

Beautiful 621

Chapter 621 5 Cs

Ling Qingyu reclined gracefully in a shaded courtyard, a tray of tea steaming softly on the low table between her and Gu Yi. Both women seemed at ease on the cushioned recliners, though the tranquil setting belied the depth of their conversation.

Gu Yi sipped her tea slowly, her sharp eyes appraising Ling Qingyu over the rim of her cup. "You seem more composed than I expected, Qingyu. Given recent events, many would be rattled, and more is likely to erupt very soon."

Ling Qingyu's lips curved into a faint smile, her gaze drifting momentarily to the rustling leaves of the trees that enclosed them. "Composure, Mother, is often the deciding factor in battles of both words and weapons."

Gu Yi chuckled, setting her cup down with deliberate care. The maids outside of hearing range were watching the duo's activity. Once both of them were about to empty their cups, they were ready to refill them—the moment they received Ling Qingyu's signal, of course.

"To be honest, you're really young, in my opinion, to have reached the current status quo," said Gu Yi. "Throughout my experience, unless one truly walks their own path, solely belonging to them and no one else, it's hard to climb higher. Of course, I'm not talking about nepotism here—I mean a systematic ascension."

"So, in my eyes, your potential is higher than mine. A pity you aren't interested in politics." Gu Yi shook her head. "I can already see you've built a strong framework for yourself. You just need more materials to finish the remaining construction."

Gu Yi briefly explained her philosophical framework and shared a few examples from her past. None of them were confidential, but they shed rare light in Ling Qingyu's eyes.

When Gu Yi tilted her head and glanced at Ling Qingyu from the corner of her eye, Ling Qingyu understood.

Ling Qingyu let out a light laugh, her eyes glinting with a dangerous, knowing look. "Mother, you flatter me. There's no great secret, just a framework I live by. I call it the Five Cs. It's the cornerstone of everything I've built and prepared for the future."

The Minister's eyebrow arched. "Five Cs?"

"Yes," Ling Qingyu nodded, sitting upright as she leaned closer, her expression turning serious. "It's about mastering five key elements to build and maintain power. Let me explain."

She lifted her index finger. "Capital," she started. "First and foremost. The foundation. Money isn't just power—it's flexibility. It gives you options, resources, and the ability to execute plans without waiting for anyone's approval."

Gu Yi nodded slowly. "A given, but not the whole picture. Without resources, you're nothing, even if you are talented."

Ling Qingyu smirked. "Naturally. The second C is Connections. Relationships built over time, through trust, favors, and sometimes mutual fear. You can't buy certain doors open, but you can have people open them for you. When you have friends in high places, you hold more sway than any bribe can buy."

The Minister leaned back, intrigued. "So far, it's a politician's playbook, but it's interesting to see you've already learned the important factors at your age."

Ling Qingyu's gaze hardened slightly, her smile fading as she raised her third finger. "Cohort. This isn't just a loyal team; it's an armed wing. People who are not just willing but ready to fight for you. From protecting assets to executing operations on the ground, they're your first line of offense and defense. Maybe they can be the daggers in the dark to eliminate difficult enemies. Security is a must. Even if you have soft power, without hard power supplementing it, you are merely a fish on the board of others."

Gu Yi's eyes flickered with something akin to understanding—and perhaps approval. "A necessity in times of chaos," she mused.

"Not to mention, in apocalyptic times like in those movies, when the order collapses, why wealthy people are targeted. If a loyal armed wing helps you, how can you suffer?" Ling Qingyu curled her lips. "Forget about those rich elites portrayed as villains deserving crowd punishment. They minimize the good ones who are robbed because of their lack of strength. I don't think even the person who donated the most would escape from human greed."

"It appears you take serious moral lessons from movies and books," Gu Yi raised a brow and joked. "Will it be applicable to reality?"

"Movies are just manifestations of another reality. Some might be extreme and abnormal, but the fundamentals are there. Those who pay attention will gain a lot about humanity," Ling Qingyu retorted with seriousness, trying to hide her cough from being embarrassed by her mother-in-law.

After all, no matter the arguments, drawing conclusions from animations and movies—particularly the genre—didn't portray her appropriate aura.

"Alright, you don't need to say more. I totally agree with your idea. It's just, how can you be sure your armed wing will be loyal to you in an apocalyptic period?"

"That'll be up to your imagination, Mother." Ling Qingyu shrugged. Gu Yi didn't ask more. She knew Ling Qingyu had the answer, but it seemed like a secret.

In fact, loyalty and companionship reigned above everything else. If you treat others well, it's highly unlikely to receive mistreatment or unreciprocated gifts—except from a few lunatics and inhumane personnel.

For those who didn't deserve your conscience, separate your life from them. Both understood the simple morality, but Ling Qingyu had more to say—it wasn't without benefits that she had an extra previous life to compensate for her weaknesses and strengths.

Ling Qingyu continued without missing a beat, lifting her ring finger. "Creativity. This is where many fail. Innovation is not just about new products or services. It's about tactics, strategies, staying ahead of the curve. If you rely only on what worked in the past, you will be blindsided by the future. I ensure we're always innovating, whether in tech or strategy. Many groups and companies die when they lack creativity and stay in their comfort zones.

"Money is important, but fearing profit loss for the sake of newer developments, the company will not be far away from death. Sooner or later, it's outcast by the competitors or swallowed. The moment you lose your edge, the countdown begins."

"That's a debate going on everywhere. Seniors should give way to juniors because when we age, problems are everywhere." The Minister of Justice's smile was thin but genuine. "I can see why you've managed to stay ahead of your competitors and can already envision your success if you stay true to your core. And the last?"

"Actually, in my instance, I'm preparing to build my own research lab. Using other's products will make money but you'll never live up to your potential. That's why in my plan, I want my own industries and individual research labs to cater to examples like electronics, heavy, agriculture, food, pharmaceutical and who knows—university. A thorough virtuous circle is my vision."

"Damn," Gu Yi cursed regardless of her image. "I thought you're speaking about social science but I never expect you literally meant creating something from research."

Ling Qingyu raised her thumb, her smile returning with a touch of steel behind it. "Control," she said simply. "Influence over the narrative. Public perception is like clay—it needs to be molded. If you don't control the story, someone else will. It's about having command over the media, the discourse, and, most importantly, the public's opinion. When you have control, even the truth becomes a weapon in your hands."

Gu Yi chuckled, her eyes narrowing in amusement. "You're more dangerous than I gave you credit for, Qingyu."

Ling Qingyu smiled back, her voice dropping to a softer, almost conspiratorial tone. "Mother, you of all people should know. It's not about being dangerous—it's about being prepared. If you want to thrive, especially in the world we navigate, mastering these Five Cs is non-negotiable." Gu Yi paused, considering her words carefully. "You speak as if you're preparing for something much bigger than what you're already facing."

Ling Qingyu's expression didn't waver. "I'm always preparing. The moment you stop, you start losing ground. And I never intend to lose."

For a brief moment, the two women shared a silent understanding. It wasn't just business or politics for them—it was survival, power, and the game they had been playing their whole lives. Plus, a dream and vision.

Gu Yi remained silent, her expression unreadable as she processed Ling Qingyu's framework. Finally, she spoke. "You've codified survival into an art form. These principles are more than clever—they're ruthless."

Ling Qingyu inclined her head. "Ruthlessness is not my goal, but precision is. In a world like ours, leaving anything to chance invites chaos."

A faint smile touched Gu Yi's lips. "You remind me of myself, Qingyu. Perhaps too much." Her gaze softened slightly. "But tell me, do you ever wonder if this path, so calculated, leaves room for something more... human?"

Ling Qingyu met her mother-in-law's gaze, her voice gentler but no less resolute. "I balance my humanity with my ambition, Mother. That's why I choose my battles carefully. Some fights are worth the cost; others, I avoid altogether."

Gu Yi leaned back, her appraisal of Ling Qingyu complete—for now. "You've grown sharper than I imagined, and more dangerous. My daughter chose well and is lucky."

Ling Qingyu chuckled softly. "I'll take that as a compliment but I think I'm luckier. Shall we drink to understanding, then?"

Gu Yi nodded, lifting her cup in a subtle toast. "To understanding. And to knowing when to act—and when to wait."

Repeating Ling Qingyu's 5Cs.

Capital.

Connection.

Cohort.

Creativity.

Control. Though Ling Qingyu grouped them with the starting letter C to be easily memorable, Gu Yi had seen the essence, feeling a similar woman who resembled herself, sticking to the business world.

She had a weird contradictory premonition that Ling Qingyu despite acting nonchalant and uninvolved or disinterested in politics, was very ambitious and greedy for power and control.

If this girl wasn't interested in politics or officialdom, where did her eyes gaze. Although Ling Qingyu seemed idealistic, she balanced everything.

In fact, from the conversation, Ling Qingyu had constructed her own art of war. No one always following others will surpass anyone.

Her daughter-in-law had transcended. She must not fall behind as well. As a senior, Gu Yi began to consider her possible actions against Qin family, even if Ling Qingyu cited she needed no help.

In spite of clarifying her position as Yang family in the capital, she had her own teams and faction, though not comparable with the behemoths.

She wasn't frightened of them but her hands were too tied once she rode Yang family's chariot. Fortunately, some means were possible and acceptable for Yang family.

After all, four families indeed shared one another but they were only friendly on the surface. Once weakness appeared, these families were the most merciless.

Chapter 622 I was wronged!

Gu Yi left afterward. Ling Qingyu continued to sit deep in thought, her eyes lingering on the charming, fresh scenery.

Her mother-in-law and Yang Qingyue would be very busy soon after Ling Qingyu returned with a full package of hostages.

Gu Yi and Yang Qingyue chided behind the scenes at the unscrupulous bastard who left the mess and was now taking a rest.

Although their inner thoughts were filled with complaints, they were grateful for Ling Qingyu's contribution, even if she brought along extra burdens across the border.

The matter was too big to be made public. Yang Qingyue and Gu Yi controlled public opinion.

Their responses to the media had already been planned to be vague, preparing for a full explanation later and protecting the victims' identities.

No matter how much positive moral values were spread among the public, scum still existed, particularly those with a victim-blaming mindset.

There was no need to look far—a scenario frequently discussed by the public always sparked fierce debate:

A woman, flaunting her wealth and beauty, walking alone at night, was attacked. Who was at fault?

The politically and morally correct answer would be that the attacker was at fault for their greed and desires, as the woman did nothing wrong.

However, blame on the victim still persisted, backed by so-called 'logical' reasoning: Why was the woman alone at night? Or a man—it didn't matter.

Only when both hands clapped would an action produce a sound, right? This tendency to blame the victim was always present.

The ironic thing was that serial killers wouldn't care about their target once chosen. They would find several ways to create advantageous situations to support their actions.

Instead of debating and pointing fingers, why not discuss how to address the issue? Don't shut down arguments by simply stating to avoid going out at night!

Ling Qingyu might not have cared in her past life, but in this one, where she had the ability, she scorned such rhetoric and implemented her solutions straightforwardly.

The answer was simple: the bystander effect and good people doing nothing. The world only needed a moment to descend into disaster when people stopped doing good deeds and became utterly selfish.

For the topics above, Ling Qingyu began to think: why not do something? Stop blaming and act.

People should avoid roaming around at night—everyone agreed.

Nonetheless, regardless of the statistical, psychological, or normative evidence proving avoidance was the correct approach, the public should also provide solutions to thoroughly address predatory actions, enabling people to wander safely at night.

Humanity had progressed from nothing toward a safer civilization over time. Why stop researching when something could be done?

Address the root cause and reform instead of implementing partial measures.

Perhaps this was a problem with humans themselves: pointing fingers was easier than helping others.

These matters floated around Ling Qingyu's mind as her eyes lost focus. Why? Was it selfishness or cowardice?

People tended to escape rather than face problems directly. If the issues didn't concern them, nobody cared.

Ling Qingyu never sought to morally coerce others. Everyone had their own rights and responsibilities.

But humanity had survived to this day by going beyond those boundaries and restrictions.

The moment society became stagnant and stopped moving forward, civilization was not far from death. Humanity would perish by its own hand.

If anyone heard her mindset and blamed her, Ling Qingyu would fight back.

They could accuse others of moral coercion, but they could never point fingers at her.

She had performed righteous and effective actions to address public issues. She had progressed further and attempted to cure the plagues afflicting Province N and beyond, as far as her strength allowed.

For her ambition and goal of spreading light, she had done far more than was required.

No one could curse her, but she could swear at anyone.

Her impulse even prompted her to participate in so-called debates online, started by influencers and celebrities.

Ling Qingyu withdrew her sudden urge and chuckled. Why would these bastards invite her, and how could she stoop so low to engage in their themes?

Her every action must be careful in the future, especially in the public arena. She had responsibilities toward her family and subordinates.

Perhaps these shows might even get canceled by the public if she got involved.

After all, so-called influencers and celebrities targeted specific groups to enrich their wallets.

Their outspoken opinions and missions rarely aligned with their true selves. Most of the time, they created various shows to appeal to their audience on purpose.

Although a few might retain their original intention to address public problems, over time, when faced with interests and capital, people often fell.

Heated topics that sparked fiery contradictions were more likely to have hidden agendas behind the scenes. Popularity soared, and money flowed in.

Instead of selling products, they sold ideas, satisfying the audience's vanity and exploiting their need for affirmation and praise.

In this world, it was difficult to remain sane enough to distinguish genuine intentions and not be swayed by the crowd.

In this life, Ling Qingyu was aware of such tools and was frightened by the rarity of truly genuine characters.

Her thoughts had drifted far—from victim-blaming mindsets to online marketing tools. Sure enough, it must have been Miss System's fault.

Someone must be manipulating her. How could she, an arrogant and selfish brat, suddenly seek to reform society for public welfare?

She must have been led astray. Yes, her original goal was to become a powerhouse, not a saint. Miss System's influence was terrifying!

Miss System: ???

A certain existence, hidden behind the scenes and listening to Ling Qingyu's inner thoughts, darkened her expression, her eyelids twitching.

Miss System had just been about to smile in relief, watching her host grow and transform. Why, all of a sudden, was Ling Qingyu blaming her?

Fine! Miss System cast a cold gaze over Ling Qingyu and confiscated the original awesome gift she had planned for the sign-in reward, one that would have made Ling Qingyu drool hard.

People must be abused! she snorted. Treated well, they take things for granted.

Miss System floated off to another universe to sulk.

Ling Qingyu shuddered as she glanced around. Did she hear someone huffing nearby? She couldn't be imagining things.

Her maids returned her gaze with inquiring expressions after noticing her behavior. Ling Qingyu shook her head and lay back on the recliner.

Well, the recent battle might have drained her energy and caused hallucinations. If nobody snorted, then only Miss System's voice could be ringing in her ears and mind...

Hmm... wait!

Ling Qingyu straightened and slapped her cheeks rapidly, albeit softly, calling out inwardly in a begging tone: "Sis System, where are you? Did you just make a sound?"

...

The signal loss tone alarmed Ling Qingyu, making her gulp and call out multiple times in worry. Her inner complaints couldn't have driven away the multiverse godmother, right?

Although she had the confidence to navigate the future without the system, she didn't want to lose her first friend. Of course, with Miss System's help, she could excel further and aim higher.

The tsundere System might not speak kindly, but she treated her genuinely. There might be other hidden plans and costs involved, but who cared?

Until now, Ling Qingyu had always enjoyed a safe haven. Her current status and relationships began with Miss System. Without her help, Ling Qingyu wasn't sure if she could have resisted Lin Fan's aura and fallen prey.

Who knew whether her clear thoughts could be succinctly manipulated by the world? These children of destiny lacked common sense.

'Great, benevolent, and cute System, I beg for your forgiveness.' Ling Qingyu groveled shamelessly without worrying about appearances.

Nobody could hear her inner call, so she could do whatever she wanted. Honestly, she was curious to investigate the System's identity but suppressed her urge.

From their interactions, she already realized Miss System wasn't machine-like, no matter how much the latter pretended.

Someday, she believed she would gain her trust and learn the truth. For now, Ling Qingyu soothed Miss System repeatedly.

Perhaps her zealous actions received genuine reciprocity, or her repeated calling annoyed the System. It didn't matter; her heart returned to its original position once Miss System responded.

She didn't want to deceive herself, but she truly panicked at Miss System's avoidance. It seemed she was more attached than she initially thought.

It turned out Miss System had long become family to her, rather than just a tool to upgrade herself. Fortunately, she repaired their relationship.

In truth, Miss System merely wanted to teach her a small lesson and never expected Ling Qingyu to react so strongly.

When Miss System peeked at Ling Qingyu's frequency, she sensed a rare warmth and a tingle of joy spreading through her.

[What's up with you again? Don't disturb me.]

Ling Qingyu didn't want to, but the earlier snort had scared her. "Can I know what you're doing at the moment? Did I cause any dissatisfaction?"

'You ask when you already know!' Thinking of Ling Qingyu's earlier suspicion, Miss System felt wronged and got angry.

"Ah—it was just a complaint. I didn't really mean it. You know me inside out," Ling Qingyu blinked and played cute.

[Next month's reward is canceled! Any objections?]

Of course, there were objections, but Ling Qingyu pouted and accepted. Who made her complain about the boss within earshot?

Anyway, Miss System had never treated her unfairly. She wasn't a masochist, but Miss System's punishments somehow brought her joy.

So, Ling Qingyu bowed her head and groveled again. "Thank you for your mercy, Sis System. Your benevolence is unmatched."

Miss System decided to ignore the flatterer, but noticing Ling Qingyu wasn't learning her lesson, she increased the punishment. "A month is too light. Let's go for half a year."

'I was wronged!' Ling Qingyu blurted out instantly.

Chapter 623 Another week

"You can go back now. I'll notify you once I make a decision." Ling Qingyu put down the files on the table and smiled at the man who stood up. "Oh, please don't forget to reimburse your benefits at the reception."

"Yes, Ma'am. Then, I'll leave now." The man bowed and turned to walk out of the room. "Thank you."

"Thank you for your time and effort." Ling Qingyu offered her final remarks before sighing in relief as the door closed.

She rubbed her forehead and rotated the office chair as she gazed through the one-way glass, visible only from inside.

Ling Qingyu wasn't satisfied with the interviewees. Somehow, they always fell short of her expectations, but life was like that. Nobody was perfect.

She wanted an all-rounder and preferred a capable person with higher moral standards, which explained her pickiness.

The candidates were undeniably skilled and met the requirements, but she knew they didn't suit her or match her ideal.

It might not seem like much, but problems arose once deeper cooperation on detailed projects began, which often hit predicaments.

Such moments tested both parties. Although she, as the employer, could act domineeringly, she preferred not to unless necessary.

The previous man was already the eighth interviewee. One more remained. The final interview required her personal approval alone.

These men and women had already gone through several stages and passed them brilliantly to arrive before her.

Honestly, the candidates were competent, and she didn't want to let them go. However, higher positions required more than just technical merits.

Perhaps her delaying tactics might have disappointed them. After all, when Ling Qingyu informed them that the decision would be made later, they likely understood the result was unfavorable.

Of course, there were rare instances where things turned around, but those were low-probability cases.

She had decided that if the final candidate didn't satisfy her, she would serve as a temporary head and hire the others to retain them and put their talents to use.

Ling Qingyu had further goals and needed skilled individuals. With her Spirit Group's various industries, there was no way a position couldn't be reserved for them. After all, gold shines anywhere.

The issue was that the selected candidate was meant to be posted as chief executive for a new project in cooperation with the government.

If the person didn't align with her type, how could she trust and fully utilize them, no matter how strong they were?

It had been a week since Ling Qingyu ventured across the border on a rescue operation. To raise the security level in Province N and help her wife, Yang Qingyue, Ling Qingyu announced her donation.

Since the entire police force of Province N would soon fall under Yang Qingyue's command, she didn't hold back.

Spirit Electronics gifted a significant package to equip the entire province with CCTV cameras and drones. Athena had already researched schematic structures to ensure no loopholes in coverage.

The network spanned from urban to rural areas, even where CCTV use seemed inefficient.

It didn't matter as long as full public space coverage was achieved. Meanwhile, drones patrolled and complemented areas the CCTV cameras couldn't reach.

They also served as a first-line deterrent with flashing red and blue lights and non-lethal equipment onboard to detain suspects until officers arrived.

Athena's new innovations were applied to the equipment, allowing officers, alerted by the AI monitoring system, to communicate with victims and criminals via intercom before reinforcements arrived.

The new AI system had been upgraded further from what Ling Qingyu previously provided to Yang Qingyue's City N station.

The package also included one HongQi patrol sedan for each police station, from villages and townships to districts. City stations received an additional vehicle.

With Gu Yi's presence, Ling Qingyu directly negotiated with the governor on Yang Qingyue's behalf. Everyone knew that once the network was fully established, public safety would rise to unimaginable levels.

As for those nitpicking over privacy concerns, Ling Qingyu had no comment. Public spaces, by definition, lacked privacy.

Furthermore, the benefits outweighed any perceived disadvantages. She knew her actions might offend some, but with Gu Yi's intervention, she pushed forward, seizing the rare opportunity.

Perhaps her mother-in-law had sold a favor to the governor, persuading him to support Ling Qingyu's decisions. To Ling Qingyu, the process had been surprisingly smooth.

The announcement was well-received by the public but angered parties with vested interests. Gangs weren't the only issue; some influential families became an eyesore.

The governor's forceful push removed any obstacles. Ling Qingyu's actions put these vested interests in an uncomfortable position.

To avoid moral scrutiny or public backlash, they had to replicate her donation efforts, begrudgingly making concessions. They didn't want to donate much but couldn't afford to donate little either.

Caught in an awkward zone, they gritted their teeth at Ling Qingyu, who sneered at their reaction.

Ling Qingyu's expenditures were enormous, shocking both Yang Qingyue and her mother, who were unable to dissuade her.

Nobody realized that such expenses didn't faze Ling Qingyu. She didn't even glance at her true wealth, leaving Athena to handle the mess because the numbers always made her dizzy.

This initiative, particularly the autonomous drones and CCTV system, prompted a new project to build a network for province-wide monitoring and future equipment maintenance.

Her donation only covered the initial costs. Maintenance and repairs would generate revenue for her through service contracts with the government.

In essence, the government would pay her for future services, allowing her to offset the initial expenses within a few years.

Moreover, her actions encouraged the governor to award additional contracts, including orders for HongQi vehicles to improve the police fleet and upgrade fire department trucks.

All in all, she spent lavishly but secured significant wealth in return. The sales didn't end with product delivery; spare parts and ongoing services were her true sources of income.

Ling Qingyu understood the governor's motivation. A generous donor like her deserved recognition, and reciprocating her kindness also benefited the government's image.

With her public alignment to Yang Qingyue's faction and Gu Yi's support, Ling Qingyu solidified her influence while achieving her goals.

The governor wasn't an idiot. He hadn't gained his current position for nothing. Rewards were necessary to encourage people.

Of course, Ling Qingyu didn't care much about his gestures, but it felt better to hear that the governor now had her back.

She knew this governor wouldn't be clean. In fact, she had wanted to cleanse him, but since she had received a favor, it would be unkind to repay it with grievance when neither side held a grudge.

These matters were beyond her control and desire. And since she had obtained so many benefits, she didn't bother to care as long as the old man refrained from committing any further atrocious acts.

As for what lay ahead in the future, that depended on her discretion. This old man should consider retirement rather than climbing higher up the ladder, given Ling Qingyu's low opinion of him.

Anyway, Ling Qingyu had been busy for an entire week since the announcement. The project would undoubtedly take more than two months to complete.

Materials belonged to her own group but she needed a large teams to setup all the necessary facilities and additional after-service.

Fortunately, even without a manager's existence, Athena could help her with recruiting low level staff and manage them.

She could afford to wait longer till she met someone coinciding her expectations. She decided to give another week to see whether there would be applicable candidates.

The drones and CCTV systems were supplied by Athena's Spirit Electronics Co., Ltd. These products were easily manufactured, thanks to the factories Ling Qingyu had acquired during her battles of wit with opponents in recent months.

For materials that weren't readily available and needed to be outsourced, Athena streamlined the process using nano-printing.

This cheat-like device bridged any gaps, allowing Ling Qingyu to prepare thoroughly. Without it, she would have suffered considerably in business battles.

Although it didn't cost her much, any potential loss would still sting her heart.

For a capitalist, losing a fortune over a lost cause was the most contemptible outcome.

As she expanded her industries, she recalled her two saviors and felt a desire to recruit them.

The two were honest and hardworking, and from her perspective, employing them on purpose wouldn't be difficult.

However, both of them rejected her generous offer, which puzzled Ling Qingyu to the point that she doubted her own charisma.

After some time, she came to understand that the two felt overwhelmed and didn't want to owe anyone.

Although they had rescued her from danger, they believed that Ling Qingyu had already done enough by resolving their immediate threats and financial crises.

If Ling Qingyu did more, it might have been counterproductive. Moreover, they didn't want to rely on someone else's gratitude for their own advantage.

Ling Qingyu smiled and respected their refusal. She admired their choice and quietly planned to help them covertly, easing their paths in the future.

Chapter 624 The role of older generation

Another reason the two men rejected Ling Qingyu's help was that the residential areas where their families lived had improved tremendously.

Since Yang Qingyue's power had expanded and she had cleansed the "dirty worms" among law enforcement, better management had allowed numerous areas to thrive.

Specifically, Operation Skyclear had caused several heads to roll and brought in fresh blood. Although Yang Qingyue couldn't directly affect governance, her presence instilled fear and deterred anyone who might have wanted to sink into the abyss.

Officials didn't need to be exceptionally talented unless in emergencies. They simply needed to manage without inviting trouble and avoid corruption.

The amusing thing was that as long as officials refrained from corruption, more than half of the problems causing headaches could be solved.

Additionally, Yang Qingyue brought higher security to the areas under her control. Province N had long been plagued by crime and gangs.

Although petty crimes still occurred where her control was premature, people felt safer than ever before.

The two men had clearly noticed the changes. Hopes and the feeling of being alive assured them that the economy and development would soon return.

Even the slum areas where Spirit Fox waged their first battle to rescue Yang Qingyue's teams had transformed and started regaining vitality.

Speaking of Spirit Fox, the first generation's initial battle had seemed outstanding, but every operator almost winced whenever they rewatched their combat footage.

The once-ordinary special forces had since grown into a Tier One unit, or at least something comparable, after continuous training and the realistic environments provided by Ling Qingyu.

Not to mention, their combat experience had increased significantly.

Technically, they could be classified as Tier Two because most members were only assaulters.

Unlike real special forces, whose operators had diverse specialties ranging from undercover operations to covert infiltrations, Spirit Fox's skills revealed numerous areas for improvement.

Of course, in terms of close-quarters and long-range combat, if they claimed second place, no one could dare to claim first.

At least in Province N, Spirit Fox's reputation greatly facilitated Yang Qingyue's role as the sole commander in the public eye.

In fact, like Gu Yi, other high-ranking officials with access to intelligence channels had realized that Spirit Fox resembled a mercenary group exercising the rights of law enforcement and paramilitary strength.

It wasn't the first time private entities had served as public servants. For instance, black-ops by governments and intelligence agencies often staged scenes to suit their interests.

Every faction had its own private "army" to meet its needs, hidden from public view. Most officials turned a blind eye to such gray-area operations, as long as the actions weren't outrageous.

On the other hand, Yang Qingyue's black-ops leaned toward the good side. Spirit Fox attracted greedy eyes, but when Gu Yi declared her sovereignty, many unwilling eyes turned away.

A few interests persisted, particularly among individuals with positions comparable to Gu Yi, such as national ministers and influential families.

The most troublesome obstacle she had to handle was the Yang family's interference.

Gu Yi was no longer the soft-hearted person who had to compromise for the sake of family interests. She had solidified her own power and no longer obeyed the Yang family's arrangements like a puppet.

The so-called "old haggards" hurled curses at her:

"Ungrateful bastard! Using our resources and refusing to help us. Where do you put our faces?"

"Despicable bitch! Do you think you could have achieved your position without us? I want to see who in the capital dares to rely on you when they discover your deeds."

Gu Yi received several phone calls beginning with such insults. From then on, she blacklisted them and let her life brighten.

As for their words, Gu Yi ignored the swearing and sneered instead. If others in the capital knew her deeds, so what?

She understood how greedy the Yang family members were. They wouldn't dare cut ties with her because she brought too much to the table.

She was never worried about outsiders' opinions in the first place. If she were, she wouldn't have become a national minister.

Thus, the Yang family's threats didn't bother her in the slightest.

Morally, she knew she had repaid them more than a hundredfold for what she had gained, using the Yang family's background as a springboard.

She didn't owe them anything. Instead, if a pragmatic calculation were made, they owed her.

Compared to the benefits both parties had brought, she had suffered greatly. However, while she wasn't naive enough to consider the Yang family a warm haven, it would be a lie to say she wasn't disappointed by their attitudes.

What did they see her as? A slave or a tool?

Fortunately, Yang Qingyue had made the right decision to work outside their control and in a dangerous region.

Otherwise, her daughter would never have escaped their influence or had the opportunity to meet Ling Qingyu.

These thoughts, she never shared with Ling Qingyu or her daughter. It was the responsibility of an elder to shield some of the pressures from her juniors.

A week passed, and Gu Yi departed from Province N amidst Yang Qingyue's reluctant eyes and Ling Qingyu's "pity."

In reality, the latter almost hopped with joy at the thought of no longer having interruptions between the two's affairs.

During the week, Gu Yi paved the way for Yang Qingyue's smooth political journey, removing difficult opponents and streamlining the process.

Despite her words about teaching her daughter, she would never allow threats to linger around Yang Qingyue.

Though her daughter could handle them brilliantly, what was the purpose of a mother if she couldn't help her child?

Yang Qingyue had learned lessons and gained experience. That was enough—she didn't need further burdens.

The older generation worked hard for one purpose: the younger generation's well-being.

Gu Yi didn't want her child to become dependent on her, so she allowed her to gain experience.

However, that didn't mean Yang Qingyue should endure the same struggles Gu Yi had faced.

With the governor's cooperation, Gu Yi managed everything and set a path for Yang Qingyue. It was up to her whether to follow Gu Yi's steps or forge her own path.

No matter Yang Qingyue's decision, she had Gu Yi's unwavering support—and Ling Qingyu's as well.

Gu Yi was relieved to see her daughter thriving, particularly since Ling Qingyu shared many similarities with her, despite the younger woman's interest in business rather than politics.

Nonetheless, the two fields intertwined and influenced one another. Ling Qingyu would eventually enter the arena, one way or another.

Gu Yi brushed away her worries with peace of mind. Even if Yang Qingyue made mistakes, Ling Qingyu would back her up.

The two truly formed a power couple.

As for reports from subordinates about Ling Qingyu's closeness to other girls, Gu Yi trusted Yang Qingyue to handle it well.

Compared to heterosexual couples, if both kept their status discreet, people wouldn't care much even if scandals existed.

Yes, Gu Yi suspected Ling Qingyu's unstable character. She had pieced together several pieces of evidence and come to a conclusion.

This girl had zero experience apart from her daughter, yet her ambition was not small.

Recalling the other talented girls associated with Ling Qingyu, Gu Yi smiled and didn't think much of it.

If a team were formed in this manner, neither she nor Yang Qingyue would be at a loss.

Emotionally, if Yang Qingyue rejected it, that would be another matter.

In addition, Ling Qingyu's generous move to allow the hostages rescued from across the border to reside temporarily at the Imperial Resort for free brought a smile to Gu Yi's face.

Others in Province N replicated Ling Qingyu's move to gain public approval. However, Ling Qingyu's reputation soared the most when her identity as the mysterious owner of the Imperial Resort was revealed.

Her daughter-in-law had made a perfect maneuver, facilitating the current situation.

At the same time, many envied the victims' good luck—provided they hadn't endured hell beforehand.

Indeed, all of Country C shook when news about the scamming industry and the rescue stories spread. Gu Yi personally stood on the stage and solicited her firm stance, reaping her reputation in the process, which could become useful in her future plans.

Without the successful rescue tale, the entire cabinet would have been in jeopardy, losing the public's trust, if an unprepared announcement was made.

Questions arose: If this crime had thrived for so long, why hadn't the government taken action sooner?

Those aware of the stakes understood why the government had been reluctant to act in the past. Nevertheless, Gu Yi couldn't express so vividly and offended everyone.

Now that Gu Yi had pushed forward and succeeded, the credit-grabbing began. Numerous stories emerged to justify the government's inaction and clear public doubts.

Slicing the cakes out of her hand, Gu Yi endured and silently promised herself to let these vampires spit out willingly. Ling Qingyu understood her mother-in-law's mood but both needed time.

...

Ling Qingyu's thoughts wandered until her temporary assistant asked through the office phone, "Lady Ling, would you like to continue the interview? If you're not feeling well..."

Since the assistant hadn't received further instructions, she sought clarification.

Ling Qingyu tidied her hair and took a deep breath. "That won't be necessary. It's the final one, right? Let her enter."

"Yes, ma'am."

Another interview occupied Ling Qingyu's time. Unfortunately, she was destined to be disappointed again.

The candidates were capable but didn't quite fit. Were her requirements too strict?

Perhaps she should let them work under her for now and see who adapted to her needs? Or influence them slowly until they fit her expectations.

Chapter 625 Corrupted yet beneficial deal

In the end, Ling Qingyu picked out five candidates—three women and two men. The rest were not considered due to their lack of moral standards.

Being overly interest-driven wasn't her ideal choice. Though it might seem more profitable to overlook moral values, she would never risk her group's growth by relying solely on capital preferences.

A true foundation and a strongly rooted association grew from bonded, like-minded builders.

Not to mention, she highly doubted their loyalty. She was convinced that if she handed over her budding group to these unscrupulous managers, her empire would collapse from a loss of reputation and weakening bonds.

Their behavior could breed negativity and create an unhealthy culture, destroying the hard-earned corporate values she had built to cater to her employees' psychology and needs.

After choosing her candidates, Ling Qingyu contemplated their roles and prepared accordingly to suit their skills.

She had numerous industries in her plans that were yet to materialize due to a lack of connections and manpower.

For now, she wasn't in a rush to set up several companies simultaneously. There was still time before her mother-in-law would participate as a presidential candidate.

Rushing wasn't necessarily a bad idea to ready herself as Gu Yi's ally, but taking one step at a time didn't hurt either.

Besides, she could observe the candidates more deeply before entrusting them with significant responsibilities. She never intended to overburden herself by working to exhaustion.

The most she vowed to work was when she grew bored of a leisurely life. After all, what was the use of wealth if it drained her energy and left her exhausted?

There was no need to hasten her decisions, even if a journey of a thousand miles began with a single step.

So be it; these five candidates were reserved for positions in the next chip industry, pharmaceutical industry, and heavy industry. Her head hurt just thinking about the future prospects.

Fortunately, Athena accompanied her, easing many complicated tasks. She dared not imagine how she would manage a vast empire in the future without her dependable "daughter."

She had many friends, but few matched her ambition. While loyalty and capability were undeniable blessings, they were insufficient for what she envisioned.

Her confidantes currently around were enough to serve as an overseer for each industry but nobody could accomplish anything alone.

Athena facilitated everything, allowing a small number of people to control a larger network—an achievement impossible through conventional means or human understanding.

This included complex checks and balances that eased Ling Qingyu's worries. Athena had already revolutionized Ling Qingyu's day-to-day operations. By automating tedious processes and identifying potential risks, the AI allowed Ling Qingyu to focus on high-level strategy. Recently, Athena had even flagged an internal issue—an employee subtly leaking data to a competitor. Without Athena's intervention, the leak could have gone unnoticed until it became catastrophic. These small victories reassured Ling Qingyu that her choice to rely on advanced technology wasn't just wise—it was indispensable.

After all, she knew that an organization's downfall often began with internal contradictions and corruption.

When she owned only a single fashion and beauty company, she could manage and supervise personally to ensure everything ran smoothly.

However, now the stage kept rising like a surging storm without signs of decline or pause. The momentum showed an unstoppable trend.

In other words, she was biting off more than she could chew. Her rapid expansion needed solidification to prevent potential future troubles.

Without Athena, continuing at this pace would lead to inevitable failure. Luckily, the goddess of fortune seemed to favor her.

Ring! Ring!

A phone call interrupted Ling Qingyu's thoughts. She reached for the device and glanced at the screen.

The call was from her mother-in-law, bringing joy to Ling Qingyu's face. She remembered the promise Gu Yi made once Spirit Fox accomplished its mission.

Not only was the operation beautifully completed, but it also exceeded the requirements and stunned Gu Yi's expectations.

Gu Yi had even offered an additional favor, but Ling Qingyu declined, considering their close relationship.

Taking a step back was, in truth, a significant step forward. Gu Yi understood this and didn't mind, as her gesture of goodwill could only be fulfilled once she assumed a higher position.

Nonetheless, Gu Yi had promised Ling Qingyu a gift, and a week had passed.

Gu Yi had been busy with upcoming affairs and hadn't had the time to appease her daughter-in-law.

Ling Qingyu understood her difficulty and didn't mind much. Now that Gu Yi was calling, Ling Qingyu was genuinely happy.

A private air base in Province N, with permission to order Y-20 aircraft and other military vehicles. Ling Qingyu had no idea how Gu Yi obtained such confidential materials.

Though the offer was appealing, Ling Qingyu's anticipation waned after Athena and Tang Ziyi showcased Virgin helicopters.

Given enough time, the duo's products could surpass the world's technology in a short span. If more talented researchers joined them, Ling Qingyu dared not speculate on the advancements.

She even wondered if she might feel outdated one day.

Too rapid an improvement wasn't ideal for humanity, especially if moral values didn't advance alongside technological achievements.

Real life wasn't a movie where benefits from lightning-fast advancements came without consequences.

In fact, a seed of destruction was often planted, waiting to grow until civilization collapsed. In her previous life, two countries—China and Japan—had proven this.

China showed signs of instability, with officials busy patching holes in the economy, population, and culture.

There were warning signals, but with appropriate solutions and a gradual timeline for solidification, positive outcomes were achievable.

Japan, on the other hand, attempted to leap from the Meiji Era into modernization but neglected moral development, allowing barbaric tendencies from its past to resurface.

In the end, the country destroyed itself, offending every circle and nearly leading its population to extinction.

In today's timeline, extremism and terrorism had become global crises. Without thorough studies and appropriate solutions, more trouble awaited in the wheel of history.

Who knew whether extremists, equipped with advanced technologies, might bring greater dangers to the world?

Without further ado, Ling Qingyu answered the call:

"Hello, Minister Gu, it's been a while."

Ling Qingyu didn't address her too familiarly, unsure if Gu Yi was calling for a private or official matter.

"Hey, why so cold? Did you forget me when I wasn't needed?" came the pretentious, blaming tone.

Ling Qingyu smiled with ease and teased, "Oh, mother-in-law, isn't it my deep consideration to keep matters discreet? I don't want to trouble you or give your opponents any leverage."

"Thank you, my dear Qingyu. I never expected you to be so thoughtful. Compared to my quarrelsome daughter, you two are like heaven and earth."

Gu Yi coughed and became serious. She was satisfied with Ling Qingyu's behavior.

"Well, I'm envious too. This is the rarest way to express warmth and love," Ling Qingyu complimented her wife, ignoring Gu Yi's scolding.

She knew better than to meddle in family disputes, understanding that intervening could make her the common enemy if things reconciled.

"Alright, let's get serious. Remember our deal?"

"Of course, mother."

"Well, here's the good news. There's a spacious plot of land near your residence. Not too close, but still convenient. I've discussed it with the governor, and he's approved it. A private airfield is acceptable as long as you comply with aviation regulations and allow flight control monitoring."

"That's really good news," Ling Qingyu said, nodding. "But..."

"Yeah, but... The airfield is fine. It's just a matter of the Y-20 aircraft."

"You mean I can't buy it?" Ling Qingyu asked, slightly disappointed but unsurprised.

"No, you can, depending on how you view it," Gu Yi said, pausing. "My friend, General Tang, is allowing a limited quota for purchasing these planes. However, they'll be second-hand, not brand new. We cannot afford to deplete our air force without timely replenishment."

"That's alright. I suppose they're more reliable than shiny new ones," Ling Qingyu laughed, meaning every word.

"I thought you'd protest," Gu Yi admitted, surprised. "After all, the price you're paying could buy two or three more aircraft. You know what's going on behind the scenes."

Ling Qingyu sighed, understanding. Corruption and exploitation. The former was obvious; the latter suggested the military was leveraging the situation for additional funding to expand its fleet.

In simple terms, one aircraft in exchange for two or more—a deal few would refuse.

Gu Yi's negotiation wasn't without obstacles. As a prominent figure, she faced resistance from factions opposing her reforms. Convincing the governor to approve the airfield had required not only political finesse but also leveraging key alliances.

Without recent reputation gained from a successful rescue mission decided by her albeit privately, Gu Yi wouldn't be able to influence the governor.

Meanwhile, the Y-20 deal involved a delicate balance between Ling Qingyu needs and military priorities. General Tang had faced pushback from colleagues who feared diminishing their fleet's strength, but Gu Yi's persuasive arguments eventually swayed him.

When benefits was surely promised and merely required a sacrifice of time, nobody was a fool. Not to mention, their pockets were rewarded subtly.

However, Ling Qingyu felt there was another catch from General Tang. She got a feeling that her Spirit Fox were attracting her.

Chapter 626 Gu Yi's recommendation

"There's a catch," said Gu Yi.

"As expected, what does our General Tang demand?" Ling Qingyu muttered.

"Why are you speaking like it's the end of the world?" Gu Yi joked.

"You have to protect me, Mother. I'm being targeted by a pervert."

"Haha."

The two bantered in a humorous manner. What Gu Yi shared didn't bring any surprises—Ling Qingyu had anticipated a similar outcome.

It was obvious that the wolf members accompanying the mission had another task: to monitor her girls.

General Tang envied her girls' expertise and experience. Though Country C conducted regular crackdowns on narcotics and small terror cells, if Spirit Fox's experience level were used as a benchmark, none of the special units could surpass them.

After all, the girls had accomplished barricaded hostage rescues, cross-border hostage rescues, dismantling of armed gang cells, and a few open-field battles in addition to close-quarters ones.

In fact, special police units lacked funding compared to the military in terms of training and equipment, though their capabilities weren't low.

It was the restraints imposed on them that created difficulties in fighting criminals in dangerous battles.

For instance, the military didn't suffer from the same restrictions and could act freely. Without their hands tied, their strength overshadowed the police.

Of course, a level difference mustn't be overlooked, but the combat disparity shouldn't feel like night and day if everything were equalized—even if the military strictly selected special forces members.

With the same training levels, equipment, and rules, the difference between police and military wouldn't be significant.

This was why Spirit Fox's expertise piqued General Tang's intense curiosity. She even wanted to pry open Ling Qingyu's head.

If Ling Qingyu hadn't been a close confidante of Gu Yi, like herself, General Tang would have robbed everything like a bandit.

Even then, Ling Qingyu suspected General Tang had never given up on prying into her affairs.

Sure enough, Gu Yi's words confirmed her guess:

"Qingyu, General Tang wants to cooperate with you and set up a new base in Province N. Your airbase suits her needs. She wants to incorporate Spirit Fox into her newly founded Special Operations Command under the Southern Theater."

Ling Qingyu: "..."

Gu Yi: "Qingyu, are you listening? Hello?"

"I am, Mother. I'm just too dumbfounded to speak." Ling Qingyu took a deep breath. "You must seek justice for me, Mom. This is too much!"

Ling Qingyu didn't care about the Y-20 aircraft anymore. It was a pity, but if a foreign party intervened in her group, especially her precious cohort, she would never accept the deal, no matter how tempting it seemed.

"Okay, I knew your reaction would be like this, and I've already told her so," Gu Yi laughed.

"Of course, outrageous demands are doomed to fail. What does she expect? Hmph!" Ling Qingyu snorted.

"So, she suggested a deeper cooperation. You'll earn a lot too."

"Not at the cost of infringing on my power," Ling Qingyu scoffed.

"Of course. As an elder, how could I hurt you?" Gu Yi soothed and carefully explained the cooperation.

"I hope so," said Ling Qingyu with a smile as she listened to the proposed deal.

In fact, Gu Yi had tried hard to cater to Ling Qingyu's favor. The cooperation sounded domineering if she didn't listen carefully.

What General Tang wanted was Spirit Fox's involvement in missions when requested. The decision, however, would remain in Ling Qingyu's hands.

The Wolf Special Forces under Tang's command would cooperate with Spirit Fox in future missions, while Spirit Fox operators would gain unofficial military identities.

The girls would resemble a certain unofficial unit in Country A, not even registered but under JSOC—Joint Special Operations Command.

Ling Qingyu complained: "I feel like my girls are getting further away from what I intended. Do you want them to be like a certain CAG with the call sign Delta?"

"It would be a waste of their talents," Gu Yi replied, brushing off Ling Qingyu's protest.

That wasn't talent—it was her money, Ling Qingyu thought. Although her girls were capable, without her wealth and Tang Ziyi's leadership, the current scenario would have been impossible.

The infamous Delta Force seemed official but was never part of any military. The unit was so secretive that no one except their commanders knew their identities.

Unlike the flaunting SEALs, Delta rarely made headlines, but their involvement was devastating to their enemies.

From Gu Yi's tone, it seemed General Tang wanted to expand her control and influence in the special operations community. Not that Ling Qingyu cared either way—she only wanted to secure her benefits.

Furthermore, the base would be stationed near Ling Qingyu's airport. Both parties would jointly manage the airfield and share intelligence.

The recent operation had displayed Spirit Fox's remarkable intel. It was clear that General Tang felt hungry for more.

Ling Qingyu speculated maliciously that the military was doing this on purpose to monitor and study her troops from another angle. At the same time, they intended to exploit these advantages and subtly control Spirit Fox's rhythm.

Should she agree or not? Perhaps Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue could play a greater role here and see things she couldn't at the moment.

Ling Qingyu decided to remain calm. "I don't think this is a good idea. All my secrets are being watched."

"It's politics, dear," Gu Yi comforted. "General Tang has gained a lot because of your help, and I can vouch for her. Cooperating with her won't make you lose. When you venture into military enterprises, her words will carry a lot of weight."

Ling Qingyu nodded at Gu Yi's persuasion. Both sides didn't speak explicitly. Some matters were better discussed in person.

It was true that Spirit Fox's successive rescues alongside the Wolf members had indirectly increased General Tang's reputation and power.

Perhaps it even opened the path for further promotion, removing the word "Lieutenant" from her rank—a four-star general.

Making friends with someone of such stature brought huge benefits despite the dangers posed by General Tang's opponents. Besides, it wasn't good to refuse Gu Yi's personal invitation.

Maybe noticing Ling Qingyu's discomfort, her mother-in-law added:

"Of course, although I said this is the deal between us, it depends on your choice. General Tang has already given permission to deliver the aircraft to you anyway. She just wants a deeper connection and to take a step further after hearing my praise for you. I also agree with her."

"That'll be an honor, but I'd like to discuss it with my friends before confirming a few matters."

"That's natural. Once you've decided, just contact me," replied Gu Yi. "Oh, General Tang sends her regards to Tang Ziyi and invites your friend to meet her again."

Damn, Ling Qingyu cursed inwardly. This general even wanted to pry away Tang Ziyi. Her subordinates were about to be robbed!

Of course, Ling Qingyu was exaggerating. She understood how much her support benefited her girls. There was no other party in the world that could match hers.

"Mother, believe me, I am truly grateful for your help. I just can't make immediate decisions on some matters, especially those related to Spirit Fox," Ling Qingyu tried to sound tactful.

"I understand, my dear. No worries. I believe that little girl Tang Ziyi will agree. You can bet on it."

"If everything fails, I hope the airfield will still belong to me."

"Of course, my reward still stands even if you reject General Tang's offer. Come on, dear. You have no strings attached—it's just mutual benefit. You know how our circle works. Besides, don't you trust me?"

"I trust you," Ling Qingyu quickly answered. "It's just that my base would no longer hold only girls. You know even male mosquitoes are forbidden in my residence."

"Why are you so insistent on preferring females? You don't have some particular male phobia, do you? Now that you mention it, I've noticed this about you."

"You also know my sexual orientation. As a wealthy person, can't I enjoy my own eye candy? I don't want to ruin my happiness."

"As long as you're happy." Gu Yi was obviously speechless.

The call ended with Ling Qingyu's ambiguity. Gu Yi didn't mind Ling Qingyu's style—she would have behaved the same.

Though the benefits outweighed the risks, anyone would feel conflicted when privacy and freedom were in jeopardy. Still, Gu Yi knew Ling Qingyu would likely agree.

However, Gu Yi guessed there might be another catch from Ling Qingyu. The art of negotiation between the two parties was destined to connect once Gu Yi served as a middleman.

Ling Qingyu felt a headache the more she contemplated and weighed everything. It seemed like she gained everything except the ability to cooperate freely on her own terms.

Nonetheless, favors were the hardest to repay, especially those from high-ranking generals. Of course, the returns must be substantial.

Once she agreed, however, outsiders would undoubtedly mark her as part of General Tang's faction, tied to the military Southern Theater.

Should she request additional identities beyond Spirit Fox when cooperating with the army?

The idea wasn't bad—confidential, separate identities for different occasions.

Chapter 627 Surprise!

The next few days, after Ling Qingyu told Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue, the discussion spread to Su Ruomei and Jiang Yu.

The latter two showed complicated expressions upon hearing the news. They thought they had completely separated from their corrupt military past.

The honor and creed they upheld and were proud of seemed almost laughable when faced with injustice.

The only gains from the army were their discipline and powerful will—two important traits hard to find in normal civilian life.

Ling Qingyu and the others, who understood their inner turmoil, offered a few words of comfort.

Anyway, Xiao Yue suggested cooperating on the surface but not too deeply, like Yang Qingyue.

Tang Ziyi and Ling Qingyu agreed. They had no idea what General Tang was like, even if they trusted Gu Yi.

At the same time, with Gu Yi's recommendation, it was hard for them to refuse outright. She was right to say they could avoid many detours and reach their goal faster.

Shaking hands with General Tang wouldn't cost much. Tang Ziyi joked about whether Ling Qingyu believed in her own subordinates.

She and Xiao Yue affirmed their loyalty. Given Ling Qingyu's unparalleled treatment, betrayal was impossible.

They swore that no one had the slightest thought of leaving. Plus, Athena was always watching to monitor any mishaps.

With their guarantees, Ling Qingyu waved her hand and no longer concerned herself with the matter. She delegated the decision to Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue.

They weren't wrong to say she was being too sensitive. But who could blame her? Anyone who felt someone prying into their domain—especially their military force—would react the same.

Meanwhile, Su Ruomei and Jiang Yu rejected the possibility of reconnecting with the military, as Ling Qingyu had suggested.

After all, for someone at a lieutenant level like Su Ruomei, meeting and befriending General Tang was what every soldier dreamed of.

However, they cited their happy lives with the other Spirit Fox sisters as their reason and expressed their desire to cut off any ties that brought back nightmares and despair.

They immersed themselves in managing Spirit Fox as usual, reporting to Yang Qingyue regularly.

Ling Qingyu shook her head and wondered if the idea of mercenaries was possible given the girls' mindsets.

However, she sighed in relief, remembering that the purpose of founding Spirit Fox wasn't to serve as mercenaries for money. Rather, it was about building strength to protect herself and her interests.

No matter how the name changed, these girls were her bodyguards—personal ones. An army closest to her and her confidantes.

If she ever desired a big army, she'd have to tread carefully. Sending her girls to a battlefield distressed her deeply.

Despite Tang Ziyi's unparalleled protection, Ling Qingyu would rather not have to rely on them. They were her precious treasures.

If not for Tang Ziyi's insistence, Spirit Fox wouldn't have formed so quickly to help Yang Qingyue.

Still, Ling Qingyu understood her selfishness and was content to see her girls finding happiness.

Sure, a few may have entered the job for money at first, but the warm community had already captured their hearts.

Not to mention, there was little to no danger in the workplace. Where else could they enjoy such hidden benefits?

Moreover, most of the girls came from military or police backgrounds. The job was a perfect adaptation for them, setting aside the salary and perks.

Cross-border missions seemed dangerous, but not for Spirit Fox, given Ling Qingyu's immense mobile storage capabilities.

However, the wars took a mental toll on Ling Qingyu, making her worry about her girls' well-being.

Her past experiences across borders reminded her of so much unpleasantness. She thought she could handle it, given her history and her love for combat.

It turned out war indeed brought adrenaline and excitement but at the cost of countless tragedies and ugliness.

Fortunately, Spirit Fox's past missions targeted truly vile individuals. This reminded her of the importance of maintaining her team's psychological well-being.

She had spoken with Tang Ziyi about addressing potential future threats. Ling Qingyu had no intention of fighting for profit unless self-protection required it.

She wouldn't upend the table unless absolutely necessary. Following the rules and playing by the book still had its advantages.

The mercenary group she envisioned would belong solely to her, with only girls as members.

Her "harem" members were hers alone. External protection services would only be offered if she could recruit a significant number of foreign fighters, which she deemed highly unlikely.

...

Now that Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue agreed to meet and discuss with Gu Yi's confidantes, Ling Qingyu put the matter out of her mind.

However, as the two departed, they robbed her of the gift she hadn't even laid her hands on yet.

Yes, that was correct—Ling Qingyu had received a reward from Miss System: an A380 passenger aircraft, complete with proficient flight crews and pilots.

All of them could be rated five stars for both appearance and professionalism. When Ling Qingyu reviewed their profiles, she was delighted.

Moreover, they were all women. Miss System truly understood her best.

If others knew her thoughts, countless complaints about her supposed misandry would arise.

Even Miss System was helpless against Ling Qingyu's preferences. Of course, Miss System could have teased her host by providing male flight attendants, but that would undermine Ling Qingyu's motivation.

Who knew what chaos might ensue if Ling Qingyu lost all her drive, jeopardizing the future she had carefully built?

In fact, Ling Qingyu was certain she'd vomit blood if that happened. Who in their right mind with "correct" sexual orientation would look at men?

She could lose anything but not this, as it meant everything for her sense of independence.

Because of her new female subordinates, Ling Qingyu lost interest in the engineering marvel she had just received.

Even an upgraded version produced by Miss System barely piqued her curiosity.

These A380 staff members had innocent backgrounds, carefully chosen by Miss System. The addition of womanpower suggested that more of her villas would soon be occupied, even if these women stayed in her residence only temporarily.

As for concerns about the pilots' expertise, Ling Qingyu merely scoffed. In terms of capability, she was far better trained and more experienced than those oldies about to retire.

Miss System had thoroughly abused her during the skill upload. In an emergency, she could take over without the slightest pressure.

She also trusted Miss System's judgment. No unqualified personnel would ever enter the aircraft.

Ling Qingyu was furious that, before she had the chance to visit her private jet upon its arrival, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue commandeered it and flew away.

Helpless and frustrated, Ling Qingyu directed her emotions toward her business opponents and reinforced numerous plans.

Ling Qingyu's rivals: Excuse me?!

In the days that followed, opposing companies found themselves in disarray, plagued by numerous messes and bad news tarnishing their reputations.

Many searched for the reasons and culprits, while upper management struggled with headaches trying to figure out who they had offended.

Province N's business circles were thrown into turmoil for a while, lasting two weeks. The culprit remained blissfully unaware and unconcerned after a soothing session with her love.

When it came to challenging Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue, Ling Qingyu refrained from uttering a single word. She had won against the latter and could "abuse" her, but the former would protect the latter.

Not long after, the air brightened significantly in the following days. Ling Qingyu almost forgot that Miss System had gifted her two rewards.

In addition to the private jet, a private island complete with a hospital was now ready. In fact, it should be considered more of a medical city.

She had no idea why, but unlike the Imperial Resort, which she received as a reward instantly, both rewards had taken a while to arrive.

Additionally, Miss System must have encountered some unexpected positive developments, as she overdelivered beyond what Ling Qingyu deserved.

The nearest small chains of islands around had been linked together and were now owned by Ling Qingyu.

While the land area for the previous medical city had been rented out for some years, the current ownership was completely under her name.

As for how on earth Miss System had managed the difficult procedure, Ling Qingyu remained noncommittal.

Miss System was omnipotent. She might usually work in the background, but when she acted, the results were completely unexpected.

Anyway, Ling Qingyu was over the moon about now owning the medical island and the surrounding ones.

The combined area she controlled was vast and uninhabited. How in the world had a certain country surrendered its autonomy and sold them without the slightest resentment?

Wait—she should investigate whether the population there held negative opinions about her acquisition.

Damn it, this System moved so fast and brilliantly, yet she had to handle everything herself. Oh, her suffering.

Her complaints were merely an outlet, but Ling Qingyu genuinely believed she had gained more than enough benefits to justify the hassle.

Offending public sentiment might be harder to address, but it wasn't as if no solution existed.

After all, the population had yet to be thoroughly convinced. It seemed she would need to make a trip there very soon.

Chapter 628 Another month

Owing to so many affairs piling up, Ling Qingyu struggled to organize despite Athena's input. Naturally, it could have been resolved quickly, but Ling Qingyu did so deliberately to enhance her own skills.

A month passed swiftly. The day to leave Country C for Country A was approaching faster than ever. She had promised Doctor Mo to accompany her when she departed the country for higher education.

In truth, Ling Qingyu couldn't fathom what Mo Yunxi was studying. She was already a specialized doctor. Did she want to expand her field of expertise? Perhaps Mo Yunxi had persuaded Nurse Yin to join her journey; the head nurse had begun to carefully consider her future.

Her younger brother and sister in the capital were now free and safe—her hard work had paid off. The other issues involving troublesome individuals were resolved effortlessly by Gu Yi at Ling Qingyu's request a few months ago.

Now that her mother-in-law had met Nurse Yin last month, she was happy to help. It hadn't cost her much effort. Of course, the real reason Nurse Yin felt relieved enough to pursue further studies was her another sister, who was interning at Ling Qingyu's company.

Previously, her sister couldn't earn much and she had been the family's last line of defense. When Ling Qingyu promoted the younger sister to a secure and higher position based on her merits, the young woman began earning enough to support the family, just like her elder sister.

What angered Ling Qingyu the most was that Tang Ziyi still hadn't returned after meeting General Tang. She and Xiao Yue had disappeared for a whole month with no explanation other than a perfunctory notification that they would need some time to deal with an important matter—after taking a few million yuan from her pocket.

Who knew that "some time" would mean a month? The discussions with General Tang had revealed benefits and responsibilities she could accept. Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue had negotiated well, and perhaps Gu Yi's influence had ensured that General Tang didn't demand much, apart from literal assistance during emergencies.

Intelligence sharing wasn't an issue. Even though Ling Qingyu hardly had operatives working for her, Athena filled the gap. The powerful intelligence and data-gathering capabilities Athena provided were like godlike talents or an elite organization in the eyes of outsiders who were subtly aware of Ling Qingyu's network.

In fact, data compilation and analysis to draw conclusions was an incredibly powerful tool, often overlooked due to the absurd amount of time it took humans to complete. In her past world, the hunt for Osama Bin Laden had relied heavily on this method.

In movies and public perception, intelligence was believed to have been obtained through torture and advanced interrogation techniques. The CIA had deliberately spread this narrative to deflect attention. In reality, the breakthrough came through data collection and repeated iterations of analysis.

Athena could cut this time down exponentially within a minuscule minute, consuming only energy while producing estimations far more accurate than those crafted by human agents during the Bin Laden hunt.

Viewed in this light, Athena's existence was invaluable to Ling Qingyu's goals. No helper, past or future, could surpass her daughter.

Xiao Yue and Tang Ziyi had spent significant time after meeting General Tang, likely experiencing some adventurous encounters. The two tyrants had yet to request assistance, but Ling Qingyu suspected they were up to something. Damn it—would news of chaos erupt in Province T soon?

Fortunately, she didn't need to worry too much with Athena always ready to assist. Perhaps her daughter already knew the details, but Ling Qingyu wouldn't ask. Knowing too much would make life boring. A little surprise wouldn't hurt.

She also believed in respecting the boundaries of others, especially her friends and close confidants. Of course, these two were potential lovers as well. Giving them space wouldn't harm anything—rashly intervening might create unnecessary problems and disrupt their plans.

Just as she wanted others to trust her, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue deserved the same trust. Indeed, everyone appreciated being trusted. That was the hallmark of strong leadership.

A true leader wouldn't betray such a fundamental principle. Ling Qingyu wasn't a fool. Despite her control issues and preference for having everything under her command, she had learned to slowly let go.

Yet, later, Ling Qingyu would regret her decision. The two troublemakers wreaked more havoc than they had in Province N. She should have intervened earlier; it would have saved her from selling favors to contain the crisis. But that was a story for another day.

Meanwhile, the flight crew accompanying Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue were stationed in Province T, waiting for them. To ensure their safety and comfort, Ling Qingyu instructed Athena to protect them by any means and allocated the Imperial Resort for their stay. After all, the crew members were all women.

Ling Qingyu detested hearing news of flight attendants or pilots being assaulted and making headlines. She was highly protective of her people.

If Province T had been within her control, she would have sent Spirit Fox operators to guard them. Luckily, owning the Imperial Resort saved her thousands of yuan, though the amount was insignificant to her, and the resort provided additional services to help those girls.

The Imperial Resort carried prestige and hidden influence, ensuring smooth journeys and safety for the crew. Yet, amusingly, the crew had already enjoyed a month of free time before even meeting their employer.

Naturally, Ling Qingyu wouldn't recall them without reason. Their duty was to bring Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue back to Province N. If any uncontrollable events endangered their lives, Athena would have acted already.

...

During this month, a series of events spread among the ranks of Spirit Fox operators, delving them into deeper thoughts and reflections.

Three notable ones affected them drastically. The last one had the opposite effect, yet it still ranked as major news among the girls.

The first event was Spirit Fox's ongoing operations to crack down on gangs throughout Province N, assisting Yang Qingyue's campaign to eliminate any chance of organized crime making a return.

This particular event took place on the outskirts, bordering another province, where Spirit Fox arrested a small gang leader. He was considered minor yet influential in his area, though, compared to the criminal lords Spirit Fox usually dealt with, it was a relatively insignificant matter.

However, the man had his peculiarities, making the incident unforgettable for Spirit Fox, especially for those on the mission.

When the Spirit Fox team arrived and arrested him after painstaking efforts to locate him, the gang leader was caught mercilessly beating a powerless man.

Despite Athena's support, the team struggled to act swiftly because very few electronic components were available in the vicinity. Even the gang leader's phone, found after data extrapolation, was turned off and essentially useless. Still, Athena made some educated guesses about his location, leading to a successful arrest.

"Stop! Or we will shoot!"

"Stay away from the man."

At first glance, it appeared as though a ruthless criminal was torturing a helpless victim. The man lay on the ground, coughing up blood intermittently. Although his face was turned away from the Spirit Fox operators, the girls could already envision the brutality inflicted on him by the gang leader.

In the presence of the menacing, well-equipped, medieval-knight-like operators, the gang leader sneered and laughed, collapsing onto the ground.

To others, the Spirit Fox operators appeared monstrous, exuding strong killing intent from their very figures. From head to toe, they were completely covered, even their eyes—the window to the soul—shielded by ballistic visors under their helmets.

Other members of the gang were present, some injured and others lying silently on the ground. While most of them trembled under the imposing presence of Spirit Fox, the gang leader merely shrugged and sighed regretfully, glancing at his victim as if lamenting he hadn't done enough damage.

The Spirit Fox team leader narrowed her eyes, wondering if a turf war had broken out here—or if something deeper was at play. Everyone present bore injuries to some extent, and a few required urgent medical attention.

For the Spirit Fox operators, however, no emotions surfaced. Criminals didn't deserve care or mercy in their eyes. The fact that Spirit Fox announced their presence instead of opening fire immediately was a gift in itself.

After dealing with countless gangsters and organizations, each more despicable than the last, the team leader gestured and called out, "Arrest 'em."

"Roger."

Operating as a cohesive unit and likely itching for an excuse to use force, the operators zip-tied everyone on the ground.

The team leader and her battle buddy approached the gang leader with their muzzles trained on him. The gang leader was slightly surprised to see these operators fearlessly closing in on him.

Did they trust their weapons and teamwork that much? After all, his imposing stature had always scared people on first impression. It was unavoidable—his tall, massive frame instilled psychological fear in most.

Yet, the two operators seemed unfazed by his size. They paused momentarily, taken aback by his wrestling-champion-like physique, but only for a fraction of a second.

To them, size didn't matter apart from instinctive reaction of caution. Their ridiculous amount of training and devilish suffering under Instructor Tang's hands had toughened them up.

Plus, every operator now practiced the secret sutra, solidifying the bone density and muscle as the operators improved. They might not seem bulky but they were far stronger than them in terms of capability and body functions such as physiques, endurance, agility, stamina and strength.

Super soldiers against wrestlers...Come on, even baby knew the answer. Removing the super already deemed the same result.

Chapter 629 First case

"It's Spirit Fox. Damn it, we're doomed."

"Gosh, why are we being targeted by these devils?"

"I heard that Spirit Fox kills gangs without batting an eye."

Murmurs of despair spread as the Spirit Fox operators cuffed them.

"Shut your mouth, or I'll stuff your socks in it," one girl scolded, silencing the crowd.

No one wanted to eat their own dirty socks and ruin their taste buds. They weren't naive enough to think Spirit Fox was about justice, strictly abiding by laws and regulations. This was Spirit Fox—not ordinary police officers they could dare to swear at or curse, dragging their ancestors into the insults.

A group of men continued to communicate through glances, exchanging pity and consolation.

The girls rolled their eyes and cursed at the gossipers. While they were delighted to see enemies fear their name, the level of infamy had elevated them to being likened to Satan.

Okay, they killed a little too much, but they never tortured anyone.

Victims who suffered: "..."

Corpses buried 12 feet deep: ???

Alright, maybe they overdid it sometimes, but their targets were always trashbags who deserved it. They never hurt the innocent. Besides, if a mistake was ever made, the blame would fall on their liaison officer, Athena, who provided faulty intelligence.

Athena: "..."

"Hey, the police always show up when everything's already over. We catch criminals, and you guys just rob the credit," the gang leader spat.

"You speak as if you're some kind of good guy. Don't you have any idea what you've done in the past?" The team leader interrupted her subordinates' outrage and rebutted. "Now that you're arrested, I won't waste my time reading your rights to you. Someone else will."

With that, she radioed the nearest police station to take over the case. Yang Qingyue's rise up the ranks also meant that Spirit Fox's authority had increased significantly.

They were now a provincial special police task force, solely commanded by the new commissioner. In fact, this arrest could have been handled by city-level SWAT units, but Spirit Fox had taken over to assist.

With Athena's monitoring, Spirit Fox was naturally the first to locate the suspect. Of course, she also requested medical assistance for the wounded. The girls had first-aid kits but didn't bother to use them.

Come on—if there were innocent civilians injured, they wouldn't hesitate, but gang members? Please. Their greatest mercy was refraining from rubbing salt in their wounds.

The usual SOP would be puff-puff from their muzzles to end everything. Dust to dust. Ashes blown away.

"I never said I'm a good guy. I've never regarded myself as clean since I chose this road," the man spoke with complicated emotions in his eyes.

"Oh, so you're trying to tell me you're a bad boy? A very naughty bad boy?" the team leader replied, raising an eyebrow.

The gang leader choked and rolled his eyes like a frustrated woman. The mood he had worked hard to create vanished in an instant. The other girls giggled and teased, "Bad boy!"

"Ahem," the team leader interrupted the female perverts before Spirit Fox's image went down the drain.

She knew her girls were only kidding. If they were teasing because they liked these men, she predicted her boss would explode.

"I might be a criminal with serious offenses—cruel and deserving punishment—but I could never stoop to this bastard's level, no matter how hard I try, because I still have a conscience." The gang leader began to confess.

"Oh? What did he do to earn such a comment from you?" The team leader was intrigued.

"Yes, even comparing him to an animal would insult nature," the gang leader continued. "He's a serial killer."

All the Spirit Fox operators turned their heads toward the unconscious man, whose expression was filled with mockery, as if laughing at the failure of the men who had ganged up on him.

"There's a pattern. Every man is killed after four female victims are murdered. I don't know why or how—don't ask me—but I know it's him. There are already three, and I'm the next one."

"Wait, that means there are already 12 dead women. Fifteen victims," the team leader realized, her face darkening. In fact, all her teammates looked grim as they listened to the story. "But do you expect us to believe whatever you say?"

They wouldn't trust a stranger's story so easily, but the gang leader had no apparent reason to lie and sounded sincere.

"It doesn't matter. Everyone living in our area knows about the serial murders. The police are helpless. Without us, do you think anyone could ever catch him?"

"So, you encountered him, resisted, and discovered his identity?" the team leader asked.

"Yes, something like that." The man shook his head and sighed. "At first, I didn't care when he first attacked me. I managed to injure and stab him back. That was the only clue he left behind. In everything else, he's an expert at counter-forensic techniques."

"You didn't care about being stabbed?"

"In our line of work, what's a little life-and-death fight? I didn't think much of it, but he held a grudge." The man paused, gritting his teeth. "I showed some kindness to a pair of mother and daughter on the road. This bastard murdered them in cold blood. His target was me. Just because he couldn't attack me directly, he took it out on them."

"Then, the current scene follows." Each operator quickly analyzed and pieced together the story.

A certain gang leader, enraged, had avenged the victims who were implicated because of him.

Quite a drama, in their opinion, but possible. After all, who knew what went on inside a psychopath's mind?

They weren't naive enough to try to think from his perspective unnecessarily and attract unwarranted psychological troubles.

"Yes," the man agreed. "Shouldn't your police know about this case with such a large number of deaths?"

"Our departments are different. Our focus isn't monologues. Plus, our goal is you," one of the operators answered coldly. "We point our swords toward organized crimes—gangs, terrorists, and other dangerous criminals, especially like you."

"Alright, I get you. Who in Province N doesn't know that Spirit Fox is the nemesis of organized syndicate groups? It's just that I didn't expect the crackdown to be so fast and to stretch so widely across the entire network of our province." The man sighed. "Anyway, this bastard needs my testimony to end up in jail. Even then, I'm not sure how he can be linked to other crimes in court.

"I've seen enough bad deeds—killing, stabbing, ruining families—but there were always reasons. Not this lunatic. He's a pure evil breed," the man lashed out, his subordinates muttering in agreement. "He murders and tortures people for his own enjoyment."

"You talk as if you've never killed anyone. Trafficking people, smuggling drugs, running prostitution dens, loan sharking—do I need to list it all out?" Someone from Spirit Fox interrupted, completely blowing away the rare aura of justice momentarily surrounding the gang leader.

The gang leader sighed, helpless against this group of female hyenas. Why didn't they just listen from start to finish? His attempt at sparking sympathy had gone completely to waste.

In fact, the operator who interrupted noticed the shift in emotion among the Spirit Fox team and remedied the situation. Perhaps the man was telling the truth, but there was no need for the girls to get overly involved.

"I swear, what I'm confessing is the truth. I know I'm about to get arrested, but let me act like a human being once before I go to jail," the man said. "Please, lady, I don't know how you see gangs, but there are different categories. In our career, we only kill those who deserve death. No innocent or unrelated people are involved—let heaven judge my words."

Rumble. Rumble.

A soft thunder reverberated above. The man wilted and greeted the sky silently. Even nature wasn't cooperating. Everyone around wanted to laugh but managed to control themselves.

"Ahem. Like I said, we never trafficked people. That's the lowest thing a person could do." The man remembered something and paused. Damn, he had nearly confessed to everything.

Confessing guilt in court or during interrogation wasn't the same as carelessly leaking secrets here. He quickly adjusted himself and changed his tone.

"When there's demand, there will always be supply. You can try to solve the problem of the seller, but another will take their place. Drugs, prostitution, and loan sharking operate like that. There will inevitably be deaths during turf wars. When we walk this path, we're prepared to die. Actions have consequences, and you have to take responsibility for your decisions. We are not clean, but at least we have a clear conscience. I can proudly say our gang has its own rules."

"Just like the old days?" the team leader asked.

"Just like the old days."

"I hope you're telling the truth. If you lie to us, you'll suffer and regret it," the girl warned, approaching and whispering chilly words close to his ear. "So much so that you'll feel remorse even for breathing. You don't know us."

"I have no fear. I'm sure you'll remember me deeply and sympathize a little. Who wants to be a gang member if there's a better path?" The man shook his head, unfazed by Spirit Fox's implicit threat. "What worries me is that this guy will walk free without any punishment because of a lack of evidence—or that he'll merely get a slap on the wrist, then walk out later to commit another spree of murders. More families will be broken."

"How are you so sure that he's a serial killer?"

"He threatened me on the phone. Of course, he used a disguise and an untraceable cell card. Nothing surprising with his skills—and you should know his family background."

The Spirit Fox team leader's expression turned complicated because she knew the man was telling the truth. She had already searched through the data network about the suspected man's identity.

In all likelihood, she believed 90 percent of his words. A trace of killing intent flashed across her eyes.

The gang leader noticed this, his eyes narrowing in surprise. Although the murderous aura wasn't directed at him, it caught him off guard. He had thought Spirit Fox's deeds were just exaggerated rumors spread by their opponents whose interests had been harmed. It seemed there was some truth to those stories after all.

Chapter 630 First case II

Spirit Fox shouldn't have a license to kill, right? The gang leader had seen those television series and novels where secret national organizations wielded immense power, acting without approval.

His guess was somewhat confirmed when another figure placed a hand on the team leader's shoulder and advised in a comforting tone, "Don't change your mind. We need him alive for the other victims and their families. They deserve to know."

"I can break this bastard and make him spill everything."

"It won't work, my dear. People with sociopathic tendencies take pleasure in seeing others suffer and feel satisfaction when they attract attention. The more force you use on him, the happier he'll be."

"Damn it. This lunatic might actually walk free if he cooperates, confesses to his past crimes, helps unearth the bodies, and gets a light sentence," the team leader replied in a complex tone. "Provided the gangsters we captured testify in court."

"By then, isn't that better? Accidents happen all the time in the world. Besides, wouldn't this man stay in jail as well? Two birds, one stone—lock them up together. I'm sure he'd gladly vent his hatred." Her deputy patted her shoulder and left.

The gang leader pretended to tremble and asked, "I won't be silenced just for hearing some secrets, right?"

Nobody answered, and he didn't mind, continuing his monologue. "Yes, as your friend says, I can accompany this bastard. My men and I can go together. Please grant our request."

"I can't make that decision. I'll have to contact my superior," the team leader replied, not outright rejecting him. "However, do you want to form your own gang inside the prison?"

"Hey, who doesn't have one? There are many in Province N."

"Technically, the new gangs entering prison after we dealt with them are crushed. The remnants couldn't form the slightest power. Not to mention, the new prison reforms won't allow faction formation."

"But rules are dead, and people are alive. I'm sure you'll find a way." The man stared at the team leader's calm and mesmerizing eyes and shook his head at his crooked thoughts. "In fact, you're no different from us. We're the same."

"We are never the same, criminals."

"Come on, you're also the lackeys of powerful people. What law? It's just a weapon and a tool used by the elite to oppress the poor."

"We protect order; your kind destroys it, ruining people's livelihoods."

"Protect order? For whom!" The man snarled and sneered. "Power struggles always affect rules and order. You know that. The winner makes the rules."

"And for the sake of greed, must ordinary people suffer?"

"At least I don't involve innocents."

"That's your exception. Most of your kind doesn't care," the team leader snickered.

"How is it any different from us if you don't care about your regulations? I know you think you're doing it for a greater good by breaching a few laws, but it's a Pandora's box. Your behavior reeks of corruption in my opinion."

"Do you have any evidence to back your claim?"

"I don't need any, nor am I using it to hurt you. I just want to make a point. Your behavior amounts to noble-cause corruption. That's why I said we're the same kind of people."

"It doesn't matter what you think. Our conscience is crystal clear. You can sue us if you're dissatisfied."

Okay, the man was left speechless. Why was he being debated in his own style? He protested inwardly.

"Are you dissatisfied?" The Spirit Fox leader glared at everyone around her, a threat laced in her voice.

The apprehended members cracked their necks to show their stance. The gang leader looked at his subordinates with contempt. Spineless brothers!

Meanwhile, the Spirit Fox operators stood firmly by their leader's words. They weren't worried about making mistakes or taking extreme measures.

If they acted incorrectly, it was Athena's fault, not theirs. They had no psychological barriers.

Noble-cause corruption refers to officers going beyond the law to incriminate suspects, especially those who are clearly guilty but receive light punishment due to a lack of evidence or loopholes in the law. Officers might stretch their power to ensure such individuals serve maximum sentences.

While this behavior is wrong from both legal and moral perspectives, life often calls for flexibility.

The downside, though irrelevant to Spirit Fox, is that such actions could lead officers down a slippery slope, eventually turning them into tyrants of the law.

Speaking of Athena, all Spirit Fox members who had personally seen her on-screen found it odd.

They hadn't expected their liaison officer, facilitating their work, to be a foreign Westerner. Yet, this girl spoke Country C's language fluently, without the slightest accent—indistinguishable from a native.

Their curiosity grew, sparking discussions and opinions. At the same time, they couldn't wait to meet Athena in person.

After all, Spirit Fox operators had received plenty of help from her. They wanted to repay her gratitude face-to-face instead of through a mere word of thanks in electronic communication.

Undeniably, a group of young women among them was eager to learn more about the omniscient intelligence officer. Perhaps there was another group working closely with their boss in secret

"Like it or not, I still say we're the same," the gang leader said, refusing to give up. "You say we destroy other families, but aren't the officials and those in power doing the same? They use laws to bankrupt victims until they succumb to their desires. They destroy people's financial resources and block the paths of those who cross them. Some might even kill to silence others. Are we really different? Perhaps it's just that only a few lackeys know the truth while most think they're doing a greater good."

The Spirit Fox leader rolled her eyes. This wasn't the time to care about who was right. The arguments would never end because neither side was completely wrong.

Their lives before joining Spirit Fox were similar to what the man described, especially for those discharged from the military involuntarily.

Because their spines were too straight, they became eyesores, targeted by others. The man's statement contained some truths, but overall, the current order—no matter how corrupt—was better than chaos filled with crime.

What Spirit Fox had accomplished since its establishment was evident in Province N. Though their actions hadn't caused a massive impact, they were the drivers of history's wheel.

Any resisting obstacles were crushed under Spirit Fox's methods. They were the rare light of hope for the citizens of Province N. That was enough.

As for matters concerning corruption and officials' wrongdoings, these weren't their specialty. Chief Yang and their boss, Ling Qingyu, would handle such predicaments.

Even though they now had the ability to judge and think critically, after spending time with Ling Qingyu, who shared her past, they preferred to serve as her swords.

Soon, reinforcements arrived to take over. The detective teams were among them, their hurried and eager expressions betraying their fear that someone might steal their merits.

After all, Spirit Fox's intervention meant City N, the central power of Province N, could also act. They didn't want to transfer their case and tarnish their public image now that the culprit was likely already caught.

The gangsters and their leader proudly stepped into the police vehicles. Before the gang leader was thrown into a patrol car, the Spirit Fox leader grasped his arm and said,

"We are never the same. Maybe you have your own code. We have ours. We aren't the same type of people. We dare to fight against the powerful. Can you?"

Afterward, she patted the man's back and walked away, then ordered her team to return to their vehicles. Their job here was done.

The man might be right about officials abusing ordinary people who crossed them. They had also been victims of oppression in their past.

Honestly, if what the man said was true, she admired him a little. Merely a little, since it was extremely rare for bad guys to have a sense of good. It was unknown how long such a state could last under the lure of interest and benefits.

She quickly informed Yang Qingyue through intermediaries about what the man desired and his willingness to cooperate. The rest was out of her control.

However, there couldn't be right without wrong, justice without evil, or good without bad.

Fortunately, she checked her teammates' states and felt relieved. None of them were affected by the gang leader's arguments.

They had already set their own boundaries and would never allow others to infringe upon them.

Under Instructor Tang's and Ling Qingyu's leadership, everyone understood themselves better.

Nobody was vulnerable to lies or deceptions regarding ideals and interests. If they were swayed easily, they wouldn't remain disheartened either.

Instead, they would learn more about themselves and realize their hearts still needed strengthening.

Ling Qingyu's guards learned about the event and sighed. Who would have expected that a certain gang leader would be sent to jail just to enact justice and soothe the souls of victims' families?

What the police and detectives couldn't solve for months was finished by gangsters.