

48 Hours 951

Chapter 951: Coincidence

The first thing Xu Qian did after getting in the car was to take out a pack of cigarettes from her bag. In order to protect her voice after she started working as a streamer, she was determined to give up her smoking habit. However, she had no idea why she still bought a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from the vending machine downstairs before leaving her apartment that afternoon. Perhaps Xu Qian had a foreboding of what would happen next.

She knew that E-Goat liked her a lot, yet none of them had talked about it before. For E-Goat, once he confessed to Xu Qian, he would have to bear the risk of losing her and staying by her side. As for Xu Qian, she could continue to enjoy letting E-Goat work for her without feeling any guilt.

But this tacit understanding finally disappeared after E-Goat confessed to her. Since then, Xu Qian appeared to have become a little absent-minded. She did not even listen to the conversation between Zhang Heng and E-Goat. When the two talked halfway, Xu Qian looked for an excuse to go back to the car.

Xu Qian lit the cigarette in her hand. Since she had not smoked for quite some time, she choked on the first puff. And about a quarter of an hour later, Zhang Heng also left that small restaurant. He then opened the car door and got into the driver's seat.

Xu Qian then took a quick look at E-Goat in the small restaurant through the car window. The latter was sitting in a chair alone, and she did not know what he was thinking.

Xu Qian also handed Zhang Heng a cigarette, but the latter refused.

"About you being stalked and discovering that your home was invaded, can you provide me with more details?"

"What do you mean by details?" Xu Qian put away the cigarette and frowned, "I thought this matter is over. Haven't we already found the person who stalked me?"

"E-Goat was the one who followed you in the mall, but as far as I know, that was his first stalking experience. In other words, there is another person who spied on you and invaded your house. In fact, now I have reason to believe that E-Goat was just someone who took the blame for the real stalker. After you left, I chatted with him for a while and found out that after he chatted with someone named Walk The Moon, he decided to stalk you."

"This... Maybe it's just a coincidence?"

"I don't think so," Zhang Heng said. "Did you tell anyone else about going to the mall?"

"No." Xu Qian shook her head, but after a thought crossed her mind, she hesitated a little before adding, "I mentioned it to my boyfriend. Why? Are you going to suspect my boyfriend now?"

Zhang Heng did not answer her question. Instead, he said, "I asked E-Goat, and he told me that Walk The Moon seems to know you well, including some of your small habits and hobbies. This is why he decided to follow his advice. Other than that, Walk The Moon was the one that told him that you went to the mall..."

"You don't know my boyfriend," Xu Qian interrupted Zhang Heng. "I can be certain that he has nothing to do with this incident. My God, how could you say that?! You have never seen him, and neither do you even know what he looks like."

"Yes. That is why I asked," Zhang Heng said lightly.

"I have nothing to say about my boyfriend. He went to the earth a long time ago, and he is no longer in New Shanghai 0297. He has no reason to ask E-Goat to follow me," Xu Qian replied, taking in two drags. "Your witchcraft is useless. Can't you see that E-Goat is lying to you? He is a networking expert. He must have figured out a way to locate me. He just doesn't want to admit it."

"Then why did he admit that he followed you at the mall a few days ago?"

"I don't know. I think he got too nervous when we approached him just now. It could be why he simply made up a lie that didn't make sense. Or, maybe I was just hallucinating. Perhaps no one followed me all this while except for that one time at the mall. And perhaps no one broke into my apartment as well," Xu Qian said.

"Do you really believe yourself there?" Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

"Then what do you want me to believe in?" Xu Qian finally broke down. She threw away the cigarette in her hand and said anxiously, "Isn't it a fact that E-Goat was the one that stalked me? He admitted it just now. And you told me that he wasn't lying. So shouldn't we stop here? I'm just a small-time streamer, and I don't go out very often. It doesn't make sense that so many people actually stalk me."

"I'm trying to figure out the whole thing now."

"But you can't even save yourself." Xu Qian blurted out. But she regretted it almost immediately. After a moment's silence, she added, "Sorry, I didn't mean that. You have helped me identify the stalker. It's time for you to deal with your problems so that no one will suspect me when I report you to the authority eight days later."

Zhang Heng listened to her with raised eyebrows. In the end, he decided not to say a word about it.

The two of them returned to their residence after that. As soon as Xu Qian returned to her apartment, she locked herself in the studio and began to prepare for the night's livestream. Meanwhile, Zhang Heng sent an email to Miss F, asking her if she was available.

Miss F's replied him in less than half a minute. Instead of answering his question, she sent him an address.

Zhang Heng looked at the location and found out that the place was not far from the movie theater where the two first met. Including the time when Zhang Heng asked Miss F to send him the photos, this was the second time he had to bother her. Hence, before leaving, he went to the mall and bought a gift for Miss F.

After that, Zhang Heng took a taxi to the Central Shuttle Station. While waiting for the shuttle, he searched for Xu Qian's boyfriend on the internet.

Although Xu Qian had made it clear that she wanted Zhang Heng to investigate no further, Zhang Heng had no intention to give up. After meeting E-Goat, his interest in this matter had only become even greater.

The person with the name Walk The Moon acted very differently from E-Goat. Clearly, he was better at it than him. Not only did he stalk and monitored Xu Qian, but he also made use of E-Goat to distract Zhang Heng when he realized that he was being investigated. This was not something an enthusiastic fan would do.

As Xu Qian said, she was just a small-time streamer. Except for extreme fans like E-Goat, who had liked her for a long time, it stood to reason that no one would do such a thing to her. It only made Zhang Heng even more curious about Walk The Moon's true identity.

Chapter 952: F And Tang

"All passengers, please take note. You have arrived at the first level. Please check your personal belongings and disembark in an orderly manner. Thank you for taking this shuttle. We look forward to serving you next time..."

The shuttle soon slowed to a halt, and its passengers finally arrived at the destination of this trip. Zhang Heng waited until the arrival carriage moved to the arrival area. He then unfastened his seat belt and walked out of the station with the other passengers.

He noticed that the atmosphere on the first level was very different from when he came last night. Although the mood in the city was still humdrum, there were now herds of riot police patrolling the streets. Such a scene was extremely rare on the first level where its state was almost always in total anarchy.

The heavy police presence was obviously related to Zhang Heng's previous fight with the biker gang. Dozens of people had died from the battle after all, and it would be considered a serious incident no matter where it happened. Miss F was serious when she promised Zhang Heng that she'd help him deal with the problem. When Zhang Heng showed up in front of the riot police, they made no move. Instead, they just watched him walked past them.

After that, Zhang Heng headed towards the rendezvous point.

The rendezvous point was a residential area. However, unlike the third-level residential area, the only access control system was broken, and no surveillance cameras were installed. So, Zhang Heng took the elevator to the 22nd floor and knocked on the door of 2204.

After a while, the electronic lock was unlocked, and Miss F's voice came from inside.

"Come in. Close the door."

"Hmm."

Zhang Heng did what she asked and walked into the room.

Unlike what he expected, this place was not like the secret base on the second floor of the cinema. It was an actual residence. The furniture and furnishings weren't comparable to Xu Qian's apartment, but

the hangings on the wall and the decoration in the house showed that there was indeed someone living here.

Besides, Zhang Heng had also seen a little girl sitting on the carpet in the living room. She was about three to four years old and an adorable one as well. As of now, she was playing with a toy duck. Zhang Heng said hello to the little girl, but she just looked up at him and did not say a word. After that, she lowered her head and continued to play with her toy duck.

And Zhang Heng sat down on the sofa opposite her. About five minutes later, he heard Miss F's voice coming from the kitchen, "Help me clean up the table."

"Okay." Zhang Heng got up and cleared the books and papers on the dining table next to him.

After a while, Miss F came out of the kitchen two plates of stir-fried vegetables.

"I usually only eat vegetables at night. Since you are here, I have cooked an extra plate of shredded pork with green peppers for you tonight. It's in the kitchen. You can bring it out."

"Thank you," Zhang Heng said, and he looked at the little girl on the carpet. "Does she belong to you and Mr. G..."

"No, she is my friend's child. She asked me to take care of her temporarily," Miss F said, "Her mother will get off work soon and will pick her up."

"Oh."

Zhang Heng then walked into the kitchen and took out the plate of shredded pork with green peppers and the two bowls of rice on the side.

Other than that, Miss F also filled the bowls with congee. She then placed the chopsticks and spoon beside the bowl. At the same time, she asked the little girl on the carpet to play in the room next to her.

Once the two were seated, Zhang Heng passed the gift that he had just bought to Miss F, who sat opposite of him, and at the same time, thanked her. "I didn't expect that you would let me come to your house."

"Why do you say that?" Miss F took the gift and found that it was a box of chocolates. When she saw the chocolate brand, her hand froze for a short while

"Once I return to the security company, this memory of mine would most likely cause you some trouble," Zhang Heng said. "Thank you for showing me the movie. The part about social surrealism is impressive and profound. Oh, and the hamster you gave me. I didn't understand what it meant until I got home."

"That's impossible," Miss F frowned. "It is never easy to doubt one's self-existence. Even the best philosophers would not be able to figure out your identity so quickly, not to mention that you have accepted it in such a composed manner. And you did not even doubt it."

"Uh, this is probably because recently, I happened to be thinking about who I really am," Zhang Heng said.

“Do you have an answer now?”

“No, but I at least already know that I am a clone.”

“Due to the existence of the memory encoder, the memories possessed by the clones are all forged.” Miss F used her chopsticks to take some vegetables for Zhang Heng. “You need a little time to adapt to your new identity and think about who you are, what you live for, and how you want to live.”

“You are right. But before that, I still have one important thing to do,” Zhang Heng said while pointing at his head. “I have to take out the tracking device under my cerebral cortex.”

“Is that why you came to me?” Miss F seemed a little curious. “How do you know I can help you?”

“Because I know who you are,” Zhang Heng said. “If there is another person in this world who can solve the trouble I’m encountering, it is you. You have encountered the same thing as me, and the world thinks that you are dead. And now you are sitting across from me. I’m not sure whether I should continue to address you as Miss F or Tang.”

Miss F’s pupils contracted when she heard what Zhang Heng said. But soon, she returned to normal. If Zhang Heng had not been paying attention to her eyes all this time, he wouldn’t have captured the split-second emotional change on her.

After that, Miss F calmly said, “Tang is dead, or to be more precise, she has never existed before. She is just an idol created to meet the entertainment needs of the public. She has no relatives, no friends, no freedom of thought, and precious memories that truly belong to her. She is just an... empty and beautiful toy.”

“But now you have those things,” Zhang Heng said. “I came to you for no other purpose. I just want to know how you extract the tracking device out of your head back then?”

“Sorry, I can’t help you with this matter.” Miss F shook her head.

“Huh?” Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

“I was rescued by someone back then, and you have seen the person who saved me.”

“Mr. G?”

“Yes. So, if you want to remove the tracking device from your head, you can only ask him for help. As far as I know, he is also the only person in New Shanghai 0297 who can remove the tracking device from your head.”

“Then what price should I pay? Wait... In order for him to help you, you are required to marry him?”

“You have misunderstood us. I want to marry him because that’s what I want. Mr. G didn’t force me to do anything. Otherwise, we wouldn’t have delayed until now to get engaged.” Miss F then touched the engagement ring on her hand.

“But you have to know that even if it is him, the risk of helping you is very high. He may ask you to do him a favor in return. But don’t worry. I will help you to convince him.”

Chapter 953: You Are Special

The meeting with Miss F went smoother than Zhang Heng could've imagined.

The fact that Miss F was Tang was actually Zhang Heng's wild guess. After all, everyone knew that Tang was dead. The police found her body and chips after she set herself on fire. Tang was also a celebrity clone built by an entertainment company with a lot of money. She was supposed to have the perfect facial features. On the other hand, although F wasn't unsightly, she could only be considered ordinary-looking. She wouldn't be grabbing anyone's attention when she walked on the street.

The only thing that could connect F and Tang were their mechanical prosthesis. According to the rumors circulating on the internet, Tang lost an arm when she escaped from the fifth level. Other than that, the reason why Zhang Heng thought F was Tang was her temperament.

Zhang Heng had always wondered how the ordinary-looking F would possess such an amazing temperament, where not even the celebrities on the billboards could be compared. And now he finally found the answer. As the most celebrated female clone streamer at that time, she had broken a lot of records in the streaming industry. And no one could surpass her until now. The level of her confidence and temperament were way better than Xu Qian and other streamers.

However, neither the mechanical prosthesis nor the temperament could prove that F was Tang. Even if Zhang Heng connected the two together, Miss F could easily deny it. Zhang Heng's current identity was still a clone trying to escape from the authorities, after all. If the company captured him and read his memory, he would put Miss F at great risk.

It was hard to imagine the courage that she had back then. She had to endure so much pain before she could escape that manor. After that, she had to fake her death just to live the life of an ordinary person.

He would definitely not admit that she was the clone that faked her death if the two exchanged positions. When Miss F promised to help him convince Mr.G, Zhang Heng could feel the kindness she had for him. Zhang Heng asked Xu Qian about the number of clones in New Shanghai 0297. One could only imagine the number of clones that were working for humans right now. And Zhang Heng did not know why Miss F valued him so much.

It was as if Miss F knew what he was thinking. She then explained, "Do you know how many clones achieved self-awakening in New Shanghai 0297?"

"Please enlighten me."

"Ever since the city was built, there have been no more than one hundred," Miss F said lightly. "And most of them have been traumatized like me. Only a handful of them survives the hardship. For so many years, I have been trying to awaken other clones. Due to the laws and regulations and the risk of memory being read, I can only hint at them about it secretly. Most of them do not respond to my hints. A small number of them would doubt their identities. Before they could think more about it, their memories are reset. Hence, there is only a handful of us realize our true identity."

"What happened to them after that?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Without exception, they all broke down." Miss F said, "I have never seen someone like you. Maybe I can find the answer I've been looking for a long time from your body."

"What answer?" Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows.

“An answer to liberate our kind.”

“I’m afraid I might disappoint you. As you said, my situation is indeed very special. I don’t think I’m worthy of being promoted,” Zhang Heng said honestly. He did not know how many clones there really were anyway. However, he knew that he was the only player in the entire New Shanghai 0297.

Miss F was noncommittal. She then said, “Let’s eat. The dishes are going to get cold.”

After a while, the two did not talk to each other anymore. And they finished the dinner together just like that. While they were eating, Miss F’s friend came over and picked up the little girl playing in the bedroom.

Zhang Heng had witnessed the way Miss F killed her enemies, but he didn’t expect her to be an excellent cook as well. Although the three dishes on the table were simple home-cooked food, they were very delicious, especially the stir-fried shredded carrot. Zhang Heng realized that the thickness and length of each slice of carrot were almost the same.

Zhang Heng could not help but gobble down another bowl of rice. When he put down his chopsticks, he realized that Miss F had finished her food a long time ago. There was not a single grain of rice left in her bowl. After that, she got up, picked up the dishes, and put them in the dishwasher. Zhang Heng, on the other hand, was sensible enough to take the initiative to clean the tabletop.

“Let’s go.” After everything was done, Miss F put on her coat and picked up the saber.

“Okay.”

Zhang Heng came here to ask for something. So he did not bring any weapons except for Infinite Building Block. He followed Ms. F to the underground parking lot before she started her second-hand off-road vehicle remotely. She then entered the driver’s seat and left the other to Zhang Heng.

Once they got into the car, she set the destination with the navigation system. The place was located southwest of this level. Close to the edge, it was quite some ways from where they were.

After the car started moving, Miss F spoke again. “Thank you for the chocolate. I can see that you did a lot of research before you came here. However, I don’t eat this brand of chocolate anymore.”

“Why? Are you worried that your memory of liking this chocolate might’ve also been forged?” Zhang Heng asked.

Miss F did not answer, seemingly acquiescing to this statement.

“Even if it’s a fake memory, the most important thing is that you feel good when you eat it. Am I right?”

“I just simply don’t want to remember any memories of being Tang,” Miss F mildly said. “Not everyone can accept the fact of being a clone as calmly as you. That’s why you are so special.”

“I’m quite special, but I’m afraid I’m not as special as you expect.”

“It doesn’t matter. Anyway, Mr. G will be the person who will be negotiating with you later. Just need to make sure that he is interested in you.”

Miss F turned on the speakers in the car while talking.

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About forty minutes later, the two arrived at their destination. It was a toy factory. Miss F ignored the group of burly security guards at the entrance and entered the factory with Zhang Heng. After that, they walked towards the second workshop. This factory was huge, but there were very few people working in it. Apart from the security guards, only engineers responsible for maintaining the equipment were present. Machines had completely replaced all the workers at the assembly line.

But as soon as he walked into the second workshop, Zhang Heng saw two people, and one of them was someone he knew.

The leader of the biker gang was now handcuffed against production machinery. There were wounds all over his body. Zhang Heng could see the flesh and bones beneath his skin being exposed. And there was a pool of blood under his feet. He looked like he was dying.

Chapter 954: Courier

This unfortunate man in front of Zhang Heng had his consciousness getting fuzzy. Even when Zhang Heng walked past him, he did not show any reaction, as if he did not recognize Zhang Heng at all.

“Are you torturing him to find out the mastermind behind the attack last night?” Zhang Heng asked.

“No.” Mr. G’s voice came from the second floor, “I know who the mastermind is. I’m just using him to send a warning.”

“A warning?”

“Yes. Don’t get me wrong. I am not a sadist or a tyrant. I just don’t want what happened last night to happen again. The person who attacked my guest on my turf must pay the price. I need to make sure everyone bears that in mind.”

Mr. G gestured to the two bodyguards next to him to drag the two dying men outside and get rid of them. After that, he walked down the second floor and raised his head when he stood in front of Zhang Heng.

“When we met for the first time last night, I had a hunch that we would see each other again. However, I didn’t expect this day to come so soon.”

“I’m here to ask for your help,” Zhang Heng bowed slightly.

“I heard what my fiancée said,” Mr. G smiled. “She thinks highly of you.”

“Miss F thinks too highly of me.”

“I don’t think so. Before we discuss other matters, the fact that you single handedly fought against a dozen enemies before my men arrived last night and protected the middleman, ensuring that the transaction was uninterrupted isn’t something that everyone can do. To be more precise, I should say that no second person in the entire New Shanghai 0297 could do what you did last night. After that incident, I have been thinking about how to thank you.”

Zhang Heng knew that Mr. G had not finished speaking. So, he did not reply in a hurry, waiting quietly for him to continue speaking.

Sure enough, Mr. G continued. "I think Miss F should have told you that it is not easy to extract the tracking device in your head. And given the strict control of human cloning in New Shanghai 0297, this is a very risky matter. If it's any other day, I don't mind operating on you right away. However, I'm in the midst of a very important transaction. I must first secure the transaction."

"May I ask about how long your transaction will take?"

"Initially, we planned to do it in two weeks. However, the main problem we are facing now is that we can't find a suitable courier. As you can see, I am the actual ruler of the first level. I have a lot of men who are good at combat. And I also have men with cool heads or strong adaptability. However, I don't have anyone that possesses all the traits I just mentioned."

Mr. G, went on, "It's a bad sign that the middleman gets targeted even before the transaction happens. When the transaction is officially completed, there will definitely be some troublemakers who will come looking for me. For confidentiality, this has to be as low-key as possible of a transaction. So I can't assign too many people to carry out this task for me. I hope to hire a man with multiple talents to be my courier. F is supposed to be the most suitable candidate for this task. However, there is another task that requires her attention. This problem has been a headache for me until I saw your fighting video last night."

Mr. G paused, then continued, "I don't know how much time you have left, but if you are willing to be the courier for this transaction, then I can arrange for it to be carried out within five days. As long as you bring the goods back to me, I will immediately help you to solve your troubles."

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Similar to when he came, Miss F drove Zhang Heng to the shuttle station when he wanted to leave.

The two of them did not speak anymore while they were in the car. Zhang Heng turned his head to look at the regressive streets and buildings through the car window, as well as the passers-by with different looks. The scenery at the first level was monotonous. The sycamore trees were the only plants being planted in the green zone, and the exterior walls of all the buildings were painted with drab colors. However, the number of billboards here was more than the third level's. There were all kinds of advertisements being displayed 24 hours a day. It reminded Zhang Heng of the endless pop-up advertisements from certain rogue antivirus softwares.

No matter what era it was, if one wished to watch less advertisements, the person had to spend more money. Miss F parked the car next to a convenience store, and the opposite was the waiting area of the shuttle central.

Zhang Heng then unfastened his seat belt and thanked Miss F again. "Thanks to you for everything today."

The latter shook her head. "All I did was bring you to meet Mr. G. You were the one that talked to him about the whole thing. There is no need to thank me again." Then she reminded Zhang Heng, "You

should avoid causing any new trouble for now because we will be contacting you soon, when we are ready.”

“Understood.”

Although Zhang Heng verbally agreed to it, he still drove to where E-Goat lived an hour later. Zhang Heng had sent an email to E-Goat, but the latter did not reply to him. Thus Zhang Heng checked on the navigation application and marked several bars nearby his place.

A quarter of an hour later, he found out that E-Goat was drinking alone in the corner of one of the bars. Zhang Heng then sat on the sofa opposite E-Goat. The latter looked up at him and looked away immediately. It was as if he had seen a stone on the side of the road. He had no interest in talking to him at all.

“Aren’t you curious why I came to you again?”

“It doesn’t matter,” E-Goat’s voice sounded a little hoarse. It was probably because he had been drinking too much. “If you are here about the stalking matter, I advise you not to waste your energy. I don’t want to talk to you anymore. You can call the police and let them arrest me.”

“Relax, haven’t we already told you that day? We won’t call the police to arrest you,” Zhang Heng said.

“Get the hell out of my face then!” E-Goat raised the wine glass in front of him and drank all of its contents.

“The woman you like is about to marry another man. I know you must be feeling very uncomfortable now.” Zhang Heng was not angry when he heard the way he spoke to him, but remained very patient with him.

“Why would you come here to bother me? You know I’m going to scold you.” E-Goat glared at Zhang Heng.

“Actually, you know very well that chances for the two of you to be together is very small, right? And you also know that the day she confronts you will come sooner or later. But even so, you are still willing to love her unconditionally. Tell me, why did you do something that you knew won’t end well?” Zhang Heng asked rhetorically.

“You are sick. Did you come here just to taunt me?!”

“Of course not. I just want to confirm how much you are willing to contribu

Chapter 955: Cooperation

The second meeting between Zhang Heng and E-Goat was not pleasant. It ended with E-Goat spilling beer on an innocent lady behind Zhang Heng. His move almost caused a commotion in the bar. When Zhang Heng came to the Central Shuttle Station early the next morning, he saw the gloomy E-Goat outside the gate.

“Good morning. You haven’t had breakfast yet, right?” Zhang Heng greeted him and handed a bag of Polo buns to E-Goat.

“Were you anticipating me?” E-Goat did not take the bag of buns from Zhang Heng and grimaced. “You are just despicable. You knew that I wouldn’t have sat back and watched when I found out that Xu Qian is in danger.”

“You overthink the whole thing. I just bought two Polo buns for breakfast. Since you are here, I don’t mind giving one to you,” Zhang Heng said. “Besides, if I remember correctly, I told you that Xu Qian might be in danger.”

E-Goat looked caught in a dilemma. But in the end, he still reached out and took the Polo bun from Zhang Heng. “Let me tell you something first. The only things that I care about are related to Xu Qian. If I find out that you want me to do things for you in the name of Xu Qian, I will turn around and leave.”

“No problem,” Zhang Heng nodded. “You fill in the application form first.”

According to New Shanghai 0297’s regulations, when the occupants of lower-level wanted to take the central shuttle to the higher level, they would need to submit an online application first. After that, they were allowed to purchase the tickets only after their applications were approved. Fortunately, the process was not that complicated. And for the people with no criminal record, the authorities would usually approve the application. If the applicant wanted to travel with another person, they needed to fill in the companion’s ID on the application form.

After hearing what Zhang Heng said, E-Goat suddenly became alert again. “Why don’t you apply for it yourself?” he then asked.

“Because I want you to be useful.”

“...”

Zhang Heng later explained, “No matter who is monitoring Xu Qian, the person is obviously well-prepared. When I started to investigate this matter, the person had already noticed me. That was why he used you to take the blame. So in the follow-up investigation, we must be extremely cautious. Since I am Xu Qian’s bodyguard, my presence will be more conspicuous. As for you, you can move in the dark.”

“But, according to your statement, if Walk The Moon is the one that is spying on Xu Qian, he should know me as well.” E-Goat doubted.

“It’s okay. Your presence shouldn’t bother him.” Zhang Heng patted E-Goat on the shoulder.

“...”

“Oh, I don’t mean that you are insignificant. Everyone knows that you are just Xu Qian’s crazy fan. Once you craft such an identity for yourself, the enemy would not be too wary of you. By the way, Do you have any relatives or friends living at the fourth level?” Zhang Heng asked afterward.

“No.”

“How about classmates?”

“Neither.” E-Goat shook his head.

“People you know?”

“A company on the fourth level is our company’s client. He bought a complete set of equipment recently. I go to them from time to time for network maintenance.”

E-Goat frowned.

“Very good. Just use this reason.”

Although E-Goat was a little unwilling to listen to Zhang Heng’s order, he was left with no other options since it was related to Xu Qian’s safety. In the end, he obediently filled out the application form, and as Zhang Heng said, he received approval less than five minutes later.

The two bought their own tickets and boarded the shuttle to the fourth level.

At the bar last night, Zhang Heng had only revealed to E-Goat that Xu Qian might be in danger, but he did not specify what kind of threat it was. Besides, E-Goat was in a bad mood last night, and he did not ask for more details from Zhang Heng.

He struggled the whole night, and it wasn’t until dawn that he made up his mind to come to the station. He initially thought Zhang Heng would tell him all the details when he got on the shuttle, but the latter seemed to have forgotten about the matter. Zhang Heng did not say anything to him after they boarded the shuttle.

Until the shuttle arrived at the fourth level, E-Goat could not help it anymore and stopped Zhang Heng after they stepped out. “Did you forget about something?” he tried to remind Zhang Heng.

“What did I forget?”

“We have now reached the fourth level. All you did was make me prepare this and that. You haven’t even told me what we are doing here,” E-Goat snorted.

“Oh, I want to visit this company.” Zhang Heng handed a note to E-Goat.

“New Shanghai Zhuorui Sensor Co. Ltd?” E-Goat took the note and looked at it. “What does this place have to do with Xu Qian?”

“You should ask what the boss of this company has to do with Xu Qian.”

Zhang Heng took back the note.

“Wait... Could it be that...” E-Goat seemed to think of something, and his expression suddenly changed.

“You guessed it right. The boss of this company is Xu Qian’s boyfriend, or more accurately, her fiancé. He’s already proposed.”

“Did Xu Qian say yes?” E-Goat was feeling anxious.

“No. He went on a business trip recently, but he’ll apparently be back soon, and that’s when Xu Qian will agree to his marriage proposal,” Zhang Heng said. “The good news is that we should have a few days left. So you treat this operation as your last chance.”

E-Goat did not show any joy after he heard what Zhang Heng said. On the contrary, he hesitated even more. "I... I followed Xu Qian once earlier, and now I am going to her boyfriend's company. If she finds out about this, she'll definitely block me permanently."

"Believe me. Your current situation is no better than being blocked by her," Zhang Heng said. "And you don't have to worry about this issue. We are not going to enter the company looking like this."

From what Xu Qian told Zhang Heng, her boyfriend was supposed to be at the earth right now. Still, Zhang Heng decided to use his Lv2 makeup skill to change their appearance just in case. When they stepped into the company, the two had transformed into the buyers of an electronic display company. E-Goat then handed over the newly-released electronic business card to the receptionist at the front desk.

After the receptionist looked at the names on the card, she asked, "Mr. Wang Hao and Mr. He Tian, have you made an appointment?"

"No. Our company needs to purchase a batch of sensors, and they sent us here to visit the manufacturer. However, your company is not included in our initial inspection list. We found your company's information by accident on the Internet, and it happened that we were nearby. So, we came here to take a look." Zhang Heng said.

"Oh. I see. Please wait comfortably in the second reception room. I will contact the manager right away." The receptionist took Zhang Heng and E-Goat to the lounge and made two cups of tea for them. After bowing, she left.

Right after she walked out of the room, Zhang Heng pretended to look around before he blocked the surveillance camera at the upper right corner, allowing E-Goat to take out his microcomputer from his bag.

But E-Goat did not expect the table in the room was transparent. After he took out the microcomputer, he did not know where to put it. In the end, Zhang Heng threw his backpack on the table, blocking the microcomputer under the table.

Chapter 956: Secret

"It's nice to meet you two. I'm Liao Ming, the manager of the marketing department."

Five minutes later, a tall man in a suit and a pair of leather shoes walked in from the door and shook hands with Zhang Heng and E-Goat.

E-Goat looked a little nervous. Since he held the microcomputer with one hand under the table, he could only sit on the chair and give Liao Ming a handshake with his other. Unfortunately, he did not look like someone who came here to discuss business with the overly serious expression on his face. Instead, he looked like he was here to find fault.

As the marketing manager, Liao Ming had read through countless people and dealt with all kinds of monsters. Hence, not about to be bothered by E-Goat's expressions, he still enthusiastically exchanged electronic business cards with the two.

"You two are from...Qitong Technology Group?"

“Yes. To be precise, we are just a subsidiary of the main company. We were only established recently,” Zhang Heng said.

The two electronic business cards forged by E-Goat were very detailed. Taking into account the possibility that the other party might do a background check on them, E-Goat decided to use the information of a real company. The main company was about the same size as Shengtang Morgan, where it had thousands of subsidiaries under it. E-Goat had selected a newly established subsidiary to increase the authenticity of its business card. It also allowed them to whip up something on the spot.

Liao Ming nodded, “As far as I know, Qitong Technology Group also has a company in the sensor business. No. I should say that Qitong Technology Group’s sensors are very popular in the industry. So why not just order the sensors from that company?”

Of course, Zhang Heng had already prepared the answer to this question.

“Oh, their sensors are indeed very popular. That’s why they need to deal with a lot of orders. And we need those sensors urgently and we have very little time left. Besides, we don’t have high requirements for the sensors... We actually hope to lower costs...”

“Understood. Let me introduce our product lineup to both of you,” Liao Ming said while connecting his bracelet to the projection in the living room.

E-Goat’s breathing only got faster than before.

Zhang Heng discussed the possibility of hacking the bracelet when he met E-Goat for the first time. According to E-Goat, the bracelet was a must-have personal device for everyone in this era. It had multiple functions and was also used to store personal information. In other words, the security that was used to protect the bracelet had to be top-notch. It also meant that it was almost impossible to hack the bracelet through the internet. Even the top-tier hackers would take considerable time to hack into the bracelets of other citizens.

No matter how secure the system was, however, there would always be loopholes. So, E-Goat came up with an idea. He would use the short-distance communication method to complete the hacking. Before Liao Ming’s bracelet was connected to the projector in the meeting room, E-Goat would first shield the projection signal and disguise his microcomputer as the projection device. Then, when Liao Ming connected his bracelet to the projector, he would not realize that he was actually connected to E-Goat’s microcomputer. Without using any brute-force attack, E-Goat would be able to access Liao Ming’s bracelet easily.

Of course, this simple and crude method wasn’t without its shortcomings.

First of all, when Liao Ming connected his bracelet to E-Goat’s microcomputer, the real projector would not receive any signal. If Liao Ming weren’t a fool, he would very quickly realize something amiss. Fortunately, this was an easily solvable problem. As long as E-goat connected his microcomputer to the projector, he would be able to project whatever Liao Ming wanted to show them. The biggest problem was that Liao Ming’s bracelet would display a safety reminder when it was connected to a new device.

This was not a serious matter because they did encounter this message from time to time. Most people do not care too much about this security reminder. However, they could not rule out some cautious people who would notice the subtle difference.

Liao Ming, for instance, now had a look of surprise on his face when he received the security reminder. As the marketing department manager, Liao Ming had to take care of his customers all the time. This was not the first time he used the second meeting room, nor was it his first time connecting his bracelet to the projector. Hence, he was surprised to receive the security reminder.

On the other side, E-Goat's heart had almost jumped out of his throat. He was worried that that Liao Ming would find out about it. But, on the contrary, Zhang Heng remained calm and asked, "Why? What's the matter?"

"Oh. It's nothing. It's probably because I just upgraded the system two days ago." After seeing Heng seemed to be in a rush, Liao Ming didn't want to overthink things. He simply clicked OK, and his bracelet was connected to E-Goat's microcomputer. About two seconds later, the projector started working and projected the company information Liao Ming had stored in his bracelet.

At this point, Liao Ming was relieved, and he began to introduce their lineup to the two. He talked for about a quarter of an hour, during which he would pay attention to Zhang Heng's and E-Goat's expressions from time to time. He seemed to be studying their behavior. However, to his disappointment, Zhang Heng almost had no expression on his face. E-Goat, on the other hand, seemed to be more relaxed than before. In the end, Liao Ming could not read anything from them.

After Liao Ming finished his presentation, Zhang Heng asked a few more frequently asked questions by the buyers before asking, "Can we visit the production workshop?"

"Of course. Wait a minute. Let me contact them first."

Liao Ming made a phone call. After that, he brought Zhang Heng and E-Goat downstairs. Then, they walked to the workshop behind the office building and visited the assembly line.

Zhuorui's production workshop was similar to the other companies on the fourth level, where no workers were on the assembly line. Liao Ming had said that the entire Zhuorui Sensor Co. Ltd. had less than forty people. The R&D and marketing departments were where most of the workers worked. As for other departments, there were only two to three employees in each.

After turning around, Zhang Heng and E-Goat found nothing anything suspicious. At least on the bright side, Zhuorui was a small technology company that operated like any other technology company. As for the dark secrets they might be harboring, Zhang Heng and E-Goat had to check out the information they copied from Liao Ming's bracelet.

When it was all over, Zhang Heng shook hands with Liao Ming.

"We have a better understanding of the whole thing now, but we still need some time to study and compare the quotations. I will contact you as soon as possible once we make the decision."

"Thanks for your hard work. You can call or email me if you have any questions later!"

Liao Ming sounded as enthusiastic as ever.

After leaving Zhuorui, Zhang Heng and E-Goat went into a cafe and asked for a corner seat. After that, E-Goat compiled the data that he copied and sent to Zhang Heng, including Liao Ming's communications records, emails, photos, two months' worth of location information, and consumption records.

It took an hour for E-Goat to sift through all those information. As he read further into it, he became more and more disappointed. That was because the data stored in Liao Ming's bracelet was nothing out of the ordinary, just like the workshop the two visited earlier. Other than the inappropriate relationship with a female employee, he did not seem to be hiding any secrets.

Chapter 957: Best Employee

"We just wasted all of our efforts. Xu Qian's boyfriend turned out to be clean."

E-Goat turned off his microcomputer and leaned his body back on the sofa, looking frustrated.

He hesitated for the whole night before making up his mind to come to the fourth level with Zhang Heng and sifted through the information obtained by illegal means. But, unfortunately, it turned out that it was just a false alarm. Anyone would be disappointed by such an outcome, especially E-Goat. At first, E-Goat was planning to use the information obtained from this investigation to prevent Xu Qian from getting engaged with her boyfriend. Now, it seemed all of his hopes were lost. Hence, he had now returned to his previous state of despair.

Zhang Heng, who was sitting opposite him, did not say a word. He was still flipping through the copied materials in his hands. As the manager of the marketing department, Zhang Heng and E-Goat had the highest chances to meet up with him. Due to the nature of his work, he had to deal with various inquiries from the customers. Hence, a large amount of company-related information was stored in his bracelet. From these data, it could be seen that Zhuorui's business was nothing more than ordinary. They would take orders from other companies every month, and the orders could be big or small. And most of the time, Zhuorui would deliver its products on time.

As for Liao Ming, the marketing manager's activities in recent months, he could not find anything wrong with it as well. Other than daily activities, most of his contacts were customers who wanted to order sensors from Zhuorui. After Zhang Heng checked his communication records and location information, the thing that impressed him the most was his work attitude.

In essence, he was more than diligent. Liao Ming got married very early, his wife being his classmate from the university that he attended. However, the perfect couple that everyone expected to last a lifetime did not have a smooth life after the marriage. After seven years of marriage, their relationship was forced to come to an end. Liao Ming chose to leave her and took away his four-year-old daughter.

One could see that his failed marriage impacted him greatly. Although Liao Ming was messing around with some heterosexual partners due to his physical needs, he never had the idea of remarrying. At the same time, to make up for his daughter's lack of motherly love, Liao Ming decided to give his daughter a high-standard and materialistic life.

Although he was living on the third level, he paid a hefty price to send his daughter to the boarding school on the fourth. That way, she got to enjoy the high-quality educational resources the level had to offer. The pocket money he gave her and the money he spent on her clothes and toys were comparable to the other students in the boarding school. In addition to that, every year, he would save a future

education fund for her underage daughter to prepare her to leave New Shanghai 0297 to study further on earth.

To maintain such a life would undoubtedly cost Liao Ming a great fortune, which probably explained why he worked so hard in the company. He spent more than 14 hours with his customers every day. Besides the need to constantly look for new clients, he also needed to maintain a good relationship with his existing ones. Liao Ming's notebook was filled with various customer personal information, including their children's birthdays, the cosmetic products their wives liked, and even what food their pet dogs enjoyed. It allowed him to establish an intimate relationship with his customers in the shortest time possible and make a breakthrough in his business.

Such a person could be regarded as a model employee no matter which company he worked in.

E-Goat then complained, "Maybe he will contact someone from Qitong Technology Company to check on our background now. He seems to be quite familiar with Qitong. He should have some friends over there. We should leave before he exposes us on the fourth level."

"Well, if you are worried, you can go first. I will stay here for a while," Zhang Heng finally said.

"Why? Do you know that we are only allowed to stay here for less than ten hours? According to the regulations, we will need to leave the fourth level before six o'clock in the evening." E-Goat frowned.

"Thank you for reminding me. I will pay attention to the time," Zhang Heng replied, then beckoned to the waitress of the coffee shop.

"Wait. Are you planning to leave me alone and do something bad?" E-Goat looked nervous when he heard what Zhang Heng said. He seemed to want to say something but was forced to shut his mouth when he saw the waitress walking over.

"Bill, please. Thank you."

"Okay. I will send you the e-bill now. All you need to do is click pay when you confirm that everything is stated correctly," the waitress smiled and returned to the other side after speaking.

While waiting for her to leave them completely, E-Goat continued lamenting in a low voice, "Can you stop making trouble everywhere? I was the one that filled out the application form. If you cause any trouble, I will be in big trouble too."

"Don't worry. I won't cause any trouble," Zhang Heng said. "I will go back after I meet up with someone."

"Who else do you want to meet?"

Zhang Heng did not answer his question immediately this time. Instead, he raised his eyebrows and said, "If you really want to help, I do have a favor to ask from you."

"What's the matter?" E-Goat asked.

"Can you pay the pill, or we can go with AA."

"..."

After that, E-Goat saw the bill forwarded to him by Zhang Heng. They had ordered two cups of coffee and one cookie from the cafe, and after staying for an hour and a half, they spent a total of 300 credits. Zhang Heng was the one that asked E-Goat to help him, and he did contribute a lot at Zhuorui Company. It was only right for Zhang Heng to buy him a cup of coffee. Unfortunately, he just started the quest, and he had less than a thousand credits with him when he first came here. Now he was only left with six hundred credits.

It would cost him half of what he had now if he paid for the meal. Left with no other options, Zhang Heng had to ask E-Goat to pay for him first. As a result, the latter looked at him contemptuously and paid the bill.

The price of the items on the fourth level was way higher than that of the third level. Although E-Goat's income as a network engineer was not as good as that of Xu Qian, he still earned a considerable amount of credits every month. Hence, he could still afford to pay for this meal.

However, when E-Goat followed Zhang Heng to the next place, he found out that he had deceived him. Zhang Heng did not continue to investigate Xu Qian's boyfriend. Instead, he went to the elementary school where Liao Ming's daughter studied.

Zhang Heng checked the background of this school on the internet earlier. Even on the fourth level, this school had a good reputation, was well-known for its strict management and teaching quality. Therefore, this school was favored by many parents.

Zhang Heng then used his old tricks again. He bought a package of snacks from the nearby supermarket, disguised as a friend of Liao Ming, and met Liao Ming's daughter's class teacher with the reason of wanting to give her the snack.

He chatted with her class teacher for about five minutes. He then handed the snacks to the class teacher and left the school. After that, he reunited with E-Goat that waited for him outside the school. The latter looked confused, "This is it? What the hell are you doing? You came here just to give Liao Ming's daughter some snacks?"

"Yes, that's right." Zhang Heng nodded.

"And then?"

"It's getting late. Let's go back to the third level first. Thank you for coming here with me today... After I go back, I have to investigate a few more things, and I'll ask you for a coffee after I figure out everything." Zhang Heng said.

Chapter 958: Wish

Zhang Heng worked on the matter until around ten at night. After that, he returned to Xu Qian's apartment. And when the elevator door opened, Zhang Heng saw Xu Qian sitting in the living room. She was supposed to be livestreaming at this hour.

The latter had no makeup on. Sitting on the carpet in her pajamas, she was watching a shopping advertisement on the TV. There was a plate of chicken feet, melon seeds, and two cans of beer beside her.

"You're back." Xu Qian's mood seemed to have lightened up as compared to two days ago. She even took the initiative to greet Zhang Heng.

"Did something good happen?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Yes. I just received a call from my boyfriend. He told me that he's almost done with his business on earth, and he estimates that he will be back in two days," Xu Qian exclaimed excitedly.

Before that, she was a little hesitant about getting married so early. But, after experiencing so many things recently, from the continuous decline in viewer numbers to getting stalked to the bodyguard her hired bodyguard who had recently discovered his clone identity, she had become a little overwhelmed by all these unfortunate events.

Now she realized how precious it was for her to have a shoulder to lean on. She had prayed more than once for her boyfriend to come back to her.

Now, her prayers were answered. He was going to return to New Shanghai 0297 earlier than expected.

This was the only piece of good news Xu Qian received during this period of time. So, she decided to give herself a day off and take a break. Seeing Zhang Heng's frown, Xu Qian waved her hand again. "Don't worry. I still remember the agreement between us. I never told him a thing about you."

"That's good."

Zhang Heng then put his backpack on the floor.

"How about you, have you found... uhh... a solution to your problems?"

"Well. I contacted a friend, and she said she would help me," Zhang Heng replied.

Xu Qian nodded, but the excitement on her face had reduced. Zhang Heng's reply wasn't to her satisfaction. In fact, Xu Qian wasn't as hopeful when it came to this. To her, it was impossible for Zhang Heng to go against the corporation that owned him. It was only a matter of time before he was caught. Xu Qian's only hope was that Zhang Heng could hold on a little longer, at least until she got married.

Initially, her boyfriend wasn't supposed to be returning this early. However, he suddenly told Xu Qian that he was almost done with business on earth, and it gave Xu Qian a glimmer of hope. She then pointed to the chicken feet in front of her.

"Do you want some?"

"No. I had dinner before I came back," Zhang Heng replied.

"You look exhausted. Did you go to lots of places today?"

Seeing Zhang Heng rejecting her offer, Xu Qian picked up a chicken foot for herself.

"Well, I'm tracing the whereabouts of Walk The Moon."

Zhang Heng's words froze Xu Qian's expressions. And it took a while for her to squeeze out a smile. "I thought we reached a consensus on this issue. You are not supposed to investigate this matter anymore."

Didn't you tell me that the investigation was purely an act to conceal the fact that you have discovered your identity? You caught E-Goat, and you have gotten what you want. So why continue to investigate?"

"Because I am very interested in this matter."

"Interested? Why? I don't plan to pursue it anymore. Why are you still interested in it? And shouldn't you focus on your affairs now?" Xu Qian asked.

"I'm dealing with it," Zhang Heng said, "Are you free tomorrow? I want you to go somewhere with me."

"Uh... I'm afraid I don't have that kind of time to go out."

"Don't worry. I won't be long, and it can be done during the day."

"But I have to prepare for the livestream tomorrow evening. Tomorrow's stream is very important to me because that is probably my last," Xu Qian said.

"Your last livestream?"

"I told you before. Most female streamers quit their job once they get married. As soon as this news spreads, the popularity of the streamer would instantly go downhill. And I am in a lot of trouble now. I estimate that I will not be able to start another livestream after tomorrow. So, it is better I say goodbye to my fans as early as possible."

Although Xu Qian's words were relatively euphemistic, Zhang Heng understood what she meant by trouble. Once Zhang Heng, an awakened clone, was caught, Xu Qian would fall into a series of legal troubles according to the current laws and regulations. This was why she wanted to marry herself off as soon as possible.

"My boyfriend actually discussed this matter with me a month ago. He also hoped that I could retire early. You know, he is not short of money, and he could be quite conservative too. He does not wish his wife or girlfriend to work as a streamer," Xu Qian said.

"So, your boyfriend is the one that wants you to retire?"

"No, it is the result of our mutual discussion. I just made up my mind, and I'm sure he will be delighted when I tell him about this decision. Why... is there any problem?"

"No matter what I say now, you probably won't believe it. So, the easiest way for me to convince you is to make you come with me tomorrow," Zhang Heng said. "This matter is of grave importance, even more, important than your retirement. You better take some time out tomorrow."

"You... won't hurt me, right?" Xu Qian seemed a little worried, and she started to step back.

She knew that the people who were driven to a dead-end would often make some crazy decisions, having the idea of "Since I am going to die anyway, I should do something crazy before I die." They would even drag in other innocent people to achieve their end goal.

Although Zhang Heng's mood was fairly stable so far, Xu Qian did not know what was on his mind. So, Xu Qian acted very carefully during this time. She did lose control once when Zhang Heng suspected her boyfriend. Other than that, Xu Qian would treat Zhang Heng politely most of the time.

At the same time, Xu Qian was glad she didn't mistreat Zhang Heng when she first met him. She knew that some people in New Shanghai 0297 did not treat the clones as human. But Xu Qian was not that kind of person, and she did not want to get into any trouble because of it. Unfortunately, she still got herself into big trouble in the end.

Zhang Heng did not answer Xu Qian's question, but instead, he asked, "What is your biggest wish?"

"My biggest wish?" Xu Qian seemed a little confused. She couldn't understand why Zhang Heng suddenly changed the topic to a life goal.

Chapter 959: Utopia

"My biggest wish is to live a better life," Xu Qian confessed after thinking a little. "I have stayed on the first level before, and although I have always wanted to forget that part of my life, it turned out unforgettable. Throughout the time I lived there, I swore every night in my heart that if I leave that place one day, I would never go back."

"So, you haven't been back since you left, have you?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Yes. Any problem with that?" Xu Qian asked. After a pause, she continued, "I have come so far, and I worked my way up to where I am today. Now, I just need one more step forward, and I can make my dream come true. I know what you think of me—a female streamer who loves money more than anything else. I don't deny that. It's crucial that I become a fourth-level resident, not to mention that my boyfriend is also a very nice man. He is definitely qualified to be my life partner."

Zhang Heng was noncommittal when he heard those words. Instead, he said, "It's getting late. Let's go to bed early. We have to go out tomorrow."

Xu Qian nodded and groggily stood up from the ground. At the same time, she asked the housework robot to clean up the unfinished snacks on the ground.

She then said to Zhang Heng, "If you have any sexual needs, I can pay someone to find... professionals to help you to deal with that. For the sake of the times we got along well, I hope you will not hurt me."

"Oh. You think too much," Zhang Heng lamented. "I am your bodyguard. And our contract is not even over yet?"

"Yeah. Anyway, um... thank you for helping me to find the person who stalked me in the mall." Xu Qian put her arms together and walked towards her bedroom, "Also, about that... Good night."

"Sweet dreams."

After Xu Qian returned to the bedroom and closed the door, Zhang Heng did not lie down and go to sleep immediately. Instead, he came to the floor-to-ceiling window of the living room. When the sensor detected someone standing here, the curtains would automatically retract to reveal the night view outside the window.

Xu Qian's apartment was located close to the city center. Zhang Heng could see half of the third-level city from Xu Qian's apartment, where the colorful street lights and electronic billboards twinkled beneath his feet. Although it was late at night, many cars were still moving on the street. The suspended

monorail whizzed by under the circular track, and on both sides of the track were the futuristic office buildings with their lights still turned on.

A group of elite white-collar workers had just solved a challenge they encountered on their project. They were walking out of the office building while talking and laughing. Although they looked exhausted, the excitement on their faces was evident. Instead of returning home to sleep, they decided to meet up to have supper together to celebrate the victory.

Now, although Xu Qian always laughed at herself for being a materialistic small-time streamer, it was understandable why she was desperate to move to a higher level after comparing the first level and third level.

Compared to the bleak, jam-packed, and chaotic first level, this was indeed a place full of positivity and vitality. In addition to the huge gap in education, living environment, and consumption levels, the most important thing was that everyone on this level seemed to be filled with hope for a better future.

Convenient and trendy tech gizmos were displayed all over the shelves of the department stores. With clean and tidy streets, and coupled with the breathtaking night sky, even the most demanding critics had to admit that this might be the most ideal future habitat for humankind.

And this was only the third level of New Shanghai 0297. The fourth and fifth levels were definitely more beautiful and dreamier. In the end, Zhang Heng laid his eyes on the huge shuttle track that penetrated the sky in the city center. Like the Tower of Babel described in the Old Testament, it was supposed to connect heaven and earth.

Later, he turned off the light in the room and bid the hamster on the table goodnight.

...

Although Zhang Heng promised that he would never hurt her, Xu Qian still looked a little nervous the following day, especially when she had breakfast. She tried to make Zhang Heng tell her where they were heading next, but he said nothing in the end.

Xu Qian couldn't help but feel nervous. It wasn't until the two arrived at the station that Xu Qian saw the e-tickets Zhang Heng bought and realized where they were going next.

"We are going to the lowest level?!" Xu Qian looked incredulous. "I told you that I would never go back there again."

"Relax. I'm not asking you to settle down over there. It's just as a short trip," Zhang Heng persuaded.

"I don't want to travel there because it'll remind me of the life I had."

"I forgot who said it, but someone once said that if we want to understand the present, sometimes we need to face the past," Zhang Heng said. "Anyway, I have already bought you a ticket. As long as you come with me once, I promise that I won't bother you again."

Xu Qian hesitated. A series of events that had happened on the first level made her reluctant to return. Besides, the first level was not as safe as the third, which also meant that it was easier for Zhang Heng to do whatever he wanted to do to her.

Of course, if Xu Qian yelled for help from the guards at the station, they would immediately get her out of trouble. Zhang Heng would very likely be arrested and recalled by the company in advance. However, once his memory was read by them, she would get into big trouble, which would undoubtedly affect her engagement.

In the end, her intense desire to ascend to the fourth level overwhelmed her fear. So, Xu Qian chose to accept Zhang Heng's arrangement and boarded the shuttle to the first level.

"You said that when you first moved to New Shanghai 0297, you worked as a waitress in a small restaurant. Do you remember where that restaurant was?" Zhang Heng asked Xu Qian on the shuttle.

"Of course."

Xu Qian shifted slightly after she strapped her seatbelt on. Even though she had already made up her mind, an inexplicable sense of despair still nudged her heart once she realized that she was approaching the first level. She just wanted to get up from her seat and leave the shuttle immediately. However, since the shuttle had started moving, she wouldn't be able to unbuckle the seatbelt. So, left with no other option, Xu Qian had to sit tight till the end of the journey.

After a while, she frowned again. "So, you plan to get me to go to the small restaurant I worked at? Why? I don't like the boss there and don't want to see him again."

"You are more successful than him now. Don't you want to go back and avenge yourself?"

"What's the point in doing that? It's in the past." Xu Qian shook her head, continuing, "Besides, with his thick face, there is an 80% chance that he would ask me to take a picture with him and advertise his small restaurant. I don't want to let him take advantage of me anymore."

"You don't have to worry about that. I am here now. If you are displeased with him, I can beat him up for you," Zhang Heng said.

"This plan of yours sounds good."

Xu Qian managed to squeeze a smile.

Chapter 960: Buying Happiness

No matter how unwilling Xu Qian was, the shuttle would still arrive at the first level. After walking out of the station, Xu Qian first raised her head and looked at the dull sky above her head. It was unlike the third level. Although the sky on the first level also had clouds, they would not move. After watching it for too long, it could even cause discomfort to some people. Other than that, only two preset temperatures were available during the day and night. These two presets never changed over time.

Xu Qian let out a long sigh. "I don't know how in hell's name did I live in this hellhole for almost a year."

"Do you still remember this place?" Zhang Heng asked.

"How could I not? When I moved to the second level as a streamer, I had a nightmare. I dreamt my viewers kept dropping in numbers, and eventually, I was forced to move back here. Thank you for making that nightmare a reality." Xu Qian looked at the small stalls around the station, and a look of contempt flashed across her eyes. She then pulled out her coat worth 20,000 credits.

“Let’s go. Didn’t you say you wanted to go to the small restaurant I worked at? We can go back earlier if we are done with what we are supposed to do here.” Xu Qian finally thought through the whole thing. Since she could not say no to this trip, it was better for her to cooperate with Zhang Heng and end this nightmare as soon as possible.

Before getting off of the car, Xu Qian took out a pair of large sunglasses from her bag and put them on. It covered half of her face. After that, the two drove to the small restaurant Xu Qian had worked at. As soon as they got out of the car, they saw two young girls in short skirts standing by the door of the small restaurant. They surrounded a man, trying to convince him to dine at the restaurant.

The upper body of one of the girls was completely attached to the man. “We have Cantonese, Sichuan, and Huaiyang cuisine! You can also enjoy a 30% discount when you top up our membership card...”

However, she was shoved away before she could finish.

“Go away. Don’t stand in my way.”

After that, the man wanted to continue walking, but he did not expect another woman to stop in front of him. Furious, he was about to swear, but when he saw how the woman dressed, he immediately swallowed the swear words he was about to spit out.

“There’s no need for you to push others if you don’t want to eat here,” Xu Qian snapped coldly.

“Why? Are you with them? Are you guys here to sell food or make money by scamming others?” the passerby asked angrily.

“I don’t know them. All I know is that they are just doing their job,” Xu Qian said as she walked up to the girl the man had pushed away. “Hey, are you okay?” she asked the employee. “And why did you get so close to the man? Did your stupid [BEEP] boss make you do this? Why listen to him?”

The girl smiled and whispered, “I’m fine.”

Xu Qian checked her arm and confirmed that there was no bruise on her before she stood up. After that, she said to the passerby, “You are lucky that she is not hurt. Apologize to her right now.”

“Apologize to her? Why?”

And the girl who was being pushed by the man quickly said, “No need. I’m at fault. It has nothing to do with this gentleman.”

“No. You misunderstood me. It has nothing to do with you either. I just want to hear him saying sorry,” Xu Qian said lightly.

“Where did this mad woman come from? What’s wrong with you?” The man was laughing even though he was furious. He was a man with a short temper. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have pushed the girl in the short skirt earlier. In fact, if Xu Qian did not dress so well and Zhang Heng was not beside her, he would have resort to violence again.

Xu Qian did not refute him. She then activated the projection of her own bracelet, entered three thousand credits in the transfer interface, and said to the man, “Apologize, and the money is yours.”

Not only the man who pushed the girl was taken aback, but the two girls in short skirts next to him were also shocked beyond words. One of them moved her mouth as if she wanted to say something, but she decided not to say it in the end.

“Is it true? Are you trying to mess with me?”

The man was a little skeptical about whether he did not believe that such a good thing would happen to him. The average monthly salary on the first level was only two thousand credits, way lower than the credits Xu Qian offered if he apologized.

“It’s just three thousand credits. So why would I need to lie?” Xu Qian said and looked at the two girls. “They will be our witness.”

The man hesitated for a moment. He was not considering whether to apologize to the girl. Instead, he was worried Xu Qian might break her promise. However, he figured out that he had nothing to lose if he apologized. So, the man decided to do what Xu Qian asked and apologized to the girl he pushed.

“I’m sorry.”

After that, he turned and looked at Xu Qian. However, she did not make any moves. Instead, she asked the man, “Aren’t you going to apologize to me too?”

Seeing the man was a little puzzled, Xu Qian reminded, “You called me a crazy woman just now.”

“...”

“I’m sorry.” He had done it once. So, he did not mind apologizing again.

When he was done apologizing for the second time, Xu Qian spoke to him. “Reach out your hand.” She then flashed her bracelet at the man’s bracelet and then entered the password. A few seconds later, three thousand credits had been added to his account.

The man gulped, and he almost called Xu Qian insane. When Xu Qian looked at him, she knew what he was thinking at the moment. It seemed like he was worried that she might regret her decision. After receiving the transfer, he started to run away as fast as possible.

Xu Qian nodded at the two girls and asked, “Aren’t you girls supposed to bring in more customers?”

The two employees quickly snapped back to reality. One outside the restaurant continued to attract more customers, while the other smiled and led the way.

“Please, come inside.”

Although this small restaurant named Fu Ji could cook all kinds of dishes, its area was really small. In total, it could only fit four tables. The two girls in short skirts were both ushers and waitresses. Other than that, one more girl was responsible for cleaning, and the lady boss worked as a cashier. As for the boss, he was now working as a cook in the kitchen part-time.

While the girl walked away to bring them the menu, Zhang Heng said to Xu Qian, “If you give those three thousand credits to the girl who was being pushed, she should feel happier.”

“Why should I do that? She didn’t even sustain any injuries. And I’m not her mother. Why should I pay her?” Xu Qian said. “I did say that I feel unhappy because he didn’t apologize to the girl after he pushed her. I spent the three thousand credits to buy happiness for myself.”