

Beautiful 651

Chapter 651: Family night

At last, Ling Qingyu showed the badge of Spirit Fox to get through and avoid worsening the situation.

It turned out the reason the police were so nervous was due to a big fight between two groups of people, likely some small gangs.

Although Spirit Fox aimed to eliminate all the gangs entirely, achieving such results was still impossible—even with cheats—without a sufficient period of time.

Some spillovers needed time and consolidation. Yang Qingyue would have to further rectify and solidify law enforcement control.

Even if the governor seemed to be on her side, who knew what he and his allies were conspiring behind the scenes to destabilize the region?

Well, Gu Yi's pressure might have quelled the governor's faction, but there were still enemies.

Like her mother-in-law had warned before—it seemed that because Yang Qingyue was a tough nut to crack, their focus had shifted toward her instead.

Anyway, Ling Qingyu could understand the police's extreme vigilance, given the ongoing tit-for-tats.

Province N had transformed, without a doubt. A few firecrackers here and there still existed.

Leaving behind the mess, Ling Qingyu finally managed to drive back to her residence. Sofia, on the other hand, never ceased teasing her.

After all, she was the sole culprit behind heightening everyone's fear—cigarettes, the convoy, and her aura.

Two weeks passed in the blink of an eye.

Ling Qingyu's manor. In the courtyard with ample space. Under the starry sky.

"Yu'er, roll it carefully. Why are you struggling with a simple spring roll?" Amorette said, rolling her eyes.

"Come on, your daughter has talents in other areas, so some skills will deteriorate over time," Denise joked.

"You two shouldn't put too much pressure on the girl. Everyone has their own weaknesses sometimes," said Zhao Xiurong's mother.

"Haha, so even you have these moments, Qingyu," laughed Gu Yi. "A pity my hands are tied, or I'd take a proper picture."

"Yeah, fortunately, we just asked her to make a spring roll, not dumplings. Otherwise, we'd be eating jelly right now," added Ling Qingyu's mother.

"Look at Yue'er, Ziyi, Xiurong, and Little Qingyue—they accomplished the task brilliantly," Denise said.

The four elders mocked Ling Qingyu mercilessly as they exchanged joyful banter.

They gathered around the bonfire, grilling delicious barbecue for everyone to eat. The courtyard had been cleaned early in the morning for the event.

Of course, Gu Yi was asked to step aside by the other three. After all, letting a country minister cook for them wasn't exactly appropriate.

But Gu Yi insisted, enjoying the chance to participate and relax away from the tiresome political arena.

Unfortunately, her assistant, surnamed Su, had her own family to tend to and couldn't join the feast. Though a career was important, at the end of the day, what mattered most were true loved ones.

Tonight was the Lunar New Year festival, adhering to Country C's traditions and culture.

Ling Qingyu pursed her lips and stared bitterly at the disheveled spring roll she had made.

She didn't bother to retort since they were her elders. They could say whatever they wanted.

Not to mention, she felt their precious love. Beneath the scoldings and mockery, warmth seeped into her heart.

Well, everyone was here at Ling Qingyu's manor. Gu Yi and Yang Qingyue were celebrating the festival with a homely feeling.

It was no surprise that both preferred staying here over the Yang family's house.

Ling Qingyu's confidantes were also present—Tang Ziyi, Xiao Yue, Cai Ning, Zhao Xiurong, Mo Yunxi, Yin Jingfei, Su Ruomei, Jiang Yu, Fan Xi, Lin Xiao, Sofia, and even Tanya, along with other familiar girls, including Spirit Fox members, maids, and more.

Tanya, the PhD graduate, pestered Su Ruomei nonstop, much to Jiang Yu's annoyance. To this day, Jiang Yu found her presence an eyesore.

Still, Tanya contributed a lot to the team, and Ling Qingyu acknowledged her value. Hence, despite her dissatisfaction, Jiang Yu wasn't too persistent—except when the two were around Su Ruomei, which gave the latter major headaches.

Mo Yunxi and Yin Jingfei were meeting here regularly, especially as the date for the former's studies abroad approached.

Both had already made plans to fly overseas with Ling Qingyu. Yep, all three had received their visas.

Given the current restrictions and nuisances, particularly from the top layer's antics—like kids throwing tantrums to achieve their goals—the trio had lost their original excitement.

However, Mo Yunxi had already made promises and built connections with mentors at the university. It wasn't morally right to back out of the agreement, especially within the elite academic circle, where people really knew each other.

Not to mention, such political turmoil likely had zero impact on them. It didn't matter one bit what games the so-called "children" were playing.

As for visas, Mo Yunxi and Yin Jingfei had no trouble due to the former's connections and the high reputation of their mentors.

On the other hand, Ling Qingyu was welcomed without the slightest hesitation. Wealthy and elite—what country would refuse entry to someone who could boost their economy?

The interview was merely a formality. She had yet to show up at the embassy to obtain her visa. With Gu Yi's help, some of the daunting paperwork had been avoided.

If she had a high-ranking friend or connections in Country A, she probably wouldn't even need an interview.

It didn't matter what the ideology or governing system was—corruption existed as long as human beings were at work.

Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue were finally back after messing around. Yes, they had flown back here.

They were also the real reason Gu Yi spent her holiday at Ling Qingyu's manor. She and Gu Yi hadn't spoken about it yet to avoid disrupting the happiness of the moment.

The stakes had risen so high that careful consideration and discussions were required. Of course, it wasn't as if Ling Qingyu knew everything, but from Yang Qingyue's words, General Tang and Gu Yi had to intervene to prevent a prairie fire.

These matters would be discussed later with her mother-in-law. For now, the Valkyries were busy kneading cute dumplings.

Their creations were perfect, leading the elders to compare theirs to hers. Ling Qingyu couldn't deny their words.

Making flawless dumplings without any mistakes completely overshadowed her own success. In fact, Ling Qingyu had learned the technique and could make beautiful ones, but she was impatient.

As a boss, why should she do it herself when she could have others do it? She had maids and cooks she had hired.

Yet, nope—the elders insisted she participate so that a sense of connection would arise. Nonsense. She needed no such tradition. Everyone here at her manor was already cherished by her to the fullest.

At the end of the day, when the four elders themselves volunteered to handle the barbecue, what rights did she still have to argue?

Of course, every girl had her own responsibilities, and apart from her, they all seemed glad to immerse themselves in the activity.

Anyway, her maids and cooks had prepared everything, merely requiring the final touch to fulfill everyone's desire.

Yang Qingyue and Cai Ning formed another group alongside Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue. Both sides exchanged conversations ranging from daily life to extraordinary topics.

Ling Qingyu regularly cast grievance-filled stares at her wife, yet the latter didn't even bother to raise a brow.

Fortunately, she had the company of another beauty—Fan Xi. The legendary goddess whom Ling Qingyu had never known but had lied to in order to obtain her favor.

Fan Xi was guiding her work and also helped alleviate her boredom.

Her half-sister, Ling Yunxiang, was spending the day with her family and couldn't come.

These two had already found success in the entertainment enterprise. With excellent networks and overflowing funds, achievements were only a matter of time.

Fan Xi might not have had experience managing a business group, but Ling Qingyu filled in the gap—sharing her knowledge and skill set, pointing out directions, and introducing innovative ideas.

The new media company had begun generating small revenue after a few investments in movies, TV shows, and series. Several artists had been signed, along with many promising talents.

Meanwhile, Ling Yunxiang had improved dramatically and completely changed the public's perception of her under Fan Xi's guidance.

Now, Ling Qingyu introduced her goals for the future establishment of a news media outlet and channel. Fan Xi's eyes glimmered with ambition and hope at Ling Qingyu's vision.

Fan Xi sought to improve her status after becoming disillusioned with the treatment she had received from past employers, prompting her to become a capitalist herself.

By luck, she met Ling Qingyu, who helped her without the slightest doubt or hesitation. No matter how much the latter eased her burdens and tension, Fan Xi felt compelled to bring in profits and positive feedback.

She held immense gratitude for Ling Qingyu and didn't know how to repay her. Thankfully, Ling Yunxiang's self-improvement bolstered her confidence, allowing her to meet Ling Qingyu's initial expectations.

Time passed, and the two mingled, preparing enough food before finally stopping. Fan Xi reported everything about the future framework and potential collaborations, citing several interested parties.

One example was Fan Xi's plan to realize Ling Qingyu's goal of establishing a news media channel.

To this, Ling Qingyu simply replied, "I trust you, Sister Xi. Since I've delegated everything to you, I'm not going to interfere with your decisions. Act with confidence."

"But, you know, I won't feel good if I exploit your money and gain huge benefits while you receive very little."

"Benefits?" Ling Qingyu asked with a smile. "What do you think counts as benefits in my eyes?"

Let's not talk about these things. Sister Xi, you're much more familiar with and deeply understand this circle. If not you, then who's qualified?"

Chapter 652: Ling Qingyu thinking about Fan Xi

Fan Xi smiled and recounted her past struggles—the hardships of rising to stardom and the obstacles set by colleagues or malicious parties who had their eyes on her beauty and potential.

Perhaps, during her time, it was a little easier to navigate the industry when big corporations had yet to dominate the entertainment circle. Now, without joining one of them, success was even further out of reach. Yes, artists had an easier time and walked a smoother road, but freedom had become a liability.

Sometimes, they were forced to do things they disliked—including Ling Yunxiang, who was lucky enough to have a solid family background and avoided most of it. However, for others, there was no choice. Even Fan Xi, despite her past prestige, struggled and seemed to be deliberately entangled in schemes designed to make her submit.

That was why Fan Xi had planned to quit and considered opening her own studio before expanding further when she secured enough rewards. Ling Qingyu's entry completely skipped those steps, allowing her to strive toward a loftier goal.

Ideally, she hoped her company could become a sanctuary for talented individuals, shielding them from exploitation.

In fact, during their conversation, she had been testing whether Ling Qingyu had her own agenda regarding entertainment revenue and whether she intended to use artists as political tools. She was relieved to see Ling Qingyu show no interest at all. Fan Xi didn't want to become another accomplice, sending artists to serve powerful figures and satisfy their vanity.

For instance, in a northeastern province, scandals had surfaced about artists being coerced into sexual corruption with high-ranking officials. Of course, the identities of these officials rarely made the news—mainstream channels were deliberately flooded with reports on famous artists instead.

Well, Fan Xi had almost doubted her own popularity when Ling Qingyu wasn't familiar with her at all when they first met. But as they warmed up, she realized that this girl was a complete noob in entertainment—unable to name a single recent popular artist.

Perhaps, except for her sister, Ling Qingyu displayed no interest whatsoever. Only benefits and opportunities seemed to catch her attention.

It wasn't that Fan Xi didn't trust Ling Qingyu, but she dared not place all her bets just yet. In fact, Ling Qingyu had indeed expressed her intent to use her media group in the political arena.

Clearly, however, Ling Qingyu's entry into politics wasn't through lust, corruption, or desires—she wasn't ensnaring men and women by weaponizing sex, the easier path.

Instead, she had chosen a harsher and more difficult road—one that Fan Xi both admired and desired. Controlling public opinion on a larger scale, with the potential to influence politics, wasn't a simple feat. Unlike the usual tactics of handling scandals and smear campaigns, this was a whole new level—one that had skyrocketed beyond ordinary means.

Fan Xi occasionally glanced at Gu Yi during their conversation, having noticed that she played a crucial role in the deal between her and Ling Qingyu.

She had already known that Ling Qingyu had connections in the upper echelons, but befriending even a minister? That left her dumbfounded.

Gu Yi was a national minister. With her presence, many doors that were shut to even the elite suddenly became accessible.

Of course, this also meant facing Gu Yi's enemies and getting caught in factional battles.

Fan Xi's ambition grew as she grasped the stakes. She had no doubt Ling Qingyu could handle these threats. From their conversation, it seemed she wouldn't even need to.

For Gu Yi to cooperate, there had to be something else at play. Given Ling Qingyu's remarks about controlling public discourse, Fan Xi understood that this move was designed for Gu Yi's benefit.

There was no way Ling Qingyu and Gu Yi would collaborate without securing their respective goals.

The answer was obvious.

Gu Yi was already a minister. Beyond her current position, what else could she aim for but the presidency?

Fan Xi swallowed hard at the realization—she was about to become an aide to a future presidential candidate.

A vision she had never even dared to imagine was now within her grasp.

She couldn't help but marvel at her fate with Ling Qingyu.

It had all started with another beautiful woman competing for her underwear to protect her chastity.

If Ling Qingyu hadn't raised her hand, and her own belongings had been handed over to a strange man, would she really have ended up where she was now?

Perhaps, in the best-case scenario, she would have been stuck in a small studio somewhere, struggling against major enterprises just to make ends meet.

Or, in some inexplicable twist of fate, she might have ended up entangled with that man instead.

Who knows?

"Alright, we're done here." Fan Xi clapped her hands joyfully and stretched. "Let's go fry the spring rolls."

Ling Qingyu ogled at the goddess's chest, almost reaching out before she glanced at Yang Qingyue with guilt and coughed lightly. "Forget about it. Leave these to the cooks. They're masters at what they do."

Frying? Smoke and greasiness? Heck no—Ling Qingyu refused instinctively. While cooking could be enjoyable, it certainly didn't include her.

"Oh, is it because you're afraid your cooking skills will be exposed? Don't worry, I get you." Fan Xi hugged Ling Qingyu and whispered in her ear, "I won't tell anyone. I promise."

Ling Qingyu blushed and tried to distance herself. As expected of a former national goddess—those nuclear weapons attached to her were laced with deadly poisons.

She almost lost control of her hands again.

Glancing around, she caught Yang Qingyue staring at her like a laser beam.

Ling Qingyu quickly waved and smiled, feigning innocence, but Yang Qingyue simply snorted and continued conversing with Cai Ning, Tang Ziyi, and Xiao Yue.

Relieved, Ling Qingyu pushed away any weird thoughts and regained her sanity. Otherwise, things might escalate into something she feared.

Of course, she liked Fan Xi—her charm, maturity, and self-confidence. Compared to Yang Qingyue, who was younger, Fan Xi exuded a much more fatal attraction.

But now wasn't the time.

Even though Yang Qingyue had subtly admitted she wouldn't mind, as long as she was informed in advance and confessed early...

Nonetheless, Ling Qingyu would never believe a woman's words at face value. They said one thing when they meant another. She wasn't about to make a fool of herself.

Inwardly, she had already made up her mind to include Fan Xi—after all, she had stolen Lin Fan's harem.

Usually, Lin Fan's women encountered trouble through unexpected scenarios, either indirectly via him or due to world factors where their pasts came back to haunt them. Who knew if Fan Xi would face the same fate?

Likewise, Ling Qingyu recalled the beautiful bank clerk whose relationship fate had been severed by her subordinates. She was no longer able to reconnect with Lin Fan.

Maybe the two would meet again.

Either way, Ling Qingyu had ordered Athena to monitor her and ensure she stayed out of danger.

What if she encountered a precarious situation and no longer had the male protagonist to solve it for her?

Taking care of a bank clerk didn't cost much.

Ling Qingyu swore that lust had nothing to do with her decision.

She was simply fulfilling her role as Miss System in a rational and logical manner.

Miss System: "—||—"

Fan Xi and Ling Qingyu ended their activity under the reluctant gaze of the latter. The two carried their finished products to the cooks for the final touch, making sure to keep their movements discreet from the four elders.

Fortunately, no one paid attention to them, as the elders were fully absorbed in an antique discussion.

Watching their sneaky behavior, the cooks and maids struggled to hold back laughter, their expressions twitching with sheer willpower to avoid embarrassing their boss.

From a distance, Ling Qingyu spotted the trio nearly smothering each other.

Well, no need to guess—she knew about Su Ruomei's affair.

Ever since the rescue, Tanya had barely left Su Ruomei's side unless work-related matters forced her to.

Ling Qingyu envied their relationship.

Although Jiang Yu seemed to be resisting, Ling Qingyu knew the outcome was inevitable—based on the experiences compiled in the forbidden books.

And this stupid Su Ruomei had great luck.

Look at herself—Yang Qingyue had to scale a tall mountain just to break through.

As for the easier ones—Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue—she still had to defeat them first.

Despite all her efforts, Ling Qingyu could only sigh and raise her hands in surrender.

Compared to these combat geniuses, her cheats merely balanced things out from a data perspective.

She also realized that her once insane rate of physical enhancement had slowed down.

Not that she could complain—her strength had already reached monstrous levels.

If this continued, who knew if she might one day collapse an entire building just by walking too fast?

"Mind if I interrupt your little moment?" A teasing voice came from behind.

Ling Qingyu turned around and saw Gu Yi smiling at her, her eyes flickering between her and Fan Xi.

"Of course, Lady Gu," Ling Qingyu replied without the slightest change in expression. "This is Fan Xi, who will be leading my new media and news channel group."

"Nice to meet you, Madame." Fan Xi bowed politely. "It's an honor to speak with you."

"I know you. I used to watch your movies and series whenever I had time to relax. It was quite enjoyable back then—helped relieve my stress. I hope I'm still young enough to ask for an autograph."

"Of course! I'm flattered to have a fan of your caliber. My heart is beating so fast, I need to take a deep breath."

"Relax, I'm not someone dangerous." Gu Yi patted Fan Xi's shoulder. "I miss those days when talent and perseverance were the keys to rising in the entertainment industry. The modern era... alas."

"Each era has its merits. People's tastes have simply changed, Madame."

"Agreed. By the way, since you're familiar with Qingyu, don't call me Madame. Call me Aunt Gu or Aunt Yi—whichever you prefer."

"..."

Ling Qingyu stared, awestruck, her eyes nearly bulging. Please, tell that to your enemies. Many heads rolled because of you, who didn't fear you!

A super-friendly mother-in-law?!

Gu Yi: says someone whose ruthlessness is well-known in the business circle. Don't think that I haven't forgotten you've assassinated so many famous figures because they crossed your eyes.

These must be the exact response Gu Yi would give if she heard Ling Qingyu's accusation.

Gu Yi's expression and words seemed genuine, and her admiration didn't feel the least bit pretentious, Ling Qingyu was amazed, a little frightened at the approachable Gu Yi.

She wouldn't have any hidden plans and agenda, right? Even if Gu Yi was her future mother-in-law, Ling Qingyu still withheld suspicion.

Like-minded people had their problems.

Chapter 653: Political and Business circle

"I've regained my former confidence with your words alone, Aunt Gu," Fan Xi said.

"Oh? Why? I'm curious," Gu Yi asked.

"Someone of your position, wisdom, and age knows me—unlike a certain person who claimed she did but couldn't even name a single work I participated in." Fan Xi rolled her eyes at Ling Qingyu.

Gu Yi chuckled and nodded. "Don't doubt your charm. She just has a slightly different interest."

"If only she recognized my face and figure..." Fan Xi sighed dramatically, while Ling Qingyu inwardly nodded at her words.

Since she had subtly seen and touched a few times before, she would never forget Fan Xi now. Just wait for her...

"Believe me, she won't forget from now on. I'm fairly certain," Gu Yi shot a knowing glance at her future daughter-in-law, who smiled guiltily.

Unbeknownst to Fan Xi, Ling Qingyu had begun to target her. Maybe even if she knew, she wouldn't resist much or dislike the idea—so long as her dream wasn't affected.

The only obstacle Ling Qingyu faced was the resistance toward love between girls. Though she understood this world was a little different in terms of tolerance, she wasn't sure if that included Fan Xi.

After chatting with Gu Yi, Fan Xi knowingly excused herself. She knew the two had topics that couldn't be discussed freely.

Her presence wouldn't offend either woman, but it could bring discomfort. Withdrawing when necessary was a skill.

Ling Qingyu lamented Fan Xi's social awareness. As expected of a veteran actress who had to mingle in many circles, Fan Xi grasped the perfect timing—neither too early nor too late.

"Have you finished everything?" Gu Yi asked.

Her implication was clear—could they speak alone?

"Of course, the rest depends on others." Ling Qingyu stretched and cracked a few joints in her waist. "Why don't we take a stroll? I've been too immersed in the preparations—I need to freshen up my sense of smell."

The two walked away from the group, enjoying the tantalizing wind brushing against their hairlines.

The earthy dampness carried by the breeze brought a soothing refreshment. The night seemed peaceful, adding to the joyful atmosphere of the gathering.

"You better not disappoint my girl. I only have one," Gu Yi teased, though the weight of her words carried a chilling threat.

"How dare I?" Ling Qingyu fixed her slightly messy hair and replied.

"As long as you know."

"Is there a secret you want to talk about?"

"I know you're leaving the country for a while in the coming weeks. After listening to the two doctors and the nurse, I understood you're accompanying them." Gu Yi paused. "But won't you be too vulnerable once you leave? Your businesses are now being eyed by many people."

"I've delegated enough, Mother. Even without my presence, things can run fairly well for months—provided officials don't intervene through crooked or underhanded methods. Plus, I'm only away for two weeks at most."

"I don't think your confidence comes from what you just said."

"Your eyes are sharp as always," Ling Qingyu praised. "I have enough wealth to cover losses if things go south. Not to mention, with your protection, I doubt such situations will even arise."

"I thought I was overestimating your strength, but it turns out I was underestimating you," Gu Yi said with a heavy sigh. "Don't worry, I'll handle the officials. I'm still waiting for your support in the future."

Gu Yi immediately realized that Ling Qingyu's confidence stemmed from her abundant cash flow. Her assistant had estimated a rough figure, but from Ling Qingyu's words, the actual amount could be far greater.

Half a trillion?

"Thank you, Mother." Ling Qingyu smiled and turned her gaze toward the women happily celebrating with genuine laughter. "I received an invitation to meet Province N's top circle. It looks like they're preparing for a big battle to suppress me. I didn't even bother responding to their provocation."

"Provocation? I'd call it a direct threat and a show of force," Gu Yi corrected. "Is it the Shen and Xia families? However, I heard you have a good relationship with the Shen Group. Why would they target you?"

Gu Yi had clearly done a thorough investigation into Ling Qingyu's situation. It was her early warning that had made Ling Qingyu aware of their malicious ambitions.

Of course, Ling Qingyu had anticipated this long ago. Athena had already informed her before her mother-in-law did, sifting through their communications.

The actions were illegal, prompting Ling Qingyu to feign innocence and sincerely thank Gu Yi.

"No friends forever, only eternal interests—the circle of adults," Ling Qingyu's answer was concise. "Perhaps greed has overwhelmed their sanity, or they're simply helpless, forced to go against the entire circle here."

"Please, don't perceive the world with that attitude all the time. Not every adult prioritizes interests above all else."

"I know, but it doesn't hurt to guard against others. Otherwise, how could I be worthy of sitting in this chair and responsible for the many employees and family members who depend on my success?"

"Alas, at least the girls around you are sincere and genuine. Cherish them."

"You don't need to say it twice."

Both of them fell silent and squinted into the distance. Being away from urban infrastructure allowed them to observe the celebration elsewhere, with spotlights wavering around.

Perhaps a concert or something similar.

Gu Yi asked, "Have you prepared any feedback and solutions in case something disrupts your business chains?"

Ling Qingyu replied, "Since last time, when the Qin Group from the capital smeared and interfered, I suffered a few losses and prepared several preventive measures covering many areas. I've addressed a lot, but not everything—loopholes will always exist. However, I've already made countermeasure plans for the most likely sectors they'll target.

"In fact, I could force them into losses if every chain were fully intertwined and belonged to me. However, that would give others an excuse to sue me for monopoly, despite my current level being far from reaching such heights."

"You've covered everything, but I hope you don't escalate the situation into something uncontrollable," Gu Yi said.

"The initiative isn't in my hands, unfortunately," Ling Qingyu replied. "There could be real trouble if they're cornered too quickly. After all, most real estate belongs to the big families and other hidden forces. What if they maliciously raise rental prices or break deals to force my businesses to suffer losses? Even though it's a lose-lose scenario, I'd rather avoid it."

"But from your tone, you don't seem too concerned about that."

"Of course not. In terms of wealth, I can outlast them," Ling Qingyu responded with pride. "What concerns me more is the anonymous smearing. After all, a loss of reputation is the hardest to recover from."

"You? Maybe in other areas, I'd have some concerns. But when it comes to public opinion, you're completely in control." Gu Yi recalled the hacker group backing Ling Qingyu—capable of fighting against the Qin family from the capital and even causing them financial losses.

Censorship, monitoring, and even property damage—though she had no direct evidence and Ling Qingyu never admitted to it, Gu Yi knew she was the mastermind.

She didn't mind her daughter-in-law's prowess or fear it, because she knew Ling Qingyu never abused it.

"I can't always rely on my trump cards and expose myself. Wouldn't that just further validate that I'm behind the attacks? I don't want to create more enemies to deal with. Unless absolutely necessary, I won't bother flipping the table. A business war should be settled through our own means."

"To be honest, it feels like my existence is a joke to them—they don't even give me face," Gu Yi said, referring to the attackers' intent.

"Maybe it's because of your face that they're willing to talk to me on the same level," Ling Qingyu smiled, comforting her angry mother-in-law.

Even though Gu Yi didn't voice it outright, Ling Qingyu could tell she was displeased.

"As the saying goes, a dragon cannot defeat a local snake. It's good that things are playing out this way. I don't want to attract your old enemies, especially at your level. Otherwise, I'd just hop out of the country and invest abroad."

"No, you can't. I mean—please consider your motherland first."

"Interest is everything, Mother."

"I know you must be upset that your chip manufacturing has to be divided among multiple parties. The cake is too big for you to swallow alone. But I'm sure even outside the country, you'd face the same scenario. At least here, you have me."

"I don't blame you. In fact, I never had the slightest blame. I knew the stakes before I even opened my mouth," Ling Qingyu replied. "That's exactly why I should never bet everything on a single entity. Having more options means more leverage."

"Once we reach 7nm, someone will try to take advantage without contributing much—minimal input, maximum gain. And if I achieve another breakthrough, do I have to gift away the profits again? For the motherland? Who's in power, and who's making the real money? I don't think I need to spell it out."

"5nm, 3nm... am I supposed to take all the risks, only to become a stepping stone for others? Life isn't fair—there's no doubt about that. But that doesn't mean I can't resist, right?"

Sure, Athena's inventions were effortless and cost-saving compared to conventional research breakthroughs.

Nonetheless, if Ling Qingyu's achievements were replaced by ordinary inventors who toiled relentlessly, only to see their hard work exploited for others' profits, who would willingly accept such a fate?

The emotions, struggles, breaking points, and dangers invested took an enormous toll. Yet, the gains were never proportional to the effort. Compromise seemed necessary, and rules were established—unspoken yet binding, leaving people helpless to abide by them.

But in Ling Qingyu's eyes, rules were meant to be broken. Sooner or later, researchers and inventors would be discouraged from pushing further. After all, who would willingly see their credit and merits handed over for unrelated others to reap the benefits? Such an imbalance would inevitably lead to clashes between the political and business circles.

The former had more leeway and networks to command the latter. Neither side was truly good. Political families resembled aristocratic rulers, while businesses were dominated by corporations.

The compromise between the two provided a breather for ordinary people, but these matters were far too distant from what truly mattered to her.

Ling Qingyu only wanted to receive what was proportional to her efforts. Athena was her daughter—her creation—and her work deserved recognition.

The original intention and motivation to contribute to her country's rise had already faced a Waterloo before even starting its engine.

The hidden ambition lurking in her heart crackled as an imaginary plan took shape in her mind.

What if?

Chapter 654: The deal

"I almost forgot about our past deals before the chips got deployed," said Ling Qingyu.

"What deal?"

Ling Qingyu rolled her eyes at Gu Yi. She had no idea whether her mother-in-law was playing around or had truly forgotten their past conversations.

One of her first gifts to Gu Yi and Assistant Su was when she demonstrated her strength and potential for a discussion.

"Something about bulletproof clothing to take over the luxury market, Mother," Ling Qingyu hinted with a schadenfreude tone.

Gu Yi understood Ling Qingyu's implication and chuckled lightly. Since the two had warmed up to each other more than ever before, Ling Qingyu had begun calling her "Mother."

No matter how much she pretended to dislike it, Ling Qingyu remained unfazed. Over time, Gu Yi got used to the title.

Of course, this only happened when they were alone—it was their little secret. In front of others, Ling Qingyu was extremely respectful, contrasting with Gu Yi's initial worries. This was why she stopped minding the naming terms, as long as it didn't escalate into cookies and other nonsensical jokes.

"I remember the deal. I thought you said you weren't ready back then?" Gu Yi recalled.

"It was mass production holding me back. Now, it's fine as long as my target customers aren't the entire country. Only 20 percent of the population can afford my products."

"So, your technology is sufficient to meet this demand. You should realize that with your fashion sense and aesthetically pleasing products, the wealthy won't just buy one if they like it—they'll buy many."

Considering how the truly rich squandered money like trash—amounts that an average person would take a lifetime to earn just for a casual bet between friends—Gu Yi's words carried a warning.

After all, rather than letting money be wasted elsewhere inefficiently, Ling Qingyu's products created high value, especially for the upper class, who constantly feared for their lives.

"Mother, I understand your concerns. I wouldn't start if I wasn't sure," Ling Qingyu said. "Without 100% certainty, I would have merely launched a pilot project and expanded slowly. But I intend to take over the entire upper circle's market. Otherwise, competitors will try to copy my path."

"Don't worry, things like the chips will never happen again, I promise. You won't be disappointed. Have a little faith in me," Gu Yi assured her.

"I remember you saying the same thing," Ling Qingyu pointed out.

"Did I? How come my memory says otherwise?" Gu Yi stared into Ling Qingyu's eyes. She clearly remembered listing out the possible futures, which included dividing the cake.

This little fox even wanted to take further advantage of her guilt. Gu Yi smiled more when Ling Qingyu coughed.

"Well, I might have mixed up the two," Ling Qingyu admitted, relieving her embarrassment.

"Don't blame me, Little Ling. I could have prevented your chips from being exploited, but the price wasn't worth it—not for you, nor for me. Endure a little longer, and in the next few years, we'll have the last laugh," Gu Yi comforted.

Ling Qingyu waved her hand lightly. "Although I'm acting disappointed, I'm not that down. I'm just angry at a few bastards who always try to pick the peach when it's ripe but didn't grow the tree themselves or take any responsibility.

"Besides, I already expected as much, which is why we've kept any news of further possible developments, like 3nm, under wraps. By the time Mother sits in the chair, good news will flow in, and everyone will unconsciously praise you for bringing luck to the nation."

"Unconsciously bringing luck?" Gu Yi repeated the words, sneering. How dare this girl subtly smear her as if she were merely decorative?

However, Ling Qingyu's words carried truth. In the name of the motherland's progress, why bother handing over merits that rightfully belonged to them just to catch up with other superpowers?

Even if opposing nations developed, they shouldn't progress as fast as theirs, based on intelligence reports. Of course, Gu Yi had already considered the possibility of enemies trying to deceive them.

Because Ling Qingyu had single-handedly produced an invention that propelled technological advancements to an unimaginable level, Gu Yi also had her doubts.

Regardless, with Ling Qingyu's mindset, progress wouldn't halt just because of fears of stolen merits.

Other nations were pressing forward, and so were Ling Qingyu and her group. The latter might have trouble facing off against state machinery, but her daughter-in-law had proven time and again that she could surpass the impossible.

"Alright, in the civilian market, you'll have no problems. The only real threat can come from the military or groups affiliated with top military officials."

"Exactly, Mom. What if they force me to sell my secrets in the name of serving the country? As a poor woman who depends on my secrets to make a living," Ling Qingyu pouted and exaggerated her expression. "I can't bear to imagine the losses if someone somehow managed to leak my contributions to the nation... straight to my competitors."

"Quit acting coquettishly. Oh gosh, let me rub my arms," Gu Yi hissed, curing her goosebumps. Whether she actually had them or not, only she knew. "If you're a poor woman, then I'm a dog, okay?"

"Alright, Mom. It's just a chat."

"Little Yu, don't worry about the military. Proceed with confidence. Besides, remember General Tang, whom I asked you to cooperate with? She could play a vital role here in balancing any intruders," Gu Yi suggested. "I'll inform her about your moves and ask her to assist you when necessary. In the meantime, when I'm free, why don't you tag along with me for a chat with her?"

"Sure, Mom. It'll be my blessing," Ling Qingyu responded. She had almost forgotten about General Tang, one of Gu Yi's confidantes.

This was the advantage of having a friend in the military elite circle. Even if General Tang couldn't contribute much, her presence alone provided leverage and a stronger background for negotiations—better than being a fish on the chopping block.

"I'm not afraid of anything except foreign nations. Do you realize that once you possess such an artifact, your future will definitely be disturbed by spies?" Gu Yi warned, bringing Ling Qingyu to a standstill.

The latter deeply contemplated the stakes and recognized the dangers. The best-case scenario involved regularly dealing with infiltrations. The worst would be direct conflicts and restrictions on her freedom to move globally.

At the same time, however, Ling Qingyu's products could expand her network of wealthy capitalists, some of whom might have influence over world governments and even the United Nations leadership.

Weighing the benefits against the risks, Ling Qingyu chuckled and brightened her smile. Gu Yi was amazed, though she understood that Ling Qingyu was far from being just a simple businesswoman or political strategist.

Her courage was anything but mediocre. Gu Yi quickly grasped the source of her sudden confidence—opportunities and risks always coexisted.

Besides, the invention itself wasn't necessarily a major threat. Well, another scenario could unfold if Country C imposed export restrictions to prevent sensitive technology from leaking and threatening national security.

"Maybe your fashion armor business will do well here. As for overseas markets, I can't be sure—you might face some obstacles," Gu Yi snickered, as if secretly amused by the troubles she foresaw heading Ling Qingyu's way.

The latter paused, heaved a helpless sigh, then shrugged with nonchalance, unbothered. "Hopefully, things don't go down that path. Otherwise, my secrets might get leaked by hackers to the World Government and end up benefiting your enemies."

"You..." Gu Yi bit her lip, annoyed at Ling Qingyu's pragmatism. This girl had just blatantly threatened to sell state secrets to enemy nations.

Who would believe that other hackers could successfully infiltrate Ling Qingyu's data when Gu Yi had already witnessed what had happened in Country K and other nations?

Ling Qingyu laughed inwardly, knowing she had just scored a point. In reality, like it or not, leaks would happen eventually—regardless of how much effort was put into safeguarding secrets.

Perhaps the culprit wouldn't even be Ling Qingyu herself but her customers. There was no way to completely stop others from spying.

Protecting core secrets was the highest level of security one could achieve. Ling Qingyu wasn't naive enough to believe, as in the fictional stories she had read in her past life, that secrets would remain forever unknown to enemies.

Given thirty years, everything would be exposed and laid bare. Perhaps undressing the underwear of these secrets would take more effort and time.

So, unless the goal was to divide the cake fairly, the only viable restrictions would be hiding formulas and materials, as well as ensuring that key employees were exclusively Country C's citizens.

As she contemplated further, Ling Qingyu was horrified by the implications of her seemingly small moves, already capable of affecting tens of millions of lives and reshaping geopolitical landscapes.

What if she took an even bigger step? Won't the entire world tremble? Well, if Miss System insisted on shattering realm gifts, Ling Qingyu shouldn't be too surprised.

Would Miss System do it?

Chapter 655 655: Anti-ballistic clothings and Prison industries

Ling Qingyu's circle had improved beyond the ordinary since she met Yang Qingyue and Gu Yi.

Interacting with Gu Yi brought many benefits if she thought deeply. So, she had no right to blame anyone for the scenario of her chips being robbed.

"We'll see where the fashion armors take us," said Ling Qingyu. "Let's discuss another important deal that I've talked about with your daughter."

"My daughter?" Gu Yi remarked oddly.

"Do you want me to explicitly state her as my wife?" Ling Qingyu rolled her eyes.

"You better solve your own crisis before thinking about marriage. And please, I'll happily accept the title as long as you control your lust," Gu Yi said with a frown.

"Ahem, please, Mother. Give me some face. I wouldn't be this embarrassed if I had achieved so many successes in love," Ling Qingyu complained.

"Tsk... as expected, your skin is as thick as a city wall." Gu Yi clicked her tongue. "Now, what's the deal?"

"A private prison industry where low-risk criminals will be transferred to mine, as the prison capacity of Province N is failing due to the increasing number of successful arrests," Ling Qingyu explained carefully and slowly to ensure her mother-in-law understood.

Gu Yi's lips twitched as she listened to the inability of Province N to house criminals. Couldn't they be relocated across other provinces where she could solve the problem as a minister?

And why wouldn't Yang Qingyue, her daughter, request her intervention instead of seeking Ling Qingyu's methods?

Of course, she realized she was overthinking— the number of apprehended criminals was simply too staggering.

She believed these numbers could indeed flood the entire country's prison system and paralyze it.

There was a catch here: Ling Qingyu's private prison involved a private party without government intervention, something the authorities disliked the most.

Even if Gu Yi didn't mind, the rest wouldn't share her agreement. However, she was relieved to hear that the government had a portion of the shared profit from the prison business.

In the face of capital, no officials would protest foolishly. The money might not be much, but combined with other industries in their hands, only a few would refuse in the name of righteousness.

Gu Yi had long matured beyond the naive belief that people were incorruptible. Greed for wealth, power, and lust always created weaknesses in people.

As long as one studied a person well, their greatest weakness could be easily identified and exploited for relevant interests.

Corruption had always existed as long as people ran the government. It was merely a matter of degree—more or less—that measured the efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

In an authoritarian regime, although people tried to hide it under the table, no one cared as long as strong parties shared common interests.

With a strong background and personnel strength, corruption became so rampant that petty cases were seen as the norm and a skillset among officials.

One could survive in the arena as long as they flattered the right people and avoided offending hidden titans or the powerful.

Big fish ate small, and the small devoured the smaller, sucking the blood and sweat of the people below until they were drained dry.

On the other hand, in republican states where democracy and decentralization prevailed, petty corruption wasn't tolerated.

Swift action was taken to deter any form of corruption. Strong backgrounds rarely mattered here as long as evidence was found.

On the surface, it seemed these states had fewer corruption cases. What people failed to realize was that corruption didn't disappear—it was simply embedded within countless legislations and loopholes that were purposely designed to make it legal.

If one understood the methods to exploit these loopholes, they could get away easily, thanks to their knowledge and connections with higher-ups.

Even if caught red-handed, it didn't matter—because what they did never actually broke the law in the first place. They perfectly abided by the constitution and its articles.

Regardless of the government system, corruption always existed. The reason authoritarian regimes fared worse than their democratic counterparts was that, in the latter, corruption was confined to certain classes with influence and relationships.

In contrast, the former had corruption spread across the entire hierarchy, ruining everything.

Nonetheless, if the top echelons were firm on dealing with corruption, things could improve for a while—until people found new ways to exploit the system again.

Anyway, corruption or not, none of this mattered to Ling Qingyu's decision. She intended to provide great help to Yang Qingyue while simultaneously securing her benefits, without wasting the slightest effort.

Although the profit margins were high, her greed had long been quenched by Athena's hands.

"You are insisting on slave workers," preached Gu Yi with a dull expression. "You should know how hungry those human rights groups will be to sniff around."

"Come on. Why should taxpayers' money be spent on criminals, wasting resources while they enjoy free meals and living expenses? The price is merely their freedom," Ling Qingyu blurted out without scruples. "If they work while serving their sentences, it will help them truly reform and contribute to society. After all, doing something meaningful will prevent them from losing their future pathways when they are released."

"You really know how to stand on the moral high ground," Gu Yi said, speechless. "In any case, no matter how you sugarcoat it, you just want slaves to work for you. You think beautifully."

"Alas, it's killing a lot of birds with one stone—why refuse, Mother?"

"It's as if I don't know your true plans. While you transfer your original employees to work on elite products, the rest of your business will be handled by these prisoners at almost no cost, saving you a fortune in expenses. For instance, your clothing and fashion business."

"Please, it doesn't hurt for them to go through labor reform, especially since the prisoners will be those serving short sentences. Everyone benefits—I don't think it's a bad deal."

"You've almost convinced me. Perhaps you should start a pilot project in Province N. I don't think you need an industry that spans the entire country," said Gu Yi.

"Then, put in a word so I can easily negotiate with the governor. The prison business will require new construction projects, which will boost the economy as well."

"You really have some wishful thinking," Gu Yi sighed and shook her head.

"At the very least, with so many projects, the real estate sector will thrive. I'll be able to enter the industry with momentum and strong backing." Ling Qingyu's reasoning made Gu Yi's eyes brighten. "It might take a few years before I can fully detach from the subverters plotting against me. This is part of my strategy—to stall until I gain enough independence to protect my business empire."

"There's no way the governor will reject your offer with so many benefits—unless your enemies intervene," added Gu Yi.

"If only Mother would step up and help her daughter-in-law," Ling Qingyu smiled playfully.

"Alright, I get it. I'll keep your offers in mind. Your armored clothing and private prison project, correct?"

"Perfecto," Ling Qingyu joked with a subtle accent.

"Now, let's talk about the messes left behind by your two girls."

"Are you talking about Sister Ziyi and Sister Yue?" Ling Qingyu glanced down at the duo with a strange look.

"Is there anyone else who could make me collapse?"

Gu Yi wasn't surprised by Ling Qingyu's tone and expression. She had nearly gone bald dealing with the aftermath left behind by the two downstairs.

"Mother, you're exaggerating. Besides, they didn't do anything wrong other than seeking justice," Ling Qingyu quickly defended them.

"Seeking justice by completely flipping the table in Province T. The upper echelon went through an entire reshuffling. I had to work hard just to cover their tracks."

"I can assure you, no one could trace them—everything is covered."

"And who would dare take that risk?" Gu Yi rolled her eyes.

"In fact, I haven't even asked them properly what they did. I'm curious myself. All I did was support them from behind and mitigate any dangers from the official channels. Luckily, I have you as my background to walk sideways."

"I'm not even that powerful yet, and you're already thinking of flaunting arrogance?" Gu Yi squeezed Ling Qingyu's shoulder and replied through gritted teeth. "Their mess hasn't even been fully cleaned up yet. We're just stalling for time and applying pressure on their enemies. You have to understand—at certain levels, evidence isn't needed to take action, especially when the targets have weaker backgrounds."

Watching the exhausted Gu Yi, Ling Qingyu became even more curious about what Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue had done.

She trusted their integrity and talents. There was no way this couple could have acted wrongfully—there must be a reason. Regardless of her mother-in-law's complaints, she stood firmly on the side of her closest confidantes.

"Well then, Mother-in-law, I'm all ears to hear the story from your perspective. I'm highly interested, especially since so much of my money has flooded into their hands. I have no idea what kind of bombs they blew up."

Chapter 656: Involvement of Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue

Soon, Gu Yi narrated the thrilling story—or so it seemed in her eyes—of Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue's stay in Province T.

She included General Tang's complaint about losing hair and turning white too quickly due to the hidden storm.

Naturally, in public, everything appeared normal, and the undercurrent was difficult to notice, even for those highly sensitive to politics and deeply interested in it.

The highest echelons were extremely alarmed by this sudden destabilizing factor, while the other upper levels feared their futures were doomed.

Those who had climbed the ladder for so long understood that most, if not all, had weaknesses that could jeopardize their entire careers.

What Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue accomplished simply broke the unspoken rules. Regardless, Ling Qingyu wouldn't stop or abandon her confidantes, even if it meant crossing a dangerous threshold.

Not to mention, she trusted that the girls would never commit wrongdoings or stir up unnecessary trouble unless the situation truly called for it—or they were pissed.

Ling Qingyu had long believed in them and expressed her stance even before Gu Yi began her narration. The latter also showed support and understanding.

After all, she had interacted deeply with these young women and mostly understood their mindset.

It was good to be young—no need to weigh benefits and risks too much, just follow one's passion. Gu Yi was convinced that if she were in Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue's place, no matter how righteous she was, she wouldn't have sought out the slightest trouble or burden.

In fact, she also knew that this was precisely why villains grew complacent and acted more blatantly, exploiting the good-hearted nature of others.

The events began after Tang Ziyi successfully negotiated deals with General Tang, supported by Xiao Yue's strategic expertise.

The cooperation between the two parties was cause for celebration. Spirit Fox operators would serve as CQB instructors while simultaneously learning advanced military knowledge in army organization and logistics.

Since Ling Qingyu aimed to establish a mercenary group—though her resolve wavered after experiencing the battlefield—Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue sought to complement their weaknesses.

On the other hand, General Tang wanted to tap into Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue's mercenary expertise.

Through personal meetings, she realized the two's strengths—Tang Ziyi as a tactical master and Xiao Yue from a strategic perspective.

The younger woman had the skills of a general capable of commanding a vast army. The only things she lacked were age and experience.

If not for their deeper cooperation, General Tang would have extended a special invitation to recruit Xiao Yue into her team.

Well, both Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue, actually.

The two didn't mind General Tang's subtle moves and simply laughed them off.

There was no need to burn bridges over a mere recruitment attempt. If Ling Qingyu were present, she would have erupted in anger.

Trying to snatch away her two greatest talents was no different from slapping her in the face.

In reality, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue were more curious about who was inviting whom.

So, instead of reacting, they simply warmed up to General Tang.

After reaching an agreement, the two parties decided to have a sumptuous meal to commemorate their partnership.

Through their discussions, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue came to understand General Tang's ambitions.

Apart from forming her own special forces unit in the southern theater and surpassing her peers, she aspired to reach an international stage.

Unlike the old world, this one offered far more freedom and leverage, given the power mercenaries held.

Of course, mercenaries also had corresponding responsibilities and rules, even as their rights expanded.

These overarching factors could easily be studied through various online channels. However, deeper knowledge surfaced subtly through conversations with General Tang.

Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue exchanged a knowing glance—they had been careful not to talk too much or reveal anything unnecessary.

Sure enough, as long as the desire to learn remained strong, knowledge would always come.

In any case, to experience Province T's local specialties and better understand its culture and heritage, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue requested to travel around.

It was rare to have time to relax after parting from Ling Qingyu, and they enjoyed the change of scenery. General Tang happily agreed and assigned a liaison officer to assist them.

And so, the story began. Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue visited various places—both the good and the bad—driving around in their Cadillac.

The vehicle had been transported here via an A380, its ample cargo space in the rear compartment easily accommodating several vehicles.

They also retained their gun licenses and had the backing of General Tang's aides. With their skills, they had no fear of traveling freely.

Besides, they had to admit that Province T's security level was far better than the chaos of Province N.

The duo explored clubs, bars, and night markets—gray areas where accurate news and hidden rumors were easier to uncover—leaving their liaison officer helpless as she constantly fretted over their safety.

As General Tang's esteemed guests, even the smallest incident could land her in trouble if not handled properly.

She remained cautious at all times, despite having subordinates to assist her.

One night, Tang Ziyi noticed a mature woman, seemingly in her mid-twenties or thirties, drinking in despair by the roadside.

Her eyes were devoid of hope, clouded with sadness.

She was stunningly beautiful, appearing younger than her estimated age. However, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue had assigned her a slightly higher age due to the temperament she exuded.

Fate worked in mysterious ways.

Normally, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue wouldn't have paid much attention, nor would they have intervened.

But something about this woman drew them in, as if meeting her would lead to unexpected surprises.

They parked nearby, and Tang Ziyi approached her for a conversation. After all, they had nothing better to do—why not hear her story?

Xiao Yue, standing by, scoffed.

"Don't blame fate—it's obviously her looks that ensnared this lustful woman," she muttered.

Her snarky remark made Tang Ziyi grin cheekily and swear she was telling the truth.

A lighthearted comedic exchange unfolded between them.

Despite her words, Xiao Yue still followed along.

The elegant yet inebriated woman before them seemed like a contradiction—her scholarly aura clashed with the air of despair and unwillingness surrounding her.

Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue sat beside her, acting warm and friendly.

Surprisingly, the woman showed no discomfort or resistance.

That was when the duo realized—this woman was completely broken and lost. Under their skillful comfort—and fueled by intoxication—the woman blurted out all her despair.

Her name was Dong Xi, aged 30, and she was married to a 48-year-old man with the surname Ning.

As expected, her story was as cliché as ever. Her beauty had caught the attention of powerful figures, bringing calamity upon her husband's work and achievements.

His company was being suppressed to the brink of bankruptcy, with the threat of prison looming over him if things were not handled properly.

All she had to do was bow her noble head, and everything would be settled, returning to how it once was.

But she simply couldn't accept such a life.

Listening to this so-called fairy tale, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue scrutinized Dong Xi and couldn't help but complain inwardly.

This woman paled in both appearance and temperament compared to them. If Ling Qingyu were here, she would have completely overshadowed her.

Yet, her beauty had brought disaster upon her?

That vile bastard had actually mobilized vast resources just for this woman?

Hmm... According to the rumors, the Ning Group was indeed on the verge of collapse. Could it be that the company belonged to Lady Dong Xi's husband?

Possibly, that old bastard and his fellow corrupt demons had some twisted obsession with stealing other men's wives—pursuing them relentlessly as if it were a game.

Or perhaps they were simply confident that things would never spiral out of their control because they had a firm grasp on Dong Xi's mentality.

There had to be more to the story, but the duo restrained their curiosity.

If Dong Xi wished to reveal everything, she would do so in due time.

There was no need to rush.

Of course, neither they nor Dong Xi were naïve enough to believe that selling her body would truly bring peace.

Greed knew no bounds, and Dong Xi would only be haunted by villainous demons until her beauty faded.

Somehow, the duo found themselves wondering how the real Ling Qingyu had managed to survive in this world.

Perhaps it was a mix of luck and background.

Luck, in the sense that she had avoided crossing paths with corrupt powerhouses.

Background, in the sense that she had enough weight to deter small-time villains.

Maybe it was because Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue exuded a rare warmth, but Dong Xi opened up further, revealing even more secrets.

As the deeper layers of the plot unfolded, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue were left shocked, while Dong Xi merely laughed bitterly and shook her head.

She understood her own helplessness and was prepared for the judgmental gazes that might come her way.

Even so, confessing had undoubtedly soothed her fragile emotions, allowing her to clear her mind and consider countermeasures.

Yet, instead of the scorn she had braced herself for, she was met with compassion and understanding.

Tears welled up in her eyes as she leaned into Tang Ziyi's embrace.

Tang Ziyi merely shrugged at Xiao Yue's gaze before making her decision.

Since fate had led them to meet, lending a helping hand in a few matters wasn't difficult.

Besides, through Dong Xi's background, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue realized something—this woman could become an ally for Ling Qingyu in the future.

Chapter 657: Dong Xi's background

Indeed, although Dong Xi instinctively sought help, she understood how difficult it was for outsiders to intervene in her case.

Not to mention, her close friends had distanced themselves to avoid getting caught up in the disaster. In the adult world, she had long realized how rare true friendship and warmth were.

Despite Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue's willingness to help, she didn't expect much. To her surprise, Dong Xi never imagined they would genuinely attempt to resolve her predicament.

When she received their sincere expressions of willingness to help, she was astounded and couldn't believe her luck.

Dong Xi was no ordinary woman, nor did she come from a wealthy elite family that would allow her to match her current husband's status based solely on her background.

Both luck and effort had played a role. Yes, she had thoroughly seduced her husband and climbed the social ladder, becoming a madame.

It wasn't an easy path, nor were her plans morally sound. However, compared to others who tried to exploit every advantage to the last drop, she believed she was still better, right?

Dong Xi had worked at a national television channel—one of Country C's most famous propaganda tools—in its branch office in Province T after graduating with a journalism degree from the capital.

Her career started smoothly. Given her attractive face and figure, she didn't suffer too much in the beginning.

However, as expected from the saying that beauty attracts disaster—which Ling Qingyu would always argue against—she eventually caught the attention of unwarranted predators.

After working for several years, she began facing obstacles in her climb. She subtly realized she was being targeted.

Having overheard gossip among women, she had a vague understanding of what was happening. No matter her merits, if someone or a group wanted to suppress her and didn't report it to the higher-ups, she was doomed to stagnation.

It wasn't until later that she discovered the top brass had noticed her—and she was now blatantly targeted.

Naturally, she wasn't willing to give in. She flattered and tried to curry favor, but the old bastards turned a blind eye.

Those who wanted to help could only sigh helplessly and reject her approach with distress. There was nothing they could do at their level when a top official-like figure had intervened.

Comparing an unknown TV hostess, journalist, and ordinary woman to a great figure whose single word could change everyone's fate, no one was foolish enough to offend the powerful for the sake of righteousness or their oaths.

Walking the path of officialdom had long tempered their arrogance and shaped their experience.

The final moment came at a banquet where she had to cater to several high-ranking figures. Their approaches became frighteningly direct.

Either she gave in, survived, and climbed higher—or she would be thrown out of her job.

She was unwilling to surrender, yet she feared that finding work outside after being forcibly retired wouldn't be easy.

If the suppression followed her, her future would surely be bleak. Things could only get worse.

As for resisting, Dong Xi already knew the outcome. The top echelons were so deeply corrupt that she, a mere small fry, wouldn't even cause a ripple.

The final decision came when she met the real top figure.

Contrary to her expectations, the man was very young—not older than five fingers, apparently.

To wield such immense power and connections, his background had to be from the capital—humongous and unimaginable.

With words like "It's good for young people to fight, but it's useless without methods. There's no need to struggle so much. Just lower your stance, and everything will become easy," he dangled a shortcut against an uncertain future.

Under the pretext of dealing with a young man and receiving a mix of carrot-and-stick treatment, Dong Xi finally accepted the deal.

She reasoned that becoming an underground lover to a young man wasn't much of a loss.

At first, the rapid leap in promotions from mere sexual favors felt unbelievable. She lamented the unfairness of life.

Serving a young man instead of those pot-bellied old bastards seemed like a better option.

Gradually, Dong Xi catered to the man's desires and unconsciously obeyed his every command.

Somehow, his words became final to her as she adapted to his psychological and emotional manipulation—including in the bedroom.

She saw several other women around him, which she had already anticipated.

Each had their own needs. Nobody owed the other anything.

One of them was his secretary from the capital, Lin Yuxin, who was already married.

Morally wrong, yet powerful people always enjoyed breaking these boundaries and treating others as they pleased.

Another woman was Miao Ying, a newly promoted resident director whom he was making moves on.

She had suffered even more struggles because she initially refused and ultimately ended up like Dong Xi. Though she had some intention of helping, she was barely surviving herself.

Besides, even if she had no emotional ties, small jealousies were unavoidable. Although the women sympathized with each other, certain emotions couldn't be ignored.

Afterward, things took a darker turn. Dong Xi deeply realized that, to powerful men, women were nothing more than accessories.

At some point, the man even lent her out to his circle of friends, exchanging lovers—not for favors or interests, but purely to satisfy his twisted desires and pleasure.

There was nothing illegal about such a club as long as all participants remained silent. Perhaps, through good feelings, deeper cooperation could be established, though the man didn't actually need any.

She felt like a concubine in ancient times, used as a tool to strengthen bonds between powerful figures.

She didn't like it, but the man manipulated her as if she had no resistance. She had no idea how she was being controlled, but Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue, who were listening to her story, exchanged glances and nodded.

That womanizer was quite experienced—charming enough to leave a good impression despite starting off on slightly bad terms.

A few years passed, and nothing changed. Since the man didn't mind sharing, Dong Xi, like Lin Yuxin, took advantage of any benefits she could.

Through these activities, her network expanded, and her career skyrocketed thanks to the favor of many men.

She was closer to Miao Ying than to Lin Yuxin, given the latter's deeper connections in the capital and her role as the man's secretary.

But there would eventually come a day when people wanted to break free, and Dong Xi was no different.

She knew that if she didn't plan for her future while she still had youth and beauty, she would be in danger.

Never rely on or trust a position given as a favor—such things could be taken away at a whim. She had to secure her own destiny.

Not to mention, no matter how her sex life appeared, she longed for a deeper connection. Rationally, it was about benefits, but emotionally, people had needs.

Once, she met an attractive older man. Mesmerized, she made her move.

Though his background was inferior to the men she had previously been with, she was extremely satisfied.

From then on, she gradually reduced contact with the group and eventually cut ties completely.

She didn't see herself as an exceptional woman, nor was she after love.

The rich man was steady and treated her well enough. She seduced him intentionally, but over time, she became emotionally attached.

Later, marriage became an agenda, and the two were set to be together for life.

Her sudden withdrawal annoyed some in the group, but many dared not speak out.

Just as they held her weakness—her promiscuity—against her, she also held theirs.

Even if she had traded her body for benefits, she could excuse herself, while they had their own skeletons in the closet.

Both sides held the tip of a sharp sword to each other's throat.

As for the powerful man who had coerced her, his reaction was minimal.

He expressed some anger at her betrayal, but things didn't escalate. There were too many women in Province T, and who knew how many more he had across the entire nation?

Perhaps if he hadn't treated her like a mere object—if he hadn't traded her away for entertainment—she might have remained under the radar, enduring the volatile status quo.

Powerful men having numerous lovers was understandable. But sending their lovers to other men?

Because of this, she knew she would receive no help if she ever got into trouble. In fact, she had paid a hefty price to extricate herself from that toxic circle.

Before leaving, she heard that the young master had set his sights on another target—Wen Yalan, a project leader under Miao Ying's management, who was married to a man in the same workplace.

Dong Xi later heard from Miao Ying that Wen Yalan had already been eaten.

However, from the sudden coldness between the two women, Dong Xi suspected Miao Ying had deceived her subordinate and dragged her into hell.

After all, she had met Wen Yalan once and understood her temperament—she was a true conservative who valued tradition.

Dong Xi speculated that the bastard had raped Wen Yalan, with Miao Ying's underhanded assistance.

Perhaps he hadn't completely conquered her yet and was still making moves.

His true nature was becoming clear.

He seemed kind to his women—at least as long as they obeyed him.

He had never appeared to force anyone. But when faced with strong resistance, he simply cooked the raw rice.

Maybe he was treating Wen Yalan even worse, until she had no choice but to surrender completely.

No matter how she disliked that man, she admitted resisting was the most difficult aspect when he learned the art of controlling women.

Yes, Dong Xi learned why she felt easily swayed and manipulated.

Chapter 658: Xiao Yue's calculation

Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue had made up their minds to help after listening to the woman's tale.

These kinds of clubs shouldn't exist in the first place. Whenever powerful figures established them to quench their desires, victims appeared.

Whether out of willingness or coercion, both women despised their existence. Like Dong Xi, it seemed as though she was cooperating, but was that really the case?

How many others had volunteered? Though they had only heard four names, who knew how many more remained hidden?

Not to mention, other provinces might have their own 'clubs.' Perhaps most of the men Dong Xi and the other women encountered were from Province T, but one thing was certain—the powerful figure at the head of it all was no ordinary man. He roamed freely, allowing officials to cater to his every word.

For some reason, Dong Xi refused to reveal his surname, as if instinctive fear had overridden rational thought.

Fortunately, with Athena, they uncovered his identity quickly. His surname was Qin—a distant relative of the Qin family from the capital.

The fact that even a distant family member could act so brazenly without consequence made the future of Country C somewhat concerning.

The existence of so many bootlickers made this possible. Otherwise, if each person in the government simply fulfilled their duties without excessive flattery, the system should have functioned properly. But when destiny was controlled by those in the highest seats, nothing could be changed.

Since someone from the Qin family was involved in this case, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue had even more reason to intervene.

Although Ling Qingyu had been retaliating against the Qin family through underhanded methods, if official power got involved, she was no match.

The battle between titans was one of networks and connections—a competition to see who could endure longer. Ling Qingyu's contacts weren't enough.

Even so, even the smallest moves from the Qin Group created obstacles for Ling Qingyu's business.

Many within the Qin Group believed it was a waste of resources to target a mere wealthy figure from the outskirts of Country C. After all, Province N was considered a backwater compared to the capital.

Furthermore, the Qin Group had its own enemies to fend off, as well as internal struggles. Ling Qingyu's sister was merely targeted by one lineage, even though they were the successors of the entire group.

Some factions wanted the head family to face trouble and lose their prestige.

Thus, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue considered testing the waters and preparing for the inevitable battlefield when Ling Qingyu finally broke all pretenses with the Qin family.

Naturally, it was Xiao Yue who made the decision. The hidden war was far more difficult and complex than one fought with real gunpowder.

In fact, Ling Qingyu could resort to assassinations and brute force to wipe out the entire family while Athena blacked out and filtered all evidence that could lead back to her.

But at what cost? What would be the difference between her and the unscrupulous villains if she resorted to such methods?

Although Yang Qingyue and her mother wouldn't say anything, would they ever look at her the same way again? Once she set foot on that path, there would be no turning back.

As for Dong Xi's words, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue took them with a grain of salt. Some of her claims were hard to believe, but ultimately, it didn't matter.

Whether she had truly fallen in love with an older man or simply sought a safe haven from her past worries, they didn't care.

For a rational woman who had sold her body—speaking bluntly—love was out of the question. Perhaps connection and companionship were possible.

Or was Dong Xi simply afraid she might have to relive her previous despair? Regardless, the powerful figures who played with women's lives would be eliminated because Xiao Yue had decided so.

Moreover, Xiao Yue was interested in the women Dong Xi had subtly mentioned. With Athena's aid, she was able to dig into their backgrounds.

Dong Xi was a veteran in the government media sector, having worked her way up from TV host to department director of HR management.

Miao Ying had been heavily promoted to another key position, overseeing Province T's entertainment industry and monitoring any violations.

Wen Yalan was currently just a simple program director and had not yet fully entered the circle.

The most notable background belonged to Lin Yuxin, who was also from the capital. Her surname was comparable to Qin.

The four most prominent families in the capital were Qin, Su, Yang, and Lin. Lin Yuxin, now the secretary of Qin, had also indulged in promiscuity.

This woman couldn't be simple—she must have had her own hidden agenda and had been working hard toward it. After all, she had no reason to be coerced by anyone, even if she was merely a distant relative of the Lin family.

She was a powerful figure herself, though ranked lower compared to the surname Qin. All in all, Xiao Yue had her own agenda for providing aid, especially to those in need, like Dong Xi and Wen Yalan.

Miao Ying wasn't entirely sure, but she was confident she could persuade these figures to support Ling Qingyu's venture into the media industry.

Fan Xi was still in the process of establishing a large media group. All the necessary equipment was available, including those that required harsher conditions.

Manpower was the only scarcity. Compared to fresh talents, these women were a better fit, particularly since all of them had experience working in government institutions.

Unlike the private sector, government institutions provided a vast networking field as well as invaluable experience.

Because of the complexity of their internal mechanisms, employees were far more capable in management.

Naturally, corruption and abuse couldn't be ignored, but the broad spectrum of talent was exactly what Xiao Yue sought.

If these women joined Fan Xi's group, they would also bring in other colleagues who wished to escape a toxic environment while carrying with them the valuable lessons learned over the years. This would allow Fan Xi's project to progress smoothly and reach its goal faster, avoiding pitfalls and illusions.

Xiao Yue believed that with great kindness, generous treatment, and the deterrent power achieved by helping Dong Xi and the others, no one would dare betray Ling Qingyu.

When Xiao Yue and Tang Ziyi offered their assistance, the liaison officer accompanying them wiped away cold sweat, feeling anxious for the general.

As always, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue relied on Athena's power to find weaknesses in Dong Xi's enemies, particularly from a political perspective. Crimes, if exposed outright, would create temporary chaos among the public.

Public opinion warfare was also an effective tool to pressure them, though it rarely worked if the entire organization was united in suppressing the news to protect its reputation.

Athena excelled at these two methods, setting the rhythm of the attack. The third strategy targeted businesses linked to their enemies, creating financial losses that would throw the groups into disarray.

Because the chains and connections were difficult to break directly, a distraction was needed. Ling Qingyu's financial resources would support this objective by persuading volunteers to come forward and confess the crimes.

The final blow came from the official background. Since Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue had negotiated massive deals, especially for the light armored clothing that General Tang was practically drooling over, eager to equip her troops at the lowest friendly price, they had leverage.

Not to mention, General Tang owed Ling Qingyu a favor. The successful raid on the scamming syndicate had skyrocketed her merits and reputation.

If no major issues arose, she would surely be promoted to a four-star general in a few years.

Of course, the path wasn't that straightforward—hidden complications would follow.

Regardless, for General Tang, fulfilling this request was easy. A senior military official with a deep foundation applying pressure on civilian officials in media, propaganda, and business affairs?

Even the governor of Province T had to tread carefully, especially when General Tang shamelessly cited a distant relative of a military officer who had risked his life on a mission and suffered injustice.

Furthermore, undeniable evidence was already in their hands. The stakes rose when—

Thus, in just over a month of residing in Province T, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue used General Tang's resources to send those bastards to jail.

Strong backgrounds and connections proved useless once the governor intervened. General Tang didn't even need to ask for Gu Yi's help.

The operation freed Dong Xi from her bondage and worries, leaving her both grateful and slightly fearful of Tang Ziyi's and Xiao Yue's power.

However, eliminating those who had threatened Dong Xi required little effort and even gained them extra followers, like Wen Yalan and Miao Ying.

With their thunderous methods, even corrupt individuals who hadn't yet been affected kept their distance, wary of getting caught up in the chaos. As a result, Wen Yalan and Miao Ying were temporarily free.

The trio accepted Xiao Yue's offer. As long as their material needs were met, they had few concerns.

Sure, it was a pity to leave behind all their hard work. Although the club had been the sole reason for their rapid promotions, without talent and skill to prove themselves, how could they have held onto their positions when greedy eyes were constantly watching?

Besides, it would have been impossible for them to catch the attention of the people they had originally aligned with.

Cases of people with nothing at all rising through the ranks were rare and would be exposed sooner or later.

Lin Yuxin, on the other hand, sensed something was off with the sudden change in Dong Xi and met with the trio. Though amazed and wary, she merely offered congratulations and decided to distance herself.

Her intuition told her that the attack was headed in her direction. She wasn't loyal enough to warn her club members about the impending crisis and inform them of the trio's newfound freedom.

This was only the beginning. Xiao Yue's plan involved even higher stakes.

The chaos that would soon catch Gu Yi's attention had begun.

Chapter 659: General Tang moves

In fact, the enemies targeting Dong Xi weren't dangerous enough to influence the club she had retired from.

So, after Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue crudely resolved the problems from all angles, Dong Xi was completely free.

However, her husband, who was under arrest, couldn't be released, even though the duo had the means to do so.

The final test satisfied them, as Dong Xi didn't take over the properties despite being given the chance.

Or perhaps Dong Xi was simply clever enough to tread carefully, avoiding mishaps and offending others.

Without their involvement, Dong Xi was certainly destined to succeed and live well, despite the unwarranted sacrifices.

After all, she had served many men, understood their desires deeply, and learned how to manipulate them. This was how she had ensnared her short-lived husband.

Perhaps her fate would have remained unsightly and helpless even if she had survived this disaster.

The only difference was that two strangers had allowed her to leap over that disgusting fate and cut off the past stigma—something she had hardly expected.

Like a final stroke of luck, she had befriended these two strange women. She was exhilarated that her connection was so valuable, especially after witnessing how cleanly the two had eliminated her threats.

Not to mention, their accomplices seemed to be from the military. And among all social circles, which was the most powerful?

Politicians, followed by the military. The man who had played her belonged to the former—or so she thought.

She didn't believe that her rhetoric had convinced Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue to help; rather, her story had likely disgusted them.

More than once, the two had confessed that they despised people who exploited others—especially those who weren't villains or evildoers—for their own pleasure.

And her experience as a National TV host on the Official News Channel, plus her other positions, didn't hold enough weight to warrant so many resources being spent to rescue her.

Thus, Dong Xi decided to express her gratitude further by persuading other women who shared her woes. Miao Ying and Wen Yalan became her targets.

She bragged and exaggerated Tang Ziyi's and Xiao Yue's backgrounds, even though she didn't know the details. But it wasn't hard to guess that her words were close to reality.

Citing her own experiences and the need to secure their future, Dong Xi successfully poached Miao Ying and Wen Yalan. The former was already too deep in, while the latter had only just taken the first steps.

The two had been closer than sisters—until the latter felt betrayed. With Dong Xi's intervention, the duo reconciled.

After all, if not Miao Ying, there would have been others. Besides, why should a woman make things difficult for another woman, so long as no unforgivable evil had been committed?

Although both were reluctant to abandon the industry they had worked so hard for and the official career paths they had climbed, Dong Xi's sweet words and the possibility of transforming themselves into a capital-backed group truly swayed them.

Yes, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue laid out a few promises to transfer some shares once the group matured successfully. Moreover, Dong Xi received more gifts from the confiscation of her enemies' assets.

Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue were too disgusted to take over those properties from such greedy bastards. Besides, their actions would draw Dong Xi in closer.

Despite seeming useless and powerless against the capital and political circles, the former National TV host couldn't be underestimated—particularly her charm and grasp of human nature.

The trio of women were surprised, especially Dong Xi, when she realized that Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue were attacking their former godfather sponsor.

They were fragile pawns, useless in this type of large-scale battle. Fortunately, with the military-affiliated support of Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue, they were able to relocate to another province, where Fan Xi resided, without the slightest pressure.

Although they shouldn't have been affected, they were linked to Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue, and their departure coincided with the attack's timing. It was hard to pretend they weren't involved.

Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue weren't foolish enough to ignore even the smallest threats like in those cliché movies. They covered all angles, and Athena would compensate for any weaknesses if found.

...

When Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue decided to attack the mysterious backer with the surname Qin, General Tang showed some embarrassment.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that could almost be classified as elite crimes, General Tang weighed her strength against the risk.

This was a fight against a titan from the capital, and these girls dared to play around with it. The situation had escalated beyond her self-confidence.

Even though she could hold him down for a while, the question was not if she could—but for how long.

Afterward, she would likely face the wrath of a powerful family. Well, with her friend Gu Yi, that would be another matter.

Even then, the complications could escalate to a dangerous level—a tug-of-war between powerful families—once compromise became impossible.

Of course, General Tang had no fear of this distant Qin, who was always indulging in his sexual desires.

It was the surname that created pressure. She had no desire to offend a powerful party and block her own path forward.

Nonetheless, what Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue brought to the table created ambiguity in her decision-making.

It was clear that, with or without her involvement, both were determined to proceed. Specifically, the evidence they had must not be exposed to the public.

The duo's actions proved their willingness to act, as well as their alternatives if she chose not to cooperate.

Furthermore, General Tang didn't want to undermine the recent positive relationship between both parties.

They had cooperated once before and achieved great success. Now, the deeper stakes made General Tang salivate.

When Tang Ziyi slammed important data related to jet engines onto the table—data both she and Xiao Yue had previously ignored, since Athena's research spanned a wide spectrum—General Tang immediately hardened her stance.

Although the data had yet to be verified by her teams, the benefits were obvious. Besides, Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue weren't the type to lie.

With enough interest at stake, her mindset wavered. She had heard from Gu Yi that the new chip industry project, which had only recently begun, was tied to these girls.

The cake seemed to have excluded Qin Group and its allies, leading to protests and clashes between factions.

After all, chip technologies had long been monopolized by Qin Group, making it a key factor in their hegemony.

Spirit Fox undoubtedly owned research facilities. Otherwise, how could Aegis vehicles and armored clothing exist?

If research cooperation deepened, General Tang couldn't even begin to imagine the immense gains.

Her confidantes would also rise alongside her, with military projects under her direct leadership contributing significantly.

The intertwined interest groups behind her would definitely support Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue once the deal was settled, even if their opponent was Qin Group.

Would Qin Group dare to fight against everyone just for a distant relative?

Yes, they had been domineering in the past, but they weren't foolish enough to jeopardize the entire family over pride.

Thus, General Tang agreed to help.

Surely, the trio didn't target the Qin surname outright but instead chipped away at his allies piece by piece.

With enough proof, no matter how vast his protective umbrella was, he wouldn't be able to shield them.

There was indeed evidence of his crimes, particularly his so-called philanthropic activities, which concealed sexual abuse and money laundering.

Too many stakes were involved—capital links tended to cluster together, and touching their money was like pinching their lifeblood.

Under relentless pressure and continuous heavy blows, he utilized all his resources to safeguard his business.

Contrary to his belief in his own invincibility, it collapsed much sooner than expected.

He attempted to 'escape' and remained in the capital, where he wouldn't be as easily controlled or monitored.

Unfortunately for him, General Tang's response was even swifter. Airports, subways, cars—every mode of transportation had his name sealed off.

Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue allowed Athena to continuously monitor the situation, just in case this bastard somehow slipped through the blockades.

Soon after, MSS apprehended him and his powerful associates, setting off fireworks in the capital.

General Tang gritted her teeth and persisted.

Anyway, she wasn't wrongfully charging them, right? In fact, she was even helping Qin Group by suppressing news that could be detrimental to their image and business.

His arrest was kept private—nobody knew who he was, not that anyone had known his identity in the first place.

Meanwhile, some officials in Province T were sweating, wondering if staying neutral had been the right choice.

Siding with General Tang meant breaking ties with Qin Group, the behemoth. At the same time, they questioned where General Tang had gotten so much confidence.

Meanwhile, Gu Yi was also alarmed by her close friend's movements.

She nearly cursed out her daughter-in-law when she discovered who the culprit was after calling General Tang.

The parliament appeared disturbed by what they deemed a "reckless" law enforcement action—one that had a high chance of damaging the economy by blatantly targeting business groups.

There was no need to guess the identities of the lobbyists who brought up the issue. Gu Yi had encountered them multiple times and had warned them once: they couldn't afford too much publicity.

Behind the scenes, multiple questions arose, with some suspecting that she was attempting to disrupt the balance of families within the political circle.

Several families, however, backed her in exchange for promised benefits from General Tang. Seizing the momentum, Gu Yi immediately outlined her major rectification plan, citing the rampant corruption within government agencies—particularly those with deep family ties—where officials abused their power to satisfy their desires.

Using concrete examples from Province N and other regions, all backed by Athena's intelligence, Gu Yi and her aides delivered a veiled threat: Stay down and fix yourselves. Things might not turn out too badly. But if you press on, everyone will be exposed.

The implication was clear—this was just one insignificant figure. Why create unnecessary chaos? After all, no family was completely clean.

Those from families with long-standing heritage understood this best. Despite training and disciplinary actions, black sheep always existed. A few were completely beyond redemption.

Gu Yi had already made up her mind to eliminate these vampires feeding off the population.

The powerful could prey on the weak, but not at the cost of absurdly impacting ordinary lives and violating their fundamental rights.

Some families were so rotten that their corruption disgusted the entire nation. Gu Yi had long been aware of their deeds, but Athena had now exposed everything, tearing down the facade completely.

Honestly, even her own Yang family wasn't spared.

Regardless, the mess created by Ling Qingyu's confidantes forced Gu Yi to take direct oversight of the case.

The charges—ranging from sexual exploitation, corruption, bribery, and money laundering to drug trafficking and murder—had piled up to the point where the death penalty was more than justified.

Yes, murder was explicitly on the list. While it initially seemed unrelated to the accused and his associates, Athena's thorough reports connected all the dots.

Qin Group and its allies had no choice but to admit defeat and sell some rights to preserve their reputations. Containing the situation was imminent than saving their family members now. Otherwise, many wouldn't be spared.

Gu Yi was on the righteous side!

Chapter 660: New horizon

Indeed, Gu Yi handled everything and understood the feud wasn't over. Both sides could resolve their grudge later, but reactions still existed.

Sure enough, Gu Yi had to fight harder to brace for the repercussions. There were no missing personnel or dramatic accidents like in the movies to punish or threaten the protagonists.

General Tang's subordinates and confidantes immediately came under scrutiny. Numerous threats emerged, causing the former to enter a menopause-like state throughout the confrontation.

If not for the favorable prices offered by Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue, she would have almost written the word regret on her face.

Fortunately, with Athena's foresight and warnings, Gu Yi and General Tang easily neutralized these hidden threats.

The cooperation between the parties deepened, drawing them closer than ever before. No matter the enemies' conspiracies, their plans were exposed as clearly as daylight before Gu Yi and General Tang.

For veterans in officialdom, even a small clue—one that might be difficult for Athena to discern—could reveal deeper meanings.

Athena's analytical skills, combined with Gu Yi's sharp eyes and strategic ideas, became a nightmare for their enemies.

For about a month or more, Gu Yi and General Tang were busy wiping Tang Ziyi's and Xiao Yue's asses.

Thankfully, their actions dismantled many similar sex clubs or forced them to lie low for a while, eliminating several corruption factors within the government.

Listening to Gu Yi's complaints and Athena's additional narration, Ling Qingyu smiled helplessly, lamenting her sisters' thoughtfulness in attracting valuable talents to Fan Xi's new projects.

As for their identities, Ling Qingyu didn't care. She had long become immune after realizing the filth behind corruption and rampant tyranny.

Besides, Zhou Rong's case had already desensitized her expectations of this world. She even suspected that what Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue encountered might be another scripted plotline influenced by Miss System's playfulness.

Whether she had disrupted the plot of a passionate genre or not, Ling Qingyu didn't feel the slightest bit of guilt. She wasn't afraid of the world's causality trying to force destiny back on track.

She speculated that as long as she contributed enough to the world, it wouldn't even raise an eyebrow. Only key characters—protagonists with great luck, who had a significant impact on society—warranted caution.

Ling Qingyu concluded that once she fully attached her interests to this world, the world itself would no longer restrict her actions, even if she eliminated its favored children.

Since she had identified the key factors, her burden of worry for the future lightened, especially regarding her inevitable clash with Qin Group.

And possibly, Lin Fan could stand opposite her if their interests and ideals didn't align. Even though Miss System didn't urge or remind her, Ling Qingyu still remembered the original goal—to rob away harem members... ahem... to prevent scumbags from planting seeds irresponsibly.

Bullshit about a responsible man providing a husband role for those in suffering. If not for most of the women's identities allowing them to fund and support themselves, his protagonist aura would remain a mystery.

His so-called wealth was barely sufficient for a handful to squander. How could he survive without ruining relationships, without the women's financial input?

Anyway, Ling Qingyu didn't understand why women fell for him, apart from the aura effect that subtly brainwashed them into lovesickness. Up to five women were acceptable; anything more offended her.

Of course, that number didn't apply to her, hehe... Those connected to her were genuine, unaffected by the so-called will of the world.

"You'd better guarantee the level of technology sharing promised earlier," Gu Yi's words interrupted Ling Qingyu's contemplation.

"Mom, that wasn't me speaking, right?" Ling Qingyu teased, then quickly corrected herself when she noticed the darkening expression. "Ahem... I'll make sure to satisfy your request. You should have already noticed our secret helicopter."

Gu Yi nodded and gestured for Ling Qingyu to continue. She understood where Ling Qingyu was going with this.

Given the technology displayed and Assistant Su's explanation, Gu Yi realized that her daughter-in-law's technological advancements far exceeded Country C's in certain areas.

Country C lacked proper jet propulsion technologies, particularly high-quality ones. Most of the airworthy models in mass production had issues with lifespan and reliability. Ling Qingyu could easily fill that gap.

If not for their close relationship, Gu Yi couldn't help but consider the possibility of confiscation and brutal suppression.

After all, no state institution liked things spiraling out of control. That applied to capitalist nations as well.

Unless their influence and wealth reached dangerous heights, such figures still had to curry favor within political circles.

However, understanding Ling Qingyu's strength and hidden means, Gu Yi dared not even entertain such thoughts, despite her position.

Moreover, her daughter-in-law had declared her commitment to her cause. How could she reject it or entertain other thoughts, both morally and rationally?

In fact, the technologies owned by Athena surpassed the world's by a large margin. Ling Qingyu was reluctant to share them unless necessary—these were treasures that could propel her up the ladder quickly once the right opportunity arose.

However, it seemed fine to divert a few foreign nations' technologies, right? Athena had stolen... ahem... studied them zealously to broaden its horizons and solidify its foundations.

It was thanks to these nations' contributions that Athena had reached its current level.

"Not enough, my dear Little Yu." Gu Yi shook her head. She was determined to squeeze Ling Qingyu dry tonight. How unfilial of her to let her mother-in-law drive around for weeks!

Apart from aerospace propulsion tech, Ling Qingyu also sold other data. "Will the secret data and information on the F-22 work?"

"You have them?" Gu Yi's voice carried urgency despite her stoic expression.

"Of course. There are other important weapon systems as well." Ling Qingyu shrugged. "But you can only get one. Forget it—consider less important areas. I don't like seeing foreign agencies sniffing around my backyard."

Given the power of certain nations—such as Country A, which possessed the F-22's secret files—Ling Qingyu felt some apprehension after making her offer.

She had no doubt about their espionage capabilities. If their classified files were leaked in Country C, they could track the source with terrifying accuracy.

Plus, she was about to visit Country A soon to accompany Mo Yunxi and Yin Jingfei. How could she foolishly set a trap for herself?

"Alas, how could you not have the slightest patriotism?" Gu Yi complained, rolling her eyes.

"Only a win-win-win interest always wins and lasts longer. Ideologies don't apply as easily to someone at my current level," Ling Qingyu replied. "I'd rather send you more files later when you're sitting in the chair. I don't want to hand over credit to your mediocre colleagues who did nothing."

"Alright, it's your decision. I won't morally blackmail you. Don't worry." Gu Yi patted her forehead reassuringly. "By the way, General Tang suggested the possibility of equipping your girls with Z-8 or Z-18 transport helicopters. She's willing to compensate more if you provide additional intel."

"You want my girls to fly those pieces of junk?" Ling Qingyu scowled in disbelief. "You should have seen the futuristic version. What makes you think we'd want those?"

"Give me some face when you complain." Gu Yi clicked her tongue. "At the very least, they can appear in public and serve as a valuable cover. Besides, I suspect General Tang wants your research team to refine and upgrade them after evaluating their design."

"I'll think about it since it's not much of a loss from my perspective," Ling Qingyu said, not outright rejecting the idea. "I need Tang Ziyi's and Xiao Yue's opinions first."

"Regardless, stay low and keep quiet for a few years. Once I've secured my plans, you can mess around as much as you like."

Meanwhile, Gu Yi's inner thoughts were in turmoil. Ling Qingyu had far more hidden assets than she had assumed.

From her tone, it was clear there were even more files waiting to be unveiled—each one powerful enough to shake the entire world.

Did she save an entire galaxy in her past life to have Ling Qingyu as her junior? Gu Yi thought narcissistically.

"Yes. By then, you'll have the initiative and be able to utilize every resource efficiently," Ling Qingyu reassured her, perhaps noticing Gu Yi's inexplicable silence.

It didn't hurt to make promises to ease her mother-in-law's concerns. Unless she was backed into a corner, Ling Qingyu would never betray the country.

Maybe she wasn't the most patriotic or generous person, but she wasn't ungrateful for the environment and opportunities she had here.

Pop! Pop!

Beautiful fireworks lit up the dark night, painting the sky with vibrant arrays of floral patterns.

Everyone gazed upward, sighing happily. According to tradition, the new year had arrived.

In the distance, tiny sparks of fireworks crackled in the sky as people celebrated the festival with joy. Though the event was far away, the murky echoes and festive atmosphere still reached Ling Qingyu's residence.

A new beginning. A new battle. A new opponent. Ling Qingyu exclaimed cheers inwardly and exchanged a knowing smile with Gu Yi.

Thankfully, Gu Yi's existence shortened her revenge plan dramatically. Otherwise, she might be pissed to death, watching Qin, male lead, dancing around in front of her like now for so long.