

48 Hours 621

Chapter 621 We Need To Stop Him

On the grasslands, the sheriff, his deputy, Zhang Heng, and Wendy sat around the campfire.

The miners and farmers from Bliss Town were sitting next to them. Although the two sides decided to work together, they had not worked on their communication. They were each doing their own things and still looked at each other with hatred.

A look of worry flashed across the sheriff's face.

"What's going on?" Zhang Heng asked. "We still lack manpower, and most of us here are inexperienced fighters as well. And the worst part is that there is an internal conflict between us. If we fight Cook in such a state, I am afraid there's a high chance that we will lose."

Zhang Heng did not answer the sheriff's question, asking instead, "Do you know a lot about Cook?"

"No, most of my memories of him were when we were living in the same town. He was a very easygoing man. Similar to his wife and daughter, the whole family are devout Puritans. We were the first to arrive in the town with a covered wagon. I was only six at that time. It is probably hard to imagine now the difficulties and obstacles we encountered along the way at that time. There were robbers, Indians, and men with ill intent lurking everywhere. We had gone through many tough battles, and Cook is the best marksman among us. It is difficult to imagine a gentleman like him would fight so bravely.

"He is the most outstanding person among us, a natural leader, and he cares about everyone that matters to him. Without him, we wouldn't have been able to reach a settlement. When the town was first established, we unanimously choose him as the sheriff. Nonetheless, he refused the position. He was the 'family first' kind of man. After he opened his own ranch, he wanted to spend all his time with his wife. Hence, we chose Thompson as the sheriff in the end.

"Now, Thompson was a respectable man in his own right, but unfortunately, he disappeared from the world in less than a year. On that particular day, he attempted to help a widow from town retrieve money that someone owed her. Tragically, he was ambushed by the debtor and his two brothers, and they shot him dead in the process. One of them was later caught and hanged in the next town. As for the other two killers, there were long gone before we could sentence them. Some said they fled to Japan, and others said robbers had killed them. Rumors even said they joined the army under different names. But in short, we couldn't locate them no matter how hard we tried.

"Let's talk about Morris next. He worked for four years as a sheriff. A robber shot him and blinded him in the eye during a crossfire with a group of robbers in town. But he miraculously survived the injury. Two years later, he retired as sheriff. After that, Thompson Jr, son of old Thompson, took up the position... During that period, Cook had two children, the first one was a boy, but unfortunately, he did not survive the birth. Then, the girl was named Mary. I think the Cook and his wife poured all their love for their deceased son into their daughter.

"Cook originally wanted a third child, but in the end, his wife died of dystocia. Neither adult nor the child survived. Cook was depressed for a while, but fortunately, he still had his daughter. Mary pulled him out from his depression and made him embrace life again. It was then when Matthew came into his life.

Matthew's father was an Indian from the Apache tribe, and his mother was a British immigrant. His birth was unexpected. Due to his Indian descent, the townspeople didn't like him the least bit.

"I fought with him when he first arrived in the town. At that time, I was just a young man and couldn't tell right from wrong. I beat him just because he wasn't pleasing to my eye, but I didn't expect that the fight would make us friends. Matthew said that he came to town to find a job, but at that time, I was just a poor boy, so I directed him to Cook. I knew that if there was one person in town that was willing to accept him, it had to be Cook.

"Sure enough, although Matthew didn't know anything at the time, he was hardworking and had an open mind—he was willing to learn everything that was taught to him. It was apparent—Cook liked him so much that he treated him like his own son. Most people in this world are blind-eyed fools. Only a few possess the ability to look past a person's gender, race, and appearance. It is more important to look at a person's heart and mind. And Cook has the ability to do so.

"You know what happened later. I won't say more. Matthew married Mary, and then the unfortunate incident happened. I still don't know if what we did that night was right or wrong." The sheriff paused. "...but I thought about it again later. I don't think it was an accident that things got out of control that night. At that time, most of us were determined to avenge Mary. With Cook's meticulous mindset, it would be impossible he didn't know the situation we would be facing after killing Ruben and his men. That means he had made up his mind from the beginning to kill all the people in town.

"At that time, he was probably disappointed with the townsfolk. Considering how he did so much for this town, the people should have supported him. However, when Mary was killed, only a few were willing to stand by his side. He felt the town had betrayed him.

"I heard about what happened later. After the three of us broke up, he went to the east coast alone and killed United Pacific Railroad's director. Then he came back and founded the Cook Gang. For the past decade, Cook has been the strongest and most terrifying gang in the West. They looted trains, ransacked towns, and even fought head-on with the rangers. Of course, they also suffered heavy losses. At one time, the people thought they had disappeared, but it didn't take long for them to emerge again and become more brutal and powerful.

"Except for the larger towns, small towns like Glen all live in fear of the Cook Gang." The sheriff looked into Zhang Heng's eyes. "The reason I tell you about these past events is, so you know how terrifying Cook is. When a person like Cook with many excellent qualities decides to turn evil, the damage he can wreak beats any ordinary robber. I don't know what happened to him after the three of us were separated. One thing's for sure—I know he must be stopped at all costs."

"In the beginning, he was simply obsessed with revenge. Everything he did afterward, however, was no longer about revenge. His hands were covered with the blood of many innocent people. He killed more ordinary folk than those powerful people died. He even lost count of the children that lost their fathers and wives that lost their husbands. He wouldn't even bat an eyelid when he slaughters an entire stranger's family. What happened in Bliss was no accident. If we don't do something about him, I don't know how many more crazy things he will do," the sheriff said with a solemn expression.

Chapter 622 Hunter's Hut

According to the sheriff's description, Zhang Heng could determine that Cook's marksmanship had surpassed Lv.2 but hadn't yet reached Lv.3. Also, his horseriding skills were outstanding. He could now fire his gun while he was riding on his steed. Of course, it was not as accurate while he was standing still.

Considering Cook's age, Zhang Heng was confident that he could defeat him if it were a fair matchup. However, if one took into account the thirty thugs in the Cook Gang, the situation was not optimistic.

But luckily, they still had time.

Cook would not expect that the ten people he left to be stationed in Bliss would be killed, causing their whereabouts to be exposed ahead of time.

According to Zhang Heng's estimation, Cook Gang should still need to travel for another day before they reached Lincoln County. While they were thinking about how to deal with those thugs, there was a key problem for them to figure out, and that was how to intercept Cook and Matthew before they got to Lincoln County.

"The intel that I have on hand about the Cook Gang is two-months-old," the sheriff frowned. "They have always been like this. They come and go like the wind. Some people call them the Crimson Scourge. No one knows where they would appear or where they were heading to. The only thing that everyone knows was that wherever they went, and blood would be spilled." "I probably know where they will be," Zhang Heng said. Bailiff Morton has been tracking those bandits disguised as fur traders. As long as Cook and Matthew are not stupid, they will find Morton first. So they should arrive at the scorched town now." Undoubtedly, 80% of them would believe what Morton told them, thinking that Zhang Heng was the one that took the forty kilograms of gold and the object Cook had deposited in the bank.

In fact, Zhang Heng couldn't really determine if the thing really existed, or whether it was just an excuse for Cook to draw Matthew out.

Apart from Cook, the only group of people who could answer this question had been killed by Zhang Heng. Getting an answer might prove a little challenging. Zhang Heng told the sheriff about the direction that Cook and the others might be heading in. The latter spread out a map and pointed to a forest trail twenty miles east of Lincoln County. "If your intel is reliable, Cook will first group up with the ten people he left in Bliss. After that, he will attack the county seat. Considering that there will be a gap between their arrivals, the first person should find a place to settle down. And this is the best location."

Wendy then interrupted, "My father and I went there in the summer. I remember a hunter's hut over there. It has no owner, and any hunter can rest there."

"If Cook didn't see anyone in Bliss when he arrived, he would probably rest in the hut too," the sheriff said.

"Can we set up an ambush there?" Zhang Heng asked. "It's difficult," the old cowboy shook his head. "I haven't been to that place yet, but Cook is a very cautious person. The bailiff who pursued him said he'd first sent some scouts to garrison the location. Once the place is secured, he will set up a perimeter around him. This is why the Cook Gang has been so difficult to eliminate. Even if we want to surround him, we cannot hide nearby. We'll have to charge at them from a distance."

Zhang Heng frowned at the sheriff's idea. The dark of the night was his best advantage to win the fight against Cook. However, if Cook and his people chose to hide in the hunter's hut until dawn, then it would make no sense to ask a group of miners and farmers to fight. "Let's head there first," said Zhang Heng after thinking for a while.

There wasn't much time left. The Cook Gang should reach Lincoln County in a day. On the other hand, Zhang Heng and the others would take at least half a day to get to the woods. At the same time, they had to be cautious of any encounters with Cook members in the woods. That meant they had only half a day left to make all the necessary preparations. Before dawn, the group had set off again to the cabin Wendy mentioned.

That hut was located in the middle of the woods, and there was a small trail leading to it, created by the hunters who frequently hunted there. A stream ran beside the hut as well. Since it just rained, the air in the woods was humid; tree barks still had water droplets on them.

This was by no means pleasant news for Zhang Heng and the rest since it meant that they couldn't use fire to drive Cook and the others out of the house. Besides, there were branches on the ground and it would be difficult to approach outside without making a sound.

To avoid hoofprints on the ground, the sheriff made everyone else wait outside the woods. Zhang Heng, Wendy, and he were the only ones that entered the woods.

The sheriff walked around the hunter's cabin and asked Zhang Heng, "Do you have any ideas?"

"I don't think they can fit thirty people in this hut. Cook will assign some of them to guard the perimeter. Once we commence the attack, whoever is inside the hut will be alerted. It is difficult to complete the ambush. However, if we are lucky, we should aim at all the thugs guarding outside. Once we eliminate a few, our chances of winning would improve significantly," Zhang Heng paused, "But the real trouble is fighting those who remain in the hut. There is no place for cover around here. By that time, we will have to wait for them to attack us before we can attack. Hence, we need to find a way to lure them out."

"Even if we can draw them out, are you confident you can defeat them?" The sheriff raised his eyebrows.

"It's impossible to defeat all of them in one go. If they are determined enough to leave this place, I don't think I can kill them all. However, if Cook is my only target, I think I can pull it off," Zhang Heng said.

"That should be more than enough. Cook has always been the soul and brain of the Cook Gang. As long as Cook is killed, the Cook Gang will naturally cease to exist." The sheriff said, "I may have a way to get them out of the hut, but I still need your men to help me." "They will all follow your order, sheriff." After briefly discussing the battle plan, the three temporarily left the forest. If all of them entered Lincoln County simultaneously, they would attract all the unwanted attention. So, they went only one person to watch the place, and the rest headed west. After a twenty mile walk, the group of twenty took the time to rest behind a grassy slope. And Zhang Heng still had something to do before the war began.

He walked toward Wendy, who had been quiet the whole way here.

"Let's go. I will take you home first," said Zhang Heng. "Please, I've been honing my marksmanship for a long time, and I'm ready for combat... and you are not short of manpower now," Wendy begged. "You have never experienced a real battle. This is not as simple as you think, and what we are about to face is

the most brutal and powerful gang in the entire West. I don't think we'll have any room for negotiation," Zhang Heng replied.

Chapter 623 Sheriff's Plan

Seeing how persistent Zhang Heng was, Wendy said nothing but obediently followed him back to her ranch.

A woman milking a cow in a cowshed saw Wendy returning and immediately put down the milk bucket and ran over. Taking Wendy into her embrace, she sobbed, "Great, they said a strange oriental man kidnaped you. And Matthew is not there. I almost died of worry!"

Wendy tried to move her head away from her mother's chest, and she glanced at Zhang Heng awkwardly, "Sorry..." Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows, "It okay. Such is the nature of humans."

"Oh!"

Wendy's mother finally noticed Zhang Heng, immediately shoving her daughter behind her, a hint of alertness showing in her eyes. She probably did not know what to say, so she just stood there.

The scene was a little awkward. In the end, Zhang Heng broke the silence. "I have escorted your daughter back here safely. You'd better watch her and don't let her run off anymore."

This time, Wendy's cooperation made Zhang Heng felt a little uneasy. Considering how she was prone to making an escape, he couldn't help but worry that she would sneak out again. Initially, he wanted to ask someone to watch over her, but he did not have the manpower to fight against Cook Gang. Hence, he couldn't afford to take out someone from this team to do such a thing.

"I didn't mess around. I went out to find my father!" Wendy defended herself.

"Whatever, you just need to stay home this time," replied Zhang Heng before giving Wendy's mom a nod. "Excuse me."

After that, he left with Radish without waiting for the answer from Wendy's mother. As soon as Zhang Heng left, a beer carriage rolled into Lincoln County.

The coachman jumped out of the wagon, unloading barrels of beer, and some workers from the wagon. The barkeeper walked out and was a little surprised when he saw them. "Where is Bhagat? Wasn't he the one delivering the beer before this?"

"Bhagat has been diagnosed with a bad case of measles. I'm his replacement for now."

"Poor boy," the bar owner muttered with emotion, "I hope he recovers soon. Come on, bring the beer in. You haven't had lunch yet, right? I have some food left in the kitchen."

"That couldn't be better." The driver tied the horse and smiled, showing a row of yellow teeth.

The bar owner did not notice that the workers following the driver had gone a little pale. Even if he noticed, he would not take it seriously. Bhagat, the coachman who was working with him, had measles. It was understandable why the young man was in a bad mood.

After Zhang Heng handled Wendy's affairs, he immediately returned to the sheriff and other people. From a distance, Zhang Heng saw the old sheriff cutting something with a knife. Zhang Heng then walked up to him, "Why, are you still a tailor?" "I'm no freaking tailor, but if you want Cook and his men to abandon the hunter's cabin, you better pray that my tailoring is good enough."

"Hmm?"

"The only thing that worries Cook around here is Major Wade and his hundreds of soldiers," the sheriff said. "I plan to masquerade as Major Wade. If we are lucky enough, where the moonlight is not so bright tonight, Cook and his men would have poor visibility, and my plan might work. If Cook realizes that an army surrounds him, he will definitely not stick to the hut anymore. He would start to flee before his enemies get close." "Sounds pretty good," Zhang Heng said. "We better pray this works," replied the sheriff.

"Any movement over in the forest?" Zhang Heng asked again.

"We haven't spotted them for the time being. So far, only two kids wanted to enter the forest to do some hunting. Our men talked them out of it, but unfortunately, we can't warn the county's people. Once Cook and his men are here, I'm afraid no one will come out alive once they go into the forest." "So, what's your plan here?"

"We better get started early."

That said, the night had passed, and there was no trace of Cook and his gang. And the next morning, Cook still hadn't shown up. "What seems to be the problem here? Is there something wrong with the route you gave us?" the sheriff asked Zhang Heng. "The route... should be fine. There is still a day left before they get here. Although they should have arrived at their current speed, I'm not ruling out the possibility of accidents while on the way here. Let's wait a little longer." Zhang Heng said. If Zhang Heng's horseback riding was good enough, he might have just wandered around, doing some investigations with a good horse. But now, there was nothing he could do other than to wait. Once this whole debacle was over, Zhang Heng planned to sharpen his equestrianism and the ability to shoot while on horseback.

Half a day had passed, and several miners and farmers had begun to grow impatient.

They only followed Zhang Heng here since they were afraid that the Cook Gang would attack their towns. With their departure, their town's defenses would become weaker. The thing that worried them the most was that Cook's men chose not to attack Lincoln County. Instead, they changed their route suddenly and headed towards their towns.

This outcome would undoubtedly be disastrous for those residing in those towns.

Fortunately, though, soon after sunset, the people who were keeping an eye on the woods rushed back to them on horseback.

Everyone felt really nervous at that moment. That could only mean one thing, and that was their target was finally here.

Sure enough, the ally shouted before he got off the horse, "The Cook Gang! They are here!"

The sheriff was startled, immediately asking, "How many of them are here? Is Cook among them?"

"I didn't dare to take a closer look. They were very vigilant. After arriving at the hut, they began to sweep their surroundings. I was afraid of being spotted. So, I took a quick look at them from a distance and ran away." The investigator added, "But I'm sure it is them because I recognized one. He was the one that forced us to kill Sheriff Harper. There are many of them, and they should be the Cook Gang. What should we do now, should we ambush them?"

"No, it's too early now." The old cowboy shook his head. "You have to wait at least for the sun to go down completely, and also to see how bright the moonlight is. Let's fill up your stomachs first, put on your military uniforms, and get ready for battle. ."

After speaking, he pulled aside a tall and chubby guy, the person who'd be playing Major Wade tonight. Taking advantage of this time, the old cowboy once again told him what to do to the house. The people inside shouted.

"No, it's too early now." The sheriff shook his head. "At least we have to wait for the sun to go down completely. And also to see how bright the moon is at night. Let's fill up our stomachs first. Put on your military uniform and get ready for battle. ."

After that, he pulled a tall and chubby guy aside, the man that was supposed to act as Major Wade tonight. The sheriff took advantage of the time left and reminded him what to say to Cook Gang later outside the hut.

Chapter 624 Perimeter Defence

To be honest, Zhang Heng was never once lucky since he entered this dungeon. The first thing he did was kill an entire bar full of people to get himself a drink. But later, he found out that the people that he killed were related to his primary mission. Amid the search for Wendy's father, he encountered the old sheriff. Zhang Heng got into a massive fight with him because he insisted on sending Wendy home. When he arrived at his destination, he became embroiled in the conflict between local miners and farmers. Fortunately, his bad luck would seem to be finally over by tonight.

As soon as the sun went down, a large black cloud appeared in the sky, blocking the moonlight. It was very dark, and the visibility that night was very low. In other words, their plan's success rate for tonight had just gone up.

But to be cautious, everyone decided to wait another two hours before making their move.

The war was approaching, and everyone in the camp carried a different look on their faces.

Zhang Heng walked to the sheriff, who was in a daze as he held a hip flask that he carried with him. "Are you okay?" Zhang Heng asked. "Of course," the sheriff confidently said, "Why would I not be okay?" "You only talked about the relationship between Cook and Matthew, and the relationship between you and Matthew, but you didn't mention the relationship between you and Cook."

"There is nothing to mention between Cook and me. I joined the Lucky Horseshoes because of Matthew. Cook and I are just ordinary friends."

"Is that right? But from your tone, it's pretty obvious you admire Cook very much." Zhang Heng sat down in front of the sheriff, resting the Winchester rifle on his knee.

The latter went silent for a moment before saying, "He has always been the person I admire the most. No, it should be said that he's the one that all the young folks in town admire. After what happened that night, I know he did not tell me everything about the plan. I don't blame him. And I'm telling the truth here. He understands me and each of us. He knows that if the price he has to pay is to kill everyone in the town, we might not join him in his revenge plan. So I can forgive him regarding this, but everything that happened after that... it's somewhat difficult to accept.

"Actually, I lied earlier. When the Cook Gang was first established, I went to him look for him alone. At that time, they just robbed a train and killed all its passengers. They took everything valuable, and the remaining goods were burned to ashes. The Cook Gang at that time was not as cunning as it would become later. I managed to find them with the trail that they left behind."

"And then?" Zhang Heng took the hip flask handed over by the sheriff and took a sip. "Then, I was discovered by their people. A guy sneaked and knocked me out from behind. When I opened my eyes, I found myself tied to a tree."

"Did Cook recognize you?"

"No, he was looking at me quietly. And one of his men had a gun pointed to my head. At that time, I was so angry that I didn't consider my safety. I just asked him aloud, on how he became such an evil man."

"What did he answer you?"

"He didn't answer me. He just asked me how many people I had. I didn't answer his question. Then his men started to beat me up for about three minutes. The brutal attack caused me two broken ribs. Just when I thought I was going to die, Cook finally asked them to stop. And then he told me that this would be the first and last time. If he met me again, he would beat me to death. After that, they left me alone under the tree and fled.

"I lay dying there for a whole week before being rescued by a passing caravan," the sheriff lamented, his head shaking. "So stop thinking that I would show him mercy just because of our past friendship. I have to make him pay for what he's done."

Two hours passed by quickly.

Zhang Heng and his party started to make their move at nine o'clock. To avoid getting spotted by the enemies, they made sure to ride slowly, not to mention how they wrapped their horses' shoes in cloth. Finally, they arrived at the outer perimeter of the forest at a quarter to ten.

The look on the sheriff's face had also turned solemn. With the low visibility, the people they appointed would disguise themselves as Major Wade and his soldiers, but that would also increase the difficulty of sneaking in. The man responsible for keeping an eye on the forest ran back to tell them that the Cook Gang had finally arrived. Now that they knew about the forest situation, and they had no idea about their defense arrangement.

"I'll lead the way," Zhang Heng said. And he took out the Filter Lens and put it over his eyes.

Within an effective range of 300 meters, his vision became entirely clear again. Even the water droplets on the tree trunk could not escape Zhang Heng's eyes.

Everyone silently walked for about two hundred yards. After that, Zhang Heng stopped suddenly.

"What's wrong?" the sheriff asked in a low voice.

"There are people on the tree in front of us," Zhang Heng said. With the Filter Lens' assistance, Zhang Heng saw a man doing surveillance for the Cook on the tree not far away.

He would actually be quite troublesome to deal with from this distance. After all, there were 19 people on Zhang Heng's side. Even if they moved carefully, they would still make some noise. And Zhang Heng could not use his gun to kill the man from such a long distance. Besides, the sound of gunshots would expose their location too. Bows and arrows would not work either because the sound of the body falling on the ground would alert other people. "Change direction," Zhang Heng said. Although there were 30 people in the Cook Gang, it was still impossible for them to cover the entire forest. And the people that were in charge of surveillance had different habits. For example, the man Zhang Heng encountered after diverting to the east was now squatting under the tree.

Zhang Heng took his bow and arrow from a farmer and then cautiously approached his target. At a distance of about 80 meters, the enemy began to sense that there was movement around him. The ground was filled with dried branches and leaves, and the sound of breaking and crunching twigs was inevitable. But fortunately, at this distance, the enemy could not see Zhang Heng clearly. He thought that the sound was caused by wild animals that lived in the forest.

Zhang Heng walked forward another ten meters. This was probably the closest he could get to the enemy. He then put his Paris's Arrow on the bowstring, looked at the target's position roughly, and released it. The arrow drew an arc in the sky before landing the target's heart accurately.

The enemy grunted, and he wanted to reach out to the arrow and pull it out from his chest. However, he stopped breathing when he placed his hand on the arrow.

"It's safe." Zhang Heng rushed to the people behind him, and then he walked to the man that he just shot to death and retrieved his Paris's Arrow.

After taking out the enemy quietly, there was no trouble for the rest of the journey. Everyone quickly approached the hunter's cabin. Since the Cook Gang was not engaged in a war, it was logical that they invested in less manpower to secure the perimeter.

Chapter 625 Battle in the Forest

Zhang Heng had the hunter's hut in his sights. Other than that, he also saw a few more tents being set up around it.

At that time, Cook Gang had just finished supper. There was nothing else for them to do in this barren mountain, and except for the guards, most chose to sleep right after they ate. After all, they needed all their energy for the tough fight that would ensue in two days.

The county seat of Lincoln County differed from other small towns. Manpower was never a problem for them. Although they did not have enough law enforcement officers, many ranches were nearby. The

local ranchers and cowboys possessed the caliber for basic combat, and even the brutal and ruthless Cook Gang made sure to not take them lightly.

Zhang Heng, too had gone to lie down for a while. Too bad the Filter Lens didn't possess the function of seeing through obstacles, or he would have used it to locate Cook. If he guessed right, Cook should be resting in the hunter's cabin, the most comfortable spot in this forest. Unfortunately, Cook did not walk out of the house while he was watching the hunter hut. Otherwise, the battle would have ended in seconds. Since he had no idea how often the guards changed shifts, Zhang Heng didn't want to wait too long. He nodded at the sheriff, and everyone started to utilize the light coming from the hunter's cabin to attack Cook Gang.

It was unclear if Zhang Heng or the sheriff fired the first shot. At least two bullets hit a robber that came out to pee, and at the same time, Deputy Sheriff Joseph's excitement could be heard. "I hit the target!"

The thug fell to the ground as soon as he took out his penis. The first shot had broken the calm and quiet night. In the first attack, at least six or seven people from Zhang Heng's side shot the only thug standing outside the hut. But in the end, only two bullets landed on the target, the rest either missing or landing on the corpse. The sheriff then shouted hastily, "Aim at the tent."

The marksmanship of these farmers and miners was average. Coupled with their inexperience and frayed nerves, it was unrealistic to expect each one of them to accurately hit the target. Even though the tents were relatively large, it was impossible that they miss their mark so long as they could shoot decently. Of course, whether the bullet would hit the person inside was another matter.

The bandits who were used to risking their lives everyday reacted very quickly, instantly waking up from their slumber the moment they got attacked. They picked up their weapons without putting on their clothes, and some even rushed out from the tent naked. While looking for cover, they started to fight back.

Upon seeing this, Zhang Heng raised his Winchester rifle in his hand and killed the naked thug. At this time, most of the thugs from the tents were killed off by the farmers and miners. Fortunately, they did not have time to figure out where the enemy came from, merely firing wildly in all directions. The people in the hut quickly realized something had gone wrong. Promptly, they killed the kerosene lamp, leaving the hut in complete darkness.

No one injured from Zhang Heng's side got injured save for an unfortunate miner whose arm was struck by a bullet.

Suddenly, the sheriff's heart sank. The Cook Gang's combat ability was definitely more substantial than the farmers and miners. Once the initial period of panic had subsided, and the situation calmed down, Cook Gang would be the final winner.

The dark of the night had limited the Cook Gang's combat effectiveness. Otherwise, Zhang Heng's side would have suffered more casualties. The sheriff hadn't yet come up with a good solution for their shortcomings, and although he was an excellent marksman in his own right, the restrictions he faced in that situation were too significant for him to bear. Right now, he could only place his hope on Zhang Heng.

The latter had promised that he would handle the situation. However, when the sheriff asked Zhang Heng what exactly he should do right now, Zhang Heng simply told him to kill every single enemy.

Hence, the sheriff was eager to see how Zhang Heng eliminated their enemies.

After Zhang Heng fired the first two shots, there were no more movements from the enemy's side. Using the short window he had, he memorized each Cook member's location outside the wooden hut. After figuring out everyone's location, he swiftly picked up his rifle again.

It was then that the sheriff saw the most memorable scene of his life. Zhang Heng constantly switched between firing and reloading. Whenever a bullet escaped his rifle, a life from the enemy's side would be harvested.

The sheriff did not know how Zhang Heng pulled it off. On a night where visibility was so low, Zhang Heng managed to hit all his targets accurately. Once he emptied the rifle, Zhang Heng replaced it with another one.

At the same time, the Cook Gang finally started to retaliate. Seeing their allies getting picked off by one, the thugs who had gone through all kinds of bloody fights began to feel panic. Zhang Heng's side then took the opportunity to move closer to the hut. At the same time, Zhang Heng took out another two enemies.

Meanwhile, Cook's casualties had finally exceeded double digits. And the battle had just begun not too long ago. The sheriff didn't just stand by and watch Zhang Heng make all the killings. Seeing that the rest of the thugs retreated to the wooden hut, he immediately led his men to shout outside the hut. He told Cook and others that they were surrounded by the military and asked them to lay down their weapons and surrender.

After that, "Major Wade" came forward and began to persuade them to surrender, promising that their lives would be spared as long as they handed over their weapons. Instead of being killed, they would be brought back for a fair trial.

The sheriff knew that it was impossible for Cook to take the deal. Hence, they did not surround them. Instead, they left an opening for the gang to escape, and Zhang Heng would be there waiting for Cook to show up.

The sheriff shouted for a while, but there was no movement in the wooden house. Just when he began to doubt whether their identities were exposed, the hut's door and windows all flew open simultaneously. Cook gang members who were still nestled inside flocked out and started looking for their horses, preparing to break through the encirclement.

Zhang Heng resisted the temptation to shoot and quickly searched for Cook and Matthew inside the hut.

Soon he found a man who he suspected to be the leader, with his face covered. He was lowering down his body and being guarded by the thugs around him. However, Zhang Heng did not see Matthew among them.

Although they were in retreat, the Cook gang members showed a considerable degree of organization and did not appear to flee in chaos. Even Zhang Heng had to admit that Cook had his men and horses

trained well. Even though they were merely a band of thugs, their discipline surpassed that of the regular army.

The opportunity was fading, and Zhang Heng was running out of time to search for Matthew. He started firing at Cook's position, where he managed to kill the two thugs guarding Cook. After that, Zhang Heng seized the golden opportunity and pulled the trigger without hesitation.

The bullet landed on Cook accurately. Zhang Heng could see Cook staggered for a while, but the men next to him quickly helped him get on his horse. Quickly, they rode deeper into the forest.

Chapter 626 Wendy's Plan

"Managed to hit him?"

The battle on the sheriff's side soon came to an end. Since they managed to get closer to the enemy, they did gain something in return. Two thugs had been successfully killed and another four wounded. Nonetheless, three thugs managed to get away unscathed.

As for Zhang Heng's side, one man got injured, and the enemy killed the other. The outcome had rendered the sheriff speechless.

Fortunately, the military uniforms had managed to put fear into the goons. Besides that, Zhang Heng's expert marksmanship also helped destroy the bandits; his confidence had made them reluctant to fight the war. Otherwise, the situation would've only gotten worse.

At that moment, however, the sheriff was more concerned about Cook's life and death. "Yes," Zhang Heng nodded. "Where?"

"Head."

"At such a great distance, in a pitch-black forest, and under the protection of the thugs, you still managed to shoot him in the head?!" Although the sheriff had the chance to witness Zhang Heng's expert marksmanship before, he still could not help but ask him about the unbelievable feat. "Strictly speaking, I fired two shots. You are right. Many people surrounded him, and I had to shoot and kill one of his guys first. After that, I killed another

runners," Zhang Heng said. "I have seen so many weird things at my age. I have seen a man's crotch getting stung by a hornet. I have seen someone getting killed by a bullet falling from the sky. No one knew who the murderer was, but I still want to say: what happened to you was simply a miracle. Your marksmanship and eyesight are too good. You are the goddamn miracle itself! A one-man army indeed!" gushed the sheriff in significant excitement. "Have you found Matthew yet?" "No. What about you?"

"It's too dark at night, and I can't see clearly. But the good news is that at least I don't see him among the thugs we just killed. But if you really killed Cook, then Matthew might be in danger. With Cook by his side, Matthew's safety is not a problem. However, if Cook's dead, then the remaining thugs are likely to blame Matthew. So we'd better catch up with them immediately."

"I won't go with you guys," said Zhang Heng. Zhang Heng knew his horseriding skills couldn't match up to them, and although he was improving by the day, the combination of him and Radish made it impossible to catch up with Wendy. Let alone going after a bunch of thugs who had a forte of coming

and going without a trace. The sheriff did not force Zhang Heng to go along with them. So far, Zhang Heng had the highest kill count in the group. Coupled with his previous masterful shots, Cook members should have lost the courage to resist. And there were only a dozen of them left. In other words, Zhang Heng's side had outnumbered the enemy. Although the farmers and miners were not good at shooting, it was advantageous to have them around as cover for the finer marksmen.

Saving Matthew was the utmost priority. So, the sheriff jumped on his horse and went after them without saying much.

Seeing how the rest were going after them, Zhang Heng frowned. He felt that something wasn't right. Things had gone a little too smoothly tonight. Of course, this had something to do with their preparations. That said, Cook Gang's combat effectiveness shown tonight seemed somewhat inconsistent with the legend. Besides, as the big boss of this dungeon, Zhang Heng had shot Cook right on the head—he obviously wouldn't survive from such an injury. Nonetheless, Zhang Heng received no game points for killing him—the only notification he received was that he had killed ten players and was rewarded 30 points. There was still no progress for the primary mission. Did he miss something?

.....

Wendy had been well-behaved since Zhang Heng left the ranch, and for the first time, began to practice playing the violin that she hated the most. Her mother was delighted by her recent change, thinking that her child had finally grown up after experiencing hardship.

The first thing that she did was to check Wendy's body. She was relieved when she found that the thing she worried about the most did not happen. Being a very conservative woman, she was opposed to her daughter learning how to ride a horse. She felt that a woman should be doing the things that a woman should do.

But this time, her husband, Matthew, who rarely sided with her daughter, thought that it wasn't unreasonable that a rancher's daughter learned how to ride a horse. If something untoward did happen to him one day, Wendy could inherit this ranch.

Thus, Wendy was given Lightning when she was seven. At that time, so was so delighted that she wanted to bring Lightning into her room. Fortunately, her mother stopped her from pulling such a crazy stunt.

Even so, the matter worried her mother for a long time. If she knew that her precious daughter had learned to shoot from a gun, the poor woman might just faint. Fortunately, it seemed that everything was back on track now. As long as Matthew came back, it would be a happy family once again.

While playing the violin, Wendy leaned on the window and looked down quickly. Unfortunately, she saw no chance to escape the house. Zhang Heng knew her better, though, knowing that she wasn't one to give up so easily. And Wendy had indeed been secretly planning a second escape.

And this time, she decided to take the shotgun her father left in the storage room with her. She knew the place where the battle was going to occur, and with Lightning's speed, it meant she could get there in an hour. Since she assumed that she had mastered her marksmanship, Wendy felt that her unexpected appearance amid the fierce battle might actually change its tide and fortune.

Before all of that could happen, though, she had first to escape her house. Although she found no opportunity to escape the house in the afternoon, she wasn't discouraged. If escaping during the day wasn't possible, she could do it at night. After dinner, she waited patiently until her mother fell asleep, and then she tiptoed down from upstairs and walked to the storage room beside the stable.

She managed to retrieve the gun smoothly. However, after putting on a smile for mere seconds, Wendy was in trouble.

She rummaged through the storage room but failed to find any shotgun rounds.

It turned out that the place her father stored the shells was now empty. So, she had to continue her search elsewhere. In the end, she had to return to her room since she found no ammunition.

Early the next morning, she pretended to have a chat with her mother about the shells, with the latter saying that they were locked someplace in the house. Thus, Wendy had to wait until the second night. She first took the key from her mother's room, opened the locked cabinet, and took two ammunition boxes from it. After that, she locked the cabinet again and temporarily hid the gun behind the cabinet. Finally, she returned to the mother's room to place the key where it belonged. However, when she was about to put the key down, someone knocked on the door downstairs.

Wendy was stunned. Could it be that the battle was finally over? Was Zhang Heng here with his father?

Chapter 627 I'm Going To Die, Matthew

The knocking on the door also woke Wendy's mother up. She then saw her daughter standing in front of her window, key still in hand.

It was a bit of an awkward atmosphere.

However, the mother wasn't bothered about educating her daughter at the moment. When she heard the knocking on the door downstairs, she immediately got dressed, rushed down, opened the door, and saw the man that she had been thinking about for the longest time.

Twenty-one days had passed since Matthew's disappearance. Inevitably, some bad thoughts had crossed her mind, and her heart had sunk many a time. Now that her husband had safely returned, tears started welling up in her eyes.

Immediately, she ran into Matthew's embrace.

But then, she heard someone talking. "Shouldn't you introduce them to me, Matthew?"

Wendy's mother looked up and saw an elderly hunchbacked man and three burly men standing behind Matthew. If the bar owner were here, he would probably recognize one of them as the one who brought him the liquor yesterday afternoon. The old man then took off his hat and bowed to her, "Don't worry, ma'am, we are all friends of Matthew."

Wendy's mother looked at her husband.

The latter nodded, "Jane, this is Cook, Cook, this is Jane, my wife."

Jane breathed a sigh of relief, smiled, and stretched out her hand, "Forgive my nervousness. Matthew hasn't returned from home for a long time. Wendy ran away with an Asian man earlier, and we didn't know where he came from. There was a rumor saying that a group of bandits was planning to rob the town, and so on... I remember that the leader of the band was also called Cook."

"There are a lot of coincidences in this world, madam." The old man kissed the back of her hand, continuing politely, "I hope I didn't disturb you. Seeing you is like seeing my daughter. You are so kind and pure. It's a pity she wasn't as lucky as you."

"You are too kind. Why would you say that?"

"Oh, something has happened to her, terrible things, but it's all over. It's better not to mention it," said the old man said to the three men behind him. "Stay here."

The three men nodded.

Then the humpback and Matthew walked into the house together. When he saw Wendy coming down the stairs, a smile broke out on his wrinkled face. "Look at this lovely girl. She's your daughter, I suppose? Matthew has spoken about you many times. Your name is Wendy, right?" The old man touched his pocket and took out a gold bar. "Sorry, I was in a hurry along the way. I didn't have time to buy any candy. Let me give you this instead."

"The is too expensive!" Jane quickly rejected the gift. "It's nothing. It's just a small gift. Good people like you deserve nothing less than this. Just treat it as a gift of fate."

"Jane, go get something to eat. Neither Cook nor I had dinner yet," said Matthew while waiting for the old hunchback.

"Okay, I remember I baked some cookies in the morning."

"Very well. Please make two more cups of tea as well." After Matthew spoke, he looked at Wendy again, "Go and help your mother."

Wendy glared at her father, then looked at Cook suspiciously before finally followed her mother to the kitchen.

After the two left, the old hunchback said, "The child has eyes quite like yours. When I first saw you, you were just like her, vigilant, stubborn..."

"Don't beat around the bush, Cook. Aren't we here to check out the town? Why come to my house?" Matthew interrupted.

"Oh, you don't need to worry about that. Morris had already inquired about everything that I wanted to know yesterday," said the old hunchback said leisurely. "I did ask him to inquire about your residence."

"What do you want?"

"Nothing, just a little curious about your life."

Cook put his foot on the table in front of him. "I have always regarded you as my son. I want to know how you've been after we separated."

"You can ask me directly," Matthew said with a sullen face.

"Yes, but I prefer to see it with my own eyes." The hunchbacked old man smiled, "I'm sorry to interfere with your life. Really, I hope we can warm up a little. Let's start with what we've done all these years. I'll start first; then, you will tell me how your life has been..." "I don't need you to tell me. I know what you have done all these years. You've been quite a frequent topic in the papers."

"Well... I must admit that I am really popular with reporters and newspapers. As long as I'm still here, they will never be unemployed." The hunched old man shrugged.

"Whatever you have done... those things... they're not funny. You and your thugs burned and looted every place you come across. Whether the rich or poor, the old or young, you wouldn't let them live. You set fire to the church and slaughtered babies..." Matthew snapped coldly. "Fear is power in itself. You must learn and harness it and use it to your advantage. I am a robber, not a priest. Why should I do good deeds and listen to everyone's bitter tales?"

The hunchbacked old man paused.

"Damn it. I thought you would become a little more mature after that incident. In the end, it appears you are no different from your past self. Okay, that's all for the topic. Let's get down to brass taxes. I know you have heard a lot of news about me over the years, but the next thing I want to tell you has never been reported in the newspapers. No... I should say that even most of Cook gang members know nothing about it." "What have you done this time?"

"It has nothing to do with that." The hunchback looked straight into Matthew's eyes. "I'm going to die, Matthew."

"After you have done so many bad deeds, do you think you will get a good death?"

"No, that's not what I meant." Cook waved his hand, "I said I am going to die, and I'm referring to my health. My time is running out. I can feel it. This is why I've come back to find you."

Matthew fell silent after hearing this. "How do you know you are dying?" "It is my body; of course, I know I am dying," the hunched old man said. "I have seen the face of death himself. He has blue eyes, just like Mary. I am not afraid of death, but I do have a few things to do before I die. And the most important thing is to look for someone who can take over the Cook gang."

"And you want me to take over the Cook gang and become the next you?" "Why not? Believe me. You will love this feeling of freedom. You are now trapped by the menial and the mundane with a pretense of false happiness. I've come to your home tonight to free you from this tragic cycle."

Chapter 628 They Can't Save You

Matthew's face changed suddenly when he heard that. "I swear, if you dare to do anything to Jane and Wendy, I will kill you, Cook! No matter where you go or how many people you have around you, I will come for you and drive a bullet into your head."

"Very well, all I need is this rage." After that, Cook suddenly stopped talking. He saw Jane walking over with tea and cookies, and he asked, "Are you guys talking about something interesting?"

“Yes, Matthew and I were talking about our previous salmon fishing trip.” Cook then took the teacup and thanked her with a smile. “I don’t know if he told you about it. There was one time we got lost in the forest after our hunting trip. We walked nonstop, and we arrived at a creek. I’m not sure if we were the first one to find out about this creek. In short, there were so many f*cking salmon in there that they were squeezing against each other! Every single one of them was healthy and fleshy. Matthew and I caught them without using any fishing gear. As long as you extend your hand, you will be able to catch them. And they didn’t even put up a fight, as if they were staying there for you to get them. And it made me very curious. What made them like this?”

“What is it?” Jane asked with interest. “It’s life, madam. It’s life that made them like this. For a long time, they had no enemies to disrupt their lives. This creek has provided them with lots of sustenance, and they gradually lost their guard against the dangerous world. They dwelled and indulged in their short-lived happiness, and when the threat came knocking on their door one day, they forgot how to escape.” Cook took a sip of the tea and continued, “Seeing them reminds me of the society we live in now. Isn’t it like this creek? It does its best to maintain order and allow the fishes to live in comfort and multiply as much as possible. All these laws, economic orders, God... these things create an illusion of prosperity, making people feel at ease.

They become willing to be domesticated, and they eventually lose their self-instinct. Ma’am, did you know that when the real threat comes, none of these things can save you? Your laws, money, and God... none of them can save you.”

After Cook was finished, the living room fell into silence.

Jane tried to squeeze out a smile on her face, “... honestly, what you said scared me a bit, sir.” “I apologize for that, ma’am. By the way, your tea is delicious.” Cook raised his glass, then turned his head and looked at Wendy, “You are fortunate to have such a skilled cook for a mother.”

Wendy commented nothing about that, but instead, asked, “How is your harvest?”

“What?”

“You said that the creek was full of salmon. How was your harvest that day?”

“Oh, great. Although we didn’t catch the deer, we did catch many salmon. I had to take off my coat to put all the excess that could no longer fit into our container. But even so, compared the ones that we caught with the ones of the creek, it is still insignificant. It as if no matter how many fish we pulled out, their numbers didn’t reduce. Your father and I had to eat the grilled salmon for several days. After that, the smell of fish became repulsive to me for a long time.” Cook reminisced, smiling as he went along. Matthew, who’d been quiet all the while, spoke up. “Well, I have something to discuss with Mr. Cook. Wendy, why don’t you go upstairs with your mother first.”

“Okay, we will leave the living room to you men.” Jane smiled politely at Cook.

However, her smile suddenly froze on her face the next moment.

It was because Cook had drawn a revolver from his waist and was now pointing it at her. “I like you, dear, really. You remind me of my daughter. I sincerely hope this will not happen to you. But... I need

you to help your husband sober up because he just wouldn't listen to what I have to tell him. I think it's time for life to reveal the truth."

Cook then pulled down the hammer of the gun.

Jane's breathing instantly hastened. Her eyes bulged in disbelief, and she looked lost. At the same time, Matthew, who was on the other side, also stood up abruptly from his seat, like an angry cheetah, ready to pounce on its enemies. Before he could do that, though, Cook drew out another pistol and pointed it at him.

"It's not your turn yet, my child. Be patient."

"You don't know what you are doing!"

"On the contrary, I know exactly what I am doing!" Cook smiled.

"What do you want, Cook? If you kill my wife, I will not join your gang even if it costs my life." "About that, let's wait and see... I will kill your lovely wife first; then I will take your daughter with me once I'm done with Lincoln County. But in return, I will hand over the Cook gang to you, and you can use them to find my whereabouts. Many of them have lived with me for a long time. They know my habits, where I like to go, and even the places where my old friends live.

All you have to do is ask them, and they will take you to me willingly. "Don't worry; they're all easy-going folk. As long as you familiarize yourself with their temper and give them what they want, they will treat you as their own. You might lose two family members, but you gain more than forty brothers in return. Sometimes, you might feel that they are a little noisy... but you will get used to it. You have one year. Don't let me down, my son."

"Don't do this, Cook. When I find you, I will kill you!" Matthew glared in a shocking rage. "If you are capable of doing that, I don't mind at all."

"If you don't let my mother go, I will kill you too," said Wendy.

"Hahaha!" Cook burst into laughter when he heard what Wendy said. But the next moment,, his laughter stopped abruptly because he saw Wendy's shotgun.

Unlike her mother, Wendy once heard the sheriff talk about the past. Therefore, when the old hunchback showed at her doorstep, she immediately knew who the other person was. Nonetheless, Wendy did not act like any other ordinary girl. There wasn't a hint of fear on her face.

Instead, she concealed everything in her heart. Her face showed no fluctuation from the beginning till the end. She had even managed to deceive an experienced man like Cook. Wendy was simply waiting silently for a chance to strike back.

It wasn't until Matthew and Cook got into a heated argument, that she finally found the opportunity to take out the shotgun that she had hidden behind the cabinet. She forced herself to calm down and recalled the methods that Zhang Heng had taught her. Picking up the shotgun as fast as possible, she aimed it at Cook's heart.

Chapter 629 Countdown

"Do you know how to use it, kid?" asked Cook.

"Of course. I have a teacher of great distinction. He is a superb marksman and can defeat ten heavily armed men all by himself. If he happens to be here tonight, I bet you and your lackeys will die even before you step into my house," Wendy said.

"Wow... that's a real shame. Pity he isn't here tonight. Otherwise, I'm curious as to what this man looks like. It sounds like he has three heads and six arms," Cook said casually.

"It's okay. You don't need to feel any sort of regret. I, his protege, am more than enough to deal with you. Although I am nowhere as good as my teacher, I'm still a sharpshooter myself," Wendy puffed out her chest.

"I can land an accurate shot on a running hare from fifty yards, let alone shoot at such a close distance. When I pull the trigger, a hole will appear in your chest the next second, and the bullet will tear through your flesh and heart. In your final moment, you will fall to the ground and wail. But rest assured, it will be quick since you will soon go to hell, you damn old hunchback bastard!"

Wendy spat on the ground.

"Heh," Cook raised his eyebrows. He was stunned and did not speak for half a minute. Blinking, he continued, "I have to admit that... you gave a pretty passionate speech there, my child. Especially the last few expletives. I can say that you are way more straightforward than your benevolent, moral-centered father. I gave him plenty of chances while we were on the way here.

I deliberately turned my back to him when I slept. If he were cruel enough, he would have snatched my gun, threatening me and winning the fight. But in the end, he let me down. All he could think of during that time was to run away from me. Sadly, he didn't know that there was nowhere in this world he could escape to. It's because no one can escape fate."

"I don't know about your bullshit about creeks and salmons, but I only know that people can't outrun bullets," Wendy snapped coldly. "Well, at this point, I can't agree more," Cook paused. "It seems that we are in a deadlock. You have a gun, and I have a gun. Let me tell you what will happen next, kid. I'll shoot and kill your parents. Then, you'll shoot me, and if you're as good of a marksman as you claim to be, the gunshots will attract the three men outside your house.

They will rush in, and when they see my body on the ground, they will shoot at you without hesitation. And yes, you will fight back. If you are lucky, you may be able to get someone as a human shield. Nonetheless, a bullet will hit you eventually. Believe me, it hurts a lot. Especially if this is your first time getting shot. "If you get hit... Well, the process is similar to what you described. If you are unlucky, you won't die for some time after getting shot. That would be the worst part.

You will be lying on the cold hard ground, bleeding out while waiting for death to claim your soul. You will feel the utmost desperation and loneliness. Your mother's corpse will be lying on your left, and your father's to your right. In a sense, you will be reunited with your family. And then you will have the old bastard of a hunchback lying in the middle. Oh, things are about to get real annoying for you."

"Are you done?"

Wendy asked in nonchalance. Although she was trying to restrain the panic in her heart, she had to admit that Cook had indeed dug into her weakness. What she feared most was her parents dying in front of her. When the gruesome scene crossed her mind, her hand trembled slightly, and her body became stiff.

But that was not the worst part. What was worse was that she knew that she could not even sacrifice herself for her family.

Not to mention that she exaggerated her marksmanship and applied the words the sheriff used to describe Joseph on him. After all, at such close proximity, Wendy was confident that she could land her shot on Cook accurately.

Unfortunately, her gun was empty. Although Wendy stole both the gun and the bullets, she did not have time to reload it. Initially, she wanted to ride her Lightning into town after returning the keys, then find a bright spot to slowly reload the shotgun. However, she did not expect Cook to come knocking right on her door.

When Cook sat down in the living room, she had to look darn hard for the slimmest opportunity to get the shotgun, let alone reload it. In other words, thus far, she had been lying. "Are you feeling nervous, child?" Cook's devilish eyes seemed to see right through her heart.

Wendy was sweating bullets from her forehead to the tip of her nose. "I'm not nervous. I don't mind sacrificing my life to kill you. At least I can watch you die in front of me. I'll consider it revenge for my parents. I bet it will feel good," she insisted with resolute obstinance. "Very good. See, Matthew, this is what I've been trying to emphasize all along. Even your daughter knows that you must look straight into the eye of fate and fight that bitch. What a pity..." Cook looked at Wendy with a look of regret, "You are a girl, and I don't have that long to train you. I would have brought you with me, but since I am in a good mood now, I'm deciding to do you a small favor."

"What kind of favor?" Wendy gulped. "I know you are suffering, and you don't know what you should do. It doesn't matter, kid. Just leave it all to me. Dealing with this kind of deadlock has always been my forte," Cook harrumphed. "I will count to ten. If you don't put down the gun, I will pull the trigger and kill your parents. Of course, you can try your luck and kill me first. This should be fun."

Wendy kept telling herself that Cook was pulling psychological tricks on her, trying to crush her will with every word uttered. However, she could tell from the latter's icy stare that he wasn't lying.

"Ten," Cook added casually.

Wendy had never felt so helpless before, having practically no idea what she should do next. Should she surrender, or hold out to the end and watch Cook kill her parents? She had done everything she could. Preventing the tragedy that was bound to happen now seemed impossible. Although she kept telling herself to be strong and to keep the enemy from peering into her weaknesses, tears couldn't help but ooze out from the corner of her eyes.

"It's okay. It's okay, Wendy. You've done well. Your mother and I are proud of you," Matthew said softly, then looked at Cook as if his mind had been made up. "Let them go, and I will go with you."

“No, you have to follow my plan. I don’t believe in your verbal promise, Matthew. I will kill your wife and take your daughter away. This will be an unchanging fact. Of course, if your daughter insists on holding on to the gun, I can only kill you together with them. You know me well, Matthew. I always do what I say. I have always regarded you as a son. Now, I have lost a daughter, and you have no idea the torment I’ll have to endure if I lose my son. My heart will be filled with grief. Nine.”

Tears blurred Wendy’s eyes. She felt that the shotgun was getting heavier and heavier to the point that she could not lift it anymore, as if it would fall from her hand at any moment. Just when her strength about to be exhausted, she heard a gunshot from outside the house, with two more following that. The sound of the firing gun, however, was mixed with the sound of screams. Then, bodies began to drop dead on the ground.

After that, everything returned to silence, as if nothing had happened.

The sound of the gentle night breeze blowing past the pastures was the only audible thing “What the hell was that?” Cook frowned. No longer in the mood to play games with Wendy, he shot her in her hand while she was distracted, forcing her to drop the shotgun. Then Cook turned his gun and pointed at the door.

Chapter 630 It’s Fine Now

“Kenny!”

“Walt!”

“Manuel?!”

Cook raised his voice and called out the names of his three men, but no one answered.

It was not until half a minute later that there was another knock on the door.

“What a load of bullshit.” Cook sneered. He did not say any more nonsense after that. He pulled the trigger and emptied all the bullets from his pistol. The other party might have sabotaged himself this time. If he did not knock on the door, Cook might have still not known where he was. With the knocking on the door, the other party had just revealed his position. And the thin wooden door was nowhere nearly tough enough to stop the bullets from penetrating it.

In the blink of an eye, Cook was done shooting at the door. When the white smoke from the muzzle dissipated, he could no longer hear anyone moving outside the house.

Cook threw the empty pistol to Matthew and said at the same time, “Go, open the door and see what’s going on outside.”

Matthew hesitated for a moment, knowing that Cook intended to use him as bait. When he saw that Cook was aiming another gun at his wife, he could only pick up the emptied pistol, lift the kerosene lamp on the table, and walk out of the house.

On the other hand, Jane was no longer worried about her life anymore. She quickly ran to her daughter, checked her injured hand, then opened the cabinet to look for some gauze she could wrap around the gunshot wound.

Wendy endured the excruciating pain, looking at the shadow under the cabinet from time to time. Earlier, she hid the shotgun rounds there, intending to find an opportunity to reload. But the next moment, Cook's words shattered her last hope. "My dear, you'd better not make any more stupid moves. Otherwise, I'll make sure your body gets punctured by more bullets. Now, kick me the shotgun with your leg." Wendy had no choice, unwillingly kicking the weapon to him. Cook then stepped on it with his left foot and turned to look at Matthew, who had reached the door. The latter took a deep breath and opened the door riddled with bullet holes.

There was, however, no gunshot. "How did it go? Did you see his body?" Cook asked.

"No, there are only three corpses outside. All of them are your men," Matthew said.

"Where is the blood?"

Matthew moved the kerosene lamp forward. "Uh, I don't know. There are a lot of bloodstains on the ground, but it looks like your people left it."

"Well, it seems that I am going to meet him in person." Cook's face looked unchanged after hearing that, "It just so happens that I haven't moved my muscles for a long time." As soon as his voice fell, the mysterious man pulled the trigger, and the bullet went through the kerosene lamp in Matthew's hand. Cook reacted quickly to the threat. Within seconds, he managed to figure out the direction of the gunfire. He then rolled to the door, raised his gun, and fired.

However, the next moment, a figure flashed past the window and smashed another kerosene lamp in the house. Then the room soon plunged into darkness. Cook kicked over a table as a cover, grabbed Wendy's mother, and leaned back. After that, he started to shout.

"What then? Without light, I can't see you, but you can't see me as well. And I still have a hostage with me. It seems we are in a gridlock. Why don't we have a chat?"

Cook paused and asked, "Who are you, and what is your relationship with the Matthew family? Why do you care about them?"

II

11

There was no reply to his questions. It looked as if the mysterious visitor had made up his mind and didn't intend to speak.

Cook was not bothered, though. He continued, "Well, let me tell you how things will go next... You killed three of my men. To be fair, I should kill the hostage, or... should we resolve this dispute in a gentleman's way? How about a one-on-one fight with you? You're an excellent marksman, and I'm just an old man. If we have a duel, you have a greater advantage. Just kill me, and you can save this family."

"Tsk, it seems that you are a person who doesn't like talking, but that's okay. I am a very patient person. I will give you half a minute. After half a minute, if you don't respond, I will kill this woman."

As soon as the room fell into the darkness, Wendy squatted down for the first time, endured the pain in her busted hand, and started to search the ground blindly. She did not know who the mysterious visitor was. The person could be Cook's enemy. That said, it was never her style to pin her hopes on others.

After a while, she managed to get her hands on the box of shells under the cabinet. She then gently crawled in the direction of the shotgun.

While going to get the shotgun, she had to avoid the debris on the ground carefully. It was important for her to make as little movement as possible. Only she would know how difficult it was to perform. When she finally laid her hands on the shotgun and wanted to reload it, she heard another gunshot.

Wendy was stunned.

She had been feeling extremely tense the entire time. The concept of time was no longer mattered to her. She did not know how many minutes had passed. Maybe the half-minute deadline had been reached. The only thing that she felt was some warm liquid splashing on her face.

Until the light came back on. She quickly looked around, and the thing that she feared most did not happen. Although her mother looked terrified and trembled in fear, it seemed like there were no injuries. Instead, Cook's head was pierced through by a bullet and collapsed in a pool of blood. The liquid that splashed Wendy's face just now was Cook's blood and maybe mixed with some brain matter.

At the top of the stairs on the second floor, Zhang Heng put down his gun. At the same time, he received two system notifications. One was about the main quest, and the other was the 30 game points that he received after killing Cook.

In the second half of the main quest, Zhang Heng met the sheriff, and then he met Matthew and Cook. In other words, he had gathered all the three founders of Lucky Horseshoe. This part of the quest was now completed.

This quest was not as difficult as he imagined it would be. Strictly speaking, Zhang Heng actually did not need to go through any battles. As long as he found the three people, he could complete the quest. But in fact, it was implausible for him to encounter Cook and his gang without going through a battle with them.

Zhang Heng looked at Wendy, who was still in a daze, and said to her, "It's okay."

It seemed Wendy did not hear Zhang Heng talking to her. She was still holding the shotgun in his hand tightly and pointing at Cook's body on the ground.

Zhang Heng went downstairs and walked to Wendy. He held the barrel with one hand and carefully remove Wendy's fingers from the shotgun, "It's okay. He's dead. There shouldn't be many thugs left in the Cook gang. Sheriff Dolan will lead his men after them. Your family is safe now."