurous Hill solo and purchase a plane ticket. I'd rather not trouble Mr. Lombardo."

Charlie's demeanor turned serious, "Uncle Hogan, Mr. Lombardo owes you this courtesy. No need to be overly deferential. Besides, I'm not well-acquainted with him. He's like a car parked on a hill, requiring constant vigilance. The handbrake must

never falter; it must be checked and tightened as needed, lest the car rolls back at the slightest chance."

Uncle Hogan chuckled, "I believe... he's done enough..."

Firmly, Charlie insisted, "Uncle Hogan, I'll handle this matter. You need not worry."

Resigned, Uncle Hogan relented, "Then I'll defer to the Young Master."

Charlie informed him, "I'm still in Eastcliff. I'll head to Aurous Hill later. I have some matters to attend to there. I plan to depart from Aurous Hill to New York tonight. Uncle Hogan, no need to fret. Just pack your belongings and tidy up your place. Once settled, head to the airport this evening. We'll meet directly there."

"Understood, Young Master!" Uncle Hogan affirmed, "I'll see you tonight."

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After firming up the plan with Uncle Hogan, Charlie promptly reached out to Mr. Lombardo.

Over the phone, Charlie instructed him to arrange a private plane departing for Aurous Hill at nine o'clock that night for Hogan. He also requested a motorcade to transport him from Hogan's residence to the airport.

Next, Charlie escorted Maria to bid farewell to Lord Wade.

En route, Maria inquired, "Young Master, you're heading to New York tonight, and you'll only have a little over ten hours in Aurous Hill. Isn't that a tad rushed?"

Charlie shook his head, "There won't be much to attend to when we return to Aurous Hill. The main purpose is to meet my grandparents and extended family, update them on recent events, and see if they can offer any valuable insights. I'll also pay respects to my in-laws before we depart."

Maria nodded, her voice gentle, "The Young Master's wife is currently in the United States."

"Yes," Charlie confirmed. "I've asked Miss Joules from the Joules family to bring her over for assistance. She's in New York now."

He added, "But I don't plan to inform her about this trip."

Curious, Maria probed, "Why keep it from her? Isn't it better for husband and wife to be together?"

Charlie explained, "This journey to the United States involves not only finding Peter Cole but also seeking information about the Preface to the Apocalyptic Book from my parents. I'm uncertain if the Warriors Den is aware and to what extent. It's a sensitive and perilous mission, so I'd rather not risk involving her."

Maria nodded in understanding, advising, "It seems New York's intricate web of alliances is quite the labyrinth. And given the circumstances surrounding your grandparents' family, it's best to err on the side of caution. The Warriors Den likely has a network of spies in New York. Exercise utmost care during this trip."

Charlie sighed, "That little uncle of mine is bound to be a future headache."

Maria agreed, "Indeed. I suspect he's developed a tacit understanding with your grandma's family. They're in a delicate position—they can't come to China, and your grandma's family can't confront him in the United States."

Charlie concurred, "He's a stumbling block to the Evans family in New York. As long as he's there, they won't be able to reclaim their roots. While he may struggle to seize the Evans family's assets, their absence from the United States and their ties to him are hindering my affairs and the group's operations."

Reflecting, Charlie added, "Killing him isn't an option, yet letting him be is equally problematic. If we spare him, he'll pose a significant threat down the line."

Maria inquired, "When does the Young Master plan to reintroduce the Evans family to the public eye?"

Charlie pondered, then replied, "Until we dismantle the Warriors Den, the Evans family can't return to New York. And even then, it'll require careful consideration. For now, it's best they remain hidden."

Maria proposed, "I have an idea. Would you care to hear it?"

Charlie encouraged, "Please, Ms. Clark, do share."

Maria outlined, "The Evans family's economic prowess is globally recognized, and they're a Chinese family. I suggest enlisting Keagan Myers to help forge connections in Eastcliff. This way, the Evans family can collaborate directly with the Chinese government, becoming the official representatives of Chinese families. They can attract significant foreign investment, make public appearances in China, and

strategically invest—all with official endorsement. Morgana may be audacious, but she wouldn't dare oppose the Evans family on such a scale."

Charlie was thoroughly impressed, commending, "It's an excellent idea! In the eyes of the state, the Warriors Den is a mere sideshow, incapable of causing significant trouble."

Maria added, "Of course, this means the Young Master's grandparents' family will be securely rooted in China. However, leaving China might pose risks, as Morgana could retaliate."

Charlie assured, "That's fine. Let them establish themselves in China first. Before we deal with the Warriors Den, they can transition the business and core management of the group to China. This way, at least the Evans Family's operations can continue uninterrupted."

He looked at Maria, gratitude in his eyes. "This is an exceptional suggestion. Thank you, Miss Clark!"

Chapter 5524

Charlie was keenly aware of Keagan Myers' formidable influence in Eastcliff. If he lent his support to bridge the gap, Maria's vision would undoubtedly materialize.

Furthermore, Maria's approach held a high degree of practicality. With government backing and ample attention directed towards the Evans, their safety in China would cease to be a concern. Morgana, even if bestowed with tenfold courage, wouldn't dare openly defy a nation.

That is, unless she'd endured four centuries of existence and grown truly weary of living. Yet, as per Charlie's present understanding, people clung tighter to life the longer they lived, fear of death escalating with the years.

Morgana, having endured four centuries, must harbor an intense dread of mortality. Otherwise, her panicked flight from Shiwan made no sense.

Maria observed Charlie's tacit approval and promptly contacted Keagan Myers to relay the situation.

Upon learning, Keagan Myers swiftly concurred, lacking any hint of hesitation, and promptly initiated talks with Eastcliff.

Foreign investment introductions were routine in China, yet Charlie aspired for the Evans' return to be a pinnacle in all respects.

Keagan promptly rallied his connections, ensuring the initiative reverberated up the hierarchy.

Before long, Keagan received promising updates, which he promptly conveyed to Maria.

Eagerly, Maria informed Charlie, "Young Master, Keagan has taken action. Provided the Evans family earnestly invests in our country, officials are prepared to extend the highest echelons of foreign treatment. They'll personally endorse the Evans family and marshal media resources for comprehensive coverage. Simultaneously, we'll go to great lengths to ensure the family's safety and the success of their investments within the country. If the Evanses are willing, they can discreetly meet with Keagan in Eastcliff."

"Fantastic!" Charlie exclaimed. "I'll discuss this with my grandfather and the others at noon. If they're interested, I'll have my grandfather and Keagan journey to Eastcliff together!"

With that, Charlie couldn't help but sigh. "Once the collaboration between the Evans and China is officially announced, Morgana will surely be crestfallen."

Shortly after, Charlie promptly phoned his uncle, arranging a meeting at Elys-Champ Hot Springs Villa at noon. Learning of Charlie's impending arrival, the Evans family eagerly prepared a lavish lunch, anticipating his visit.

By noon, Charlie and Maria had already touched down in Aurous Hill.

Maria, though desiring to accompany Charlie to the U.S., recognized the need to tend to matters at Zilian Mountain Villa and resume her studies following the completion of school's military training. Thus, she reluctantly conceded.

Charlie saw Maria off at Zilian Mountain Villa and proceeded directly to Elys-Champ Hot Springs Villa without delay.

Upon arrival, Charlie's extended family had made thorough arrangements. Following a sumptuous feast, they promptly rushed out to greet him, a testament to how highly they esteemed him.

After exchanging pleasantries with numerous elders, Charlie was drawn into the living room by his grandmother.

Grandma couldn't help but inquire, "Charlie, where have you been these days? You've neglected to visit me."

Charlie hastily replied, "Grandma, I journeyed to the southwest. I explored Shiwan Mountain, hoping to uncover any traces left by my parents."

The elderly gentleman nearby interjected, "How was it, Charlie? Did you find anything?"

Charlie sighed, "Regrettably, I unearthed no definitive leads. I was dissuaded and turned back halfway."

The older man exclaimed in astonishment, "You were dissuaded? By whom?"

"Grandpa, it's a long tale. Let's discuss it inside."

Evans readily agreed, "Of course, let's go in and talk."

Charlie and the Evans family proceeded into the villa and convened in the dining area. Seated in private, Charlie candidly recounted his Shiwan Mountain expedition and disclosed everything about Stephen Thompson.

Their collective astonishment was palpable upon learning that Charlie had been persuaded to return by a counterfeit nun of Greenwood Temple.

They couldn't fathom that someone had predicted Charlie's movements and lay in wait along his route.

Even more astonishing was the revelation that Bruce's long-serving subordinate, Stephen Thompson, harbored another allegiance.

Following Charlie's account, Uncle Desmond incredulously asked, "So, Stephen Thompson truly vanished from the world?"

"Yes," Charlie affirmed. "His phone has been off, and his whereabouts are unknown."

"Good Lord," Desmond breathed, after a pause. "This Stephen Thompson concealed himself rather deeply! Although I'm unfamiliar with his identity, thankfully he and his concealed patron harbor no ill will towards you, Charlie. Otherwise, the consequences could have been unimaginable!"

Evans furrowed his brow, musing, "I've heard of Stephen Thompson. Based on my understanding, he's utterly devoted to Bruce. How could he have another patron?"

Charlie, equally perplexed, added, "I've been in contact with Butler Thompson for years and never noticed anything awry. Now, I'm at a loss. I can't fathom a single clue."

Jack, who'd been silent, spoke up, "Mr. Wade, do you still have the photo album you found in Eastcliff this time?"

"Indeed." Charlie produced the album and handed it over. Facing them, he explained, "I inquired with my grandfather, and he affirmed this album wasn't in the study previously. It must have been left by Butler Thompson."

The family opened the album, finding a cherished photograph of Charlie's parents. Tears welled in the eyes of the Evans family.

When they reached Peter Cole's image, no one recognized him. Even Detective Jack, seasoned in New York's crime-solving, drew a blank.

Jack reflected, "Mr. Wade, as soon as you arrived at Shiwan Mountain, you were persuaded by the fake nun. Later, when you reached Eastcliff, Butler Thompson prepared this photo album for you. There's a strong likelihood the same person is behind both incidents."

Charlie nodded. "I share your suspicion. Yet, Butler Thompson has vanished, and I'm devoid of any solid leads."

Jack sighed. "This individual's capabilities shouldn't be underestimated. Not only does he foresee Mr. Wade's actions, he also successfully recruits your father's confidant for his cause. Most notably, he remains unseen alongside Mr. Wade. The Warriors Den likely won't find a trace. Given that he's aligned with Warriors Den, Mr. Wade needn't be overly concerned. From my estimation, this individual is a friend, not a foe. Overall, it bodes well."

Charlie, with a rueful smile, remarked, "The lone lead has evaporated, and I'll no longer be troubled by him. When the time is right, he'll emerge from the shadows to meet me."

Having shifted the conversation, Charlie proposed, "Grandpa, I have a friend who can establish connections and secure official endorsement for the Evans. However, for it to hold, genuine economic cooperation is imperative. If you're willing, consider making substantial investments in China. My friend will strive for the highest level of strategic collaboration for Evans. With official backing, Morgana won't dare harm your family in China. What are your thoughts?"

Samuel Evans promptly declared, "Absolutely, no problem! Concealment is unsustainable in the long run. Achieving the highest level of economic cooperation will be akin to acquiring a protective amulet, enabling the Evans family to operate openly in China. From there, we can gradually transition our business focus from the U.S. to China, contributing to the nation's growth!"

Seeing his grandfather's unreserved agreement, Charlie pressed on, "If your schedule permits, I'll arrange for that friend to join you in Eastcliff promptly. You can hammer out the investment details and expeditiously announce the specifics of this strategic partnership to the public."

"Very well!" Samuel Evans eagerly chimed in. "I can go at any time, and the sooner, the better!"

Chapter 5525

In the afternoon, Samuel Evans, flanked by his eldest son, Desmond, and his second son, Marcus, surreptitiously made their way to Eastcliff alongside Keagan Myers.

Charlie didn't immediately return to Thompson First residence. Instead, he headed to his neighboring villa and placed a call to Master Vail, the martial arts instructor in charge. He requested that Isaac Cameron and Don Albert be summoned to meet him.

Charlie had been concerned about the possibility of Isaac Cameron vanishing without a trace. Stephen Thompson, as the chief steward of the Wade family, had a hidden force supporting him. This led Charlie to suspect that Isaac Cameron, as the family's representative in Aurous Hill and Thompson's direct subordinate, might have been strategically placed by someone. Fortunately, Isaac Cameron was still at Elys-Champs.

Upon seeing Isaac Cameron, Charlie's apprehension somewhat eased. He couldn't deny, though, that learning of Stephen Thompson's allegiance to another master was disheartening.

On one hand, Stephen Thompson had been his father's most faithful aide. Although Charlie couldn't demand that loyalty to the Wade family, Stephen's unwavering support over the years had created a minor emotional rift. On the other hand, Charlie had placed almost absolute trust in Stephen Thompson. After all, the man had

safeguarded him for many years. Charlie had arrived in Aurous Hill with the assurance of Stephen's unwavering support. It was only today that he discovered Stephen worked for neither the Wade family nor himself. How could Charlie not feel let down?

His greatest fear now was the potential presence of others like Stephen Thompson in his circle. He dreaded the notion that the enigmatic figure might have seeded various spies around him.

Isaac Cameron and Don Albert were among the first individuals he'd met after reclaiming his identity as the Young Master of the Wade family. They were also two subordinates he held in high regard. If issues arose with them, it would be a significant blow to Charlie.

Over ten minutes later, Isaac Cameron and Don Albert, who were engaged in martial arts practice, jogged their way to Charlie's villa.

As they entered, Isaac Cameron respectfully remarked, "Young Master, when did you return? Why didn't you inform us?"

"Yes, Master Wade!" Don Albert chimed in swiftly. "You could have let us pick you up from the airport!"

Charlie smiled faintly, gesturing them to lower their hands. "I'm only here for a day this time, and I'll be leaving at night. There was no need to inform others."

Isaac Cameron inquired curiously, "Young Master, where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"America," Charlie replied casually, before turning to Isaac Cameron. "Isaac, what do you know about Butler Thompson?" As he spoke, Charlie subtly applied some reiki, influencing Isaac Cameron to answer truthfully.

"Butler Thompson?" Isaac Cameron detected nothing out of the ordinary. He considered for a moment and honestly replied, "Young Master, while Butler Thompson is my immediate superior, there are spokespeople for the Wade family in every province and municipality, as well as many overseas. So, I'm just one of hundreds of spokespeople for the Wade family. I've only interacted with Butler Thompson during the annual work report meetings in the past, so we didn't have much contact."

Charlie nodded in acknowledgment. It appeared Isaac Cameron and Stephen Thompson were not in the same boat.

Charlie employed the same tactic with Don Albert. “Don Albert, did you know Stephen Thompson before you met me?”

“No...” Don Albert shook his head emphatically, half-mocking himself. “Master Wade, before meeting you, I had no knowledge of you. I was just an old hand with a bit of reputation in Aurous Hill. I couldn't hold a candle to Mr. Isaac, let alone the Chief Butler of the Wade family...”

Seeing this, Charlie also felt relieved.

He then addressed Isaac Cameron. “Isaac, Butler Stephen has temporarily left the Wade family for a period. During this time, the position of Chief Steward is vacant. I want you to assume the role temporarily. I hope that when Butler Stephen returns, you'll resume your previous position as his deputy. If he doesn't return, then you'll hold this position indefinitely.”

Isaac Cameron was taken aback and stammered, “Young Master... My responsibilities have always been... I've never left this province. I've only recently begun to find my footing. Asking me to take over for Butler Thompson, I... how can I be capable of it...”

“Isn't it true that Butler Stephen also climbed the ranks step by step?” Charlie interjected.

“Yes...” Isaac Cameron admitted awkwardly. “It took Butler Stephen more than ten or twenty years to ascend. I'm far inferior in ability, and my qualifications may not win everyone over.”

Charlie waved his hand. “I am the head of the Wade family. Whoever I appoint to the role of Chief Steward is naturally qualified. It depends on whether you're willing.”

“This...” Isaac Cameron found himself in a quandary.

For him, Stephen Thompson's position was the zenith of his career in theory.

Originally, he hadn't dared to entertain the notion of reaching Stephen Thompson's heights in the future. However, after receiving Charlie's appreciation and recognition, he occasionally felt that as long as he remained devoted to Charlie and worked diligently, there might be an opportunity in the future. But that was something he could only hope for once he turned fifty and amassed enough experience. He never dreamt that Charlie would unexpectedly present him with this one-step-to-the-sky opportunity.

His only concern now was that he might not be up to the task.

However, when he met Charlie's determined gaze, he knew that Charlie's decision not only signified an acknowledgment of his capabilities but also a demonstration of trust in his loyalty.

And so, he gritted his teeth and declared, "Young Master, with your kindness, I am willing to give it my all and try my best. If I prove inadequate, I'll resign as soon as possible. I implore the Young Master not to give up on me."

Charlie expressed his appreciation, saying, "Rest assured, if your abilities don't measure up, I won't show nepotism. I'll promptly find a replacement."

Turning to Don Albert, Charlie inquired, "Don Albert, you've been by my side for quite some time. Once Isaac assumes the role of Chief Steward for the Wade family, you'll be the agent for all of Aurous Hill and the entire province. Are you willing?"

Don Albert's eyes gleamed with joy, and he eagerly raised his hand. "Master Wade, your subordinate is willing! Like Mr. Isaac, your subordinate will give their all. However, if your subordinate proves inadequate, please don't push it, Master Wade!"

"Very well!" Charlie nodded approvingly. "Both of you, prepare yourselves. After Isaac hands over his responsibilities in Aurous Hill to Don Albert, he'll make his way to Eastcliff as soon as possible. I'll give my regards to the old man ahead of time and have him assist you in assuming your role. But you'll have to work diligently. Initially, stay in Eastcliff to sort through what Stephen Thompson left behind. Subsequently, you can manage some of the responsibilities in Aurous Hill while continuing to train here in martial arts."

Isaac Cameron's eyes lit up with delight at the mention of martial arts practice. He promptly exclaimed, "Thank you, Young Master! I'll devote myself to both perfecting my martial skills and executing my duties flawlessly!"

"Excellent." Charlie beamed. "Hurry and delegate your work. I must return to Thompson First promptly!"

Upon leaving the Elys-Champ Hot Springs Villa, Charlie hastened back to Thompson First. He intended to swiftly pack some essentials and inform his father-in-law Jacob and mother-in-law Elaine that he'd be departing for an out-of-town Feng Shui consultation overnight.

The couple was accustomed to Charlie's constant movement and took the news in stride. Yet, Charlie was taken aback when his mother-in-law, Elaine, displayed genuine concern. With a worried expression, she said, "Dear son-in-law, you're always on the go and never take a few days off. What if you overexert yourself?"

Elaine's show of care caught Charlie off guard, making him feel the moment was indeed rare. He reassured her with a smile, "Mom, don't worry. Despite my busy schedule, I'm not actually fatigued at all."

Jacob looked at Elaine and scoffed, "What do you know? My excellent son-in-law is now a Feng Shui Master. He's in high demand, and the people who hire him are big shots and celebrities. They hold Feng Shui Masters in higher regard than their own fathers. He must be well taken care of in terms of food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. In ancient times, he'd require eight sedan chairs for transport!"

Elaine chimed in thoughtfully, nodding before turning to Charlie with a smile. "My wonderful son-in-law is the best! Wealthy individuals have to beg just to spend money on my good son-in-law!"

She then rolled her eyes playfully and continued, "Alright, son-in-law, can I discuss something with you?"

Charlie could tell from Elaine's demeanor that she was about to request something from him. It was clear she was showing care today for a reason. He inquired, "Mom, go ahead and tell me if there's something on your mind."

Elaine hesitated before saying, "Um... we've been a bit tight on funds lately. With you leaving again, I'm worried that if we run out of money, we might have to inconvenience you and your wife. So, what I'm suggesting is, could you leave some money for me before you go?"

Jacob shot Elaine a disdainful look and declared, "Elaine, I know you, always with ulterior motives. You're asking Charlie for money!"

Elaine, feeling attacked, responded indignantly, "Jacob! If my good son-in-law wants to give me some money, what business is it of yours? I'm showing off to you, that's all!"

Jacob retorted heatedly, "You have hands and feet, why can't you make money for yourself when you're strapped? Look at me, I make a decent sum in the Calligraphy and Painting Association. With the monthly salary and subsidies, it's ten to twenty thousand!"

Elaine scoffed, "Bah! Spare me the talk about your Calligraphy and Painting Association. If it weren't for your good son-in-law's help, you would've given up long ago. Get out of here!"

"You talk nonsense!" Jacob blushed, defending his dignity.

Seeing the impending quarrel, Charlie quickly intervened, urging, “Dad, Mom, please don’t bicker. Once I leave, you’ll be the only one here. If you keep arguing, I won’t have peace of mind while I’m away!”

Elaine huffed, “I won’t pay him any mind unless he picks a fight!”

Charlie nodded, understanding Elaine’s nature. He could be generous when she had money, and she’d be content with just a bit of spending money when she didn’t. With a cheerful tone, he stated, “Mom, money isn’t an issue. I’ll transfer one million to your account shortly. You can use it as you see fit during this period.”

Elaine’s eyes widened in astonishment when she heard this. She stammered excitedly, “Good son-in-law! Is what you said... true? Are you really giving it to your mother? One million?”

“Absolutely true,” Charlie affirmed cheerfully. In a more serious tone, he added, “But I have one condition. You mustn’t quarrel with Dad while I’m away.”

Elaine immediately raised her right hand and swore, “Don’t worry, good son-in-law. I won’t quarrel with him while you’re gone!”

Charlie nodded and said, “Alright, Mom, you go about your business. I’ll go pack some things.”

Elaine insisted, “Oh, my dear son-in-law, what do you need to pack? Let Mom help you tidy up. You can just relax in the living room!”

Charlie smiled and declined, “No, Mom, it’s alright. You’re not familiar with where my things are, so I’ll take care of it myself.”

With a sense of urgency, Charlie turned to go upstairs.

Jacob, who had been holding back his request, couldn’t keep quiet any longer. He called out, “Oh, my dear son-in-law, don’t be hasty...”

Charlie turned back, inquiring, “Dad, what’s on your mind?”

Jacob sneaked a glance at Elaine and then at Charlie as if he had just tasted a bitter pill.

Charlie could see that something was amiss with Jacob. Considering he’d just transferred a million to Elaine, he had an inkling of what Jacob had in mind.

Elaine wasn't oblivious either.

Jacob cast a sly look at her, and she immediately said, "I'll tell you, Jacob, you absolutely mustn't ask for money from my good son-in-law! Can't you make your own money? What kind of a vice president of the Calligraphy and Painting Association, an upright and capable individual, begs his son-in-law for money?"

Chapter 5526

Jacob's cheeks blazed with embarrassment at her words. He hesitated, then shot back, "Who ever said I was about to ask for money from my son-in-law? Did I even hint at such a thing? There's a world of difference between finding a suitable son-in-law."

Elaine gave him a withering look. "Save me your lecture," she retorted. She didn't bother arguing further with him. Instead, she turned to Charlie, resolute in her stance. "Listen up, dear son-in-law. No matter what nonsense he's spouting, you mustn't give him a single cent!"

Abruptly, Jacob's temper flared. He straightened up and spat, "Elaine, why must you persist in this? It's always about money for you, isn't it?"

Elaine playfully shook her head, mischief dancing in her eyes. "What's the matter? Since you're not asking your dear son-in-law for money, I'm simply advising him not to offer you any. What's so bothersome about that?"

"You... you..." Jacob hadn't expected Elaine's defense to be so vigorous, quashing his own arguments. He'd said his piece, so why did she have the audacity to approach Charlie for money?

Jacob, defeated by his own hesitation and lacking a counter, fumed, "I... I never meant to request money from my good son-in-law... I just wanted to remind him to be cautious out there!"

Elaine feigned nonchalance, took a deep breath, and placed her hands soothingly on her chest, as if greatly relieved. "Oh, Jacob, you nearly gave me a heart attack. I thought you had the nerve to ask your dear son-in-law for money! He works hard for his earnings. You're a capable man, so you shouldn't be spending other people's money."

Jacob snapped, "Elaine, what's gotten into you? I've already told you, I have no intention of seeking money. Why are you endlessly fixated on money?"

Watching Jacob's frustration while he remained reluctant to express his true thoughts, Charlie couldn't help but think that the ancient adage might hold some truth, this poor man must indeed be despised.

Jacob, with a feeble disposition and a penchant for secrecy, perpetually lived in the shadow of imagined challenges, sabotaging his own opportunities time and time again.

When Matilda first returned to China, it was clear to everyone that Jacob had a desire to reunite with her. Matilda herself had been contemplating the same. They were like star-crossed lovers. If only Jacob could muster the courage to divorce Elaine, they could mend decades of regrets and secure a contented old age.

Yet, he remained too timid to shatter the fragile veil of indecision, causing Matilda to lose patience. And to make matters worse, Mr. Riley, a man far above Jacob's league, suddenly entered the picture, stealing away the love of his life. Even such a profound lesson from Matilda failed to trigger any meaningful self-reflection or a shift in his timid, obstinate nature. This left Charlie both frustrated and empathetic.

Turning to Jacob, he inquired, "Dad, do you need money? If so, just say the word, and I'll transfer some to you."

A spark of hope flickered in Jacob, only to be extinguished by Elaine's mockery and the whole money debacle. He was too ashamed to ask Charlie for help.

Thus, Jacob found himself at a loss for words.

At that moment, Elaine saw Charlie's inclination to offer money and grew frantic. She hurriedly interjected, "Dear son-in-law, your father just declared he has all his faculties and limbs intact and doesn't need your money. He's a respected figure in the arts community, vice president of the Painting and Calligraphy Association. To be blunt, he's quite the big shot with a stellar reputation. If you were to give him money now, it might just wound his pride."

Jacob felt even more ill at ease. Though he wanted to stride up and give Elaine a piece of his mind, he recognized that her words had him cornered. Should he actually go along with Charlie's offer, he'd be utterly humiliated.

Seeing his prolonged silence, Charlie, exasperated, let the matter rest. He echoed Jacob's words, "Dad, I appreciate your concern. I'll be careful. Nothing else to worry about. I need to finish packing and head to the airport."

They might have approached Jacob like someone riding a donkey downhill, but he always slipped down like a donkey from higher ground. Elaine's few words blocked his escape, leaving him to slide down her slope. This was Jacob's Achilles' heel and the linchpin of Elaine's control.

Charlie understood Jacob's stubborn nature, unlikely to change. He didn't offer any further openings. Having spoken his piece, he turned and headed for the elevator.

Seeing Charlie ascend, Jacob felt a pit of discomfort form within him. Gazing at Elaine's triumphant smile, he felt worse than wretched.

Upstairs, Charlie couldn't help but sigh inwardly. When would his father-in-law, Jacob, muster the courage to break free from his inner turmoil and live as he truly desired?

With everything packed, Charlie left home under the cover of night, bound for the airport.

Stepping into the elevator, he spotted his father-in-law, Jacob, cigarette perched in his mouth, rising from the sofa.

Jacob greeted with a smile, "Good son-in-law, you're off, then?"

Charlie nodded, "Yes, Dad. I am on my way to the airport."

Jacob rubbed his hands, ready to speak, when Elaine suddenly descended the stairs, feigning a limp and exclaimed, "Oh, my dear son-in-law, Mom's here to see you off!"

Having pocketed a million, Elaine and Jacob, who missed out on the sum, both sought to bid Charlie farewell.

Jacob intended to find an opening, a subtle way to allude to his tight finances, hoping Charlie might effortlessly offer a helping hand. Jacob was the type to never ask for what he needed directly, rather, he'd downplay or feign indifference, secretly hoping someone else would step in.

Elaine understood Jacob's disposition and how to manipulate it. She was worried that Jacob might feign neediness in front of Charlie to siphon money, so she was poised to disrupt his plan.

As Jacob's pretense of plaintive words hovered on his lips, he swallowed them back.

Elaine, at that moment, glanced at Jacob and turned to Charlie, a sycophantic smile in place. "Dear son-in-law, off you go. Leave the household concerns to us!"

With that, she swiftly moved forward, taking up Charlie's luggage with exaggerated vigor. She urged, "Dear son-in-law, it's getting late. You mustn't dawdle. Don't miss your flight and jeopardize your business."

Jacob watched, crestfallen, as Elaine herded Charlie out. He followed, simmering with frustration.

Charlie refused to give Jacob any opportunities. He stowed the luggage in the BMW's trunk, waved to them and stated, "Mom, Dad, I'm off."

With that, he got into the car and drove off.

Half an hour later, Charlie arrived at the airport. The plane awaited, and Hogan touched down at Aurous Hill Airport punctually.

The two met and boarded a private plane bound for the United States. The night swallowed them up as they soared towards New York, ten thousand kilometers away.

Chapter 5527

In the late hours, Lama Temple radiated an ethereal tranquility. Nestled within a secluded Zen chamber, concealed from prying eyes, an exquisite woman graced a wicker chair in the courtyard. Her gaze fixed upon the canvas of autumn stars above.

A bald-headed woman emerged, draping a blanket over the lady's legs with the utmost reverence. "Madam, the Young Master's plane has taken off."

"He's departed?" The stunning woman's eyes flickered towards the airport, a hint of apprehension playing across her features.

In the distance, points of light waltzed across the night sky, prompting a nostalgic sigh. "I wonder which of those shimmering dots carries Charlie."

Turning to the elderly lady beside her, she inquired, "Who is accompanying Charlie? Is Hogan with him?"

This striking woman was none other than Lily, Charlie's mother.

The woman at Lily's side, disguised as an old nun, went by the name Joyce Turk. Her loyalty and years of service to Lily equaled that of a seasoned housekeeper.

"It appears, Madam, that the Young Master has boarded the plane with Hogan. They are hurtling through the sky at great speed. They are expected to touch down in New York around eight o'clock local time," Joyce Turk reported.

"Very well." Lily nodded, a faint smile gracing her lips. "Peter has faced his share of trials in recent years, and I've been unable to assist him. If Charlie finds him, I believe he can guide Peter through these challenges. Perhaps, in turn, Peter can help Charlie unlock the secrets of the Soul Palace."

At 8,30 PM in New York, the plane carrying Charlie and Hogan touched down smoothly at JFK Airport.

Due to the late hour, Charlie had no intention of heading straight to the antique store in Queens that night. He understood that Hogan had accompanied him to New York for a specific purpose - to reunite with Jordan, the man he had once taken under his wing. Jordan now presided over the roast goose restaurant, a place brimming with Uncle Hogan's memories and sentiments. So, upon disembarking, Charlie turned to Uncle Hogan and said, "Uncle Hogan, let's explore Chinatown tonight. Do you know the usual closing hours for your roast goose joint?"

Uncle Hogan, somewhat surprised by Charlie's choice, quickly responded, "Young Master, it might be best to attend to business matters first. We can visit Jordan afterward."

Charlie grinned, "Uncle Hogan, considering the late hour, it would be quite unusual for two busy individuals to head straight to an antique store right after landing. If someone with a curious mind catches wind of this, they might mistake it for espionage. Let's save the antique store for later. Tonight, we'll stay in Chinatown and pay a visit to Jordan. Tomorrow, we'll retreat to the New York Shangri-La for the night and then make our way to Queens."

Uncle Hogan understood the wisdom in Charlie's words. While he appreciated Charlie looking out for him, he was not one to beat around the bush. "Young Master, roast goose joints usually close around two in the morning."

Charlie's curiosity was piqued. "That late?"

Uncle Hogan nodded, explaining, "Mainly for the sake of affordability. Many of our patrons are laborers, often undocumented migrants. They usually finish work in the early morning hours, so we keep our doors open to accommodate them."

A smile graced Charlie's lips. "Very well, if the hours are accommodating, then a meal it shall be."

Uncle Hogan agreed, "I'll inform Jordan to make preparations."

Charlie inquired, "Uncle Hogan, did you let Jordan know about your arrival in the States this time?"

Chapter 5528

"Not yet," Uncle Hogan replied, his urgency evident in his tone. "This time, I was in a rush. I didn't inform him because I was worried that if I couldn't make it, it would be worse to get his hopes up."

Charlie grinned, "In that case, there's no need to give him a call. Let's just show up and surprise him."

"Alright!" Uncle Hogan readily agreed, his anticipation written all over his face. He couldn't help but confide in Charlie, "Young Master, I won't keep anything from you. Jordan, I've always considered him my own. It's been a while since I've seen him and I miss him dearly."

Charlie nodded in understanding.

Life in the United States had been harsh for Uncle Hogan. It had seen slight improvement over the past few years, especially with Bella by his side, providing some comfort.

However, after Bella's departure, he eked out a living running a roast goose shop, while constantly looking over his shoulder due to his illegal immigrant status. His life was a mix of misery and despair.

To him, Jordan was more than an adopted child or a companion, he was a lifeline.

After leaving the airport, Charlie rented a modest Chevrolet and set off for Chinatown with Uncle Hogan.

Charlie hadn't made any prior arrangements upon arriving in the U.S. He hadn't even informed Michaela. Keeping a low profile not only ensured safety but also facilitated the search for hidden market clues.

Driving into the familiar Chinatown, Uncle Hogan's roast goose restaurant was still in operation.

Charlie parked the car and Uncle Hogan couldn't wait to open the door.

Stepping into the roast goose shop, they found it strangely empty. There was only one person seated at a dining table, while Jordan worked away in the kitchen. Upon hearing the arrival, he called out, "Sit wherever you like, we'll be right there!"

A dozen seconds later, he emerged from the kitchen, a plate of roast goose rice in hand. Seeing Uncle Hogan and Charlie, he was momentarily taken aback and murmured in surprise, "Uncle Hogan, Mr. Wade... Why are you here?"

Uncle Hogan with a smile on his face, was about to greet him when he noticed Jordan's face marred by bruises and purple scars. There was even a cut at the corner of his mouth, now forming a black scab. He asked in shock, "Jordan, what happened to your face? What's going on?"

Jordan instinctively turned his face slightly, all the while serving the guests and hesitantly said, "It's fine, Uncle Hogan... I was just trying to show off on a motorcycle a few days ago. I took a spill..."

Uncle Hogan immediately protested, "Impossible! These injuries aren't from a motorcycle accident! Look in the mirror, at those panda eyes. It's clear they were inflicted. And those cuts at the corners of your mouth... Even if I were to hit you hard, it wouldn't cause those kinds of wounds. Tell me! What really happened?"

Jordan shifted uncomfortably, "Uncle Hogan... My injuries are really... not from a fight..."

Just then, he glanced at the clock and saw it was already past nine. He hastily added, "Oh, the time. Uncle, why didn't you let me know you were coming? I could've picked you up from the airport. It's getting late now. How about I close up shop and find you and Mr. Wade, a place to stay?"

Without waiting for Uncle Hogan's response, he turned to the guest, "I'm sorry, sir. I have an urgent matter to attend to today, so I'll be closing early. I'll pack your meal to go, free of charge. Is that alright?"

The guest quickly agreed, but Uncle Hogan's brow furrowed as he asked, "Jordan, tell me the truth. Are you in some kind of trouble?"

Suddenly, the low growl of motorcycles echoed outside, steadily approaching. The roar grew louder and nearer.

Jordan's expression shifted from nervous to alarmed, "Uncle Hogan, Mr. Wade, I have to handle something. Please, head upstairs and stay out of this for now!"

Chapter 5529

As tension etched Jordan's features, Charlie, who had maintained a quiet vigil, instantly discerned the growing rumble of a motorcycle engine drawing nearer. It was heading their way.

In that charged moment, Uncle Hogan grasped the gravity of Jordan's potential entanglement. His voice turned stern as he demanded, "Jordan, lay it bare. Who have you crossed?"

Conceding that the truth could no longer be masked, Jordan, resigned, began, "Uncle Hogan, these folks here belong to a fresh gang making waves in New York..."

Uncle Hogan interjected, "Debt collectors, are they?"

Jordan hastened to clarify, "No, Uncle Hogan! They've just laid claim to Chinatown two days past. Now they're squeezing folks for 'protection' money, three grand a month. If you don't pay up, they rough you up and threaten to ransack your store."

Furrowing his brows, Uncle Hogan inquired, "Hasn't Chinatown always been run by Chinese syndicates? The fee's been a mere three hundred a month for the past few years. Why this sudden usurpation?"

Jordan sighed, weariness settling in, "Chinese gangs ceded it to them last week after a fierce showdown and heavy losses. Big Vigo has thrown in the towel and handed Chinatown over..."

This revelation caught Uncle Hogan off guard. He probed further, "What's the story with this new gang? It's only been a month since they've started yapping about three grand. Sounds rather fishy, doesn't it?"

Jordan's voice bristled with frustration. "Who's denying that! We toil from dawn till dusk in these stores, paying rent and working under the table since we lack legal status to foot the bills. You're overseeing it all and after all's said and done, you're

only scraping together a few grand a month. They want three thousand, essentially turning everyone into their indentured servants!"

Uncle Hogan queried, "Who's behind this new gang?"

Jordan responded, "They go by the name 'Burning-Angel.' Mostly African-Americans with a sprinkling of Latinos from Brooklyn and downtown. Word is, they're backed by Italians. The Italians are slowly fading into the background, pulling the strings but keeping out of the fray. They'd rather let these ruthless African-Americans run the show..."

"Did they inflict those wounds on your face?" Uncle Hogan pressed.

"Yes," Jordan's voice was edged with resentment. "They came to collect their 'protection' money. I couldn't cough up the sum, so they beat me down. They've given me until tonight. If I don't produce the cash, they'll ransack the store."

"Have you contacted the police?" Uncle Hogan's tone carried a mix of anger and concern.

"I did," Jordan's posture slumped. "But it's no use. You know the deal in New York. The police focus on the affluent areas. They came, gave it a cursory glance, and told me they couldn't locate anything."

Annoyance flared in Uncle Hogan's eyes. "It's utterly unreasonable!"

Jordan's voice held a tinge of hopelessness. "I called them, told them they'd be back. The police said there aren't enough officers to keep tabs here. They told me to call as soon as I spotted them. Dial 911 for the police, but what good does it do? If they roll in with guns blazing, I'd be eight ways to dead before the cops showed up."

With a sigh, Jordan continued, "They're American citizens, we're undocumented. The American police couldn't care less whether we live or die..."

As he spoke, the motorcycle's roar reached the doorstep of the roast goose shop, and Jordan's nerves ratcheted up. He implored Hogan and Charlie, "Uncle Hogan, Mr. Wade, hurry upstairs!"

Chapter 5530

Charlie settled into his seat, a mischievous grin playing on his lips. "You know, I've never actually witnessed a gangster collecting protection money before. This should be quite the spectacle. Jordan, fetch me some of that mouth watering roast goose rice. I intend to savor every bite."

Jordan's voice quickened, "Mr. Wade, these guys are no joke! You really ought to..."

Before he could finish, Uncle Hogan interjected, giving Jordan an encouraging pat on the shoulder. Urgently, he urged, "The Young Master specifically requested your expertise with the roast goose rice. No time to waste, let's see if your culinary prowess has lost its edge."

In walked five young men, their attire exuding a hip-hop swagger mixed with an air of arrogance.

Leading the pack was a slender, towering figure, shrouded in an oversized hoodie that obscured half his face. His hands were buried deep in the front pockets, an unmistakable air of menace about him.

Stepping forward, he eyed Jordan and sneered, "Well, well, Mr. Goose from China. Have you got the money I asked for? If I don't see 3,000 bucks on this table by tonight, I'll make sure you get a taste of lead before your body takes a leisurely cruise back to China via the Hudson River."

Jordan's nerves danced on a knife's edge. But Charlie, seated at the table, interjected, his gaze fixed on Jordan. He prodded, "Boss, I'm famished and feeling rather pugnacious. Hurry along and prepare a meal for me."

Jordan stood frozen, uncertainty etched across his face. Uncle Hogan murmured, "Go on, now."

With determination etched in his features, Jordan gritted his teeth, "Alright... I'll go at once..."

With that, he turned on his heel and headed for the kitchen.

The lead man, observing Charlie dispatch his boss, wore an irksome scowl. He scoffed, "Looks like we've got some new business in town."

Taking a seat across from Charlie, he declared coolly, "Hey there, Chinese guy. Who gave you the audacity to interrupt my collection?"

Charlie's smile remained, his eyes locked onto the man's. He countered, "You don't let paying customers eat? Haven't you heard the customer is king?"

The man's face tightened, realizing Charlie's nonchalance. Sternly, he warned, "You clearly don't know the lay of the land here. From this point on, the entirety of Chinatown, I mean the whole shebang in New York, belongs to us Burning Angels. If you Chinese folks want to do business, you'll pay up, or face the consequences."

Charlie met the threat with a raised brow and a confident smile. "I must caution you, I'm not one for waiting, especially when there's a meal in front of me. So, whether you're a fiery angel, a savage beast, or a scampering rodent, it matters little. But if you and your entourage don't vanish from my sight this instant, I'll show you a fate far worse than death."

The man's temper flared. "You think I'm messing around?" he spat, drawing an M9 pistol from his pocket. He brandished it, aiming straight at Charlie. In a frigid tone, he warned, "You're about to get a firsthand taste of bullets."

Charlie arched an eyebrow, his smile unfaltering. "I've made people do all sorts of things, from eating less-than-appetizing meals to languishing in iron cages at the bottom of rivers. I've even used people as canvases for calligraphy. But I must confess, feeding them bullets is a novel concept. Since you're so keen, let's give it a whirl."

His gaze fell to the gun. "This should be a nine-millimeter, right? Thirteen rounds in the mag when it's full. With that many, I wonder if you'd prefer to chew or swallow."

Chapter 5531

"Damn it!" The black man's temper flared as he eyed Charlie's audacity. Without hesitation, he used the pistol's base to sweep the table clean of bottles and cans. Rising menacingly, he jammed the gun's muzzle against Charlie's temple, spewing venom. "Chinese guy, this is America, land of the free, and troublemakers like you get lead, not lectures!"

A scoff escaped Charlie's lips, "Quite the theatrics."

His smile faded, replaced by a cutting disdain. "But fear isn't my forte."

Grimacing, the man snarled, "Are you really that eager to die?"

Charlie spread his hands, unruffled. "Today, right here, angels ablaze or dogs of the inferno, let them come. They'll kneel and sing 'Conquer' for me. If they hit the notes, they live. Otherwise, I'll hand out canine head souvenirs from east to west Chinatown."

He scrutinized the man's face, a frown etched deep. "Your head, it's all wrong. Too elongated, too pointy. Like a rugby ball. Can't dribble it, only punt it. Allow me to rephrase: sing poorly, and I'll be your head's tour guide."

"Holy hell!" The man's fingers trembled, poised dangerously close to the trigger.

He was a tempest in human form.

Bouncing within a three-meter radius, he muttered darkly. "Ending this bastard now. Instantly! Instantly!"

A sly wink rallied his followers, who promptly sealed the goose shop's fate.

With the door secured, the man's gun zeroed in on Charlie's brow, chilling intent in his voice, "Chinese love tempting gun barrels. I've put down many like you. One more won't change a thing. Any final words, speak them now."

"Final words?" Charlie jeered, disdain dripping from his words. "You're a farce, not a threat."

He rapped the table with a smirk. "Jordan, my meal. Chop chop!"

Jordan rushed from the kitchen, clutching a bowl of roast goose rice, his words a jumble. "Mr. Wade... here's your rice..."

In one Swift motion, the black man sent the entire meal scattering, "You're thinking of a feast at death's door?!" he thundered.

He swung his weapon towards the fallen bowl, squeezing the trigger. The gunshot rang out, shattering the plastic container and sending Jordan into a quaking fit.

Uncle Hogan, on the sidelines, remained unfazed. He was aware that these men were nothing more than insignificant specks compared to Charlie.

The Burning Angel? A sideshow compared to him.

The Joules family, a powerful dynasty in New York, had no influence as Charlie mercilessly shot Patrick Joules right in front of them.

Who in the Joules clan would dare oppose him? When Charlie asked Patrick's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather Joules whether they were convinced that he killed Patrick, who would dare to say no?

Now, a few gang members who knew nothing about the world dared to jump in front of Charlie with guns, and Charlie would never let them have an easy time.

The leader locked eyes with Charlie, who showed no fear. Instead, he turned to Jordan and said, "Bring me another bowl. This swill's a waste. I'll make him kneel like a dog, licking every grain off the floor."

The man's composure crumbled. He'd pulled the trigger, yet Charlie remained unfazed. Fear tinged the edges of his bravado, tangled with his murderous intent.

He gaped wide, lips flapping without sound. With a furious grit of his teeth, he spat, "Chinese man! Since you court death, I'll deliver you to God!"

He hammered the trigger!

Jordan squeezed his eyes shut, while the black man's companions retreated a few steps. They saw their boss's murderous intent. At this point, revulsion painted their faces, anticipating the spray of blood to come.

Just as they thought Charlie was about to be shot, the black man's eyes widened. Though he struggled to pull the trigger, he muttered, "What's happening... Why can't I... Why can't I pull the trigger..."

Charlie's smile held steady. He'd only exerted a minuscule amount of energy, enough to render his opponent utterly defenseless. The black man's hand had lost all strength, unable to squeeze even a grain of rice.

The black man, bewildered, still had power in his arm, yet his fingers were rebellious. In his panic, Charlie reached out and wrenched the gun free.

He calmly and confidently inspected the sleek Italian M9 pistol, "If God wants to see me, he'll have to come to me, not the other way around."

"Damn!" The four black-clad men behind him scrambled, drawing pistols in their panic, preparing to fire at Charlie.

Charlie sneered, seizing the black man's wrist and swinging him like a baseball bat!

Before the four could draw their weapons, a massive, dark force slammed into them from the side. Before they could react, they were sprawled on the ground.

In an instant, five bodies lay wailing in the corner.

The man who was tossed suffered the most. His right arm hung by threads, cheekbones, ribs, and leg bones shattered. Countless fractures crisscrossed his body.

Even though the other four didn't sustain as severe injuries, the sudden and powerful impact felt like a high-speed car crash.

Bruised and battered, they lay groaning.

They'd never imagined an ordinary person could wield such incredible power. They knew, deep down, that they'd encountered a master. Perhaps this was a legendary Kung Fu master.

Unfazed, Charlie approached the five, his expression unreadable.

They shrank back, their refuge in the corner now a prison.

The man who had once been the tough guy had been beaten half to death already, and now all traces of his former fierceness had vanished. His face was etched with fear and unease.

Charlie stared at him and delivered a resounding slap across his face.

The sharp crack reverberated throughout the roast goose shop.

As the man's cheeks rapidly swelled, Charlie offered a wry smile, "The underworld, huh? And the Burning Angels... Who came up with such a ridiculous name? Look at that grizzled mug of yours—does it have anything to do with angels?"

The pain in the man's cheek was explosive, but all he could do now was cry and plead with Charlie. "I'm sorry, truly sorry. I had no idea you knew kung fu, please, let us go, we'll never return here!"

Charlie furrowed his brow and delivered another stinging slap.

The crisp sound grated on the eardrums of the four people nearby.

After Charlie's second slap, he grinned and inquired, "Wasn't it all about being ruthless just a moment ago? You held that gun like a real tough guy, ready to jump and fire. Why did you soften up so quickly?"

Despite being nearly knocked unconscious by the relentless blows, the intense pain kept the man's mind sharp. He realized he had encountered a formidable opponent and had no one to back him up. So, he resorted to pleading in a hushed tone.

With this in mind, he cried out, "Sir, I was truly in the wrong... I grew up in poverty. My father abandoned my pregnant mother and left. She had to work three jobs to support us. I was raised by a laborer and received no education. I've been associated with gangs since I was a child. I implore you, spare my life for my mother's sake..."

Charlie smiled and asked, "So your routine now is to feign weakness and beg for mercy, then gather more people to help you when you're out, right?"

The man hastily responded, "No, no! Absolutely not! I swear to God!"

Charlie delivered another resounding slap and inquired in a cold voice, "Why do you never mention God, but you still use a gun to extort protection money? With a gun, you're a Burning Angel; without one, you're God's lamb. So, do you believe in God or guns?"

"I...I..." The man was stumped by Charlie's questioning and didn't know how to respond. He could only muster the courage to say, "I... I believe in God..."

Charlie fired back, "Then do you think God can save you today?"

The man found himself in an ever-deepening pool of fear. He was trapped, unsure of what words would secure his safety. If he claimed he could survive, Charlie might cruelly deny it and end his life with a gunshot. On the other hand, if he admitted he couldn't survive, Charlie could still find a way to twist his words and deliver the fatal blow. It was a grim situation, with death looming no matter which way he turned.

Desperation washed over him, and he implored Charlie, his voice trembling, "Brother, please spare my life, I... I don't want to die... I promise I'll never get mixed up with a gang again, I swear!"

Charlie's lips curved into a slight smile as he observed the man's extreme terror. He calmly remarked, "Survival isn't about chances. It's about seizing control."

Upon hearing this, the man swiftly broke into tears and declared, "I'm ready to take control, I'll absolutely do it!"

Charlie nodded decisively, and he deftly removed the magazine from the pistol. With a stern look, he extended the magazine towards the man and uttered a grim command, "You seem to relish the idea of serving up a taste of bullets to others,

don't you? Well, now's your chance. Consume every single bullet from this magazine! I'm cautioning you, ingest every last one, and leave none behind! If any bullets remain, I'll personally make sure they find their way into you!"

Chapter 5532

Charlie's face transformed, becoming a picture of fierce determination. His eyes burned with a deadly fire that sent shivers down the black man's spine.

In that moment, all doubt vanished. The man understood Charlie's ultimatum crystal clear. Defying it meant signing his own death warrant.

But the idea of swallowing bullets gave him the creeps. It wasn't just about gulping them down; getting them out afterward was a whole different ball game.

He briefly wondered if dropping the name of the Burning Angels might rattle Charlie once more. Like some Taoist priests, maybe they could play mind games, a battle of wills. If Charlie felt satisfied, maybe they could skip the fight and have a drink together. It wasn't unusual, whether in China or the States. The key was knowing when to call it quits.

Yet, when he tried to voice these thoughts, he stumbled. Charlie's punches still smarted, and begging wouldn't do any good. If he kept asking for peace, he'd only get more beatings.

Just when he teetered on the brink of indecision, a loyal friend by his side took the leap.

With all the courage he could muster, the companion spoke up. "Sir, maybe this is all a big misunderstanding. We, the Burning Angels, pride ourselves on being rational. Show us a bit of respect, and we can set up a meeting with our boss. Maybe we can work something out and avoid all this escalating."

The man watched his buddy say what he couldn't bring himself to utter. Hope sparked inside him, and he nodded vigorously. "Yes, sir, you see, you're a skilled fighter, brave. If we team up, the Burning Angels will be unstoppable. Don't you think?"

Charlie eyed the man, a smile tugging at his lips. "You've got wit and know how to make friends out of enemies."

The man nodded eagerly. "Yes, sir, he's always been sharp..."

Charlie's grin grew wider. "With such a smart ally vouching for you, I'd be a fool not to go along."

The man brimmed with excitement. It looked like Charlie might actually let him off the hook.

Even though the beating had been brutal, at least he wouldn't have to gulp down bullets. Once he got out of this tight spot, he swore he'd report it all to his boss. Trying to turn enemies into buddies was just plain foolish. Survival meant seizing this chance and getting back at them in kind.

But just as he began to believe Charlie would show him mercy, hope curdled into dread as Charlie changed the game. "You asked God for forgiveness once, and he might not have granted it. Are you ready to ask for mine now? I'll give it a shot."

The man practically glowed with hope, babbling, "Yes! Yes! Sir, I, Will Johnson, beg your forgiveness!" He stared at Charlie, eyes brimming with expectation.

Charlie met his gaze, a slight smile on his lips. "Swallowing a whole bullet ain't easy, so I'll cut you some slack."

With that, he took the bullet, pinching the casing with his fingers, then the head with his thumb and forefinger. A collective gasp filled the room as Charlie effortlessly separated the bullet from its casing.

These were seasoned gang members, familiar with firearms. They'd messed around with bullets before, but the bond between casing and warhead was usually rock solid. It took specialized tools, often a vice, to do it.

Charlie's casual disassembly left them stunned, a growing sense of fear settling in. If he could take a bullet apart that easily, what was stopping him from smashing skulls with a single blow?

But at this point, they didn't grasp Charlie's plan. Why did he dismantle the bullet, and what did it have to do with the forgiveness he'd mentioned?

Charlie turned to the man, holding up the separated bullet with a grin. "You asked for forgiveness, right? Here it is. Swallowing a whole bullet is a tough gig, so I made it a bit more manageable."

The man sank into dread, staring at Charlie in disbelief. These words, coming from the young man before him, felt surreal.

Charlie reminded him, "Don't forget to thank your loyal friend. He got you this chance."

The young man's face went pale, and he avoided his friend's eyes. Anger boiled within him.

If he had known Charlie would resort to such a cruel trick, he would have gladly swallowed the whole bullet without hesitation.

After all, ingesting an entire bullet and then retrieving it intact seemed less risky than this. Now, he was facing a mouthful of gunpowder.

Panicking, he turned to Charlie. "Sir... this... there's gunpowder inside!"

Charlie nodded, unfazed. "Yep. What's a little gunpowder gonna hurt?"

The man was on the brink of collapse, pleading, "You're lying... it'll kill me!"

Charlie sneered and forced the man's mouth open. He poured the gunpowder in, the sharp chemical taste assaulting his senses. The man's tongue stung, tears welling up. He struggled to cough, but before he could, Charlie put the bullet back together and clamped his mouth shut.

With a cool demeanor, Charlie instructed, "You better swallow those bullets and casings. If you fight it, you'll find more in your mouth soon. If you struggle, I'll help you along with a stick."

He took another bullet and repeated his earlier motions. The man had no choice but to obey, gritting his teeth to gulp down bullets and casings.

As they watched, the other followers felt a mix of relief and a dark satisfaction. Thankfully, they had dodged this brutal fate at the hands of this ominous figure.

But just as they began to exhale, Charlie issued another order. "For those of you with guns, you better do the same. Swallow all the bullets in your firearms. If you defy me, you'll face the same fate as him!"

Chapter 5533

In this humble roast goose shop in Chinatown, a magical and interesting scene is taking place.

The five gang members, once the terror of Chinatown, struck fear into countless Chinese vendors. Now, they knelt on the ground, cramming bullets of yellow, orange and gold into their mouths. Swallowing 9mm pistol rounds was like trying to gulp down fat capsules without a drop of water to ease the pain. They gritted their teeth and forced them down.

Will Johnson, in particular, suffered. His sister was a mistress to the Burning Angel boss and he himself had a ruthless streak, rising to middle management in the gang. Chinatown fell under his jurisdiction.

In the American underworld, he was the Burning Angel's Chinatown enforcer. But his authority did him no favors now.

The others managed to choke down the bullets, wincing through the ordeal. Theirs were at least somewhat spherical. Will Jackson, however, faced Charlie's own macabre concoction. Charlie meticulously dismantled each bullet, pouring the powder into Will Jackson's mouth, then followed with the disassembled round and casing. It was a merciless race to swallow them down.

The bullet casings, separated from their warheads, were jagged and often caught in Will Jackson's throat. But Charlie allowed no reprieve. He swallowed as best he could, and soon, blood mingled with the effort.

Witnessing this horrifying display, Jordan's stomach churned. He turned away, fighting the urge to vomit.

"Jordan," Charlie inquired, "How many times have you crossed paths with Will Jackson?"

Jordan stammered, "Mr. Wade, I... I've seen him maybe three or four times..."

Charlie nodded, then gestured for a plate. "Here, hand it over. What does he usually do?"

Jordan recalled, "The first time, he went to Angieda's shop for protection money. Angieda didn't speak English, so she chased him out with a broom. He retaliated by breaking her limbs..."

Will Johnson, quick to defend himself, interjected, "She struck first, it was self-defense!"

Charlie gripped Will's wrist, exerting just enough pressure to snap it at the joint. Will cried out in agony. Charlie's voice remained cool. "You walked in here today, I'm defending myself."

Will nearly crumbled. Yet, what followed was even more harrowing. Charlie picked up an unloaded pistol and used the barrel like a hammer, smashing it onto Will's right ankle. The crack was unmistakable. Pain overwhelmed Will, and he teetered on the brink of unconsciousness. Charlie showed no mercy, moving on to shatter the left ankle.

Ignoring Will's frenzied screams, Charlie turned to Jordan. "Continue."

Jordan recounted, "The second time, he demanded three thousand dollars from me. When I couldn't pay, he brought these men and beat me up, saying it was my deadline."

Charlie surveyed Jordan's bruised face, offering a slight nod. He seized Will by the collar, delivering four or five brutal slaps until blood seeped from his capillaries. Then, he cast the man aside. He turned back to Jordan and asked "And the third?"

"The day before yesterday night," Jordan began, "He was in a Cadillac, parked on the street corner. Anthony Carvin from the Chinese Gang came out of the nightclub and was pulled into the car by his brother. I heard a gunshot, then saw blood spray from the car's rear door. They shoved Carvin's body out and sped away..."

Charlie listened intently. "Anthony Carvin, does he often terrorize people in Chinatown?"

Jordan shook his head. "The Chinese Gang is actually quite helpful in Chinatown. They do collect protection money, but they step in when we're in real trouble, especially for immigrants like us. We're often targeted and they're more reasonable about their fees. Doing business in the U.S. taxes may be optional, but protection money isn't. Compared to others, the Chinese Gang is kinder."

"Alright." Charlie pressed on, his voice firm. "You mentioned Will Johnson sitting in the car and Where did Anthony Carvin sit?"

Jordan hesitated briefly but summoned the courage to reply, "He was behind the passenger seat."

Charlie continued probing, "So, Carvin was brought into the car through the door behind the driver's seat?"

Jordan nodded, affirming, "Yes..."

"Alright." Charlie paused, his gaze unwavering. "Did you see who pulled the trigger?"

Jordan shook his head, revealing his uncertainty. "Could you tell who fired the gun? It was only after Carvin was gone that the window behind the passenger seat was rolled down and I saw Will Johnson spitting out."

Charlie turned his stern gaze towards Will Johnson. "Let me be clear, Will. Did you kill Anthony Carvin, the one who aided them?"

Will Johnson shook his head frantically. "It wasn't me, I swear!"

Charlie turned to the other four individuals, his tone unwavering. "For any one of you who tells me the truth, I'll subtract five bullets from your meal. But if you choose to lie or refuse to answer, you'll feast on those bullets and see your guns dismantled and eaten as well."

The four of them squirmed, beads of sweat forming on their brows.

Charlie's mention of consuming gun parts sent shivers down their spines. Chowing down on more than a dozen bullets allowed for a chance to pass them naturally. But devouring pistol components was akin to a direct execution, though at least it offered some excitement.

Under this threat, several individuals corrected their stories, confirming that it was Will Johnson who had fired the fatal shot at Anthony Carvin, the Chinese gang member.

Will Johnson's face was drained of color. He considered defending himself, but the realization that these men had betrayed him held him back. If he spoke up now, he might just provoke Charlie's wrath.

The thought of Charlie's penchant for vengeance, exacting double the harm for any wrongdoing, filled Will with dread. He had killed a member of the Bloom Gang, did Charlie intend to return the favor today?

As fear gnawed at him, Charlie turned his attention to Jordan. "Do you know the boss of the Bloom Gang?"

Jordan nodded emphatically, affirming, "Yes, his name's Casey Vigo. He used to visit the shop often."

Uncle Hogan chimed in, "Young Master, Casey Vigo smuggled from the mainland to Hong Kong Island and then to the United States. Despite his gang ties, he's got a decent reputation."

Charlie nodded, then asked Jordan, "Can you track him down?"

Jordan pondered for a moment. "Mr. Wade, it seems Big Vigo went into hiding to lie low. Finding him won't be a cakewalk now."

Uncle Hogan interjected, "He can't have strayed far from Chinatown. Maybe he's holed up there, possibly at the Monroe Hair Salon. He's known to stick close to what he knows and believes that the most perilous place can also be the safest."

Jordan exclaimed, "Impossible, Uncle Hogan! The whole of Chinatown knows the Monroe Hair Salons proprietress is influential, a lover of Big Vigo. He wouldn't dare to hide there now."

Uncle Hogan replied calmly, "Don't question it. Just head to the Monroe Hair Salon and inform the lady boss that I've returned. Invite her to meet me on our terms."

Chapter 5534

Upon receiving Hogan's command, Jordan bolted out in haste.

Chinatown, a maze of complexity confined to a single thoroughfare, fostered an intimacy among its denizens. A bustling street, it drew Chinese souls in droves. Here, bonds mimicked those of street-side neighbors. Despite a sprinkling of unscrupulous characters, the collective ethos leaned toward assistance and solidarity.

In the early days, newly-arrived Chinese immigrants in the States sought strength in numbers, forming close-knit groups for survival. Over time, as society evolved, so did the divisions, and the occasional alliance for mutual protection transformed into a vocation. Thus, the Chinese gang took shape.

Bloom Gang's history told a different tale. From its inception, it was not a marauding crew preying on the weak.

Contrary to their Chinese counterparts, American gangs, largely birthed during Prohibition, thrived on anti-government ventures. They bore a century-long grudge, a doctrine that flouted authority. Huabang, on the other hand, collected protection dues in Chinatown akin to an unofficial community fee, reasonable and obliging, attending every household's call.

Yet, the Burning Angel, collectors of protection dues, were veritable brigands. They craved only lucre, your life was spared if they got their fill. Deny them and a blade or bullet would speak.

Minutes later, Jordan returned with a middle-aged man in tow, a man of about forty.

As soon as the man crossed the threshold and beheld Hogan, he exclaimed with zeal, "Brother Hogan, you've returned!"

This was Casey Vigo, the overseer of the Chinese gang in New York's Chinatown.

Spotting the thick bandage around Casey Vigo's neck, Hogan swiftly inquired, "Vigo, what happened to your neck?"

Casey Vigo sighed, "Long story short, caught a bullet coming home. Grazed my neck. If I'd been a hair off, I'd be reporting to the Lord of Hell."

He turned a horrified gaze to the five wretched figures in the corner. "Hogan, what in the world happened? What's going on?"

Hogan pressed, "Jordan didn't fill you in?"

"Only mentioned it was urgent," Vigo replied, "But didn't spill the specifics."

Nodding, Hogan explained, "These fellows came to collect 'dues' from Jordan, but Mr. Wade here gave them a different lesson."

Then, to Charlie, he introduced, "Mr. Wade, this is Casey Vigo, head of the Chinese Gang."

Casey Vigo stared in astonishment. Charlie could scarcely believe that this vicious Burning Angel bunch had been reduced to such a state by the young man before him.

Hogan continued, "Vigo, allow me to make the introduction. Mr. Wade here also wished to meet you."

Casey Vigo snapped back to reality. Unfamiliar with Charlie's identity, he surmised it was no small feat to have inflicted such a pounding on these five. He promptly approached Charlie with respect. "Hello, Mr. Wade. I'm Casey Vigo. Pleasure to meet you!"

Charlie nodded, inquiring, "How many members are in the Bloom Gang?"

Casey Vigo honestly replied, "Nearly a hundred once, but now, barring the wounded and the deceased, most have scattered."

Charlie's brow furrowed. "With nearly a hundred, how'd you let these five ruffians roam Chinatown?"

Casey Vigo, shame washing over him, confessed, "Mr. Wade... These five belong to the Burning Angels. Behind them are Italians. They command over a dozen gangs, totaling several thousand. We're outmatched..."

Charlie's voice went cold, "Have you ever heard of a gang brawl with thousands involved in the U.S.? Could they really march thousands into Chinatown?"

With a rueful expression, Vigo said, "Mr. Wade, you don't understand... They're ruthless. Openly or covertly, they've taken out key members of our gang. Fear gripped our brothers and they've all recoiled..."

Charlie pressed on, "How many of yours have the Burning Angel taken?"

Vigo's reply was somber, "Eleven... Only... We're a foreign minority gang in New York, can't take on local titans like them. We have no wish for confrontation and they've taken full advantage. Lay a finger on one of theirs, and they'd exact retribution tenfold..."

Charlie persisted, "What about the ethnic minority gangs? Koreans, Vietnamese, Algerians, are they being crushed by the Burning Angel, too?"

Vigo evaded Charlie's unyielding gaze, hesitating. "I haven't heard of any clashes with them..."

Pointing at the five, Charlie turned to Vigo, "Then, have you ever wondered? Why do these men steer clear of Koreatown and not Chinatown?"

Vigo, reddening, hung his head in shame.

Silence pervaded, broken by Will Johnson, quivering. "The Koreans are armed to the teeth because... Since 92, we've had scarce confrontations with them..."

Charlie nodded, shifting focus. He probed Vigo, "Do you know why they haven't dared provoke Koreans since 92?"

Vigo admitted, shame weighing on his words, "I... I know... The Koreans have made a name for themselves in the U.S..."

Charlie's tone remained icy, "And they earned that name with blood. So, as head of the Chinese Gang, why haven't you mustered your troops? Don't forget, you lead nearly a hundred brothers, with the entire Chinatown community depending on your shield. They've paid for your protection. When you flee, what do they do?"

Vigo flushed, wishing he could bury himself.

Charlie pressed on, "Have you thought that if you retreat, the vendors in Chinatown are left defenseless? Soon, they'll be seen as easy prey. Today, the Burning Angel takes a piece, tomorrow the Frozen Demon may come for their share. In days, even the strays will come for a taste! Furthermore, what if you retreat? Will they spare you? If so, why's the boss of a Chinese gang, a towering figure, cowering in a hair salon?"

Charlie's barrage of questions nearly shattered Vigo's resolve. The past days had tormented him. His brothers fell one after another, and he himself came close to death's door. But as the boss, he never mustered the courage for a final stand. Fear of the Burning Angel's escalating brutality shattered the Chinese Gang's resolve.

In these past days, regret gnawed at him. Regret for not facing the Burning Angel head-on. Perhaps, with unwavering resolve, they might have relented, sparing his brothers.

The weight of his decisions, past and present, crushed Vigo. His eyes reddened, voice choked with emotion. "It's all my fault. I'm too weak. I thought if I appeased them, things would improve. Little did I know, retreat only led to a precipice and now, it's too late to turn back. My brothers won't return..."

Charlie met his gaze, firm and calm. "It's never too late to wake up."

With those words, Charlie handed Vigo a loaded pistol, with five bullets left. "If you're truly awake, think of how Carvin met his end. Then think about how you'll avenge him."

Chapter 5535

Charlie's words sent shivers down the spines of the five, Will Johnson included.

Who could have fathomed enduring Charlie's torment up until now? They'd hoped he'd release them, but instead, he'd tracked down the Chinese gang's boss, issuing a deadly command.

Terror gripped them. Will, bloodied, managed, "Mr. Wade... we did as you asked. Spare us..."

Charlie smirked, "Begging won't cleanse your hands of bloodshed. Did those you killed beg?"

Ignoring Will, Charlie thrust the gun into Casey Vigo's trembling hand, coldly saying, "What are you waiting for?"

Staring at the pistol, Casey's inner struggle was palpable.

Casey bore a profound grudge against the Burning Angels, yet the prospect of taking a life weighed heavily. He'd fought many times, but never killed.

Charlie's intention was crystal clear, five bullets, five enemies.

Casey fretted. Would vengeance bring a life on the run, chased by police and the Burning Angels? The Bloom Gang stood no chance, especially against the Italian power behind the Angels.

Yet, Charlie's words resonated deeply. Chinatown was crumbling under their leadership, devoured by the enemy. Fleeing meant annihilation for the Chinese Gang and Chinatown.

The dead, even the vendors, would bear the cost.

Casey grappled with a conflict he'd never known.

Charlie's disappointment was evident. "Fearful, hesitant, indecisive. The Chinese Gang and Chinatown deserve a better leader."

Casey, humiliated, couldn't commit.

In his quandary, Jordan approached Charlie, resolute. "Mr. Wade, give me the gun. I'll do it."

Hogan's brow furrowed, worried for Jordan's future. "Jordan, this act may exile you from the U.S."

Undeterred, Jordan clenched his fists, "Uncle Hogan, enduring their tyranny is worse! They deserve this fate! As an illegal immigrant, I'd rather leave this country after exacting vengeance for our Chinatown brethren."

His resolve solidified, "Before I go, I'll fight with all I have. Avenge our fallen comrades."

Hogan held his words, eyes on Charlie, awaiting guidance.

Charlie regarded Jordan gravely. "Jordan, you have two paths. Firstly, I'll arrange your swift exit from the U.S., as you suggested, never to return."

A beat, then Charlie's tone grew resolute, "Secondly, stay and form a new Chinese gang. Any insult merits punishment. Kill them. Protect your kin and compatriots."

Jordan stood stunned, then, with determination, nodded. "Mr. Wade, I choose the second."

Charlie cautioned, "No turning back. Are you certain?"

Jordan affirmed, "Mr. Wade, I'm sure."

He turned to Casey, resolute. "Casey Vigo means well, but he's unfit to lead. I've seen our gang falter and our people suffer. I won't stand for it. Leading, I'll make us formidable, a force none dare challenge in New York, or the U.S."

Hogan voiced his support for Jordan.

Charlie saw the resolve in Jordan's heart.

Turning to Casey, he asked, "And you, Mr. Vigo?"

Casey hesitated, coughed, "The gang's dwindling. Jordan alone may struggle to lead..."

Charlie cut through, "Self-doubt and slander only diminish you. Think, what if Jordan succeeds? You could thrive in Chinatown. Be a backbone of the gang. Consider which matters more."

Casey felt a deep sense of shame.

Chapter 5536

He held a low opinion of Jordan, let alone Charlie. When Casey Vigo caught wind of this, he felt a pang of shame.

Not only did he hold Jordan in low regard, but he also viewed Charlie as an untested newcomer.

He doubted Charlie possessed the mettle to help him, or Jordan for that matter, to wrest control from the Burning Angels.

Yet, he conceded one truth, Jordan, a greenhorn in the world's ways, possessed more gallantry than he did.

Despite harboring reservations about Charlie's capabilities, Casey Vigo harbored his own concerns. Rejecting Charlie would mean forever skulking in China, without a chance to turn the tide in this lifetime.

On the flip side, cooperation with Charlie might offer a glimmer of hope for a reversal of fortunes.

With this in mind, his gaze drifted to Hogan, a man he held in high esteem.

Though confined to this eatery, tending to roast goose for years, Hogan was Chinatown's sharpest mind. If even Hogan put faith in Charlie, it signaled Charlie's potential exceeded his initial estimate.

Resolutely, Casey Vigo addressed Charlie, "Mr. Wade, I'm prepared to join forces with you. Whatever you need, consider it done."

Charlie responded nonchalantly, "Tell me about this Burning Angel, and the puppeteers behind them. Where do these Italian connections originate?"

Casey Vigo swiftly explained, "The Burning Angel emerged in recent years, born from the amalgamation of several small New York gangs. This consolidation was chiefly orchestrated by the Italians. The Mafia and Italian influence runs deep in the U.S. Over time, they distanced themselves from the grimy work, instead, delegating it to the new gangs they backed. These new gangs are required to fork over at least 50% of their profits to the Italians." He continued, "Most Italian mafia in the U.S. are structured around families. The five major families were once renowned, but

presently, the Zano family stands as the mightiest beyond the quintet. The Burning Angel is fiercely loyal to the Zano clan."

Charlie mused, "So, they're endorsed by the Zano family, with over half their earnings funneled back to them. In essence, they specialize in sub-brands for the budget market, with the Zano family as the unequivocal majority shareholder. "

Casey Vigo nodded, adding, "Indeed, Mr. Wade. There are many such gangs under the Zano family's umbrella. The majority of Burning Angel members are African Americans, often with limited education. Their main operations involve land seizures and extortion. Additionally, there are a few outfits dabbling in slightly more lucrative contraband."

Hogan interjected, providing Charlie with further context. "The Zano family's current leadership is astute. They've compartmentalized their business, parceling out various facets to different organizations. These groups cooperate, cross-check, and keep each other in check."

Charlie arched an eyebrow, requesting, "Uncle Hogan, enlighten me further."

Hogan elaborated, "My perspective is based on external intel and my own insights from my time here. It may not be entirely precise, but it shouldn't be far off."

He continued, "The Zano family's primary revenue stream has always been narcotics trafficking and distribution. They have a crew devoted to smuggling and another to distribution. Then there are lower-tier gangs, like the Burning Angels, vying for territory nationwide."

Charlie nodded thoughtfully, remarking, "So, it's like dispatching robbers to hijack a vehicle first. After the looters clean out the valuables, they drive on, picking up additional passengers—dealers and distributors—to reach their final destination and maximize profits."

"Exactly," Hogan affirmed. "But it's not just drug trafficking. Alongside the monopoly on narcotics, they control casinos and vice operations within their territories. No one else is permitted to run underground casinos or engage in usury. They even bring in a stable of prostitutes to dominate the vice trade in their turf, effectively shutting out any competing operators or solo practitioners."

Charlie couldn't help but express his intrigue, musing, "This approach indeed maximizes resource utilization. Each segment serves as a check against the others. It's a far more stable operation than entrusting all these enterprises to one gang. The Zano family truly has their wits about them."

Hogan nodded sagely, stating, "The Zano family's most remarkable feat is their near-complete absence from direct involvement in criminal activity. They steer clear of illicit dealings altogether, a stark departure from the Italian Mafia of old. Back then, they'd proudly claim responsibility for their hits. The Zano family, on the other hand, has assassins dump bodies at their doorstep, promptly alerting the police, and voluntarily surrendering all surveillance footage. They seem more eager to close the case than the authorities."

Curious, Charlie inquired, "Uncle Hogan, are you recounting a real event or speaking metaphorically?"

"It's all too real," Hogan confirmed. "Just last year, the head of another Italian mafia family was riddled with bullets by four submachine gun-wielding assailants from two angles while waiting at a traffic light. One of the gunmen actually transported the boss's body to the Zano family estate. The third Zano immediately called the police. Not only did they proactively release the footage of the gunman disposing of the body to the public, but they also proclaimed the Zano family had been set up. They even offered a million-dollar reward for help in apprehending the killer. But in truth, that family was the Zano family's chief competitor. They were vying for the rights to distribute Colombian cocaine and become the exclusive agency for New York, if not the entire East Coast. Whoever secured those rights stood to rake in hundreds of millions in profits for at least a year. Everyone knew the Zano family was behind the hit, but nobody expected them to stage such a spectacle after the fact."

With a wry smile, Charlie remarked, "Since the Zano family enjoys theatrics, let's put on a show for them, shall we?"

Chapter 5537

As Charlie spoke, a plan crystallized in his mind. Having been in New York for this long, certain issues demanded a thorough resolution. With the Zano family's reach extending into Chinatown, encompassing Uncle Hogan's decades of hard work, there was no room for self-restraint.

He turned to Jordan, his tone resolute, "Jordan, change into those chef's clothes and join me."

Jordan's gaze darted to the five imposing figures of the Burning Angels. "Mr. Wade, what about them?" he inquired urgently.

"Dispatch them, one bullet at a time. Make every shot count," Charlie affirmed, a steely determination in his voice. The five stood, trembling with fear. They never fathomed that the once-bullied cook, who wouldn't even dare to breathe too loud, now harbored a resolute intent to end them all.

Witnessing Jordan's unwavering resolve, Charlie's smile curled slightly. "It's premature to end them now. Let Uncle Hogan and Casey Vigo keep a close watch. Once their affairs conclude, we'll revisit this," he advised. Uncle Hogan wasted no time, seeking guidance, "Master, what's your strategy? Is there something I should tend to?"

Charlie's grin persisted. "No, Uncle Hogan. When Jordan and I depart, lock up shop and await our return. Should any trouble arise, and someone with a keen eye stirs up strife, use these five as leverage and summon Micheala immediately."

In New York, there was nothing beyond Michaela's grasp. Not just some gangsters, even the Zano family paled before her. Yet, Charlie preferred not to invoke her aid. Her intervention would dampen the intrigue of the matter. Still, he recognized his limitations. Taking Jordan to meet the Zano family meant fortifying the roast goose shop against potential threats from other Burning Angel members.

Uncle Hogan grasped Charlie's intention promptly and nodded in approval. Charlie then turned to Casey Vigo, inquiring, "You've been in New York for years. What's your intel on the Zano clan? their location, headcount, and the leader's name?"

"Long Island houses the Zano family," Casey Vigo reported promptly. "They hold sway in the mafia, boasting a significant populace. I'd reckon at least ten members. The present patriarch is Antonio Zano."

"Good," Charlie acknowledged, turning to Uncle Hogan. "I'll take Jordan to the Zano Manor. If all goes well, I'll return within two hours."

"Please exercise caution, Young Master," Uncle Hogan implored.

The Zano family, hailing from Sicily, had lorded over New York for decades. Deeply entrenched in the mafia legacy, they held an enduring relic from World War II—a Thompson submachine gun, a cherished emblem passed down through generations.

It was said that the old Zano, who'd relocated from Sicily to New York, established their dominion in the American underworld, brandishing the Thompson submachine gun, often called the Chicago typewriter. Until recently, the gun adorned the main hall

of Zano Manor, at position C. Only with the new generation's decision to cleanse their reputation did it descend from the wall.

This didn't signify the Zano family's retreat, rather, they redistributed their illicit endeavors to seemingly unrelated entities. Behind the vest-clad gangs, they quietly propelled them to conquer New York and the entire East Coast, expanding their influence and criminal profits.

On the surface, under Antonio Zano's leadership, the current head, the Zano family endeavored to shed their old image and cozy up to the upper echelons. Antonio knew well that the more powerful the elite became, the more they needed entities like the Mafia. However, their hypocrisy barred overt cooperation.

This meant that any mafia family seeking their favor had to clean house first. Essentially, what the upper crust desired wasn't a hidden, shameful chamber pot but a lavatory that could stand openly, immaculate and odorless. The traditional Mafia was akin to the former—a dirty, pungent chamber pot. Antonio sought to guide the Zano family's evolution from chamber pots to pristine, openly displayed toilets.

At that moment, Antonio oversaw the preparations at Zano Manor. Today, a distinguished guest from afar would grace their halls. This guest's visit held paramount importance for the Zano family's future. If collaboration was struck, they would ascend to new heights.

In the grand hall of Zano Manor, a sprawling table, over ten meters long, was impeccably set. Flowers flown in from France adorned it, alongside the finest crystal and silverware. Forty-seven-year-old Antonio observed, with a mixture of anticipation and pride on his face.

His siblings, along with their progeny and spouses, all impeccably attired, lined up to extend their greetings. Antonio embodied the role of a patriarch, warmly welcoming each member. Once nearly all the immediate family had paid their respects, Antonio couldn't help but inquire about his 22-year-old daughter.

"William, where's Julia?" he queried. William replied promptly, "Brother, I haven't seen Julia all evening."

Antonio's dissatisfaction was palpable. "This child! She's been obedient her entire life, why go against me now? Doesn't she realize I've planned this for her? How perfect could life be?" William offered reassurance, "Brother, Julia is still young, lacking in social experience. Give her some time, not only will she understand your intentions, but she'll also be endlessly grateful."

Antonio adjusted his suit, shirt, and bowtie, then turned to William with a conceited smile. "How do I look? Do I resemble 'The Godfather'?"

William lauded, "Absolutely! Brother, across the United States, even in all of Europe and America, no one channels Marlon Brando more authentically than you!"

Antonio nodded, a self-assured smile gracing his features. "I, Antonio Zano, will undoubtedly become Sicily's most accomplished godfather in history!"

At that very moment, Antonio's youngest brother, Francisco, approached respectfully. "Brother, your esteemed guest's plane has landed at JFK Airport! Estimated arrival at the manor is in forty minutes!"

"Excellent!" Antonio couldn't contain his excitement. "Tonight hinges on whether we ascend to the next level!" With that, he carefully smoothed his hair, declaring, "You all keep watch here. I'm off to find Julia!"



Chapter 5538

As the clock ticked away, Charlie skillfully maneuvered the inconspicuous Chevrolet, his passenger, the jittery Jordan, by his side. They approached the bustling Zano Manor on its outskirts.

The manor was aglow, a beacon of activity. Black-suited mafia members flanked the entrance, poised as if awaiting a person of great import.

Charlie grinned at the sight. "Looks like we're right on time. The Zano clan must have something big going on."

Jordan, his nerves evident, turned to Charlie. "Mr. Wade, what's the plan? There must be hundreds out there. Are we really going in to stir trouble?"

Charlie's smile remained steady. "Remember our little performance? Just stick close and follow my lead. Watch my eyes, and you'll know what to do."

He added, "Of course, if you're genuinely concerned, I can handle this alone."

Without hesitation, Jordan replied, "Mr. Wade, I'm worried, but not scared. Just tell me what to do, and I'll do it."

"Good," Charlie nodded. "Let's wait for the right moment..."

Inside Zano Manor, Antonio paced outside his daughter Julia's door, hesitating before he finally knocked.

"It's me, Julia," he implored. Silence met his words.

Antonio persisted, "Julia, you must understand, our Sicilian tradition dictates that everything is for the family. My position isn't for personal glory or wealth; it's for the future of our Zano legacy. I hope you'll prioritize the family's interests, just as I have."

A voice from within snapped, "Your 'family first' is just your own belief. You can't impose it on me! If that's how it is, I'd rather leave this family!"

Antonio's voice raised in anger, "Watch your tongue! You're a girl with Sicily Island blood, and that heritage, even if you marry or change your name, you must always honor it. The family's mark is etched in every Sicily Islander's heart, in their bones and souls!"

"To hell with your family's mark!" the girl retorted. "From now on, I'll bear my mother's name! I am no longer Julia Zano! I'm Julia Zano Chiricella! I've long grown tired of the Zano name!"

Antonio's fists pounded the door. He shouted fiercely, "Julia, if you choose to defy me, then by morning, you'll be on a plane to Sicily, tending to your cousin's farm, shearing sheep for the rest of your days!"

A tense pause ensued.

Antonio's temper hadn't abated. Seeing his daughter's silence, he pressed on with a rising intensity, "Julia, don't think this will pass without consequence! I'll give you three seconds. If you're resolved to confront me, I'll arrange your flight immediately!"

His voice grew even louder, "One! Two!"

In the room, a nervous voice pled, "Fine, fine! I'll do as you say! I'll do as you say!"

Antonio, somewhat calmer, warned, "That's more like it. Remember, a Sicilian girl's duty is to her family."

The girl sighed in resignation. "Alright, you win. Now please, leave. I need some time to prepare."

Antonio's tone grew colder. "You have ten minutes. I'll be waiting here."

With a shrug, the girl conceded, "As you wish. If you're determined to wait, no one can stop you."

Antonio smirked, adding a final caution, "Julia, don't think of escaping through the window. I've stationed someone outside. If you try, they'll catch you and you'll be headed straight to the airport."

The girl's eyes flashed with fury. "You wretch!"

But Antonio, unfazed by his daughter's outburst, continued, a hint of a smile playing on his lips. "Remember, Julia, a Sicilian girl dedicates her life to her family. If you betray us, you bring disgrace upon us all. I'd rather see you in Sicily, tending to sheep for the rest of your days, a stain on the family name."

"Antonio Zano! I despise you!"

"You may despise me, Julia, but remember..."

Before Antonio could finish, the girl cut in, her voice resolute, "A Sicilian girl dedicates her life to her family! I know, please, no more!"

A brief smile touched Antonio's lips. "That's what I wanted to hear."

Ten minutes later, the door creaked open, revealing a tall, stunning figure. Julia Zano, with her brown hair, green eyes, and elegant white gown, emerged.

Antonio couldn't help but marvel, "Julia, you're undoubtedly the most beautiful girl in all of Sicily!"

With a look of disdain, Julia countered, "I'm not from Sicily. I was born in New York, and I've barely spent half a year of my life there. I want nothing to do with that place!"

Antonio sighed, shaking his head. "Your rebellious phase will last longer than I thought. It doesn't matter, as long as you heed my guidance. No need for arguments."

In tow, Julia followed Antonio into the manor's grand hall, her eyes scanning the surroundings.

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Moments ticked by. Outside the manor, Jordan couldn't contain his curiosity. "Mr. Wade, what are we waiting for?"

Charlie's eyes gleamed with anticipation. "We're waiting for the right moment."

Surprised, Jordan questioned, "What? The right moment?"

Standing by, Charlie's eyes locked onto a black car exiting the manor's gates. He pointed, excitement in his voice, "That's our moment!"

With that, he flicked on the headlights, flooring the accelerator as the car surged forward.

Inside the black car, Julia, her evening gown pristine white, sped away with determination. She'd feigned a minor wardrobe malfunction to escape the main hall, finding this unguarded car.

Unaware of the role she was about to play, Julia struggled to brake or swerve as the car hurtled towards the manor's entrance. The inevitable collision sent the Chevrolet spinning.

As the mafia members rushed to the scene, they recognized the car and pulled the driver, Julia, from the wreckage.

Startled exclamations filled the air. "Miss?! How did this happen?"

Julia pushed them away, collapsing on the ground, overwhelmed.

Her plan to escape seemed foiled. If her father got wind of this, her chances of fleeing would dwindle further. Her escape routes were closing.

Just then, the Chevrolet's door swung open, revealing a man of Asian descent, indignation in his eyes. "Hey, do you even know how to drive? You caused this mess. Couldn't you hit the brakes?"

Forced to respond, Julia murmured, "I'm sorry, my car seems to have malfunctioned. I couldn't stop it..."

"Malfunction?" Charlie retorted assertively. "This is a Maybach! I don't buy that it couldn't stop. Admit it if you lack the skills, no shame in it."

Julia, crestfallen, nodded. "You're right... I'll compensate you for the damages."

Charlie leaned in, resolute. "This car supports my family. With this damage, I won't survive for long. You owe me at least ten days of work, a hundred grand. I'm sure a place like this isn't short on cash. Pay up, I've got things to do!"

The Sicilian mafia, in their suits and ties, stood in disbelief. Is this guy deaf? He's really trying to extort the boss's daughter right outside the family's manor? For a hundred grand, he could buy a much better car!

One of them roared, "You bastard! Blackmailing our lady? Have you lost your mind?"

Chapter 5539

"Blackmail?" Charlie quickly said as the accusation hung in the air. He retorted, "I was just passing by, not looking for trouble. Then out of nowhere, this girl plows into my car. Demanding compensation is only fair. Labeling it extortion is unjust. Don't think you can intimidate me just because you have numbers on your side!"

The mobster swiftly drew a pistol from his waist, aiming it at Charlie's head. His voice was cold and unwavering, "Leave now! One more word and I'll pull the trigger!"

"Fool!" Charlie spat, his anger boiling over. "You really think you can shoot me out here?"

In the nick of time, Jordan swung open the passenger door of the Chevrolet, brandishing his phone. He shouted, "Mr. Wade, I've called the police!"

"Good!" Charlie nodded, a smirk playing on his lips. He fixed a steely gaze on the mobster and challenged, "You planning to shoot me? Well, come on, take your shot!"

He gestured at his own forehead, taunting, "If you've got the guts, do it!"

Julia, wide-eyed and horrified, shouted, "Robert! Lower that gun!"

To Julia, even though the sum the stranger demanded was exorbitant, she recognized her culpability in the accident. It was only right to offer compensation. It was completely unjust for her father's henchman to wield a firearm.

Seeing Charlie's unyielding stance, the mobster found himself at a loss.

He didn't actually want to pull the trigger.

He just wanted to assert his mafia affiliation, to make this audacious oriental man grasp the gravity of the situation and leave.

But who would have anticipated this level of defiance?

Usually, he wouldn't hesitate to fire.

Yet today was different.

For starters, they were at the entrance of the Zano family's estate.

A shooting here would undoubtedly draw massive attention.

Furthermore, the police had been called, they would be here soon to address the accident. If someone died, there'd be no covering it up. Not only would he be apprehended, but the Zano family would suffer repercussions.

And then there was the young miss, bearing witness. How could he kill someone in front of her?

At this juncture, another figure approached Robert, whispering urgently, "The VIP is arriving! Don't stir up trouble. The boss won't be pleased if you neglect the VIP!"

Robert shuddered at the reminder, fretting. "What do we do now? He's demanding a hundred thousand dollars and I can't consent to it."

He stole a glance at Julia, whispering, "The young miss is still here. What's our move?"

The man hissed, "Are you daft? Can't you see the young miss is desperate to get away? Handle it properly and the boss will see this accident as fortuitous. If not for this, she'd have driven off and wouldn't tonight's banquet be jeopardized?"

Robert snapped back to reality, a grin of realization dawning on him. "Then I'll notify the boss right away!"

With that, Robert produced a walkie-talkie and relayed, "Tell the boss the young miss had an accident at the gate. He needs to come over."

Hearing this, Julia, panic-stricken, implored Charlie, "Sir, you want a hundred thousand dollars, right? Drive me somewhere and I'll get you the money!"

Charlie had overheard the exchange between Robert and the whispering figure. It dawned on him that the girl standing before him was none other than the Zano family's boss's daughter.

Talk about a stroke of luck. He couldn't let this opportunity slip away.

Leering, he stated firmly, "No, I want cash and I'm staying put. No money, no movement, even if the police arrive!"

Julia, teary-eyed and desperate, begged, "Sir, please, take me away from here. I'll give you two hundred thousand!"

Charlie remained resolute. "Cash, now."

Tears welled in Julia's eyes, her gaze darting back to the manor. But Charlie offered no quarter.

In the midst of their standoff, a portly figure in a suit barreled towards them, trailed by a retinue. Spotting him, Julia's hopes sank. The lead figure was none other than her father, Antonio.

Antonio was a storm of fury and anxiety. He never imagined his daughter, Julia, would have a fender-bender at the manor gate. It was especially vexing as she had just torn her dress. He had intended to fetch a needle and thread to mend it when he received word of the accident.

Upon spotting her father, Julia started to flee, but Charlie caught her. He warned her gravely, "Miss, if you run now, it's a hit and run."

Julia, her frustration mounting, stomped her foot. Just moments ago, she was feeling guilty towards Charlie. Now, she wanted nothing more than to slap him.

Left with no alternative, she pointed at her approaching father and pleaded, "That's my father. He'll give you the money. Please, let me go."

"No can do," Charlie asserted. "You hit me, you owe me. One hundred thousand, not a cent less."

Julia's fury overflowed into tears. Her father, Antonio, had reached them, his gaze narrowing in anger. "Julia! Explain yourself!"

Julia, risking everything, cried out, "Because I want out! I want no part in this home! None of you can stop me!"

"Outrageous!" Antonio thundered. "Leave this house and you'll be tending sheep in Sicily!"

"I won't go!" Julia retorted fiercely. "I'm cutting ties with you. From now on, I'll fend for myself and your fate is no concern of mine!"

"How dare you!" Antonio seethed. "As a Zano, you're a Zano for life!"

With that, he motioned to his entourage, commanding, "Take the young lady back!"

Julia fought to break free, but she was outnumbered and overpowered.

Seeing her about to be hauled away, Charlie interjected angrily, "You're all in cahoots, aren't you? Where's my money? She hasn't paid up, she's going nowhere!"

Antonio frowned, addressing Charlie with a chilling tone, "And who are you?"

Charlie met Antonio's gaze evenly, speaking neither obsequiously nor defiantly. "Your daughter hit me. You expect her to leave without settling the score? That's not fair play."

Antonio's countenance darkened as he appraised Charlie and the damaged cars. After a moment of contemplation, he produced his wallet, took out a thousand dollars and handed it over, his tone steady. "Take this as a gesture for my daughter. Leave and consider the matter settled."

Charlie sneered, unimpressed. "You think a thousand bucks will cut it? Are you penny-pinching or just out of touch?"

Antonio hadn't anticipated such brazenness. His expression turned glacial. He locked eyes with Charlie and demanded, "What's your price?"

Charlie met the challenge head-on, his voice resonating, "Listen up. One hundred thousand dollars, no less."

Chapter 5540

Antonio's lips twitched involuntarily at Charlie's audacious proposition. He clenched his jaw, masking his disbelief with a smile. "Alright, you've certainly got some nerve trying to shake down the Mafia!"

Intrigued, Charlie quizzed, "Are you really with the Mafia?"

Antonio sneered, "What? You just witnessed it."

With a flourish, he returned the thousand dollars to his wallet, casting a haughty glance at Charlie. "Now that you know who I am, you can leave."

Disdain dripped from Charlie's voice. "I haven't even taken your money yet and you're already showing me the door? Are you for real?"

Antonio ground his teeth. "Young man, if you squander this chance I'm giving you, don't blame me!"

Turning to his henchmen, he commanded, "Put him in his place and then drive him out of here, far away. Hurry, our esteemed guest will arrive soon."

Several of his men swiftly geared up and approached Charlie.

Just then, sirens wailed and a fleet of police cars raced to the scene.

Once parked, over a dozen officers emerged from the vehicles. One of them approached Antonio, inquiring, "Antonio, we received a call about Mafia-related activity, crashes and fatalities. Can you fill us in on what happened?"

Antonio gave a slight smile, taken aback, then instinctively glanced at Charlie.

Seizing the opportunity, Charlie wore a wicked grin as he addressed the police, "Officer, one of their men ran me down. And not only did he evade responsibility, he even brandished a firearm at me."

He gestured towards the Mafia member who had just threatened him. "It's him! He's got a gun!"

Several officers immediately aimed their weapons at the man, one of them bellowing, "Hands on your head, lie down on the ground, now!"

He was at a loss, aware that getting shot by American police was about as common as chewing gum. In this situation, failing to cooperate could likely result in him being shot on the spot.

However, the way American police enforced cooperation was a blow to one's dignity. They insisted on hands on heads, arms spread, legs apart, lying flat on the ground, spelling out submission.

For the average person, it was no big deal, but for gang members concerned with pride, it was akin to kneeling in the street. Hence, many prideful gang members met their end in the U.S. every year.

The police ordered him to comply, but he resisted, some even daring to put their hands in their pockets provocatively, taunting, "Can't I get my phone?"

When American police encountered such a brash individual, they didn't allow room for remorse. Regardless of how many officers were on their side, they would empty their magazines in record time, then return to file reports claiming they suspected he was reaching for a gun in his pocket, resuming duty the next day.

Antonio, too, found the idea of lying prone here disgraceful. He addressed the officer, "Officer, this was just a run-of-the-mill traffic incident. My daughter accidentally hit this man while driving. We're in the midst of discussing compensation for the damage to his car."

The officer, not wanting to escalate matters further with Antonio, turned to Charlie and asked, "Sir, is this how it happened?"

Charlie shook his head firmly. "Absolutely not. He hit me. And not only did he refuse to pay, he threatened to kill me."

Seizing the opportunity, Charlie channeled his mother-in-law Elaine's style, calmly seating himself on the curb. "I don't mind. I'll stay here and watch how he deals with me. And just so you know, they're all armed. If you don't handle this properly, I'll upload all of this online for the world to see how the New York police cover for the Mafia."

Jordan, not far off, raised his phone. "I'm live-streaming this on the video site! I've also told my friends to record and share it across multiple platforms!"

Hearing this, the officer coughed awkwardly and told Antonio, "You've seen what's transpired. Firstly, resolve this issue. Secondly, anyone who brandished a gun will need to accompany me for further questioning."

Antonio seethed. He hadn't fathomed being manipulated and extorted on his own doorstep. And the worst part? He didn't have a solution.

At that moment, his trusted aide approached and murmured, "Boss, the distinguished guest is almost here."

Antonio felt a surge of anxiety. He couldn't bear the thought of squabbling at the door with guests on the way. But more pressing was his daughter's accident and his reluctance to face the shame of compensation.

In a desperate move, he gave a reluctant nod, pulling the man over, extracting his pistol from his waist and dropping it to the ground. He then pushed him towards the police. "Take him away."

Turning back to Charlie, he said, "You want one hundred thousand dollars, correct? Wait here. I'll get it for you immediately."

The police, astounded, turned their gaze to Charlie. "You asked for a hundred thousand dollars?"

"Indeed," Charlie replied matter-of-fact. "I have a high wage for lost work hours, so a hundred grand is actually a steal for him."

The officer swallowed hard. "You don't know who he is, do you?"

Charlie scoffed. "Do I need to?"

The officer regarded Charlie sympathetically. "Listen, this man's name is Antonio Zano. While we're here, he won't harm you, but once we're gone, you'll have to think about it. I'd advise against pushing too hard. Your car isn't that expensive and repairs will take some time. Ten grand should cover it."

Charlie sneered. "I've never heard of Antonio Zano. Plus, I don't keep track of my daily earnings. Asking him for a hundred grand is a courtesy, really. Even with a discount, what's he got to complain about?"

Antonio, baffled, hadn't expected such audacity. So, he turned to Charlie. "Since the officer's here, let's not haggle. Give me the original price."

Charlie, unflinching, replied calmly, "The original price is at least a hundred grand!"

Antonio nodded, teeth clenched. "You're quite the shrewd one. Let's do this, you want a hundred grand in cash. I may not have it now, but leave me your contact and address. Once I have the hundred grand, I'll send it your way."

Charlie sneered, "You find it embarrassing to part with a hundred grand while living in this mansion?"

The officer felt his head spinning. Thank goodness he couldn't understand Chinese, or he'd be at a loss for words.

Antonio was incensed. It was like a CEO of a Fortune 500 company arguing with a parking lot attendant. You could try every trick in the book, but he wouldn't let you in!

Suppressing his anger, he turned to Charlie. "Alright, tell me your solution and I'll hear you out."

Charlie nodded, gesturing toward the manor. "I'll wait at your place. Once you've gathered the hundred grand, I'll take it and be on my way. Case closed."

Surprised, Antonio questioned, "You mean, you want to come in and wait?"

"Exactly," Charlie affirmed matter-of-factly. "Of course I'll wait at your place. Otherwise, what if you shut the door and dodge me?"

Antonio burst into laughter. "Alright, if you put it that way, please come in and make yourself comfortable. I'll arrange for the money right away!"

Chapter 5541

Antonio viewed a character like Charlie, who seemed to prioritize money over his own life, as a walking invitation to self-destruction. Despite openly disclosing his ties to the mafia, he had the audacity to request money from Antonio. Wasn't this akin to bargaining for cash at the cost of his existence?

And how could he even consider handing him the money? You see, despite his net worth exceeding a staggering hundred million dollars, every single penny in there was hard-earned. He'd toiled and strained to wring it from the very pockets of the less fortunate. For any outsider to try and filch even a dime would be, figuratively speaking, akin to signing their own death sentence.

Initially, he was quite concerned that Charlie might have already tipped off the cops, with law enforcement just moments away. Although he'd committed countless misdeeds in his past, He'd recently started mending my reputation. How could he possibly harm this kid in front of the police? Yet, little did he know that this boy would willingly accompany him inside the house, all in the pursuit of cold, hard cash. It felt like he was inviting a wolf into a tiger's den.

Once he crossed the threshold, safe from prying police eyes, he could have his henchmen make quick work of him, then orchestrate a break-in scenario. When the authorities arrived, they'd simply find a burglar who had met a fatal end at the hands of his men. And with a savvy attorney at his side, the likelihood of jail time would be minimal. Even if the legal defense faltered and someone went behind bars, it would be his lesser brother, disassociated from him.

Hence, the very moment Charlie expressed his desire to accompany him inside, he'd already resolved that he wouldn't leave alive.

Simultaneously, the police officers sensed the impending disaster once Charlie entered the premises. One of them kindly suggested, "Sir, if you have any issues, it might be better to resolve them outside. Going in could complicate matters."

With added conviction, he remarked, "Furthermore, demanding a hundred grand for this matter seems rather excessive. I'd recommend considering the initial proposal of ten thousand dollars."

Charlie comprehended the officers underlying intentions but was determined to follow through with his morbid charade for Antonio. He responded to the police, "I'm sorry, but I won't accept ten thousand dollars. I insist on a hundred grand."

Turning to Antonio, he declared, "Let's go in. I'll wait for you to collect the money."

The police officer had no choice but to inquire once more, "Sir, if there are no objections and an agreement has been reached, we'll take our leave. Any further questions?"

Charlie offered a slight smile and replied, "No. Thank you, comrade police."

The American police officers exchanged perplexed glances upon hearing the term "comrade." Then, holstering their firearms, they returned to their vehicles and departed.

As soon as the police left, a transformation swept over Antonio's demeanor. His feigned smile vanished, replaced by a chilling countenance laden with murderous intent. He pointed contemptuously at Charlie, then at Jordan and ordered his underlings, "Take these esteemed guests to the wine cellar. After I've hosted them, I'll have a personal conversation with them."

When Antonio used the word "Guest," Charlie even heard the grinding of his teeth. However, Charlie remained unfazed and with a hint of disapproval, quipped, "Is ushering people to a wine cellar the Italian mafia's idea of hospitality?"

"Please?" Antonio's lips curled coldly. "Today, I'll show you the true meaning of Sicilian hospitality!"

Julia, in Antonio's grip, urgently whispered to Charlie, "He'll kill you. Please, let's not stay here!"

Charlie grinned and replied, "I've never been to Sicily. Today, I have the chance to experience 'Sicilian hospitality' in New York. It'd be a shame to miss it."

As he approached the manor, Charlie couldn't resist commenting, "Honestly, your estate isn't all that impressive. Though it's near Long Island, it's more like the gateway to Long Island. The true elites of New York are those who reside in Long Island. What business do you have living here? Are you guarding the entrance for the wealthy on Long Island? Oh, right, I nearly forgot your actual occupation, the underworld. You're nothing more than a reaper for the poor, a guard dog for the rich and a lackey for the powerful. Living on the fringe of Long Island, where the rich and powerful thrive, you play both protector and servant. It's quite the balancing act."

"Damn it!" Antonio erupted, his rage uncontrollable. He seized Charlie's collar, threatening, "You truly don't understand the word 'death.' When you set foot in my territory today, you won't leave alive. Remember your arrogance now, for you'll soon discover how you can beg for mercy!"

Charlie remained unperturbed, offering no resistance or irritation as Antonio gripped his collar. He simply met Antonio's gaze with a smile and remarked, "I forgot to mention, while you can grasp my collar, there's a price to pay, the hand that touches will have to part ways with your arm. Your daughter may be lovely, but this is non-negotiable."

As Charlie goaded Antonio, the latter lost control of his temper. His fist rose, poised to strike Charlie in the face.

In that tense moment, a whistle pierced the air behind Antonio. He turned to find a convoy of four Cadillacs and a Rolls-Royce Phantom advancing around the corner. His countenance abruptly brightened, the fury forgotten. He pushed Charlie aside and hurried to the Rolls-Royce Phantom. There, he respectfully opened the rear door.

Seated inside was a middle-aged man. Antonio, who had been domineering moments ago, now bowed like a humble servant. He welcomed the man, saying, "Dear Mr. Aman Ramovich, welcome to New York!"

Chapter 5542

In the present moment, Aman Ramovich, a man well into his fifties, exuded an air of timeless refinement. Dressed immaculately in a high-end suit, sporting a flawlessly

groomed hairstyle, and maintaining a physique that defied middle-aged stereotypes, he easily passed for a man in his forties.

The sight of Aman Ramovich had an almost magical effect on Antonio. The very same mafia figure who had recently vowed to eliminate Charlie was now reduced to a humble admirer, resembling nothing less than a young child eagerly anticipating a treat from his grandfather.

Aman Ramovich, his demeanor cool and detached, locked eyes with Antonio and delivered his words with a hint of condescension, "Antonio, you're still here, waiting to welcome me at this late hour. I appreciate your dedication." Antonio was instantly flattered.

Quickly responding, he stammered, "Sir, your politeness knows no bounds! It's an honor, not just for me, Antonio, but for the entire Zano family, to serve you." He hastened to add, "Mr. Ramovich, I've made arrangements for a sumptuous dinner. Please, join us in the manor banquet hall."

Aman Ramovich waved away the offer with a calm demeanor. "Dinner is of no concern, I've already eaten on the plane. However, I do apologize for the inconvenience, and I thank Miss Julia for her patience."

Antonio, astute as ever, understood the implied message in Aman Ramovich's words.

In fact, the primary purpose behind inviting Aman Ramovich to his New York residence was to unite his twenty-something daughter, Julia, in matrimony with Aman Ramovich. Aman Ramovich had learned a harsh lesson from his failed attempt to marry Helena from Norway in the past.

His unique background had left him marginalized throughout Western Europe, and even his cherished football club had been wrested away by the British in the name of justice. In such circumstances, marrying into a European royal family had become an almost impossible dream.

Moreover, local conflicts in Eastern Europe had made his situation in Western Europe even more precarious. He was no longer the successful businessman of yesteryears, but rather a pariah subjected to relentless criticism and ridicule in the media.

This prolonged neglect had sapped Aman Ramovich's enthusiasm. Thus, he made the bold decision to abandon Western Europe and seek refuge in the United States, a land where he could rebuild his life.

He was acutely aware of the hostile environment he faced in Western society. Even in industries where investments were welcomed, his involvement was met with disdain. It was as if he stood at the threshold, barred from entry.

Therefore, he turned his sights to the United States, a land of opportunities where he could both advance and retreat. If circumstances improved in Eastern Europe, he could return as a triumphant businessman. If not, he had his billions to secure a comfortable retirement in the United States.

With these plans in mind, he began seeking alliances in the United States. However, among those with influence, only the Mafia, represented by Antonio, showed interest in him.

Antonio stood out because of his beautiful daughter, Julia. Although Aman Ramovich had experienced multiple failed marriages and previously looked down upon the idea of marrying into a Mafia family, his current circumstances were unique. He was no longer the celebrated businessman, but rather a tarnished figure. Marrying into the Mafia no longer seemed beneath him.

Julia, a young and stunning Italian girl towering at 178 centimeters, was a captivating beauty. Her youth was a magnetic draw for Aman Ramovich. What intrigued him further was the investigation he conducted, revealing that Julia, despite her Mafia ties, maintained a pristine and modest reputation. Rumors suggested she had never even had a boyfriend, a fact that piqued Aman Ramovich's interest.

For him, accustomed to relationships with younger partners, Julia's untouched allure was a rare find, akin to tender, unspoiled grass amidst a world of seasoned pastures.

Furthermore, Julia's lineage was not to be underestimated. Antonio's family wielded considerable influence in New York's underground realm. Marrying into this powerful clan promised safety and protection, effectively silencing any media outlets that dared to mock or criticize Aman Ramovich. After all, he would be the Mafia's son-in-law, and such audacity might be met with a bullet in the streets.

This was why Aman Ramovich chose Antonio's home as his first stop in the United States. His plan was to secure an engagement and wedding date with Julia, purchase a mansion on Long Island, and settle into a peaceful life.

Antonio's motives were straightforward. Unlike the Mafia's dominance in Mexico or Colombia, the underworld in the United States had its limits. Washington tolerated their presence as long as they didn't become too powerful.

It was akin to raising a Shiba Inu in Washington. The dog, from birth, understood the constraints on its growth. If it grew into an Akita, Washington would take drastic

measures to cut it down to Shiba Inu size. Aman Ramovich, in his situation, needed help to find new opportunities.

For Aman Ramovich, once wealthy and now shunned by European and American society, Antonio's offer seemed like the most appealing path forward.

Chapter 5543

Antonio, though younger than Aman Ramovich, harbored an earnest and unwavering desire to earn his approval as a son-in-law.

In his bid to impress the ideal candidate, he leaned in, speaking in a hushed, attentive tone. "Mr. Aman Ramovich, rest assured, Julia holds you in high regard and has been eagerly awaiting your arrival. She may seem a bit reserved due to her youth and shyness. If there are any lapses in etiquette later, please don't take it to heart, Mr. Ramovich."

Aman Ramovich nodded, a smile playing at his lips. "Being over thirty years her senior, I find myself naturally more forgiving and understanding."

Antonio's face lit up with delight. "Excellent! Excellent! Mr. Ramovich, please, let's continue our conversation within the estate."

With a nod of agreement, Aman Ramovich followed Antonio through the manor's gates, casting an appraising eye over the Zano family property. "Antonio, your Zano estate seems a touch small. Is it not within the Long Island expanse?"

Antonio, a touch sheepish, responded, "Mr. Ramovich, I'm currently in the process of procuring a new property, though I'm still in the search phase. The prime locations on Long Island command exorbitant prices, tens, even hundreds of millions. Our family has had substantial expenditures recently, so summoning such funds all at once is quite the feat."

Aman Ramovich nodded thoughtfully. "Residing in Long Island's heart isn't particularly costly. Just days ago, I tasked my staff with securing a manor. It's nestled in the very best part of Long Island, adjacent to the renowned Feijia Manor. It's for my upcoming nuptials. Should you ever fancy it, you're welcome to stay."

Antonio beamed. "Thank you, Mr. Ramovich!"

Meanwhile, Charlie, having entered ahead of them, observed Aman Ramovich from a distance. He couldn't help but chuckle softly. Casting a glance at Julia, he shook his head, privately musing on how Aman Ramovich's stature far outshone her.

However, he couldn't help but think that Aman Ramovich was having a run of bad luck, aiming for a wife twice and crossing paths with him both times.

Seeing Charlie unflinching, Julia, irate, admonished, "Don't you have any fear? If my father takes offense, he might have dealt with you!"

Charlie's smile persisted. "Don't fret, your father lacks the power for such deeds. But I must admit, I'm quite tempted to give him a piece of my mind today."

Frowning, Julia inquired, "Who are you? Are you affiliated with the Chinese Gang?"

Charlie shook his head. "I hail from China, but not the Chinese Gang."

Julia cautioned, "Don't be under any illusions. Here, the moment my father utters a command, his men will seize you. He can have you shot, and he'll bear no consequences. I'm not exaggerating. There's a monthly toll in his hands. If you value your life, should things come to blows, kneel and beg for mercy, implore his forgiveness. If that time comes, I'll do my utmost to intercede on your behalf. Perhaps he'll spare you."

Charlie grinned. "You're taking on too much, aren't you? What about yourself? Do you have time to put in a good word for me?"

Pointing towards Antonio and Aman Ramovich as they approached, he exclaimed, "It appears that your father has invited Aman Ramovich, turning this into quite the intriguing game indeed. Was this your idea?"

Julia gaped at Charlie, astonishment etched across her features. "How did you know?"

Charlie replied composedly, "I've heard a bit about Aman Ramovich. Seems he's been searching for a wife everywhere. Is it possible your father has plans to wed you to him?"

Julia's composure faltered, her response hesitant. "These are matters you needn't concern yourself with. Consider how you'll leave this place alive today."

Charlie assured, "Fear not, in half an hour, your father will be begging for my leave."

Julia, at a loss for words, was left dumbfounded. Compassionate though she was, being raised in the Zano family, she'd witnessed many a life-and-death struggle. She no longer had the patience for persuasive words and switched to a colder tone. "I've said what needed to be said. If you're set on your course, you'll have to seek your own solace."

As Julia concluded, Antonio and Aman Ramovich drew nearer. Antonio, preoccupied with his daughter, was oblivious to Charlie. Aman Ramovich, too, was entranced by Julia, clearly pleased with what he saw.

Antonio approached Julia, urging, "Julia, greet Mr. Ramovich!"

Julia, wearing an inscrutable expression, stated, "I'm not acquainted with Mr. Ramovich and I'd like to leave. Please don't detain me."

Antonio's countenance darkened abruptly. He shot Julia a fierce glare, then pivoted to Aman Ramovich. "I apologize, Mr. Ramovich. Julia's a bit... unconventional. Given her unfamiliarity with you, there might be some resistance. I hope you'll overlook it."

Aman Ramovich, with a genial smile, addressed Julia's youthful charm. "No need for concern. I appreciate Miss Julia's candid nature."

Antonio breathed a sigh of relief and swiftly implored Julia, "See, Miss Julia? Mr. Ramovich is quite understanding. Extend your gratitude."

Julia frowned, inquiring, "Why should I thank him?"

Antonio seethed, his voice sharp. "Julia! Show some decorum in Mr. Ramovich's presence. Remember who you are, a Sicilian girl!"

Julia turned her head defiantly, but then, spotting Charlie, her resolve wavered. She turned to Antonio. "You want me to be more courteous and refined, correct?"

"Exactly!" Antonio affirmed solemnly. "Always remember, you are the face of the Zano family!"

"Very well!" Julia nodded with a determined look, her finger extending to point at Charlie, who stood not far away. She declared, "Release him and let's stop causing him any more trouble. I'll do my utmost to maintain my composure."

Antonio followed the direction of Julia's outstretched arm until his eyes landed on Charlie's beaming face.

The instant he caught sight of Charlie, a surge of anger coursed through him, and he spoke in a stern tone, "Didn't I instruct you to apprehend him and remove him permanently? Why is he still here?"

Just as he said this, Aman Ramovich couldn't help but shift his gaze towards Charlie as well. When he saw Charlie's mischievous grin, his pupils contracted instantly, and his expression shifted to one of extreme fear.

He instinctively inquired, "Mr. Wade... what brings you here?"

Charlie smiled and replied, "It's been a while, Mr. Ramovich."

With those words, Antonio was left utterly flabbergasted, his eyes locked in disbelief. He cautiously turned to Aman Ramovich and asked, "Mr. Aman Ramovich, do you... recognize this individual?"

Chapter 5544

In a heartbeat, Aman Ramovich found himself facing a surreal encounter that sent shivers down his spine. The last thing he ever expected was to come face to face with the infamous and sinister figure, Charlie Wade, right here in New York, inside the home of a mafia kingpin.

Ever since Charlie had single-handedly foiled Aman Ramovich's grand scheme to win the heart of Princess Helena, he had become a haunting specter in Aman's life. It wasn't just about his thwarted royal marriage plans, Charlie had even dared to humiliate Aman personally, repeatedly, with open slaps to the face.

Though Aman Ramovich had clawed his way from humble beginnings to become an oligarch who answered to no one, Charlie was the one exception, the only man who had ever asserted dominance over him. In normal circumstances, Aman would've plotted his revenge meticulously, but this time, he hesitated. Why? Because Charlie was no ordinary foe he had the formidable might of the Wade family behind him, wealthier and more influential than Aman himself. However, the true reason for Aman's pause wasn't just the Wade family's riches, it was the enigmatic force known as the Dragon Temple, lurking in the shadows.

Unbeknownst to Aman Ramovich, the Dragon Temple had pledged allegiance to Charlie, a fact that he remained blissfully ignorant of. He believed that the Wade

family had simply handed over half their wealth to appease and gain the Temple's favor.

Aman's disdain for the Wade family was akin to that of a landowner confronted by a turncoat, needing to extend politeness despite his desire for treason and glory. Although Aman Ramovich had a sense of superiority, he couldn't underestimate the power behind the Wade family.

Little did he know, Charlie was no ordinary visitor to New York.

On this day, as he disembarked from his plane and before he could even settle at Antonio's residence, he stumbled upon Charlie once again. The resurgence of old humiliations fueled his anger and left him clenching his fists, teeth gritted in frustration.

Antonio, observing Aman's delayed reaction, prodded, "Mr. Aman Ramovich, do you... recognize this young man?"

Charlie watched with a curious glint in his eye, waiting for Aman's response.

Aman Ramovich paused, deliberating on two pivotal matters. First, was Charlie here intentionally or by sheer chance? Second, Charlie appeared to have just one companion and Antonio had clearly instructed his younger brother to dispose of him. Could Aman use Antonio's assistance to finally exact his revenge? He knew that men like Antonio wouldn't hesitate to kill if there were no consequences. Antonio's unfamiliarity with Charlie's true identity was evident.

Deliberately pointing at Charlie, Aman questioned Antonio, "Do you know him?"

Antonio shook his head, "No, there was a minor altercation earlier, but nothing serious. If you do know him, Mr. Ramovich, we can let bygones be bygones. If you have any issues, I'll apologize on your behalf, sir."

Antonio was also troubled, fearing that Aman Ramovich and Charlie might be connected. Convicting Aman would lead to undesirable consequences for him, so he smartly expressed willingness to mend the situation. Aman Ramovich seized on the opening.

Listening to Antonio's response, Aman Ramovich saw an opportunity. "Antonio, I've heard that Sicilians are known for their courage and directness. This is a chance to see for myself. I had intended to discuss some economic collaboration with you, but it's all in your capable hands. If you decide that I should witness something, be it a confrontation or something else, I'll oblige. I'm here to learn."

Antonio, no stranger to the art of manipulation, realized Aman's hidden agenda. "This Russian fellow is trying to be sly. His real intention is for me to do his dirty work. He probably believes Sicilian men aren't afraid to get their hands dirty as they age. Well, I'll indulge him today. Since I don't know this young man and Mr. Aman Ramovich is our guest, I see no issue with resolving the matter myself. Today, I'll handle this myself to lift your spirits."

Aman Ramovich wore a satisfied grin and reassured Antonio, "As the host, you call the shots. I'm at your disposal. If you wish to show me a confrontation, so be it. If it's a simple spectacle you want, I'm open to that too."

Antonio nodded, a sly smile on his face. "In that case, let's adjourn to the wine cellar. Escort this young man and his companion there. Today, Mr. Aman Ramovich will witness how Sicilian men handle their affairs."

Julia interjected hurriedly, "Dad, you can't kill him!"

Antonio responded icily, "He disrespected me and brought great shame to a Sicilian man. This is an affront I cannot ignore."

Julia blurted out her thoughts, "I accidentally hit him with my car. I owe him. This whole situation is my fault. If I hadn't snuck out, he wouldn't be in this predicament. You might do as you please today, but I will never forgive myself. Nor will God."

Antonio was momentarily taken aback, then smiled, "My dear, rest assured, Sicilian hearts are forgiving. Trouble follows those who seek it. You needn't worry."

Charlie, growing impatient with the mind games, interjected, "Antonio, was it? All this nonsense about wine cellars, can we get to the point? Where's this cellar you're talking about? I'm ready to go there right now!"

Chapter 5545

Antonio had initially harbored sinister intentions towards Charlie, envisioning a gruesome end for him. However, it was a disguised Aman Ramovich who unexpectedly altered the course of events. Antonio sought a discreet location to swiftly end Charlie's life with a single gunshot to the head.

The wine cellar, a chilling choice for such dark deeds, became Antonio's preferred stage. He aimed to eliminate the audacious and unaware Chinese man right before

Aman Ramovich's eyes. Little did he anticipate Charlie's impatience, which outpaced even his own impending demise.

After a brief pause, Antonio sneered at Charlie, pointing a finger, "I've dealt with many, but I've never met anyone so eager to meet their fate. Very well, I'll oblige."

With urgency, he commanded his entourage, "Restrain him, now!"

Julia stood her ground, disregarding her own safety, her voice unwavering, "You cannot do this!"

Unwilling to let his daughter interfere further, Antonio contemplated having her removed. But before he could issue the order, Charlie interjected impatiently, "Why waste time on her? Can't she witness blood? It'll toughen her up."

Antonio seethed, his words sharp, "Julia, as a Sicilian woman, you must acquaint yourself with the grim reality of this world. Otherwise, you'll remain as fragile as a child."

"Child!" He snapped and then turned imperiously to his younger brother, "Take them away, together!"

Charlie wisely toned down the aura that had previously unsettled several of the mafia underlings. They were too stunned to question this shift. Swiftly, he retrieved a firearm and directed them towards the wine cellar.

Afterwards, Antonio extended a respectful invitation to Aman Ramovich, stating, "Mr. Ramovich, please join me here."

Aman Ramovich relished the moment. He held a deep disdain for Charlie, but circumstances had prevented him from acting. Today, an opportunity had presented itself, and he would watch from the sidelines. A gleeful prospect indeed.

Anticipating potential retaliation from the Dragon Temple against Antonio in the future, he cast Antonio a glance tinged with pity, remarking with a wry smile, "Antonio, it seems you're destined to leave your mark today."

Like a soldier receiving commendation from his general, Antonio stood tall, his expression filled with pride. "Fear not, Mr. Ramovich, today you shall witness something extraordinary!"

Aman Ramovich offered a note of caution, "I observe that this Chinese gentleman possesses an admirable physique, and the Chinese are known for their martial arts prowess. Exercise the utmost vigilance."

Antonio scoffed, "All that kung fu is just a facade, a trick to deceive. Even if Jackie Chan himself were here, he'd be no match."

Aman Ramovich countered swiftly, "No, no, no, caution dictates we secure him. Bind his hands with handcuffs. One pair won't suffice—ensure there are at least two, preferably three!" Although Antonio found Aman Ramovich's wariness puzzling, he complied with the boss's directive.

Without delay, he instructed his henchmen, "Fetch multiple sets of handcuffs. Secure the Chinese gentleman to me with one, and bring a few more pairs!" Before long, Charlie approached the wine cellar, his wrists enveloped in three sets of restraints. The iron cuffs were formidable; even Jordan wore two to preempt any potential resistance.

Julia implored Antonio to release Charlie, but her pleas fell on deaf ears. For the first time, Antonio conceded that Charlie had a point. As a Sicilian woman, Julia needed to confront certain harsh realities. Compassion had its limits; it was time for her to confront the sight of blood up close.

The wine cellar Antonio referred to was located in the manor's basement. This vast underground chamber housed three wine cellars, two filled with an array of vintages, while the largest one lacked wine but held an ancient rack designed for torture, a relic from the 15th-century Vatican.

This was Antonio's grim execution theater.

Despite Charlie's wrists being encased in six sets of handcuffs, Antonio refrained from securing him to the rack. Instead, he guided Charlie beneath it, positioning himself nearby. An aide relieved Charlie of his firearm, pressing it against his forehead while taunting, "You're fortunate. Usually, only the high-profile magnates of New York meet their end at my hand. You, a minor character, are indeed fortunate."

Before Charlie could respond, Aman Ramovich had privately assessed, "Antonio, this man hails from China's Wade clan. In terms of significance, he surpasses anything you mafia types have encountered. If you manage to eliminate him with one shot, he will be the most influential figure you've ever dispatched."

Though threatened at gunpoint, Charlie remained unfazed. In his eyes, a firearm, no matter how powerful, posed no true threat, unless it was an anti-tank round fired at point-blank range. He met it with composure.

He grinned and quipped, "This is rather peculiar. I've been in New York for only a few hours, and already, two muzzles have been pointed at my head. Is this the customary gangster hospitality here?"

Antonio, bewildered, asked, "What do you mean? Apart from me, who else aimed a gun at you?"

Charlie waved dismissively, "Oh, just a few small-time individuals. But don't worry, I'll introduce you to them later."

"Introduce me?" Antonio gawked, incredulous. "Do you think you'll leave here alive?"

Ramovich, undeterred by the gun aimed at Charlie's head, was growing uneasy. He viewed each second Charlie remained alive as a threat and attempted to incite Antonio. With a grin, he opined, "Antonio, it appears this Chinese lad isn't the least bit afraid of you. I suspect he believes you lack the nerve to pull the trigger!"

Antonio felt a flush of heat spread across his face. Without hesitation, he turned to Aman Ramovich, declaring, "Mr. Ramovich, take a step back. I will blow his head off on the count of three! Be prepared; there will be blood!"

Aman Ramovich complied, retreating a few paces. He encouraged Antonio, "Proceed with your countdown, Antonio."

Julia, aware of her father's murderous intent, made one last plea, her voice desperate, "Dad, please... don't... don't kill him... he's innocent..."

Antonio paid her no mind, his gaze fixed on Charlie. His voice turned icy, "Three!"

Charlie's smile remained, his voice steady, "Two!"

"Damn!" Antonio had not anticipated Charlie's final act of defiance. He ground out, "Fine, this will be your final utterance in this world!"

With that, he bellowed, "One!"

He squeezed the trigger without a moment's hesitation!

Bang!

The deafening gunshot, coupled with Julia's scream, echoed through the wine cellar.

Antonio executed the shot flawlessly, the recoil confirming its discharge.

As he turned to observe Charlie's head, Antonio's eyes widened in disbelief. Charlie stood unharmed!

Unaware of how Charlie had evaded the bullet, Antonio only saw the flash before his eyes as the round discharged. Charlie continued to regard him, a smirk playing on his lips.

The onlookers were too stunned to speak. Aman Ramovich, in particular, could not fathom how Charlie had remained unharmed.

Seizing the moment, Charlie quipped, "Your marksmanship leaves much to be desired."

Antonio, dumfounded, responded by firing at Charlie's head once more.

Bang!

Once again, Charlie effortlessly sidestepped the incoming round!

Antonio's jaw dropped, incredulity etched across his face. He stammered, "How... how did you do that?"

Charlie derided, "Chinese Kung Fu, my friend. You're out of your depth."

With a swift motion, Charlie shattered the six sets of handcuffs encircling his wrists using his chi. The metallic fragments, guided by an unseen force, hurtled into the heads of Antonio's eight henchmen, dispatching them in an instant.

Seeing his men strewn across the floor, lifeblood pooling, Antonio felt as though he'd witnessed a ghost. He turned and fled, but terror had rendered his legs weak. He remained rooted in place.

A similar shock gripped Aman Ramovich. He watched Charlie, unable to discern how he'd managed this feat. He kept his eyes on Charlie, sensing an enigma.

At this juncture, Charlie took Antonio's Beretta, aiming it at his head. He asked, with a trace of a smile, "You do enjoy aiming guns at others' heads, don't you?"

Antonio, trembling, stammered, "N-no..."

Seeing this, Aman Ramovich sought to retreat, but Charlie abruptly shifted his aim, firing at Aman Ramovich's right knee.

Boom!

Aman Ramovich crumpled to the ground, clutching his wounded knee, wailing in pain.

Charlie stated, expressionless, "Mr. Ramovich, take one more step, and I'll aim for your kneecap next. Do you think one shot can dislodge it?"

Aman Ramovich pleaded, "I won't move, I won't. Please, Mr. Wade, I'll stay put..."

"Mr. Wade." Antonio, drenched in sweat, regained his senses and stared at the collapsed Aman Ramovich, incredulous. "You...you know him?!"

Before Aman Ramovich could respond, Charlie chimed in, smiling, "He addressed me as Wade when he saw me. Surely you recall?"

"I... I can't seem to recall..." Antonio, bewildered, struggled to recollect.

Charlie sneered, "Your memory is lacking."

He then addressed Aman Ramovich with a smile, "Mr. Ramovich, you excel at using others as pawns, but don't you find it audacious to wield a hen's blade against a dragon?"

Aman Ramovich, fear-stricken, implored, "Mr. Wade. Mr. Wade. I meant no harm..."

Charlie waved him off, "Before you check out, I'll settle Mr. Zano's tab first."

Julia on the side came to her senses and said quickly, "No! Please don't hurt my dad!"

He shifted his gaze to Julia, coolly stating, "You have no say here. Your father intends for you to witness my demise, and I intend for you to witness his."

Antonio, trembling, knelt, pleading, "Mr. Wade, spare me... I... I won't cross you again..."

Charlie smiled, assuring, "Relax, I'm not ready to take your life just yet. I said I'd introduce you to a few acquaintances later. We'll have a chat."

"Thank you, Mr. Wade, thank you, Mr. Wade." Antonio, relieved that Charlie didn't plan to end his life, gushed in gratitude.

However, before he could exhale, Charlie abruptly raised his gun and fired. A bullet struck Antonio's left knee, shattering it. Only sinew and skin held his knee together.

Antonio clutched his mangled leg, crying out in agony. Charlie addressed him, composed, "Just because I'm sparing you for now doesn't mean I won't let you bleed. Don't rejoice too soon."



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