

## 48 Hours 401

### Chapter 401 Meet Again

Zhang Heng said nothing and turned on the television. A commercial for a shampoo was playing

“We can’t contact her directly and tell her when she should go to the ski resort, but we can make her come up with the idea herself.”

Waldo snapped his fingers. “Ad! We can send an advertisement to her mailbox, pretending to be the ski resort.”

“But she probably receives a lot of those. Strictly speaking, the advertisement will only raise the probability of her visiting a ski resort by a little.”

“No... We only need one person to get it done,” said Zhang Heng.

“Who?”

“Her girlfriend, the blonde from the band... what’s her name again?”

“Adele,” Waldo answered.

“Yes. Black Nest is only monitoring Leah. So, we can plant the idea of going to a ski resort in Adele!”

“I can send the advertisement to Adele’s email, and include a discount for couples,” Waldo chimed in.

“Don’t use the ski resort’s name. It’s too easy to see through. Use the name of some travel agency,” Ponytail added. “I remember she has a part-time job, so we can place some billboards along the route she takes to work,” Philip explained, “We can also ride on the same elevator, and discuss skiing-related things in front of her.”

“I can even get into her social accounts to see who she follows and use them to post pictures of the scenery of a ski resort. By employing these methods, the idea of going to the ski resort will transpire in her mind.”

“Very good. Remember, when she talks Leah into going to the ski resort, Black Nest will also be watching. Whatever we do, we mustn’t blow our cover. We have to make Black Nest believe that it was truly her own idea to go skiing,” Zhang Heng added, “It’s a bad time for me to be out in the city, so...”

“Leave it to me,” Waldo thumped his chest.

“I can stay and help too. You will need someone to act with,” Little Boy said, “Last time at the casino, all of you said that my chest is too flat, and I can’t possibly distract the staff. I’ll be able to do it this time.”

“Then, I’ll leave the car for the both of you,” Semiprime said.

“Philip and I will go with Luke to the ski resort to get ready,” said Ponytail, “All of us will split up and do our parts, then meet up again at the ski resort after that.”

None of the members of the 01 Guerrillas had any objections, so after being assigned to their respective parts, they retreated to their rooms to rest. Zhang Heng, however, did not climb into bed. He looked at

his Tissot-it had been almost thirty hours since he entered the quest, which meant that the parallel quest would start soon.

Back in the Apollo Training Camp, he had gone back fourteen years in time. It was the same with the Master Builder parallel quest, where he was sent back four years. He did not know what year he would be sent to this time, only hoping that it wouldn't be too far back since computer technology constantly and rapidly evolved. It would be unfortunate if the technology he spent so much time learning about were useless in the time period he was sent to.

(Generating parallel quest—this is a parallel quest for Whistleblower]

Number of players: 1

Mission objective: None

Duration: 360 days,

[Attention, player...] This time, the sound of Edith Piaf's "Life of Roses" played in his ears. She was a singer, revered as a national treasure who lived a tragic but legendary life. At only forty-eight, she died of liver cancer, and France held a state funeral for her.

When the music faded away, Zhang Heng opened his eyes again and found himself standing in a dark and dingy alley. Someone had somehow managed to break the bulb of the street lamp.

Fortunately, it was a full moon that night, and under the moonlight, Zhang Heng could make out the graffiti on the wall-it was a mask made up of 01 codes. On its right was the corporate logo of Black Nest with a big red 'X' sprayed over it. Underneath it, the words 'We want you to...' were written, with the rest of it scratched off.

Zhang Heng thought that it was a little odd. He looked around at his surroundings, made sure that there was nothing else worth paying attention to before walking out of the alley.

Fortunately, everything else on the street appeared normal—the neon signs of restaurants, the passing vehicles, and walking pedestrians. Zhang Heng even spotted a large and bright electronic billboard at the intersection not far away from playing advertisements. The illuminated sign was a novelty; it's avant-garde design bound to attract all who saw it.

On Zhang Heng's right was a coffee shop that offered takeaway. When he searched his pockets, though, he was horrified to find that other than his game items; there was nothing else in them. Even the wallet and passport he had with him all the time were nowhere to be found. This would undoubtedly make moving around the city a hassle for him.

Zhang Heng frowned as he shook his head. Just then, he heard exclamations and gasps behind him. He turned around and saw a fully masked individual carrying a backpack. He had apparently just thrown a rock at a street camera and broke the rest, one after another.

The onlookers looked flabbergasted, constantly stepping backward and avoiding the individual like the plague. Maybe it was because of how he was dressed like a terrorist and the bag full of pebbles that nobody came forward to stop him. They simply ignored him as he senselessly continued attacking the cameras.

Luckily, his despicable behavior did not go on for very long. The sound of sirens was approaching fast. However, it seemed like the masked individual was not too keen on confrontation. He abandoned the remaining pebbles and sprinted toward the alley where Zhang Heng had just walked out from.

Just as he was about to enter the alley, something changed. A pair of lovers who had joined the onlookers suddenly seized the masked individual. The man held the vandal and pinned him to the ground. He then twisted his arms before the woman pulled out a pair of handcuffs, locking them on his wrists.

“Police! You are under arrest for destroying public property. We’ve been searching for you for a very long time,” the male officer grunted as he pulled the mask off the vandal. To his surprise, the one beneath the mask turned out to be a girl.

The other officer’s walkie-talkie was already out and she was about to say something when something hit her at the back of the head. She blacked out and collapsed on the ground.

The male officer did not expect another incident to occur in the situation they thought was under control.

He reached for his gun, but he was one step too late. He was struck on the temple too, and like his partner, fell to the ground as well.

Zhang Heng searched the male officer for the key to the handcuffs, but the masked girl urged, “We don’t have time for that. We need to get to the safehouse first.”

Zhang Heng picked her up from the ground and said, “Lead the way.”

He was certain that the parallel quest this time was different from the previous ones since the Little Boy in his arms looked much more mature than when they had first met... even the areas that were previously undeveloped had now blossomed.

## **Chapter 402 Future**

Zhang Heng carried Little Boy and ran to the end of the alley.

“The trash can... there is a folding ladder in it. You can use it to go up the wall. It would be best if you go up first. You can help me get up after that,” Little Boy said.

“Maybe there’s an easier way.”

Zhang Heng took off his coat and tied Little Boy tightly around his chest. He then stepped on the trash can, jumped onto the wall, and managed to land on the other side right before the police arrived.

“... I destroyed the CCTV on your right two days ago,” Little Boy paused as she continued to point the direction. Zhang Heng did not waste any time, running to the right side without saying a word.

“Turn left, pay attention to the camera. Stick to the wall to avoid it.”

Little Boy seemed to be very familiar with the surrounding area, and she even planned out an escape route that would avoid the detection of the countless surveillance cameras. Ten minutes later, the two were already clear from where the incident occurred, and they could no longer hear sirens behind them.

“Hey, you can put me down now,” Little Boy frowned.

They were in a somewhat awkward position now with their upper bodies were stuck together. To have a better grip, Little Boy had to clamp Zhang Heng’s waist with her legs and having had to tilt her head all the way to observe the route, her neck and thighs started to feel a little sore.

When she was back on the ground, she moved her neck and looked at Zhang Heng.

“I didn’t have time to ask you questions just now. Who are you, and why are you saving me?”

“After so many years, you are still the same. In this case, you should first say thank you,” Zhang Heng said.

“It’s not too late to thank you after I figure out your true identity. Perhaps you are from Black Nest, just like the pair of police officers. They pretended to be a couple and arrested me. You pretended to be a good-hearted person who helped me. You are trying to win my trust. Who knows if you have any other ill intentions? And don’t talk to me in that tone. I don’t know you at all.”

Little Boy tried to tidy up her hair, but her hands were still handcuffed behind her.

Although she was as stubborn as before, Zhang Heng still managed to extract a good amount of information from her words. This parallel quest was different from the one he’d competed earlier in the sense that it was no longer about the past but the “future.” Little Boy made it seem as if it was the first time she met Zhang Heng. Hence, there was a high probability that this so-called “future” was based on a past that had no player activity.

“You are part of the 01 Guerrillas, right?”

“It’s obvious, isn’t it? We are the only ones in the city who are still fighting against CTOS.” “By smashing the CCTV with stones?”

“Are you guys laughing at us?”

“No, I admire you very much. Philip and Waldo, are they with you? How about the magician and Semiprime?”

Little Boy’s expression changed when she heard those names. “Are you here to look for trouble?” she muttered with an audibly different tone.

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t you watch the news? Black Nest would be bleeding money if they were hired as an undercover agent.

“Hmm... It seems you guys got yourself on the news... I urgently need to cram everything that happened in the past few years in the shortest time possible,” Zhang Heng said, “How about we make a deal?”

“What deal?”

“I help you unlock the handcuffs, but I’ll need you to answer a few questions. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of them, you can choose not to answer.”

“Oh, I can unlock the handcuffs without your help,” Little Boy snorted. Before Zhang Heng spoke, a passerby saw Little Boy and the handcuffs on her. Instantly, a suspicious look grew on his face.

“What are you looking at? Haven’t you seen kinky stuff like this?” Zhang Heng lifted Little Boy against the wall with one hand and opened the zipper of her sweatshirt with the other.

“Shameless!” the passerby cursed softly and left in a hurry.

“Look, the CCTV isn’t your only problem now. You can’t even walk a few steps without people looking at you,” Zhang Heng smirked and zipped up Little Boy’s sweatshirt again.

Little Boy’s expression changed. And after a while, she asked, “Can you really undo my handcuffs?”

Zhang Heng glanced at the cuffs, taking note of its model. “Of course. Do you have a wallet?” he asked.

“In my right pocket.” What surprised Zhang Heng was that there was no credit card in Little Boy’s wallet but only cash instead.

“Based on your credit card spending records, they can know when and where you went, what you bought, and even compare the credit card records of others to find out who you met. Cash is the safest method for me to purchase things right now.”

“You are right.” Zhang Heng folded a brand-new euro banknote into a long thin straw, inserted it into the keyhole, and twisted the note in an anti-clockwise direction. The handcuffs clicked open as they became undone.

“Who are you, murderer, thief, gang member?!”

“It’s just a small trick that I learned from watching videos on the Internet.”

“Aren’t you afraid of being monitored when you search for such videos?”

“I don’t live here.”

“You are lucky.”

Little Boy took off her handcuffs and wriggled her wrists. She then looked at Zhang Heng and stared at him for a long time, trying to figure out something from his face. Half a minute later, she said, “Come with me.”

“Where to?”

“My place, it’s safer there.”

Zhang Heng followed Little Boy to her apartment. It was an old house with moldy walls, and even the ceiling was covered in grey blotches. There was no elevator. Little Boy’s door was secured with the most common mechanical lock. She then took a key out of her pocket and unlocked the door.

The unit was a small one-bedroom apartment with the living room taking up the rest of the space. Little Boy’s place was in great contrast to the old and dilapidated staircase he saw earlier. Her apartment was clean and tidy, and although the area was small, her choice of decorations gave it a snug feeling. There was also an English Shorthair sitting on the sofa. When the door opened, it did not raise its head.

“First things first,” Little Boy opened the door of the microwave oven, “put in all your smart devices that can be connected to the internet.”

“I don’t have any smart device...” Zhang Heng said.

“You are lying.”

“You can search me if you don’t believe me.”

Little Boy frowned. Instead of believing in what he said, she decided to frisk him to ensure that he was not lying. After that, she said, “Just sit down.”

There was only one sofa in the living room, and the English Shorthair had claimed it. Zhang Heng was wise enough not to invade the territory of the very ferocious beast. So, he sat down on the stool at the next table.

“What do you want to drink?”

“Coffee.”

“No. I don’t have coffee here.”

“How about tea?”

“...no tea as well.”

“Water then.”

“Great.”

Three minutes later, Little Boy warmed up some milk and poured a glass for herself and Zhang Heng. She then picked up the lazy English Shorthair on the sofa and sat opposite of Zhang Heng. “What do you want to know?”

“Where is Edward?”

“You actually know that name?” Little Boy was getting a little cautious, “...and you dare tell me you are not from the Black Nest?”

### **Chapter 403 Have You Heard of the Parellel Universe Theory?**

“This is a bit complicated to explain.” “You won’t know if you don’t try,” Little Boy scratched her short chin.

“Have you heard of the parallel universe theory in quantum physics?” Zhang Heng asked.

“Sorry, what? Say it again.”

“The theory of parallel universes, the multiverse is a collection of finite or infinite possible universes...”

“I know what a parallel universe is,” Little Boy interrupted Zhang Heng, “I mean, are you going to fool me with this science fiction skullduggery? Do I look like a junior high dropout or a die-hard Marvel fan?”

“Look, I told you that it’s complicated to explain everything...” While the quest was still in progress, players were prohibited from revealing to NPC that they were players from the real world. Hence, Zhang Heng could only try to use the parallel universe theory to explain how he knew the 01 members and Edward.

“Just treat it as science fiction for now.”

Zhang Heng spent a good twenty minutes relating his encounter with the 01 Guerrillas to the point they prepared to rescue Leah. Little Boy raised her eyebrows after listening to Zhang Heng’s story.

“So you really got 600,000 points in Tetris?” she asked, gasping under her breath.

“It’s a good story, and it’s enough to pick up immature girls who haven’t stepped into the world, but please tell me you’re not expecting me to believe this kind of nonsense. However, I have to say that you seem to know 01 very well... did you collect our information on purpose?”

Little Boy frowned, then paused as if caught in some deep thought. “This story is so ridiculous, and I kind of believe you’re not Black Nest. I know they are all a bunch of bastards, but if they wanted to send an agent to infiltrate 01, you should have made up a better story.”

“...thank you for trusting me.” Zhang Heng said.

“Well, what do you want to know? I can’t trust you fully yet. Although you saved my life, I still can’t tell you some of the ol’s secrets.”

“No, just tell me the things that you are allowed to tell me,” Zhang Heng said, “Let’s go back to the first question, where is Edward now?”

“Dead.”

“He died?!”

“Yes, not only is he dead, but it has been twelve years since Black Nest killed him. How? Some reporters who contacted him betrayed him. They pretended to enter his room for an interview, but that was when they killed him. They took away all his important documents. We failed. Black Nest has also erased every trace of his existence in this world.”

Little Boy took a sip of milk and continued, “In the second year after Edward’s death, Black Nest completed the first phase of CTOS development-first in Nice, then in Marseille, Paris, France... and it’s all over Europe now. They have eyes everywhere. I’m talking about traffic lights, surveillance cameras, subways, POS machines, car navigation systems, satellite phones, mobile phones, computers – as long as they have built-in microprocessors and are connected to the internet, they are all under CTOS’ control.”

“Isn’t anybody against them?”

“Of course, there are. In fact, when it all started, many people expressed their concerns about privacy and security. News reporters, network activists, a small number of senates, and hackers were not happy with it, but Black Nest promised the public that CTOS would never be above the law.”

The British Shorthair was getting a little impatient after Little Boy rubbed it for a long time. The feline stretched its legs, prompting her to quickly put it on the ground.

“As their tagline goes— ‘technology makes life better,’ Black Nest is not just a company. It’s a complicated web that runs all the way to the top, supported by mega-corporations, politicians, and entrepreneurs. Combined, they are like a huge machine that always runs at full capacity to pave the way for CTOS to be employed in all aspects of life. Man, I have to admit: they sure covered up CTOS well. To the public, CTOS is safe, efficient, and convenient, just like a gift from God. “Black Nest promised that with CTOS, traffic would dramatically improve, crime rates would drop exponentially, and public resources would no longer be wasted. They did it, in fact, but at the expense of personal data privacy. However, no one noticed how the number of politicians supporting CTOS had steadily increased among voters. At the same time, the politicians who are against it are getting less and less support. Thanks to this, they are gradually bidding their political career goodbye. Some die-hards have accumulated a lot of fame among the voters, so Black Nest uses CTOS to completely violate their privacy, collecting every little bit of information they could find to create scandals. They analyze every sentence word. Even a casual chat during dinner cannot escape the ears of CTOS.

“Nobody could withstand the power of such offensive attacks on one’s privacy. During those days, new scandals were being published almost every day. The people screamed and cursed the corrupt politicians on the internet. At the same time, Black Nest completed their purge little by little. After that, they take over the press and education... they silently control the right to speak. Everyone began to praise CTOS. Even those who didn’t get to enjoy what CTOS had to offer are also eagerly looking forward to Black Nest’s arrival in their cities.

“Only hackers are aware of the severity of the situation... in the name of defending freedom and privacy, they declared war on Black Nest. We have experienced fierce battles on the internet. Some have been caught and knocked down, even killed. New people continually join the battle, but with the crazy expansion of CTOS, we are getting less and less space to move around.

“Moreover, public opinion is always on their side—we are labeled as criminals. We don’t just need to take on Black Nest; we are about to take on the entire world! On the other hand, Black Nest’s behavior gets more outrageous by the day. They created a list of ten thousand people, slapping the tile ‘dangerous’ on them. They monitor them 24 hours a day, and if necessary, they will use the same methods they used on Edward to deal with the people on the list.

“We have suffered significant losses. No, maybe it is more accurate to use the term: end of the road. During that time, I lost a lot of friends. You want to know the situation of other people in O1, right? Well, this is no secret—when Edward was killed, the magician was with him. So... he was not spared by Black Nest. Philip was tired of the war, emigrating to Hong Kong with his family. Waldo, he betrayed us six years later and joined Black Nest. A large number of top hackers were also being recruited at the time he joined. Z was arrested two years ago.

“Now, only me and Semiprime are left. Nonetheless, we have assembled a few who still want to fight against Black Nest. O1 is the only remaining resistance in Europe. We can only operate underground.”

“Are you now the leader of on?”



“Don’t you read the news?” snapped Little Boy, “The current leader of 01 is Leah, Edward’s sister, who also happens to be at the top of Black Nest’s hit list. They are roaming all over the world, trying to bring her in.”

#### **Chapter 404 What if I Agree To Give You A Job?**

“Leah’s your leader? That’s probably the most shocking thing I’ve heard all day since I found out that Black Nest has taken over all of Europe!” Zhang Heng exclaimed.

“You only say that because you don’t know her. She’s a born a fighter like her brother. After Edward’s death, she became the most resolute anti-CTOS mutineer, employing her charismatic personality to influence and unite many.”

“Where are they now?” Little Boy sighed again, “We’re fighting a war we cannot win.”

“It’s tough to believe that even you would say something so dismal,” said Zhang Heng. “The Little Boy I knew would have never given up so easily.”

“I’m just stating the facts. This war has been going on for twelve years, and I’m starting to get real tired,” Little Boy chugged down the entire glass of milk in one large gulp.

“Then why bother to sabotage the cameras on the street and risk getting caught?”

“It’s only to send a message to those skeptical of CTOS that there are still people in the city resisting them. On top of that, Z’s second phase is about to begin. The people in Black Nest have appointed the three judges, and the jury also belongs to them. We may not have a chance to win, but we can always do something.”

Zhang Heng also finished his glass of milk. “One last question-how do I find Leah?”

“I don’t know. Black Nest is always sending people out to capture her, so her location is a secret that only the 01 knows. If you want to get to her through me, you best give up now. I don’t know where she is, and even if I do, I would never tell you,” said Little Boy as she picked up the two empty glasses from the table.

“I’ve answered all your questions, and I even gave you a glass of milk. Yes, you’re welcome. We’re even now. If there’s nothing else, please leave.”

Little Boy turned to walk to the sink, ignoring Zhang Heng. But after she finished washing the two cups, Zhang Heng was still sitting in the same spot.

“What’s the matter? Do you need me to open the door for you?”

“I don’t have any documents or identification on me.”

“Oh, I would like to express my sympathy for your tragic experience, but you can go to the police and bring the Proof of Loss, a photocopy or an electronic copy to your country’s embassy to have it reissued.”

“I don’t have a photocopy or an electronic copy. In fact, I have my doubts about whether my country still retains my personal information,” said Zhang Heng, “As I said, this world is different from the one I’m

used to; there is no evidence of my presence here.” “Hah, your parallel universe theory again? I must admit, you’re pretty good at making up stories.”

“Do you have any suggestions?”

“If, and I’m saying IF... if what you say is true, then you’re in deep trouble. Without any identification, and since they can’t determine your country of origin, they might detain you until you die of old age. No one will care if you live or die anyway.”

“So that means I should avoid the police at all costs so I won’t get locked up, huh?” Zhang Heng got up from the seat. “Thank you for your consultation. I’m delighted to have met you.”

Zhang Heng walked to the door, but just as his fingers met the doorknob, Little Boy said, “Wait.”

She had a look of uncertainty on her face. After a long while, she sighed. “Do you have any money?”

“No, but I can borrow some off those ‘kind’ people on the street,” said Zhang Heng, “based on how I usually do things, survival is always my number one priority, I suppose.” “Are you even aware of how CTOS works? Do you know where all the cameras in the city are located? Do you know who you can trust and who the enemy is?” Little Boy’s frown deepened, “even if it’s just committing a crime, you are just a rookie in the criminal world. The police will surely catch you.”

“I don’t think so. Trust me, it’s not going to be easy to catch me.”

Zhang Heng pushed the door open. “What if I’m willing to offer you a job?” “Huh?” Zhang Heng stopped in his tracks. “...and a place to stay,” Little Boy added, “you don’t have any identification so you can’t stay in any of the hotels. I can take you in, but you’re sleeping on the couch, and you must listen to everything I say. You only do what I tell you to do. Of course, I won’t ask you to do anything absurd. On the other hand, I will teach you how to survive under CTOS, how to avoid cameras, lose a tail... and you are responsible for feeding Baby Croc.” “... did you really name your cat Baby Croc?”

“You just have to tell me if you agree or not,” Little Boy answered with a poker face.

“I want to learn your communication skills too,” Zhang Heng said.

“If you meet my requirements, I will consider it.”

“If that’s the case, I don’t see why I should refuse the offer,” Zhang Heng closed the door, “can I ask why the sudden change of mind?”

“Here’s a piece of advice-mind your own business. Don’t ask too much.” Little Boy turned and walked into her bedroom, then came back out with a quilt. She then spread it on the couch. “I only have two quilts,” she said, “this one is a little thin, but you seem to be in good shape, so you probably won’t freeze to death. I’ll get some necessities tomorrow. You’ll have to make do tonight.”

“Where’s the pillow?”

“You are pushing your luck here.”

“I prefer to call it a basic human need.”

“I don’t have any extra pillows. Do you want Baby Croc’s cat bed?”

Zhang Heng looked at the British Shorthair. As if noticing something, the cat stared back at him as well, daring him to try if you will.

“I don’t think it’ll agree to that suggestion.”

“You’re such a pain, you know? I have some old clothes you can use as a pillow,” Little Boy said.

“Thank you.”

After she was done dressing the couch, she found Zhang Heng a pair of slippers, a towel, and a toothbrush. “You are not allowed to use my cup, and before I buy you a new cup, rinse your mouth directly at the tap. When you pee, you must put the seat up,” Little Boy went on, “the water heater is ancient, so before you shower, let it warm up first. During winter, showers have to be done within twenty minutes, or the water will turn cold. Too much hair clogs up the drain, so it must be cleaned regularly. You can eat the food in the fridge, but it will be deducted from your salary, and we’ll split utility bills fifty-fifty. Do you have any more questions?”

“Erm, if your boyfriend finds out that I live here, will there be a problem?”

“I don’t date.”

“But if it’s been twelve years, you’re probably around twenty-nine already.”

As if she didn’t hear anything, Little Boy turned off the lights of the living room.

“You should get some sleep. There’s a whole list of things to do tomorrow,” she said.

#### **Chapter 405 Job**

Zhang Heng opened his eyes and realized that Baby Croc was sitting on his chest, staring straight at him.

Rays of sunlight broke through the gaps of the curtains and fell on his face.

Zhang Heng glanced at his watch. The time now was 07:29. He picked up the British Shorthair and placed it on the coffee table beside him. After that, he got up and sat on the sofa.

Simultaneously, the bedroom door was opened, and Little Boy, still in pajamas, stumbled sleepily out of the bedroom. She squinted. “Up so early?” she asked.

“You said there are lots of things to do today.”

“We’ve got lots of things to do, but you’ll have to wait work ends,” Little Boy said, “If you can brew the coffee and toast the bread before I finish cleaning up myself, I won’t ask you to pay for this breakfast.”

“Fair enough.”

Zhang Heng walked into the kitchen and waited for Little Boy to come out of the bathroom. There was a pot of coffee, four slices of bread, bacon, and fried eggs being served on the table.

“You sure work fast,” Little Boy said.

“It’s a surprise, you’re not asking me to pay for breakfast. Hence, I made sure I went the extra mile.”

Little Boy gobbled up the omelet and bread at a speed that was incompatible to her body shape. She also drank the entire cup of coffee in one breath.

“I’m going to work; you stay at home. Try not to make a mess. I’ll be home at about four in the afternoon, and then we will go shopping for your daily necessities.”

“So, you hired me just to make breakfast for you?”

“Of course not, your work can’t start until the evening. Oh, and don’t make dinner. I will come home with pizza.”

“So while waiting, I’ll just sit here and stare at Baby Croc?”

Little Boy paused, “You can watch TV or read something. I have a book in my bedroom... If you want to learn my communication skills, start with the most basic theory. Okay, I can’t keep going on, or I will be late.”

“Have a great day. I’ll watch over Baby Croc.”

After breakfast, Little Boy flew downstairs and ran to the subway station a mile away from where she lived. After the transit, she had to take two different buses to get to the pizzeria she worked at. Despite the energy-consuming rush, she managed to get there only a minute before she was considered late. Wasting no time, she shuffled over to the employee’s changing room and got into her uniform.

She took a deep breath, opened the door, and walked to the ordering counter.

Today was not much different from the past. However, the staff who worked with Little Boy could not help but notice how she wasn’t paying attention to her work today. She had keyed in the wrong order several times. And it seemed as if she had this frustration that she had nowhere to vent.

Little Boy realized she might have made a grave mistake. She should have never left the guy calling himself ‘Lu Yan’ at home. The two had known each other for less than a day. She didn’t even know if it was his real name, let alone his background, or why he had approached her.

As the day progressed, thoughts of what Zhang Heng might be doing in her house couldn’t help but cross her mind. She was a little too careless this time. She should have at least brought Baby Croc along, but pets weren’t allowed in the pizzeria. Also, if she did bring her cat with her, she would not know where to place it.

Little Boy impatiently counted down for someone to take over her shift. She looked extremely serious as she had her lunch, and even employees who were close to her didn’t dare approach the grim-looking girl.

After what seemed like forever, it was finally time to get off work. This time, Little Boy did not take the bus or subway. Instead, she hailed a taxi and headed straight home. Once she arrived at her apartment, she quickly ran upstairs, took out the key as fast as possible, and opened the door.

A soccer match was on the TV, and a copy of “RRU Design Principles” was placed upside down on the coffee table. The living room was empty. Even Baby Croc, usually basking on the couch at this time, was gone. Little Boy’s heart sank at the scene.

At the same time, she heard a suspicious rustling in the bathroom. She hastily looked around, quickly finding a baseball bat in front of the TV and took it with her. With bated breath, She gingerly approached the bathroom.

Just as the bathroom door came into sight, it suddenly opened slightly, and Baby Croc squeezed out from the crack. Zhang Heng's voice could be heard from inside the bathroom, "Ah, you're back... earlier than expected."

"What are you doing in there?" Little Boy anxiously asked with a frown.

"Changing the light bulb... the light bulb in your bathroom is not working. Didn't you know? Aren't you afraid of bumping into something at night?"

When she heard that, Little Boy breathed a sigh of relief and put the baseball bat away. "Nosy!" she sneered.

"What do you mean by nosy? I'll be living here too, from now on." When the bulb had been replaced, Zhang Heng turned on the faucet and washed his hands.

Then, another thought crossed Little Boy's mind. "There are no spare bulbs at home. Where did you find one?" she asked curiously.

"I removed the bulb from your bedside lamp."

"You have two lamps in your bedroom. It won't matter if one gets removed. Oh, and you better change your table lamp's bulb... just buy a new one and replace it."

"Well, a second piece of advice-don't mess with the things in my house when I'm away," Little Boy said in a stern tone. "If you insist..."

Zhang Heng wiped his hands clean and walked out of the bathroom, "Where is my pizza?"

"...I forgot... I was in a hurry. While I was working, I kept thinking about what sort of damage you would cause. Tomorrow, I will bring you the best pizza in the shop." "So... you work in a pizza restaurant now?"

"Yes."

"With your skill set, no communication company will reject your application..."

"I am also on Black Nest's wanted list. If I work for those big companies, I will have to use my mobile phone and computer. Black Nest will monitor my every move then. This is why I've been working petty and insignificant jobs these few years." "It hasn't been easy, huh..."

"Ugh! Enough with that nonsense. I did promise you to buy your daily necessities today. And I have to buy you another set of working clothes as well..."

"Can I buy four sets of Lego bricks?"

"What?" Little Boy thought there was something wrong with her ears.

"You can deduct the cost of the Lego bricks from my salary. How shall I put it? It is quite important to me..."

Little Boy looked at Zhang Heng again, and when she saw that he was not joking, she agreed. "Okay, you need to list everything down, and we'll buy them all together later," she replied.

"If I can vote for the best employer of the year, I will vote for you."

"Let's get it straight. I am not your employer. I happen to know where you can work, that's all."

Little Boy shook her head as she sighed, "Let's go, we need to finish with the purchase before sunset. Then you can start working."

"Can I ask in advance about the nature of my job?"

"I don't know. You have to meet the middleman to know what jobs he offers. Don't worry. You won't be allowed to do anything dangerous... it's not like you can do them anyway."

### **Chapter 406 Middleman**

Zhang Heng tagged along with Little Boy to the nearby Carrefour, where they bought blankets, pillows, a rinse cup, underwear, socks, and razors. Little Boy also picked out a bottle of cologne for him, but Zhang Heng waved it off, indicating to her that he had no need for that sort of thing. When he passed by the knife rack, however, he stopped and picked up a pocket knife.

Its handle was made of rosewood with a brass end. Sporting a stainless-steel blade, it felt sturdy and durable. More importantly, it was only 11cm long—compact enough for traveling. With Zhang Heng's level 3 knife fighting skills, it would make a perfect melee weapon. "Do you want it?" Little Boy asked. "Can I?"

Zhang Heng looked at the price tag that read €35. "It's a little pricey," he hesitated, "I can choose another one."

"Never mind, just take this one. It'll just be deducted from your salary."

"Thank you."

After their trip to the mall, Little Boy brought Zhang Heng to a used clothes store and spent €10 on a black suit, a collared shirt, and leather shoes—the whole set.

Zhang Heng changed into the suit and walked out of the fitting room. Little Boy took two steps back and gave him a once over.

"How is it?" asked Zhang Heng.

"It's half a size too big, but it seems pretty good overall," Little Boy commented as she picked out a pair of shades off the rack and handed them to Zhang Heng. "You don't have to wear it, just put it in your front pocket."

Zhang Heng did as instructed, and Little Boy finally nodded in approval. "Now, that's more like it..."

Little Boy did not explain why it was 'more like it,' and Zhang Heng didn't ask.

They dropped their shopping bags at home before getting two hot dogs from a roadside stall for dinner. It was already night by then.

“Let’s go. Time to get to work.”

Little Boy finished off the last of her sausage, wiped her mouth, and lead Zhang Heng to the subway.

It was the hour where everyone was just getting off work, so the station was packed to the brim. The two had to squeeze their way into the train. “In a while, we’ll be meeting a guy called Fox. He’s a famous middleman in the neighborhood,” Little Boy explained to Zhang Heng as the doors of the coach slid shut.

“Middleman?”

“Yes, he sets up the connectionsmatchmaking businesses. He then draws commissions from them. Simply put, he’s the go-to person when you’re in trouble. As long as you have money, he’ll do anything for you. Of course, he won’t be doing them himself. What he does is recruit the right talents for you.”

“Like an intermediary?”

“They have the same method of making a profit, but the biggest difference is that an intermediary only does legal things. Fox, on the other hand, has no taboos—lawful, unlawful, or even grey-area endeavours... as long as it brings him money, he’s willing to make a deal.”

“Hah! And I thought criminals would disappear like magic once the city connected to CTOS.”

“The crime rate has dropped significantly, but the perpetrators have not entirely disappeared. The people working for Black Nest are brilliant. If criminals were to vanish all of a sudden, then people would definitely question the feasibility of CTOS. The public is willing to sacrifice some of their privacy for safety, but if they realize that they are already safe, their focus will shift back to the security of their privacy. So, Black Nest has to maintain a balance—they need to prove that CTOS is effective, and they can’t do that if they eliminate every criminal in the city.”

“If criminals no longer exist, then there would be no need for the police.”

“Yup, that’s the logic around it,” Little Boy said, “but after CTOS was set up, it massively impacted Dark World. The old rules of survival no longer apply. Old and stubborn ones who are not up to the times retired, but newcomers like Fox emerge as quickly as the older ones disappear.”

“What about 01?”

“We’re not criminals,” Little Boy went on, looking dead-serious, “even though Black Nest has always discredited us, 01 has been a non-profit organization since its establishment. Even illegally obtained funds were used to fight CTOS, and never have they gone into the pockets of the members.” “It’s really inspiring,” Zhang Heng nodded. “Are you mocking us?” “I have never ridiculed you. You, on the other hand, no matter what year I meet you, you question my motives. Is this the ‘historical inertia’ everyone had always talked about?”

An hour later, the pair arrived at the other side of the city. Here, near the outskirts, there were evidently fewer cameras and even fewer people on the streets. “Do not speak when we meet with Fox. Let me do the talking,” Little Boy reminded Zhang Heng when they arrived.

“Whatever you say.” Hence, they walked into an underground garage. The cars grew lesser as they descended two floors below, and the sound of booming stereos grew louder and louder.

When they finally reached the lowest floor, two men with crew cuts were smoking at the entrance. When they saw the pair approaching, they got up and made a 'no entry' gesture with a finger.

"We're here to see Fox," Little Boy said.

The men looked at each other, then sat back down again.

"So much for security, those people. One name and you're allowed to come in," Zhang Heng observed. They then walked into the garage four levels underground. Unlike the empty upper floor, the place was packed with people, luxury cars, and sultry, attractive women.

"It's just a small gathering organized by a group of rich second-generation kids who try to be as badass as possible to satisfy the curiosity of gangsters. Some of them even brought 'soft censorship' to avoid being targeted by the police." Little Boy searched the place and finally stopped. "I found Fox."

He was also one of two people in the party in formal wear; the other person being Zhang Heng, dressed in a full suit. Unlike Zhang Heng, though, Fox was semi-formal, where under his trench coat lay pair of beach shorts and hairy thighs. Even though the room was chilly, he did not seem cold and even appeared to be in a good mood. In each of his arms was a French girl, both of them smiling and looking up at him. "I'm sorry, darlings, work is here. Why don't you go get me some champagne?"

The two girls reluctantly left his arms, and one even raised her eyebrows at Little Boy as she walked past.

"Don't take it to heart. Sophie gets jealous easily, and Aneth keeps a cute cobra in her garage," Fox said, "It's been a long time. I haven't heard from you for a very long time. When Semiprime sent me an encrypted email telling me that you're coming to see me, I thought I heard wrong. Is this... your boyfriend?"

"No, he's just a guest, and right now, he needs money for rent, which is why I brought him to see you."

"Nice to meet you." Fox extended a hand and shook hands with Zhang Heng. Then he turned his attention to Little Boy. "So, you still haven't found a boyfriend yet?"

"People who talk crap often die prematurely in movies," Little Boy growled in a chilly tone.

### **Chapter 407 Additional Condition**

"You're to look for a job? Okay... First, tell me what you are good at?" Fox asked, "and for the sake of 01, I'll help to make you some good recommendations."

Before Zhang Heng could say anything, Little Boy chipped in, "Just give him the most common job. We don't want him to get into trouble."

"What do you mean by a common job?" "A job that doesn't violate the law." "Wow, it's a magical feeling hearing this from the people of 01," Fox touched his chin, "No wonder you dressed this man up as a Credit Bank of Lyon director."

"I remember you offered bodyguard jobs here, didn't you?"



“That was in the past. When security companies were understaffed, they would borrow some people from me. But now, their bosses don’t like me very much.”

“Why?”

“Well, it’s probably because I took the lead and killed one of their important customers,” Fox spread his hands, “What can I do? An excellent middleman should treat all employers equally. If I tell them who’s going to kill their customer, my reputation will be gone forever. By then, how am I supposed to continue in this line?”

“Do you have any other similar jobs?”

“Well, I’ll look for it,” Fox nodded as he took out his laptop from the car’s trunk. He clicked on the mailbox and scrolled a few times. “Uhh... there’s a bar that needs people to watch the place for them, but they are specifying for someone muscular and has a fierce gaze. How’s your body shape?”

“No way,” Little Boy vetoed after his suggestion, “sometimes a bar commotion will alarm the police, and he musn’t come into contact with the police at all costs.”

“Why?”

“There is no why. Also, he’s not allowed to do jobs that require him to verify his identity.”

“That’s going to be troublesome. Enforcers are making sure that no one breaks the law at a time like this. It isn’t easy to find a legal job without verifying your identity. After all, I am a middleman, not a headhunter. It’s not like I have that many legal jobs for you to pick.”

Little Boy was silent for a moment. “What about black jobs?” she asked.

Fox snapped his fingers, “There will be one black job tonight,” he turned and looked at Zhang Heng, “Can you drive?” “No problem.”

“Then, it should be an easy job for you. A client entrusted me to find a driver and personal bodyguard to accompany him to complete a transaction. After everything is done, he will pay you 300 euros.”

“Transaction? What kind of transaction?”

“Sorry, you know the rules of our business. I don’t inquire about the nature of our customers’ personal business. I don’t recommend that you find out about it as well. The less you know, the safer you would be. But based on my previous experience, this should be a low-risk job. Most probably, your friend will simply be required to drive the car over there. After that, he’ll just need to stand there and wait for a while. Oh... yes, if everything goes well and the customer is satisfied, they will increase the pay. It’s a simple job.”

“Just drive the car there to earn 300 euros, and there are zero risks to it?” Little Boy looked at Fox with a cocked head and sneered, “do I look like a fool to you?”

Fox sighed, “Well, I’m just saying, you know. If it is so easy, I would have done the job myself, but I can swear that this is indeed a solid job. In fact, several people have been looking for this job before you came. I’ve made the inquiries, and the employer told me that he’s in a rush. I’ll have to decide in half an

hour, but I can give you 20 minutes to discuss it first. After that, please tell me your decision. If you decide to do it, I will find other jobs for the others.”

Fox then beckoned at the two girls who had gone to get more champagne while Little Boy had pulled Zhang Heng to the corner.

“I suggest you give up on this job. The more ambiguous the job, the easier for you to encounter an accident,” Little Boy said, “You don’t have to start working tonight, right?”

“But you heard what he said. I don’t have any way to verify my identity. Even if I manage to find odd jobs like you, I still have to avoid the police. I have to find a way to support myself. After all, I owe you a lot of money,” Zhang Heng said.

“I’m not in a hurry. What are you worried about?” Little Boy frowned, “We can think of a better way. I think Semiprime should know other middlemen.”

“In your heart, you know very well that even if you change the middleman, we’ll probably get the same results, right?” Zhang Heng put his hand on Little Boy’s shoulder and looked into her eyes.

“Hey, I have experienced crazy things that the ordinary person would never imagine. I am good at many things, but handling a crisis is my forte. I have always done a good job protecting myself, so trust me, I can handle this,” he said. Little Boy’s eyes darted back and forth at his face as if looking for an answer. She silently let out a sigh.

Zhang Heng waited for her answer. It was then when a wealthy inheritor, probably tired of the models and female students around him, saw something special in Little Boy. Wanting to have a change of taste, he approached her, attempting to strike a conversation. As expected, Little Boy simply told him off, leaving a shocked and defeated look on the rich boy’s face.

“Well, you win this time,” Little Boy sighed, “Remember to leave as soon as the situation turns bad. I will find you another job if that happens.”

It took the two less than five minutes to give Fox a reply.

“So, what is your conclusion?”

“I’ll take the job,” said Zhang Heng.

“Very well, uhh, let me find it... Where’s the car key...” “...but, we have an additional condition,” Little Boy blurted all of a sudden.

“Huh?”

“I want to go with him.”

“Sorry, what did you just say?!” Fox raised his head with a dazed expression, only to discover that Zhang Heng’s face was also awash with surprise.

“Either take me, or we won’t do this job,” Little Boy insisted, her tone suggesting no room for negotiation.

“This... it’s against the rules,” Fox scratched his head, “the client only asked for one person.”

“Then tell him my request and let him decide,” Little Boy said, “You can pull it off.”

Fox became extremely frustrated. “Do we really need... ugh... to make a simple thing like this so complicated?”

“It depends on how good you are. Convince him if he wants to get it done ASAP. He should consider my suggestion.”

“Ha-” Fox opened his mouth and wanted to say something, but he eventually swallowed it back. In the end, he just sighed, “I will try to tell him that nobody is willing to take the job except for you. This is the best I can do for you.”

“Thank you.”

Fifteen minutes later, Fox turned off his computer and said, “It’s done. You both can do this together, but the reward remains the same. I really don’t understand why there are idiots in this world who are willing to provide two-person service for a single-person pay. Are you the two in love or something?”

“As a friendly reminder from a woman, the woman called Sophie is not jealous of you. She knows that you like the feeling of someone getting jealous over you... all men who treat women as dumbasses are the real idiots.”

#### **Chapter 408 The Chemistry Teacher and the Box**

Zhang Heng grabbed the car key from Fox, and together with Little Boy, went up to the second basement of the parking lot.

“Can you really tell if a woman is really jealous or just pretending?” he asked her as they approached a black Volkswagen Transporter that had seen better days.

Opening the creaky door, Zhang Heng slid into the driver’s seat, moved it to his position, and adjusted the rear-view mirror.

“No, why would I bother myself with such trivial matters?”

“I only said it to make him feel bad. Anyway, there’s no actual way to verify such things,” Little Boy said, “hey, do you really know how to drive?”

“It feels bizarre to have to answer the same question twice,” Zhang Heng replied

“It’s not too late to give up now. It’s better to admit defeat than to put on an act and then get caught later.”

“Yes, yes. I’ll try not to let the cat out of the bag.”

Zhang Heng started the car, and forty-five minutes later, the Volkswagen pulled up below a bridge. Under the glare of its headlights, a figure could be seen pacing anxiously by the pier.

Zhang Heng stopped the car, a little taken aback. Since it was a black job, he expected his employer to be someone from the underworld, but the man before him looked like a regular person in his forties or fifties. He was slightly bloated, had a slick of oily hair but was clean-shaven. With the frumpy windbreaker he had put on, he looked somewhat petrified.

Instead of climbing in right away, the man asked apprehensively, "Is this the car to the laundromat?"

"I'm sorry, the laundromat is closed," Zhang Heng replied. It matched the agreed-upon code, and the man heaved a huge sigh of relief when he heard those words. He opened the car door and climbed into the front passenger seat. "Thank God, you're finally here, I was so worried I nearly died," he stammered nervously. He carried a cardboard box close to his chest, and it was evident that it was very important to him. He had his arms wrapped tightly around the package as it was the most precious thing in the world, not loosening his grip even as he settled down in his seat. "Where are we headed to?" The man gave Zhang Heng an address of a remote location, a place quite a drive away from where they were. Unfamiliar with the city, Zhang Heng did not react when he saw the address, but Little Boy's brows furrowed when she heard where they were headed.

"Why are you going into the Albanian's territory?"

"That, uhh..." The man wiped the beads of sweat on his forehead with the back of his hand, not knowing what to say.

"Is there a problem?" Zhang Heng asked. "Those guys are big-time criminals. They are inextricably linked to the red-light district business in the city, smuggling and tricking girls from their own country into coming here in the name of working abroad. They would then turn on them, keep them captive, before forcing them to provide services to men. Sometimes, they would even prey on female tourists who are traveling alone, planting good-looking members of their community at airports or train stations to strike up conversations with the girls. After they've gathered the target's information, they decide whether or not to make a move. On top of that, they are also involved in other criminal activities—you'll basically find them when there is money to be made."

"I... I have some business with them," the man stammered.

"It's unwise to make the Albanians your business partner," Little Boy said to the man. She then turned to Zhang Heng. "This is too dangerous. I suggest that we abort this job," she said.

"No, no, no! I must go there tonight," the man immediately panicked, saying, "I've already contacted their leader. He's a very kind person, and there shouldn't be any danger."

"Then, we should just hand the car over to you, and you can go there yourself," said Little Boy.

The man was speechless. He began sweating even more profusely. Desperate, he begged, "I... I can't... I've heard a lot about them. If I had options, I would never have chosen to associate with them. Please, I beg both of you – don't abandon me. I... I can pay you more."

"This has nothing to do with money," Little Boy replied sharply.

"I can give you three hundred, no, five hundred... one thousand!" the man promised, "If the transaction goes smoothly, I can even give you two thousand."

"You're that loaded? I couldn't tell," Little Boy raised her eyebrows at the man.

"If I'm really rich, why would I get myself involved with those people?" the man smiled sadly. "What do you do for a living?" Zhang Heng suddenly asked. The man hesitated for a while. He did not want to divulge too much information about himself, but at the same time, he was even more afraid that his

driver and companion would desert him and let him deal with those demons on his own. So, eventually, he decided to tell the truth.

"I'm a chemistry teacher," he sheepishly muttered.

"Chemistry teacher?!" Little Boy studied the man again and realized that his temperament was truly that of a teacher. "So, what is a Chemistry teacher, instead of being in school educating people, messing himself up with the underworld?"

"Same as you-money," sighed the man again, "I had a happy family... but seven years ago, my daughter was diagnosed with a rare disease. At the stage she was in, no medicine could cure her. She could only rely on drugs and machines to keep her alive. We have to fork out a large sum of money every month for such kind of extensive treatment, and we've used up all our savings. We even sold the house and the car. Then last year, my wife was so overwhelmed by it all that she filed for divorce.

"The school that I work for has set up two fundraisers for me, but the donations were just a drop in the bucket compared to the medical costs. I've borrowed from family, friends, the bank... even loan sharks refuse to lend me any more money. There's nothing I can do. If I can't pay this month's bills, the hospital will stop my daughter's treatment. I don't have a choice. I have to take the risk. Please, please help me! I really need this money to save my daughter's life! Once it's done, we can split the money 30:70."

"Hang on, did you..." Little Boy's gaze fell on the cardboard box in the chemistry teacher's arms. Then, she paused, finally understanding it all. "The balls you have on you... you know the consequences of getting caught with those?"

"A person like me has nothing else to lose. If I can help my daughter live, even for one more day, why must I worry about what's going to happen tomorrow?"

The chemistry teacher hugged the box to his chest, his teeth chattering. "...but don't worry. I know the rules. Just pretend this conversation never happened. No... you've never even seen what's inside the box. Even if something did happen, it would have nothing to do with you."

"No." Little Boy shook her head. "Even if you are willing to risk dealing with criminals like these, they have 10,000 ways to swallow an ordinary person like you alive. Let go when you should. You've already done your best. That's just how life is... your daughter will not blame you even if she gets to know..."

"No! no... it's not the end. It hasn't ended!" The teacher's eyes widened, his breathing grew heavy, and the green veins on his neck bulged. The fear on his face vanished, replaced with a demeanor of a stubborn bull. "Please, Fox said that you are both capable people. There must be a way you can help me complete this transaction, right?" he resolutely insisted.

#### **Chapter 409 Think Carefully**

"Unfortunately, we can't help you either. I don't know what the Fox guy told you, but we are not who you think we are," Little Boy said, "We are different from those Albanians..."

"I can help you," added Zhang Heng. "Really?"

The chemistry teacher was surprised, and although he felt desperately hopeless after hearing Little Boy's discouraging remarks he saw the light of hope again after Zhang Heng promised to help him.

“Don’t try to play tough here. The men who traded with him are the real criminals. They have guns in their hands. There’s no way we can go against them,” Little Boy reminded, “You are not helping but harming him.”

“The situation is not as bad as you put it,” Zhang Heng said while holding the steering wheel. “The teacher next to me has what they want. Of course, it would be better to just grab it without having to pay for it. If we can take this opportunity to grab the hen that lays eggs forever, this will be a huge victory for us.”

The chemistry teacher’s face changed drastically. “No. No way. I have an agreement with their person in charge.”

“Trust me, no one in this world understands how a robber thinks better than me,” said Zhang Heng.

“This proves what I’ve said is right. We are heading directly into a trap set up specifically for us,” Little Boy frowned.

“Theoretically speaking, you are right. But...

“But?”

“But it doesn’t mean that this is an impossible task. A robber behaves according to how a robber is supposed to behave. They work hard for a reason. The point of a negotiation is to convince them that the cost of violence is higher than whatever they stand to yield.”

“Please teach me how to do it,” the chemistry teacher pleaded, “I will share half of the money with you this time.”

“It’s too late. It’s hard to change a person’s behavior in just one or two hours. If you trust me, then don’t say anything when you see the boss later. Let me do the talking,” Zhang Heng said. “No problem,” the chemistry teacher nodded. Zhang Heng turned to Little Boy. “This time, it’s a lot more dangerous than expected. I will drop you near the subway station so you can go back first.”

“No, I said I would go with you. Although the 01 has no business with the Albanians, they should have heard of our name before. If the negotiation goes south and they want to deal with you using radical measures, they’d have to think about the consequences of messing with the 01,” said Little Boy confidently.

“Okay, but we have to set some ground rules. When I negotiate with the Albanians, stay in the car.”

“Hmm.” Little Boy nodded in agreement, knowing that she wasn’t good at dealing with this sort of situation. “Then, can I stay in the car, too?” the chemistry teacher eagerly asked.

“Unfortunately, you can’t. You are the key to this transaction. You must come with me, and you must try to control your fear too. Don’t shiver, and don’t be afraid if someone looks at you. Don’t look away, and play as tough as you can. By being brave, you will help us take the lead in this.”

“Tough? How can I be tough,” the nervous teacher asked.

“Well, imagine you are standing on a podium, and treat them like they are your students,” Zhang Heng said.

The teacher wiped his sweat away. "I... I'm not sure if I can do it."

"At least give it a try," Zhang Heng said, "Don't be too nervous. I'll be there with you."

Zhang Heng drove half a kilometer away from the rendezvous point. The area he was at now felt different from other places, where there were more women on the street, and each of them had their own fashion sense. Though it was a chilly day, many of them were dressed in skimpy clothing. A few just put on a coat to cover their bare bodies.

France had a contradictory view toward red-light districts. It was different from the Netherlands and Germany, which had wholly legalized it as an industry. It also differed from the semi-legalized UK. Although it was deemed illegal in France, the government still slapped taxes on it, calling it a freelance job.

As society continued to develop, the ancient industry had started promoting its business on the internet. Customers could now choose the girls they wanted online. That said, certain Eastern European countries still preferred to conduct business traditionally.

"What's the matter?" Seeing that Zhang Heng had stopped the car, the chemistry teacher couldn't help feeling nervous again.

"Give me five minutes," replied Zhang Heng, and to the surprise of Little Boy and the teacher, he took out his newly bought Lego blocks.

"Huh?!"

Little Boy looked at Zhang Heng as if he was pulling some kind of prank.

The chemistry teacher became even more anxious. He hesitated for a moment. It's... not the time for this," he reminded Zhang Heng.

"Don't worry. It's still too early." As he spoke, Zhang Heng assembled an Italian Beretta 92F pistol. He then threw a couple of Lego bricks to the teacher next to him. "Try it too. It helps ease the tension."

"I think I'll be fine," replied the teacher and immediately returned the bricks.

"Err.. are you going to use these toys to negotiate with those Albanians?" Little Boy asked.

"Just in case," Zhang Heng murmured, inserting the Infinite Building Block into the gun he just built. Since he had so swiftly placed the 92F on his waist, Little Boy and the teacher missed the moment when the Lego gun turned into a real weapon.

"We are not playing games here. Do you think those Albanians are stupid?" Little Boy suddenly looked dead serious. "You will get yourself killed!"

Zhang Heng had made the final preparations. "I'm sorry I kept something from you. Not only did I come from a parallel universe, but I'm also actually a magician," he said. He then waved to the girl that had already headed toward the car, telling her that he did not need any special service.

"I, I feel a little bit out of breath!" The teacher was feeling nervous, trembling before they even met their target. This was not a good sign. Sure he had made up his mind, but the moment he thought about

what he was about to face, the honest man who had never received a speeding ticket failed to control the tremors that had overcome his body.

“You should take her advice. Not everyone is suitable for the thug life. In fact, I have seen many powerful people in the criminal world, and they did not end well. Besides, CTOS is all over the city now. Think carefully. There’s no turning back after you take this step. Even if you want to stop, someone will dig up your past and coerce you into doing things you would never do. To put it simply, you’ve now reached a dead end,” Zhang Heng said.

“Thank you... I may not be ready yet, but I have figured it out,” the teacher said, “This is the only way to save my daughter. Let’s get started.”

Chapter 410 Fight Me Together?

The location that had been agreed upon was outside a slaughterhouse.

An unpleasant stench wafted around the surrounding air.

Zhang Heng stopped the car. Not far from them, four men were playing a knife game around a small table.

The rules of the game were simple. The player was basically required to place a hand on the table, and with a knife in the other hand, poke the gaps between the fingers quickly. Whoever moved the fastest would be the final winner.

The whole process was fascinating, often regarded as a symbol of courage for those with the nerve to participate. Hence, the four men were having so much fun that they failed to notice somebody coming.

“There are still twenty minutes left. What should we do? Wait in the car, or should I go down and talk to them?”

“No need for so much trouble,” Zhang Heng said while turning on the high beam of the car.

The headlights hit the men so brightly that they could no longer continue playing. Irritated and annoyed, they got up from their chairs, grabbing their weapons and cursing loudly.

The chemistry teacher was shocked. “Wow! Now is that impolite or what?”

“Have you ever seen robbers and villains speak politely?” Zhang Heng asked, “These four were there to make sure that they could give you a good scare. They know you are just an ordinary person, and I can bet that they would never come to you if you don’t get out of the car. If you go to them, they will not listen to you either. This is how they do things. Tactics like these will make you feel more nervous and fearful. The more you fear, the more they will benefit in the negotiation.”

“Is this the location that they requested? The nearest security camera is a kilometer away, and with the current visibility, there’s no way it can capture clear footage. In other words, they hold the power to strike first.”

The chemistry teacher was embarrassed, “I initially thought we were supposed to meet at the bridge where you picked me up, but their person in charge told me on the phone that their boss wanted to



trade on their turf instead. They said they would call off the deal if I didn't comply. I know it's a bad idea, but the person in charge of the transaction assured me that it would be safe..."

"They are just playing good cop-bad cop with you," Zhang Heng said, "Not having a surveillance camera is actually not a bad thing. Wait for my signal to get out of the car."

"Huh?"

Before the teacher could figure out what was going on, Zhang Heng was already heading to the four men.

"Kid, are you the driver? Do you have a death wish? Why the hell did you shine your lights on us?!" the man with tattoos on his body and face growled viciously, "Don't you know whose turf is this?"

"Two hundred years have passed, and you guys still haven't made much progress. You can only pretend to be tough by relying on a gang behind you and shitty makeup. How disappointing," Zhang Heng said calmly, "Since that's the case, I will let you witness what real evil is."

"Yo, asshole! What kind of crazy are you?! You must be longing for death," the tattooed man smirked as he stretched out his hand to grab Zhang Heng's collar.

"What should I do?!" cried the panicked teacher in the car with a tone as anxious as an ant on a hot pot. "Why did they suddenly start fighting? There must be some misunderstanding. They might not know why we are here. I'll go down and talk to them."

Little Boy reached out and held the teacher's shoulder.

"You heard what he said before getting off the car. Let him handle this matter. Just wait for the signal here."

Despite her confident words, there was a hint of worry in Little Boy's eyes.

The next moment, she saw the tattooed man suddenly falling to his knees while clutching his neck with his hand. His face was beet red, and like a fish on land, he opened his mouth wide and gasped for breath, but no air would reach his lungs.

The remaining three men looked at each other, shocked by what they saw.

Zhang Heng shook his fists.

"Are the three of you going to attack me at the same time?"

This time, things were different from the quick fight against the casino thugs. Not only did Zhang Heng have to defeat the four men in front of him, but he had to also injure them as much as possible to instill fear in them.

Earlier, Zhang Heng's fist landed on the tattooed man's trachea, allowing him to experience the not-so-subtle pleasure of suffocation. Although the man's tragic situation had affected his three companions, the bunch of Albanians was taught to live fearlessly. Cowards would never survive in this cruel and dark environment.

The three men froze for a while. Looking at each other, they then charged at Zhang Heng. One swung an iron meat hook in his hands, attempting to hit Zhang Heng with it. Before he could do so, though, a knife that came out of nowhere penetrated the flesh of his arm.

Zhang Heng drew out his newly acquired knife, and blood started splattering all over the floor. "Find a hospital within 20 minutes and deal with your wound. You can choose to be not disabled for the rest of your life," he told the unlucky man.

However, the young man with a deep cut on his wrist did not take a step back. The wounds he suffered only angered him further. He let go of his bleeding wrist, roared in a fury, and charged at Zhang Heng again. "Your courage is commendable, but unfortunately, you are an idiot. After becoming a cripple, do you really think you can continue staying here?" Zhang Heng said, elbowing the young man who attacked him from behind. "There is no such thing as respecting the old, loving the young, and helping the disabled in this line of job."

For the last opponent, Zhang Heng elected to break his leg and leave him on the ground wailing. At the same time, the valiant youth had also started attacking. However, Zhang Heng simply stood there and didn't move until his opponent got very close. Moving aside, he managed to dodge the attack easily. To reply in kind, Zhang Heng's knee landed hard on the guy's abdomen.

This time, peace had finally returned.

Zhang Heng put away the folding knife in his hand, walked to the tattooed man, grabbed his hair, and dragged him on the ground for three meters to the table that they played the knife game on. He slammed the man's head onto the table and grabbed the knife lying nearby. "Which eye do you prefer, the left or the right?"

The tattooed man could no longer play the tough guy like before. Tears and snot flowed out uncontrollably, and all that was left in the formidable gangster was man's most primitive and instinctive fear.

Suddenly, a voice was heard saying,

"Enough."

An older man with a leather apron came out of the slaughterhouse. He was dressed like a butcher, his beard and hair trimmed carefully. He then took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped away the blood on his hands.

"I'm sorry. Forgive me. My memory has not served me well. Have we met before, my friend?"