

ARC OF FIRE

Chapter 6: Accident

After barging into the room, Wang Zhong let out a sigh of relief.

Perhaps because he had put his mind at ease, his wound began to hurt.

So he yelled with full breath, "Medic!"

Immediately, a female medic appeared, "Who's calling?"

"Me, me!" Wang Zhong raised his left hand—the right one was injured and couldn't muster much strength. He could raise it, but it would hurt.

The female medic rushed over and swiftly tore off Wang Zhong's sleeve, skillfully unraveled the bandage, "Who did this dressing?"

Wang Zhong, "I did it myself. It was an emergency. We had just blown up an enemy jeep, and we didn't know when the enemy would hear it and come over."

The female medic, "This is horribly done, and you haven't disinfected it, it's already starting to fester. Expect a fever. The good news is the bullet went through."

As she spoke, she took out a packet of yellow powder and sprinkled it all over Wang Zhong's wound.

Wang Zhong screamed in pain.

The female medic teased, "Don't scream, your girlfriend is watching."

Originally observing the outside, Ludmila immediately turned her head upon hearing this, “I’m not his girlfriend. I am a prayer hand, part of the 55th Divine Arrow Group, but my Divine Arrow was destroyed by a tank.”

When Ludmila said this, she glanced at Wang Zhong, hesitated briefly before adding, “I narrowly escaped under the command of Colonel Aleksei Konstantinovich Rokossov.”

In reality, right after Colonel Aleksei Konstantinovich Rokossovsky had been bombarded by a tank, he had fled pell-mell into a basement—literally in a most undignified scramble.

By saying this, Ludmila was preserving Wang Zhong’s dignity.

Realizing this, Wang Zhong surreptitiously closed his legs, which he had spread apart, fearing someone would notice the stain on his trousers.

The pee wasn’t his; it was best if it went unnoticed.

The officer who had just let the two in frowned slightly, “Colonel Rokossov’s battalion’s defensive area is two blocks away. Has this battalion already collapsed?”

Wang Zhong recalled the scene he had witnessed from the second floor; it seemed there were no khaki-clad troops left resisting nearby.

So he answered, “Yes, my unit has disintegrated.”

The reason for the disintegration, of course, was the sight of their commander ignominiously taking cover, which would make any unit fall apart.

The questioning officer cursed and fiercely rubbed his stubbly beard.

Ludmila glanced at Wang Zhong and said, “The enemy’s assault was too fierce; there was nothing we could do.”

Wang Zhong remembered, Ludmila called him Alyosha, which was a nickname for Aleksei. If the custom in this country was similar to that of Earth's Russia, calling each other by nicknames implied they were relatively close. RÑNÓBEs

Perhaps Ludmila's assistance in covering for him was due to this relationship.

Wang Zhong felt slightly dejected.

He thought he had already won the girl's trust.

Ludmila continued, "I need to rejoin my unit. My squad has been dispersed across the entire 79th Division, there must still be some of my comrades alive, and I want to join them."

"You're just in time," the stubbled officer said, "Monk Yeca Neiko's squad just lost their prayer hand. I'll get someone to take you there, Stepan!"

A burly middle-aged man appeared, "Sergeant Major, did you call me?"

The stubbled one pointed at Ludmila, "Take this captain to Monk Yeca Neiko's squad, she's a prayer hand."

The burly man nodded, "Follow me."

Ludmila stood up, gently placing her hand on Wang Zhong's shoulder, "Alyosha, you're wounded; go and rest properly. If I don't come back, take care of my parents for me."

This girl obviously knew the peeing colonel quite well.

Even though Wang Zhong didn't even know the name of the country they were in, with no patriotic fervor, as a man, with the girl preparing to face death so bravely, he couldn't possibly show cowardice.

"No," he said, "I've only got a light injury; I can still fight."

Ludmila seemed surprised and stared at Wang Zhong for a few seconds before smiling sweetly, “Not this time. If you’re worried I might think less of you, rest easy. I couldn’t possibly look down on you; you got injured trying to save me.”

Indeed, Wang Zhong had shouted to draw attention when he saw the enemy aiming at Ludmila, which got him hit.

Ludmila went on, “If you remove yourself from the front lines now, no one will hold it against you. Leave honorably, and after you’ve healed, give those Prussians a taste of their own medicine!”

After speaking, Ludmila turned decisively, giving the burly man a nod, “Lead the way.”

The two then left.

The stubbled Sergeant Major snapped his fingers, “Xie Na, finish dressing the colonel’s wounds, and find a stretcher bearer to take him to the rear.”

Wang Zhong, “No! I can be evacuated, but first I need to report the intelligence I’ve gathered to...”

To whom?

Wang Zhong didn’t recognize anyone.

Wait a second, his identification seemed to have the unit number on it, but he hadn’t remembered it in the rush.

Before he could reach for his ID, the stubbled man said, “Do you mean to tell Duke Vladimir?”

Wang Zhong, “Yes! I’ve just come back from enemy territory, and en route, I killed a high-ranking officer in a jeep!”

Actually, Wang Zhong didn't know why he was trying so hard to stay at the front line; his original plan was to survive in this chaotic world, and to achieve that goal, he should have been safely evacuated to the rear.

Perhaps it was Ludmila's performance that had stimulated him.

Or maybe he just didn't want to leave Ludmila alone on the front line.

When he had a moment, Wang Zhong checked his vision and found that on the interface of his "cheat," Ludmila's "soldier tag" was gone; he had become a commander with no troops under him again.

Just as Wang Zhong was feeling conflicted, Bearded Guy spoke up, "Okay, technically speaking, you are a Lieutenant Colonel, and we have no choice but to follow your orders. Anton!"

Another decorated private entered the room: "Present!"

Bearded Guy: "This is Lieutenant Colonel Aleksei Konstantinovich Rokossovsky, take him to the command center."

"Carry him there?" asked the private in surprise.

Wang Zhong stood up on his own, pushing away the medic who was still trying to wipe the bloodstains off him: "I can walk."

Private: "Please follow me."

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Following the private to the backyard, Wang Zhong realized that an opening had been made in the courtyard wall; from the looks of the edges, it was clearly intentional.

"Did we make this hole?" he asked the private.

"Yes, the duke ordered it to be made," the private answered with evident pride. "The duke has experience in civil wars; he said it would help connect

the defense areas. We worked all night to break through these walls. Of course, the Prussians also helped a lot, with their bombs!”

While talking, the two passed by a crater five or six meters in diameter, with the surrounding buildings half-collapsed.

“See the spire ahead? Saint Maria Cathedral, they say it’s a building from six hundred years ago, built of huge stones, even 155mm heavy artillery can’t do anything to it! Now it’s the duke’s headquarters!”

Wang Zhong looked toward the spire the private was pointing at, then noticed that there was no cross on top of the spire; instead, there was a sun emblem.

This really wasn’t Earth; even the religions were different.

Five minutes later, Wang Zhong arrived in front of the cathedral.

The guiding private saluted the sentries at the door and then announced loudly the arrival of “Lieutenant Colonel Aleksei Konstantinovich Rokossovsky.”

A lieutenant immediately came out from the cathedral: “The Colonel has arrived? The duke is waiting for you.”

Wang Zhong furrowed his brow slightly; the duke is waiting for me?

The private saluted Wang Zhong: “I’m heading back now.”

Wang Zhong took the opportunity to learn the military’s way of saluting and imitated it: “Thank you, I wish you good luck from here on out.”

The private walked away without looking back.

Wang Zhong followed the lieutenant who had come to receive him into the cathedral.

Although most of the sky outside was covered in gunpowder smoke, sunlight still shone through the stained glass windows, coating the interior of the cathedral in a layer of sacred light.

The lieutenant led Wang Zhong through the chapel, into the sacristy at the back.

The sacristy had now been transformed into a command center, covered with at least six radios and eight telephones as far as the eye could see. The kind of “tick-tick-tick” telegraph sound that’s often heard in old war movies filled the room.

A huge map of the city’s defenses hung on the northern wall.

The map was covered with arrows indicating enemy attacks.

Duke Vladimir stood with his hands behind his back in front of the map.

The lieutenant snapped to attention with a salute: “Sir, Count Rokossov has arrived.”

Wang Zhong raised his eyebrows; they used titles of nobility here rather than military rank?

Duke Vladimir turned to Wang Zhong: “You are still alive, that’s great, the Crown Prince personally sent a telegram ordering me to ensure your safety.”

The Crown Prince?

Wang Zhong briefly recalled the equipment he had seen used by both parties on his way here, clearly that of World War II level armies; how was there still a Crown Prince?

Had World War I not happened?

It could be; there was a notion that the end of World War I was actually just an indefinite ceasefire, and that World War II and World War I were essentially the same war.

Duke Vladimir turned to his aide: "Arrange for forces to escort the Colonel back to Yekaterinburg immediately."

Wang Zhong: "Wait! I came to report on the situation at the front!"

Duke Vladimir didn't listen to Wang Zhong, continuing to give orders to his aide: "Also, get the Colonel a new pair of trousers that fit. My tailor should have enough cloth."

Wang Zhong looked down, then realized that the water stains were actually quite clear; people had just pretended not to notice earlier.

This made his ears instantly burn hot, even though the stains were not his doing.

Just then, a shrill whistling sound came from the sky.

Duke Vladimir's face changed dramatically, and he roared with all his might: "It's naval artillery!"

The next moment, the roof was pierced by a 381mm heavy artillery shell.