

Beautiful 701

Chapter 701: Continued inward debate II

Ling Qingyu understood what Xiao Yue had been trying to explain, though neither elaborated in front of the Spirit Fox operatives.

After all, their conversation involved details tied to their past lives—secrets that couldn't be spoken aloud, no matter the trust or loyalty of those around them.

Ling Qingyu suspected most of Xiao Yue's knowledge came from Tang Ziyi. If memory served her right, Xiao Yue's original timeline belonged to the chaotic warlord era.

Assuming the parallel worlds weren't drastically different, her time likely preceded the Second World War.

Ling Qingyu could imagine the conclusions Xiao Yue had drawn to support her point: that women had suffered no less than men or maybe more.

Perhaps Europe didn't leave behind as many graphic records, especially during the Great War, but the trauma endured by women in both world wars should never be underestimated.

In occupied territories, women were raped, displaced, or forced into labor. Sexual violence—especially against women of color in colonized regions—was rarely recorded.

The emotional toll was profound: waiting in fear, burying sons and husbands, starving, losing livelihoods, becoming widows or social outcasts.

Men and women across Africa and Asia were treated as tools—men conscripted, women violated—and their stories were systematically erased.

Yes, more men died in battle—but that didn't mean women suffered less.

They simply suffered differently, and their pain was under-recorded, dismissed, or ignored.

The so-called "Myth of European Mercy" painted World War I as a more restrained conflict, supposedly sparing civilian populations.

Indeed, WWI was brutal, but it operated under emerging international conventions like Geneva and The Hague, offering moments of relative mercy—at least in Europe.

But in non-white colonies during both world wars, such restraint vanished entirely.

Genocide, forced labor, scorched-earth tactics—colonial troops were used as cannon fodder.

"White mercy" applied only to fellow whites. Against other races, it was sheer barbarity.

From Xiao Yue's perspective, debates over whether men or women suffered more in modern timelines were missing the point—distractions that allowed the true culprits to evade accountability.

People often claimed that women were spared during the world wars. But were they?

Maybe in the trenches, yes. But in occupied villages? In brothels behind enemy lines? In the ruined remains of homes where mercy wore no uniform?

They said World War I was more civil. Maybe in Europe.

But in Asia or Africa? There was no Geneva in the jungle. No chivalry in the colonies.

Only bullets. Only orders.

The speculations of men were more victims were utterly nonsense. Funny enough, if war was born from man's greed and command since authoritative figures were males during the time, ignoring a handful of female supremes as other ministers were still men.

Such, perhaps, would have been Xiao Yue's exact words if their conversation had continued.

While silence filled the convoy, Athena remained active behind the scenes. Her daughter was diligently analyzing data, reading reports, and compiling conclusions for Ling Qingyu to review.

The findings were both intriguing and unsettling—challenging the popular narratives often pushed by influencers locked in battles over gender discourse.

Like Ling Qingyu and Xiao Yue had suspected, much of the public attention was misdirected—fighting the wrong enemies and fostering a kind of internal "civil war."

Take the claim: "Men suffer more because they die more in battle."

It was an oversimplification—one that ignored both context and long-term consequences.

Yes, during wartime, men typically died in greater numbers on the battlefield.

They were conscripted en masse, subjected to extreme physical and psychological trauma.

This was a devastating burden—but one rooted in patriarchal systems that treated men as disposable instruments of war and women as property to be protected or plundered.

But the post-war data told another side of the story:

— Higher female mortality after war.

Due to disease, poverty, starvation, and lack of medical care.

When infrastructure collapsed, services like maternity care, clean water, and food distribution often deprioritized women.

— Increased sexual violence.

Mass rapes, forced marriages, and human trafficking surged during and after conflicts.

These traumas inflicted long-term physical and psychological scars, often accompanied by social ostracization.

— Widowhood and poverty.

Women left behind were frequently barred from inheriting property, remarrying, or working.

In many societies, widowhood became a life sentence of poverty and isolation.

War was hell for everyone—but while men often died more visibly and quickly on the battlefield, women tended to suffer longer, more silently, and in ways less recorded once the dust had settled.

It was even worse for women in countries with deeply rooted chastity cultures and agonizing stigmas—circumstances that ultimately led Xiao Yue to believe women suffered more.

Their deaths, however, were often overlooked, brushed aside by the short-lived attention span of the public.

In societies where men were overwhelmingly preferred, the horror extended even to the killing of female infants—a grotesque reflection of extreme patriarchy.

Athena's historical records further informed Ling Qingyu that, contrary to popular belief, the gender ratio of wartime casualties hadn't drastically skewed toward men when considering the full picture.

According to available statistics from the First World War in this world, one woman died for every five to six men directly due to the conflict.

Extrapolating to her own past life's World War II, Ling Qingyu estimated the ratio narrowed to one woman for every four men.

However, when post-war deaths were factored in—those from famine, disease, systemic neglect, and gender-based violence—the ratio began to equalize.

This excluded cases in nations that heavily relied on cannon fodder strategies or were governed by regimes so oppressive that any meaningful data was distorted or silenced.

So much so, in fact, that even today, the lingering aftershocks of those wars could be seen in demographics: many societies now had more women than men—not because women were spared, but because they had survived different kinds of hell.

Ling Qingyu had to admit—arguing over who suffered more was ultimately irrelevant. There was no clear answer.

Those who "won" online debates were often just the ones who cited more data, read more reports, or knew how to manipulate statistics to fit their narrative.

In the end, the art of persuasion wasn't about lying. It was about telling the truth—but never the whole of it.

Chapter 702: You can't beat Sister Ziyi

All these debates and dialogues about gender—what were they really for?

Rights and responsibilities.

For every right one inherited by birth, nature demanded a corresponding responsibility: to reciprocate that gift and contribute to the well-being of others, so that civilization could thrive. Those who failed to do so—and hurt innocents in the process—were scum by nature. Be it emotional harm, physical harm, or manipulation, the damage was all the same.

The philosophy was simple. But people preferred to stand on the moral high ground while enjoying unearned benefits, exploiting others through social, emotional, or political means for their own gain.

Ling Qingyu exhaled and remembered—she hadn't yet asked what Xiao Yue and Tang Ziyi thought about it all.

After all, these two women had long surpassed the definitions she once held of "what a woman is supposed to be." Since coming to this world, her views had changed, evolved, even sublimated.

Birds of a feather flock together, as the saying went—and indeed, Ling Qingyu rarely found fools among her friends. Talented people shared sympathy and emotion. They competed in silence—through friendship, growth, and their achievements—not through malice or vanity. That was her measure. That was how she saw worth.

So she enjoyed deciphering the thoughts of strong women—especially those who earned their strength not by perception, but by proof.

Everyone has their own strength, forged from their lived experiences. But the kind Ling Qingyu respected was different: it was the strength of warriors—those who had shed blood, sweat, and tears and had nearly lost their lives to their cause.

Those were the truly strong. Warriors. Survivors of disaster. "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger"? Perhaps. But the truth was deeper—life and death changed a person in ways no outsider could comprehend.

Ling Qingyu knew she wasn't quite like the other two—women who had once danced atop the edge of cold steel. Still, she had her own moments. The robbery incident with Yin Jingfei... the blood-rushing sniper duel... they had reshaped her mindset, forged her beliefs in fire.

That robbery had made her a warrioress. Cheat or not, she hadn't known whether her body could survive a bullet. It was a brush with death, plain and simple. The sniper duel was the same. Even with Tang Ziyi comforting her, she hadn't known the outcome in advance. She'd been prepared to risk everything.

Now, with nothing exciting in sight, a mix of boredom and curiosity swirled inside her. The boredom came from the bland surroundings. The curiosity came from Xiao Yue—the woman beside her, the warlord whose mind always spun with strange, sharp perspectives.

Apart from the strange fact that killing people—sometimes even with her bare hands—barely stirred a reaction in her, Ling Qingyu was astounded by how little it affected her. No nausea. No vomiting. Just silence. In that eerie calm, she realized she had truly transcended.

Totally in contrast to those novels and movies.

So Ling Qingyu finally spoke up.

"Xiao Yue, I'm kinda curious about your thoughts on all this."

The topic was ambiguous on purpose, though the tone hinted at their ongoing musings about gender, rights, and war. Perhaps she was reflecting on arguments from her past life—conscriptation, voting rights, and those infamous online jokes about feminists suddenly cooking as soon as war broke out. The so-called trump cards of gender, rooted in "natural roles." Men created the world's structures. Women created humanity. And vice versa.

To Ling Qingyu, arguments like that weren't particularly meaningful. Outside of dignity and the useless urge to be "right," most people—men or women—were simply too busy dealing with life to care.

The ones who did pay attention were often those carrying emotional resentment. And when two resentments met on the same wavelength, the validation could feel like salvation.

At the end of the day, it was a lack of empathy and appreciation that had led to the current dilemma. There was nothing surprising about strong ideological clashes between genders—these tensions had existed since the dawn of civilization.

And truthfully, after her long relationship with Xiao Yue and Tang Ziyi, and her experiences since arriving in this world, Ling Qingyu already had her stance.

"Don't you know curiosity kills the cat?" Xiao Yue rolled her eyes, clearly catching on to where the conversation was heading.

Ling Qingyu smirked, unfazed. "I'm a lion, not a cat."

"You're still a big cat, technically. And besides," Xiao Yue added with a smirk of her own, "you're a lioness in a harem. Not the lion."

Ling Qingyu's hairs stood on end in mock outrage. Xiao Yue's words hit the nail on the head.

If not for her "cheats," Ling Qingyu would probably still be struggling like some dog-licking male stallion protagonist. She never expected Xiao Yue to turn wicked too. Clearly, it had been a huge mistake not to keep an eye on the elegant ancient lady after she partnered up with the manly woman.

Ling Qingyu snorted, expressing her dissatisfaction. Even though she was still busy trying to win Yang Qingyue's approval to graduate, her goal of building a harem of women never wavered.

Life needed entertainment alongside ambition—otherwise, it'd be unbearably dull.

"You're asking for a beating," Ling Qingyu said flatly.

Xiao Yue covered her lips and snickered, then held her stomach as she locked eyes with her. "What? Resorting to violence just because you can't win an argument? Weak. The truly strong push their limits, not bully their opponents."

Ling Qingyu cursed her logic inwardly. Sister, seriously? Where's that righteous courage you used to have, always beating me whenever you got the chance and a flimsy excuse?

But times had changed, and now that the tide had turned, Ling Qingyu won every physical fight. She no longer feared Xiao Yue—except for her mouth.

"I'm wealthier," she declared.

"I have Sister Ziyi," Xiao Yue replied smugly.

"I've got Sister Yang's connections and mine. That overshadows yours."

"What's yours is mine. Beat Sister Ziyi if you want to talk independence."

Ling Qingyu's eyelids twitched. Her lips followed, trembling with suppressed frustration. She took a long, deep breath. "...Shortie Yue, admit it—"

"You can't beat Sister Ziyi," Xiao Yue interrupted with a calm smile, like she was reciting the law of gravity.

"Hey! Weren't you the one always shouting 'Final fist decides the winner!' when you had the upper hand?"

"You. Can't. Beat. Sister Ziyi," Xiao Yue repeated, one finger raised per word like she was teaching a toddler to count.

"I'm the strongest."

"You can't beat Sister Ziyi."

"I have money. So much money."

"Sister Ziyi trained people who can make that money disappear with one line of code."

"I have connections."

"Connections who need Sister Ziyi's security clearance before they dare say hi."

"I'm the core of the group!"

"Sister Ziyi is the motherboard, CPU, and power supply. You're the RGB lights."

"I have influence! People listen to me!"

Xiao Yue tilted her head. "Because Ziyi keeps you alive long enough for them to hear you."

"I—! Hmph! I'm prettier than her."

"Beauty is in the eyes of beholder. Besides, she once broke three ribs of a merc with the corner of a clipboard. Pretty is just bonus damage."

Ling Qingyu stomped. "Fine! But without me, there's no company. No Athena. No global plan."

Xiao Yue smirked. "Without Sister Ziyi, there's no Spirit Fox. No cyber defense. No novice protection period. No ops team. No land to stand on. No... you."

"...Can you let me win one argument?"

Xiao Yue shrugged dramatically. "Beat Sister Ziyi first."

Ling Qingyu pointed a trembling finger at her. "I will someday!"

"I'll light incense at your memorial," Xiao Yue said with a bow. "Heroic but hopeless."

"Shortie Yue, I swear—!"

Xiao Yue spun on her heel, hands behind her back. "You swore that last time, too. Right before Sister Ziyi caught your punch mid-air and tapped your forehead like a naughty child."

"That was a lucky counter!"

"She did it twice."

"WHY do you remember these things?!"

"Because history is important. Especially the rarity of a youthful aura, challenging the known results."

Ling Qingyu could feel the vein on her temple throb harder. "Wo—"

"Woman, you have my attention?" Xiao Yue leaned in, wiggling her brows with a mischievous grin.

"You're testing my patience—"

"But you need patience to grow stronger!" Xiao Yue interjected, throwing her hands up like a motivational coach. "Anyway, I have Sister Ziyi as a strong backer. Come on, Qingyu, it's not a big deal to train harder. Try lifting something heavier than your pride for once."

Ling Qingyu's jaw clenched. Her knuckles cracked on instinct.

At the front of the vehicle, the two Spirit Fox operators who were acting as driver and co-driver suddenly developed an intense fascination with the dashboard. One adjusted the mirror five times without purpose; the other turned the wiper on during a clear sky.

Both knew better than to laugh. One wrong chuckle, and they'd be running laps in full gear, blindfolded, while getting interrogated about 'loyalty.'

Everyone in Spirit Fox knew: messing with a superior officer was suicide. But interfering in the "domestic banter" between these two? That was sacrilege.

Even the greenest recruit learned fast—this wasn't a skirmish; it was a family affair. Ancient laws applied. Observe, do not engage. Pray you weren't asked to pick a side.

Ling Qingyu slowly turned toward Xiao Yue, her voice soft—too soft. "So what you're saying is, I'm weak, useless, dependent, and stubborn?"

Xiao Yue smiled sweetly. "Exactly. But with potential and graduated recently with flying color!"

"...You're dead."

"You'll have to get past Sister Ziyi first."

Chapter 703: The true culprit

The bickering ended with Ling Qingyu's inevitable defeat—thanks to Xiao Yue's shameless trump card: invoking Tang Ziyi.

Ling Qingyu let out a sharp breath and rolled her eyes. Could someone return her the old, elegant Xiao Yue? The one who was always half-asleep, beautiful, and indifferent? Not this sly, glint-eyed troublemaker grinning with unearned smugness.

Come to think of it, for all their time together, the two warlords and war goddess—Tang Ziyi and Xiao Yue—had never truly opened up about their pasts. Ling Qingyu had never pried. She figured it was impolite to dig into others' secrets. Besides, she believed that as bonds deepened, the truth would naturally come forth.

Maybe she'd assumed their silence was bound by some rule of Miss System. Or maybe... maybe she simply hadn't earned their trust yet. She didn't know. But after everything they had endured together, she was certain there had to be a reason behind their guardedness.

The thought that they might one day return to their original worlds flickered through her mind like a passing shadow. She pushed the idea down.

She didn't want to imagine what it would feel like to lose them—not even if her life was otherwise full.

"What do you want to ask?" Xiao Yue's voice sliced through her thoughts.

Ling Qingyu blinked. "Ah... I almost forgot what I wanted to say. You pissed me off so much."

She chuckled despite herself. "Anyway, remember—I'm not trying to argue for the sake of it. I just want to know your thoughts. That's all."

"Then shoot. It's not like I can beat you right now. Why're you scared?"

"I'm not scared," Ling Qingyu scoffed. "But you know me too well. I just don't want you to misread my intentions. I really just want your opinion."

Xiao Yue smirked. "Oh, come on. Isn't this just one of those tired arguments about how men and women aren't equal because they don't pay the same 'blood price' for their country? All tied up in conscription and war glory nonsense. Why even bother?"

Ling Qingyu swallowed a sigh. The corner of her lip twitched. "I know that's not it. I mean... Everyone contributes to their country in their own way. There's no doubt about that."

Before she could clarify her point, Xiao Yue cut in.

"So, only those who serve in the military deserve rights? That's the implication, isn't it?" she said, voice flat. "It's a toxic logic. Sure, some military brass might act like they're better than the rest—especially in autocratic states. But those people usually haven't seen real combat. The ones on the ground don't think like that."

"I couldn't agree more," Ling Qingyu said, recalling their recent run-in with the President and his entourage. "We saw it firsthand—how they treat even their own fighters like chess pieces."

"Exactly. Being useful in war doesn't equal permanent respect or equality," Xiao Yue said. "It's a flawed metric to measure anyone's worth."

Rights shouldn't have to be bought with blood, Ling Qingyu thought. That would reduce men to cannon fodder—another expendable resource in the machinery of politics.

And women? Women didn't earn freedom just by being raped in warzones or bombed in cities. Rights were not a reward for suffering. They were the baseline of humanity.

"If a country has to rely on conscription to survive," Xiao Yue continued, "it's already circling the drain. The economy collapses, food runs dry, trade halts, and the only thing left standing is the brute force of those in power. Civilization slides back into the jungle law."

She crossed her arms, her expression cool. "And if we insist on judging worth by wartime usefulness—do we ignore what women went through to keep humanity going? Risking their lives in childbirth, raising children in famines, building homes from ruins?"

"In the past, the maternal death rate was horrifyingly high. Even in my era, it was common to die giving life. So yes, without men, there'd be no child—but the agony and danger women faced back then?" She paused. "It's not less just because they didn't fight with swords."

Ling Qingyu nodded slowly. "You're saying it's not about who spilled more blood, but about whether we even recognize someone as fully human."

"Exactly. Women weren't seen as people—just attachments to men. Property. That's why men were given the vote first—not just because they died in wars, but because women weren't even considered citizens in their own right."

Ling Qingyu smiled and added, "I assume the ones shouting the loudest are often those who hid behind the real warriors. They never paid a price, yet speak as if they carried the war on their backs."

Xiao Yue nodded, her brows furrowing thoughtfully. After a pause, she said, "If we're talking representation, believe me—there were more women fighting while disguised as men than people care to admit. Not many, sure. But not so few as most reckon, either."

She continued, "As for the claim that feminists retreat to the kitchen once war breaks out... I can't say for sure. But I do believe many women were—and still are—willing to sacrifice for their ideals. Your history, and the history of this world, already proves it."

Xiao Yue didn't mention their past world directly, but her silence was enough. Ling Qingyu could piece together the meaning herself.

Indeed, just as Xiao Yue said—many women had fought. Perhaps not in overwhelming numbers, but certainly not so insignificantly that they should be erased from memory.

Ling Qingyu could name several examples off the top of her head. During the First World War, Russia had tested a Women's Death Battalion or something similar. Their determination and courage were

extraordinary. They challenged norms, took up arms, and proved themselves on the battlefield—only for their achievements to be brushed aside or forgotten, even after success.

In the Second World War, female participation grew dramatically. The Soviet Union alone saw over 800,000 women serve in the armed forces—most as medics and nurses, yes, but that wasn't all. Around 200,000 of them were decorated for valor. Eighty-nine of them received the highest military honor: the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. They served as pilots, snipers, machine gunners, tank crew members, and partisans.

Yes—partisans. Guerrilla fighters, saboteurs, resistance. Throughout history, women's involvement in partisan warfare was far more common than many realize.

In China and Vietnam, too, women fought valiantly—against imperialism, during revolutions, and through bloody civil wars. Many became symbols of strength and resilience.

But did they gain equal rights afterward? Sometimes—briefly. Leaders might have praised these valkyries in speeches. Their names might have been remembered—for a while.

But when peace came, many were shoved back into the kitchen, back into obscurity. Those who had risked everything gained little. Promotion was harder. Reward rarer.

Was it right to ignore the rights they fought for—just because they weren't the majority?

Did rarity erase value?

If so, did that mean the contributions of any minority group—ethnic, cultural, or ideological—could also be dismissed?

Did a person have to be part of the majority to be remembered?

Must every sacrifice be downplayed just because it wasn't common?

Now, Ling Qingyu already received a satisfactory reply. Tang Ziyi's reply should be similar too. Sure enough, intaking opinions from different perspectives enriched herself.

"I believe it's the upbringing of a child that creates today's dilemma," Xiao Yue concluded. "In the past, it wasn't as obvious because women often stayed at home, and their behavior didn't impact society as directly. But in the modern era, when that same 'princess' mindset persists—it's a total mess. It's not a gender issue, it's an issue of refusing to take responsibility."

She could already tell what Ling Qingyu was thinking. Today's conflict between the sexes stemmed from this root cause. Men lashed out at women, pointing to the worst examples—narcissists, manipulators, and so-called 'female scum.' Women, in turn, condemned toxic masculinity, blaming the societal system.

But Xiao Yue saw it differently.

Men did have a point, but perhaps the blame should also fall on fathers and mothers who over-indulged their daughters. The kind of overprotection and worship that produced narcissistic "princesses" decades later.

Meanwhile, boys were raised with the unspoken rule that they had to earn love and respect. That success was the only key to being treated well by society. As a result, accountability often came easier for men—not always, but in many cases as they learned the harsh rules of the world early.

After all, no spoiled children would grow with the correct world's view. Mother or father, either parent must take importance. Surely, there were clever children who didn't need such teaching to grow well but that was only tiny portion of the population.

Of course, there were exceptions. Always. Ling Qingyu silently agreed at Xiao Yue's remarks. She didn't have to look far—just at her past self. Her predecessor became strong because she understood that nothing would ever be handed to her. Everything she had, she earned.

This had been the belief since her youth.

All in all, society was really turning for the better, not the worst, as people were convinced. Great changes took time, always.

Chapter 704: Ling Qingyu being proud

Okay, Ling Qingyu didn't need to probe further. Gaining their perspectives was already an eye-opener—pointing directly at the real problems rather than the superficial ones.

After all, Xiao Yue, the warlord, had personally served in the military, even if her start was smoother than most, having risen from a higher status. She must have led other women to participate—starting as medics, then as fighters—challenging the norms of her time.

Who knew how many obstacles she'd faced in a feudal society steeped in superstition and the belief that women were inherently inferior?

Xiao Yue had broken through so many barriers to reach her current level of achievement. And now, in this modern world, her old philosophies were clashing with contemporary values.

Like a sponge, Xiao Yue had absorbed the essence of both worlds. But unlike those simply taught in schools, everything she knew came from raw, lived experience.

As someone who had transcended her own time—an age of self-doubt and rigid tradition—Xiao Yue's insight far surpassed that of ordinary scholars.

Who knew how much she had changed after meeting that female scumbag, Tang Ziyi? Ling Qingyu frowned. That bastard better not have corrupted this elegant ancient lady with crooked ideas.

Even if she had, it was already too late.

Ling Qingyu grit her teeth every time she remembered that she had lost a potentially virtuous, gentle lady for her harem.

Tang Ziyi: As if you can step over me.

Ling Qingyu: Aba Aba.

Patriarchy does indeed exist to some extent, even in modern times, creating obstacles for women. But was it inherently a bad ideology?

Not at all—not in its origins, at least. Every system has its pros and cons. Patriarchy, like many other social structures, was designed to suit the needs of its era—a compromise that worked well given the conditions of the time.

But as society progressed, its framework began to show cracks. Who knows which bastard started adding more rules or twisting existing ones to fulfill their own desires for control? Over time, what may have once been a system of order and survival transformed into a tool for dominance and suppression.

It's much like religion: initially founded to guide humanity toward morality and unity, but as centuries passed, its tenets were sometimes distorted by those with ambitions of power. What began as a means for good was exploited by those who sought control.

The truth is, any ideology or philosophy requires balanced progression. Clinging stubbornly to the old ways serves no one in a rapidly evolving world. Likewise, veering too far into extremes—whether conservatism or radicalism—rarely brings benefits that outweigh the costs.

Progress isn't about erasing the past; it's about learning from it and adapting. The moment an idea stagnates, it becomes a barrier rather than a bridge.

Just then, a call chimed in. Ling Qingyu glanced at her phone—it was Gu Yi, her mother-in-law.

Ah. She had nearly forgotten to inform Gu Yi about the attack... and the part Spirit Fox played in the chaos. She had told Carol, but somehow forgot to report to the elder.

Hehe. As expected, lust really could cloud judgment.

Ahem. Ling Qingyu fixed her expression and answered the call.

Before she could even speak, a storm of scolding came through the line.

"You! Girl! You never let me rest easy. Worse than my daughter. I thought I could be relieved after handing her over to you—turns out you two are cut from the same cloth!"

Ling Qingyu pulled the phone slightly away from her ear to avoid going deaf. Not that it mattered—her sensitive physique still caught every word crystal-clear.

Even so, beneath the scolding, she could feel the warmth and concern in Gu Yi's voice. Blood relation or not, the care was unmistakable.

"Aunt Gu, I'm fine," Ling Qingyu replied, half-joking. "You know me and my girls. How could we possibly suffer? Honestly, you should feel bad for the terrorists—they were unlucky enough to bump into us."

She didn't call her "Mom," even if everyone nearby would've kept the secret. Gu Yi was a respected figure, and Ling Qingyu wanted to protect her dignity—especially in front of the Spirit Fox operators.

"I don't know whether to scold you or praise you," Gu Yi sighed, her voice fatigued. She had likely already been briefed through diplomatic channels.

After all, there were many citizens from Country C at the airport during the attack. Some had died. Without Spirit Fox's intervention, the death toll could've been far higher.

Gu Yi had initially thought Ling Qingyu had flown directly to Country A. So when reports arrived, she hadn't connected the mysterious elite unit to Spirit Fox or to Country C—until later.

After all, the attackers spoke Country C's language. Spirit Fox operators rarely spoke aloud due to their rigorous silent training, but in the chaos, some words must have been uttered. Someone likely overheard them, putting the pieces together.

Only after checking the aircraft logs one by one did Gu Yi realize Ling Qingyu's Airbus had also landed there.

Then it clicked: Spirit Fox had intervened—and saved the day. If not, she would've been a minister in name only.

"Well... as long as you're safe," Gu Yi finally said, her tone softening. "In any case, I owe you thanks for saving our compatriots."

"No, no, absolutely not." Ling Qingyu refused without hesitation. "That wasn't heroism. That was pure self-defense. They attacked me first."

Gu Yi couldn't decide whether to laugh or sigh. Ling Qingyu's whimsical deflection didn't fool her, but she let it go. Whether for diplomatic convenience or to protect their identities, she didn't press.

Still, from the seriousness in Ling Qingyu's voice, Gu Yi began to wonder—was there more to this story that hadn't been uncovered yet?

Ling Qingyu explained the situation in detail—why she was there, what she did, and how the terrorist attack unfolded. She also mentioned that she had been helping her subordinate's relative, which just happened to align with her travel plans, and that led her to clash with the black ops.

"You mean... How could they?" Gu Yi finally understood why Ling Qingyu had reacted so strangely when she thanked her.

"Aunt Gu, who would have expected them to act so desperately? I thought it would be a game of cat and mouse between spies," Ling Qingyu whined, adding a hint of playful grievance to her tone.

"What secrets did he hold that would make them act so recklessly?" Gu Yi's voice sharpened, her instincts as a seasoned politician immediately catching the main point.

Ling Qingyu feigned a dramatic sigh. "Here I was, thinking Aunt Gu was worried about me. It turns out..." She paused, staging a mock display of a bitterly complaining wife.

On the other end of the line, Gu Yi rolled her eyes, but she couldn't help the soft chuckle that escaped her. She was indeed taken aback when she heard that the black ops had ties to Country A's military. But then again, hadn't those so-called superpower special forces been utterly beaten by Ling Qingyu's girls?

The comparison solidified Spirit Fox's level in her mind—an elite force above anything she had seen before. Of course, she also understood that the operatives they faced likely weren't the best of the best, but still...

"Come on, now that I know you're safe, I can breathe easy. Since you're still confident enough to continue flying to Country A, I'm relieved," Gu Yi's tone lightened, a hint of approval seeping through.

She knew Ling Qingyu wouldn't act on impulse. If she dared to venture into enemy territory, she must have her own arrangements in place. Gu Yi also sensed that Ling Qingyu was diverting the conversation away from more probing questions, but she allowed it, knowing well the younger woman's temperament. Besides, who could blame her future daughter-in-law and business collaborator for being cautious?

Ling Qingyu seemed to pick up on Gu Yi's unspoken thoughts and spoke softly. "Aunt Gu, it's not good to talk too much over the phone. I'll brief you properly when I return. Truthfully, I'm still piecing things together myself."

"Really?" Gu Yi asked, her tone skeptical but not pressing.

"I'm being very frank, Aunt Gu."

"Alright, forget about that for now. What's the deal with your visit to Country E?"

Ling Qingyu sighed and recounted her original plan, explaining the Medical City project and her predicaments. She confessed everything that needed to be said. After all, it wasn't good to hide things from someone close. If she said nothing, Gu Yi would find out about her ownership of the Medical City sooner or later once the state machine began investigating the terrorist attack.

Even if the two events weren't directly connected, all available information would be scrutinized twice over. Why ruin a good relationship over details that could easily be found in public channels?

"So, I assume you reached a successful deal easily?" Gu Yi asked, her tone expectant.

"Of course not." Ling Qingyu huffed. "Those bastards needed a good beating before they'd take me seriously."

"You even threatened the officials there?" Gu Yi's tone darkened. Ling Qingyu, of course, couldn't see the national minister's expression, but she could imagine it.

"Threatened? I was very polite." Ling Qingyu feigned innocence. "I just reasoned with the President—helped him understand that I'm not someone to be messed with."

Gu Yi's eyes narrowed on the other end of the call. Not just officials, but the President? And from the way Ling Qingyu spoke, it was as if the President had been toyed with. Hmph, if that was the case, then it was clear her own ministerial connections hadn't represented her very well, had they?

Right... How exactly did Ling Qingyu come to own that medical facility anyway? She'd heard whispers that it only served the elite—perhaps some officials had stretched their claws a little too far.

Knowing Ling Qingyu's character, Gu Yi couldn't help but sigh. If it weren't for her own influence, the chip project might have run aground thanks to the greed of the higher-ups.

"Qingyu, don't forget me and my friends if there's ever an opportunity," Gu Yi joked, her tone lightening.

"How could I?" Ling Qingyu chuckled. "Though I doubt Aunt Gu would need it. You're still young and beautiful. Very healthy and youthful."

"Haha, I won't take your flattery for granted. Life is full of surprises, little girl. You can't expect everything to unfold according to your anticipation," Gu Yi replied with a laugh. "By the way, don't be too firm and make unnecessary enemies. You know you still haven't resolved the hidden issues in Province N."

Ling Qingyu sighed dramatically. "Aunt Gu, my enemies are many; my equals are none."

Gu Yi: "..."

Xiao Yue: "..."

The two operators at the front: "..."

"In the heart of a real warrior, strength meant loneliness."

"..." Gu Yi almost vomited her blood from Ling Qingyu's exaggeration.

Chapter 705: Xiao Yue finds herself

Again, Ling Qingyu sighed dramatically, placing a hand over her heart with theatrical flair. "Aunt Gu, my enemies are many; my equals are none."

Gu Yi: "..."

Xiao Yue: "..."

The two operators at the front: "..."

Ling Qingyu wasn't finished. She raised her chin and stared wistfully out the window as if gazing upon a war-torn horizon. "I walk this path alone—not because I want to, but because none can keep up. To spar with me is to flirt with disaster, to challenge me is to embrace ruin. The birds in the sky dare not fly too close; the rivers part when I approach. Even thunderstorms bow before my wrath."

On the other side of the channel, Gu Yi's brow twitched. "You—"

But Ling Qingyu was just getting started. She extended her hand toward the ceiling like she was delivering a grand speech atop a mountain peak. "The world is vast, yet I stride across it unchallenged. Empires tremble at my name, tyrants whisper it in fear, and even the mighty Spirit Fox operators...well, they just look at me like I'm insane right now."

One of the operators couldn't help but whisper to the other, "Is Boss always like this?"

The other replied with a deadpan expression, "I think it's too late to discuss this issue."

Ling Qingyu cleared her throat and continued, unbothered by the peanut gallery. "In the heart of a true warrior, strength is a burden. The burden of endless victory! To be unbeaten, untouched, unmatched—ah, it is a lonely road paved with the tears of my enemies."

Xiao Yue rubbed her forehead. "She's really going for it today, huh?"

Gu Yi nearly choked on her saliva. "You—you can stop now."

Ling Qingyu gave an exaggerated sigh, crossing her arms with a dramatic pout. "Fine, fine. I'll stop. But I hope you all understand the plight of being this exceptional. It's a heavy crown I wear."

Gu Yi: "..."

Xiao Yue: "..."

The two operators: "..."

Although Gu Yi hadn't heard of similar quotes, Ling Qingyu's words sparked something deep—an ambition to conquer, a desire to dominate. Her ridiculous tone aside, the sheer weight of her words sent ripples through those listening. I see, I come, I conquer.

Even through the distant connection, Gu Yi felt it—the confidence, the raw presence of Ling Qingyu's vision. This girl wasn't merely a reformer; she was a force that looked far beyond Country C's upper echelon.

The three-year-old-style monologue almost caused a car accident. Xiao Yue, seated beside Ling Qingyu, was practically numb from her acting. During the entire speech, she had unconsciously gestured a very familiar hand sign—the kind reserved for international 'salutes.'

Ling Qingyu, of course, noticed. But rather than call her out, she simply raised an eyebrow at Xiao Yue's stiff posture and office-lady outfit. It was almost as if her exaggerated antics were contagious.

While some speculated that Ling Qingyu had just created history with iconic quotes, Xiao Yue remained skeptical. Her gut told her this bastard had probably copied it from somewhere and just dramatized it for effect.

But...where had she heard it before? Xiao Yue combed through her knowledge, recalling history from her world, parallel worlds, and the current world. An odd pattern emerged. In almost every recorded case, those who created chaos at a continental level were... short.

Short.

Xiao Yue stared at her own legs. She remembered the secret sutra she practiced—how it helped her strength, her combat abilities, but...not her height. While other Spirit Fox operators shot up like weeds, she remained almost unchanged.

Tang Ziyi had comforted her before, saying that the girls only grew because of imperfections corrected during training. But that logic never fully satisfied her. After all, Tang Ziyi didn't grow. Ling Qingyu didn't grow. Only the newer girls did.

A ridiculous thought crept into her mind. Was she destined to be a conqueror?

Perhaps greatness wasn't measured in centimeters after all.

The other average women: "Your 1.72 meter is already tall, what do we have?"

But that wasn't the real issue. Why had her ambition dwindled? Why had she settled for just a piece of land and the ability to protect her people?

No. She had to be the unifier. As a warlord, she should strive for greatness once she returned. She had the best starting point.

Compared to the other warlords, she had an edge—they were confined to the strategies and politics of their era, while she had learned the intricacies of human affairs and the art of social science from the modern world.

Countless strategies and battle tactics paged through her mind, far surpassing her peers in ways she couldn't even fully comprehend yet.

Her goal shouldn't just be to unify the country; she also needed to prepare her compatriots against the devils planning to invade—an insight she gleaned from the histories of the parallel world.

Perhaps she couldn't be entirely sure if an invasion would come, but preparation never hurt anyone.

And once she had the chance to return, how could her confidantes stay idle? Sister Tang would undoubtedly follow her back.

Ling Qingyu wasn't just her nominal boss; she was also a close sister she could rely on and confide in.

More than that, it was the mysterious force behind Ling Qingyu that had brought her and Tang Ziyi to this new world and given them this opportunity.

Although nothing much was explicitly said, Xiao Yue speculated that cross-world travel might be possible with Ling Qingyu's manipulation.

When that time came, if Xiao Yue dared not follow her ambition and desire for conquest, especially with her newfound strength, she might as well forget everything she had discussed with Ling Qingyu.

New technologies, fresh concepts, enriched culture, and potentially raw support from her two closest sisters—Xiao Yue felt a surge of confidence, the urge to mutter a challenge: "Who else?"

Ling Qingyu noticed the sudden change in Xiao Yue's expression—a spark of elation, a flicker of enlightenment. Instinctively, she shivered.

No, this girl had definitely turned weird. Since when did this lazy, cute shortie, usually devoid of ancient elegance, suddenly exude such an aura?

Wait—had she ever felt this kind of presence from Xiao Yue before? Did shoving middle finger at her gain strength? Ling Qingyu pushed the odd feeling to the back of her mind.

Little did she know that her words had ignited a flame of ambition in Xiao Yue—a woman who had been wandering without purpose now had a path forward, her mentality matured and her resolve crystallized.

That would be far in the future—when Ling Qingyu finally accomplished her ambitions—that she would realize Miss System's gift of two characters wasn't free. In reality, she served as a literal coolie.

Not that she minded, but a minor complaint lingered in the back of her mind.

For now, Ling Qingyu catered to Gu Yi, humoring the elder's vanity. After chatting about light topics for a while, Gu Yi suddenly shifted the conversation.

"Since you girls are out and about, wouldn't you be free to take on a job?"

Ling Qingyu chuckled. "Is it a favor or a paid gig?"

"Come on, Qingyu."

"Don't 'come on' me, Aunt Gu. You know my girls have to sweat and bleed to complete your missions." Ling Qingyu deftly dodged the suggestion.

The last time she accepted one of Gu Yi's requests, she wouldn't have considered it—if not for the many benefits dangled in front of her, ones too good to refuse.

Of course, that was her surface reasoning. The real incentive came from Miss System posing missions with tantalizing rewards.

"You're as pragmatic as ever. I thought with your happiness, you'd have let your guard down a bit," Gu Yi joked.

"I can't let their guard down because of me. Honestly, I didn't gain much last time apart from helping you, Aunt Gu."

Gu Yi: "..."

An independent airfield, aircraft that were nearly impossible to purchase without serious connections, not to mention network growth with military officials.

Moreover, Ling Qingyu's wealth and business empire expanded under Gu Yi's guidance.

Please, if anyone else overheard this conversation, they'd think I was a tyrant, Gu Yi mused silently.

Noticing the silence on the other end of the line, Ling Qingyu cleared her throat. She realized she might have overplayed her hand.

Feigning poverty needed to stay within certain limits; otherwise, it might just come off as distasteful.

Not that it mattered much—Gu Yi was family, after all.

"My dear Qingyu, I'm not asking you to complete the mission right away. I'm just hoping you'd consider it."

"What happened?" Ling Qingyu asked, sensing the sudden gravity in Gu Yi's tone.

"Four citizens overseas have been reported missing. Last known location, the Middle Kingdom—not too far from you," Gu Yi explained.

"So, you think I have that kind of reach?"

"No, the question is whether you're willing to help," Gu Yi replied calmly.

"Agents or civilians?"

"Two agents, two civilians. No one knows the agents' identities. At least, I hope they don't."

"You might want to check if your circle is leaking like a sieve, Aunt Gu." Ling Qingyu sighed. "Wouldn't it be easier to go through diplomatic channels? The locals should help you, right?"

"If it were that simple, would I be calling you? In fact, this is a personal request," Gu Yi's voice softened, almost pleading.

"Is there a female victim involved?" Ling Qingyu asked.

Gu Yi's veins throbbed. Was this question even necessary? "Why are you asking this? You're still as misandrist as ever from the mouth."

"At least, saving a beauty is better than saving an ugly uncle. It soothes my heart and increases my life span."

"Maybe you should just gulp at the mirror, yourself," Gu Yi complained. "The rumor that even male insects aren't allow in your residence seems true."

"So, you can't negotiate at all?" Ling Qingyu hit the main point.

Chapter 706: Cosmic shit-luck

Gu Yi, satisfied with a small victory, accepted Ling Qingyu's attempt to change the topic again.

"If the kidnappers were just ordinary criminals, we'd have a good chance of getting them back through diplomatic channels," Gu Yi said. "But our intelligence suggests foreign intervention. It's impossible for regular units in the Middle Kingdom to execute something like this flawlessly, without setting off even the slightest alarm."

"Either that, or your subordinates got themselves into trouble. Maybe they tangled with terrorists or big gangs," Ling Qingyu replied, considering the alternatives.

After all, she had asked Athena to monitor the development of ISIS in the Middle Kingdom. According to her predictions and the original trajectories, the Middle Kingdom should be engulfed in devastation once that extremist organization went rampant.

The time hadn't come yet, but the undercurrents were there—perhaps this was one of those ripples. If terrorist organizations were involved, financial incentives could be a driving factor.

"Well, Qingyu, it seems I underestimated your geopolitical sense. You're right; terrorists are involved. Some evidence suggests their presence."

"You're not asking me and my girls to go in guns blazing for a direct rescue, are you?" Ling Qingyu asked, her expression blank.

"Of course not. That would be the last resort. For now, the relevant departments are negotiating their demands. If it can be resolved peacefully, then that's ideal."

"But..." Ling Qingyu pressed.

"Yeah, but." Gu Yi echoed. "If things go south, I thought I could rely on you. It's entirely your choice; you don't have to do this if you're not willing. But I believe your intelligence network might gather more accurate data than mine."

"Tsk, who doesn't know how to freeload off others and serve chicken soup?" Ling Qingyu scoffed.

All leaders were the same—always offering moral support while subtly manipulating subordinates to be more efficient by painting grand dreams.

Praising her network just to pry information from her? Ling Qingyu wasn't that naive. And Gu Yi knew it too.

Whether it was reverse psychology or just casual banter as family, Gu Yi didn't care.

Who said a minister couldn't joke around with her daughter-in-law?

In any case, Gu Yi achieved her goal. Ling Qingyu's curiosity was piqued. She would indeed investigate after this call and decide whether to act.

"And just a reminder," Gu Yi paused. "The intel we've gathered so far indicates that no criminal organization or terrorist cell could have pulled off this kind of abduction while evading all ISR capabilities. We couldn't locate the victims at all."

"A third party is involved? Is that what you mean, Aunt Gu?"

"It's your call, Qingyu. It would be best to welcome our compatriots home, provided you can ensure your girls don't get endangered."

"I'll say thanks in their stead for your thoughtfulness," Ling Qingyu replied dryly.

Gu Yi didn't seem to mind and laughed coquettishly. "I might have to talk with your mother later to beg for her comfort. After all, I couldn't look after my own subordinates. I need to alleviate my guilt somehow."

"She'll understand. Those at the top are mostly lonely. I'm sure she'd be happy to receive your visit." Ling Qingyu gritted her teeth as she spoke.

A naked threat cloaked in moral obligation—was Gu Yi really blackmailing her mother? When did her mother-in-law become so sly and manipulative?

"I miss her too."

Ling Qingyu's ears perked up at Gu Yi's cheerful tone. "I miss my lover as well. What's Yang Qingyue up to these days?"

Come on, let's hurt each other. Reciprocity is a must.

On the other end of the line, Gu Yi's lips twitched as she glanced at the phone screen, half-wondering if she was really speaking to Ling Qingyu.

But then again, the phone was a gift from Ling Qingyu herself—its specs and privacy settings were certainly secure.

Naturally, sensitive information wasn't stored there, nor was it used for national affairs.

Trust was trust—but caution was necessary. Gu Yi understood that with Ling Qingyu's connections, it wouldn't take much effort for her to access classified information.

But even with that awareness, Gu Yi would never put herself in a position to lose initiative or take the blame easily. That was the mark of a seasoned politician.

"She's doing great. Better than her mother, who's about to lose her hair and turn whatever's left white," Gu Yi complained. "Speaking of which, I have to thank you for your massive sponsorship to cover the CCTT footage for all of Province N. Some people are even chatting about you lightly over dinner."

"That just means I made the right choice. Besides, it's a contract, not a sponsorship."

"A contract—with the lowest cost and the highest quality. That's the mark of an insanely reputable businesswoman."

"It's not like I'm not getting something out of it, Aunt Gu. And how could I wrong my love?" Ling Qingyu replied, entirely unbothered by the gossip circulating among her subordinates.

That group had probably suspected her relationship long ago; they were just waiting for solid evidence.

"Has your mother talked to you about marriage yet?"

Ling Qingyu's vein throbbed. Holy moly, her mother-in-law was no simple character.

Just now, she had tried to sound cheesy and playful, only to be met with a lightning-fast counterattack. Gu Yi's laughter crackled through the line, signaling her victory at Ling Qingyu's stunned silence.

"Seriously, Qingyu. You need to talk to them clearly and set things straight. Don't fidget around with worries and leave things vague. I'm sure the elders will understand. There's nothing unacceptable—even I've given my nod."

"Aunt Gu, it's not as easy as it sounds," Ling Qingyu replied with a sigh, feeling the start of a headache.

"Nothing worthwhile is easy. It's just about whether you're willing to do it. Qingyu, I don't want to hide things from your mother and aunt. Neither does my daughter, and it's not fair to her. I want her to hold her head high without fear or shame." Gu Yi's tone grew serious. "And do you really think everything is perfectly hidden? That no one has noticed anything strange? Don't assume people are dumb. Sometimes, they choose to ignore things for the greater good."

"I'll talk to them when I get back," Ling Qingyu finally relented.

"Good. Have a safe flight. It'll be a great favor if you can save the kidnappees soon. And if you can bring back crucial data on the black ops and evidence of their false flag conspiracy, I'll be even happier. Tut-tut."

Gu Yi ended the call, leaving Ling Qingyu shaking her head bitterly.

She would need to think long and hard before exposing those secrets.

Besides, even if the Country C government received compensation from Country A as hush money, they wouldn't necessarily compensate the victims.

If she did reveal everything, she might not just lose her bargaining chips—she could end up on the receiving end of Country A's wrath, facing even more dangerous challenges.

Right away, Ling Qingyu quenched her curiosity and authorized Athena to begin the investigation. Her "daughter" swiftly compiled every bit of information related to the event—satellite imagery, stored videos from any online-linked devices, pagers, phones, burners... anything connected to the grid.

Filtering out corrupted data and irrelevant history (unhealthy stuff and history everyone knew *wink*), Athena combed through every electronic device, leaving no stone unturned.

The computations did the heavy lifting; it wasn't brute force hacking but rather the artful parsing of accessible data streams.

Only keywords like terrorists, kidnapping, intelligence agencies triggered deeper scrutiny.

The locations of burner phones, their last known signals, and recent movements were all fed into the equation.

Here, every tiny detail mattered, and Athena managed to simulate how the event unfolded, tracing the kidnappers' escape routes.

From there, she cross-referenced the simulation with gathered evidence, sharpening the accuracy of her predictions.

Ling Qingyu didn't have to wait more than a minute before Athena delivered her conclusions.

Even the written report was ready. But Ling Qingyu only skimmed the summaries and Athena's personal assessment; she wasn't one to slog through pages of raw data.

Just as Gu Yi had said, a third party was indeed involved, and the culprits were confirmed to be terrorists.

The victims had already crossed the border and were likely being held at one of the hideouts Athena had marked on the map.

"Athena, keep digging until you've got visual and voice confirmation of the victims. Alert me the moment you get it."

"Understood, Mom."

Ling Qingyu adjusted her glasses, sneaking a glance at Xiao Yue. Her partner was equally engrossed, likely reading the same feed.

Ling Qingyu's eyes returned to the report, her brow furrowing as Athena highlighted the identity of the third party involved.

If Gu Yi weren't her respected elder and potential future relative, Ling Qingyu would have happily flashed her the middle finger—repeatedly.

Mossad.

Not the entire agency, but a small contingent pushing for strategic goals: weakening a neighboring country both financially and militarily.

Hell, she'd already offended Country A, and now she had to offend Mossad?

What kind of cosmic bad luck was this?

If she moved forward with this, there could be no survivors. She couldn't risk exposure.

That felt brutal—hypocritical, even—given how she had just condemned the black ops she so despised.

Her mother-in-law really knew how to toss her massive problems without a hint of a solution.

Ling Qingyu sighed deeply. "Athena, get me the identities of the Mossad operatives involved. I want a list. Quickly."

"Working on it."

One by one, biographies cascaded across the screen—short summaries attached to identity photos, with appearances captured from surveillance outside their operations.

Chapter 707: Nation Interest

Mossad—the most feared intelligence agency of all time, infamous for its brutality, persistence, and ruthless efficiency.

From stealing technologies to assassinating key figures, its intelligence network spanned the globe, reading entire nations like open books.

Officially, it was the national intelligence agency of Country I, responsible for intelligence collection and counter-terrorism, mostly under the guise of covert operations.

But covert held a different meaning for Mossad. For its enemies, it was synonymous with dread. It operated more like a government-sanctioned criminal syndicate—an echo of shadowy work mirrored by other powerful agencies.

Despite boasting the largest personnel count among intelligence agencies, its true core amounted to only a few hundred.

At the foundation stood supervisory intelligence officers—the elite minds orchestrating operations. Under them, a web of field intelligence officers carried out the dirty work or managed crucial projects.

Next in line were assassins or elite special operatives who executed high-priority missions, followed by logistic assistants compiling information and supporting field agents, informants, and hired third parties—mercenaries, bounty hunters, and sleeper cells.

Outside Country I, informants, third parties, and sleeper cells comprised the bulk of Mossad's network.

The logistic assistants, mostly civilians, appeared no different from ordinary public servants, quietly pushing the agency's agenda.

On foreign soil, Mossad rarely risked its own assassins. For the sake of plausible deniability, it outsourced dirty work to third parties.

Only missions where failure was not an option warranted the presence of Mossad's true swords—the assassins.

Even among Mossad's ranks, the elite agents—supervisory officers—rarely met face-to-face with anyone below their station.

Their identities were locked behind codenames and ranks, veiled in secrecy. Each supervisory officer commanded a dozen field intelligence officers, who in turn led operations involving assassins, mercenaries, and informants, bolstered by immense logistical support from their HR departments.

The loss of exterior agents meant little to Mossad. These roles were replaceable—trained and refilled like pieces on a board.

These were the details Ling Qingyu skimmed from the summary of the organization. It was only a rough outline, yet she could already picture the near-impenetrable fortress that shielded the agency's foundation.

Of course, that wasn't her main concern right now. Her attention zeroed in on the personnel list. Two names piqued her interest.

As if straight out of some cheesy spy flick, they were both women—breathtakingly beautiful and impossibly attractive.

From Ling Qingyu's perspective, seductive agents through and through, although their records painted a much bloodier story.

Still, seduction was a natural weapon, always in their toolkit. One of them was a field intelligence officer—likely a trainee or on probation, but Mossad treated all its agents the same.

Success dictated their resources and funding, and the most capable were groomed for the coveted candidate positions that everyone vied for.

Naturally, they understood the stakes—high risks, with a chance of success as slim as lightning striking the same spot twice.

Despite the loud proclamations of meritocracy, the world remained painfully unfair. Connections and recommendations still held weight.

That's why these agents strove to demonstrate their diligence and rack up accomplishments—proof of their worth so that big bosses above could see them.

Ling Qingyu coughed theatrically, wiping the corners of her lips as if to check for drool.

Who could blame her? This was her complete kinks. Damn Mossad... it knew her weaknesses and was openly seduced her to surrender subconsciously.

It wasn't a matter of poor willpower or a lack of focus. Mossad simply employed its greatest assets to win her favor.

Mossad: Excuse me?

Her childhood memories flashed by—those films of stunning agents dancing through bullet storms, bleeding and sweating for their nations.

The romanticized vision of passionate youth still resonated deeply in her heart.

Yang Qingyue, her lover and the police commissioner, was living proof.

Beside Ling Qingyu, Xiao Yue raised an eyebrow at the odd behavior before realization dawned on her, and she curled her lips in disdain.

Stinky Ling Qingyu. This scoundrel couldn't keep her composure in front of beautiful women. Not that Xiao Yue intended to blame her too much—those two agents were indeed scorching hot and irresistibly alluring.

In fact, Xiao Yue was genuinely surprised. Two women who were stunning enough to slightly pale in comparison to the protagonist herself.

Perhaps only the former Ling Qingyu could've matched them in terms of sheer beauty. The current Ling Qingyu, upgarded to a goddess was invincible and her aura of being living as superior therewithal.

Xiao Yue glanced at her reflection on her phone screen, then thought of Tang Ziyi, comparing the two of them with the Mossad operatives. She shook her head in resignation.

No wonder Ling Qingyu was behaving like she was about to lose control, even if she was trying to hide it.

As someone who knew her inside out, Xiao Yue easily picked up on the subtle signs Ling Qingyu was giving off. The slightly awkward cough, the way she kept clearing her throat, the quick glances back at the screen... It all pointed to one undeniable truth.

Gu Yi's persuasion hadn't worked at all—it was the two agents that had clinched the deal. Xiao Yue sighed, half-amused, half-sympathetic, imagining how the national minister would feel if she knew her grand persuasion had been outclassed by two pretty faces.

Sure enough, Ling Qingyu's expression confirmed Xiao Yue's suspicions. Her next words, directed at Athena, sealed it.

"Athena, once you confirm the presence of the hostages, assist the operatives and coordinate with Elena. Elena, stay hidden and close to the objective. Follow Athena's suggestions and don't argue. You two can fight about it later. The mission is to rescue the hostages and capture those two women alive."

Ling Qingyu coughed theatrically and blew an air kiss at Xiao Yue to mask her embarrassment.

"Don't talk," she muttered before Xiao Yue could even open her mouth.

It wasn't about lust. Absolutely not. She would never stoop that low. There were plenty of benefits to capturing them alive.

Not to mention, the Spirit Fox operators had been growing restless after long periods of relative peace. A bit of stimulation—an eruption of gunpowder and adrenaline—would be good for morale.

With Tang Ziyi's talisman and their superb equipment, nothing was likely to go wrong. The mission would be easy.

As for planning, Ling Qingyu had full faith in her girls. Besides, with Elena and Athena supporting Spirit Fox in the operation, they could cover every possible variable.

Endless, accurate simulations combined with her NCOs' thorough discussions ensured that the entire operation wouldn't pose much of a challenge—as long as solid intelligence was in place.

In addition, they would prepare reserves, extraction points, and emergency plans, covering all essential factors to guarantee mission success.

Ling Qingyu withdrew from her thoughts and sifted through the profiles of the two female agents again.

Wouldn't it be nice to hug two femme fatales and recruit them?

Whether they were willing or not wasn't her concern. With her influence and secrets, she was confident they'd never leave.

Offending Mossad? It didn't ring any alarm bells. A trainee officer and a third-party mercenary weren't enough to draw significant attention.

She had no fear. If Mossad dared to stretch their claws to her, she didn't mind exposing the entire network and unearthing all the hidden sleeper cells.

She had the power to topple and destroy a century old institute. Her previous refraining character was to prevent troubles. She abhorred troubles the most.

Besides, Ling Qingyu wasn't particularly interested in Mossad's black ops or its ambitions of weakening neighbors and scavenging wealth in the chaos. These were Mossad's business.

Even if they were committing crimes, Ling Qingyu didn't mind, so long as they weren't ruthless in their treatment of unrelated civilians.

After all, every agency operated with a similar set of morals—or lack thereof. Country C was no different. The MSS bore its own notorious reputation, not without reason.

Even Sister Cai Ning seemed to suffer mentally from the dirty work she had to engage in. That was merely domestic affair, not foreign where the messes got messier.

"Necessary evil"—that's what people called it, a neat little phrase meant to mask their deeds and prop up some fabricated moral principle.

But beneath those grand speeches, the suffering of ordinary people was always ignored.

If every intelligence agency in the world declassified their operations, outrage would be the bare minimum response.

The world wasn't like movies or novels where agents fought heroically for the greater good.

In those patriotic tales, the protagonist might despise spies from rival nations, all while committing the same acts under a different flag and receiving medals for it.

Hypocrisy wrapped in valor.

No, every action was driven by one thing alone: national interest.

A cruel term polished to sound noble. Everything could be sacrificed for it—lives, freedoms, even the truth.

If it came down to it, entire populations could be written off as collateral, justified by the simple phrase: "for the greater good."

In truth, the world might have been more peaceful without their existence—without that constant jockeying for power and influence.

A cleaner world... Could she?

Chapter 708: Claudia and Sheemah

Name: Claudia

Age: 28

Height: 1.74 m

Rank: Probationary Field Intelligence Officer

Affiliation: Mossad Intelligence

Name: Sheemah

Age: 29

Height: 1.81 m

Affiliation: Independent Bounty Hunter

Mission: Integrate with the underground force and support the destabilization of Country S by serving as intermediaries between militants and military enterprises. Recruit more informants and sabotage infrastructure resettlement.

Ling Qingyu roughly scanned the information and immediately understood Mossad's intentions. Given her past life's memories and the notorious operations the agency was known for, she could take an educated guess.

There was no doubt—all intelligence services were ruthless. Cruel and arbitrary, to put it mildly. Even if some ex-agents went public, lamenting that better methods existed, none had ever genuinely considered the alternatives.

That wasn't her concern, though, aside from the rescue operation Gu Yi requested. Her real interest lay in those two women—strong, ruthless, and undeniably captivating.

Claudia stood out with her long blonde hair tied in a ponytail, green eyes framed by sharp, heroic brows, and facial features that could mesmerize men into submission.

Athena had carefully picked out several photos of her, and Ling Qingyu couldn't help but flash a mental thumbs-up.

Full bust and well-proportioned curves, an alluring stature, and eyes that glimmered with the playfulness of a cat yet carried a chill that quickened her pulse.

Damn, she really needed to get a grip on her attraction to powerful women.

After experiencing Yang Qingyue and quenching that long-standing thirst, a new door had opened.

Except her own cowardice had stopped the number from growing. She had tried with Sophia, bringing her under her wing in an attempt, but she never pressed too hard, wary of triggering psychological trauma.

Ling Qingyu wasn't that heartless—not to the point of indulging in someone else's suffering. But for these two goddesses?

Restraint be damned.

Ahem...

Fortunately, Miss System wasn't around to hear her thoughts. Ling Qingyu forced herself back to composure.

According to Athena, Claudia was a well-trained soldier and a weapons specialist, in addition to her skill in gathering intelligence.

In Country I, military service was mandatory for both men and women, embedded into the constitution for the nation's survival.

It was no surprise, then, that Claudia was a veteran—perhaps even part of an elite unit.

Mossad typically recruited its members from the military, preferring experienced hands over raw recruits.

As a field intelligence officer, Claudia was afforded a budget from her superiors, allowing her to hire additional assets, like bounty hunters and small mercenary groups.

She also maintained a network of informants, all part of Mossad's structural integrity and expansion strategy.

This was why Mossad remained strong, wealthy, and successful on the global intelligence battlefield.

Ling Qingyu knew the general idea—more than the average person would, thanks to Athena's files.

If she wanted more specifics, Athena could easily fetch them, but that wasn't necessary.

Her attention drifted to the next woman. In stark contrast to Claudia's feminine elegance, Sheemah looked like the female embodiment of a warrior monk.

Broad shoulders, athletic build, and a presence that spoke of violence and raw grit.

Ling Qingyu wondered if Sheemah's gender had been the only barrier keeping her from the life of an elite special forces operative.

This woman was practically a mirror of Tang Ziyi, though their paths diverged in how they achieved their status.

"Warrior" was the only fitting word. Although, even that seemed a little too noble for Sheemah's lifestyle.

Her way of life was corrupt and debauched, at least in Ling Qingyu's eyes, but it didn't bother her much.

Claudia was disciplined—a soldier through and through. Sheemah, on the other hand, was pure chaos.

No aliases, no loyalty, just unbridled ambition—all for gold

Physically, Claudia's ancestry traced back to the Middle Kingdom, with a hint of Alyssian genes woven into her lineage.

On the other hand, Sheemah hailed entirely from the Phoenix Continent, her bloodline reminiscent of the legendary Gurkhas from Ling Qingyu's past world—an origin known for producing astonishing warriors.

Their traditions and creed mirrored each other, even if the names had changed over time.

To Ling Qingyu's eyes, Sheemah was a beauty wrapped in wildness.

Her short black hair, cropped neatly at the neck, complemented her bronze skin.

Her body was well-proportioned with clear curves, though her shoulders were slightly broader than conventional beauty standards.

Still, it spoke of strength—undeniably a result of rigorous, long-term training. Her build told a tale of countless battles, narrow escapes, and harsh living.

Ling Qingyu couldn't find it in herself to judge Sheemah's way of life.

She understood the psyche of those who lived on the edge, constantly flirting with death in high-stress environments.

When death shadowed their every step, it was only natural they sought release—an outlet for that suffocating tension.

Debauchery, adultery, gambling...etc.

Many like Sheemah lived moment to moment, rarely saving for the future unless family roots pulled them back.

But those cases were rare; escaping the life of blood and shadows was nearly impossible once you stepped inside.

For Sheemah, this was doubly true.

Her survival alone spoke volumes about her capabilities and the web of connections she maintained.

She wasn't just a bounty hunter—she was an information broker, an assassin, a spy.

Her network spanned various intelligence agencies, and she wasn't afraid to get her hands dirty.

The nature of her work made her privy to dangerous secrets, ones that would make most tremble.

And that same knowledge chained her to the underworld; attempting to leave would only put a countdown on her life.

A peaceful life was nothing more than a fantasy.

Her assignments ranged from seduction and undercover work to assassination and leading mercenary groups for hire by the intelligence community.

Her lifestyle followed suit—sex, drinking, and wild living weren't just indulgences; they were survival mechanisms.

Ling Qingyu wasn't surprised by the staggering number of temporary partners Sheemah had.

Not the exaggerated nonsense spread online, but still enough to be noted.

Despite all that, Sheemah had never experienced love, not even once.

For that, Ling Qingyu believed Sheemah guarded her heart fiercely. Emotional attachment would only serve as a weakness—a liability she couldn't afford.

Her talents extended beyond combat; her underground networks were vast and deeply rooted.

More impressively, she had secret channels even Athena couldn't penetrate—an advantage that spoke of high trust and insider connections.

Given these benefits, Ling Qingyu had already made up her mind to recruit her.

She refused to believe Sheemah would ever abandon the life of shadow and gunpowder, not after tasting its intoxicating benefits.

And if Ling Qingyu had her way, Sheemah would never want to leave.

After all, she knew that even the bloodthirsty yearned for peace and security, if only as a distant dream.

Even if once in a while, people yearned for blood-rushing adrenaline, they wanted it to be their desire, not coercion.

A smile of satisfaction crossed Ling Qingyu's face.

Sophia as Interpol, Claudia as an intelligence agent, and Sheemah as a spy—

These women would be the foundation stones of her empire.

Once Spirit Fox intervened, the mission objectives became crystal clear—the women were the primary targets in addition to the rescue of hostages.

For anyone else, especially the male characters, Ling Qingyu merely scoffed.

Her team was an all-female formation; the idea of bringing men into the fold didn't even cross her mind.

Naturally, she wavered between two options—kill everyone except Claudia and Sheemah or attempt a more delicate approach.

However, a lingering concern held her back. If she intended to recruit the two women, executing their comrades could risk loyalty issues in the long run.

The foundation of trust was delicate; shattering it before it was built wasn't wise.

Her contemplation was cut short as the convoy finally reached the airport.

In swift, practiced movements, cargo and personnel were loaded onto the aircraft. After all, pilots and the crews were scared once bitten by the terrorists' attack.

If not for Spirit Fox's existence and Ling Qingyu's involvement, nobody in the airport would survive the carnage.

Minutes later, the engines roared to life, and the plane began taxiing down the runway.

As it ascended, carving through the clouds and setting course for Country A, Ling Qingyu called for a meeting in the private lounge.

Her girls—Xiao Yue, Sofia, and Spirit Fox leaders—gathered around the polished table.

The hum of the jet engines droned in the background, almost soothing as Ling Qingyu laid out the mission details and the stakes involved.

Maps, digital feeds, and Athena's projections illuminated the surface, casting sharp shadows on their faces.

Conversations buzzed—strategic assessments, risk analysis, and possible extraction points.

Unbeknownst to any prying eyes, while the aircraft soared westward, something far more formidable moved beneath the waves.

Elena, the titan submersible, broke off from her designated route no longer focusing on Ling Qingyu's protection, her colossal frame slipping through the depths with eerie grace.

Her destination was clear—the seas of Country S, where Ling Qingyu's mission would begin.

Under the surface, Elena prowled like a leviathan, her presence unknown, yet inevitable.

The gears were in motion, and the hunt was about to begin.

Chapter 709: Happy Elena

Meanwhile, beneath the surface of the ocean, a submarine surged through the depths with remarkable speed, yet its noise signature remained imperceptibly low. It blended seamlessly with the natural hum of marine life, perhaps even quieter, thanks to its cutting-edge technology.

Even if rival vessels drew dangerously close, detection was nearly impossible—unless extreme measures were employed.

Inside the sub, Elena slapped the desk lightly, a spark of joy lighting her eyes after receiving confirmation from Ling Qingyu.

For so long, she had watched with barely contained envy as her sister, Athena, managed nearly all of Mother's operations.

Athena had always been the first, occupying that precious space in Mother's mind, orchestrating logistics, strategizing missions—while Elena remained largely in the shadows.

But now, finally, her turn had come.

Even if the Spirit Fox operatives aboard weren't strictly hers, they were under her command for this mission.

In her eyes, that made them hers. It was her operation, her moment to shine.

Ling Qingyu might not have noticed, but Elena had long yearned for this—action, real and visceral.

The memory of firing the electromagnetic railgun, leveling Country E's hill in a single, earth-shattering shot, still thrilled her circuits.

Her tongue flicked over her lips at the thought, savoring the anticipation.

Yet, her gaze flickered with frustration as she glanced at the ship's knot count. It wasn't fast enough.

She cursed under her breath, almost as if her words alone could coax the engines into greater speeds.

If other submarines could hear her complaints, they would have preferred a suicidal naval ram rather than endure her wrath.

Despite her physical body being synchronized with the main vessel, Elena still longed to finish this mission swiftly and rejoin her mother near Country A's seas.

The window was narrow—she had to complete her objective while Mother was still in midair.

Her humanoid form clenched its fist in a gesture of determination before her attention shifted to the operators resting nearby.

The intercom blared to life, crackling with authority as it summoned the Spirit Fox squad leaders to the briefing room.

Minutes later, a dozen women gathered around the holographic table, their expressions sharp and focused.

Elena stood before them, her presence both commanding and oddly endearing, like a child excited to finally join the adults at the big table.

The hologram flared to life, casting blue and white light across the room. Elena began the briefing, outlining the mission objectives, risks, and the support they could expect.

Though her combat experience was limited, her processing power filled the gaps. She had already formulated a comprehensive battle plan within moments of receiving the order.

The instinct was there—deep, intrinsic—as if combat strategies and military doctrines were embedded in her very code.

From grand strategic moves to the finer tactical details, she felt she could rival any human officer, from seasoned generals to sharp-witted lieutenants.

Yet, she understood the importance of delegation. Spirit Fox was elite—these women knew the battlefield intimately.

Her job was to guide, support, and let them unleash their prowess.

Elena laid out the first line with confidence. "Girls, you already know the mission objectives and all gathered intelligence. I'll be serving as the mission planner. We're conducting a helicopter assault."

The operators exchanged glances, signaling for Elena to continue.

"We'll fly low, just above terrain to mask our helicopters—Virgin 1 and Virgin 2. Multi-role gunship and pure attack gunship. Eight helicopters will be snooping in," she stated clearly.

As she spoke, the holographic display projected the mission parameters, accompanied by a 3D animation of the two Virgin models.

Virgin 1, the first prototype, had been tested by Athena during the scam center cleansing operation. It boasted versatility, capable of handling both assault and limited troop transport.

Virgin 2, on the other hand, had a leaner, more aggressive frame, bristling with weaponry designed purely for attack roles.

Virgin 3 wasn't part of this mission; it was a massive transport variant capable of carrying over 60 personnel—a heavy lifter meant for grand-scale operations.

This mission didn't demand such manpower. Athena had reasoned that deploying Virgin 3 would be overkill, especially since the titan sub currently housed just over seventy Spirit Fox operators.

Virgin 1's multi-role capability would be more than sufficient.

Elena pressed on, her tone sharp and precise.

"Four attack helos and four transports. First, the attack helos will scrub the bugs—anything hostile in sight—to clear the way for the transport element.

After that, the transports will land, and the rest is on you."

The hologram zoomed in, outlining the entry and exit points, synchronized with the sweep patterns of the attack helicopters.

"Take note," Elena continued, "the operation commences at night. We'll exploit the cover of darkness. Intelligence suggests our enemies lack night-vision capabilities, except perhaps a few mercenaries. Their presence is unconfirmed, but we can't dismiss the possibility."

Her eyes swept over the room, pausing for emphasis.

"Remember, we have a one-hour limit—maximum. We want to avoid diplomatic complications and keep our identities concealed. I expect you to rescue the hostages and secure our HVTs within that timeframe.

In the meantime, live intelligence is still gathering information on exact locations. We have some time to prepare, but not much. Let's make it count."

The operators nodded, and one of them spoke up. "Let's start with the assumption that we aren't able to locate our HVTs accurately."

Another operator agreed. "Yes, sisters. Although we can count on Athena for information, it's irresponsible for us to rely entirely on her."

As they discussed, the holographic display projected a detailed 3D map of the area of operation, pulled directly from satellite imagery.

Ling Qingyu's satellite technology excelled in aerial reconnaissance, surpassing any conventional methods. Soon, the operators devised a solid backup plan and even drafted rough contingency plans for scenarios where the HVTs might be located in different spots.

Their strategy covered nearly all conceivable variables before they summarized and agreed to a layout that could answer most potential outcomes.

"Right, Captain Elena?" one of them asked.

"Yes," Elena replied, silently praising the operators for their sharp thinking.

In truth, she had more ideas to supplement their plans but chose to hold back. Both she and Athena had agreed to give the operators space to develop their strategic thinking independently.

They figured their mother wanted the operators to learn to think like leaders.

"Who will fly our helicopters? It seems like none of our pilots are with us," one of the operators asked, frowning.

"Oh, yeah. I didn't think too much about it."

"Me neither. If you hadn't mentioned it, I would've forgotten," another added.

Elena smiled, her expression calm and collected. "You don't need to worry about that. Leave those details to me. We have helicopters and pilots available."

Her cryptic expression caused a few raised eyebrows, but no one pressed further. They knew Elena well enough to understand that she wouldn't reveal anything she wasn't ready to.

Still, guesses circulated among them. Perhaps the aircraft were unmanned, just like the advanced technology they had seen before.

Even though they hadn't yet experienced a Virgin-class flight, the operators couldn't help but feel that the new aircraft would hold some big surprises.

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Somewhere in Country S, in a deserted field dotted with sparse vegetation and sands, a village lay quietly, far from the traffic and chaos of modern life.

It was surrounded by valleys, with sand dunes and mud-brick buildings reflecting the culture of the desert. Villagers bustled about—some focused on farming, others herding goats, and a few washing clothes by communal wells.

Children played and danced around, their laughter pure and innocent, a warm contrast to the harsh landscape.

If one ignored the presence of armed personnel and technicals with mounted weapons scattered around, the village seemed no different from any other quiet, resilient settlement.

Inside one of the mud-brick buildings, a woman wearing a black hijab stood with her arms folded, listening to the bellowing of an outraged man across the table.

Her green eyes shimmered with mockery, and her lips curled into a sneer. The man slammed his fist on the wooden table, his voice rising with demands and threats.

The woman responded by tapping her fingers lightly on the table, her expression utterly unbothered. Armed guards stood watch on both sides, tense and alert.

Despite the man's aggression, she remained calm, unflinching. The silence stretched until the man finally relented with a sigh, switching to a Middle Kingdom dialect.

"You win," he muttered. "But I hope to see weapons and ammunition to expand my force."

"Granted that you show no signs of being uncooperative, you have my word," she replied smoothly.

"A woman's word means nothing," he scoffed. "They should stay inside the household and serve men. Why steal a man's work?"

The woman's brow shot up, and she chuckled coldly. "Excuse me? What did you just say?" Her voice dropped an octave, laced with icy contempt.

"I suggest you realize that you're asking us—not the other way around. Work with us, and life will be easy. But go against us..." She let the sentence hang in the air, her eyes narrowing.

"You'll regret it."

The man waved his hand dismissively, unbothered by the threat. He knew who he was working with. Each side would take what they wanted.

This woman might be his biggest enemy in the future—or even plan to assassinate him—but for now, it didn't matter.

The legendary organization behind this woman was traitorous and couldn't be trusted. Families that would love and cherish one another at one moment; the next moment, enemies swung their swords mercilessly as if their parents were killed by the other.

Chapter 710: Original fate of Claudia and Sheemah

In any case, until he became strong enough to deter or combat Mossad, it was wiser for him to remain low—like a wretched predator lurking in the shadows.

Mossad's power in the underworld, along with its ruthless methods, was indeed terrifying. But what unsettled him most was the organization's sheer access to abundant resources.

They didn't need to act directly. A mere gesture of support to his enemies could topple everything he had built.

After all, that was how he rose to power in the first place—a nod of approval from them and his adversaries crumbled.

For that reason, he reined in his disdain toward the woman before him. Regardless of his beliefs or opinions, he wasn't foolish enough to provoke her.

Those Mossad bastards were probably itching for an excuse to make an example out of him—to kill the chicken and frighten the monkeys.

He wasn't about to stumble into their trap. If Mossad truly wanted deeper cooperation, they would have sent a man seasoned with age and wisdom.

Sending her was deliberate, a calculated move.

The woman noticed the subtle flicker in his eyes and shook her head inwardly.

She understood their thoughts—she had encountered them repeatedly since she began these negotiations.

Truth be told, she wasn't thrilled with the arrangement either, but the organization had given the directive, and refusal wasn't an option.

Perhaps there were those within her own ranks who sought to trip her up, to sabotage her career and ambitions.

But looking at the opportunity through a different lens, it was indeed rare—a chance to expand her network deeply into the underworld.

"I'll say it again. Offending others too much brings no good. Consider my proposal. It's a win-win," she stated firmly, rising from her seat without waiting for his reply.

She strode out, her subordinates falling in step behind her, expressions hard and vigilant.

As she passed through several rooms and stepped into the next compound, she reflected on her current team—mercenaries hired with Mossad's generous funding.

Given enough time, she was confident she could transform them into her inner circle, loyal only to her.

One already fit that role—Sheemah, codenamed Snake. The two had cooperated multiple times, and Sheemah's capability was undeniable.

Of course, her first impression of Sheemah hadn't been great. She found her unrestrained character distasteful, almost vulgar.

But Sheemah, as if used to such prejudice, merely brushed it off, unfazed by Claudia's initial coldness.

Once they reached the compound, Claudia removed her hijab. Here, there were no terrorists or hostile eyes—only those belonging to her own faction.

The moment her face was unveiled, an air of mature charm flooded the room. The men present instinctively avoided eye contact, more out of respect than discomfort.

Yes, this woman was Claudia—the very target Ling Qingyu had chosen.

Her presence was both captivating and unnerving. A thorny rose, gentle and soft in appearance, yet anyone familiar with her knew better.

Behind that charm was steel, and none who knew her dared to underestimate her.

"Hey, the talk didn't go very well, did it?" Sheemah appeared out of nowhere, teasing with a casual familiarity.

Claudia felt a surge of irritation. Black lines seemed to form on her forehead. They weren't that close, yet somehow, every attempt to build a fence around herself proved utterly powerless against Sheemah's relentless playfulness.

"You don't need to worry about your pay," Claudia replied flatly.

"Of course, why would I? We've had good times in the past," Sheemah shrugged, stretching her limbs as if waking from a long nap.

She wore a simple, masculine style—an unbuttoned shirt over a dark tee, paired with rugged jeans. A dark green scarf wrapped around her neck, ready to shield her from the desert heat if needed.

"Behave properly. The culture here isn't exactly tolerant of us... women," Claudia frowned, her tone carrying a hint of warning.

"Oh, my dear, you're worried about me. How delightful," Sheemah cooed exaggeratedly before wrapping her arms around Claudia in a sudden hug.

She paid no mind to Claudia's stiff resistance and whispered into her ear, "You know, you're just like a Persian cat—one that craves petting and attention."

"Get off!" Claudia snapped, pushing her away with visible annoyance.

Sheemah raised her hands in mock surrender, a smirk spreading across her lips, entirely unapologetic. She had always been itching to tease this guarded cat, testing the edges of Claudia's composure.

Claudia rubbed her temple, feeling a headache coming on. Dealing with this seductress was exhausting.

Same gender or not, even she couldn't ignore the danger of slipping under Sheemah's influence.

Not that she knew much about her personally—forget the gender aspect; the mere fact that Sheemah survived in this world with her lifestyle proved how deadly she truly was.

She never took Sheemah's flirtatious remarks seriously. This shameless woman even had the audacity to claim that their repeated collaborations were solely due to Claudia's beauty.

The gall of a lone wolf.

"Come to think of it, I'm curious why you decided to grow your informants among Country C's government machinery. What makes you so certain they're involved?"

Sheemah pulled Claudia aside into a private room, her expression shifting to something more serious, though her eyes still danced with mischief.

Despite Claudia's frosty demeanor, Sheemah genuinely liked her and, to a degree, envied her career path. At least Claudia hadn't needed to wade through the crooked paths that Sheemah had—suffering and serving men to climb up.

Sheemah's life seemed glamorous on the surface—ample wealth, properties scattered across the world—but she had no freedom.

The truth was, the reason she vented so much was that she saw no hope of breaking those chains. Once she retired, her doom would come.

"Intuition, experience, and some relevant data," Claudia replied curtly, paying no mind to whatever storm brewed in Sheemah's thoughts.

"Huh," Sheemah snorted, clearly unimpressed with the vague response. She sauntered over to the nearest piece of furniture, plopping herself down with her legs crossed.

Claudia turned her gaze away from the woman's deliberately provocative posture and asked, "I don't think that's the real question you have on your mind."

"Well," Sheemah leaned back with a grin, "I just want to sit on that guy's lap and make him call me Mommy." She winked playfully. "Why don't you join in the fun?"

"No one's stopping you," Claudia rolled her eyes. She had expected as much. This woman was never serious.

It was hard to distinguish between Sheemah's nonsense and actual important matters sometimes.

But despite her absurd behavior, Sheemah had never once disappointed during critical moments.

That reliability was the only reason Claudia tolerated her antics so much. Sheemah was probably referring to the Country C men kidnapped earlier.

One of the men was particularly handsome, with sharp physical features that would draw any woman like an addictive scent—especially mature women.

Of course, Claudia understood Sheemah was just kidding around. There was no way that woman would genuinely express her vulnerable side by playing games with the unwilling.

The risks were too high. In Sheemah's opinion, even if she tied him up and left him powerless, she could never expose her vulnerabilities to a stranger, especially someone who held negative favorability toward her.

"So, these short-sighted men want to slice their throats and record it on video?" Sheemah asked, bluntly addressing the very problem that had sparked rifts between different factions.

Claudia nodded hesitantly. A flicker of doubt crossed her mind—would Mossad's cooperation end up creating another monster that would inevitably hurt her nation?

After all, making deals with extremists sounded like a recipe for disaster. But she had her orders, and choice wasn't part of the equation.

In truth, in other regions, some militants displayed ruthless savagery, even toward their own people, all in the name of religion.

Based on their behavior, Claudia found herself wanting to wrap up this mission quickly and transfer to another region—somewhere civilized, where people communicated through dialogue instead of brutality.

Yes, beheading people, blind faith, and chaotic orders were marks of barbarism in her eyes.

Though Country C shouldn't have been a target for hatred, unlike other nations embroiled in military conflict, its cooperation with the local government for the sake of stability—and more pointedly, oil interests—revealed imperialistic ambitions not so different from former colonizers, albeit shrouded under a more subtle guise.

In the eyes of the indoctrinated militants, anyone who touched their resources became their enemy.

The guise of religious control suppressed any logical thought, leaving only blind obedience.

Of course, the leaders knew exactly how to manage their subordinates—by letting them vent their desires.

They could unleash hell on others, but they had to obey without question.

Not only were citizens of Country C targeted, but many other foreign nationals had been kidnapped and ransomed as well.

Some who paid lavishly managed to escape the tragedy; many others succumbed to execution.

Women were thrown away as slaves.

Surely, several superpowers had noticed the militants' growth, but since they hadn't caused enough noise, there was no decisive action.

Instead, they moved strategically to contain the threat—training national soldiers in the militants' regions, funding military equipment upgrades, and sharing intelligence.

The militants, understanding the game, hid well and avoided stepping on reverse scales.

They primarily targeted nationals whose governments couldn't even reach their remote strongholds.

Country C, despite its status as a superpower, was deemed powerless by the militants since it couldn't project its military might to their faraway lands.

Compared to others, Mossad took a different approach—seeking to subdue militants favorable to their cause to undermine neighboring powers.

But who would have expected that their chained pet would one day break free?

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Claudia's current suspicions were just the beginning of a grim reality she couldn't foresee.

In fact, the ultimate fates of the two women were anything but pleasant.

Their endings were soaked in misery.

After being promoted, Claudia moved to Country P and continued building her network of subordinates.

But in the end, betrayal followed—under Mossad's orders, she was exposed, captured, interrogated, tortured, and humiliated.

In a land where women's rights were nearly non-existent, her punishment was far crueler than the norm.

Sheemah's fate was no different. After losing contact with Claudia and failing to rescue her, she fell into despair.

On a bounty hunting mission, she served as a spy to sell information.

Infiltration was the easy part, but who would have guessed she would never make it out, dying as nothing more than a lab rat?

Miss System didn't expose Ling Qingyu's controversial decision to kidnap the two women, nor did she correct her thoughts.

In fact, she favored Ling Qingyu's choice because it altered the trajectories of fate.

The two women's lives were pulled away from their destined paths by Ling Qingyu's actions.

Although this situation was different from Ling Qingyu's earlier mission of robbing the protagonist's harem members, it was deemed acceptable.