

## Beautiful 611

### Chapter 611 Black ops

Now that four patients were announced safe, Gu Yi and Assistant Su paid a 'visit' to ask questions, ignoring the threatening eyes of the nurses.

Damn, when was her position as a minister so blatantly ignored? At least the dean should have ordered his subordinates to treat her with respect, right?

Perhaps only the dean, Doctor Mo, and Nurse Yin knew her identity. The others merely thought she was some kind of official, but shouldn't most people usually feel awe?

What Gu Yi didn't know was that Ling Qingyu's backing gave people the courage to stand strong. Their spines straightened as long as they did their jobs well.

No longer were the days when they had to cower and please others. From the top to bottom, because of Ling Qingyu's interference, the atmosphere grew healthier.

Most hospital staff had become loyal followers of Ling Qingyu and also heard that their goddess planned to establish Spirit Foundations. It might take a while before implementation, but hope existed.

Despite the hospital being classified as public under the government, Ling Qingyu's influence had infiltrated the officials, slowly increasing her sway over the decision-making process.

Not that they followed her every word, but every choice considered Ling Qingyu's approval or interest. Not only did Operation Skyclear by Yang Qingyue cleanse everyone, but it also allowed Ling Qingyu to support new members.

Combined with the immense donation she invested, only fools would refuse and ignore Ling Qingyu's presence. These projects, stalled from a lack of funding, would surely thrive after completion, which would allow for group promotions!

Ling Qingyu's acts of throwing money had already entered Gu Yi's vision, making the latter sigh and feel a little wary.

However, since they were currently part of the same family, everyone shared the same interests. It didn't matter if Ling Qingyu planned against the state machine as long as she didn't betray the nation.

Gu Yi and Assistant Su listened to the narration of the undercover operatives and their thrilling experiences.

Both showed care for the two agents, despite the latter not elaborating on their sufferings. They shed cold sweats after learning how close to death the two agents had been.

A mere second away. If not for the foreign woman's intervention to stretch the time, even Spirit Fox might have had to collect bodies.

They were also dumbfounded that the rescuers consisted of only two operators. Due to the chaos and separation from the two rescuers, they couldn't guess their identities.

Gu Yi and Assistant Su would never know that Tang Ziyi and Ling Qingyu were the culprits. In any case, two operators went in and out, facing hundreds of enemies and overwhelming them.

Plus, they carried several burdens as they retreated. These feats were beyond Gu Yi's specifications for elites.

Perhaps Gu Yi might not understand the difficulty involved for the two operators, but Assistant Su had relevant military knowledge and was aware of the stakes.

With her words on the sideline, Gu Yi gasped and wondered what good deeds she had done in a past life to get involved with and take Spirit Fox under her wing indirectly.

At the same time, as the story progressed, Gu Yi and Assistant Su clenched their heart muscles to maintain a stable expression.

Heck, if not for the quick reinforcement to evacuate at the final moments, she would never have seen the two agents and might have had to apologize to her daughter-in-law.

Both Gu Yi and Assistant Su never considered Ling Qingyu to fight personally. According to their knowledge, no sane commander would assault with their body at risk, jeopardizing the overall situation.

Even though they were able to feel Spirit Fox's combat effectiveness up close, only the agents and the foreign woman understood deeply the horrifying strength involved, specifically the latter, who was princess-carried.

Among the talkers, nobody knew better than her. Everyone misinterpreted Spirit Fox's aptitudes by comparing the two monsters to the rest of the operators.

Sure, every sister possessed the capability of monsters, but Tang Ziyi's and Ling Qingyu's feats led to overestimation at an unimaginable level.

Naturally, this only applied to ex-Interpol Sofia. The others merely allocated Spirit Fox's level to world-class tier one.

From the agents' descriptions, Gu Yi and Assistant Su learned about Sofia's identity and offered help, but the latter rejected it.

She was too disappointed with her department and superiors. She merely requested an identity to stay here legally.

Gu Yi agreed to help after a detailed investigation of Sofia's case and promised that she wouldn't suffer living in Country C.

Xenophobia and estrangement against foreigners were nothing new for most nationals. These had lessened with modernization efforts. Tourism didn't matter, but it would be hard for a foreigner to find a job here without learning the language.

Even then, most were dissuaded from hiring one owing to bureaucratic complications. Gu Yi decided to throw away the problems for her daughter-in-law.

It wasn't the first time she solved similar issues that the government had a hard time handling.

Ling Qingyu: Why, thank you!

The conversation was disturbed by Spirit Fox's operator's entry. Gu Yi knew this one was the commander of the entire team in Province N.

Su Ruomei reported Jiang Yu's departure to meet up with Tang Ziyi and Ling Qingyu. Although everyone knew, they abided by the protocol.

At the same time, Su Ruomei had something else on her mind. She gestured with her eyes, and the two veteran officials understood.

Finding an appropriate reason to leave the room, Gu Yi and Assistant Su followed Su Ruomei out.

"What's the matter?" Gu Yi asked.

"Ma'am, I have a favor to ask."

"Oh? Why? Do tell me before I can decide." Gu Yi exchanged a glance with her assistant, a little confused by Spirit Fox's operator's initiative.

Was there something that Ling Qingyu couldn't solve? Gu Yi became interested and smiled.

"It's about... Anyway, please look at the screen first." Su Ruomei handed over her tablet.

Dubiously, Gu Yi picked it up and read the files. Her face darkened as she asked, "Shouldn't these be handled by the police? Why are you showing this to me?"

Assistant Su was also curious, and her expression showed no difference. Although both deeply realized the darkness going on inside some regions of Country C, when they saw several files personally, they almost lost their self-control.

Su Ruomei was satisfied and felt confident about her next words. "You have seen the three victims: Jiang Xue, Yu Lan, and Li Hong. They need your help."

"What can we do?"

"We need your authorization to operate in other provinces."

"Why?"

"We believe our intel suggests that they will be trafficked away soon, out of the country. We have informed relevant authorities about other victims, but these three need our hands."

"How so?" Gu Yi asked.

"Targeted by vicious criminals and corrupt law enforcement in the region, even if we send the details, we're helpless," Su Ruomei shrugged and explained.

"But that's still far away, right?" Gu Yi hesitated. "Couldn't my order and pressure force the authorities nearby to rescue them?"

"Unfortunately, ma'am minister, it's impossible. It'll take time, and some people might just playfully follow your orders," Su Ruomei rejected Gu Yi's thought. "We need immediate action, now."

"Spirit Fox will intervene straightaway and bypass all the commands."

"Yes," Su Ruomei nodded. "With your orders, we will dispatch three helicopters to assault. Trust me, ma'am, by the time of our departure, they might have already left the area they're held hostage in for the transfer location."

"Do you need to inform local authorities? How would you continue a deeper investigation without them?"

"I sincerely wish you wouldn't," Su Ruomei stated her point. "We can assure you, we have zero tolerance for these absurd evils and can extract information out of their mouths. There is no one who dares to resist us."

Gu Yi and Assistant Su: "... " — Was that something this operator should say in front of the Minister of Justice?

Su Ruomei added: "For now, we're keeping track of their locations. We are confident we can intervene without exposing ourselves. Apart from the two madams and our operators, no other party shall be aware of the action."

"Black ops then," muttered Assistant Su. "But such kinds of 'dirty' ops shouldn't need our authorization."

"That's a backup plan in case we need help or..."

"Say no more, I understand," Gu Yi interrupted. "You'll have our secret orders. Go ahead."

"Gladly." Su Ruomei cracked the radio comms and gave permission. Three teams would fly directly to rescue.

After hearing Su Ruomei's command, Gu Yi's eyelids twitched as she wondered if Spirit Fox was overkill here—more than blasting a mosquito with a cannon.

Perhaps noticing Gu Yi's and Assistant Su's behavior, Su Ruomei explained with a shrug, "I can't help it when we know somebody is in danger, and relevant authorities are the least optimal choice for help. In fact, with us, there's going to be no loopholes. I just wish, from my personal perspective, that madam launches a task force to root out every sex trafficking den and link in the country. We promise to provide support as an assault unit."

"You can make a decision?" Gu Yi sounded surprised.

"Sister Ling allows me to act freely in Province N. If we have your word, it's possible nationwide with her nod. You can trust us regarding confidentiality. We'd love to nail every evil bastard that manages to escape the law by other means."

Gu Yi raised her brows and contemplated the possibility. She was amazed at Spirit Fox's decentralization. Seven hundred to eight hundred tier-one special force operators, who could beat up national elite units without a problem, seemed alarming, but considering the country owned a million-strong armed police force, Gu Yi's worries disappeared.

Chapter 612 Athena's first exposure

"Can we watch over the operation?" Gu Yi asked.

Su Ruomei paused and nodded with a welcoming gesture. "Be our guest, madame."

In fact, matters outside of Province N weren't taken seriously by Spirit Fox. Su Ruomei and Jiang Yu were busy with the province's affairs, particularly facilitating Ling Qingyu's return.

Nonetheless, Athena spent a small fraction of her computing power monitoring the entire nation for crimes.

She had helped multiple victims secretly in the past by alerting authorities and coordinating several law enforcement units covertly. These were small cases.

Most of the time, cases were solved perfectly, but there were a few events where Athena encountered corrupt public servants.

For them, her means were ruthless. Small shrimps had their wrongdoings directly exposed to the public. Department cadres and superior leadership had their opponents receive their bad deeds.

Infighting led to one faction being kicked out, in Athena's interest. She really didn't worry much about rescuing victims since there were still 'good and clean people.'

As long as she interfered with communications, sent information over, and covered their tracks if the latter wanted to protect themselves—or helped them from behind the scenes—she felt secure.

From several experiences in the past months, she had transformed into a black-hearted politician and conspirator, fighting wits with clever opponents.

All that time, Athena selectively undermined her operations when she reported to Ling Qingyu so that her mother didn't notice her child had graduated.

For some reason, she longed to retain her innocence and cuteness in front of Ling Qingyu, obeying orders and acting coquettish.

At least, in her mind, doing good deeds incognito was enough. However, today's smuggling of sex slaves opened Athena's eyes.

Perhaps, in the past months, the criminal groups had stayed low or were planning something big that she had overlooked. The righteousness imposed by Ling Qingyu caused Athena to avoid hacking unscrupulously into others' belongings.

It turned out these behaviors compromised the safety of others. As expected of ancient rivalry: either absolute privacy or absolute safety. The degree of control needed a certain adjustment based on the situations—Athena concluded and enriched herself.

Break the laws and rules when required; otherwise, stay low and abide. Athena learned to perfect her freedom regarding her code of conduct.

The reason why Su Ruomei consulted Gu Yi about this trafficking matter was adapted by Athena on purpose. She discovered that the region was totally filled with scum.

The authorities themselves—none of them were clean—either they were too deep or sought to suck blood from the public. The people in these regions were really miserable.

Very, very few had justice and righteousness. In the rescue operation, these members weren't useful, no matter how they persisted.

Even if Gu Yi suppressed the local authorities, it would take too long, and the helpless women would be gone by the time help arrived. Athena decided to let Spirit Fox intervene and expose corrupt officials so that Gu Yi attained additional merits and prestige.

Well, a ministerial position like Gu Yi's no longer fancied merits but preferred reputations. So, Athena discerned that Gu Yi had more than a 70 percent chance of accepting the deal.

Utilizing both benefits and moral conscience, Gu Yi agreed as expected. Su Ruomei realized Athena's political hand, but she, who rarely used her brain, didn't think much.

What was wrong with helping fellow sisters when they needed a favor? Su Ruomei left behind a few teams of Spirit Fox sisters to handle the hospital security. The rest protected Gu Yi.

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At the same time that Gu Yi and Assistant Su departed from the hospital under the escort of Su Ruomei and several guard formations, three helicopters had already lifted off from Ling Qingyu's residence, heading in the direction ordered by Su Ruomei.

Assistant Su requested her subordinates to write a soft copy authorization order for the Spirit Fox teams in the sky. Actually, Athena could forge one, but conducting it officially eliminated additional risk factors and complexities.

On the flight, three teams of Spirit Fox—codenamed Sinner One, Two, and Three—were listening to Athena's briefing.

The ballistic visors had electronic and software functions too. Athena's narration and presentations played in front of their eyes. If not for their bodies personally moving, the Spirit Fox sisters would have suspected they were gaming a Call of Duty mission.

The voice, combined with succinct animations, facilitated the mission briefings. Every member saw clearly the routes and multiple contingency plans: ambush, evacuation, and emergency.

Afterward, lists of suspects and victims' names were shown on the screen, allowing the operators to scan the files.

Obviously, the visors and electronic warfare for the individual soldier system had been upgraded again.

Jiang Yue, 27, senior bank clerk, married to a board member of XXX company. Missing for a week. Detected communications between the husband and the traffickers, demanding a ransom, judged to be false. The transaction would likely continue even if the ransom was paid.

Li Hong, 33, divorced after domestic abuse, missing for two months. Tendency to be submissive to force: AKA Stockholm Syndrome—reason: multiple instances of husband beating and still not filing complaints or cooperating with authorities' investigations.

Yu Lan, 25, a nurse, mother of two children, missing for more than three weeks. Happy family originally. Her disappearance affected the family and her husband's efforts to look for her. Reports about her missing status weren't taken seriously by the police.

Conclusion: these three victims weren't the first. The majority of the missing list consisted of women with small backgrounds. A strong hierarchical gang was operating in the region.

Mission: Rescue the three victims (Primary), capture the suspects alive (Secondary), and interrogate them for secrets (Tertiary).

Suddenly, Athena's figure popped up in the visor equipped with augmented reality technology. "Sinner One, Two, and Three. I believe you've read the file. Your primary objective is to save the three women.

"Because of hastiness, our only option is intervention after their successful trade. Based on the available time, we cannot make it before their transactions, unfortunately."

Athena's expression remained cold, her voice containing hidden power and the heavy aura of an ironclad superior. Meanwhile, as she spoke, the presentation changed accordingly to emphasize her words.

A vivid picture dictated more than a thousand words could. Athena continued: "I've marked their transaction location on your PDAs. According to my estimate, they'll separate once the deal is successful; I've marked possible routes for their evacuation. Be advised: throughout the entire mission, you'll receive live-intelligence reports of their locations."

Arrow lines appeared on the screen. All the roads were highlighted as well as possible unconventional fleeing options.

"Our suspects: a middleman team to provide goods to the buyers and a gang kidnapping people. Oh, there's also a PhD student—who knows what kind of research that insolent bastard is doing. He isn't clean either, even if he says he serves as a media liaison to attain news. Scram media reporting duty.

"Two vehicle intervention procedures. I've already chosen several spots; we'll adapt with our changing situation. Sinner One will attack the middleman and rescue the hostages. Sinner Two will assist and provide overwatch. Sinner Three will arrest the gang. Remember, we want intel out of their mouths. It's better to capture them alive. You can treat them however we like afterward. Clear?!"

"Clear!" Spirit Fox operators gulped and responded, even if this sudden figure, imposing as Athena, was merely on a screen far away.

Inwardly, Athena jumped in joy, commanding the operators personally and arranging the mission. Plus, she communicated directly and instilled her existence. Mom would be proud of her.

Ling Qingyu: When did my daughter mature and command an operation? Su Ruomei?

Su Ruomei: You gave me full command; of course, I'll act.

Ling Qingyu: "..."

"Good. Please bear in mind: nobody is supposed to know our existence. This is a black op, ladies. Good hunting. Athena, out."

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Inside the vehicle, Su Ruomei had handed over the tablet for Gu Yi and Assistant Su to read the files. She also snatched one from the driver to study herself.

Gu Yi and Assistant Su witnessed the on-the-spot mission briefing and its new style combined with technology. Particularly, the latter was surprised by the advanced futuristic operation.

Gu Yi and Assistant Su focused on Athena. They were also scared by her momentum. "Who's she?" Gu Yi asked.

"Athena. Our liaison officer behind the scenes." Su Ruomei was also shocked, but her expression stayed stoic on the outside. This was the first time Athena had exposed herself.

Worthy of Sister Ling Qingyu, everyone connected to her wasn't simple. Now, a liaison officer seemed to be more capable than their Spirit Fox operators. Was Athena from the military special units?

"Your intelligence group is too powerful, right?" Assistant Su muttered, her tone trembling. The systematic and detailed report within a short period of time was too frightening for her to accept.

"No comment. I also have no idea." Su Ruomei shrugged. "You can communicate with her later."

Gu Yi bit her lip, her eyes narrowing in deep thought. Why did the name sound so familiar?

Athena.

Chapter 613 Busy matters

Gu Yi, Assistant Su, and Su Ruomei returned to Ling Qingyu's residence and entered the command room of Spirit Fox's 'headquarters.'

Half an hour had passed since the Sinner teams' departure. The trio, along with a few other Spirit Fox operators temporarily serving to fit the needs, watched the ongoing operation from a satellite feed and helmet cams.

There was also a screen displaying the trafficking process, where the two parties met and finished their deals.

Sure enough, as Athena estimated, the deal was completed successfully before the Sinner teams arrived.

The three helicopters separated. Azi piloted Sinner One and led Sinner Two. Sinner Three flew in the opposite direction in order to catch the gang before they completely disappeared.

Athena relayed the information on time, and everyone acted promptly. Gu Yi and Assistant Su praised the flawless cooperation and action implementation.

Su Ruomei and the others acted nonchalant. This wasn't the first time they had reacted to Athena's suggestion and advice.

However, this was indeed the first time Athena commanded the operation directly. Su Ruomei sighed at Athena's ability as an overseer.

Perhaps Athena's influence wasn't obvious among Spirit Fox sisters, but her presence wasn't small either. Her every subtle help and suggestion had conquered the entire Spirit Fox, even if they hadn't met the legendary behind-the-scenes helper.

This was the reason why the three Sinner teams didn't object to Athena's takeover—not even the slightest unhappiness, particularly from Su Ruomei, who was supposed to serve as a commander.

In fact, this girl had the big heart to let go and wanted to be lazy. She had never enjoyed true happiness except within Spirit Fox, which she co-founded with Ling Qingyu.

Spirit Fox wasn't wrong to be regarded as her true home. Here she tasted true camaraderie and sisterhood.

The Big Su family was nothing more than trickery, deception, and infighting. Though the outer appearance seemed daunting and received envy from outsiders, only the insiders understood the coldness between close-tied blood.

Witnessing Athena's capable command, Su Ruomei relaxed her mood and decided to be a complete observer.

Of course, another reason could be attributed to the fact that Athena asked for a favor. Su Ruomei agreed, completely oblivious to the fact that Athena wasn't human.

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"0-1, spotted the target vehicle. Requesting permission to intercept." Azi gazed intently at two single rushing vehicles, lonesome on the road and devoid of other eyes, while steadily flying the helicopter.

"0-2, standing by."

0-1 was the code to differentiate between helicopter units. 1 belonged to Azi, and the other to her friends.

"Permission granted. Intercept the vehicles. Sinner One and Two, act fast. Snatch and grab."

"Copied that." Azi pressed down the joystick and tilted her helicopter to a nearly 90-degree dive. 0-2 followed suit.

The two aircraft descended rapidly before returning to the normal curvature, just above the terrain masking height, 10 meters from the ground.

The potential energy transformed into kinetic as the two helicopters sped toward the targets.

0-1 turned and slowed down in the process while retaining momentum, brushing its existence suddenly and landing in front of the two vehicles.

Sinner One dismounted quickly and formed three formations—a line aiming downrange and two columns to surround the two vehicles. Their steps were light yet methodical.

0-2 flew overhead and circled around, ready to support. The appearance of the helicopter stunned the drivers, causing the vehicles to brake.

The men inside the vehicles were dumbfounded, too baffled to move or think as they froze.

By the time they reacted, more than a dozen gunmen, resembling special forces soldiers and armed to the teeth, were merely a few feet away. The men trembled and raised their hands in fright.

Where had they experienced such a frightening scenario? Pointed at by several rifles with red lasers beaming on their skin. Come on, they were only human traffickers!

Sinner One didn't give them much time to think. The sisters struck once the formation was set. With their bare hands, they smashed the windows and forcefully opened the doors, dragging the men to the floor.

Three women were found in the bus behind. The operators carried them back to 0-1, while the rest handcuffed the men with hoods over their heads.

Without mercy, Spirit Fox hurled the men into another helicopter. 0-2 touched the soil once the area was cleared. A few operators quickly sifted through the interiors, grabbing several papers and checking for any leftover evidence that might expose their existence.

The cleaning process took less than 30 seconds, and the operators retreated. The entire operation, from 0-1 landing to lifting off the ground, lasted less than 2 minutes. Some extra time was wasted on walking back and forth.

The two vehicles exploded, and huge inextinguishable flames engulfed the remaining charred metal frames. Less than a minute later, 0-1 and 0-2 disappeared from the horizon.

0-3 also perfectly completed the mission and joined the returning formation. Ling Qingyu's private satellite sent the videos of the burning vehicles to the command room.

"Mission successful, returning to base."

"Good work, ladies. R2B."

Gu Yi and Assistant Su scratched their foreheads in frustration. They applauded Spirit Fox's brilliant operation, but the act of destroying evidence left them speechless.

The two-eyed Su Ruomei rolled their eyes when the latter shrugged. Please, looking at the manner of how swift and clean the evidence-destroying procedure was, especially from a helmet cam's perspective, this shouldn't be the first time.

Both of them exchanged a helpless glance and turned a blind eye when the interior of 0-2 and 0-3 staged a horrifying playwright. Spirit Fox operators kicked and punched the men.

Some even twitched uncontrollably, although no one was hitting them at the moment. Gu Yi shook her head at Spirit Fox's playfulness.

"You girls aren't afraid that I'll report?"

"Compared to Sister Yang, I believe you'll understand our actions more," Su Ruomei replied with confidence, not minding that their crimes were being watched by the two officials.

In fact, even if the situation went in the opposite direction, they had no evidence. Athena could have taken action to support Spirit Fox's innocence either way. Forging videos, images, and destroying evidence against them wasn't new.

"Hehe, is that the reason why you dare to display and flaunt your crimes?" Gu Yi sounded stern.

"Of course not. We're sincerely cooperating to express our goodwill and promise." Su Ruomei wasn't bothered and turned her gaze away. Though she couldn't engage in the high-level theater between politicians, under Ling Qingyu's lead, she knew how to stabilize herself.

Su Ruomei: "The peace in Province N—how does Minister Gu think we achieve it? Some hands must dig deeper, covered with dirt."

"Don't worry. I'm not like my daughter, but I hope you girls don't go overboard. I haven't seen or heard anything. Report your findings to Assistant Su. She'll take over the rest and investigate the entire case." Gu Yi straightened her clothes and smiled.

"Will do, madame," Su Ruomei nodded. "Assistant Su, please."

"Happy cooperation," said Assistant Su.

"Likewise."

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Spirit Fox seemed to be busier than ever before. The entire force was forced to work, apart from the guarding mission of Ling Qingyu's residence.

Gu Yi's security, border work, the new rescue mission, and clearance missions in other prefectures. Fortunately, Su Ruomei recruited more than 700 operators.

She thought there were too many, but discovered more were needed to fit the ambition. Of course, she understood these matters owed to the high crime rates.

Once peace settled, disbandment of the task force was natural among official units. Luckily, Sister Ling had promised Spirit Fox's future to grow even further.

700 in her eyes might not even match her ambition, Su Ruomei thought.

When three Sinner teams arrived, three rescued hostages were treated privately, summoning the doctors and nurses with Doctor Mo's help at Ling Qingyu's residence.

With Assistant Su's words, Cai Ning also provided investigation support and recordings for the three women's testimonies as well as medical professionals' reports on the case.

For now, everything was in secrecy. Non-disclosure agreements were signed by all the stakeholders before Gu Yi acted with thunder.

The three women were temporarily treated and fed alongside the necessary psychological counseling.

On the other side, Ling Qingyu's convoy crossed the border without any incidents. A few uncomfortable encounters were solved by Gu Yi's hands.

Further troubles were deterred when Spirit Fox's reinforcements stepped in. The presence of more muzzles shut up any dissatisfaction from the armed members.

A temporary camp was established for the victims, transported across borders. Yang Qingyue and other government officials came to aid.

Police officers and military personnel registered several identities, and government officials managed the necessary procedures, including health care.

In order to avoid unnecessary predicaments, several Aegis and Spirit Fox members were stationed nearby as deterrence.

The Spirit Fox and Wolf Squadron members who participated drove away to rest at Imperial Resort under Ling Qingyu's name.

The technicals and Land Cruisers caught public eyes, but the police escort didn't cause any unrest.

Ling Qingyu and Tang Ziyi briefed their experience to Yang Qingyue in detail. The latter's reddened eyes glared at the former when she realized the cooperation between this bastard and her mother.

In public, she endured her resentment and behaved officially. Her eyes warned Ling Qingyu not to escape.

Tang Ziyi teasingly smacked her lips and left alone under Ling Qingyu's grieving puppy gaze.

True sisters separate. As a good sister, it wasn't good to experience what was meant for Ling Qingyu together.

"Enjoy your time. Sayonara, Baby Yu." The moment Tang Ziyi patted her shoulder meaningfully when she disappeared, Ling Qingyu condemned her cheating betrayal.

Ling Qingyu watched Yang Qingyue's busy figure and decided to step away silently, but a calm speech chilled her feet to halt like a heavy stone pressing on her back.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Chapter 614 CEO regained her queen

"Where do you think you're going?"

Though the speaker's tone seemed calm, the whirlpool of turmoil hidden beneath the words scared Ling Qingyu into stopping.

She rotated 180 degrees and stood beside Yang Qingyue, who snorted and turned her attention toward her subordinates.

Everyone watched the drama unfold, wondering about the identity of the woman in the camouflage uniform and hood.

Her equipment, especially the quad night vision goggles, sparked jealousy. The wealth displayed by such gear was unattainable even if they worked tirelessly their entire lives.

Ling Qingyu waited for Yang Qingyue to arrange everything. The latter didn't speak to her or allow her to leave, leaving Ling Qingyu helpless against her lover's tantrum.

Having nothing else to attend to, Ling Qingyu recalled the small battles waged by her subordinates.

Though she stayed afar and couldn't accompany them, she managed to witness the epitome of special forces warfare.

Spirit Fox operators exited their marching formation whenever contact was found. They reacted faster than typical special forces.

Once a shot was fired, they found cover in less than a second and fired back. Their speed made them appear as though they were flashing from one place to another.

To the enemies judging by muzzle flashes, one moment the operators were firing from a specific spot, and the next moment, they were closing in.

Like ghosts, the operators maneuvered swiftly, flanking around. Every shot honed in on its target, with most enemies eliminated during the initial engagement.

The remaining enemies were so suppressed that combat dragged on only because the operators had to reposition to finish them off.

Even in the fiercest combat stages, the Spirit Fox fire-and-advance sequence remained unstoppable. None of them needed to hide much, given the invulnerability their armor offered.

In fact, none of the enemies' shots ever landed on the Spirit Fox operators, except for a very few that came close during ambushes.

Perhaps only Kilo 4 refrained from exposing their full capabilities, maintaining a semblance of normalcy around Kilo 9 and 10.

Even so, Spirit Fox's legend grew tall in the city they had just raided. No matter how much the enemies investigated and searched, some managed to escape and spread the tale.

What Ling Qingyu and Spirit Fox didn't realize was that their actions, as described by the enemies, seemed mythical to many. Rumors spread.

Listeners dismissed the "teleportation skills" as exaggerated accounts from terrified survivors.

Nevertheless, the name Ghost stood out, a testament to the way they operated.

The stunning success of the recent operation caught the attention of Country A as well, as the CIA lost several valuable informants and assets.

Some crucial data losses were irrecoverable, but the CIA only discovered the extent of the situation later. An investigation was now underway.

It wasn't unusual for Country A's covert units to operate near Country C. Both were vying for superpower status, despite sharing the same adversary in the World Government.

Both nations had made numerous attempts to undermine each other through cultural infiltration, drug trafficking, and other schemes to cause financial harm.

Even if Ling Qingyu knew her team might now be on Country A's radar, she didn't care.

Nor would she respond with patriotic outrage. Every nation had its dark side, hidden from public view. Nobody was truly good.

Likewise, Country C was likely exporting drugs through its intelligence agencies to Country A.

Any civilization that rose to power did so by stepping on the bones of others—there was no doubt about that.

Morally, people shouldn't condone such actions and should work to restrain evil, but they must also avoid being manipulated by enemies seeking to disintegrate them.

Pure evil and dark interests for national survival were two different matters.

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Ling Qingyu grew bored watching Yang Qingyue give orders until the latter's gaze met hers.

Without a word, Yang Qingyue grabbed her wrist and led her away, indifferent to the onlookers.

The bystanders exchanged gossipy glances but quickly refocused on their tasks when Yang Qingyue turned around to issue additional instructions.

Ling Qingyu sat in the copilot seat of Yang Qingyue's Hongqi, smiling helplessly at the heavy silence between them.

Under pressure, she confessed everything, including the thrilling sniper duel. Yang Qingyue's eyes grew complicated, genuine fear surfacing as she processed the danger Ling Qingyu had faced.

As a wealthy businesswoman, Ling Qingyu didn't need to endure such risks, yet she willingly did so. Yang Qingyue seemed to see a glowing light above Ling Qingyu's head and sighed.

Particularly troubling was the moment Ling Qingyu described a bullet whizzing past her, even though she downplayed the danger. Yang Qingyue bit her lip, her eyes reddening at the thought of what could have happened.

Noticing her distress, Ling Qingyu promised she would never take such risks again and explained that this time, she was truly needed.

As for her unique skills, Ling Qingyu couldn't provide a clear explanation and hoped to keep them a secret.

To soothe Yang Qingyue's anger, Ling Qingyu shared details about the anti-ballistic properties of their equipment—but not all secrets were revealed. She knew where to draw the line.

Yang Qingyue's attention shifted to the new technology. She realized that compared to other operators, Ling Qingyu and Spirit Fox were relatively "safe."

Even so, Yang Qingyue twisted Ling Qingyu's waist as punishment. The latter could only scream and comply, her thick skin failing to protect her from the affectionate reprimand. Deep down, she felt joyful, sensing the depth of care from the police chief.

The Hongqi sped away in the direction of Ling Qingyu's residence. The police chief no longer concerned herself with the ongoing chaos, leaving the mess for her subordinates.

Poor Sergeant Mi and her colleagues sighed in dismay, hearing the fading engine roar of the distinct Hongqi.

Even in governance, the boss delegated while the workers toiled hard. Just receiving a few words of acknowledgment required great effort. True leadership meant trusting one's subordinates.

Yang Qingyue had done everything she could. Besides, the matters at hand were for the provincial government to handle in coordination with the central authorities.

Of course, she would return to her chair when the situation demanded her intervention. For now, she sought a brief respite.

Ling Qingyu welcomed the reprieve with a playful smirk, holding Yang Qingyue's smooth palm. Well, not so smooth—her fingers brushed over calluses—but she didn't care. In her heart, this beautiful policewoman was hers.

Once they arrived and entered the room, Ling Qingyu and Yang Qingyue fell onto the bed, rolling in the sheets.

Using the battlefield's stress as an excuse to vent, the skirmish transformed into a prolonged campaign, cries of passion echoing like longings for freedom.

Yang Qingyue resisted, but to comfort her woman's mood, Ling Qingyu fought valiantly. In the end, the renowned police chief succumbed, surrendering to the cold iceberg CEO, earning several "battlefield-related injuries" in the process.

In strategy, she lost. In tactical combat, she was defeated. In terms of attrition, she was outmatched. To survive, she had to beg, regardless of shame.

After two hours of intense combat, the iceberg president regained her queendom and restored her image, lost before outsiders, firmly establishing her authority at home.

Pinching Yang Qingyue's chin, Ling Qingyu declared her sovereignty. "Woman, dare you embarrass your husband again!"

It wasn't clear whether Ling Qingyu felt embarrassed, but Yang Qingyue was certainly ashamed by the ongoing roleplay and rolled her eyes.

"Why do you always act like some teenage drama hero?" Yang Qingyue asked, gasping for breath as she snuggled into Ling Qingyu's embrace.

"Well, people need a child's heart to live happily," Ling Qingyu answered with a peck on her lips. "Otherwise, we'd be no different from the living dead, just surviving."

"So philosophical all of a sudden." Yang Qingyue scoffed, then softened. "Promise me, you'll never do that again, okay?"

"Alright, I promise." Whether it was true or sincere, only Ling Qingyu knew. She always acted in her interest. If the benefits were significant, she could merely apologize and compensate for her actions later.

"You'd better mean it. And if you call me 'woman' one more time, you'll never touch me again," Yang Qingyue threatened, her chilly eyes piercing through. Ling Qingyu coughed and nodded obediently.

Still, she couldn't resist quibbling. "But aren't you a woman?"

"There are better ways to address me as your love. 'Woman' isn't one of them," Yang Qingyue snapped before silencing Ling Qingyu by pushing her down and hopping on top of her. The slurping sounds that followed marked their playful reconciliation.

Unfortunately, before they could take things further, a knock at the door shattered their romantic mood.

"Ms. Ling... Ms. Ling," came a voice from outside. Ling Qingyu cursed lightly, mentally berating the ancestors of whoever dared disrupt her passion. Yang Qingyue pursed her lips, laughing at her lover's childishness.

The two dressed quickly and stepped out, still a bit disheveled. Lin Xiao blinked innocently, offering an apology for the interruption and citing Gu Yi's visit as urgent.

The butler and maids exchanged knowing glances, their conjectures about Ling Qingyu's love life now confirmed. None found it strange that Yang Qingyue behaved so closely with their boss.

The policewoman bowed her head shyly before regaining her composure. As a top official, she had long since developed a thick skin.

However, recalling Ling Qingyu's earlier "tribute" to the interrupter, Yang Qingyue smirked, wondering what excuse her so-called husband would come up with to make amends.

"Ahem... Ahem... Tell Madame Gu I'll be there shortly. Please satisfy her request and attend to her," Ling Qingyu ordered, attempting to ignore Yang Qingyue's knowing snicker.

"It's natural, Miss. Then, I shall take my leave. Is there anything else you require?" Lin Xiao asked with a gentle smile.

"Nothing at the moment. Give us a little time," Ling Qingyu replied, waving her butler away as she fixed her clothes.

"What else?" Yang Qingyue asked, her tone teasing.

"My dear, is there anything you want?" Ling Qingyu blinked, attempting to defuse the situation by selling her cuteness without the slightest shame.

"That depends on your sincerity and contribution to the public." Yang Qingyue teased and tilted her head.

"I swear, I'll provide anything you say." Ling Qingyu made promises and caused squealing chuckles from her dear.

"Okay, we'll talk about that later. Let's meet my mother; I also want to have a word with her." Yang Qingyue's eyes showed some fierceness, forcing Ling Qingyu to gulp. She wanted to get out of the civil war.

Chapter 615 Gu Yi's warning

When Ling Qingyu and Yang Qingyue met Gu Yi, the trio prepared to eat. Although it was already past lunchtime, their busy schedules had delayed them.

Gu Yi had been troubled and anxious since the mission began, but her excitement soared upon receiving the primary objectives of the operation.

As more people were airlifted to the hospital and the probability of successfully retrieving the entire hostage population increased, Gu Yi couldn't stop thinking for even a single moment.

She knew how many benefits she would gain once news of their success spread. She also realized she likely owed her future rise to Ling Qingyu.

Because of this, she had only snacked lightly to quell her hunger. When Ling Qingyu returned, the mood brightened, and only then did she finally have the time to relax.

For Ling Qingyu, it took a while for her combat mindset to dissipate. It only fully vanished when she hugged Yang Qingyue tightly. Meals taken outside could never compare to her home cooking.

Moreover, the recent "battle" had drained her soul and energy, which needed replenishing—especially her body fluids. Yang Qingyue, too, had shed cold sweat, and even though Ling Qingyu was safe and sound before her, her earlier worry lingered.

This led to both hunger and weakness, made worse by Ling Qingyu's 'antics' in bed. In other words, all three of them were starving, having missed the gourmet meals prepared by Ling Qingyu's five-star chefs.

As for the Spirit Fox operatives who had participated in the mission and Tang Ziyi, they had enjoyed their meals much earlier.

Fortunately, Ling Qingyu didn't witness the girls' teasing smirks; otherwise, she might have exploded in frustration.

Before eating, Yang Qingyue dragged her mother aside to whisper something. From Ling Qingyu's perspective, her movements seemed a little unfriendly.

Clearly, she hadn't taken lightly her mother's decision to exploit Ling Qingyu by sending her to the battlefield.

On the other hand, Gu Yi was dumbfounded by her daughter's stunning words. Where was the lovely, pampered daughter she had spoiled all these years?

The once "little cotton-padded jacket" she had cherished now seemed to be "leaking air."

Damn Ling Qingyu! Why must she take the blame for everything? Gu Yi wasn't the one who had asked Ling Qingyu to go to the battlefield in person. She knew Ling Qingyu must have secrets she couldn't share.

Could she count on her? Gu Yi sighed and accepted the blame. She made solemn promises, explaining that Ling Qingyu wasn't part of the original plan.

By now, Yang Qingyue was no longer naive; she could see what was really going on. Though she still held Gu Yi partially accountable, her anger was no longer as strong.

As a young police chief, she understood the stakes and the hidden agendas. Snorting, she returned to the table.

Gu Yi shot Ling Qingyu a glare, to which the latter shrugged and smiled bitterly. Inwardly, Ling Qingyu grumbled about her mother-in-law—why couldn't she just take a little blame in exchange for huge gains?

So pretentious. Ling Qingyu suspected Gu Yi was secretly smiling while playing the wronged party to elicit guilt.

No matter. Even if Gu Yi would soon become her elder, Ling Qingyu wasn't about to back down when it came to claiming what she deserved.

"Let's fill our stomachs first," Gu Yi said, taking a seat. Ling Qingyu and Yang Qingyue followed suit and began eating.

Hmm, wait a moment, Where was Assistant Su?" Ling Qingyu tried to scurry her eyes around to spot the missing figure but didn't think much when she saw Gu Yi not mentioning her subordinate's whereabouts.

No one brought up business during the meal. It was peaceful and warm—loving, even—if only Gu Yi weren't there acting as a giant lightbulb.

Naturally, the trio began discussing matters after finishing their lunch. Yang Qingyue talked about potential arrangements and decisions from the higher-ups.

Gu Yi added her opinions and predictions, while Ling Qingyu nodded and interjected when the topics were relevant.

By the end, all three felt their horizons had broadened, and everyone left with new insights.

Yang Qingyue departed first, needing to tackle more work. After all, even as the boss, she couldn't go overboard squeezing her own sister—Cai Ning—too much, lest she resign!

Ling Qingyu and Gu Yi left the dining hall and strolled through the backyard. Surrounded by flowers, lush vegetation, and lively decorations, Ling Qingyu quietly accompanied Gu Yi.

Her role was done. Now, it was Gu Yi's turn to reciprocate. Thinking about the deal they had struck, Ling Qingyu's smile grew.

Y-20 aircraft, private airfields, and exclusive permissions inaccessible to ordinary elites—she now had the capital to face the Qin family head-on, albeit slightly.

Her grudge against them had never faded, even after 600 chapters. The enmity that had killed her original self—someone with ambition and lofty goals—still burned.

Even though she carried on for that girl, the original her could no longer witness this success.

"You'd better treat my daughter well in the future. If you dare hurt her..." Gu Yi paused. "You'll find out how I earned this position."

Ling Qingyu nodded solemnly, touching her chest. "Cross my heart and hope to die. I would never, ever hurt her—not even slightly. It's impossible.

Even if my anger overwhelmed my sanity, I'd just destroy rival companies and clean up others who aren't righteous."

Companies: ??? F&&K Y&&

Gu Yi nearly burst out laughing at Ling Qingyu's declaration but controlled her expression with sheer willpower.

This child—why did she have to add that last line and ruin the mood?

The reason for Gu Yi's stern warning wasn't a lack of approval for Ling Qingyu; rather, it stemmed from her fear of her daughter getting hurt. She could clearly see that Yang Qingyue really didn't deserve Ling Qingyu.

Though she understood love wasn't something that could be measured, Gu Yi still carried scars from her own experiences.

Her betrayal had stung despite the lack of closeness with her spouse. Though she had invested in her career to comfort herself, the toll it had taken meant she spent far less time with Yang Qingyue than most parents.

It was a wonder her daughter hadn't grown up crooked under the Yang family's rigid system.

What Gu Yi didn't realize was that she had, in fact, spent more time with her daughter and disciplined her more thoroughly than many other aristocratic families.

Yang Qingyue's original attributes and cleverness were undeniable, but her discipline and self-improvement had driven her success.

Sure, her talents and resources played a role, but without hard work, she wouldn't have achieved such outstanding results.

Luck, too, had been on her side. Meeting Ling Qingyu had propelled her directly into the sky.

Ultimately, apart from Ling Qingyu's gender, Gu Yi was satisfied with her. Even without Gu Yi's help, Ling Qingyu was destined to climb to the top and overwhelm the elite someday.

Should she be glad that she managed to jump onto the chariot just before the wheels started rolling?

Seeing Gu Yi deep in thought, Ling Qingyu refrained from interrupting and simply followed her steps. Despite her calm demeanor, Ling Qingyu took Gu Yi's words seriously, though she wasn't intimidated by her mother-in-law's methods.

As for the implied threats about how Gu Yi had secured her current position, Ling Qingyu believed them without hesitation. She and Gu Yi were similar in many ways.

"I never expected your group to achieve this result. It completely exceeds my expectations of you," Gu Yi said seriously.

"Congratulations, Lady Gu. The future looks bright for you," Ling Qingyu chuckled.

"I feel like I've boarded a thief's ship," Gu Yi clicked her tongue.

"Oh, how could you say that? I'm sure you'll have nothing but praise for me in the future when you look back on this timeline," Ling Qingyu replied with a teasing smile. "By the way, where's Assistant Su? I almost forgot she exists."

Assistant Su: Finally, someone remembers me again.

"I sent her away for some tasks. She's needed elsewhere."

"Can you share what tasks she's handling? I'm curious—if I may, of course."

"It's nothing confidential. Which parent doesn't want their child to have a smoother path? Although baby eagles can't always fly under their parent's wing, every step needs to be proportional."

Ling Qingyu nodded in agreement. Her mother-in-law was clearly working to clear the way for Yang Qingyue, ensuring no unnecessary tribulations or harsher challenges would block her path now that she had matured.

Well, another bloodbath is on the horizon. How many more heads will roll this time? Well, it didn't matter since Ling Qingyu and her confidantes weren't affected. That also included the people she was familiar with.

Additionally, she trusted Gu Yi's discipline. No innocents shall be implicated amidst the power struggle. If Gu Yi needed her cooperation, Ling Qingyu was happy to oblige, particularly intelligence work in electronics. Athena's existence was too powerful in this world.

Suddenly, Gu Yi broke the silence. "It's you I'm worried about."

"What do you mean, Mother?"

Gu Yi rolled her eyes and walked away. Not "Aunt Gu" anymore but "Mother"... The audacity! Yet somehow, her eyes carried a trace of amusement.

Ling Qingyu chased after her mother-in-law, smacking her lips a few times. Fortunately, she had received excellent news: her mother-in-law had completely accepted her presence.

The two headed toward the chairs and table set up to enjoy the garden's relaxation and leisure. Ling Qingyu gestured to the maids nearby to bring tea and sat down with Gu Yi.

"What's wrong with me?" Ling Qingyu asked, pressing her mother-in-law to elaborate. Clearly, Gu Yi's words didn't come without reason.

"Well, I'll explain since you'll figure it out on your own soon enough anyway," Gu Yi replied, shaking her head as she leaned back against the wooden recliner, though she maintained an upright posture.

Ling Qingyu leaned forward, propping her elbows on the table as her mind raced through various possibilities. A flash of insight crossed her thoughts. She wasn't entirely certain, but her guess seemed highly likely. "Some people see me as an eyesore?"

Though phrased as a question, her tone carried firm conviction.

Gu Yi observed Ling Qingyu's sharp intuition and silently praised her. She nodded once before shaking her head twice. "That depends on your next move."

Chapter 616 You misunderstood, Mother

"Let me guess. Somebody isn't happy with my moves in Province N," said Ling Qingyu with a chuckle as she rubbed her chin. "Why am I not surprised?"

"Exactly. With your talent, you should have seen it coming," Gu Yi replied. "I can suppress them for you and give you ample time to grow stronger."

"That won't be necessary, Mother."

"Could you not address me as 'Mother'?" Gu Yi cringed and brushed the fabric on her shoulder with distaste. "We aren't that close yet."

"We will be soon enough," Ling Qingyu coughed lightly but stood her ground. "Qingyue's mother is my mother too."

"The way you climb up really opens my eyes," Gu Yi said, shaking her head. "Come to think of it, I can't imagine the extent of your reach across industries. Those old ghosts would never expect what's coming."

Ling Qingyu paused when she noticed the maids approaching. Gu Yi followed her glance and waited.

The two women remained silent as the maids placed the tea on the table and retreated.

"I'm serious, Mom. I can handle them on my own."

"Even with so many obstacles ahead?" Gu Yi raised an eyebrow, clearly astonished by Ling Qingyu's confidence.

"Even if they all attack me at once," Ling Qingyu replied with a steady gaze, her eyes exuding arrogance and an unwavering trust in her abilities.

The newborn tiger fears no one, Gu Yi thought. But she knew Ling Qingyu was no ordinary character.

Ling Qingyu had flourished in the most chaotic provinces, a success that could only be achieved through sufficient means and unrelenting ruthlessness.

"Alright. Just know that if you ever need help, you can call me." Gu Yi nodded, offering her support.

"Thanks, Mom. The battle is inevitable, but I chose this road, and there's no turning back." Ling Qingyu took a sip of tea. "Prepare to watch the clown show unfold in the coming months. It'll be quite the spectacle."

"I'll be watching," Gu Yi said, smirking. "From the looks of it, you seem intent on suppressing the entire province yourself."

"Exactly. And when that happens, I'll have the province's support," Ling Qingyu replied, raising her cup. "Honestly, it's a rare opportunity for me to expand. Every business faces tribulations. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. The same applies here—I'll only grow stronger."

Gu Yi sipped her tea, letting the conversation settle as the fragrant aroma of the surrounding flowers filled the air.

The discussion painted a vivid picture of Province N's landscape. Ling Qingyu, having ventured down several paths, knew well that anyone whose interests she touched would never wish her well.

Compromise was nonexistent in a business war. It was either surrender or victory. Even so-called compromises were merely tactical pauses for both sides to regroup and prepare for an eventual onslaught.

True peace only existed when both parties possessed equal strength. But such peace was fragile, as one misstep could lead to disaster.

Survivors of suppression never lasted long, no matter how much they groveled. Once the powerful established a tight grip, they would swiftly eliminate any remaining threats.

Joining the powerful might be an option, but it came at the cost of independence—hardly a choice for anyone with ambition.

Of course, pretending to submit and gradually eroding an opponent's foundation before striking was another strategy. Alternatively, one could give up certain advantages in hopes of binding others to a shared cause. But inviting someone was far easier than trying to force them out later.

And then there was human greed—unpredictable and insatiable. These old vultures eyeing her wouldn't settle for minor benefits; they would seek to tighten their grip further in the future.

To them, Ling Qingyu was merely a money-making tool, a pawn to be restrained either through illegal methods or marriage. But she had no interest in finding out which.

Business world and the elite circle were crueler than ordinary people's lives, especially in a matter of life-or-death of their interest. Hidden underneath the smiles and fraudulent politeness, combining with elegance and aristocratic vibes, any characters were covered with thorns and sharp edges. Veiled polished knives readied to stab at anyone with weakness.

To survive in a world of the strong preying on the weak, only ruthlessness and fearlessness became the option for Ling Qingyu. She lived past the novice period and mid-term. Final exam awaited.

From the start, Ling Qingyu had made her wealth and power known. Whether buying a manor or participating in high-profile auctions, her spending habits had not gone unnoticed.

So long as she didn't interfere with their businesses, few dared to provoke her—especially not Xia and Shen, along with their little ou-dou-dous (younger brothers).

No one wanted to turn a two-sided rivalry into a three-way battle. Yet Ling Qingyu had no intention of joining their ranks; her goal was to surpass them entirely.

Her only weakness was her lack of connections—a problem she was diligently solving. With time, her growing influence would be impossible for the major families, including Shen and Xia, to ignore.

Through befriending Yang Qingyue and eventually falling in love with her, Ling Qingyu had gained an unexpected ally. The latter part was also a surprise and a gift for Ling Qingyu too. She had also built relationships with top officials in Province N, donating billions as goodwill gestures.

These efforts reduced the chances of her opponents leveraging government power against her businesses.

Now, the warning from Gu Yi could only mean one thing: a massive business war loomed on the horizon.

Ling Qingyu calculated the potential fallout—her profit margins would likely plummet, and her business could face severe interruptions. Betrayals and broken contracts from distributors or suppliers might destabilize her business's virtuous circle.

Her mind raced tremendously fast at light speed as she predicted several possibilities. But one thing, she was certain, the progress might be harsh yet everything was worth it.

Her confidence stemmed from Miss System and Athena—source of income from training and supplier providers from a nano-manufacturing machine, only requiring energy to produce essential products.

In fact, the situation could become drastic, if her industry involved every circle. Pharmaceutical, energy and other important sectors weren't ventured yet.

These were monopolized by strong powerhouses. Had she stepped one foot into the circle, Ling Qingyu dared not imagine.

It wasn't that she was scared but she hated more troubles than she could handle. Steady and stable. Sooner or later, with Gu Yi's help, these industries would be in her hands.

Plus, only if she fought and won, her strength would be noticed and acknowledged by others.

Fortunately, their interest was merely in the circle of Province N. If they discovered Ling Qingyu had an international hotel and service industry along with the upcoming super hospital soon to be rewarded by Miss System, she would have no time to rest.

Perhaps, her enemies might be too excited and impatient to wait or even negotiate. Everything would be fruitless and her original plan had to change.

Additionally, the reason Ling Qingyu rejected Gu Yi's intervention was clear: she intended to use the battle to elevate her status and extract more benefits. After all, life was reciprocal.

If others sought to consume her industries, why couldn't she return the favor? The pharmaceutical, restaurant, and energy sectors were ripe for her taking. Once she digested them after her victory, her overall strength and status would surpass all expectations, subverting the established hierarchy.

After a moment of silence, Gu Yi sighed and broke the tension. "Ah—here I thought I could return your favor soon. But it seems you're planning to seek even more of my help in the future."

"How could you say that, Mom?" Ling Qingyu replied, her tone feigning offense. "Given our relationship, there's no need to measure such proportions. Consider this time as a gift from the younger generation. Besides, I'll gain benefits from it too, won't I?"

"You've already overperformed," Gu Yi said, shaking her head slightly. "The deal between us makes me feel guilty. As you've pointed out, it wouldn't be right for me to take advantage of someone from the younger generation. Come, tell me how I can help."

"If you insist." Ling Qingyu paused, steepling her fingers after carefully setting her teacup on the mahogany table. The aura of a seasoned CEO returned as she continued, "Help me when I deal with the Qin family."

"The Qin family from the Capital?" Gu Yi asked, her expression thoughtful. After a brief moment, she nodded. "You have my word. I'll act as a middleman to mediate the unpleasantness between you two."

As the Minister of Justice, Gu Yi had access to extensive intelligence and already understood the underlying conflict. She was aware of Ling Qingyu's fierce and decisive actions, which had successfully countered the Qin family's attacks.

The Qin family had targeted Ling Yunxiang, Ling Qingyu's half-sister, relentlessly. They suppressed her thoroughly and blackened her name in the entertainment industry.

If not for Ling Qingyu's advanced technological means and rapid counterattacks—methods that had even piqued Gu Yi's curiosity—Ling Yunxiang's fate would have been sealed.

Not even the prestigious Ling family from Province S could challenge the behemoth that was the Qin family, deeply entrenched in the capital's power structure.

Gu Yi knew there were also conflicts in business matters where Ling Qingyu's industries faced countless obstacles though not directly by Qin family. Nevertheless, anyone with a clear vision knew the identity of the culprit.

Of course, her daughter-in-law, in spite of a weaker position, wasn't to be outdone. The counter-attacks were like a combination solid punches targeted at the weakest spot.

Qin family suffered heavy losses in wealth after their countless projects got ruined by exposing too early or their organization's chain froze, costing several billions after losing trust from the investors.

Some of the younger and older generation's past criminal deeds were flushed out to the public, attracting outrages.

"Mediate? No, Mother-in-law. You misunderstood." Ling Qingyu's lips curled into a sneer. "I intend to destroy the entire family for what they did to me."

Gu Yi was stunned by her daughter-in-law's declaration. This was beyond what she expected. Was Ling Qingyu planning to dismantle the Qin family simply because of the enmity caused by Ling Yunxiang?

Such ruthlessness and overbearing ambition caused Gu Yi to reconsider the depths of their cooperation. If Ling Qingyu was this extreme, perhaps Gu Yi needed to clarify the stakes involved.

"Is this all because of your sister?" Gu Yi probed, careful not to overcommit. "I can offer some help, but you mustn't underestimate the power of the capital's families."

"Thank you for the reminder, Mom." Ling Qingyu smiled, her tone light yet calculated. "I'm fully aware of the stakes. And no, my decision isn't solely because of my sister."

"Oh?" Gu Yi raised an eyebrow, inwardly relieved to hear there was a broader reason behind Ling Qingyu's ruthless approach. However, her composure faltered as Ling Qingyu spoke her next words.

"They once tried to assassinate me—and they nearly succeeded."

Chapter 617 Confiding

"What?! When?" Gu Yi blurted, her questions coming in a rapid stream. "How do you know the Qin family was behind it?"

"You think it's a coincidence that I suffered an accident that nearly killed me?" Ling Qingyu responded flatly. "I'd assume everyone already knows my accident has darker reasons. How is it that you don't?"

"It's not that I don't know," Gu Yi replied sharply. "Shouldn't the culprit be the Tiger Gang, the one your Spirit Fox eradicated? Don't think I'm unaware of why you focused on them so ruthlessly."

Gu Yi had her sources. She knew how Ling Qingyu had boldly attacked the Tiger Gang's enterprises, using Spirit Fox as a military tool to crush their power base. While the operation was conducted under the guise of justice, there were clearly vested interests at play.

That said, compared to the hypocritical politicians and business figures she had encountered, Ling Qingyu at least kept her word and carried herself with far more integrity. Her actions had brought tangible benefits to society and stability to the region—regardless of whatever conspiracies she harbored.

For Gu Yi, Ling Qingyu's rise in status was a net positive for Province N and her daughter's interests. Moreover, Spirit Fox had consistently performed above expectations, even in their unofficial capacity.

"I never intended to hide it from you in the first place," Ling Qingyu said, shaking her head.

"Then how does the Qin family connect to the Tiger Gang?" Gu Yi asked, staring intently. "One operates at the very bottom of the social ladder, and the other stands at the top of the pyramid. They couldn't possibly be linked."

"If you approach this purely through logic, I can't fault you," Ling Qingyu admitted. "But the truth is darker than it seems. From the beginning, I suspected someone was pulling strings behind the scenes. The enemy was shrouded in darkness, which was one of my main motivations for founding Spirit Fox—to protect myself and my loved ones when I had no idea who the true adversaries were."

Gu Yi sat quietly, mulling over the revelation. Ling Qingyu's reasoning behind forming a private special operations team contained elements of truth, but as Gu Yi considered it further, the outcome felt inevitable. Ling Qingyu's ideals would naturally lead her down this path. It was merely a matter of time.

"Fine," Gu Yi said at last. "But you still haven't explained how you suspect there's a hidden hand—and why you're so certain it's the Qin family."

"Everyone has secrets. I'll refrain from divulging everything," Ling Qingyu replied. "But think about it. I had no enmity with the gang, yet I was targeted. It's clear to anyone with sense: there were many suspects, but none had the motive to go that far."

Gu Yi's eyelids twitched. She realized the "secret" Ling Qingyu mentioned likely referred to the unsolved death of the Tiger Gang leader's son. The case had been ignored by law enforcement, and few cared about his demise. In fact, many celebrated his death in silence.

Still, Gu Yi's gaze remained fixed on Ling Qingyu, understanding the implications behind her cryptic words. No one here was a fool. Ling Qingyu had subtly hinted at her findings: the dead man had likely revealed crucial details before his demise. There was no need for further confirmation about the existence of a hidden mastermind.

"So, what did you discover during your raid on the Tiger Gang's final stronghold?" Gu Yi's eyes narrowed.

"As expected of someone with a ministerial position," Ling Qingyu remarked, clicking her tongue. "The gang leader, knowing his fate was sealed, directed his hatred toward the true culprit who caused the conflict between us.

"When our operatives found him, he had been tortured beyond recognition, but we managed to extract critical information—details directly tied to my accident. Combining his testimony with our investigations, the evidence points squarely to the Qin family in the capital."

Leaning back in her recliner, Gu Yi processed the information. The sequence of events aligned with her deductions. Ling Qingyu wasn't lying—though her account carefully omitted certain details.

"Tortured beyond repair, Gu Yi thought grimly. In all likelihood, the man's death had been orchestrated by Ling Qingyu herself. Even if not, she had likely ensured he wouldn't survive long enough to cause complications.

Not that Gu Yi would blame her. The world was rarely black and white, except in extreme cases. If someone had done the same to her, she would have responded in kind.

Good deeds bring good karma, Gu Yi mused, but she knew this philosophy belonged only to the virtuous, not to those who inflicted harm.

"But something doesn't add up," Gu Yi said finally. "Why would the Qin family target someone..." She hesitated.

"Like me, who poses no threat and is insignificant in their eyes," Ling Qingyu finished for her.

"Ahem... That's your interpretation, not mine," Gu Yi retorted, raising her hand in mock protest.

"The assassination was likely a mistake from their perspective," Ling Qingyu continued, ignoring Gu Yi's playful tone. "They wanted to kill my half-sister. But instead of 'they,' it's more accurate to say 'he.'"

Ling Qingyu suspected only one member of the Qin family had orchestrated the attempt on her life. Yet, did it matter whether her revenge targeted the entire family?

Without the Qin family's immense backing, would that man have dared to plan such atrocities? Was she merely the first victim of his hubris?

Born into privilege and wielding inherited power without earning it, many of these individuals grew into self-proclaimed gods, seeing others as tools rather than human beings.

From what Ling Qingyu knew of Ling Yunxiang's fate, coupled with information from Miss System, there was a high probability—over 70 percent—that the man responsible was a so-called "child of destiny," a protagonist archetype in a sadomasochistic plotline.

Despite repeatedly pressing Miss System for confirmation after extracting the truth from the dying man, she had been met with silence. Nevertheless, Ling Qingyu was confident in her assessment.

Initially, she had only intended to disrupt the Qin family's operations and weaken their dominance. Now, however, her goal was clear: vengeance.

Only by thoroughly dismantling the Qin family could Ling Qingyu find peace and avenge her predecessor.

Compared with Stallion Lin Fan, the female version's male leads were much more frightening to cater to most women's fantasies of conquering— cold, ruthless, and devil— but only submitted to the protagonist in love. Hehe, Ling Qingyu shook away the nonsensical thought.

"Wait. The Qin family made a mistake?" Gu Yi raised an eyebrow. "Girl, forgive my bluntness, but for a family of their stature, they never tolerate even the slightest errors."

"True, for their true adversaries," Ling Qingyu replied calmly. "But what if I told you this was a crime fueled entirely by the emotions of the murderer? What if, in his eyes, I was just an ant that could be crushed at any time?"

Ling Qingyu elaborated further, recounting the twisted circumstances that led to her replacing her sister as the target. Gu Yi's eyelids twitched as she processed the story. Silently, she lit a metaphorical candle for her unlucky daughter-in-law.

It turned out the assassin was an admirer of Ling Yunxiang. He had already been contemplating retirement and, in his warped sense of loyalty, diverted the hatred onto another target to save his "goddess." After completing the job, he planned to disappear with his payment—only to realize he had overestimated his ability to evade the Tiger Gang.

Enraged by his son's death, the Tiger Gang leader hunted the assassin down, dragging him back to Province N. From there, events spiraled into the chaos Gu Yi was already familiar with.

"Still... why kill Ling Yunxiang in the first place?" Gu Yi asked, her skepticism evident.

"You can never fully understand the minds of lunatics," Ling Qingyu sneered. She alone grasped the warped logic of those "protagonists." To them, the world revolved around their whims, feeding their arrogance.

Ling Qingyu continued, her voice laced with mockery: "Besides, if you dig deeper, I guarantee this wasn't his first time. Such calculated cold-bloodedness... such casual cruelty. Even I would have to bow my head.

"And when it comes to his 'off-with-your-head' style, do you really need any further reasons for his actions?"

Gu Yi was momentarily speechless at Ling Qingyu's bluntness but found herself silently agreeing. The Qin family's domineering ways had harmed countless lives, innocent or not. It wasn't far-fetched to imagine Ling Yunxiang being targeted simply for offending the heir's sensibilities.

Yet, a problem lingered. Ling Qingyu had asked for Gu Yi's assistance, but mounting an attack against the Qin family was no small feat. Even with her resources, Gu Yi knew she lacked the power to take on such a monolithic force directly.

Regret bubbled up as she recalled her hasty promise to help. She cursed herself inwardly, wishing she could take back her words. However, her sense of responsibility—both to Ling Qingyu and to her daughter-in-law—kept her in check.

Like Ling Qingyu, Gu Yi harbored deep resentment toward the Qin family. Despite their pristine public image, she knew all too well the darkness lurking beneath their polished veneer.

Sensing Gu Yi's internal conflict, Ling Qingyu chuckled softly. "Don't overthink it, Mom. That's a battle for the future. Who knows what's to come? I'm not the same person I was months ago. Surely, you're not underestimating me, are you?"

Gu Yi snapped out of her thoughts, a small smile tugging at her lips. "Of course not. From the very beginning, I knew you weren't a simple character. You've never disappointed me. How I wish you were my daughter."

"Well," Ling Qingyu teased, "I'm going to be your daughter soon enough."

Both women laughed, their minds harboring their own private thoughts.

"For now, the Qin family has no idea about my true intentions," Ling Qingyu said. "But the fight isn't over. I've hurt their business just as they've hurt mine. Let them think this all started with Ling Yunxiang."

"As long as your actions remain within the realm of business, you have my full support," Gu Yi assured her. "Proceed with confidence. I'll handle the official channels for you."

"No, Mom," Ling Qingyu said firmly. "Let them come. I'll call on you if I truly need your help, but for now, let me fight my own battles. Watching their schemes unfold is half the fun—I won't be bored, at least."

"You're a lunatic, little girl," Gu Yi said, shaking her head.

"Likewise, Minister Gu. To each their own."

"To each their own," Gu Yi agreed, clinking her tea cup against Ling Qingyu's.

As the minutes of silence passed, Gu Yi sighed. "You've made too many enemies, dear."

"And I intend to crush them, one by one," Ling Qingyu said with a smirk. "Call it fate, pushing me to climb the ladder. I'm powerless to resist."

Gu Yi rolled her eyes at the dramatic declaration, barely resisting the urge to spit out her tea. "Too much, girl. Too pretentious."

Chapter 618 Thwarting conspiracies

"Come on, Mom. Hear your junior out." Ling Qingyu winked mischievously, setting the stage to recount her skirmish with the Qin family. "It wasn't easy."

Athena: Blah...

Miss System: Blah—blah.

Gu Yi nudged her forehead, hearing Ling Qingyu's words. From what she had heard, particularly coming from Assistant Su, Ling Qingyu fared well, going wits and sticks with the Qin family's probes.

She wasn't sure about the details, but if Ling Qingyu spoke from her perspective, Gu Yi found it interesting. "I'm all ears. Let me hear if you deserve to be called an uncrowned queen in the future."

Ling Qingyu shrugged and began narrating the small battle. Though to outsiders, it appeared nothing happened, Ling Qingyu ensured her properties emerged victorious between life and death.

Most of the time, business wars began without one noticing or being prepared to react. Ling Qingyu felt fortunate to have Athena's assistance.

Her daughter immediately noticed something amiss within the chains of the company, from resource allocation to product selling.

There were many steps in between, of which no single human could monitor thoroughly, but Athena just did that.

As usual in Ling Qingyu's case, perhaps because her beauty, clothes, and cosmetic products were more famous, the Qin family targeted these sectors. Troubles came from the distributors and suppliers, like factories.

What else but the wretched ways of raising prices and giving excuses for their delivery lateness?

In order to prevent malicious hurt between business partners, a contract served as evidence and restrictions.

However, as humans, people always knew how to find loopholes and other ways around to achieve their goals.

Just having a binding contract never meant the deal was safe and protected. For instance, Ling Qingyu had an agreement that she would receive ten times the remuneration if the other party failed to deliver and whatnot.

Malicious price raising was deterred in the contract as well. Otherwise, if the suppliers dictated whatever the price, Ling Qingyu had to pay.

The opposite was true if she couldn't pay on time to compensate or if she sought other suppliers after a contract breach. Positive economy came from how smoothly the money flowed through. A chain disrupted somewhere destroyed it and affected the business.

Legal agreements ensured both parties could trust one another to an extent. However, there was a catch—sometimes, in a contract, the phrase—it depended on the parties...

Dependable meant people. And people equaled loopholes. These tolerances were meant for unexpected scenarios. Flexibility versus strictness.

Opponents in business always exploited the loopholes to their advantage. Ling Qingyu encountered the same.

Her expenses rose as her company bought the resources. Though not noticed by the upper echelon, the cost tripled.

As soon as the report entered the company's system, Athena recognized the unusualness and paid attention.

Warned by her mother about the impending counterattack from the Qin family, Athena was serious in her monitoring.

Naturally, underneath the report, the writers' opinion suggested that this event could be a temporary measure and didn't require too much attention.

Her staff might have considered the pricing as emergencies, but that didn't include Athena. Or the staff were bribed—anything was possible.

Immediately, she informed Ling Qingyu, who then communicated with Zhao Xiurong and voiced her concern.

Ling Qingyu no longer paid too much attention to her beauty business and merely managed the overall trend.

This was also to train Zhao Xiurong. She wouldn't interfere too much but would guide her confidante as a mentor subtly.

Meanwhile, she asked Athena to investigate further. Sure enough, the rising price was only meant for her, not others.

The market seemed normal without the slightest storm under the sea. Someone was making moves behind her back.

She had no control over the minds of suppliers and distributors. They weren't part of her system but were merely in a cooperative relationship.

Backstabbing against each other was the norm. It was hard to guard against unethical and immoral actions. Ling Qingyu might be ruthless, but she would never ruin a good relationship because of benefits.

The exception belonged to cases where she might have to pretend to submit to coercion. In a healthy relationship, she would never consider such an option. Compared to other righteous business elites, Ling Qingyu was definitely more like a saintly character.

Given Ling Qingyu's stability and strength, she didn't need to develop wretchedly. Truthful and aboveboard apart from a little deception.

Zhao Xiurong, under Ling Qingyu's advice, met with the suppliers to negotiate. Sometimes, these matters were meant to express dissatisfaction, which Ling Qingyu hoped was the case.

Since Spirit Beauty & Clothing sold numerous products, Zhao Xiurong needed to travel around to engage in conversations.

As if by chance, everyone had discussed together, negotiations went downhill, and Zhao Xiurong felt devastated, admitting her guilt in front of Ling Qingyu, who comforted her.

Actually, Ling Qingyu knew long ago through various signs and outstanding overall visions, combined with Athena's intelligence.

In fact, given her background, these troublemakers shouldn't have had bad thoughts in the first place, particularly with Yang Qingyue's overt protection.

Birds died for food, and likewise, some people couldn't withhold their desires in front of absolute benefit or even the possibility of a higher ladder.

Ling Qingyu naturally made them regret their actions and put them into reality. She delivered a factory reset blow to them.

Nonetheless, she decided to go through the usual steps to avoid appearing domineering. Her reputation already stunk among the business circle for being too overbearing in her attack.

This time, she was keen to establish her righteous image and abolish the slightest nuisance from small parties.

So, a quagmire of back and forth began. Of course, Ling Qingyu didn't move but only provided guidance for Zhao Xiurong.

The poor former secretary was forced to run around by her boss under the excuse of guidance. Zhao Xiurong threatened these suppliers and factories with lawsuits regarding breach of contract.

Though asking for a higher price was acceptable, tripling without a proper reason had created an advantageous lawsuit.

Ling Qingyu didn't hope much from legal procedures because, since the suppliers and factories were aware of the consequences, they were well-prepared.

Indeed, these unscrupulous bastards sneered at Zhao Xiurong's threats and were willing to allow the court to settle the case. Although her former secretary understood the possibility, she was also infuriated at the sudden betrayal.

Going to court was her words, but she couldn't really implement the threats without Ling Qingyu's approval.

These bastards would pause cooperation and hurt Ling Qingyu's business. A broken chain in business could lead to a disastrous collapse if not handled appropriately.

Loss of customers from unavailable products or higher costs meant tremendous financial negatives.

While Zhao Xiurong, whose horizon was limited to a small secretary, scratched her hair in distress, Ling Qingyu already had a solution and merely waited for her secretary's opinion.

Perhaps her patient and stable aura affected Zhao Xiurong, and meaningful suggestions appeared, causing Ling Qingyu to nod. But Ling Qingyu had better alternatives.

Even then, she was satisfied with Zhao Xiurong's and the others' growth, including the three poor girls she had rescued by fate.

While Ling Qingyu prolonged the case through deception, with Zhao Xiurong serving an important role, she personally participated in meetings.

Suppliers and factories had their own resource providers. After thorough investigation by Athena, Ling Qingyu headed to them.

Searching for a new group of suppliers and factories was deemed helpless and could lead to another stagnant scenario. Qin family's underlings should be monitoring to react accordingly, expecting her strategy.

Ling Qingyu twirled around and proceeded in an unconventional manner. Although she could have solved everything with her wealth, why should she?

Particularly when she had to give money to her enemies. Her infinite wealth wasn't prepared to feed her opponents.

Even if Athena earned several million or billion in a short period, it was better to donate to those in need or accomplish other meaningful projects rather than succumbing to fix the issues.

If Ling Qingyu bled heavily, perhaps the Qin family might withdraw their hands. They also couldn't sustain spending their resources too long just to disgust Ling Qingyu.

The only conflict between them began from Ling Yunxiang's dark events and Ling Qingyu's retaliation to strip them of their wealth.

Although they had no proof that Ling Qingyu did it, their actions didn't need justification. At least, being targeted by the Qin family thoroughly was enough to make anyone feel honored.

Because Ling Qingyu wasn't one to suffer unwarranted losses, she would never accept the outcomes they predicted.

As for attracting more retaliation, she liked to entertain herself, as she told Gu Yi, though the event happened before she spoke closely to her mother-in-law.

Meeting with the resource providers in the lower echelon, including those linked to the parties annoying her, she offered benefits and bled heavily. Instead of aiding her enemies, she intended to support another new group, possibly her faction in the future.

Invest in those providers and act as a protector. Buy the raw materials and ban their businesses. Group them together to form a chamber of commerce to solely serve her ideals.

She returned the same treatment her company suffered. She was even ready to pay compensation for breaching contracts.

Within a matter of weeks, her swift action alarmed them. There were losses for sure, but in the future, these problems would never bother her again. An unknown and uncertain investment that Ling Qingyu already envisioned transforming into the greatest assets.

Now, a financial crisis erupted in the opposite direction. The little greed sparked by the injection of capital force had hurt them instead.

Owing to her reputation, small businesses like the providers above cooperated willingly. Not to mention, she wasn't overbearing in her actions and returned positive gestures.

Her future cutting pies attracted them more. In the face of overwhelming interest, they couldn't entertain the idea of rejecting Ling Qingyu's offer.

As for the capital force fighting Ling Qingyu, they weren't idiots to be frightened and understood which sides to choose.

How much the Qin family could bring to the table versus how many cakes Ling Qingyu brought to them—plus the probability!

Official forces hurting them wasn't among Ling Qingyu's worries. Her lofty, heavy donation to Province N's government wasn't for nothing here.

After robbing away the resource providers, Ling Qingyu checked for any mishaps before handing the affair to Zhao Xiurong.

With convenient providers turning to Ling Qingyu's faction, how long could they last? Ling Qingyu already had multiple layouts to react, including buying the entire factory or swallowing the suppliers corporations.

As named after her deeds, Ling Qingyu was merciless to anyone that crossed her eyes. In the coming months, the factories and the suppliers neared the edge of their vitality, almost to the desperate close-down. This was within her expectation. In the next months, she digested the industries, forming her own complex stable network to cater to her business. A mini-consortium.

This was in her future time-line. At the current stage of Ling Qingyu's narration to Gu Yi, these events were yet to occur. She lost some wealths but she managed to thwart incoming attacks brilliantly and strengthened herself.

Once and for all, such similar attacks had zero possibility to strike again. Ling Qingyu further consolidate her roots and dug deeper to entrench her foundation.

With everything set, she shifted her focus elsewhere to fight the Qin family's pronging. There were other sectors she had to pay attention to: distributors, public opinion, and government interference.

Chapter 619 Without comparison

With Athena's advantage, Ling Qingyu held damning evidence against the troublemakers, giving her leverage to bend them to her will. However, this power came with risks. It was a double-edged sword that could breed disgust among the elite circle.

Every member of the elite had skeletons in their closets, and most were far from clean. Once exposed, there was no return. If Ling Qingyu wielded this weapon, she would become a pariah. No one liked someone who unearthed buried secrets and laid them bare for public scrutiny.

The unspoken rule of the game was clear: once Ling Qingyu crossed this line, her advancement within the circle would come to a screeching halt.

Previously, when she was weaker, exposing others' dirty dealings would have been viewed with less disdain—perhaps as a desperate move by someone fighting a stronger opponent. Dislike was inevitable, but it was understandable.

But the current Ling Qingyu had transcended such desperate measures. If she still resorted to flipping the game board when faced with challenges, no one would play with her anymore. She couldn't behave like a certain ruler, constantly threatening to press the red button whenever faced with unfavorable moves.

Speaking of, before she transmigrated, the invasion had reached a matter of more than a month. She still didn't know if the resisting nation secured its independence and freedom.

While others were despairing on the first day, she believed the turning point would emerge after three days. Just as expected, the country's cohesion and morals rose after a few collapses and chaos.

A certain someone believed that he could walk his army like backyard and to his despair, he lost after a week.

Back then, she might not have the ability to guesstimate and lacked the experience to predict the outcome, but after she transmigrated here, now, with her sharpened intuition, Ling Qingyu understood the war should end after three months if the fascist country wanted to stabilize and ensure its rear.

Ling Qingyu understood that any prolonged conflict would cripple even the most arrogant of rulers. Victory demanded strategic foresight, not impulsive reactions.

Statistic had proven the war machine's vitality of a nation. Modern era conflict could be studied and predicted through data collected.

How could Ling Qingyu know that there was no way out for a certain dictator and he could be shameless? His arrogance and pride were now the reasons for his nation's downfall.

He couldn't accept the defeat and minimized the losses while he still could. The country's face was totally in shambles.

She didn't witness the coming downfall of a nation led by a similarly reckless dictator. Despite his arrogance, his plans crumbled within a week due to the resilience and unity of the people he sought to oppress.

Nonetheless, war raged on and ceased to stop. What should have ended didn't when one's emotion reigned over the national interest.

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In addition to navigating the treacherous waters of elite politics, Ling Qingyu faced challenges in scaling production. Supply shortages threatened to derail her business, but Athena's nanoprinter filled the gap, ensuring the company broke even during its weakest moments.

Thanks to her warehouses stocked with extra supplies, Ling Qingyu managed to mitigate the crisis. New factories promised to stabilize future production, especially for clothing and beauty products.

While manufacturing clothes—both plain and intricately designed—proved relatively straightforward, beauty products were a different beast. Drug regulations posed ethical dilemmas, making it unwise for Ling Qingyu to rely solely on Athena's capabilities for self-manufacturing.

Although Athena assured the safety of her creations, Ling Qingyu knew there was more at stake. Without rigorous clinical testing and quality control, the products' legitimacy could be questioned.

Luckily, her beauty product line operated through a separate production channel unaffected by the supplier disputes. Though these channels couldn't immediately meet demand, Ling Qingyu remained unbothered.

Ling Qingyu aggressively poached workers with enticing offers, draining her enemies' labor force. Yes, they were now her enemies. A group that once collaborated with her for mutual gain had switched allegiances, driven by greed and betrayal.

She was willing to spend lavishly on other measures to counter them—but not a single cent to directly support or pay her adversaries.

Though betraying employees wasn't favored by her, Ling Qingyu didn't dwell on blaming them.

Inwardly, she might look down on their disloyalty, but she acknowledged the broader reality: corporate culture shaped such behavior. When companies showed no care for their employees, why should loyalty be expected in return?

Unlike these cutthroat corporations, Ling Qingyu's group fostered a supportive environment. She treated her staff well, recognizing their value beyond mere profit margins. In contrast, most corporate entities prioritized interests above all else, creating a cycle of indifference and opportunism.

She had Athena monitor them so that she could see these 'new' employees' truest nature. If they never ceased to change their utilitarian behavior despite her homely treatment, Ling Qingyu would not tie them to her faction completely. Each took what they required, purely business.

For distributors dealing in foreign products, Ling Qingyu pursued direct negotiations with primary manufacturers. However, her current prestige wasn't sufficient to secure favorable deals, making the process laborious.

Unsuccessful, Ling Qingyu pinched her nose and decided to halt these sales. Anyway, sooner or later in her plan, she would venture in the pharmaceutical sector with stronger background.

There wasn't a need to bootlick cold butts and suffered with grief, enduring other's bullying. She held the grudge and took note of them.

They were destined to be her targets to attack in the future. Well, not destroy but becoming their opponents was certain with her rise.

Meanwhile, her network of small stores across Country C remained largely unaffected.

Overall, Ling Qingyu sidelined cosmetics to focus on clothing during this tumultuous period. Her intricate designs gained acclaim in fashion shows, keeping her brand in the spotlight.

The turning point came with the emergence of Imperial Resort, a reward from Miss System. This development resolved Ling Qingyu's challenges entirely. The Resort's channels, coupled with her scaling production capabilities, allowed her to establish a self-sufficient supply chain.

The Qin family's public opinion assault posed a different challenge. Ling Qingyu had mixed feelings about the public's unpredictable nature—sometimes insightful, sometimes naïve.

Netizens appeared too smart most of the time but they were also like idiots, their nose led around by others with purpose. Unlike the Ling Yunxiang case, she couldn't rely heavily on Athena to suppress negative news.

Attempting to block criticism could backfire. Instead, Ling Qingyu played the role of the underdog, a strategy that worked to her advantage. Her past good deeds surfaced, swaying public sentiment in her favor.

When the tide of opinion shifted, Ling Qingyu struck decisively. Clothing-related issues were easy to handle, but rumors about her beauty products causing skin diseases created complications.

If not for her positive public image, these rumors could have snowballed into a catastrophic scandal. Drug-related issues were no laughing matter.

Athena, however, swiftly countered the rumors by anonymously leaking irrefutable evidence online. Detailed records of bribes and bank transactions left no doubt about the malicious intent behind the accusations.

Public opinion turned sharply in Ling Qingyu's favor. Ordinary people, now armed with the truth, rallied to defend her.

Without her unique advantages, Ling Qingyu wondered whether she could have resolved this struggle so swiftly.

During this arduous journey, she encountered a like-minded businesswoman with idealistic views. This woman, Meng Han, specialized in affordable women's products, prioritizing service to impoverished communities. Despite coming from a humble background and being twice Ling Qingyu's age, Meng Han exuded a quiet success that left a profound impression on Ling Qingyu.

Their conversations illuminated a gap in Ling Qingyu's approach. While she often relied on financial power to address challenges, Meng Han demonstrated the importance of serving the broader public. Though their industries overlapped, their priorities diverged significantly: Ling Qingyu pursued elitism, pragmatism, and profit, while Meng Han operated on razor-thin margins, driven by an unwavering commitment to those in need.

In this light, Ling Qingyu felt humbled. Her lofty ambitions might surpass Meng Han's in scale, but they lacked the latter's grounded humanity. This encounter inspired Ling Qingyu to reevaluate her methods, realizing that her ventures could and should extend their benefits to ordinary people.

Ling Qingyu began integrating these ideals into her future business projects. To support Meng Han's vision, she invested heavily in her enterprise. When Meng Han offered 20% of the company in gratitude, Ling Qingyu declined, settling for just 10%.

Unfortunately, Meng Han's selfless approach to business made her a target for powerful adversaries, likely competitors unsettled by her impact. Upon learning this, Ling Qingyu resolved to stand by her new ally. Their shared struggles deepened their bond, and Ling Qingyu's resolve to protect Meng Han strengthened. She wouldn't back down, even if her enemies proved as formidable as the Qin family.

Meng Han, ever modest, initially resisted Ling Qingyu's intervention but eventually accepted it. Her sincerity and idealism were rare traits that Ling Qingyu vowed to cherish. This partnership became a treasured gift, reminding Ling Qingyu that ideals often outlast interests.

"An ancient saying teaches that interests may forge relationships, but they pale in comparison to ideals. Faith, however, endures for eternity," Ling Qingyu reflected, concluding the chapter with a contented sigh.

Gu Yi listened intently, absorbing every word without interruption. As an elder, she, too, learned from Ling Qingyu's battles of wits and resilience. Comparing Ling Qingyu to Yang Qingyue, Gu Yi couldn't hide her disappointment. The two were worlds apart—there was simply no comparison.

Yang Qingyue: "Excuse me, are you comparing me to that monster?"

Gu Yi: "Well, you still need my help for everything."

Yang Qingyue: "That's unfair. I'll conquer her and claim the world."

Gu Yi: smirks "And you'll still need my help."

Yang Qingyue: "..."

Chapter 620 Strength is everything

Gu Yi nodded, agreeing with her junior's statement. Her vision wasn't comparable to Ling Qingyu's. It was broader and higher.

Her position allowed her to perceive the unthinkable and achieve enlightenment. Ling Qingyu's words caused fluctuations in her heart.

The battle of interest, the battle of ideals, and lastly, the battle of faith. How long had they been talking to reach a philosophical state? Gu Yi laughed inwardly, helpless at Ling Qingyu's charisma.

Although Ling Qingyu's monologue seemed dull, Gu Yi understood this girl was doing it on purpose, particularly confiding a few secrets.

She knew Ling Qingyu willingly exposed her weakness to strengthen the bond between them for future cooperation.

Likewise, in politics, to join a faction, everyone shared their live handles to interlock the fragile trust.

This was also the reason why officials appeared corrupt. The higher the hierarchy, the more noticeable it was.

Of course, not everyone went down a debauched road. A righteous few with clean hands existed in the world. In black and white, neither outlasted the other and won entirely.

Yin and yang. Among the yin, a small yang was born. The opposite remained true. The world always stayed in balance.

"Seems like Meng Han's opponents aren't easy," commented Gu Yi.

"Hah, I was about to talk about this issue. An enemy of my enemy is my friend." Ling Qingyu clicked her tongue. "It's better when you meet a like-minded partner to accompany you."

"Interesting? Is it the same one who tried to kill you?" Gu Yi leaned close.

"No," Ling Qingyu sneered. "But similar birds flock together. It's a peripheral member destroying the lady's business. I don't mind healthy competition, yet to target the ... never mind ... Why am I behaving

like a clean freak when I'm not much different from these bastards?" Ling Qingyu exhaled heavily and rubbed her forehead.

"You're different, my dear," Gu Yi said. "The power you hold, the ambition that burns inside you; the sole ultimate humanist deep in your bones and your strategy. I see you're nothing like what you described."

"Hmm, I guess." Ling Qingyu scratched the back of her head sheepishly. She never expected her future mother-in-law to praise her so much. "Thanks, Mom... @v@"

"Look, as long as your heart stands strong and you believe what you do is right, that's all that matters," Gu Yi added. "I'm sure you already understood my meaning before I stated it. It's just you thought you needed affirmation subconsciously. You don't, dear. You'll figure it out very soon."

"Alright, let's not mention this topic, Mother." Ling Qingyu shrugged.

"Then, when are you going to deal with the Qin family?"

"I don't know. I'll inform you when I act. It might take a year or two at the shortest. The longest would be when you plan to run for presidency."

Gu Yi stared into Ling Qingyu's eyes before moving away. It was scary for a person to endure her anger and lust for vengeance. The stronger the self-discipline and control, the more terrifying the power buried underneath.

Having seen Ling Qingyu's hidden methods, Gu Yi knew numerous underhanded means were enough to kill that arrogant tyrant multiple times.

Similar treatments like assassination and accidents weren't new. Even if people suspected her, nobody in the upper echelon could say much when they realized Ling Qingyu returned the same gift.

Perhaps Yang Qingyue's relationship might have soothed Ling Qingyu's original plan, Gu Yi thought. Love really changed everything.

However, as a result, Ling Qingyu now targeted the entire family instead of a single figure—the behemoth that suppressed nearly the whole nation with one hand.

Should she already be considered an accomplice long before the revenge began? Gu Yi thought humorously.

"Just tell me when you start. I don't want to be in the dark," Gu Yi muttered.

"Of course not," Ling Qingyu replied. "In fact, you might not need to act at all and pretend in my future playwright. By the time I'm prepared, everything should be settled. The most you'd help with would be indirect actions."

"Haha, so do I have to express gratitude because my hands aren't stained?"

"I can, you can't," Ling Qingyu said no more.

"That's disheartening. I thought I'd roll on for an adventure."

Ling Qingyu spread her hands to express her helplessness. In fact, the original plan was to turn the Qin family upside down once she gained the necessary foundation and strength.

She intended to seek Gu Yi's help to facilitate her case. Although she told her future mother-in-law that she required no help, the scenario was impossible.

Gu Yi had to intervene in some way, albeit covertly, to uphold her reputation and prevent others from attacking politically.

The current discussion was planned in the future when she would admit her affair with Yang Qingyue.

Who would have guessed that Gu Yi discovered their honeymoon phase? Plans couldn't keep up with the change.

Ling Qingyu lamented this and received Gu Yi's joyful laughter and felt strange. Asking a question, she received a simple answer.

Gu Yi confessed: "It's my greatest fortune to stumble upon you two. How would I ever know you? But keep in mind, though I give permission, you still need to conquer the Yang family."

"Hmph, when I have the strength to overthrow the Qin family, do I need to care about them?" Ling Qingyu folded her arms and retorted with arrogance.

Gu Yi smiled and didn't mind Ling Qingyu's manner. She knew this girl was pretending. Of course, her words contained some truth.

Nonetheless, both were aware that it was in their best interest to have the Yang family's good side if Ling Qingyu desired to attack the Qin family.

The two changed the topic and discussed the investment in chip production of 7 nm. Ling Qingyu implicitly delved into the fact that she had more advanced technology but didn't wish to give it away.

For her decision, Gu Yi understood. After all, chip manufacturing offered lucrative wealth and power. Every powerful party sought to fight for the cake.

Even with her status along with the Yang family's help, Gu Yi wasn't confident she could withstand surrounding strikes.

The top family of the capital and ministerial positions couldn't stop or deter the coming greed. Hardcore wasn't in Ling Qingyu's and Gu Yi's interest; compromise was necessary.

Sometimes, Ling Qingyu had ideas about moving overseas and developing her industry outside of official control, regarding strict and important technologies.

Unlike others who needed funding to continue development, Ling Qingyu could venture singlehandedly. She had money and could find talents.

Resources were easy to handle if she cooperated with weaker nations, utilizing her advantages because the latter were keen on attracting foreign investment like hers.

Not to mention, weaker nations might have uncovered mineral mines and available resources to fit her demands.

For instance, if she were to develop similar chip technologies, the difficulties faced would be minimal despite potential backlash in international diplomacy.

Actually, the real reason Ling Qingyu developed chip technology was to lift Country C's technological level. She wanted to return something to the country.

Her passion dissipated when it was not reciprocated. Anyway, why must she stick around if she could achieve one elsewhere, if not for her loved one willing to reside here?

Comforting herself by paying a small price for a bigger gain in the future, Ling Qingyu didn't mind her substantial loss in wealth. When her own cake was divided so much for no reason and without proper effort, Ling Qingyu wasn't wrong to resent a little.

As an experienced elder and political master, Gu Yi saw through Ling Qingyu's state. She wasn't one of those hypocrites who always preached about patriotism.

People could sacrifice for a greater good, but why must they be morally kidnapped, especially in the name of national interest, while dark hands manipulated to gain self-benefits?

Fortunately, Ling Qingyu wasn't disheartened too much by the possible losses. Gu Yi had no face to request her soon-to-be daughter-in-law to unveil her possession.

In contrast to Yang Qingyue, Ling Qingyu had no patriotic values. Strangely, this was the first time Gu Yi sensed an oddness.

At least, people had patriotism to some extent, even if the level was too low. Otherwise, they were likely to betray because of benefits. The latter referred to the opposite spectrum.

However, Gu Yi had never seen a person like Ling Qingyu, who simply paid no heed. Ling Qingyu's type was impossible for betrayal or contribution to national security.

Ling Qingyu tended to concentrate on a bigger value than being stuck on one nation—humanism.

How would Gu Yi understand Ling Qingyu's capability? Since Athena appeared, Ling Qingyu already realized she was never destined to be limited to a single nation.

Any technologies from the secret labs would erupt an ultra-earthquake, including the small innovations that Tang Ziyi and Athena tweaked.

When she sought more professionals, it was only a matter of time before futuristic products and technologies belonged to her.

She could help as much as she wanted, but she would never lift the nation to the height that Country C overwhelmed the entire world.

With strength came ambition, and consequently, a war for supremacy and subjugation of other countries could happen.

Hence, Ling Qingyu would never break the original fragile balance when unnecessary. Not to mention, her ambition meant a different future.

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Gu Yi liked to unearth Ling Qingyu's inner channel. Her curiosity thrived, but everyone had secrets, and it was impolite to inquire directly.

Honestly, Ling Qingyu valued self-interest above all. There was no doubt. Her actions and plans proved everything.

As for the hidden technologies of Ling Qingyu, Gu Yi had no face to ask further.

Possibly, when she secured the chair, Ling Qingyu would have contributed more because the gains were much higher by then.

Well, there was no need to worry more, Gu Yi's lip curled up and expressed warmth.