

Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

Chapter 11: Rainy Night in Hua City (3)

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In the wind and rain-covered playground, about a hundred people were seated or standing, all looking over: “Brother Jiang and the others have returned!”

After the door completely vanished, Song Ke noticed there was a boy standing beside her. His face was somewhat pale, but his eyes were very bright. He had a deep blue sports headband wrapped around his head, and his hands had just retracted from the wall.

Song Ke stared at him for a couple more seconds.

Jiang Rui noticed her gaze and leaned closer to her, explaining near her ear, “He’s called Liu Zixuan. His ability is ‘door-opening.’ He can open a door on any flat surface, for twenty seconds. We use this method to enter and exit the safe zone.”

Song Ke wasn’t used to people being so close to her, so she made a ‘hmm’ of acknowledgment and took two steps away.

Opening a door out of thin air using an ability? No wonder this place could establish a safe zone. The entire wind and rain-covered playground was sealed on all four sides. The intelligent-controlled gates to the east and west were tightly shut, and there were many heavy objects piled behind them. It was like a stronghold to defend against zombie attacks. Along with Liu Zixuan’s ability, they had control over the initiative of entering and exiting, which helped avoid direct conflict with the zombies as much as possible.

A group of thirteen people walked towards the center of the wind and rain-covered playground, where a young man was waiting for them.

“Teacher Xu, we’re back!” The members of the squad saw him and immediately surrounded him.

“We hit the jackpot this time! We found steak! Lamb leg! We can finally have meat!”

“Teacher Xu, there are more and more zombies outside. When will the Alliance’s rescue team come?”

Upon hearing this last sentence, the high spirits of the crowd gradually dampened. Every day spent here added an extra layer of danger. The reason why they hadn’t lost hope was simply due to their faith, believing that the Alliance wouldn’t easily abandon Hua City.

Xu Liren was a teacher at Hua City No.1 Middle School, thirty years old this year, of average height. He wore rimless glasses and had a gentle and refined demeanor. At this moment, he was tilting his head slightly, patiently listening to a group of students chatter away.

After they had finished speaking, Jiang Rui quietly briefed him on the events of the day and gestured with his hand towards Song Ke, who stood behind.

She became the center of attention, initially unnoticed by those who remained in the wind and rain-covered playground. However, with Jiang Rui’s gesture, several inquisitive gazes immediately fell upon her.

After listening to Jiang Rui’s account, Xu Liren kindly beckoned her over, “Song Ke, come here.”

The squad members parted like the Red Sea, instinctively making way to the sides. Song Ke, who lagged a step behind, was exposed. She took two steps forward, remaining silent.

Xu Liren had been her homeroom teacher and was aware of her stuttering issue. He didn’t mind her reticence and simply gazed at her through his glasses, as if contemplating something.

“Teacher Xu, Song Ke saved me today!” Tian Yi eagerly wanted Song Ke to stay and spoke up for her.

“Yeah, yeah! When we encountered the zombies, she knocked down several of them. She’s really impressive,” Kongzi Qi chimed in as well.

The other members of the team, though they didn’t say anything aloud, had eager expressions in their eyes. Song Ke’s powerful skills had left a profound

impression on them. With someone capable of fighting like this joining them, everyone's sense of safety improved significantly.

"Professor Xu, let Song Ke stay," Jiang Rui proposed voluntarily.

"Let's not rush things, everyone," Xu Liren said with a comforting smile, looking at Song Ke with care. "According to what Jiang Rui said, you got separated from the retreating group, right? Hua City is quite dangerous now. I try my best to ensure the safety of every student. If you're willing, would you consider staying here temporarily?"

Xu Liren spoke eloquently, like a gentle breeze, and those eyes behind his glasses seemed to hold an irresistible persuasive power when meeting someone's gaze. It was hard to summon the courage to resist him. Song Ke instinctively looked away and was about to agree—

"No, I disagree!" a delicate and pretty girl walked down from the stands. When Cao Yiyi tried to grab her sleeve, she shrugged her off. "Professor Xu, this place is already dangerous. Why are we letting in unknown people? What if she seeks revenge on us or causes trouble intentionally?"

Seeing her, Jiang Rui frowned and patiently explained, "Zhou Anqi, Song Ke isn't an unknown person. She's also your classmate."

"A classmate? Did she ever treat us as classmates? Don't forget why she dropped out in the first place!"

"That's enough!" Jiang Rui interrupted her coldly.

Zhou Anqi was scolded loudly by him. At first, she was stunned, but then it seemed like she'd been slapped by a burning palm. Her father was on the school board at Hua City No.1 Middle School. She was used to being a proud little princess and had never faced such a loss of face, especially from Jiang Rui. She was embarrassed and angry, on the verge of losing her temper.

Xu Liren sent the others to handle supplies, then turned to Zhou Anqi. He calmly said her name, "Zhou Anqi."

Zhou Anqi angrily lifted her gaze, suddenly meeting his calm eyes. She shivered, and her imposing demeanor vanished instantly. The foul language on her lips was forgotten.

Xu Liren spoke slowly, as if trying to convince her, "At this time, all of us should unite and put aside personal conflicts. Think about it, Song Ke's addition is beneficial for us. Doesn't what I said make sense?"

Zhou Anqi found herself nodding along, not sure how she had agreed.

Xu Liren smiled contentedly, then looked at Song Ke. "You've had a long day. Go rest. Those several rows over there are your former classmates from Class Three. You can join them."

Song Ke stared at Zhou Anqi, feeling a bit puzzled. How had Zhou Anqi, after three years of not seeing her, suddenly changed her attitude? Just a moment ago, she was furious, wanting to bite her, and now she was obedient?

Interrupted by Xu Liren, Song Ke followed the direction of the stands and saw her "old classmates," who appeared both alarmed and embarrassed, none of them daring to meet her gaze.

"No need," Song Ke thought coldly, finding an empty corner to lean against the wall and rest.

On the western side of the stands, someone curiously approached the group from Class Three, asking for gossip.

"Who's that? So arrogant. Is she Brother Jiang's new partner?"

"You're such an idiot," the person speaking trembled all over. "Don't provoke her. She's a disaster... that scar on Brother Jiang's head was caused by her!"

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When Cao Yiyi came to find Zhou Anqi after collecting supplies, she saw her sitting by the stands with vacant eyes. Cao Yiyi adjusted her facial expression, putting on a concerned look, and whispered to her, "Anqi, are you still angry about Song Ke?"

Zhou Anqi was confused for a moment before slowly regaining her composure. "Who? Oh, her. Such bad luck. Professor Xu agreed to let her stay. How did you guys run into this harbinger of doom?"

Cao Yiyi sat down beside her. "Actually, it's not a big deal that we bumped into her. Jiang Rui insisted on bringing her back. He even took special care of

her on the way. We're all looking for supplies everywhere, and she just needs to watch."

Zhou Anqi's anger flared up again upon hearing this. She stood up, ready to confront Jiang Rui, but Cao Yiyi grabbed her arm. "Anqi, don't be impulsive. If you go to talk to Jiang Rui now, he'll only dislike you more. Jiang Rui is an ability user now. You can't provoke him like before..."

Zhou Anqi pouted. "I just can't understand how she has the nerve to make Jiang Rui bring her back."

"Because she can fight, but Anqi, things are different now. Even though she can fight, she's not an ability user. Some situations are beyond even the capabilities of ability users. Without Jiang Rui protecting her, who knows what might happen..." Cao Yiyi trailed off.

"What might happen? Hey, can't you just say everything at once? Geez," Zhou Anqi stared at her.

Cao Yiyi choked a bit, inwardly cursing at how dense she was. She had dropped such obvious hints, and yet Zhou Anqi still didn't get it.

She smiled gently. "Anqi, do you know that Zhang Qi likes you?"

*

Leaning against the wall, Song Ke let her supernatural power circulate slowly within her body, trying to control every subtle change. Her outward projection of mental energy detected a mass of energy approaching. Opening her eyes, she saw Tian Yi placing a bag of meat floss bun in front of her.

After being caught in the act, the chubby boy scratched the back of his head and shyly smiled at her. "Thank you for saving me today."

Song Ke retracted her mental power and responded succinctly, "No need."

"It's necessary. Thanks to you today, I was so scared back then..." Tian Yi waved his hands repeatedly, carefully observing her expression. Actually, he was a little wary of Song Ke at first, but after experiencing her lifesaving help, he felt a bit closer to her.

Somehow, Song Ke's cold and aloof demeanor seemed to trigger his desire to talk. Tian Yi simply sat down on the ground and started chatting nonstop, "Oh, you don't know, I used to be so afraid of disaster movies. Those moments when the zombies come rushing out..."

Chattering away to himself, he reminded Song Ke of Aming for a moment, so she didn't interrupt him immediately.

But he just kept on going, and Song Ke finally reached her limit. "Hey, you, shut... shut up."

Tian Yi stopped talking as if a parrot had its throat squeezed, looking pitiful.

Song Ke sighed inwardly. "If you really, really want to talk. Just tell me about, about the situation here."

"Sure," Tian Yi became excited again. "I entered the safe zone on the first day. What do you want to know?"

"Ability users."

"We currently have three ability users. Brother Jiang, you already know about him. He's a fire-type ability user, able to control flames like whips. He's adept at dealing with zombie groups. So, I declare, Brother Jiang is the strongest fighter here!"

Song Ke raised an eyebrow, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

"Then there's Liu Zixuan. His power is the ability to open doors. He opened the door for us when we first came in. However, he needs a 12-hour interval between each door opening. Initially, he even passed out after using it, so we usually only go out once every other day."

Thinking of how she had depleted her psychic power the first time, Song Ke couldn't help but think: Liu Zixuan's power might be unique, but its actual consumption is quite high. No wonder he can only use it twice a day.

"There's also Zhang Qi," Tian Yi pointed in another direction to a burly boy who was helping a female classmate lay out some exercise mats. His bulging biceps resembled small hills. "His power seems to be super strength? Zhang Qi used to practice throwing iron discs. Now he can lift the whole platform with one hand! Look over there."

At the west side of the smart-controlled gate, the entire platform had been uprooted and piled behind the gate. It probably weighed a few hundred kilograms. When Song Ke first noticed it, she found it odd, but now she realized it was done by an ability user.

“However, luckily, you ran into Brother Jiang today,” Tian Yi muttered to himself.

“How, how so?”

“You don’t know, Brother Jiang is not only strong with his power but also righteous in his conduct. He always takes responsibility when leading us out. That’s why everyone’s willing to follow him. But Zhang Qi, on the other hand, used to have a bad reputation. He’s impulsive and easily angered. The last time he led a team out, some people didn’t come back...”

Song Ke looked at Zhang Qi. After helping with the mats, he moved over to the stands and chatted with a few guys, causing them to burst into hearty laughter. Not far away, Zhou Anqi gave him a disdainful look, then Cao Yiyi approached, and the two started talking.

She shifted her gaze back and continued asking Tian Yi, “What about Professor Xu? It seems like you all, all listen to him.”

“Yeah, when the zombies first appeared, we were all terrified. Fortunately, Professor Xu was there. He organized our retreat and came up with the idea of the safe zone. We take turns going out to find supplies, and Professor Xu allocates personnel.”

“What about... do you know how the powers awaken?”

“I don’t know. The Alliance hasn’t released an official explanation. It’s all just hearsay, true and false mixed together. If it wasn’t for people like Brother Jiang who are genuine ability users, I probably wouldn’t believe it either.

“But I’ve noticed they share something in common!”

Suddenly lowering his voice, Tian Yi leaned in and confidentially revealed, “I’m not sure about other ability users, but the night they awakened their powers, they all had a fever. Zhang Qi was the first to wake up, around 11 p.m. Then Liu Zixuan, around 3 a.m., and Brother Jiang was the latest, waking up almost noon the next day.”

Chapter 12: Rainy Night in Hua City (4)

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©Teach her a lesson©

Was fever a precursor to awakening of supernatural abilities?

Even long after Tian Yi had left, Song Ke was still pondering this question.

Would her three-day high fever have any impact on her supernatural abilities? What exactly was the ability she had awakened?

As one problem was resolved, new questions kept emerging incessantly, giving Song Ke a headache.

Jiang Rui later paid her a visit, facing numerous gazes, and brought food and a mattress for Song Ke. From the past, she had always regarded him as a troublesome busybody, but she hadn't anticipated that after three years, he would still be like this. She was so fed up that she didn't want to bother with him at all.

Perhaps sensing her impatience, Jiang Rui didn't linger much either. He just left after putting down the items.

At night, the wind and rain on the playground subsided, and everyone lay on their mats, lost in their own thoughts, gradually slipping into slumber.

Song Ke picked up her backpack from the ground and stealthily entered the equipment room in the darkness.

Inside the stuffy equipment room, she bit her lower lip, undoing the bandages wrapped around her body.

The gauze separated from her skin with a slight tug, and after removing all the bandages, Song Ke was momentarily stunned. Several wounds on her body, deep enough to expose bone, had actually healed within just a few days. Fresh, tender new skin had grown, and even when she lightly poked at it, it didn't hurt much.

Was this related to her awakening of supernatural abilities? Her body's healing speed had significantly increased.

Previously, Song Ke had been unwilling to walk alongside those soldiers, partly because of her injuries, especially the ones on her back and abdomen. At a glance, they looked grisly, so she intentionally wound long bandages around her arms. Her aim was to divert attention to her hands, thus downplaying the existence of other wounds.

After all, she had been wounded by zombies, and she didn't know if any abnormalities would arise. The group of powerful and vigilant supernaturals, if they noticed anything amiss, given their inhumane treatment of those who showed abnormalities, the consequences would likely be unpredictable.

After reapplying the ointment and tending to her wounds, Song Ke closed the door, retreating back to her corner.

In the latter part of the night, she dozed off, hugging her backpack, until the tranquility of the safe zone was shattered by a loud exclamation.

"There's news! The Alliance has issued a statement!"

Spots of light from cell phones began to flicker one after another. The awakened individuals who were awoken by the noise didn't even have time to complain as they rubbed their eyes and checked the official messages.

"It's true! The nearest rescue team is less than 80 kilometers away from Hua City!"

"They say they will clear out the peripheral zombies first and then dispatch starships to the urban area for rescue. Survivors can upload their locations."

"This is fantastic! We can finally leave!" The girls embraced each other, jumping and rejoicing with tears of joy.

The hope of survival ignited the entire safe zone. Nobody felt sleepy anymore; they gathered together, excitedly discussing. Xu Liren gathered a group of students for an emergency meeting, seemingly discussing matters about contacting the rescue team.

Song Ke wasn't interested in their meeting's contents. She rolled over, facing the corner of the wall, and continued to sleep. When she escaped from District

177, she had already known that a rescue team would be coming in the next couple of days. The news now confirmed it, and for her, it meant just another place to wander.

What she didn't expect was that, in a short while, the group that had just finished the meeting was heading straight toward her.

"Song Ke, wake up. We need to talk to you, Song Ke?"

Representing them, Lin Xia called softly for quite some time, but Song Ke, with her face buried in her bag, was sound asleep and showed no response.

In fact, she had awakened when this group of people had approached, but with so many people buzzing around, her morning irritation got the best of her.

She wasn't really keen on dealing with these people.

Xu Liren knelt down in front of her, as if he knew she was awake. He said in his usual tone, "Song Ke, today Zhang Qi is preparing to lead a team to the starship port to gather information. We're missing one person. Would you be willing to go out for a bit?"

Although it was phrased as a consultation, a dense crowd of people was behind him, and dozens of pairs of eyes were fixed on her.

Everyone was waiting for her answer. Unable to pretend to be asleep any longer, Song Ke slowly opened her eyes and let out a big yawn.

Feeling so sleepy, her eyes even welled up with tears.

Seeing that she wasn't taking it seriously, Zhang Qi's expression immediately turned grim.

Xu Liren paid no mind to her impoliteness and continued to persuade her gently, "Song Ke, everyone in the team has their own position and contribution. You're new here, and fairness is important in the decisions I make as a teacher, right? I know you're skilled and capable of handling this task. I've talked to Zhang Qi, and he agrees with your involvement."

Through the corner of her eye, Song Ke saw Tian Yi madly gesturing behind.

Jiang Rui stepped forward, his lips tightly pressed. "Professor Xu, let me lead the team today."

Zhang Qi was already very displeased. When he saw Jiang Rui stepping up, he immediately sneered, "Jiang Rui, do you look down on me? You think you're better than me? You're a hero, and I'm a coward?"

Xu Liren interjected in time, extinguishing the brewing argument between them. "Searching outside is important, but protecting everyone within the safe zone is equally crucial. Jiang Rui, I trust you, and you should trust your fellow student's abilities, right?"

Jiang Rui wanted to argue further, but Zhang Qi standing nearby quickly pulled him back, murmuring something to him.

Both supernatural individuals had fire in their eyes, staring each other down in tension.

As the tension escalated in the background, Xu Liren remained calm and lowered his voice, gently persuading, "Song Ke, let me speak candidly. Jiang Rui is steady; I'm at ease with him leading. Zhang Qi has a stronger personality, but I believe you're capable outside. Also, Zhang Qi's words... he's a bit more assertive. Keep an eye on him when you're out there. I know you're quite capable." He stressed the last sentence meaningfully.

Song Ke's heart skipped a beat, uncertain about the meaning behind his last words.

Xu Li turned away, speaking in a loud voice, "Zhang Qi, you're leading today. Remember, we can't afford to lose anyone else."

He seemed to smile, his eyes behind his glasses hiding unfathomable depths, carrying a hint of warning.

In the dimly lit playground, a few hanging lights illuminated the ceiling but couldn't reveal everyone's expressions clearly. Song Ke's gaze swept across Zhou Anqi and Cao Yiyi in the distance, Tian Yi and Lin Xia closer by, Jiang Rui and Zhang Qi in a standoff, finally settling on Xu Liren.

Each face held its own thoughts. What were they calculating? What were they worried about? What were they afraid of?

Grandfather was right. Dealing with people was truly the most exhausting thing in this world.

With her bag slung over one shoulder, Song Ke pushed herself up and stood. "Got it, I'll... go out."

...

Liu Zixuan placed his hand on the wall. After a violent surge of energy, the outline of the door gradually became visible and eventually stabilized.

He patted Zhang Qi on the shoulder. "Send me a message when you're back."

Zhang Qi made an OK gesture.

Just before opening the door, Zhang Qi suddenly withdrew his hand and playfully said to Song Ke, "Hey, I heard you're pretty amazing? How about you go first?"

Compared to going in, going out was certainly more dangerous. Who knew if they'd face a group of zombies when they opened the door?

"Sure," Song Ke couldn't be bothered to expose his ulterior motives, so she simply responded, not bothering to look at him, and opened the door to step out.

Arrogant, way too arrogant.

Zhang Qi's face was almost twisted with anger.

This time, the team, including Song Ke, consisted of eight people, all boys. There wasn't a single familiar face among them, except for one: Zhang Hao, who somehow tagged along. On the way, he took the opportunity when others weren't paying attention to come over and remind her, "Zhang Qi might cause trouble for you. Be careful."

Having heard gossip from Tian Yi, Song Ke knew that Zhang Hao was a repeat student, older than the rest. He had a somewhat serious disposition and was quite close to Jiang Rui. She neither liked nor disliked him, so she nodded in response.

"Brother Qi, should we head to the starship port first?" Shortly after leaving Hua City No.1 Middle School, one of the team members asked.

“No rush.” Zhang Qi glanced at Song Ke. She was trailing behind, drooping her eyelids, giving off an indifferent air, as if she were keeping a distance from everyone.

“Student Song,” Zhang Qi called her leisurely, “we still have some time. I’m thinking of searching for supplies first. What do you think?”

Song Ke lifted her gaze, her eyes like lustrous gems locking onto Zhang Qi’s. His heart inexplicably trembled under her gaze. Slowly, she nodded. “Sure.”

As they would be heading to the starship port afterward, their search pace accelerated. The team walked westward along School Street. The journey was calm and peaceful, and soon they arrived at a commercial street. The storefronts here were not very large, but their numbers were considerable, closely packed together.

The group stopped at the entrance of a row of connected shops. Zhang Qi surveyed the surroundings and made a half-smiling suggestion, “Student Song, how about we split up and search separately? One person per shop. Would you like to choose first?” He remained still, and the group behind him dared not make a move, as if they were trying to force Song Ke into agreeing.

Song Ke casually chose a gift shop, gripping the door handle. Suddenly, she turned around and asked, “Split up, one person per shop. Whose belongings are these supplies considered?” It was better to clarify such matters beforehand. She wasn’t part of their group and didn’t accept their unified distribution practices.

Zhang Qi smirked but didn’t really smile. “Whoever finds them can claim them.”

Song Ke was satisfied. “Okay.”

Once she entered the shop, Zhang Qi quietly instructed his subordinates. The remaining members split up and entered adjacent shops.

Zhang Hao was searching for supplies when he faintly heard some commotion outside. Something seemed off to him, so he put down what he was doing and rushed out. Sure enough, Zhang Qi’s group had somehow brought over several thick iron chains and locked Song Ke’s door with them.

“Zhang Qi, what are you doing?!” Zhang Hao realized their intentions and moved forward to remove the chains.

Zhang Qi’s burly arm intercepted, and he punched Zhang Hao against the wall. He squatted down, staring at him sinisterly. “I’m warning you, stay out of this.”

Zhang Hao shouted angrily, “Have you lost your mind? Aren’t you afraid of causing fatalities?”

“I just want to teach her a lesson. Why are you so worried?”

“If something happens to her, not just Jiang Rui, even Professor Xu won’t let you off.”

The way Xu Liren treated Song Ke was quite polite, and Zhang Qi hesitated briefly. But then he remembered the boasting he did last night and his anger flared up. “Do you think I’m stupid? Lock it up!” he yelled.

Chains as thick as a bowl’s rim wound around the door handle, forming an impenetrable barrier like a spider’s web. Half an eternity passed, yet inside remained quiet. Several followers grew uneasy. “Brother Qi, what if there are zombies inside?”

“If there are zombies, wouldn’t she scream? When she begs me, kneels down and surrenders properly, only then will I let her out. Let’s see how arrogant she is afterward!”

As soon as he finished speaking, urgent knocking suddenly came from inside. Everyone’s hearts raced as they all stared at the door.

One follower muttered in panic, “She... why isn’t she screaming?”

The intense knocking continued for over ten seconds. Then, the door shook violently a few times, causing the metal chains to produce a crisp metallic clash. Gradually, the sounds inside the room fell silent.

The extreme quietness made everyone’s hearts feel as heavy as a stone.

Someone couldn’t hold back anymore. “Brother Qi, could... something really have happened?”

Zhang Qi hadn't expected Song Ke to be this obstinate. She hadn't even uttered a plea for mercy. He wasn't as foolish as he appeared. He really wanted to bring her to the brink, but in the current situation, it was difficult to decide.

Gritting his teeth, he held on for another five minutes. Sweat rolled down his face. Finally, unable to bear the psychological pressure, he said, "...go open the door."

Before they could take action, an earth-shaking roar erupted from inside.

"Bang—"

"Bang—"

"Bang—"

One, two, three consecutive roars echoed. In full view of everyone, the entire shop door split from the middle, sending debris flying in all directions.

Amidst the dust, Song Ke appeared like a war deity descending from the heavens. Shouldering a massive azure warhammer three times her size, she stood before them.

She locked eyes with Zhang Qi's group and tugged at the corner of her mouth. "Spoils, of war."

With a forceful kick, several headless zombies were sent hurtling toward Zhang Qi.

Chapter 13: Rainy Night in Hua City (5)

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◎You're an ability user?◎

When the zombies rushed towards them, Zhang Qi's muscles bulged as he exerted his arms' strength, using several punches to send them flying.

His subordinates behind him weren't as lucky. Song Ke had aimed shrewdly, and the headless zombies pounced right onto them, exposing their bloody

necks. Each one screamed as if their hearts were being torn apart, unaware that those zombies had been long dead.

“You’re an ability user,” Zhang Qi kicked away the obstructing zombies and fixed his gaze on Song Ke, confirming word by word.

Song Ke remained silent. Her slender waistline generated force in her forearm as she swung the massive hammer, lifting it with a single hand as if it were a toy. The hammerhead slammed heavily into the ground, creating a powerful shockwave that swept towards Zhang Qi. His shoulders felt as if they were carrying a thousand pounds, and his feet involuntarily sank into the ground. Gritting his teeth, he used all his might to withstand this immense energy.

She was intimidating him. She actually dared to! How could she dare?!

Zhang Qi was an ability user himself, so he knew just how terrifying the pressure Song Ke was emanating was. He couldn’t even move a finger right now. Her supernatural ability was definitely at a much higher level than his. It appeared that Song Ke wasn’t just an ability user; she had awakened the same power-based ability as his. That’s why she could completely suppress him. He regretted trying to deal with her earlier; it was simply laughable!

Everyone in the group were high school students, and even though they were bold, the consecutive crises had left them somewhat pale with fear.

Song Ke slowly emerged, dragging the massive hammer, and helped Zhang Hao up from the corner where he had fallen. Zhang Qi had held back when he attacked, leaving only minor injuries on Zhang Hao’s back, scraping off a layer of skin, and causing some minor abrasions on his limbs. However, his movements were unaffected. Zhang Hao’s face didn’t look good, though. He spoke urgently as he tried to steady himself, “There’s too much commotion here. It’ll definitely attract zombies. Let’s leave quickly.”

Although Zhang Qi was impulsive, he wasn’t entirely foolish. After being reminded, he immediately realized the peril they were in. This wasn’t the time to argue with Song Ke, moreover... moreover, he couldn’t win against her. So, with a grim expression, he ordered, “Retreat.”

After hastily tidying up, they quickly left the commercial street.

As they increased their pace on the road, Zhang Hao’s movements noticeably became more laborious. Sweat beads continuously formed on his forehead.

Song Ke glanced at his ankle and reached out to support him, but Zhang Hao instinctively declined, "I'm fine, just twisted it a bit."

"Oh." Since he didn't need help, Song Ke calmly withdrew her hand.

Zhang Hao: "...". He had just been trying to be polite, why did this person take it seriously?

He had to find something to say, so he muttered, "Jiang Rui was going to come on his own, but I suggested I'd come instead. I didn't expect you to be an ability user too."

Zhang Hao's emotions were complicated. He had volunteered to come out because he had witnessed Song Ke's strength and figured that nothing major would happen. He had intended to just stand by and receive a favor from Jiang Rui in return. He never expected Zhang Qi to go berserk and provoke Song Ke. Furthermore, he didn't anticipate that she was also an ability user. He ended up getting hurt in the process, making the situation worse for himself. It was just asking for trouble.

"Why did you come out? I could have handled it on my own."

As expected, after listening, Song Ke didn't show the slightest bit of gratitude. Instead, her face was full of disapproval, accompanied by a good dose of disdain.

Zhang Hao's ankle throbbed even more.

Song Ke's decision to expose her identity as an ability user was, of course, deliberate. Firstly, she felt that Xu Liren had long figured something out. If she didn't come clean, he would likely keep manipulating her. Secondly, she didn't want to keep attracting trouble. People like Zhang Qi, once they knew her abilities, would seek attention, bullying the weak and fearing the strong. After this whole journey, he had stopped taunting her as if he'd been struck mute.

The group continued on their way in silence, occasionally stopping to search for supplies along the route. By the afternoon, they arrived near the Starport. Finally, a bespectacled boy couldn't help but ask, his voice trembling, "Have any of you felt that something's off?"

Everyone stopped and carefully thought back on their journey. They all shared the same feeling. They couldn't pinpoint what exactly was wrong, but something seemed strange.

Zhang Hao had an idea, "Is it too quiet?"

Indeed, it was too quiet. When they had ventured out a few days ago, most of Hua City's basic infrastructure was functioning normally. They had seen autonomous buses, traffic-guiding robots, and the vibrant nighttime scenery. On the night when Song Ke had spent the night at the water tower, she had even witnessed a fountain show at the Hua City Theater.

However, today as they walked, the broadcasts in the malls, the music in the amusement parks, and the large projections on screens had all disappeared.

The boy with glasses turned pale, hastily taking out his phone. "My phone has no signal. How about yours?"

"No signal."

"...mine too."

They finally realized what was wrong. The hydraulic power, electricity, and the network—everything symbolizing modernization had ceased to work.

...

In the 7th day after the solar eruption in the 46th year of the New Calendar, the city system completely malfunctioned. At this point, Hua City had turned into a dead city.

The true doomsday had arrived.

Amid the deathly silence, Zhang Qi spat, "Let's go to the Starport."

"Right! And there's the rescue team. They said it's less than 80 kilometers away. The Alliance won't abandon us!" Grasping onto this final straw of hope, Zhang Qi's group hurriedly headed toward the Starport.

The design of Hua City's Starport was inspired by a lotus flower. The entire building had a soft, silvery-white appearance. The blooming flower bud at the top served as the control center and boarding platform. The petals scattered throughout the middle were departure runways. However, at this moment,

when they looked around, only a few starships were docked on the petals. A nearly eerie silence enveloped the entire harbor.

Zhang Qi's group didn't enter the Starport; instead, they found an observation platform outside. The view was expansive, and there were no zombies around.

"Someone's there." Song Ke crouched atop the rangefinder equipment and softly alerted them, "Southeast, and also north, both directions... there are people."

"Are they together?" Zhang Hao asked.

"No, they're scattered. It's chaotic."

"It should be survivors, like us, coming to gather information," Zhang Hao analyzed calmly. When the Alliance made their rescue declaration public, no one could stay put. Survivors in Hua City would be lurking nearby, waiting for opportunities. It made sense.

Several boys were anxious yet excited, unable to resist whispering to each other.

"There are very few starships here. Have they already been reassigned by the Alliance?"

"Probably. The rescue team should be coming in soon. Let's wait a bit longer."

As they waited, the sun started to dip, and soon, numerous black dots appeared in the distant sky.

"Look over there, it's the rescue team!" A sharp-eyed boy exclaimed, immediately raising his arms and shouting. Others who had been pointed out by Song Ke in various directions excitedly stood up, taking off their clothes or hats, waving them vigorously at the sky.

The group of black dots rapidly approached them, growing in number. They filled the sky densely, akin to a migrating flock of birds. Strangely, a few seemed to fall behind halfway, plummeting from the high altitude to the ground, one after another.

Song Ke initially thought her eyes were playing tricks on her and rubbed them.

It wasn't until someone nearby shouted in terror, "Something's wrong! It looks like... they're falling!!"

The closest black dots were already distinguishable, their silvery metal shells reflecting an eerie coldness. They were indeed starships. However, these starships seemed to have lost their propulsion mid-air. Their trajectories were crooked and skewed. After persisting for a few seconds, they suddenly nosedived—straight down. They crashed into the crowd that had been cheering moments ago.

"Boom, boom, boom—"

Like falling meteors, the out-of-control starships hit the ground, causing intense explosions. The deafening roar of the explosions rendered them momentarily deaf. In the midst of the fiery glow, Song Ke saw Zhang Qi's face contorted, roaring silently, "Run—!!"

The blossom-like structure of the Starport and its petals were struck by the falling debris. Soon, black smoke billowed and flames ignited. The deafening explosions continued in succession. A staggering number of starships whizzed overhead, their overwhelming shadows blotting out everyone's retinas. Song Ke looked up, and in her pupils, she saw clear silhouettes. Several starships were getting closer to them. They were about to crash!

Zhang Qi ripped off the protective netting and hoisted a steel frame over ten meters long, roaring as he raised it to block. The steel frame hit the starship, momentarily halting its descent before it veered several inches sideways, brushing past the edge of the platform. The team members hurriedly ran in the opposite direction.

The recoil force from this strike was equally terrifying. Zhang Qi nearly exhausted all his strength in an instant. His left arm dislocated upon impact, and he staggered for a couple of steps. After struggling to regain his balance, he looked up only to see another starship hurtling rapidly towards the path where the others were running.

"No! Come back!! Don't run there!"

The massive starship plummeted straight down, creating a deep crater in the platform, instantly engulfing the few individuals at the forefront in flames.

Zhang Qi's eyes turned bloodshot, and his knees gave in, causing him to kneel down.

However, the crisis was far from over. After the main group had passed, two starships trailing behind lost control and fell from directly above them.

"You all, all take cover together!" Song Ke managed to push Zhang Hao just in time before she charged toward the descending starship.

Suppressing the pain in his ankle, Zhang Hao helped up his teammate who had been knocked aside by the shockwave. They quickly moved closer to Zhang Qi.

Song Ke jumped onto the platform's top and swung her massive hammer to intercept. The deep blue hammerhead staunchly held up the metallic starship, draining her energy almost instantaneously. Following that, the hammer shattered, and the starship, influenced by the force, rotated and veered off course, colliding with another starship. Both starships overloaded and exploded in mid-air, blooming into huge black fireworks.

The intense shockwave sent Song Ke tumbling outwards, and she rolled off the platform, swallowed by the thick smoke and debris.

"Song Ke!" Zhang Hao urgently shouted, rushing down the platform to dig through the rubble.

As they dug, two more individuals emerged beside them: Zhang Qi, whose arm was hanging limply, and another boy who had come to assist.

After about five minutes of digging, the pile of debris finally shifted, and Song Ke crawled out, her face covered in ash. She looked severely injured, with one arm badly burnt, blood dripping from her forehead down, and with a cough she said, "Let's... let's get out of here first."

Supporting each other, Zhang Qi, Zhang Hao, and the other boy limped out of the explosion zone. Behind them, the Lotus Port was ablaze, while ahead, a massive fleet of starships swept across Hua City, bombing a path from north to southeast. Starships continued to fall along the way, explosions and flames erupting in a continuous cycle.

"How could this be, how is this possible! Those are... the Lu Family starships."

A survivor with an ashen face muttered in disbelief as he lay on the ground.

Lu Family starships were known not for their metallic shells made from the rare element Rhenium (Re), or their highly advanced artificial intelligence, but for their propulsion, powered by the cutting-edge Alliance technology known as “Yiyu.” This new energy source allowed these starships, weighing tens of tons, to hover in the sky without any external force and achieved self-circulation, self-cleaning, and self-recycling. Since their introduction, Lu Family starships had boasted of being “absolutely safe,” claiming to be the “blue bird that never falls”. Over the decades of operation, they had never experienced a single accident.

These were Lu Family starships, the pride of the Alliance!

However, in this moment at the Hua City Starport, over a hundred starships collectively crashed, like a meteor shower of shattered beliefs.

After leaving the Starport, Zhang Qi and the others could no longer hold on, collapsing from exhaustion on the ground.

The survivor who had narrowly escaped death couldn't stop sobbing. “What do we do? Starships are gone, the rescue team is gone. What do we do now?”

“Let's head back to the safe zone,” Zhang Hao suggested.

“No signal. How do we contact Liu Zixuan? How do we get inside?” The boy's expression turned desperate.

Zhang Qi hadn't said a word since coming out. His arm was broken, and his face occasionally contorted in agonizing pain.

Glancing at his phone, Zhang Hao saw that it was almost 6 PM. He thought for a moment and said, “I've kept a record before. Our two teams usually return between 5 PM and 7 PM. The earliest was at 4:50 PM, and the latest was at 6:40 PM. Professor Xu and the others definitely know there's no signal now. Therefore, I speculate that Liu Zixuan will open the gate at 7 PM.”

“So, before that, we must get back.”

Chapter 14: Rainy Night in Hua City (6)

Chapter 14 – Rainy Night in Hua City (6)

©Truly exasperated with this Old Sixth©

Three minutes behind, Zhang Qi and the others hurried back to Hua City No.1 Middle School, racing against the last shreds of time. The non-stop running and the toll of their severe injuries had drained too much of their energy. They sat down against the wall, utterly exhausted. A surviving male student covered his face, tears never stopping.

Time ticked away second by second, but the wall remained still, without any signs of movement.

“Why isn’t the door opening? Did we arrive late? Have they already opened the door?” The male student repeated these two sentences incessantly, his anxiety growing as he spun in circles, his tone becoming more and more neurotic. “Why isn’t the door opening? Why won’t they open the door?!”

“Calm down for a moment and wait a bit more,” Zhang Hao said, placing a hand on the student’s shoulder to prevent him from attracting nearby zombies with his restless movement. Even though he spoke words of reassurance, he was gradually becoming uneasy himself.

About twenty more minutes passed, and the wall finally softened and collapsed, gradually revealing the shape of a door.

“I knew you guys would come back. They told me to wait a bit more...” As the door was pulled open, Liu Zixuan’s face lit up with a brilliant smile. However, as he saw the figures before him clearly, the curve of his mouth instantly drooped. Four, he counted again in disbelief, just four. “What happened? Where are the others?”

Xu Liren came over from behind him, his expression unusually solemn.

“Professor Xu!” The moment the student saw him, his psychological defenses crumbled completely. He couldn’t hold back anymore and collapsed before Xu Liren, sobbing uncontrollably.

Zhang Qi's face was gloomy, supporting his limp left hand. Zhang Hao had a lame leg, and Song Ke, although all limbs intact, was covered in blood, making it difficult to see her facial features. The grim condition of the four quickly drew the attention of everyone around.

"It's all gone... Everything exploded... The starships... the rescue team..."

"What exploded?"

"What happened to the rescue team? Hurry up and tell us, you're driving us crazy!"

"What exactly happened?"

The student's emotions were too agitated, and his words were incoherent, making it impossible for him to explain clearly. Xu Liren had someone help him move the student aside to rest and then calmed and dispersed the crowd that had gathered, leaving only a few core members. Only then did he start to carefully understand the situation.

Among the four, Zhang Hao, the only one with coherent speech, took the initiative to explain: "Let me explain. This afternoon, around three o'clock, the entire Hua City lost power and network connectivity. When we found out, we rushed to the starport, hoping to meet the rescue team there. However, what arrived were numerous starships that had lost power and were falling from the sky. The others... couldn't escape the explosions, they all... died."

As the words left his mouth, the entire room was shocked. For these high school students, the notion of starships falling was something out of a fairy tale.

Xu Liren pondered for a moment, "It seems it's not just the school; the entire infrastructure of Hua City has shut down." He paused and then asked, "We didn't hear any explosions. Where did those starships that you mentioned head towards? And roughly how many were there?"

"They headed southeast, and there were probably around twenty of them."

"No wonder. The school is to the west of Hua City."

As they conversed, Song Ke walked towards a corner on her own. The others were still immersed in the shocking news brought by Zhang Hao, and few paid attention to her. Only Jiang Rui cast a concerned glance at her back.

The commotion at the entrance sparked whispered conversations among the people. Zhou Anqi emerged from the restroom, her face filled with impatience. "What's wrong with Zhang Qi? He's supposed to handle Song Ke. Why is he making such a mess of himself?"

Cao Yiyi gripped the railing tightly, her brows furrowing slowly. "Something doesn't seem right..."

Zhou Anqi followed her gaze and quickly spotted another figure in the corner. She was infuriated on the spot. "No, why is Song Ke still alive and kicking? It's driving me crazy! He didn't fulfill what he promised me. I'm going to hold him accountable!"

"Anqi, just wait a moment!" Cao Yiyi was truly exasperated with this Old Sixth. Would she be foolish enough to confront Zhang Qi in front of everyone? Wouldn't that expose all their secret calculations? Cao Yiyi reached out to grab her, but Zhou Anqi walked briskly, evading her grip. In the process, Zhou Anqi stumbled, and Cao Yiyi had no choice but to follow behind, feeling helpless.

The two of them arrived next to Xu Liren, just in time to hear Zhang Hao speak, "Professor Xu, there's one more thing – Song Ke is an ability user."

Jiang Rui, Lin Xia, and others beside them were taken aback. Zhou Anqi, upon hearing this terrible news, felt her vision darken. The world seemed to spin around her, and she thought that the darkness of the world had never been this profound.

Xu Liren pushed up his glasses, a sharp glint passing through his eyes. His tone remained gentle, though. "Oh? What kind of ability user is she?"

"Same type as me, a power-type," Zhang Qi, who had been silent until now, suddenly interjected. "And her level is roughly similar to mine."

Zhang Hao gave him a sidelong glance. He remembered how Song Ke had suppressed Zhang Qi in front of the store entrance, unable to move. He found Zhang Qi's inflated bravado somewhat ridiculous. However, Zhang Qi's intact hand was tightly clenched into a fist, emitting faint creaking sounds. It was

evident he had exerted a lot of force. Zhang Hao held his tongue, planning to explain to Xu Liren and Jiang Rui later.

“No wonder she could lift Tian Yi with just one hand last time,” Lin Xia murmured, “So, she’s a power-type ability user.”

For a moment, various emotions – envy, jealousy, resentment – began to brew covertly.

The news that Song Ke was an ability user was the only consolation in their dire situation. After losing contact with the rescue team, their situation had become perilous. Were they going to remain in the safe zone indefinitely? Who knew what other challenges lay ahead?

Amidst the anxious crowd, the only one able to maintain composure was Xu Liren. He stood on the elevated platform of the playground, overseeing the people below. “Everyone, don’t panic. Calm down. It’s not time to give up yet. I’ll work with you to find solutions. What we need to do now is to honestly share the situation with everyone.”

Xu Liren gathered everyone and conveyed the news they had brought back from outside.

No water, no electricity, no network, starship crashes, coupled with the disconnection from the rescue team – one heavy piece of news after another weighed down on them, shrouding them in darkness. Despite Xu Liren’s efforts to console, quite a few individuals succumbed to pressure, collapsing on the ground in sobbing fits.

A few bold souls who couldn’t bear the oppressive atmosphere approached Liu Zixuan, raising a commotion without restraint. “Staying here is a death sentence. Let me out! I want to go home!”

Liu Zixuan initially tried to reason with them politely, but as they continued to agitate him, he grew annoyed and retorted with irritation, “You want to leave? Go ahead! But I’ve exhausted my supernatural abilities. I won’t be able to recover until tomorrow morning at the earliest. So, just wait here!”

On the other side, Tian Yi cautiously approached, “Song Ke, are you okay?”

“Do, do you have water?” Song Ke’s eyes were so crusted with blood that she couldn’t open them. However, what was even more uncomfortable was the

sensation from within her body – the burning pain that came after her supernatural ability was drained, causing her body to feel inflamed.

“There’s a restroom over there,” Tian Yi pointed in a direction, “Luckily, we had stored water before. You can use it.”

Song Ke entered the restroom and filled a basin with water from a container. She began splashing water onto her face at an increasing speed. The cold water droplets soaked her skin, washing away the congealed bloodstains. The persistent burning sensation seemed to slightly subside.

But immediately after, she felt hunger – a deep emptiness and hunger from the depths of her stomach. Song Ke sat down on the floor, opened her backpack, and started stuffing food into her mouth: beef jerky, crackers, ham sausages, sandwiches. She consumed about half of the stored food, and only then did the burning feeling gradually fade. Her supernatural ability seemed to rejuvenate like a dry spring, replenishing itself at an astonishing pace.

A good half-hour passed, and the tumultuous sensation within her body settled down again. The abundant energy resumed its steady circulation. Song Ke now felt much more comfortable. She stood up, examined her injuries, finding abrasions below her earlobes, along the edges of her cheeks, and several fresh wounds on her left arm.

She applied a piece of gauze to her face and changed into clean clothes. Opening the restroom door, Jiang Rui was waiting outside for her.

“I heard from Zhang Hao that you were injured. I came to check on you.”

“Mm, I’m, I’m fine.”

“It’s still better to tend to your wounds. Should I ask Cao Yiyi or Lin Xia to help you?”

Two girls stood side by side behind Jiang Rui, with Lin Xia giving her a friendly wave. Song Ke glanced at them and coldly refused, “No need.”

Ignoring their reactions, she carried her deflated backpack and found a corner to sit cross-legged.

Jiang Rui’s gaze remained fixed on her face. Suddenly, he extended a finger and pointed, “You have something on your face.”

Song Ke casually wiped her face, finding nothing.

“A little lower.”

Song Ke wiped down a bit lower.

“It’s not there.” Jiang Rui watched her clumsy movement and unexpectedly burst into laughter. The smile of the young man was transparent, without any trace of gloom. He then knelt down on one knee, getting very close to Song Ke. His eyes were like a lake sparkling with countless stars. Swiftly, he raised his hand and brushed away the cookie crumbs from the corner of her mouth.

Jiang Rui’s movement was so natural, and Song Ke was unprepared. She was caught off guard.

But she quickly stepped back, then another step, until her back was against the wall. She stared at him with a head full of question marks. If there’s something on her face, so what? It’s not like it’s on his face. Why would he be so concerned? Was it necessary for him to remove it with his own hand?

“Hey! Yiyi, look!” Lin Xia excitedly tugged at Cao Yiyi’s sleeve and let out a soft scream. She was engrossed in the excitement of the moment, completely unaware of the emotion of her companion.

Cao Yiyi was fixedly observing the ambiguous interaction between the two, her expression darkening.

Despite Song Ke’s repeated refusals, Jiang Rui still left a first aid kit for her.

Song Ke didn’t like being in close proximity to people. She always found a corner in the safe zone to rest where nobody else was.

When Jiang Rui left, he looked back several times with a worried expression.

“I noticed that Song Ke’s bandaging was quite rough. I’ve learned basic first aid before. When I have time, I’ll come back to check on her,” Cao Yiyi followed him, speaking gently, “Don’t worry, I won’t tell Anqi.”

Speaking of Zhou Anqi, Jiang Rui’s brows slightly furrowed. “Yeah, you’ve been helpful. It seems that you and her are the only ones in your class who can talk to each other.”

“Yeah, Song Ke... she’s not always the easiest to get along with,” Cao Yiyi smiled.

...

Late that night, heavy rain poured down on Hua City. The sound of raindrops pelting the skylight of the playground echoed. The rain grew louder, intensifying, preventing many from falling asleep. They climbed to the windowsills, peering outside. They were greeted by a curtain of rain that seemed to touch the sky.

The rain continued until the next day, forcing them to cancel their plans to go outside.

That night, even in her dreams, Song Ke heard the sound of the rain pouring.

When she woke up, she learned even worse news.

Zhou Anqi had a fever.

Old Sixth – (Camper) is a reference to the video game *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*. In the CSGO game, there are only five players on each side in the competitive mode, a camper is considered unhelpful to the team as a whole and equivalent to the “sixth member” of the opposing side. A Camper is a player that stays in one spot in a first-person shooter game, someone who seems to be unable to see the life and death of his teammates, and who sticks up to protect his gun.

Chapter 15.1: Rainy Night in Hua City (7)

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Zhou Anqi started running a fever after falling asleep.

She had caught a cold these past two days – a sore throat, runny nose that flowed like water, and yet she was stubbornly concerned about her appearance. To avoid showing her embarrassment, she went to the restroom multiple times a day to touch up her appearance. She endured like this until

night, her temperature soaring. The next day, when her classmates came to check on her, they discovered that she had been burning up in a daze for quite a while.

With precedents like Jiang Rui and others, there was a high probability that Zhou Anqi's fever at this moment was a precursor to awakening her ability.

"41°C," Xu Liren announced the number on the thermometer, a worried expression on his face. "She needs to take antipyretics as soon as possible. If she continues to have such a high fever, even if her ability awakens, she might end up with brain damage."

The value of an ability user was clear in everyone's minds. Jiang Rui, Liu Zixuan, Zhang Qi, and even Song Ke were living examples. Without ability users leading the way, ordinary people couldn't venture outside alone. As ability users, they enjoyed privileges. Despite Song Ke's indifference to group activities, her sporadic attendance in meetings, and her lack of interest in collective actions, Xu Liren still tolerated her behavior.

Even if Zhou Anqi had a terrible personality, as long as there was hope for her ability to awaken, she wouldn't be easily given up on. However, the current issue was that when they hastily evacuated from the school earlier, they didn't have enough medical supplies, especially prescription medicines. They had to take the risk of searching outside.

"But it's still raining outside."

"That's right, going out in this kind of weather, even if we don't encounter zombies, people might still die, right?"

"Don't make me go out, please, don't make me go out..."

Since two days ago, the rain in Hua City had been growing stronger, gradually showing signs of engulfing the entire city.

Heavy rain, zombies, a sealed-off city, and coupled with the loss of communication signals, going outside had become several times more dangerous.

Faced with various doubts and whispered conversations, Xu Liren stood up slowly. His cold gaze swept across the room. "From the very first day we established the safe zone, I promised everyone that even in the direst

circumstances, I, as a teacher, will not abandon any one of you. This promise will always stand.”

His voice always had a kind of magical persuasiveness. Gradually, the crowd quieted down. Xu Liren then turned to a tall boy standing next to him. “Jiang Rui, I would like to ask for your help. Will you lead a team to go out and find medicine today?”

Jiang Rui’s fingers curled slightly. Meeting Xu Liren’s expectant gaze, he nodded with determination. “Mr. Xu, I’m willing to go out, but the other members of my team, they’re not ability users. I don’t want to force them.”

Almost the moment his words fell, several boys, including Zhang Hao, Kongzi Qi, and Tian Yi, stepped forward, expressing their support.

“Brother Jiang, I’m going with you!”

“I’m going too!”

“Count me in, the more people, the faster we’ll find it.”

Young people still had vigor in their hearts, and camaraderie was highly valued. They believed in Jiang Rui and were willing to follow him on this risky venture. Despite this, Xu Liren’s expression remained tense because the group was still small. One ability user and five or six regular individuals – the risks of going out with this composition were still high.

“Count me in too,” Zhang Qi suddenly spoke up from the back row, his head lowered.

His dislocated arm had been reset, but his despondent spirit hadn’t recovered yet. Among the members of their two teams, they each brought their most trusted companions. Jiang Rui was popular among friends, and Zhang Qi had his own group of brothers. However, that day, he had helplessly witnessed his good friends being engulfed by flames, intensely hating his own helplessness. Since then, a psychological shadow had been cast, and these past few days, he even felt a strong aversion to the idea of “going out.”

Now, the girl he liked lay on a mat, her life hanging in the balance, her face pale from the torment of high fever. Could he really be so cowardly as to beg others for help again? Would he still be considered a man if he did that? So, Zhang Qi clenched his teeth, overcame his fear, and stepped forward.

“Just me.” Zhang Qi’s voice was hoarse as he emphasized, not wanting to burden others any further.

Xu Liren nodded solemnly, for the first time not opposing the request for both ability users to go out together. “Alright, you’re both powerful.”

Seated nearby, Cao Yiyi clenched and unclenched her fingers, her inner turmoil akin to a raging fire, burning her from within.

Why?! Fine, that bitch Song Ke is an ability user, but why does even someone as dumb as Zhou Anqi awaken an ability? This idiot, this fool who can be easily manipulated with a few words, why is she any better than her?

But... she couldn’t show her anger because, in everyone else’s eyes, Zhou Anqi had always been her “best friend.” Moreover, Jiang Rui was also going out. As long as Jiang Rui was there, safety shouldn’t be a problem. Perhaps she could even find an opportunity for privacy...

Cao Yiyi struggled to maintain her expression. It took great effort to put on an appearance of righteousness. “Mr. Xu, I’m also willing to go out.”

Xu Liren looked into her eyes, now inflamed with jealousy, and slightly squinted, as if he could see through her dark thoughts. “Teacher knows you’re concerned about your friend. You should stay and take care of her.”

Cao Yiyi and Xu Liren locked gazes for a couple of seconds, and she nodded, as if bewitched by some hidden motive.

“Is there anyone else willing to help Zhou Anqi find medicine?”

Xu Liren raised his voice, surveying the surroundings. As expected, he met pairs of eyes that avoided his gaze.

“Is there anyone else willing to go out?” he repeated.

The entire safe zone seemed muted, as if someone had pressed a mute button, and silence spread like wild grass, unfurling in all directions.

“Me.”

Amidst the prolonged silence, a calm and unruffled voice suddenly broke through.

Everyone turned their heads in unison, and when they saw who the speaker was, their jaws almost dropped, especially the students from the original Class 3. Their expressions were as if they had seen a ghost in broad daylight – a truly captivating spectacle.

Song Ke leaped down from a three-meter-high skylight, facing a crowd of terrified and astonished gazes. She silently repeated, “I want to go out.”

Jiang Rui’s blood pressure surged, and he took a deep breath. Ignoring everyone else, he strode forward and pulled Song Ke aside to a corner of the room. “You don’t need to do this. Everyone saw how Zhou Anqi treated you. Don’t risk yourself for someone like her. Stay safe in the secure zone.”

Song Ke blinked in confusion. Wait, he thought she was going out for Zhou Anqi?

She tried to explain, “I’m not—”

Jiang Rui interrupted her, “I’ll talk to Mr. Xu and ask him to let you stay here.”

Turning away, he started walking, but then Song Ke’s patience reached its limit. She directly swung her backpack at the back of his head. “Not for, for her. I haven’t, haven’t eaten. Need to find supplies.”

After getting hit, Jiang Rui looked at her almost empty backpack and remained stunned for a few seconds. It took a while for him to snap out of it, coughing awkwardly. “Then I’ll bring something back for you.”

“No, I’ll find it my-myself.”

Shaking off Jiang Rui, Song Ke went around him and stood in front of Xu Liren, locking eyes with him without flinching. “Today, I want, want to go out.”

Not a request, not asking for help. Both of them understood that Song Ke was just informing him.

Xu Liren stared at her for several seconds before nodding slowly. “Okay.”

With three ability users joining the team, their strength became formidable, not to be underestimated. Even if unexpected situations arose, they would be able to handle them promptly.

“Find the medicine and come back. Don’t linger outside,” Xu Liren counted the number of people and softly advised Jiang Rui and Zhang Qi.

Seeing that others were allowed to go out, Liu Zixuan couldn’t sit still either. “Mr. Xu, let me go out too!”

“You can’t go out.” Unexpectedly, Xu Liren decisively refused him, despite his typically gentle demeanor.

“Why? I’m also an ability user, and if I go out with them, it’ll be easier to come back. We won’t have to wait outside!” Liu Zixuan’s eyes sparkled with hope.

Xu Liren sighed meaningfully. “Yes, you are also an ability user...”

Liu Zixuan felt a glimmer of hope and his excitement showed in his eyes. “So, does that mean you agree?”

“—Liu Zixuan, remember, only you, only you can’t go out.”

Every single person here could go out, except for Liu Zixuan. He was the cornerstone of the entire safe zone, or rather, everyone in the safe zone relied on his presence. If he were to go out, and something happened outside, if he couldn’t come back, or worse... if he abandoned everyone and ran away, what would the remaining people do?

The entire sports field was both a comfortable area constructed by Liu Zixuan himself and a cage that trapped him.

Liu Zixuan hadn’t realized this truth and was still standing there, disappointedly protesting. However, others instantly understood and exchanged various glances privately.

The members about to go out used their time wisely, putting on raincoats and checking their backpacks, making preparations.

Song Ke walked along the wall and pushed open the equipment room’s door. Her gaze swept over the mountains of shot puts, javelins, and discuses. When she emerged, she was carrying a huge umbrella. Its canopy was incredibly wide, and when opened, it could shield half the sky. The umbrella ribs hung slightly downward, making it look more like half of a steam-basket cover than an umbrella.

Her umbrella was indeed quite peculiar. It had a metallic luster and a unique deep blue color, instantly capturing the attention of many.

As Song Ke walked toward the door, someone muttered in confusion, “Do we have this kind of umbrella in our equipment room? Where did she find it?”

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Chapter 15.2: Rainy Night in Hua City (7)

Chapter 15.2 – Rainy Night in Hua City (7)

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After agreeing on the return time, Liu Zixuan activated his ability.

As the door opened, torrential rain poured in, drenching everyone. This rain wasn't light drizzle; it felt as if someone were holding a huge container in the sky, pouring all the water down on the city at once. The sky outside was dark and devoid of light, accompanied by fierce winds and thunderstorms. Stepping into the rain, the group immediately got soaked, and some nearly lost their footing.

Jiang Rui's group faced the storm with raincoats tightly wrapped around them. They struggled forward, carefully treading with every step after losing the navigation from their phones. They stopped frequently to verify their direction.

At a fork in the road, Zhang Hao shouted through the rain, “Brother Jiang, which way do we go?” There was no choice – in such weather, a soft-spoken voice was impossible to hear.

At this moment, they were faced with two choices: either continue west towards the outskirts of Hua City, a newly developed area, or detour southeast through the city center, where there were likely to be many hospitals and pharmacies.

Jiang Rui pondered for a moment and quickly came to a conclusion, “Let's head west. I remember there's a pharmaceutical factory in the outskirts.”

“Isn't it too dangerous to go to the outskirts?”

“Isn’t it even riskier to go downtown? It was just bombed.”

“I agree! The drugstores in the city area must have been searched. We might not find fever-reducing medicine.”

After a brief discussion, the group wiped rain off their faces and proceeded towards the outskirts of Huadu.

About forty minutes later, they indeed found the pharmaceutical factory. Jiang Rui and Zhang Qi teamed up to deal with a few wandering zombies at the entrance and some hiding in the security office. Meanwhile, others took the opportunity to run into the factory area and seek shelter from the rain under the eaves.

“Let’s find the warehouse first. If it’s not there, we’ll head to the logistics center,” Jiang Rui made a decision after studying the fire evacuation map posted on the wall.

The warehouse’s iron door was tightly shut, so they had to break the windows and climb over the wall to enter, then split up to search for medication. When it was Song Ke’s turn, she remained motionless outside the window ledge, gazing at the rain. She had no intention of coming inside. Jiang Rui glanced at her but didn’t voice any objection. None of the others dared to boss her around either; they acted as though they were collectively oblivious.

When Tian Yi crawled in, he asked in a hushed tone, “Song Ke, why did you come out?”

“To, to find food,” Song Ke answered stiffly.

Tian Yi suddenly realized, “I knew it! I heard your relationship with Zhou Anqi used to be bad. Why would you look for medicine for her? But at first, I thought, maybe you came out because you were worried about us and wanted to protect us.”

“Huh, maybe?” Song Ke widened her eyes slightly.

“Hehehe, I guess I was mistaken.” Tian Yi chuckled and, as Kongzi Qi called him from the front, he dashed over with light steps.

Song Ke shifted her gaze and leaned against the window frame, looking into the distance.

The pouring rain masked many sounds and dulled the perception of ordinary people. She closed her eyes and connected her ability with her surroundings, extending her invisible and acute senses outward. The world quieted completely; she heard Tian Yi and others talking, the faint sounds of people searching the shelves, and further out, the howling wind, the roaring rain, mingled with the crisp shattering of glass. Suddenly, the abrupt sound of something heavy falling startled her, but it quickly vanished under the sound of the rain.

Was it an illusion? Song Ke hesitated for a moment, carefully turned around, and intended to investigate further. However, she unexpectedly collided with a powerful, surging, and chilling intent to kill. It nearly brushed past her, full of danger. It was a fleeting encounter.

It's an ability!

She abruptly opened her eyes, her gaze like a torch, staring straight ahead, a hundred meters away.

Numerous factory buildings stood there, hidden among the trees' shade, making it impossible to pinpoint their exact locations.

Song Ke turned back, the high school students behind her remained oblivious, still busy searching for items.

Too close. The killing intent from that ability user was so strong she could sense it even here. If the other side detected her, these people would be in great danger.

Song Ke lowered her eyelashes.

"Tian, Tian Yi."

"Hey? Did you call me, Song Ke?" It was the first time Tian Yi had been called by her, and he ran over eagerly like a puppy.

"What's over there?" Song Ke pointed towards the misty rain.

"I don't know, seems like it's within our jurisdiction."

"I know, I know!" Kongzi Qi joined in, casually putting his arm around Tian Yi's shoulder. "There's a big research facility there called 'Qingsong Biotech.' Last

time my dad drove me by, and I took a good look. Wow! The guard at the entrance glared at me!”

Song Ke listened quietly as he finished, picked up her umbrella, and headed outside.

“Where are you going?”

“Ju-just, just going to take a look.”

“You can’t. It’s too dangerous for you to go alone!”

Tian Yi grew anxious at once and lunged to grab the large umbrella, but Song Ke dragged him several meters forward with determination. “Brother Jiang! Brother Jiang!” Seeing that they couldn’t convince Song Ke, Kongzi Qi cleverly decided to report to Jiang Rui.

“What’s wrong?” Jiang Rui arrived quickly.

“Song Ke wants to go out.”

Jiang Rui hesitated only for a second, then swiftly put on a rain hat. “Where are you going? I’ll go with you.”

After shaking off Tian Yi’s hold a few times, Song Ke finally managed to free herself from his grip. She lifted her gaze, coldly warning, “No, don’t, don’t bother me, and don’t follow me.”

Jiang Rui’s movements faltered, and he felt a chill from head to toe.

He had seen this kind of gaze from Song Ke before, three years ago. When he hurriedly arrived at Class 3’s classroom, she had stared at him like that, her pitch-black eyes devoid of any emotion. The next day, she dropped out of Hua City No.1 Middle School and hadn’t appeared since.

“Alright... I won’t follow you,” Jiang Rui’s heart twinged painfully. He cleared his throat and asked, “Will you come back?”

Song Ke opened the umbrella and hopped into the rain with a few strides, her figure gradually disappearing.

“Again...”

“Why does she always act alone? She has no sense of unity...” Someone had noticed the commotion here and couldn’t help but complain.

Song Ke was indeed being too stubborn. Even Tian Yi didn’t know how to explain for her, so he had to awkwardly clarify, “Well, she’s an ability user, you know? Ability users tend to have strong personalities. Besides, she’ll come back after she’s done!”

“Why is she the one doing something special? Brother Jiang and Brother Qi are ability users too, but they haven’t...”

Jiang Rui’s brows furrowed, but before he could say anything, Zhang Qi interjected with a scolding tone, “Shut up, all of you!”

The bones that had been set after his dislocation were still throbbing faintly. Zhang Qi hadn’t initially wanted to intervene, but he couldn’t help thinking about that day when Song Ke had leapt into the air to intercept the starship for them. A surge of anger overcame him. Let her go, let her be arrogant, let her be reckless. She would sooner or later die outside!

“Enough with the chattering. Let’s find the medicine quickly!”

He grumbled and scolded, but no one knew who he was actually speaking for.

...

[Qingsong Biotech]

A modest and stylish plaque stood in the center of the lawn, the heavy rain adding a touch of mystery to it through its cleansing touch.

The architecture here presented an inverted “mountain” shape overall, with testing factories and various laboratories on both sides and a five-story comprehensive building in the middle. The facility had long been automated, and no traces of zombies were found along the way. However, in the offices of the factory buildings, several decomposed bodies lay in uniforms bearing the Qingsong Biotech logo. They sprawled across the floor, their coagulated blood extending to the doorway, now cleansed by the pouring rain.

Song Ke’s heart sank; these people had been deliberately killed!

The opponent she was about to face was far from benign. Song Ke understood this and became even more cautious in her demeanor.

In the midst of the howling wind and pouring rain, a slender figure maneuvered between the buildings. After scouting the areas on both sides, Song Ke finally fixed her gaze on the central comprehensive building. To avoid premature exposure, she closed her umbrella and slowly approached in the heavy rain. Unexpectedly, the main entrance of the building was a sturdy steel door. She tried pushing it, but it didn't budge. If she used force to break in, an alarm would undoubtedly go off, alerting others.

Song Ke had no choice but to give up and search for another entry point. Finally, on the side, she discovered a row of arched windows. However, even the lowest windows on the ground were quite high. She tiptoed and reached out her hand, but she was still quite far away.

Song Ke inverted her umbrella, using its handle to hook onto the anti-theft mesh, jamming it into a gap. With a leap, she easily pulled herself up onto the windowsill. After wiping away the mist outside the window, she could faintly see two figures inside – one tall and one short. Indeed, there were people inside.

It was a laboratory of about forty square meters. Song Ke cautiously leaned out half her head, her ear pressed against the window glass. The conversation inside gradually became clear; there was a man and a woman.

Both of them had their backs to her. The woman had long curly hair, and the man was slender, wearing a white coat.

“Where is it? I advise you to hand it over quickly!” the man demanded sternly.

“Don't waste time with him. Search him directly. If you can't find it, break one of his legs!” The woman's voice sounded impatient. She stomped forward with her toe, as if she stepped on something, and Song Ke heard a muffled groan.

She clung to the windowsill and inched upward. It was then that she noticed a man sitting in the corner.

The man had light-colored eyes, a few strands of hair falling onto his forehead, and looked exceptionally disheveled. Yet, amidst the rain and mist, he exuded a thrilling sense of beauty. His upper body was straight, but his right leg was softly bent and immobilized, with fresh crimson blood still

seeping out. Despite his severe injuries, a faint smile hung on his lips. His entire presence seemed fragile and contradictory.

Perhaps Song Ke stared a bit too long, for the man suddenly, without any warning, lifted his gaze and looked directly at the window. Their eyes met through the rain-soaked glass, causing Song Ke to lose her focus for a fraction of a second.

“Someone’s there! Who’s there?” The man and woman quickly noticed her and rushed toward the window.

The pen in the woman’s hand slipped, the platinum tip gleaming coldly. Like an arrow, it shot toward Song Ke’s throat. She released one hand and deftly dodged to the right, but to her surprise, the pen had tracking capabilities. It turned and relentlessly continued its trajectory toward her.

In a moment of crisis, Song Ke’s years of martial arts training kicked in. She hung on to the windowsill, exerted force with her waist, and adjusted her body’s center of gravity through a series of precise sways, barely avoiding the lethal weapon. Nevertheless, the pen was still too fast, leaving a few red gashes on her collarbone. Song Ke clenched her free hand into a fist, smashed the glass with a few strikes, and swung into the room like on a swing.

The pen followed her through the broken hole but ultimately fell short. Faced with Song Ke’s preparedness, it had lost its threat.

If it were an ordinary person, they would have probably been pierced through the throat and killed instantly by the sudden and unexpected attack.

Wu Yarou, the woman inside the room, paled. She hadn’t expected the intruder to react so swiftly. She immediately raised her voice in a scolding tone, “Yang Bo, what are you staring at? Aren’t you going to take action?”

The pale-faced Yang Bo slinked behind Song Ke. These two individuals didn’t give her any chance to speak. They intended to kill her directly to silence her. Their ruthlessness and cold-bloodedness were quite apparent.

The white lab coat on Yang Bo fluttered without wind, and over a dozen test tubes floated out of his pocket. The liquid inside exhibited a murky dark yellow color.

“Cough, cough... Be careful, it’s sulfuric acid,” came a soft reminder from the corner.

In the next second, the test tubes shot toward Song Ke like arrows, their contents spilling out due to the inertia.

Song Ke’s pupils contracted, her brain sounding an alarm of imminent danger. She leaped toward the window, grabbed the iron umbrella hanging on the anti-theft net, and then executed a somersault in midair, turning herself around and opening the umbrella.

The massive umbrella rapidly unfolded, forming an impenetrable shield that securely protected Song Ke from behind. It also intercepted the attacks of the test tubes and liquid. As the two collided, the smooth surface of the umbrella seemed to be corroded by some toxic substance, emitting a pungent white smoke.

Almost simultaneously, a fluorescent blue shine lit up the surface of the shield, illuminating even the walls, before gradually subsiding. The remaining liquid on it was absorbed entirely. Wu Yarou, who had been watching on the side, had a sudden change in her expression and spoke with urgency, “Kill her quickly! She’s an awakener!”

Having yelled this, she extended her hand with a fierce expression, and that shadow-like pen appeared once again.

On this side, the three of them engaged in an intense battle. The man in the corner seemed like an outsider, sitting leisurely as if watching a show. Even though he was confined, soaked in a pool of blood, his expression remained calm, almost like he was on a vacation. His fingers rested casually on his left knee, occasionally tapping out a melody.

While the two attackers had peculiar methods of attack, their combat awareness was far inferior to Song Ke’s. Additionally, the limited space within the lab constrained the effectiveness of the pen and the test tubes. Swinging the massive umbrella she had transformed from a lead ball and iron disc, Song Ke blocked, struck, and delivered heavy blows to their joints and vital points from above. After a few rounds, the two were left disoriented, bruised all over, and lying on the ground, groaning.

Jumping down from the lab table, Song Ke looked once again at the corner.

Chapter 15.3: Rainy Night in Hua City (7)

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From the eruption of the battle to its conclusion, the man in the corner hadn't shown any astonishment. Neither the unusual attack methods of the two nor her unconventional weapon, the enchanted umbrella, seemed to evoke any emotional fluctuations in him.

Meeting her gaze at this moment, the man's lips curled upward. "Cutting the grass... cough, cough, without uprooting it, there will be endless troubles."

Song Ke furrowed her brows.

Almost as his words faded, a multitude of test tubes flew at her from behind.

Not this move again? Song Ke countered by opening the umbrella in her hand, her line of sight momentarily obstructed. When she moved the umbrella away again, she found the woman gone. A faint sound came from the back of her head. In a life-or-death situation that left no room for delay, Song Ke swiftly turned around, her eyes on Wu Yarou, whose hair was disheveled. The ferocious pen was aimed straight at her eyes. "Die!!!" she shouted.

Song Ke's eyes remained calm and composed. Unfazed, she drew a short sword from the umbrella's handle.

A move upward thrust!

She blocked and deflected the pen, sending it spinning in reverse, crashing into the wall and shattering.

A move to repel!

Wu Yarou was first struck by the fierce sword energy, and then the short sword that followed impaled her sternum, pinning her harshly against the wall.

After dealing with Wu Yarou, Song Ke turned around and swung the iron umbrella in her hand, sending its several-hundred-pound weight crashing

down on the frail Yang Bo. He was pressed down, unable to move, and promptly spat out blood before losing consciousness.

In less than a minute, the battle was decisively over. Song Ke looked at the man in the corner for the third time. He put away his smile and began slow applause.

“Quite impressive, easily taking down two C-level awakeners.”

“Is your power related to that umbrella? A weapon-based ability? No, it seems like it can transform...” The man’s raven-like eyelashes fluttered as he analyzed, muttering to himself. Gradually, he seemed to understand. “Ah... I see, it’s a metal-based ability.”

Song Ke’s initial reaction was, “...”

Then, “???”

In the next second, “!!!”

While her expression seemed impassive, a storm was raging inside her.

Observing her astonishment and confusion, the man’s expression registered a hint of surprise. “Huh? Don’t know anything, do you...”

This little girl who seemed to know nothing, yet had managed to survive unscathed in the apocalypse, dared to wander outside during such a torrential rain? Perhaps... she wasn’t just incredibly lucky; she might be incredibly powerful and fearless as well.

Judging by her performance just now, she most likely belonged to the latter category.

A lone, powerful, yet naive top-tier awakener? Heh, indeed... she seemed very easy to manipulate.

The man’s gaze shifted, and a few thoughtful traces appeared in his eyes.

Song Ke snapped back to reality, casting a wary glance at him. She silently picked up the iron umbrella that had been on top of Yang Bo and was about to leave.

Her grandfather had once said that the secret to his longevity of 103 years was minding his own business. Since the advent of the apocalypse, due to various unexpected situations, Song Ke felt like she had aged several years prematurely. This man seemed to be trouble, and her rationality reminded her it was best – no, it was imperative – not to get involved with him.

After all, the danger here had been eliminated. She should hurry back and meet up with Tian Yi and the others.

“Hey,” the man called from behind.

“You forgot your sword,” he said.

Song Ke turned her head and saw him struggling to stand up on his almost disabled right leg. He limped to the wall, pulled out her short sword, and then, right in front of her, forcefully stabbed it back into Wu Yarou’s heart!

Wu Yarou trembled all over. Within a few seconds, she lost her breath. The man withdrew the sword, then turned to thrust it into Yang Bo on the ground. Hot blood sprayed out, adding a cruel, bloody touch to his handsome profile.

A chill ran down Song Ke’s spine. She stared at him with frosty eyes.

The man lifted his head, revealing a weak smile. He explained to her in a mocking tone, “Do you think I’m ruthless? But if I don’t kill them, then it’s me who dies. The feeling of being at the mercy of others is truly unpleasant...”

This person could kill and still smile without a care. He was without a doubt the most cold-hearted person Song Ke had ever encountered.

The man tossed the sword back to her. Song Ke instinctively caught it. Then, he calmly retrieved a handkerchief and wiped away the blood stains, all the while lifting his eyelids to observe her.

Outside, the pouring rain drummed against the windows, creating a continuous sound. The two stood there, one by the window, the other leaning against the wall, quietly facing each other in confrontation.

Yes, quite composed. Unshaken even when Mount Tai collapsed before her, her mental resilience was quite impressive.

The man set aside his probing thoughts, and a smile curled on his lips. “Little girl, you saved me. I don’t have much to repay you with. After thinking it over, how about offering myself to you?”

Song Ke stared at him as if he were insane, slowly brandishing the short sword in her hand. “You, you, you are sick, do you want to seek, seek death?”

Emotions were finally stirring within her, and her stammering tendency escalated at this moment, revealing her unease.

“Haha...” The man laughed like a malevolent character causing calamity for the nation, his dark trousers completely soaked with blood. Leaning against the wall, he appeared anything but embarrassed. Instead, he radiated an eye-catching brilliance, as elegant as a nobleman. He gazed deeply at Song Ke and said confidently, “You won’t kill me.”

This person... Song Ke felt exasperated. She sheathed the sword and turned to run, one foot already on the windowsill.

“Hey,” he called after her.

Song Ke didn’t stop, silently reciting, “I won’t listen, I won’t listen, I won’t listen,” as she popped open the umbrella and prepared to leap into the rain.

“I am a researcher at the Qinglan Institute.”

The Qinglan Institute.

Song Ke was familiar with this name. She had heard it on the television at the martial arts school. It was said to be the most top-tier and enigmatic research institution in the Alliance, renowned internationally for its achievements.

“Aren’t you curious? About the apocalypse, about your powers, and even... about the origin of this torrential rain in Hua City.”

“No one has told you anything about these matters so far, right?”

Song Ke’s back stiffened. She retorted with the stubbornness of a dead duck, “I’m not, not curious.”

“If you weren’t curious, you wouldn’t have shown up here today.”

The man's lips were pale due to blood loss, but he seemed oblivious to it, still attempting to seduce her.

"You want to know the real truth? I know everything."

"Or rather... I know even more than you could imagine."

"How about we make a deal?"

Three sentences made Song Ke stop in her tracks. She stood by the windowsill, the sound of pouring rain in her ears, while a struggle raged within her. What Song Ke urgently needed right now was the truth. She stayed in District F, isolated from the world since childhood, living a life at odds with everyone around her. She knew very little about this world. This man seemed to have unraveled her thoughts, grasping her lifeline and leaving her with no way to retreat.

If there really was someone who knew all the secrets about the apocalypse and was willing to tell her, she wouldn't be able to refuse.

"How can you, how can you prove it?" Song Ke's heart was already wavering.

The man smiled, pulling out a work badge from his pocket with the name "Qinglan Institute" on it and his own photo.

Song Ke took a glance and found the photo not as good-looking as he was in person.

"How do you want to, to trade?"

"If I'm not mistaken, you have companions, right? Transfer me to a safe zone and then find a healing-type awakener for me."

"Okay."

There was a safe zone; the sports field of No.1 Middle School would do. As for a healing-type awakener, she hadn't seen one, but she could look for one gradually.

The man's request wasn't unreasonable.

Song Ke retracted her leg hanging outside the window and jumped back into the room.

The deal was struck, and the man seemed to breathe a sigh of relief. He sat down weakly, asking, "Do you have any first aid supplies?"

Song Ke rummaged through her backpack, taking out some bandages and medical supplies. She pushed them toward him. Without changing his expression, the man quickly did a simple job of dressing his wounds, swaying a bit when he stood up.

With such a major injury, jumping out of the window was clearly out of the question. Song Ke had no choice but to head towards the door. The man followed behind in silence. She walked a dozen meters, turned around to look, and found that the man had only moved less than two meters.

Trouble, this was truly troublesome.

Song Ke took a deep breath, turned around, and approached him with determined steps. She stared at him from top to bottom, then reached out and grabbed his waistband.

"What are you doing?!" This was the first time the man had lost his elegance since entering the room. His expression was no longer composed; instead, his handsome face bore a cold and stern look.

Ignoring his outburst, Song Ke held onto his collar with her other hand. With a slight effort, she lifted him off the ground, his heels hovering about two inches above the floor.

"You, you're too slow!"

The man grabbed her wrist, veins pulsing on his forehead. "Turn left after leaving the main entrance of this building. It's the second building there. You'll find a medical equipment production line for assistance devices. Go look; there should be a wheelchair."

"The door downstairs, it's locked," she reminded him.

She could freely come and go through the window, but a wheelchair was too big to fit. Going through the main entrance would require her to spend time and effort dismantling the door. It was better to just carry him down directly.

The man took a couple of steps forward and pulled out a silver-white access card from a drawer. "Here, use this to swipe."

Song Ke went to the place he indicated and indeed found a variety of finished wheelchairs. They came in various styles and looked state-of-the-art, with a bunch of complicated buttons. She grabbed two with her hands, one in each hand, and hurried back to the main building.

In the laboratory, the man propped himself up and sat in the wheelchair, his forehead beaded with cold sweat.

“Can we, can we go now?” Song Ke urged him.

“Just a moment.”

Before leaving, he maneuvered the wheelchair to the bodies of Wu Yarou and Yang Bo, bending down without avoiding Song Ke and purposefully patting them down. Finally, he took off Yang Bo’s valuable watch and Wu Yarou’s string of pearl necklaces.

Song Ke was absolutely astonished, her worldview shattered! What kind of person was this? Even at a time like this, he was still thinking about seizing a few things?

Facing her incredulous gaze, the man smiled wryly, his voice slightly trembling, “It’s not what you think.”

Song Ke nodded absently a couple of times, avoiding his gaze with unease. She began to reflect on whether her impulsive decision was correct.

Or... should she just leave him here and sneak away?

She glanced somewhat guiltily at the man. After plundering the belongings of the two deceased, he sat with his hands neatly placed on his knees, smiling at her.

Song Ke: “...” Oh no, she couldn’t run away now.

With a sigh, she resignedly walked towards the man.

...

At the entrance of Qingsong Biotech, the majestic signboard stood tall and unwavering, like a silent witness to the bloodshed and conflict that had taken place here.

Song Ke opened her umbrella, firmly shielding both of them. With one hand, she pushed the wheelchair and stepped into the endless rain curtain.

The muggy sea breeze blew against them, instantly wetting the man's knees and her back. The pouring rain gradually swallowed their figures, leaving only faint traces of conversation in the air.

"I forgot to ask earlier, what's your name?"

"Song Ke, Ke."

"Song Ke Ke? Hmm... quite cute."

"Not, not that! It's Song Ke!"

"Alright, got it, Song Ke. Hey, could you move the umbrella a bit over here? Don't just keep it to yourself."

"Also, my name is Zhuang Qingyan."