

## Doomsday Spiritual Artifact Master

### Chapter 16.1: Rainy Night in Hua City (8)

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“Brother Jiang, someone is approaching,” Zhang Hao said, his eyes fixed on the window as he promptly relayed the message to Jiang Rui.

Jiang Rui had just finished counting the quantity of medicines when he heard this and looked up to the rain outside. Despite the continuing severe weather with thunder and rain, two figures emerged from the misty boundary between sky and earth. A slender girl held a massive iron umbrella, steady against the wind and rain, while using one hand to push a wheelchair with a young man leaning against it.

As everyone squinted, trying to discern the identity of the newcomers, Jiang Rui had already opened the warehouse doors and dashed into the rain.

“You’re back?” He ran a few steps to reach Song Ke, his gaze fixed solely on her figure. “You’re not injured, right?”

“No.”

“That’s good. Come in first. The rain outside is too heavy.”

Despite only having been outside for a short while, his hair and clothes were thoroughly wet. However, Jiang Rui seemed not to mind at all; in fact, he looked rather happy.

And, of course, he was happy. This time, Song Ke hadn’t disappeared; she had come back.

Acknowledging him with a response, Song Ke closed the large umbrella and entered the warehouse with him.

“We’ve already found the fever-reducing medicine. As a precaution, we’ve also prepared some other prescription medicines to bring back,” Jiang Rui

explained the current situation to her. His attention shifted to the man sitting in the wheelchair, whom he had belatedly noticed. “And this gentleman is...”

“Um, he...” Song Ke hesitated, mainly because she wasn’t very articulate, and the situation with Zhuang Qingyan was quite complicated. For a moment, she didn’t know where to start.

After Song Ke’s brief trip outside, bringing back an unfamiliar man, her unusual behavior had already attracted attention. The others huddled nearby, secretly sizing up the situation. However, they had interacted with Song Ke several times before, so their curiosity was more innocent than malicious.

Facing the crowd’s gaze, Zhuang Qingyan coughed a couple of times. “Hello, everyone. I’m a pharmaceutical researcher at the neighboring Qingsong Biotech. Before the apocalypse, I was conducting closed-door experiments at the company. Unexpectedly... I’ve been trapped in the research building for several days now. Fortunately, this fellow Student Song rescued me while passing by.”

He let out a sigh with a lingering fear, giving the impression of someone who had narrowly escaped a disaster. “I’m really grateful. If it weren’t for Student Song, I’m afraid I might not have made it out.”

Song Ke: “...”

Well, she didn’t need to explain; this person had already concocted a complete story. And he said it so earnestly, shifting focus away from the real issues. Not a single truthful word. What pharmaceutical researcher? What closed-door experiments? At his place, experiments meant poking people’s eyes with pens or splashing sulfuric acid on their faces, right?

Song Ke grumbled inwardly, but outwardly, she maintained her composure and didn’t expose him.

Jiang Rui noticed the slight twitching of her expression and whispered, “Song Ke, come over here for a moment.”

Song Ke followed him a few steps away from the crowd.

“Is this person truly someone you rescued from Qingsong Biotech?”

“Yes.”

Though there were some discrepancies in the details, the outcome was indeed as such, without a doubt.

“You intend to take him back to the safe zone?”

“Yes.”

Jiang Rui’s brows gradually furrowed.

“Is that... not okay?” Song Ke asked in response.

“It’s not that it’s not possible, but...” Jiang Rui disliked discussing others behind their backs, so he had to hint subtly, “Inside the safe zone, Teacher Xu ensures fairness by distributing resources based on everyone’s contributions. In a situation like his, where he relies solely on a wheelchair and has no physical strength, he might not receive any supplies or food.”

Indeed, a physically frail researcher who relied on a wheelchair and had no strength to contribute, and lacked any unique abilities to shine, what value could he bring to Xu Liren?

Both of them fell silent. Unable to resist, Song Ke turned her head to glance over. There, Zhuang Qingyan, pretending to be a researcher, had become the center of attention. Holding a pile of drug boxes with long and complex names, he explained to everyone while noticing Song Ke’s gaze. He turned his head slightly, smiling at her with his eyes curved.

“If he can’t get any... then, he can’t get any,” Song Ke was momentarily blinded by his affected smile. She quickly averted her gaze. She wasn’t surprised by the situation Jiang Rui described. When she decided to bring him back, she had anticipated this outcome.

For Song Ke, the matter of whether she could stay in the safe zone wasn’t as crucial as Jiang Rui had assumed. It wasn’t even as significant as the information Zhuang Qingyan himself could offer her. She had the mentality that if this place didn’t accommodate her, she could find her own way out. Ultimately, if need be, she would just leave.

“The, the person I saved, I, I will take care of it.”

Jiang Rui’s breathing suddenly became uneven.

With some time left before the agreed return time, the group tidied up and planned to search the nearby areas again. The outskirts of Hua City were vast and sparsely populated, making the search for supplies extremely challenging. They had explored several places in a row, but the gains were meager.

As the days of the apocalypse passed, fewer and fewer people were seen outside. The local residents had either fled to higher-level cities or hoarded supplies in their homes. With limited resources and no basic productive capacity, consumption continued unabated. Sooner or later, everything would run out.

Kongzi Qi walked and muttered in puzzlement, “Why do I feel like there are fewer zombies recently? Is it just me?”

Zhang Hao replied, “It’s not your imagination. The frequency of zombie appearances is indeed decreasing.”

“No way? Zombies are afraid of rain too?”

“I don’t know, logically they shouldn’t be.”

“Damn! Where did the zombies go?”

The boys conversed up front, while Song Ke held the umbrella for Zhuang Qingyan and trailed behind them. The group was large, and it wasn’t convenient for the two of them to communicate privately. They didn’t have time for whispered conversations along the way.

Finally finding a canned food factory, when the group dispersed to load supplies, Song Ke seized the opportunity. She wheeled Zhuang Qingyan to a corner of the wall, and asked, “Can you, can you answer my questions now?”

Leaning his chin on his hand, Zhuang Qingyan, completely helpless, was pushed by the stammering girl. After a moment’s thought, he nodded, “Well, I can answer, but let’s make one thing clear first—only three questions per day.”

“Why!” Song Ke was shocked. He never mentioned this condition when negotiating with her!

Zhuang Qingyan pointed to the wheelchair and smiled leisurely, "How should I put it? Tsk, I'm disabled now, I should still keep some tricks up my sleeve, right? What if you've asked all the questions you wanted and you feel I'm not valuable anymore? Then you just... don't need me."

Song Ke: "... This person was really shameless.

Her cheeks puffed with anger, but luckily she had the foresight to confirm with him, "How can I be, be sure, what you're saying is, true?"

Zhuang Qingyan looked hurt by her suspicion. "We're complete strangers. What benefit would I gain from lying to you?"

A bit of twisted reasoning there? Well, she did save him, so whatever, she'd trust him for now.

Song Ke posed her first question sullenly, "Then, I want, want to ask, who were those two people just now? Why did they want, want to kill you?"

Zhuang Qingyan replied, "You're talking about Wu Yarou and Yang Bo, right? I had a research finding that they cared deeply about. Hey, don't look at me with that kind of expression. I didn't steal it, and it's not theirs either. Well... strictly speaking, it belongs to Qinglan. But they've coveted this research finding for a long time. As for me, I wasn't willing to just hand it over. So, they got angry and came after me."

"What... research finding?" Song Ke pressed further. She couldn't completely trust Zhuang Qingyan. His background and appearance were too suspicious, and what kind of research finding could prompt two ability users to resort to killing, even going so far as to silence someone?

Zhuang Qingyan raised his gaze and smiled playfully in response, "Are you sure you want to ask? Explaining this finding will take more than a few days, and this would already count as your second question."

"No, it... shouldn't!" Song Ke's frustration grew. Shameless, this person was just shameless!

Not getting the upper hand in the conversation and unable to outmaneuver him in wits, Song Ke was close to losing it. She swiftly wheeled the wheelchair in circles a few times and then, coincidentally, aimed it towards the direction of

the main gate. She lifted her feet off the ground, releasing her hands on the handles.

“Student Song, let’s talk peacefully. Don’t resort to violence!” The front wheels of the wheelchair lifted slightly. If Zhuang Qingyan dared to play tricks on her again, Song Ke was ready to send him rolling headfirst into the pouring rain.

After gaining the upper hand, Song Ke released a sigh of frustration. She assertively posed her second question, “What exactly is my, my ability?”

Zhuang Qingyan had figured it out. The young girl didn’t trust him, and she was truly determined. She wanted him to give up some information first before she would reciprocate. Otherwise, she might just abandon him along the way. He pondered for a moment, then asked, “Can you manipulate the form of objects?”

Song Ke didn’t say a word. She casually picked up an empty pineapple can nearby. In an instant, the can transformed into a shiny dagger as she waved it forward, a glint of deep blue light passing through it.

Zhuang Qingyan nodded, “For the time being, known abilities can be roughly divided into three categories: mental abilities, physical enhancements, and mystical. Mental abilities mainly involve controlling elements and telekinesis. For instance, the gold element is widely recognized as a strong offensive ability. From the surface, you possess a commendable gold element ability. But being able to transform weapons already signifies your command over materialization. Compared to other superhumans of the same level, you would be more powerful.”

He pointed at the dagger in Song Ke’s hand, “Just like this...”

“Spiritual weapon,” Song Ke interjected.

“Spiritual weapon. Although it looks like a knife and feels like a knife, it isn’t an actual knife. It’s the external manifestation of your gold element ability. If I’m not mistaken, you should be able to manipulate it with ease.”

Turning her palm, the dagger disappeared into thin air, leaving no trace.

Zhuang Qingyan paused. Song Ke’s control over her ability was incredibly precise. Her ability to switch weapons in battle was seemingly unrestricted.

Forget just being in the gold element, she was likely among the most powerful and dominant of all awakeners.

He continued, “Physical enhancement superpowers are more common. They involve enhancing basic attributes, physical transformations, and accelerated healing. As for mystical abilities, they encompass a wide range of abilities, including precognition, healing, external object manipulation, and temporal manipulation, among others. These abilities are elusive and unpredictable. When encountering them for the first time, it’s easy to be taken off guard.”

## Chapter 16.2: Rainy Night in Hua City (8)

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#### ©My person, I’ll take care of it©

Song Ke meticulously recalled her experiences since the apocalypse began. Aspects that previously puzzled her suddenly became clear, like dispelling clouds and fog. So, the middle-aged man she saw at the docks (Wind), Xu Xing (Ice), An Qiwen (Thunder), and even Jiang Rui (Fire) were all elemental awakeners of the mental abilities category. Zhang Qi’s strength, Wu Juemin’s teleportation were both attributes of physical enhancement. As for mystical abilities, the tracking pen of Wu Yarou and the sulfuric acid test tube of Yang Bo had just proven to be incredibly unpredictable.

“The strength of awakeners ranges from E to A, ascending step by step. E-level is the lowest, representing individuals with relatively acute sensory perception. A-level is the strongest, with superpower intensity reaching up to about 83% of the body’s maximum tolerance threshold. However...” Zhuang Qingyan said up to this point, he smiled ambiguously, “If one can surpass this threshold and unlock more potential during awakening, there might even be awakeners with an S-level beyond the upper limit.”

Zhuang Qingyan was almost certain that Song Ke’s superpower level was not low. Not only could she externalize her abilities, but her physical qualities also far exceeded those of ordinary physical enhancement awakeners. Not to mention the precise and fierce combat skills she displayed at Qingsong Biotech, which was why he had thought it over and ultimately decided to hug her thigh.

“You could easily defeat two C-level awakeners, which would suggest your level is probably above B and might even be A. However, superpower reactions have a strong variability. To get the most accurate data, we’d have to rely on authoritative testing equipment.”

Song Ke remembered something, “Testing? Is it that kind of, of black box with lots of, wires?”

“You’ve seen one?” Zhuang Qingyan was mildly surprised. “But what you’re referring to seems to be the most basic superpower detection device, an outdated product. Aside from assessing whether the subject has superpower fluctuations, it doesn’t serve any other purpose.”

“I’m actually curious, where did you see one?” Zhuang Qingyan stared at Song Ke with interest.

The most advanced R-type superpower detection devices of the Alliance were all stored in various Qinglan research institutions. Portable versions that were available on the market were mostly owned by the military. If Song Ke had undergone superpower testing, would those people have allowed her to leave so easily?

“I’ve seen it, but it, it was broken.” Song Ke felt irritated recalling the incident. She briefly recounted her evacuation from District 177, omitting the part where she rescued someone and the “objective fact” that the testing device exploded because of her.

“Ah... what a pity,” Zhuang Qingyan sighed after hearing her story.

“Pity, for what?”

“Hehe~ Don’t misunderstand, I’m pitying those people.”

Zhuang Qingyan looked out at the pouring rain outside the door, his gaze becoming distant.

Azure Phoenix? He hadn’t heard about them for a long time. As the once most glorious fighting force of the Alliance, they had fallen to the point of needing to recruit awakeners from civilians. Could that not be considered a pity?

With only one question left to ask, and with Song Ke having too many questions in mind, she was paralyzed by indecision. So, she temporarily put



the matter aside, planning to ponder over it once she returned to the safe zone. With limited supplies of her own and now the added burden of another mouth to feed, she had to accompany Jiang Rui's group in scavenging the canned food factory. In the process, they managed to collect a variety of strawberry, peach, and orange canned fruits.

During this time, Zhuang Qingyan remained silently seated in the wheelchair. Song Ke inexplicably felt that when he was quiet, he wasn't as annoying as she had initially thought.

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Half an hour early, the group returned to Hua City No.1 Middle School, waiting for Liu Zixuan to open the door.

As the appointed time arrived, the wall recessed, and the superpower door opened punctually.

Liu Zixuan appeared and couldn't wait to ask, "Did you find the medicine? Zhou Anqi woke up, but the fever hasn't gone down."

"We found it," Jiang Rui nodded.

Liu Zixuan breathed a sigh of relief. "That's good. Her ability has awakened."

Zhou Anqi's awakening had been a foregone conclusion even before Jiang Rui and the others returned.

There was a subtle magnetic field sensitivity between awakeners. Earlier in the morning, Liu Zixuan sensed energy fluctuations in her. He immediately reported it to Xu Liren. However, she was mentally weak due to the high fever, making it difficult for her to speak. This continued until Jiang Rui's group returned with life-saving medicine.

Xu Liren took the medicine box and after several checks, had Cao Yiyi feed it to Zhou Anqi to take.

"Anqi, how do you feel now?"

Zhou Anqi leaned weakly against Cao Yiyi. Hearing the question, she merely raised her eyelids. She was now the focus of everyone's attention, with

everyone looking at her expectantly. Only Jiang Rui's gaze drifted elsewhere, not in the same direction as the others.

Suddenly feeling displeased, Zhou Anqi couldn't care less about manners: "Not good. My throat hurts, my head hurts, my whole body hurts."

Everyone exchanged glances. Xu Liren didn't tolerate her tantrum and asked straightforwardly, "Do you know what ability you've awakened?"

"What kind of ability I've awakened is none of your d\*mn business..." Zhou Anqi, in the midst of anger, was about to blurt out a rude retort. However, upon seeing who was asking, she forcibly swallowed her words, lowered her head, thought for a moment, and honestly replied, "I've always been afraid of getting hurt since I was little, worried that scars wouldn't look good. When I just awakened, I could vaguely sense something related to wounds."

"Wounds..." Xu Liren's eyes lit up. He called over the guy who had gone out with Zhang Qi last time. Although he had managed to escape the starship explosion, his arm and leg were still bruised and had not been properly treated. They had even begun to fester.

Zhou Anqi stared at the ghastly wound, looking at it with disgust for quite a few minutes. Eventually, with Xu Liren's encouragement, she placed her hands over the wound through the gauze. About ten minutes later, sweat started forming on her forehead, and she slowly withdrew her hands. The guy eagerly removed the gauze, only to find that the wound had completely healed. His skin was as good as new, not a scar left! He excitedly hopped in place, no different from any regular person in his movements.

Witnessing this miracle with their own eyes, the atmosphere in the safe zone ignited like a spark, bursting into an uproar.

"It's a healing-type ability!"

"Really? Are you not joking?"

"This is amazing! We won't have to worry about injuries anymore!"

"Come on, do you think Miss Zhou would be kind enough to heal you?"

"Uh... that's true. Got excited for nothing."

Xu Liren smiled gently and kindly advised Zhou Anqi to take her medicine on time, rest well, and then stood up to attend to other matters. Just as he did so, Jiang Rui walked over to him and whispered, “Mr. Xu, Song Ke brought someone back.”

“Oh? Who is it?” The delight on Xu Liren’s face hadn’t faded yet, and he nodded unconcernedly. “I’ll go take a look.”

When the others swarmed around Zhou Anqi, only Song Ke stood there like a wooden pole, rooted to her spot.

Of course, Zhuang Qingyan, who fancied himself as the “disabled person,” also remained still, calmly watching the crowded scene.

“Your classmate seems to have awakened. Don’t you want to join the excitement?”

“No, no need.”

“Oh? You don’t want to see the excitement? Have you had a conflict with someone?”

...Is this person telepathic? How does he seem to know everything!

Song Ke was speechless, poking at the wheelchair’s wheel with the tip of her foot, making the wheelchair spin chaotically.

Zhuang Qingyan in the wheelchair was affected by the chaos, and his perspective spun around, forced to face multiple directions. However, he didn’t seem annoyed at all. He maintained his smile and continued teasing her, “Really? Did I hit the nail on the head? You really have a grudge with someone?”

This only made Song Ke angrier, causing her to spin the wheels even faster.

While the two were playfully bickering, Xu Liren and Jiang Rui stopped in front of them.

“Song Ke, I heard you brought back a stranger.”

Song Ke’s actions came to a halt, and the faintly expressive look on her face vanished instantly. In the awkward silence, she suddenly recalled Jiang Rui’s

mention of the “distribution according to work” system. She forced herself to speak stiffly, “You don’t need to give, give him supplies, I will take care of it.”

Xu Liren’s expression turned sour as he scolded her in a low voice, “What do you think this place is?!”

The girl in front of him lowered her gaze, presenting a rebellious appearance. It was like this before, and it’s still the same now. Xu Liren had taught for many years, and while Song Ke wasn’t the most unruly student he had seen, she was certainly the most stubborn. She would never learn to be submissive.

Suppressing his impatience, his tone grew even more stern. “The safe zone is the result of everyone’s hard work. Back then, we were willing to take you in because of the fate between teachers and students, not so you could act capriciously. You saved someone on a whim today, who knows if you’ll pick up a cat or a dog tomorrow. If this continues, teacher won’t be able to manage it.”

Song Ke’s mind went blank, and she automatically started her “turtle reciting scriptures technique,” allowing her thoughts to wander freely. Xu Liren’s words entered her left ear and swiftly slipped out of her right, coming and going lightly, leaving no trace behind.

Unluckily for her, her act of pretending to be “dead” didn’t escape the notice of another.

“Hehe~” A magnetic chuckle resonated, interrupting Xu Liren’s words. Zhuang Qingyan, likened to a “cat or dog,” seemed to have a better sense of self-awareness than Song Ke. Recognizing his own rudeness, he quickly apologized, “Sorry, couldn’t help it. You can continue, please continue.”

Xu Liren’s glasses glinted, a cold glint passing through his eyes.

In the safe zone, nobody could challenge his authority.

He composed himself, looked down at the wheelchair, and saw the languidly seated man. His handsome face seemed to be emitting a glow. His features were exquisite, a perfect work as if crafted by Nuwa herself.

Caught off guard, their gazes locked.

Zhuang Qingyan arched an eyebrow, his smile unchanged. But Xu Liren, as if struck by lightning, paled in disbelief! He appeared complex, even a touch frightened, staring at Zhuang Qingyan.

Innocently and perplexedly, Zhuang Qingyan said, “Um, Mr. Xu? Are you okay?”

Xu Liren gazed at him for a long time, not detecting anything unusual. He let out a suppressed breath, “I’m fine.”

He then turned to look at Song Ke, his expression cold. “Song Ke, you brought this person here, and we have no obligation to take care of him. You are responsible for him yourself.”

“Furthermore, this is the last time.”

Jiang Rui quickly left a message “I’ll find you later” and followed Xu Liren as they left.

Once they were far away, Song Ke asked in confusion, “What’s wrong with him?” He was having a normal conversation and then suddenly collapsed. It’s pretty unsettling.

“Maybe... he had a sudden illness?”

Zhuang Qingyan looked at Xu Liren’s departing figure and smiled.

**\*\*TN**

Hugging someone’s thigh – attaching yourself to someone powerful

Nuwa – the mother of humankind, the goddess of nature, order, fertility, and marriage.

## **Chapter 17.1: Rainy Night in Hua City (9)**

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©Get out of here©

Song Ke stared at his smile, a chill running down her spine, and a row of goosebumps appeared on her arms.

She recalled the ancient court dramas that Aming enjoyed. Occasionally, when she had free time, she would catch a glimpse of them. The way Zhuang Qingyan smiled was just too similar to the beautiful and sinister main antagonist in those dramas.

After the others had walked away, the corner where the two of them were located regained its quietness. Zhuang Qingyan suppressed the smile on his face, and his expression finally appeared somewhat normal: "Since we have time now, tell me about the intricacies here."

"Intricacies?" Song Ke was bewildered.

"The safety zone you brought me to, surely you can't know nothing about it?"

Of course, she wouldn't know nothing. On the first day she entered, she cleverly asked Tian Yi for information!

Song Ke straightened her chest full of confidence: "Go, go ahead and ask."

"What is the organizational structure and management model here? Who are the main leaders? How are the awakeners, as a scarce resource, allocated?"

Song Ke was taken aback for two seconds, hesitated, and shook her head.

"How is defense and patrolling arranged? What are the rules? Are there any taboos? Also, have you noticed any unusual places?"

"Defense? Unusual?" Song Ke continued shaking her head; she had no idea.

"..." Zhuang Qingyan couldn't continue his questioning.

After a while, he helplessly rubbed his forehead, "Student Song Ke, can I ask, what do you do every day?"

"Eat, sleep, and fight, fight zombies."

...So, not really using your brain, huh?

Very well, perfectly reasonable, can't find any faults.

Song Ke glanced at Zhuang Qingyan's expressionless face, guiltily fiddled with her fingers, and the next second she shouted, "Tian Yi!"

It's okay, if she couldn't explain, there's someone who can.

Tian Yi's ears were quite sharp; he heard her call from quite a distance and hurriedly ran over, bouncing, "Hey, here I am! What's up?"

Song Ke pointed at Zhuang Qingyan, "Can you, tell him about, the safety zone?"

Tian Yi had been curious about Zhuang Qingyan for a long time. He had wanted to approach him outside but didn't dare. Now that he had the chance, he immediately came over with enthusiasm, "Brother Yan, can I call you Brother Yan? You were also saved by Song Ke, so we could consider it as having a deep connection, right? What do you want to know? I will definitely tell you everything."

Zhuang Qingyan keenly caught the "also" in his words, gave Song Ke a slow, deliberate glance – oh, the little girl's in the wholesale business of saving lives, huh?

After Song Ke passed the baton, she released her mental burden, lowered her head to rummage through her backpack, not noticing his gaze.

Zhuang Qingyan also stopped looking at her, saying, "I want to understand the personnel structure here. Let's start from the beginning. How did you all come here?"

Tian Yi responded with an "Oh" and began talking about the origin of the safety zone. He recounted from the advent of the apocalypse, the first wave of zombie outbreaks, Xu Liren leading them in a hurried retreat, and he continued all the way to the current situation.

Zhuang Qingyan occasionally interrupted with questions he was particularly concerned about. Tian Yi couldn't answer them all, but after some thought, he spoke for a long time.

Song Ke, who was by the side, was getting bored. With one hand, she knocked and twisted, opening a can of orange slices. She buried her head in the can, her nose twitched, greedily sniffed, and then pulled out a spoon from her bag, happily stuffing it into her mouth. She quickly finished a can.

“So, the number of awakeners among you isn’t large?” After listening to Tian Yi’s account, Zhuang Qingyan quickly sensed the core issue.

“Yeah, not counting Song Ke, there are currently four: Jiang Rui, Liu Zixuan, Zhang Qi, oh, and Zhou Anqi.”

“Four?” Zhuang Qingyan’s expression shifted slightly. “You mentioned a teacher named Xu Liren. Didn’t you say he’s in charge? So, he’s a regular person?”

Tian Yi scratched his head. “Uh... Teacher Xu is a regular person. He teaches the first year students and he’s also the only teacher left in the safe zone. That’s why everyone is willing to listen to him. Without him leading us these days, we probably wouldn’t have survived.”

High school students aged sixteen or seventeen naturally had inherent trust and respect for teachers. Tian Yi’s thoughts were understandable.

Zhuang Qingyan didn’t comment and casually tapped the metal wheelchair with his slender finger joints.

“You said he’s the ‘only’ teacher left?”

“Yes, initially, there was Teacher Wang, Teacher Chen, and Vice Principal Li, but they had accidents... so only Teacher Xu remained.”

Zhuang Qingyan smiled very faintly. “Whether he’s a selfless dedicated teacher or a benevolent dictator in disguise, I’m afraid only by peeling away that layer of hypocrisy can one find out.”

His words were somewhat cryptic, and the only two in the audience didn’t quite understand.

Song Ke set down the empty can, burped softly, then opened another can of a different flavor and swallowed large mouthfuls. She was carefree; whether she understood or not, it didn’t affect her focused eating.

After discussing for nearly half an hour, Zhuang Qingyan had a basic understanding of how the safety zone operated.

Tian Yi also received a call from Kongzi Qi in the distance, asking him to quickly collect today’s supplies. Before leaving, he remembered something,



“Oh, by the way, you probably don’t know yet. Zhou Anqi awakened as a healing-type ability user.”

Song Ke’s movement of stuffing a peach slice into her mouth suddenly froze. The fruit slipped off the spoon and landed with a soft plop on the ground. She didn’t have time to feel sorry for it as she reflexively turned her head to look at Zhuang Qingyan’s legs.

Zhuang Qingyan supported his chin, sighing softly. “Mm, I got lucky.”

At that time, there were two conditions for their deal: one was to bring him back to the safe zone, and the other was to find a healing-type ability user. To achieve both so quickly, of course, luck was on their side. However, Song Ke didn’t feel happy at all.

Her emotions had changed too obviously, which Zhuang Qingyan noticed. He then recalled her being alone in the corner earlier, and asked with a hint of realization, “You don’t want to ask for her help?”

Song Ke didn’t say anything, and after a long while, she reluctantly nodded, her face showing evident reluctance.

Zhuang Qingyan fell silent and looked down at his own knees.

Perhaps due to losing too much blood, unconsciously, his complexion had become even paler than when they first met. At this moment, he seemed to be standing on the wheel of fate: Song Ke obviously was unwilling. Would she give up this opportunity just like that?

He didn’t know if he could hold on until they found another healing-type ability user. Going alone to find someone of unknown strength? Maybe he could save his own life, but undoubtedly, it would anger this new ally. The prospects were indeed worrying. Zhuang Qingyan needed to make a high-stakes gamble, an all-in bet, and the price was his own life.

Unfortunately, he had always been the most reckless gambler.

However, clever gamblers tend to use some confusing tactics before placing their bets. Opening his mouth again, Zhuang Qingyan’s emotions stabilized, and his voice was gentle, “If you’re unwilling, you don’t have to ask her.”

Song Ke’s moist eyes blinked, and she felt somewhat guilty. “Your... legs.”

Zhuang Qingyan harvested her sympathy without hesitation and said gently, like a gentle breeze, “Don’t worry, they’ve already been bandaged. It’s not that serious.”

Song Ke felt a bit relieved and found him more agreeable than before. After thinking for a moment, she took out a beautifully packaged small cake from her backpack and handed it to him.

“Please, have it.”

“What?”

“Egg... cake.”

“Why cake?” Zhuang Qingyan gestured toward the pile of empty cans on the ground. “I thought you might treat me to canned food.”

“Because... today is my, my birthday.” Song Ke smiled subtly, and the small dimple on her cheek became more pronounced. This was the last piece of cake she had hidden away, and it was the most visually appealing one. There were even pointed strawberries on top. She had been reluctant to eat it, wanting to save it as a reward for herself on her birthday.

Zhuang Qingyan poked the cake with a plastic spoon. The small portion on the very top had oxidized to a pale yellow, indicating it was made of the cheapest vegetable fat cream. It was a type of junk food that he would never have tried in the past, categorized as “garbage district specialties.” However, his expression remained unchanged as he gently scooped up a very small piece and put it in his mouth. His eyes then curved into a smile. “Thank you, it’s delicious.”

“Song Ke, happy birthday.”

Song Ke’s eyes widened slightly.

From the time she could remember, this seemed to be the first time someone other than her grandfather had specifically said “happy birthday” to her. It wasn’t a surplus from Zhang Ci’s birthday at the Yue Mountain Martial Arts School. It was a complete and wholehearted wish for her alone to have a happy birthday.

Song Ke felt somewhat overwhelmed, her fingers tugging at her backpack strap. She hesitantly pushed two unopened cans over to him. "Here, these are for you too."

Couldn't get supplies? No problem! She had them! During this time, she could manage that for him.

...

In the early morning, the rain-covered sports field was completely silent.

Song Ke tossed and turned, finding it hard to sleep. She had a nagging feeling that she had forgotten something until a "ding" resounded in her mind. She suddenly remembered she had one remaining chance to ask a question. With only three opportunities a day, she had to be frugal, so how could she waste it?

Swiftly, Song Ke rolled over, feeling around in the darkness and moving towards the side. Zhuang Qingyan was sleeping quietly, his hands neatly resting on his abdomen, and even his breath was light.

Song Ke poked him, but he didn't respond.

She tugged at his sleeve, only to encounter a damp chill.

Song Ke was taken aback and crouched down to examine him closely. The nighttime lighting wasn't great, but her night vision was exceptional, allowing her to quickly make out the person before her. Zhuang Qingyan was covered in cold sweat, his face pallid. His jet-black hair hung on his forehead, and he looked extremely unwell. He had been drenched in rain during the day, hadn't changed his clothes, and spent the night in the cold and wet. Now his wound had deteriorated rapidly, and he had lost consciousness.

Song Ke rolled up his pant leg, and the white bandage was stained with a large patch of glaring red, like vividly blooming nirvana flowers. She gently pressed on the broken leg, and the fragmented bones were like mush, devoid of any support, completely contradicting what he had said about it not being "that serious." The injury was even worse than she had imagined.

"Zhuang... Qingyan, Zhuang Qingyan!" Song Ke urgently called his name while tapping his face.

She applied a bit too much force, accidentally knocking his head askew. His handsome face had lost its vitality and slowly tilted to the side.

This can't be... Song Ke was startled, quickly supporting his head. Pressing her ear to his chest, she was relieved to hear a faint heartbeat.

Song Ke anxiously picked at her fingers, wondering what to do. Regardless of his words, he probably wouldn't make it through the night. But to save him, the only option now...

She raised her gaze and looked in another direction. It was pitch black there, with faint signs of vitality shimmering.

Go ask that person? Even if they were willing, getting them to act wouldn't be that easy. What bargaining chips did she have to exchange? And what kind of price would she need to pay?

A voice deep within her kept urging her: Give up, don't bother. After all, they had only known each other for less than a day. Leaving him behind wouldn't matter much. There must be more than one person who knew the truth about the apocalypse. She could always go outside and capture another researcher.

Forget it, forget it...

But for some reason, Zhuang Qingyan's voice kept flashing in her mind. He had said to her, "Song Ke, happy birthday."

Song Ke closed her eyes and when she opened them again, she stood up with a swish. She picked up Zhuang Qingyan and placed him in the wheelchair.

## **Chapter 17.2: Rainy Night in Hua City (9)**

### **Chapter 17.2 – Rainy Night in Hua City (9)**

#### **©Get out of here©**

Hasty and disordered footsteps, the intense friction of the wheelchair against the ground—this commotion woke up a large group of people who were sound asleep.

“Who’s making noise in the middle of the night?!”

“Is something wrong? Did zombies break in?”

“Who? Who broke in?!”

Flashlights flickered, and a group of people at the center of the safe zone sat up warily.

Pushing Zhuang Qingyan in the wheelchair, Song Ke stopped right in front of Zhou Anqi. “Save him.”

Zhou Anqi, still half-asleep, was first startled by the pale complexion of the person in the wheelchair. After hearing what Song Ke said, she incredulously lifted her head. “Are you out of your mind?”

“You’re a healing-type ability user. Please, please save him.”

“Why should I? I won’t save him!”

It seemed that the tables had turned. Fate had its way of circling back, and unexpectedly, there came a day when Song Ke had to beg Zhou Anqi. Zhou Anqi didn’t even have time to set off firecrackers in her heart to celebrate, and she was still counting on her to save people? It was utterly outrageous!

With folded arms and a condescending stance, she glared fiercely at Song Ke. Mockingly, she said, “I’ve said it before, you’re a star of disaster. Whoever comes into contact with you will be unlucky. It serves them right to die. Let’s see who you can deceive from now on!”

Zhou Anqi’s eyes were filled with resentment and malice. Song Ke knew that continuing to talk to her was futile. She pushed the wheelchair in a different direction, turning toward the person who could actually make the decision: “Save him.”

Xu Liren stood in the center of the inner circle, wearing a coat, half his face obscured in the darkness, silent and still.

Song Ke had considered that Xu Liren wouldn’t agree unconditionally. She raised her eyes and surveyed the faces in the darkness. One by one, they looked panicked and bewildered, looking helplessly at the confrontation. This

included Tian Yi, Lin Xia, Kongzi Qi, and others, their hushed whispers filling the air:

“Why did this person faint? His complexion looks terrible...”

“Can Zhou Anqi’s temper improve? She should just help out a bit.”

“Um, Song Ke, are you okay?” Tian Yi looked at her with concern.

Song Ke roughly counted the heads. The survivors in the safe zone were decreasing continuously, and now there were just over a hundred left. Just over a hundred ordinary students, unarmed, facing the zombies outside—it was no different from sending them to their deaths.

She roughly estimated her mental strength, clenched her fist, and played her negotiation card.

In the chaotic night, Song Ke’s right hand swiftly slid over the back of the wheelchair and then opened her palm. A mountain-cutting knife emitting a faint blue light quietly appeared, its blade jagged and sharp, exuding a piercing aura.

“One hundred weapons, exchange for his life,” she said.

The flickering blue light illuminated the astonished faces of the people nearby, quickly causing a commotion.

“Wow! Unbelievable! One hundred weapons?”

“How did that knife just appear? Did anyone see it clearly?”

“Am I dreaming? I must not be awake... Someone pinch me!”

“Song Ke? This knife... How did you...” Round-faced girl Lin Xia exclaimed in shock, nearly losing her ability to speak.

“Supernatural powers,” Song Ke responded slowly, enunciating clearly.

The surrounding noise quieted for a moment.

“So, you’re not a power-type awakener at all!” A boy who had been healed by Zhou Anqi pointed at her and shouted, “When we went out earlier, that huge

hammer you used to break the door, and the strange iron umbrella from before, you made them with your supernatural power!”

“Made with your supernatural power!”

“You’ve been lying to us all along!”

“It’s not really lying, Song Ke never admitted she was a power-type. We all just guessed...” Tian Yi weakly defended her.

The sudden appearance of powerful weapons out of thin air, combined with Song Ke’s proposal, left everyone in the safe zone dumbfounded. One hundred weapons was a grand offer, almost enough for each of them to have one, fully arming their group of a hundred.

People were uncertain, whispering and discussing among themselves.

Taking advantage of the distraction, Cao Yiyi’s expression shifted slightly. She leaned in and said something to Zhou Anqi.

Xu Liren took the spiritual weapon mountain-cutting knife from Song Ke’s hand. After observing it for a moment, he suddenly, without any warning, swung at a nearby volleyball pole. “Crack!” The sturdy steel pole snapped, and the volleyball net fell to the ground.

He weighed the handle of the knife, his expression no longer calm. He suddenly looked up at Song Ke.

“Weapons of equal quality, are you sure you can provide a hundred?” he inquired.

“I can.”

“When can the delivery be made?”

“Within half an hour.”

Exchanging spiritual weapons for Zhuang Qingyan’s life was the only valuable bargaining chip Song Ke could think of. Through her observations over the past few days, she realized that the safe zone’s most pressing need wasn’t food, but weapons. With weapons, the teams going outside for exploration could expand in numbers and deal with emergencies. After all, the situation in the apocalypse changed rapidly. Hua City No.1 Middle School was

surrounded by zombies from all sides, and it could only serve as a temporary buffer zone. How long the safe zone could truly remain “safe” was uncertain; no one could guarantee that.

Xu Liren adjusted his glasses and seemed shaken. However, he neither directly agreed nor disagreed. He appeared to be waiting for something.

“I don’t agree. Why should I save him?” Zhou Anqi, who had been ignored for a while, suddenly interjected, complaining discontentedly.

Xu Liren gave her a faint glance, his eyes behind the lenses devoid of warmth, “Why don’t you agree?”

“It’s my own ability; I have the right to decide!” Zhou Anqi said, her voice faltering for a moment, her gaze suddenly distant, as if a momentary sense of familiarity and fear enveloped her. Her voice grew quieter, her teeth chattered, yet she continued to insist defiantly, straining her neck, “You can ask me to save him, but I have a condition.”

In the dim light, Xu Liren’s tone took on a deliberate inducement. “You’re right. So, what’s your condition?”

Everyone’s gaze focused on her. Zhou Anqi’s fear diminished, and her courage gradually grew. “I dislike Song Ke. If you want me to save him, she has to kneel down and kowtow to me twice, crying and begging for forgiveness. Then she can get out of here!”

Cao Yiyi closed her eyes, her nails digging deep into her palm. Idiot! This idiot! She had made everything so clear to her. The immediate priority was to get Song Ke out of the safe zone, yet here she was adding unnecessary drama!

“Zhou Anqi!” Jiang Rui’s stern voice interrupted her. “It’s already this late. Can’t you stop acting crazy?”

“This is going too far. Song Ke is an awakener,” Zhang Hao said with a serious expression.

“What’s the big deal about being an awakener? I’m a healing-type ability user. She can only produce some worthless junk. Is she more important than me? If you’re not happy with this, why don’t you go save him? Don’t come begging me!”



Xu Liren remained silent. He looked at Song Ke, then turned his gaze to the unconscious man in the wheelchair, lost in thought.

An unruly piece on the chessboard, a disabled pawn whose potential was uncertain—how much benefit did they still bring him at this point? Zhou Anqi's demand seemed unreasonable and overbearing, but upon closer inspection, it might not be a bad choice.

“Zhou Anqi, that's enough. It's unacceptable to degrade a fellow student,” Xu Liren advised, his words neither harsh nor gentle. His true intentions were even harder to decipher. He seemed to be giving the decision-making power to Zhou Anqi?

With the reins of power firmly in her grasp, Zhou Anqi had no understanding of the concept of stopping while ahead. She looked smugly at Song Ke, a cruel innocence in her beautiful face. “How about it? Either watch him die or obediently kowtow to me and then get out of here!”

In the tense atmosphere, Jiang Rui suddenly spoke in a calm tone, “If Song Ke has to leave, I'll go with her.”

“Brother Jiang! Don't act recklessly!”

“Jiang Rui, why are you joining in this madness?”

One stone caused a thousand ripples.

Song Ke leaving and Jiang Rui leaving carried two completely different meanings. Song Ke, the lone wolf who kept to herself most of the time, hadn't been around for long, so even if she left, nobody would care too much. But Jiang Rui was different. He was a pillar in the safe zone, strong in power and popular among the people. His departure would undoubtedly shake the morale, especially considering that losing two awakeners in one fell swoop, especially one of Jiang Rui's caliber, would be a heavy blow to the entire safe zone.

Zhou Anqi was so furious that her eyes turned red. She screamed hysterically, “Jiang Rui, you're like this again! You're like this again!”

Seeing that the situation was about to get out of control, Xu Liren stared at Jiang Rui for two seconds before pulling him aside. “I'll give you some time.

Calm down. There's always room for negotiation in everything. Don't be so impulsive."

Behind them, Zhou Anqi began screaming and smashing things, and everyone else avoided her like the plague. Amid the hesitant gazes of people like Zhang Hao and others, Jiang Rui returned to his spot and began packing his bag. Suddenly, a slender palm stopped his movements.

"Why?" Song Ke asked.

"You don't need to worry. I'm doing this willingly," Jiang Rui replied.

"Why... willingly?" Song Ke's gaze was clear, pure curiosity in her eyes, wondering why he had made this decision.

Jiang Rui looked into her eyes, his lips moved, and after mustering the courage, he finally said, "Song Ke, I made a mistake before. I apologize to you. There's something I didn't have a chance to tell you back then... Actually, I... I like..."

"No need for this." Song Ke withdrew her hand, her brows lightly furrowed.

"No need to, to apologize. The past is in the past."

Those embarrassing experiences that had once made her uncomfortable, she had come to accept. While she wouldn't reconcile with Zhou Anqi and the others, she didn't need Jiang Rui's compensation or apology. Besides, she already had Zhuang Qingyan as a complication. She wasn't suitable to carry another burden.

"I understand," she reiterated, "there's no need for this."

As expected... he was rejected.

Jiang Rui lowered his head, looking at the hand she had pulled away, and couldn't help but smile wryly. "You don't know, you've never known."

You don't know about that summer, when the shade covered the sun and a boy had once had feelings for you. He struggled to say the words "I like you," and because of every wrong choice he made, he ended up growing distant from you, unable to get any closer.

Squatting in front of him, Song Ke tilted her head, looked at him for a couple of seconds, and suddenly realized. She patted his shoulder, “Don’t worry, I’m, I’m strong.”

She stood up, her thin shoulder blades stretching as she moved. She walked to the front, past Zhou Anqi and the others.

Zhou Anqi clenched her teeth, her expression as if she wanted to devour Song Ke. “Song Ke, are you satisfied now? Aren’t you pleased? Let me tell you, I won’t help you save him even if I die. I want all of you to go die—”

A faint blue light pierced through the darkness, brushing against the edge of Zhou Anqi’s hair, slicing through her falling bangs.

“Clang!” The platform behind Zhou Anqi split in two, exploding with a resounding noise, debris filling the air.

“Save him. I’ll leave, leave this place.”

Song Ke maintained her stance with the blade. The throwing knife circled the area once before firmly returning to her palm.

Zhou Anqi’s pupils shrank in fear. Her legs shook, and she collapsed to the ground, too terrified to utter a word.

Her master had once said that when reasoning failed, one had to rely on fists to determine the outcome.

Well, it seemed like it worked quite well.

Song Ke felt reassured.

## **Chapter 18.1: Rainy Night in Hua City (10)**

### **Chapter 18.1 – Rainy Night in Hua City (10)**

©You won’t leave me, will you?©

In Hua City No.1 Middle School, at the storm-proof, enclosed stadium.

A variety of objects formed piles resembling small mountains, filling the entire equipment room. Song Ke had only mentioned the need for materials, the more the better, without specifying any particular type. As a result, apart from heavy objects used to block the door, everyone brought over anything they could carry.

Kongzi Qi set down the last basketball storage basket and leaned towards Tian Yi, draping his arm around Tian Yi's neck.

As they approached Song Ke, before they could speak, Kongzi Qi gave a thumbs-up with a grin, "Awesome! Even though this might be a little unfair to Princess Zhou, I still want to say, it's so satisfying!"

Tian Yi, caught in Kongzi Qi's grasp, flailed his limbs in the air, struggling to break free. He kicked Kongzi Qi hard in the heel, and Kongzi Qi let go, clutching his foot while hopping and wailing, like an agile flamingo.

Despite their daily play-fighting, their relationship was actually quite good.

"By the way, Song Ke, Tian Yi asked me to ask you what those flying things that went 'swoosh swoosh swoosh' just now were. They were so cool!"

"Kongzi Qi, you were the one who wanted to ask in the first place, so why blame me?" Tian Yi retorted indignantly.

"Oh come on, isn't it the same if you ask or I ask?" Kongzi Qi chuckled, then leaned closer to Tian Yi's ear, whispering, "You're quite close to her, huh~"

Song Ke didn't keep it a secret either, taking something out of her pocket. It was a thin blade, as thin as paper, about seven inches long, resembling a willow leaf. A bright red silk was tied to its end. In the dim indoor light, the blade's surface was covered with a faint blue glow.

Kongzi Qi let out a whistle and his eyes lit up.

"For you." Seeing how much he liked it, Song Ke handed him the throwing knife generously.

"Really? Well then, I won't hold back!" Kongzi Qi was ecstatic and accepted it without hesitation. Joking aside, there was no need for hesitation. This wasn't an ordinary throwing knife; it was a legendary supernatural throwing knife! It

could cut through iron like mud and hit the target every time. Even if he didn't know how to use it, it was still great for warding off evil spirits.

"Song Ke, are you really leaving?" Tian Yi asked in a low voice from the side.

"Yeah, once Zhuang Qingyan gets better... then I'll leave."

Tian Yi's tone held a hint of reluctance as he murmured, "Oh." He was a reserved person, unable to voice his thoughts within the safe zone. Even Jiang Rui couldn't convince Song Ke, and coupled with Xu Liren's silent approval, it seemed that Song Ke's departure was an unchangeable outcome.

After Kongzi Qi and Tian Yi had moved the things, they closed the door and left, leaving only Song Ke in the spacious equipment room.

Faced with a room full of equipment, Song Ke's expression turned focused. She placed her hand on the nearest metal rack, and in an instant, the rack—nearly two meters high—vanished on the spot, transforming into three brand-new entrenching shovels. This process continued with the second and third items...

Like a meticulously organized assembly line, a large number of standardized weapons lined up in perfect order under Song Ke's guidance, revealing their imposing momentum.

At the same time, connected to over a hundred spiritual tools, Song Ke accelerated the drainage of her abilities, and the immense spiritual energy gradually became insufficient, reaching its limit. With a thought, she severed her connection with this portion of energy.

Almost instantly, Song Ke realized that she had lost her connection with these spiritual tools.

This was her first attempt at cutting off spiritual energy. She gazed at the entrenching shovels in her hands, pondered for a moment, and released her spiritual energy again. After a few seconds, the newly formed spiritual tools were destroyed and dissipated, but the spiritual energy within them didn't return to her body.

After severing the connection, did the spiritual energy become unidirectional and unable to be retrieved?

In this way, these spiritual tools no longer required her effort to sustain them. While their power might decrease, they would be more easily circulated. Song Ke had left a safeguard; she discreetly marked each handle of the spiritual tools. Based on their natural rate of consumption, the energy within this batch of spiritual tools could last for about 2 to 3 years before depleting and causing the tools to shatter and vanish.

One hundred weapons. Although this wasn't her current limit to bear, the enormous energy consumption over a short period had still put a considerable burden on her. Counting the shimmering spiritual tools on the floor, Song Ke slowly rested and drank water, recovering her exhausted mental energy.

Considering the users were a group of high school students with no combat training, she only transformed two types of weapons: machetes and entrenching shovels. These two types of cold weapons were easy to handle and versatile, suitable for both defense and offense, especially effective against zombies.

There were people guarding outside the equipment room. When Song Ke emerged, several key members of the safe zone walked over to her and entered the room to tally the quantity. Song Ke didn't move. One hundred weapons, no more, no less—she had handed them over. How to distribute them was an internal matter for them.

The male student responsible for tallying came out and nodded at Xu Liren, who stood behind, "Teacher Xu, it's all here."

With the deal completed, Song Ke couldn't be bothered with the insincere conversations and left without looking back.

On the other side, treatment for Zhuang Qingyan was underway, but the situation wasn't going smoothly. Zhou Anqi seemed a bit queasy at the sight of blood. Zhuang Qingyan's broken leg was terrifyingly misshapen. Just looking at it made her turn pale, and she often had to stop to cover her mouth and rush to the side to vomit.

Song Ke brought over a stool, sat in front of her, and stared for a while. Unexpectedly, she grabbed Zhou Anqi's wrist, and Zhou Anqi tried to pull away instinctively. But Song Ke's strength was too great—her grip was as unyielding as steel claws.

Just now, she had been intimidated by force. The tremble of fear from Song Ke hadn't yet dissipated within her. Even though she was reluctant, she dared not confront this ominous figure recklessly. All she could do was put on a pretense of strength and ask, "What, what do you want?!"

Song Ke's expression grew cold as she shifted her gaze to Zhuang Qingyan in the wheelchair. If you ignored his excessively pallid face, his features were still handsome, even at a time like this. However, from the knee down, his half-twisted, deformed leg ruined that perfection.

"Why is it... like this?"

Perhaps her gaze was too terrifying, Zhou Anqi's teeth were chattering, "I've already stopped the bleeding for him and tried to help the wound heal as much as possible. His leg... his leg... it can only be like this. To be honest, just keeping him alive is an achievement!"

From the surface, the wound on Zhuang Qingyan's right leg had indeed healed. However, when you touched it, it was soft and feeble. Inside, the broken bones were jagged and irregular, causing the lower leg to remain curled up.

"Did you do this, this on purpose?"

Zhou Anqi, overlooking her fear, stood up angrily, "Song Ke! Stop spouting nonsense! This has nothing to do with me. His leg is broken like crushed ice. I'm not a doctor. How would I know how to set it? Besides, my spiritual energy was automatically absorbed when it came into contact with him. I couldn't... control..." Her words raced ahead of her thoughts, and she realized she had said too much, regretting it instantly as she bit her lip.

Couldn't control her spiritual energy.

Song Ke keenly grasped the key point and formed a conclusion in her mind. It seemed that her ability was insufficient; she hadn't intentionally tampered with the treatment.

Staying here any longer was pointless. Song Ke arranged Zhuang Qingyan's pants, pushed his wheelchair, and prepared to leave.

Zhou Anqi timidly chased after her from behind, "I've already saved him. So when are you going to... leave?"

“Tomorrow, check on him again.”

“Why should I?!”

Song Ke looked at her expressionlessly.

In a space imperceptible to ordinary people, a domineering surge of spiritual energy swept forth like an overwhelming tide. Zhou Anqi’s hair stood on end, and she quickly yielded, “I, I understand!”

\*

Zhuang Qingyan felt like he was traversing through a cold mist, surrounded by countless indistinct faces. They stared at him gloomily, closing in slowly and urgently, reaching out with pairs of hands to grab his legs, clutching his throat, covering his mouth, dragging him into an endless swamp, sinking together into oblivion. Just before suffocation, he suddenly opened his eyes—

His vision gradually focused. Song Ke held a tissue in her hand, less than an inch away from his nose.

Zhuang Qingyan’s eyes turned icy, and his reflex made him want to wave her hand away. But he quickly realized this action contradicted the “image” he had crafted. He paused for a moment, then softened the corners of his eyes, crafting a feeble yet handsome smile.

Song Ke didn’t mind, and she hadn’t even noticed his subtle change of expression. Seeing him awake, she tossed the tissue at him, “Zhou Anqi has already, already treated you. How are you feeling now?”

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his head to look at his leg. The same oppressive feeling, like a bone abscess, returned. He soon sensed something was wrong. His entire right leg, from ankle to knee, felt as though it had been injected with a heavy dose of inferior anesthesia. Nerve cells were dead, meridians paralyzed, devoid of any sensation, and stiff like a crude prosthetic castoff.

Zhuang Qingyan’s eyelashes quivered as he braced himself on the wheelchair, attempting to stand up.

“Clang—” After losing a leg, maintaining balance became nearly impossible. He lost his center of gravity, tilting and crashing heavily to the ground.



Worthless.

He clenched his fist, silently spitting out the word in his heart.

Enduring a whole day with his injured leg, Zhuang Qingyan was well aware that his situation was far from optimistic, requiring prompt treatment. Although he had taken a risk by betting his life, he was fairly confident that Song Ke would save him. As expected, he won the bet.

However, he had overestimated “Zhou Anqi’s” ability. This newly awakened healing-type ability user likely didn’t even possess a D-level power. And what’s more, she turned out to be an utter medical imbecile, merely focused on sewing up the surface of the skin, giving no thought to the underlying structure of flesh and bone. Consequently, he had truly been reduced to a cripple!

Worthless.

He clenched the wheelchair handles tightly and repeated the word in his heart, not knowing if he was cursing Zhou Anqi or himself.

Song Ke didn’t help him up. Zhuang Qingyan lowered his head, and the veins on the back of his hands strained. She couldn’t clearly discern his expression at the moment.

“Zhou Anqi’s ability is for stopping bleeding and wound healing, but her control is very poor. She doesn’t know how to set bones.”

She pursed her lips and revealed her plans: “She’ll check on you again tomorrow, then we’ll leave.”

“What? Is this the condition for saving me?” Zhuang Qingyan supported himself to sit back in the wheelchair and responded coldly.

He was always clever, quickly inferring the implied meaning in Song Ke’s words.

“Yeah.” Song Ke briefly explained the events leading up to the exchange using spiritual tools. Her use of force against Zhou Anqi in front of Xu Liren could be seen as a last resort, completely burning bridges with the safe zone. Staying here any longer would likely pose hidden risks. Even if Zhou Anqi hadn’t made any demands, Song Ke had intended to leave anyway.

Furthermore, her original intention for coming here was solely to gather information on awakeners. After encountering Zhuang Qingyan, these issues were essentially resolved for her.

“Before we leave... kill them.”

Zhuang Qingyan listened and lightly uttered these words.

His face carried a smile that wasn't quite a smile, and that casual bloodthirst from when they first met, the one that had led him to kill two people without a second thought, resurfaced. “Kill them, and you won't have that much trouble. Go wherever you want, no one can order you around.”

## Chapter 18.2: Rainy Night in Hua City (10)

### Chapter 18.2 – Rainy Night in Hua City (10)

◎You won't leave me, will you?◎

Song Ke stared at him, not saying a word.

Their gazes clashed, neither of them looking away first. As seconds ticked by, Zhuang Qingyan gradually subdued his smile.

“Just kidding,” he leaned back against the wheelchair, returning to his lazy state. Those sharp edges of his presence seemed to have been but a fleeting illusion, concealed away. “I just didn't expect you to be so unwelcome.”

This person's mood swings were too rapid. Song Ke couldn't be sure whether he had truly harbored murderous intent in that instant. Standing still for several seconds and seeing no abnormality, Song Ke pulled out a new blanket from her bag and covered his legs.

“Your leg, I will, I will heal it.”

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his gaze and glanced at her, allowing her actions. “It's not that simple. Healing-type ability users are rare to begin with. Given my current condition, even having an A-level ability might not necessarily guarantee success.”

He wasn't intentionally making things difficult for Song Ke. To truly achieve a complete recovery, to be able to run and jump like a regular person, his dislocated bones and tendons would have to be shattered again, using spiritual energy to reposition them correctly. The precision of this process was comparable to a top-tier surgical procedure, something beyond the capabilities of an ordinary healing-type ability user.

"I will, heal it."

Song Ke stubbornly repeated herself. She rarely made promises, but once spoken, she was determined to fulfill them.

For a long while, neither of them spoke.

Around them, there were the echoes of noisy voices, the patter of raindrops, but in their corner, silence reigned.

Song Ke felt a sense of guilt, as well as a deeper sadness. She had taken this person in, earnestly vowed to take responsibility for him, yet she had messed up. Not only had she failed to heal Zhuang Qingyan's leg, but she had also burdened him with the need to follow her around again.

"I'm sorry."

She hugged her backpack tightly, curling up in disappointment.

After a while, Zhuang Qingyan spoke in a faint voice, "No need to apologize. It's not your fault."

Song Ke shook her head, her mood still low. "You're wrong. They all, they all dislike me."

At her words, Zhuang Qingyan's gaze shifted to the corner. Song Ke was crouched there, looking like a frost-bitten cabbage, her head covered by the continuous drizzle. She appeared wilted, bereft of her usual vitality.

"All of them? What did you do? Did you offend so many people in one go?" He shifted into a more comfortable position, a hint of interest in his eyes. "I remember D District implements... collective education, right? Did you blow up the school? Or burn down the dormitories? Based on your personality, you can't possibly have beaten up everyone, right?"

Song Ke's eyes widened. "!" How?! How did he guess it right again?

Feebly, she tried to defend herself, "No, not all of them, just... just a few dozen."

"Just—" Zhuang Qingyan drawled, emphasizing it slowly, "a few dozen."

"..."

"You're pretty good at fighting."

"Just, just alright?"

"..."

"...?"

In the midst of the prolonged silence, Zhuang Qingyan's light laughter broke through the awkward atmosphere. He turned his wheelchair and leisurely gazed at Song Ke. "So, why did you beat up those few dozen people?"

Song Ke clenched the strap of her backpack with her fingers. "Because... because..."

Her voice grew smaller and smaller, and she trailed off mid-sentence.

After waiting for a response for a while, Zhuang Qingyan's patience remained, his slender fingers tapping the wheelchair in succession. Lowering and then lifting his gaze, in the blink of an eye, his expression had shifted to a different one. "Let me guess, our Classmate Song here is so kind-hearted that it must be those people's fault, right?"

Song Ke abruptly raised her head, revealing two round, gleaming eyes from behind her backpack. She stared directly at him.

With a smile in his eyes and an air of certainty, Zhuang Qingyan said nothing. He seemed to completely trust her. The taut strings in Song Ke's heart loosened inexplicably. After carefully considering it, she realized there wasn't much she couldn't say. Slowly, she began to speak, "I used to go, go to school in Hua City."

This was the first time she had proactively shared that part of her past with someone. Perhaps enough time had passed, and the feelings associated with

that time had become distant. As she spoke, Song Ke unexpectedly felt a sense of calm.

...

Three years ago.

The Alliance introduced a new compulsory education law, merging the junior and senior high school systems into a five-year program and reallocating teaching resources across different regions. At that time, Song Zhiyuan was already critically ill, yet he clung to life and, with the help of Old Cheng's connections, secured a spot for Song Ke to enroll in school. This gave Song Ke, who had always been confined at home, the opportunity to attend school.

For Song Ke, who had been isolated from society since childhood, "going to school" was a completely novel experience. And so, with great excitement, she came to Hua City.

Hua City (D99 District) was a D-grade renowned city, and No.1 Middle School was the school with the highest enrollment in the newly established educational system within the district. Song Ke, the "country bumpkin" from F177 District, was like a drop of water in the ocean, attracting no one's attention.

She was an inconspicuous figure in her class, her test scores consistently falling in the bottom five. Because of her natural stutter, slow speech, and poor expression, she didn't have much interaction with her classmates. However, Song Ke was content with this life. She attended school in Hua City during the week and traveled to Yue Mountain (E166 District) for martial arts practice on the weekends. Unlike between F and D District, transportation between D and E Districts was relatively normal, and the costs weren't high.

And so, just like that, by the end of the first semester, Song Ke's peaceful life was disrupted.

At the end of June, during the scorching summer afternoon, after finishing her meal, Song Ke passed by the outdoor basketball court. The deafening cheers and shouts from the court attracted her attention, prompting her to turn her head.

Right at that moment, a nimble figure flashed by her. Running, turning, skillfully dribbling the ball, followed by a high jump—dunk! The young man

wore an oversized white basketball jersey, like a soaring white seagull, his single hand gripping the rim for several seconds before landing gracefully, exuding confidence.

“...Ah.” Song Ke opened her mouth and muttered to herself.

She couldn't fathom the point of this activity where a group of people fought over a ball. However, a sudden realization dawned on her as she observed the young man's footwork.

This fancy footwork must be what her master often referred to as “chickens die from too many moves.” It looked good but was riddled with flaws. Placed in an actual combat situation, she could swiftly find a hundred ways to counter it.

Unconsciously, she stopped in her tracks, her gaze fixed on the basketball court.

A basketball rolled to her feet, and the youth in white stood in backlighting beneath the hoop. He called out to her from a distance, “Hey! Classmate, can you throw the ball back?”

Song Ke cradled the basketball in both hands, looking at the young man and then at the hoop above his head. She thought he meant for her to do the same thing as he had just done, to throw the ball into the hoop. So, she responded with a slow, “Oh,” and from a distance of almost thirty meters, she lightly pushed her wrist forward.

The basketball traced a perfect parabola in the air and landed directly in the center of the net.

The boys on the court, who had been chatting away and adjusting their wristbands, were left dumbfounded. Some even sprayed their mouthful of mineral water in astonishment, “What the...?”

The youth in white also froze for a moment but quickly jogged over and tossed the other basketball to Song Ke. “Classmate, want to try another throw?”

Perplexed, Song Ke threw the ball again right in front of him, and the basketball once more swished through the net, drawing exclams of amazement.

A second successful throw, and it was evident she excelled at this.

With a piercing gaze, the youth spoke up, invitingly, “You have a good aim. We’re a player short. How about joining us?”

Song Ke shook her head rapidly. “No, I, I can’t.”

Seemingly amused by her baffled expression, the youth’s eyebrows relaxed, and a radiant smile bloomed from the corners of his eyes, revealing his pearly white teeth. “It’s alright, I can teach you. I’m Jiang Rui.”

Leading Song Ke back onto the court, Jiang Rui organized a game of 3v3. Although Song Ke’s shooting was precise, she was clueless about the other rules, making her play utterly awkward. Patiently, Jiang Rui explained the rules repeatedly, continuously fed her the ball as he backpedaled and ran, and the warm sunlight generously embraced him, even favoring him with its sweat.

When the game ended, Song Ke had transformed from a mere rookie into a long-range marksmanship wizard who could hit her target accurately from half the court away. Their opponents lay scattered on the ground, gasping for breath and begging for mercy. Jiang Rui stood at the heart of the crowd, shining radiantly. He spun the ball in one hand, his sword-like eyebrows and starry eyes exuding a triumphant and carefree smile.

Idle on the sidelines, Song Ke hadn’t even broken a sweat.

Not enjoyable, she evaluated inwardly.

She thought this would be the end of it. She didn’t even remember Jiang Rui’s name. However, the next day during the break, as the teacher walked out of the classroom, someone boldly tapped on her desk from outside the window.

Song Ke looked up, and Jiang Rui had both hands resting on the windowsill, his expressive eyebrows arched. “Little junior, want to play basketball together this weekend?”

Song Ke shook her head. “No, I, I have something to do.”

“Alright then. Let’s make plans for next time,” Jiang Rui didn’t dwell on it, waved casually at her, and before leaving, reached in and placed a bottle of chilled milk on her desk. “Here, have this.”

“You’re so short, you can’t even reach the rim.”

Song Ke wiped off her test paper where the moisture had smudged her name, frowning her brows in displeasure, not noticing that in the back of the classroom, all the girls who had been fervently discussing cosmetics had fallen silent.

...

Zhuang Qingyan, who had been quietly listening all along, seemed to sense something. He frowned and scoffed, “Tsk, troublesome.”

Song Ke halted in her speech, looking at him with a bewildered expression.

Zhuang Qingyan lifted his chin slightly, indicating for her to look to the other side. The sun had just broken through the dawn, people bustling about. Jiang Rui, wielding a trenching tool, was demonstrating its use. His tall figure was almost swallowed up by his enthusiastic fans. The lively scene made their corner appear even more desolate and ignored.

“You and him are not on the same path. The closer you get, the more troublesome it’ll be.”

Jiang Rui was like a luminous and scorching star, with all celestial bodies within his gravitational pull orbiting around him. Those lonely wandering stars, used to being adrift, would find themselves burnt badly if they accidentally fell into his orbit.

Thinking of the unfortunate incidents that occurred later, Song Ke nodded in agreement. “Yeah! Troublesome.”

.....

## **Chapter 18.3: Rainy Night in Hua City (10)**

### **Chapter 18.3 – Rainy Night in Hua City (10)**

**©You won’t leave me, will you?©**

Meeting Jiang Rui marked the beginning of disaster for Song Ke.



To the girls at No.1 Middle School, Jiang Rui was the unattainable North Star, the little prince of the rose stars, an existence that could only be hoped for but not obtained. As for Song Ke, who had the fortune of catching his gaze a few times, she became nothing more than a pile of filthy mud at the feet of the gods.

At the start of a new week, Song Ke clearly felt malice coming from all directions.

Dead snakes and mice were stuffed into her desk, her handed-in papers were frequently soaked in ink for no reason, and her backpack, left on her seat one moment, would inexplicably vanish the next, only to turn up in the washbasin of the restroom.

Although the Alliance's Anti-B\*llying Law had been in place for years, it was as good as nonexistent in the remote D-level city of Hua City. At the time, Song Ke had no idea what "b\*llying" meant, nor did she understand the magnitude of the harm caused when "evil" was amplified.

During that period, Song Zhiyuan eventually succumbed to illness, leaving Song Ke an orphan. She had no one to vent her grievances to and no one to help her unravel why she was being treated this way.

Before his passing, Song Zhiyuan had admonished her not to stand out in Hua City, not to act recklessly, and especially not to casually resort to violence against ordinary people. Thus, Song Ke only disposed of the desiccated animal carcasses in her drawer, retrieved her backpack, and silently returned to her messy seat. From the very beginning of this malicious prank, she had lost her desk mate.

However, the b\*llies interpreted this as a sign that Song Ke was enduring and acquiescing.

This meant that the victim wouldn't fight back.

As a result, those who were cruel became even more audacious, gradually crossing the line. One day, the most beautiful girl in Class-3, the proud Zhou Anqi, like a peacock, cornered her in the cafeteria, flipped her food from top to bottom, and poured it down Song Ke's neck.

At the time, there were many students having lunch, and even two supervising teachers witnessed the misdeed, yet no one stepped forward to stop it.

Some saw but remained silent, and others pretended not to notice.

The thick liquid flowed down her back, all the way to her heels, and Song Ke caught a whiff of the damp and fishy smell of the muddy mixture.

She wiped the liquid off her face and belatedly realized, “Ah... So it wasn’t soup.”

It wasn’t soup, and it wasn’t an accident either. It was another malicious prank that had been occurring to her day after day.

“Hey, stutterer, can’t even speak properly, but you’ve already learned how to seduce men?” Zhou Anqi arrogantly tossed her plate aside, pinching her nose in disgust. “I heard you’re from the F District. No wonder you smell so fishy; I can smell it from miles away.”

“Hey! Come over here and see if she stinks!”

“Stinks, it stinks terribly! Hahaha!”

“Ugh... I’m gonna puke.”

At a table behind her, Cao Yiyi, who had a delicate appearance, considerately handed over a tissue, unfortunately, it was for Zhou Anqi. “Anqi, be careful, don’t splash yourself.”

Each time, it was Zhou Anqi, the domineering instigator, who led the bullying against Song Ke. Standing behind her, forever untainted, was Cao Yiyi. Their temperaments and characters were vastly different, but the smiles at the corners of their mouths and the malice in their eyes were perfectly aligned no matter how you looked at it.

At the time, the homeroom teacher for Class-3 was Xu Liren.

Song Ke stood in the bustling office, stuttering as she recounted her ordeal. Xu Liren was busy grading papers, rapidly circling and marking with a red pen. When she finally managed to finish speaking, it took a while before he seemed to extricate himself from his busy state. He pushed up his glasses and said, “Our class is about to conduct evaluations. Teacher thinks that it’s better to avoid unnecessary trouble. It’s best to resolve these minor conflicts among classmates. I believe you can reconcile, right?”

“Moreover, have you ever considered why others are fine, but it’s only you who’s facing all of this?”

“Sometimes, we shouldn’t just blame others. We also need to reflect on ourselves.”

But Song Ke couldn’t do it. No matter who she faced, whether it was cold sneers or the constant barrage of “pranks,” she couldn’t reconcile. She only felt stifled, and going to school was no longer a happy affair for her. Now, people in her class were talking to her, but unfortunately, it was all insults and curses.

Jiang Rui still occasionally came to find Song Ke, bringing her snacks and inviting her to play. Because of her frequent absence, he complained a few words. He had no idea about Song Ke’s experiences in the class. He remained the same carefree, radiant campus idol.

At first, Song Ke didn’t understand the source of the hostility around her. But as Jiang Rui’s visits became more frequent, even she, as foolish as she was, could sense that this person was the cause of her troubles. So, she earnestly told him, “Don’t, don’t look for me anymore.”

Naively, she believed that if Jiang Rui stopped looking for her, everything would return to normal.

Jiang Rui didn’t take her words seriously. “I just like hanging out with you. What’s up with your hair? Why’s it stuck with chewing gum?”

“I’ll get it out for you.” The cool young man leaned down near her in the shade of a tree, clumsily pulling apart the clump of sticky hair.

Song Ke turned her head to avoid his touch, quickly stepped away, paying no mind to Jiang Rui’s displeased shouting behind her.

In the opposite teaching building, Cao Yiyi put down her phone, which contained the pictures she had just taken. She gazed at Jiang Rui’s departing figure, swiftly scrolled through her contacts, found Zhou Anqi’s name, and clicked send.

The explosion came swiftly.

On the day of the outburst, it was Song Ke's turn for class duty. The boys in the class deliberately lingered, making loud noises by dragging tables and chairs around. Before she realized what was happening, they had surrounded her in a "concave" shape against the wall. Her classmates used the water pipes from the restroom, usually used to clean, and splashed water all over her head. Some got carried away, swinging iron buckets in their hands, one of which struck Song Ke on the head with a resounding "clang."

The classroom fell silent for an instant, followed by nonchalant laughter as if nothing had happened.

The high-pressure water flow prevented Song Ke from opening her eyes and completely washed away her patience, making her increasingly aware.

Grandfather had said that she should get along well with her classmates at school. She had tried, but unfortunately, she hadn't succeeded. But her master had also taught her "an eye for an eye." If someone hit her, she had to hit back, and this, she could do.

—Song Ke kicked over the desk in front of her.

She didn't think she was being overly harsh. She was merely giving back what others had done to her. However, when she poured the filthy water onto Zhou Anqi and Cao Yiyi's heads, the group of boys seemed to be collectively possessed. They all twisted their expressions and charged towards her. Song Ke hooked the mop with her toe, and the dirty cloth slapped their faces, smearing them forcefully.

Her actions were measured; she didn't even break anyone's limbs. However, this group of fourteen or fifteen-year-olds lacked exercise, and after a few moments, they were defeated. What Song Ke couldn't understand, especially, was that she was just returning the favor, yet now these tormentors were writhing on the ground, crying and wailing in pain. Hadn't they ever thought that others might suffer just like they did?

The commotion caused by the brawl in Class-3 was too intense. Even people from other floors came running to watch. The front door, the back door, and the corridors were filled with onlookers, hecklers, gossips, and rumors flew like wings, spreading everywhere. Jiang Rui was the first to receive the news. He rushed over in a state of anxiety, and upon entering the classroom, he was shocked by the chaotic scene of people sprawled all over the floor.

Zhou Anqi was lying amidst a pile of trash, her school uniform skirt covered in scraps and dirt. She was calling his name while sobbing uncontrollably.

Cao Yiyi's braids were undone, and she timidly hid behind Jiang Rui, gently gripping the hem of his school uniform. "Senior, please stop Song Ke. She's hurt many students. Anqi's father has already informed the principal. If this goes on... she'll be expelled."

Jiang Rui's full attention was focused on another person, and he didn't notice Cao Yiyi's small movements. He bypassed her and approached Song Ke with a stern face. "...Stop."

Jiang Rui grabbed the mop, which still dripped dirty water, and his expression turned icy. "Do you know the consequences of starting a fight?"

Stubbornly, Song Ke glared at him, neither nodding nor shaking her head.

Jiang Rui felt a headache coming on. He lowered his voice. "...You've hurt people. Apologize first."

With teary eyes, Song Ke stubbornly resisted. "No."

Suddenly, cries of surprise came from outside the classroom.

"Mr. Xu is here!"

"The principal and the dean of discipline are here too!"

Jiang Rui grew increasingly anxious. With a strong pull, he tried to take the mop from Song Ke's hand. "Listen to me. No matter the reason, fighting with classmates is wrong. Wait for the teachers to come, apologize first, and then..."

With reddened eyes, Song Ke pushed forward.

Caught off guard, Jiang Rui, along with the mop, was pushed a few meters away. The back of his head hit the wall hard, and the iron hook hanging on the mop hit his eyebrow, cutting open a gash that immediately started bleeding profusely.

Time seemed to stand still, and everything around them fell silent, so quiet that it felt like one could hear the sound of blood drops falling. Cao Yiyi's face

paled. Ignoring Zhou Anqi, who had fallen to the ground, she rushed to Jiang Rui's side in a flurry, using tissues to cover his wound.

Amidst the chaos, the stern-looking dean of discipline rushed in first, his breath heavy as he shouted, "Stop it all!"

Following him was the displeased Xu Liren. The class teacher of Class-3 stared at the whole scene, realizing that any hope of this year's awards was gone. His gaze landed on the only one standing, Song Ke, his expression cold as a knife.

Jiang Rui's head was spinning, his ears ringing with screams and exclamations. Through his bloodied, blurred vision, he saw Song Ke's lips move slightly, whispering something.

Then, she climbed over a windowsill and ran away.

As the white light and ringing gradually faded, Jiang Rui belatedly realized what Song Ke had said: "You're just like them."

...

Zhuang Qingyan fell silent for a while after listening to the story. He knew that Song Ke's willingness to share these things wasn't because she harbored resentment or sought comfort. The girl was strong physically and rather straightforward in her thinking. It was highly likely that, seeing him with a crippled leg, she decided to tell a more distressing story to ease his mind a bit.

"...So you just ran away like that?" he asked.

"Yeah."

From that day on, Song Ke had returned to F177 District and had since refused to go outside. Oddly enough, neither Zhou Anqi nor the school authorities bothered her afterward.

"Getting your frustration out by giving them a beating might help," Zhuang Qingyan sighed lightly. "The governing level in D District is uneven. Without the backing of parents, even if you're in the right, you might not be able to explain yourself. Even if you caused a scene in the city center, I'm afraid it wouldn't change much."

Song Ke shook her head. Throughout the ordeal, she had never thought about seeking fairness or justice. Xu Liren said she was wrong for not letting things go, Jiang Rui said she was wrong for ass\*ulting her classmates, everyone thought she was wrong.

Zhuang Qingyan scoffed lightly, “Wrong? Would this matter just disappear if you didn’t act?”

If Song Ke hadn’t hit Zhou Anqi, the b\*llying from Class-3 would have continued. She couldn’t endure such days any longer.

At this point, Zhuang Qingyan’s eyes slightly narrowed, veiling the destructive urge he had to destroy everything. “You hit them because those people deserved it. Even if you were wrong, what can they do?”

“Some people spend their whole lives doing ‘right’ things, only to die in the end, and no one will put up a monument praising them for it.”

He reached out and ruffled Song Ke’s hair. “You’re still a kid.”

“—Remember this, in this world, right and wrong aren’t that important. Living happily is what matters.”

It was twisted logic, but Song Ke couldn’t argue against it.

This man’s mindset was completely different from what her grandfather had taught her. Her grandfather had said she needed to assimilate into society, try to be like everyone else. However, Zhuang Qingyan seemed to not care about anything. Whether others lived or died had nothing to do with him, as long as he was content and happy.

“If it were you, what would you do?” Song Ke asked.

“What would I do? Haven’t you already seen?” Zhuang Qingyan rubbed his chin and revealed that characteristic smile of an antagonist.

Song Ke: “...”

She thought about the fates of Wu Yarou and Yang Bo, and her heart felt heavy.

Unknowingly, time passed quickly. The sky outside gradually brightened, and a new day began. The atmosphere in the safe zone had also changed. High

school students who received new weapons grew bolder, and a particularly large exploration team was gearing up.

Song Ke stood up. "I'll go out to find supplies. You rest well."

They were leaving today. Song Ke intended to go out early to scout the route. When Liu Zixuan opened the door again at night, she would take Zhuang Qingyan with her.

Before leaving, she poked Zhuang Qingyan's leg, and this time, he didn't dodge. "Remember, go check again."

Zhuang Qingyan didn't promise. Instead, he stared at Song Ke, his eyes filled with sorrow.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm wondering, you won't just leave me here, will you?"

"..."

Song Ke rolled her eyes internally, thinking only someone like you could come up with this: "I'll come back and pick you up!"

Zhuang Qingyan saw her off, much like a worried wife seeing off her husband. He leaned against his wheelchair, waving with a bright smile. "Remember to come back early. I'll be waiting for you."

Song Ke: "..."

There was something oddly strange about it.

In a grand procession, Song Ke followed behind, as usual, keeping her distance from the others, appearing isolated and detached.

She carried the massive spiritual weapon umbrella with her again.

After everyone had left, Zhuang Qingyan returned to his corner and took out Yang Bo's wristwatch from his pocket. He lowered his gaze and examined it for a moment, then with a slight movement of his finger, seemingly imperceptible, a new set of clean clothes appeared out of thin air.



After changing clothes, he checked the wristwatch and the necklace again. Yang Bo's watch contained only clothes and food—nothing out of the ordinary. However, in Wu Yarou's necklace, Zhuang Qingyan discovered something unexpected.

A silver miniature intelligent terminal, far surpassing D District's technological level.

Zhuang Qingyan nonchalantly operated it a few times and destroyed its positioning device.

## Chapter 19.1: Rainy Night in Hua City (11)

### Chapter 19.1 – Rainy Night in Hua City (11)

#### ©Insect Tide©

The watch Yang Bo left behind was actually a storage space crafted by a space-type ability user. The area wasn't large, around twenty square meters. Perhaps the level of the awakener who opened up the space wasn't high enough to impose strict restrictions on entry. Anyone who released a trace of mental power could unlock it. This gave Zhuang Qingyan an unearned advantage.

Before the apocalypse arrived, awakeners were monopolized by the military. These personal storage spaces were only circulated within the military. Obtaining one from the black market would cost a significant price. Nowadays, even as the order broke down and more ordinary people awakened to supernatural abilities, these items remained rare and precious.

Zhuang Qingyan was slightly taller than Yang Bo, but their body sizes weren't significantly different. He picked out a new set of black casual clothing from the space and took out a large bucket of purified water. He thoroughly cleaned himself from head to toe. After changing into clean clothes, he looked refreshed and neat, appearing as youthful as a college student who had just stepped out into the world.

Song Ke was not around, and the overly familiar chubby guy Tian Yi had also gone out with the main group. The remaining people were all strangers to Zhuang Qingyan. However, he didn't feel the slightest discomfort or unease.

He strolled around the safe zone as if on a holiday, manipulating the wheelchair to survey the entire area at his leisure.

In his view, this place was not suitable for long-term stay. Although there was still some stored water in the washroom, at the current consumption rate, it would run out within three days. Yet, this wasn't the biggest issue. The safe zone had a fatal flaw—there were too many “wastes” here.

“Wastes” referred to those who lacked the courage to venture outside, unwilling to use their brains to find solutions. They spent their days whimpering in corners while consuming a significant amount of resources. Of course, this category also included him, the “disabled person,” Zhuang Qingyan self-deprecatingly thought.

He didn't believe that “Teacher Xu” was so kind-hearted. At least, he hadn't noticed any dazzling halo above the person's head like a saint. Xu Liren must have his own motives for keeping these wastes.

The metal wheelchair smoothly glided over the ground and soon entered the inner circle of the safe zone.

Upon hearing the commotion, Zhou Anqi and Cao Yiyi both looked up and then visibly froze.

Zhou Anqi was someone who focused on appearances. With the poor early morning lighting and being agitated by Song Ke, she hadn't really looked at Zhuang Qingyan before. But now, Zhuang Qingyan appeared clean and tidy. Facing his smiling eyes head-on, she realized that this young man was unusually good-looking.

Regrettably, Zhou Anqi pouted. He was brought by Song Ke.

Cao Yiyi waved gently with warmth and smiled at him, “Hey, how are you?”

“Hello,” Zhuang Qingyan replied with a calm expression.

However, Cao Yiyi seemed genuinely concerned about him. After a moment, she sighed softly, “Song Ke is usually careless. You should take care of yourself. By the way, have you known each other for a long time?”

She had taken care of Zhou Anqi yesterday and hadn't gone out with Jiang Rui and the others. She only heard that Song Ke was the one who discovered

him and brought him back when he was seriously injured. As for the exact relationship between the two, no one was clear about it, so she skillfully phrased her question.

Zhuang Qingyan smiled quietly and replied in line with her intentions, “No, we just met yesterday. We’re not that familiar.”

“I see,” Cao Yiyi mused, adjusting her hair thoughtfully. “There’s something I don’t know if I should say...”

“Please go ahead.”

“You probably don’t know this. Yesterday, Song Ke angered Teacher Xu quite a bit. That’s why she was kicked out. If she hadn’t caused so much trouble and dragged you into it, maybe you could have stayed here to recover.”

“Oh...” Cao Yiyi realized she had slipped up and bit her lip in frustration. “I wasn’t intentionally speaking ill of Song Ke. I just think you have the right to know the truth. She might have her reasons. You shouldn’t argue with her!”

“Ah, well, I should have kept quiet. I just felt it wasn’t quite right...”

Zhuang Qingyan gazed at the person in front of him silently, appreciating her clumsy acting.

Even though his golden thigh, Classmate Song, was a bit simple-minded, her intuition was accurate. This Cao Yiyi, with her overflowing tea aroma, indeed wasn’t a good person.

He lightly tapped his fingers on the wheelchair, his deep and magnetic voice carrying hidden meaning, “So, that’s the situation. I knew we were doing fine, so why suddenly leave? Thanks for telling me.”

Cao Yiyi shook her head, “You don’t have to thank me. I only told you because I consider you a friend.”

Zhuang Qingyan supported his chin and smiled, “Since that’s the case, how about you think of a way to help me stay?”

Cao Yiyi stammered, “Huh?”

“Song Ke is too fierce. I can’t handle her. You seem nice to me, gentle and kind-hearted. Help me figure out a way to stay and recover. I’ll repay you.”

Zhuang Qingyan blinked at her, displaying a deeply affectionate look full of unspoken emotions.

Cao Yiyi nearly choked on her own saliva. What could she possibly do? Why was this guy so shameless? He was acting like he deserved to be taken care of without a hint of embarrassment!

Cao Yiyi awkwardly responded, "You... you're not serious, are you?"

Zhuang Qingyan looked surprised, "I'm not joking. You care about me so much and consider my feelings. I thought maybe you..."

His face was full of accusations as his beautiful peach blossom eyes drooped sadly, and he covered his mouth in a heartbroken manner, "You didn't need to tell me. But now that I know the truth, can you really watch me go to my death? How can you claim to care about me while not taking responsibility? I find you quite frightening."

Cao Yiyi hesitated, at a loss for words.

What do you call lifting a stone only to drop it on your own foot? What do you call stealing a chicken but losing the rice?

She just wanted to sow discord between this guy and Song Ke, making sure Song Ke wouldn't feel at ease even after leaving. Yet, what kind of weirdo was this person? How did he manage to turn everything around and make her seem like a terrible criminal?

No, blame it on Song Ke if you must. Why is this being pinned on me?

Cao Yiyi rarely found herself at a loss for words. She quickly tugged on the sleeve of the person next to her, attempting to change the topic, "A-An, Anqi, aren't you still going to examine him? Maybe you should do it now."

While the two were engaged in a tea-making showdown, Zhou Anqi had remained silent on the side. She supported her head, looking quite uncomfortable. Hearing Cao Yiyi call her, she could only weakly say, "Fine, let's hurry up. I'm not feeling great."

After speaking, she stood up impatiently and reached out to touch Zhuang Qingyan's leg.

Zhuang Qingyan abruptly maneuvered the wheelchair with a sharp turn, evading Zhou Anqi's touch. His left hand's finger joints twitched nervously, and a flash of icy killing intent seemed to pass through the air. "No need."

His evasive movement was quite sudden, and his disgusted expression was evident. Cao Yiyi, however, didn't notice anything unusual because Zhou Anqi stumbled forward a few steps, and then turned pale and fainted.

"Anqi? Anqi!"

Awakeners with healing abilities are very precious, and someone rushed up from the side immediately, calling for Xu Liren loudly.

Zhuang Qingyan was pushed out of the inner circle by the commotion, leaning lazily against the back of the wheelchair. He looked towards Zhou Anqi, who was surrounded by a crowd of people, and raised an eyebrow in surprise.

Perhaps others didn't understand what was happening, but he was well aware. When an awakener faced external spiritual force, their internal energy field could become disrupted. If their own strength wasn't formidable enough to resist this impact, they could lose consciousness and fall into a coma. In severe cases, their brain's neurons could be damaged, possibly leading to mental impairment.

He knew that Song Ke had previously used spiritual force to frighten Zhou Anqi, but at that time, she had been perfectly fine. It had taken a considerable amount of time for her to lose consciousness afterward. This didn't seem like the result of a recent impact; rather, it seemed like an eruption caused by prolonged accumulation of suppressed spiritual energy.

This was interesting, Zhuang Qingyan smirked.

In this safe zone, aside from Song Ke, who else would have been "prolongedly" and "oppressively" using spiritual energy on her?

After various back-and-forths, Zhou Anqi finally stirred weakly, but her spirit seemed somewhat listless. She couldn't muster the energy to speak. The others didn't discern any particular cause for the incident, so they could only attribute it to the lingering effects of her awakened supernatural ability.

**\*\*TN**

Tea Aroma – Green Tea B\*tch, someone with a good and positive image but is actually a mean b\*llly, always trying to sow discord, kinda like a white lotus

## Chapter 19.2: Rainy Night in Hua City (11)

### Chapter 19.2 – Rainy Night in Hua City (11)

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At exactly 7:00 in the evening, Liu Zixuan stood up on time and said, “It’s time, I need to get ready to open the door.”

The team that went out for exploration this time was particularly large. Everyone hoped for unexpected gains. They gathered at the door, ready to welcome the returning people. Zhuang Qingyan’s wheelchair stopped in the slightly shaded area further back. He had nothing with him, only waiting for the door to open so he could leave with Song Ke.

Liu Zixuan placed his hands against the wall and began to release his special abilities. Soon, the outline of a door gradually became clear and fixed. He wiped the sweat from his forehead and exhaled a breath. His expression became more relaxed, and he smiled as he pulled the door handle. The wind and rain outside poured in an instant, hitting people’s faces so intensely that they couldn’t open their eyes. Others hadn’t yet seen the specific situation – an unexpected event had occurred!

A burst of crimson flames shot up into the sky, sweeping sideways, forcing the people inside the door to retreat continuously. In the next second, they smelled the strange scent of burned protein, followed by the eerie sound of crackling and rubbing.

Jiang Rui’s loud shout was caught in the midst of the raging storm, “The door is open! Hurry inside!”

“Everyone, step back!!”

A thunderous roar came from the sky, illuminating a large open space outside the door. Liu Zixuan, closest to the door, looked dazed. In his retinas, there was an endless and densely packed tidal wave, along with countless pairs of gray-white unsettling pupils.

One by one, disheveled figures rolled in. Zhang Qi, Zhang Hao, Jiang Rui... finally, at the forefront, was Song Ke. The artifact umbrella in her hand was fully open, with menacing spikes raised on it. The sound of impact echoed, and the umbrella surface kept bearing weight, pressing down, and pressing down again... The noise wasn't the rain; it was the sound of thousands upon thousands of living things hitting it.

Some fish that slipped from the net crawled in through the gaps in the door, swiftly making their way inside. Jiang Rui cracked his whip, flipping over a section, but a few still managed to rush into the crowd. "Ah—!!" Fearful screams echoed, but fortunately, Zhang Hao and the others successfully entered. They had weapons in their hands, and with concerted effort, they managed to kill those things.

Song Ke wedged the umbrella handle against the wall, rolled on the spot, and slid inside the door. "Bang—" she forcefully closed the heavy door behind her.

Zhang Qi's arms bulged with veins as he held onto the door frame, but things outside were increasing in number. The sounds of impact grew louder and louder. Others realized the situation and rushed to help prop up the door panel and the wall. They held on for more than ten seconds like this, but the supernatural gate gradually disappeared as it exceeded its time limit. The intruders were blocked from entering, at least for the time being.

"What... what are these things!!!"

In the terrifyingly quiet atmosphere, someone pointed to the floor and shouted in desperation.

...

Ten minutes ago, Jiang Rui led the team back to the side wall of the enclosed stadium.

This time, there were more people in the group, and they had walked a bit further. They went eastward, approaching the outskirts of the city's outer ring. The supplies outside were becoming scarcer, and the survival conditions were becoming increasingly harsh. If they continued to roam around in the same place, they wouldn't have any gains. Fortunately, from yesterday to today, they hadn't encountered hordes of zombies. This heavy rain seemed to make them disappear. The safety of going outside had improved significantly.

The team members were wearing raincoats, resting against the corner of the wall, either sitting or standing, chatting and waiting for Liu Zixuan to open the door. Several boys had a particularly positive attitude. They were shooting vlogs at the corner, saying that they would post them on social platforms after they were safe. They were sure to gain a lot of views.

The heavy artifact umbrella covered most of Song Ke's figure. She had a pen in her mouth and was at a loss while looking at the spread-out city map. Her geography had always been poor, and now, apart from the cardinal directions and a few circular traffic networks, she couldn't make sense of anything.

Jiang Rui approached her gently and said in a low voice, "Before the network went down, I saved the locations of nearby shelters. Should I send it to you?"

"No need," Song Ke refused. She didn't plan to take Zhuang Qingyan to crowded places, and besides, she didn't have a phone. "Thank you."

Jiang Rui fell silent. His hair and face were wet, like a wet dog – pitiable and stubborn.

Song Ke glanced at him and tilted the umbrella to cover his head.

A few minutes later, she paused and suddenly looked up, "Do you hear, hear any sounds?"

"What sounds?" Jiang Rui was puzzled.

Song Ke frowned. She couldn't quite describe it. It was like the buzzing of wings in motion, or the sound of many feet walking on the ground. The frequency was fast, and it was extremely dense, causing her eardrums to pulse and swell.

Song Ke looked in the direction of the distant mountains meeting the horizon. Apart from a black dividing line, there was nothing else.

She shifted her gaze away, circling left and right a few times, but she found nothing.

The next second, Song Ke abruptly turned back.

She hadn't seen wrong; that dividing line was clearly moving!



The rustling sound was getting closer to her ears, soon becoming extremely close. Song Ke held her breath and focused her senses. The people around her were influenced by her serious expression and stopped talking, their expressions becoming vigilant.

The grass in front swayed gently, and suddenly a large insect leaped out. The insect had black wings that vibrated rapidly and harmoniously behind it, as if it were flapping, and it flew towards them.

Zhang Qi was closest to the insect, and his reaction was swift. His biceps bulged as he swung his machete, cutting the insect in half from its abdomen, cleanly dividing it. Black pus flowed out from the insect's belly, creating a foul-smelling puddle in the water.

Before the others could catch their breath, the second, third, and countless more insects flew out.

It wasn't a moving horizon at all; it was a dense horde of insects!

Several guys who were shooting videos stood slightly forward. Their steps hesitated for a moment and were instantly engulfed by the swarm of insects. Within moments, layers upon layers of insects crawled over their calves, arms, and faces. They emitted heart-wrenching screams, frantically trying to swat the insects away, but their movements became slower and slower. In the end, what fell were broken, blood-soaked skeletons.

"Get closer, everyone!" Jiang Rui's ring emitted a red light, and a massive whip of fire shot up into the sky, pushing back a part of the insect vanguard. The remaining people quickly raised their weapons, standing in formation to defend themselves.

After devouring the flesh and blood, countless pairs of compound eyes among the insects quivered slightly, then they turned their gaze towards Jiang Rui and the others, locking onto their next prey.

...

The commotion outside the door gradually subsided, but inside the safe zone, it was a deathly silence.

"What on earth... what the hell are these things?"

The shattered remains of insects on the ground were about the size of a volleyball, oval-shaped, entirely brown-black in color. They had two long antennae on their heads and cloudy gray compound eyes. They bore a striking resemblance to the mutated zombies. Just looking at them was enough to send shivers down one's spine.

"These are cockroaches," Zhuang Qingyan suddenly spoke from his wheelchair.

The crowd showed a puzzled expression.

"Flattened body, dark brown, medium-sized, long filamentous antennae, well-developed compound eyes, membranous wings in front and back. Based on the biological data from the ancient civilization, these are cockroaches, commonly known as roaches."

Most people still looked bewildered, but a boy with good academic performance remembered something, "But didn't cockroaches go extinct a long time ago?"

He was someone who enjoyed studying prehistoric creatures. Recalling the books he had read, he furrowed his brow and said, "According to the Alliance records, cockroaches went extinct in the 4th year of the New Era. And besides, how could... there be such huge cockroaches!?"

Normal cockroaches were no more than a few centimeters long. The ones before them were nearly the size of a volleyball!

Zhuang Qingyan wrapped a stick with a tissue and flipped over the bodies on the ground. "Because these are mutated cockroaches, you could also think of them as zombie cockroaches. Like zombies, they feast on carrion, and they possess the characteristics of cockroaches – rapid reproduction, fast movement, and appearing in groups."

—Rapid reproduction, appearing in groups.

It was as if the sky had fallen, and many people, upon hearing this, looked utterly hopeless.

Could there be any worse news? Dealing with zombie humans was already difficult enough, and now there were zombie cockroaches as well. Could they

still make it out alive? Was there any hope of waiting for the next Alliance rescue?

“Don’t lose heart, everyone!” Lin Xia’s hands and feet were trembling, but she mustered the courage to console, “These... zombie cockroaches aren’t that terrifying. Didn’t we kill some of them?”

Someone immediately chimed in, “Yeah, they’re dead, right?”

“We have weapons, so we can just kill them!”

“Exactly, one by one, ten by ten, a hundred by a hundred. Let Brother Jiang burn them all!”

The teenagers became excited, each one shouting louder than the other: “We have weapons, and we still have Brother Jiang! What’s there to fear?”

However, Jiang Rui’s expression wasn’t optimistic. Fire-based abilities were the most suitable for dealing with these creatures, but unfortunately, it was pouring rain in Hua City, greatly diminishing the power of his abilities. His true strength was less than forty percent of its usual, and facing so many zombie cockroaches alone, he had no chance of winning.

Amidst the clamor, Xu Liren made a gesture to quiet everyone down.

He pushed up his glasses, his face unusually serious, “That’s right, we can kill one or two, maybe even ten or a hundred. But what about a thousand, or even ten thousand?”

“Based on our numbers, which one of you has the confidence to kill ten thousand zombie cockroaches outside?”

Song Ke frowned, recalling the densely packed black swarm of insects. It even seemed challenging for her.

No one could answer this question, and the hope that had just ignited was quickly extinguished.

Ten thousand zombie cockroaches – that number was like an insurmountable mountain, crushing everyone’s will.

A boy who had narrowly escaped death at the Starship Port suddenly broke down. He angrily raised the knife in his hand and viciously stabbed the

abdomen of the zombie cockroach over and over again, muttering, “I don’t believe it. It’s all fake, all fake! There are no zombies, no apocalypse!!”

Zhang Hao managed to restrain him in time, but it was too late. Someone couldn’t bear the oppressive atmosphere any longer and burst into sobbing tears.

Fear and panic were contagious. Soon, the safe zone was immersed in sorrow and confusion.

“Perhaps... there are more than ten thousand,” it was at this moment that Zhuang Qingyan spoke up.

“When you spot a cockroach under the sunlight, it means that there are so many in the dark places that they can’t fit anymore.”

Everyone: “...”

Wuwuwu!!

## **Chapter 20.1: Rainy Night in Hua City (12)**

### **Chapter 20.1 – Rainy Night in Hua City (12)**

**©Kongzi Qi shivered uncontrollably©**

Song Ke sat on the ground, cleaning her spear.

Her spiritual weapon umbrella, previously used to ward off the insect tide, had been left outside the door. Moreover, the iron umbrella itself was too bulky to have an advantage against these small creatures. So, she transformed it into a pitch-black spear about one to two meters long. She meticulously wiped the spearhead.

“Sorry, I should have taken you away earlier in the morning.”

Zhuang Qingyan shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. With this many in number, we would sooner or later encounter them if we went out.”

His gaze drifted into the distance, and he continued, “This safe zone won’t hold for much longer. Be cautious tonight.”

“What you just...”

“Hmm? What’s wrong?”

Song Ke’s spear-cleaning motion paused briefly as she swallowed the rest of her sentence.

Looking up, she saw Zhuang Qingyan still smiling, seemingly oblivious to the recent incident that had sparked anger.

She had come to realize that this person had a remarkable ability to infuriate others without even flinching. A casual sentence from him could make over a hundred people in the safe zone want to pull out their weapons and attack him.

If she hadn’t decisively intervened and pushed him away, someone might have lost their patience and attacked him.

Troublesome, really troublesome.

Song Ke sighed inwardly and didn’t pursue the topic. Instead, she silently raised four fingers.

Zhuang Qingyan looked puzzled. “What does that mean?”

Song Ke explained, “Yesterday, I asked one less question, so today, I can ask up to four.”

Zhuang Qingyan was taken aback for a moment and then realized the situation, finding it somewhat amusing.

His proposal of three questions per day as an exchange condition was a temporary measure. Before understanding Song Ke’s character, he had left himself some leeway. However, after the events of last night, the two had shared some candid moments. He thought that, based on the understanding that adults had, this unreasonable condition would naturally be nullified.

It was just a matter of answering a few extra questions, and he wouldn’t lose much.

He didn’t expect the child to be so serious about it, actually counting on her fingers. Zhuang Qingyan didn’t need to imagine; he could already picture it.

He was about to admit that the restriction was lifted starting from today, but then he changed his mind. Continuing to tease her was quite enjoyable.

Suppressing his amusement, Zhuang Qingyan said, "Right, it's four questions. You got it right."

Song Ke felt satisfied.

Little did she know that this guy was quite mischievous. She even thought that she didn't suffer this time and became smarter!

And she certainly didn't know that some people with no moral boundaries would even deceive a child.

Drawing a bit closer, Song Ke asked seriously, "Are the cockroach mutations related to the apocalypse?"

"They are," Zhuang Qingyan nodded. "What you want to ask is probably the truth about the apocalypse, as well as how the supernatural abilities and zombies actually originated."

Song Ke nodded eagerly; these were her biggest questions.

Zhuang Qingyan playfully teased her with a hint of distress, "Well, that's kind of two questions already..."

"?"

Song Ke looked baffled.

Song Ke gritted her teeth.

Song Ke raised her spear.

Zhuang Qingyan coughed lightly and decided to back off, "Uh, calm down a bit. Put the spear down, and I'll talk, I'll talk."

"Contrary to what many people believe, this apocalypse wasn't caused by a virus.

"It was caused by radiation."

Zhuang Qingyan's expression finally turned serious. "Have you ever thought about why the mutation of zombies is so rapid? Why in different places, some people awaken superpowers simultaneously... Because in this apocalypse, there's no fundamental pathogenic strain or so-called transmission chain. Every one of us is exposed to the air, and the real culprit is radiation.

"Due to frequent solar wind outbursts, the current radiation dose has exceeded five times the normal value. The Earth's strong magnetic field has become chaotic and cannot withstand the sudden increase in radiation impact. High-speed particles and cosmic rays freely penetrate the surface and the air. The continuous radiation energy integrates into the cells of the human body, leading to genetic mutations. In this scenario, some people successfully 'evolve,' upgrading to superhumans with explosively enhanced abilities. Others can't endure the excessive radiation, leading to rapid cell decay and the transformation into zombies. However, more people maintain a delicate and fragile balance, becoming 'ordinary individuals' in between.

"People can mutate into zombies, and naturally, animals can too. Moreover, animals that turn into zombies often possess stronger aggressiveness," Zhuang Qingyan's gaze inexplicably turned colder, "The Alliance has done plenty of behind-the-scenes animal experiments. Whether events like today's large-scale insect tide are due to fate or human manipulation... it's hard to say."

Zombies lack consciousness, and logically, zombie cockroaches should too. Song Ke recalled the bizarre bird she had seen in the martial arts hall. She vaguely felt there was a difference. That bird... didn't seem to have strong attacking tendencies?

Perhaps she got lucky? The big bird was already full? It didn't care about her, this little sprout?

Song Ke shook her head to dismiss these baseless speculations and continued, "If someone is bitten by a zombie, will they turn into one?"

"Based on the outcome, the answer to that question is 'yes.'"

Song Ke was puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Zhuang Qingyan explained, "I just mentioned that the cause of the apocalypse is radiation. So, when someone is bitten by a zombie, it's like undergoing radiation bombardment once again. However, this time, it's radiation that's

already 'contaminated.' Most people can't withstand this impact. Their internal magnetic fields go haywire, and they transform into zombies."

"Most people?" Song Ke keenly grasped the focus. Did that mean there was a chance of survival?

"Since it's a magnetic field imbalance, there's naturally an extremely slim probability of awakening passively, evolving into superhumans."

Song Ke pinched her palm, feeling its dampness. Unconsciously, her hand was sweating.

She pursed her lips. "What if the one bitten is a superhuman?"

Zhuang Qingyan squinted. "What, were you bitten?"

The hair on the back of Song Ke's neck stood up like lightning. "I-I wasn't bitten, no!"

Zhuang Qingyan couldn't be easily fooled. Song Ke felt incredibly guilty. To prove herself, she hastily extended her arm for him to inspect. The bandages on her arm were already removed, leaving a bare and unscarred surface.

Not to mention her arm, the wounds on her back, abdomen, and lower waist had all disappeared. It had only been a short week since the battle at the martial arts hall, yet her body's healing ability was so fast that she couldn't believe it herself.

Zhuang Qingyan lowered his gaze, his inquiring eyes seeming to penetrate her.

Song Ke had just been caught in the rain. She had taken off her coat and was only wearing a thin T-shirt and knee-length shorts.

Zhuang Qingyan's gaze swept from her delicate neck and wrists, all the way down to her ankles. The girl had shoulder-length damp hair, gleaming eyes that looked like a startled small animal, nervously shifting around. There was gauze on her cheeks. With her slender arms and legs, merely judging from her appearance, she could be categorized as "completely harmless."



“If superhumans mutate into zombies, the consequences are unimaginable. Therefore, if discovered, even if there’s a one in a million chance of self-recovery, they have only one fate.”

“What... is it?”

“Execution.”

A cold, cynical smile played on Zhuang Qingyan’s lips. “The Alliance can accept sacrifices, but it absolutely won’t allow the existence of superhuman zombies.”

Song Ke pressed her lips tightly, a chill running down her spine.

\*

Tonight, no one could fall asleep. In an effort to conserve power, only a few flashlights were lit within the vast safe zone. Accompanied by the ferocious winds and torrential rain outside, survivors lay wide-eyed, huddled together, trembling.

Xu Liren convened an emergency meeting, and attendees presented two different opinions, leading to a swift dispute.

“Let’s charge out!”

“Have you gone mad? There are not only zombies outside, but also tens of thousands... maybe even more roaches! Are you trying to get killed?”

“If we don’t charge out, staying here is a death sentence!”

The radical faction led by Jiang Rui and Zhang Hao believed that they should take advantage of the situation before it further deteriorated and break out.

Not far from the safe zone was the parking lot of the No.1 Middle School. Zhang Hao had observed that there were several buses there. They could safely drive out. However, the risk of this plan was extremely high because even the nearest route required passing through two dormitory buildings. In other words, they would have to traverse through thousands of zombies, running about 100 meters.

On the other hand, some people held conservative opinions, like Liu Zixuan, who believed that staying within the safe zone was the wise choice.

The outer wall of this enclosed stadium was made of the Alliance's latest materials, rendering it an impregnable fortress. By guarding the two large gates on the east and west sides, those inside would be safe. They could wait for the rain to stop and the insect tide to recede before figuring out their next move. But when would the rain stop? Would the insect tide really recede? Liu Zixuan had no certainty.

## Chapter 20.2: Rainy Night in Hua City (12)

### Chapter 20.2 – Rainy Night in Hua City (12)

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The two sides held their ground, arguing loudly. However, the two individuals in the corner were unaffected. Song Ke gestured to both sides of Zhuang Qingyan's wheelchair, gradually concentrating her spiritual energy. In the palm of her hand, a dim blue light coalesced into the shape of a crossbow, which she mounted on his wheelchair. In case of an emergency, even if she couldn't attend to Zhuang Qingyan, he could defend himself.

Then she picked up a piece of shachima and, while nibbling on it, observed Zhuang Qingyan.

Zhuang Qingyan was adapting to the wheelchair's control panel: forward, turn, brake, elevate, lower... those complex instructions posed no difficulty for him. Soon, he was handling them with ease.

Once familiarized, Zhuang Qingyan raised the spiritual crossbow. It was a lightweight repeating crossbow with intricate and complex internal structure. The accompanying bolts were around eight inches long, and it could fire ten in one go, making it virtually invincible in terms of short-range crowd control.

Zhuang Qingyan lightly brushed his fingertip over the arrowhead, immediately causing a cut, blood flowing out.

"So, this is what you call a 'crossbow'? How did you make it? The Alliance doesn't possess weaponry of this kind."

“An artifact from the old civilization?” He quickly contradicted himself, “No, this type of repeating crossbow had already been lost during the old civilization, right?”

Song Ke’s eyes dimmed. The shachima in her hand didn’t taste as good anymore. “My master... my master drew it for me.”

Zhuang Qingyan had heard Song Ke mention that her master and her fellow disciples had turned into zombies. Knowing her current mood wasn’t good, he didn’t probe further. He played with the crossbow bolts a bit and smiled, saying, “Teacher Xiao Song, how about teaching this frail researcher how to use this? What do you think?”

“Oh.”

Song Ke gulped down the rest of the shachima, wiped her mouth, and approached to teach him.

...

On the other side, the argument over whether to “charge out” or “stay put” escalated into a heated dispute.

“Everyone, stop arguing! Listen to Teacher Xu and let Teacher Xu decide!”

Zhang Qi, whose eardrums were tortured by both sides, shouted in exasperation.

With a forceful shout, the voices of the people attending the meeting fell silent.

Zhang Qi was momentarily surprised; when did his words become so effective?

He quickly realized it wasn’t his words that were effective but rather that everyone’s faces had turned pale and they anxiously stared at the floor.

“Squeak, squeak...”

“Creak, creak...”

—There was something moving beneath the floor!

Liu Zixuan's statement was only half correct. While the outer wall of the stadium was indeed unbreakable, unfortunately, the ground underneath wasn't.

Sounds of stone being gnawed cracked continuously. In just a few seconds, the floor suddenly broke open into a two-meter-wide hole, as if a hornet's nest had been punctured. A large number of zombie roaches flew out from below, crawled out...

Impossible! They could actually burrow through the ground!

The actions of the three awakeners within the area were swift. Jiang Rui cracked a fiery whip, repelling the first wave that surged out. Zhang Qi's muscles surged as he lifted a plank of wood, pressing it heavily onto the gap. Meanwhile, Song Ke, like an agile leopard, leaped from the ground, spear in hand, precisely striking down each crawling zombie roach that emerged from the hole.

"Turn on the lights quickly! It's too dark!" Zhang Qi yelled.

The flashlight beams flickered inconsistently, illuminating the majority of the safe zone with effort. However, dark, ghostly figures still darted around in the shadows. Some responded by raising their weapons and striking with all their might, while others faltered, unable to wield their weapons effectively. Their fear grew as swarms of zombie roaches converged on them, gnawing and devouring from toes, shins, mouths, to skulls... within a matter of seconds, leaving only bloodied skeletons behind.

The light overhead suddenly dimmed, causing everyone to look up in panic. The skylight was now covered in densely packed zombie roaches, countless pairs of gray-white compound eyes coldly fixated on their prey, obscuring the last faint moonlight.

Seeing the dire situation, Xu Liren made a decision: "We're going with plan one to escape. Everyone get ready, I'll open the east gate!"

Song Ke rolled back to Zhuang Qingyan's side, securing her backpack to her body. "We... we need to escape."

Zhuang Qingyan swiftly adjusted the wheelchair's direction. "Yes, I'm ready."

Zhang Qi cleared the obstacles behind the door, and Xu Liren rushed over to input the password. The long-sealed automated control door slowly opened again, and everyone scrambled to be the first to rush out.

The people squeezed in the back couldn't break through, so they shouted to Liu Zixuan, "Liu Zixuan! Open the door! Open another door!"

Liu Zixuan attempted to gather his spiritual energy, but the faint light sphere dissipated before forming. He shook his head at the person speaking, saying, "No, this damn ability is useless at critical moments, I can't release it!"

However, the person who had just spoken stared at him in terror and pointed, "Bugs! Bugs!!"

The skylight couldn't withstand the weight of the zombie roaches, shattering with a crash. Glass fragments and countless black insects cascaded down like a waterfall, covering Liu Zixuan from head to toe and swallowing a few stragglers who hadn't managed to escape.

"Ahhhhhh!!!"

Continuous, eerie screams echoed from behind.

The boy who had been running at the front turned around excitedly, his face displaying relief from having survived. He called back to his companions, "Hahaha, we made it out, you stinky bugs..."

His words were cut off abruptly as a lean figure in school uniform lunged out from the dark rainy night, biting into his neck.

It was a zombie.

The students halted, afraid to move forward.

Beneath the shadowy dormitory, hundreds of zombies turned their heads in unison, their hollow pupils fixated on the group's direction.

Flames ignited, shaping into a whip of fire that lashed out diagonally. It severed the heads of five or six zombies. Jiang Rui led the way, running forward determinedly, "Stick close to me, get ready to charge through!"

Song Ke's long spear flew out piercing through zombie after zombie and roach after roach, like a long string of candied hawthorns. Jiang Rui's flames followed closely, burning a path through the encirclement.

Zhuang Qingyan followed behind Song Ke, deftly evading. It was unclear how he managed it, but the zombies and roaches around him were noticeably fewer. A nearly vacuumed area formed around him as the center.

Two powerful awakeners cleared the path. The students with good speed and physical endurance had successfully crossed the first dormitory building and the parking lot was faintly visible.

Tian Yi followed at the rear of the group, wiping away tears as he ran. He dared not cry aloud. He had almost failed to make it out of the stadium.

"Kongzi Qi, w-what should we... can we make it out?"

He was lagging behind and relied on Kongzi Qi, who grabbed his collar, to give him a physical boost. "It's fine. We're following Teacher Xu."

"With Teacher Xu here, there won't be a problem. He'll lead us out!"

Xu Liren was also not running fast, staying three or four meters ahead of the two. A few girls and a slender boy were beside him.

This small group of people was among the worst in terms of physical agility. Even if they pushed their limits, they still couldn't move very fast, gradually falling behind the main group ahead.

From the side of the dormitory, a window on the first floor suddenly opened, and several zombies leaped out. Caught off guard, they collided with Kongzi Qi and Tian Yi, sending them tumbling. A few boys at the front emitted cries of agony, pinned down by the zombies who began to bite.

Xu Liren was also knocked down, rolling into the midst of the zombies. Just as a zombie with a gaping maw was about to pounce on him, its foul saliva even dripping onto his glasses, Xu Liren's pupils contracted—

The two girls beside him cried out, "Teacher Xu!"

Their voices abruptly ceased.

As if invisible hands were choking their necks, their expressions twisted and their bodies convulsed violently. Gradually, their movements slowed, and their bodies eerily toppled backwards. Seizing the opportunity, Xu Liren yanked them, pushing the two into the mouths of the zombies. Using the recoil, he struggled to get up, without even looking back as he continued to run forward, desperately trying to catch up with the group ahead.

In the middle of his sprint, Xu Liren felt a sensation and swiftly turned his head to glance back.

The two girls had been savaged by the zombies, their appearances unrecognizable. Not far behind them, Kongzi Qi reflexively pushed down Tian Yi's head, making him lie face-down on the ground, using his own body to shield him.

Kongzi Qi lifted his head, meeting Xu Liren's gaze. The eyes behind the lenses held no warmth.

Kongzi Qi shivered uncontrollably.

**\*\*TN**

Sachima – is a sweet snack in Chinese cuisine made of fluffy strands of fried batter bound together with a stiff sugar syrup, and of an appearance somewhat similar to American Rice Krispies Treats.