

## **Beautiful 711**

Chapter 711: Yang Qingyue's helplessness

Province N, Western Region — 18:00 PM

Light had faded. Darkness crept over the bright, dazzling infrastructure as evening settled in.

On a particular ten-lane highway, a lone, ordinary SUV followed the thick traffic of people returning from work.

Inside, rock and roll music boomed. Two Spirit Fox operators occupied the vehicle.

The driver was clearly enjoying the rhythm—one hand on the wheel, the other twirling her finger to the beat. She even shook her head and tapped the steering wheel in sync.

To a faint-hearted person, her carefree antics at such high speed might induce a heart attack, but her passenger only showed a mixture of helplessness and doting amusement.

After all, they weren't ordinary people. One mistake at that speed might spell disaster for most—but not for Spirit Fox.

The two had been in the unit for a long time now, seasoned through repetitive training cycles and field rotations like military tours.

Under Tang Ziyi's leadership, advanced tactical driving was one of their key skillsets.

Tonight, they had been out patrolling nearby neighborhoods, bored, and were now returning from an established zone back to headquarters—Ling Qingyu's residence.

Taking the highway was routine.

Just as the duo settled into the calmness of the night, a familiar and irritating sound shattered it.

A series of loud exhaust cracks erupted behind them.

Both glanced into the rearview and side mirrors.

The darkness made it hard to see clearly, but the headlight from the cars behind traced shadowy figures that seemed to weave through the traffic.

The unmistakable, obnoxious revving and pops from tuned exhausts triggered their recognition instantly.

The operator in the passenger seat cursed. "Damn! When will they ever stop?"

"We beat the shit out of those devils that plagued our province, made them fear our name. But this new breed of punks—" The driver trailed off, equally annoyed.

The answer became obvious seconds later.

Vroom! Vroom!

A swarm of motorbikes raced past, weaving through cars and deliberately provoking chaos.

They brake-checked vehicles, ruined the flow of traffic, and threw up middle fingers at frustrated drivers.

Some drivers braked, others swerved, most kept their cool to avoid escalation.

Even the black SUV—an ordinary-looking Volvo—was not spared. Dozens of bikes streamed past like locusts.

The operator behind the wheel finally snapped and turned off the music. "These bastards! If not for our duty, I'd have arrested them all right here."

Her partner chuckled. "You can, though."

"Yeah? And they'll be out in a few days, bailed out or fined. Short jail time, maybe. There's no real punishment." She paused, voice heavier now. "Sometimes I seriously wonder... did Spirit Fox somehow give birth to these pests?"

"Honestly," the passenger replied, clicking her tongue, "I didn't think there were this many rich brats around. Back when the gangs and crime syndicates were still running wild, most of these so-called elites stayed low-key out of fear. Now that no one threatens their lives anymore..."

She didn't finish the sentence, but the silence was answer enough.

The two operators understood exactly who these bikers were: second-generation rich kids, thrill-seekers craving attention and rebellion.

They weren't organized gangs. Their crimes didn't involve drugs or extortion—just reckless traffic violations, endangering others and themselves for kicks.

Spirit Fox had cleansed Province N of the real scum—murderers, traffickers, warlords.

Yang Qingyue, as the new commissioner, had once felt triumphant about the progress.

But that sense of victory was short-lived.

A new kind of pest had emerged.

Biker gangs. Illegal street racers. Even rogue pickup truck clubs.

They collectively slapped the public across the face and proved one thing: it was too early to celebrate.

Police units from multiple districts were helpless.

These punks were smart, slipping past AI surveillance and facial recognition systems with masks, filters, and evasive tech.

Worse, they were too many.

Sure, a few got arrested and had their vehicles impounded—but no one cared. The wealthy ones simply hired top-tier lawyers to reduce their charges or get them off entirely.

Yang Qingyue nearly exploded in rage more than once.

She cursed the bloodlines of these nouveau riche families—especially those who'd gotten rich off demolitions and real estate speculation.

Not all offenders were from these backgrounds, but the majority of captured individuals traced back to them.

Determined not to give up, Yang launched a new crackdown.

With Ling Qingyu's help, she upgraded CCTV networks and equipped the police with faster response vehicles—new cruisers and patrol bikes specifically geared to chase down the new menace.

At least on the surface, the police weren't humiliated.

They made arrests. They showcased a response. They tried to prove that the law still held weight.

But in truth, the results were dismal.

The law was too lenient.

Those arrested were back on the streets within days.

Even Yang Qingyue—so persistent and iron-willed—sometimes felt like giving up.

The police did arrest several repeat offenders. But interrogations yielded nothing.

No snitching. No real information.

The deterrence had failed. The cycle resumed.

And despite everything, Yang felt too ashamed to ask Spirit Fox for help.

After all, Spirit Fox wasn't built for this.

Their mission was to combat terrorism, dismantle organized crime, and neutralize high-level threats to national security in Province N.

Yes, Spirit Fox could clean up these street rats if they wanted.

But to what end?

They'd jail them, only for the system to release them later.

It would be overkill—for minimal, temporary gains.

Yang Qingyue knew she couldn't justify that bargain.

Spirit Fox understood the dilemma.

They sympathized.

But they had their hands full too. While the streets appeared calm, there were buried threats still festering beneath the surface—threats Spirit Fox operators worked tirelessly to eliminate.

The repercussions weren't visible in headlines. But the fight was real.

"I bet our way is still the best," the driver grumbled, eyes narrowing at the bikes ahead. "Just slam the pedal, break through their formation. They'd be gone for good. Injured, traumatized, permanently disabled."

"Come on, Sis," her partner replied with a tired chuckle. "They're annoying, yeah. But they don't deserve that much wrath."

"Wait until someone actually gets hurt because of their fun," the driver muttered, shooting a cold side glance.

They had seen plenty of these pests before—on previous patrols.

If it wasn't motorbikes, it was flashy supercars.

Fortunately, their boss wasn't passive.

She'd already proposed building multiple racing tracks across the province to redirect this thirst for thrill into something constructive.

By hosting regulated competitions, the idea was to give these second-generation brats what they craved—excitement, recognition, and a sense of achievement.

It might be the most effective long-term solution.

Because at the root of all this chaos was a simple truth:

These kids didn't want to hurt people.

They just didn't know how else to prove they existed.

"Look, look at them—wheelies and dancing," the operators joked, watching the stunts through the windshield.

Some of their sisters had learned to ride bikes and could even pull off a few tricks themselves.

So they weren't too impressed.

Especially not when their boss, Ling Qingyu, was in the picture.

That woman wasn't just a phenomenal driver—she was a damn lethal biker too.

Nobody had expected the seemingly ordinary businesswoman to possess such insane, jaw-dropping skills.

She didn't just ride—she captured audiences with every move.

In their eyes, Tang Ziyi and Ling Qingyu were godlike.

And Ling Qingyu even more so, since she came from the elite financial world. A deadly force with a credit rating higher than most people's net worth.

Suddenly, the onboard computer screen flared red and let out a sharp, blaring alert.

It was part of Spirit Fox's emergency protocol—run directly by dispatch and their proprietary AI.

Unlike the conventional police system, where dispatchers would alert officers after AI notification, Spirit Fox's infrastructure operated under Athena's direct management.

That meant faster alerts, seamless handoffs from human dispatchers, and, sometimes, predictive warnings that came before a crime even happened.

The passenger leaned in and read the brief note flashing on the screen—most likely from their liaison at Athena.

These messages usually arrived minutes, sometimes tens of minutes, before any call reached the regular police.

A capability that had baffled everyone—especially the Spirit Fox team, who were endlessly curious about Athena's methods.

Compared to the Province N police AI—capable of issuing real-time alerts and some preventive warnings—Athena's system was simply in another league.

"Possible home intrusion. A woman and a kid in danger," the passenger read. "We're the closest unit. It's a preliminary warning."

The driver didn't hesitate.

"Doesn't matter. I'm tired of sticking around these punks' rear ends. Let's take the call. Besides, it costs nothing to react. Golden hour, pal."

"On it."

The passenger tapped the address, patching the route directly into the GPS overlay.

"I've selected the fastest route. Now, kick that gas."

"With pleasure."

The driver grinned, flipping open a compartment and pressing a series of buttons.

Instantly, the sirens lit up.

The lightbar burst into red and blue, and the previously ordinary SUV howled to life—its engine note rising in pitch.

From stealth to full-blown law enforcement in seconds.

The change sent shockwaves through the biker group.

Several nearly lost control—especially those mid-stunt.

Some screamed and accelerated, tires screeching as they fled the scene.

In the blink of an eye, they'd committed multiple traffic crimes right in front of the police.

"Nice timing, dumbasses," ordinary road users muttered.

Most of the group cursed out their leader, who was now visibly shaking.

They hadn't expected to pull their stunts next to Police.

Meanwhile, the surrounding drivers honked and clapped, thinking justice had finally come.

Their joy would be short-lived, but for a moment, karma looked like it was doing her job.

Chapter 712: New AI detection

The Volvo SUV's front end was slightly wrecked—tilted upward from the sudden torque surge when the driver stomped harder on the gas.

From the bikers' perspective, the police SUV looked dead set on chasing them.

Most panicked and darted away, but a few with cooler heads began to slow down, ready to pull over.

They weren't foolish enough to challenge the full force of the state machine—no matter how deep their pockets or how powerful their connections were.

Paying a fine and spending a night at the station was manageable. But if they fled, injured someone, or caused a fatal accident, they'd face disaster.

Even escaping without causing harm could add extra charges, another night in detention, and heftier fines.

Especially now—after the province-wide CCTV project spearheaded by the authorities had blanketed nearly every corner of Province N.

True, a few installation gaps remained, but once the police decided to come for you, hiding your face wouldn't save you.

Worse yet, there were drones. So many drones.

Formations of small units patrolled every block, but the real terror came from above: a massive hybrid drone—part fixed-wing, part rotary—manufactured by Ling Qingyu's Spirit Group.

Unlike the smaller quadcopters, this beast cruised high above the skyline, armed with ultra-high-resolution cameras.

It could monitor a dozen city blocks in one sweep, tracking minute movements with surgical precision.

Though it lacked the raw agility and acceleration of sport-class FPV drones, it more than made up for it in speed, altitude, and sheer endurance—rivaling even manned helicopters.

To make matters worse for lawbreakers, recharge stations dotted the province, keeping the drones operational around the clock.

And with AI-driven CCTV analytics feeding live intel, escape wasn't just difficult—it was damn near impossible.

Because of this ever-present surveillance web, street crime had plummeted.

In fact, it was hard to recall the last time a resident reported a street-level offense.

There were, of course, voices raised about personal freedom and the fear of tyrannical overreach—mostly from those with skeletons to hide.

But to the average citizen, peace and safety mattered more than anonymity in public spaces.

Everyone understood by now: there was no such thing as privacy on roads, around buildings, or within public infrastructure zones.

Those who slowed down exhaled in relief when the police SUV sped past—clearly uninterested in them.

But those who'd chosen to flee? Their nerves were fried.

Some were crouching so far over their handlebars they looked like they wanted to pedal for extra speed.

They cursed themselves for not pulling over. In the past, those who stayed behind had suffered under brutal police handling.

But now, something was different.

The wailing siren, the roaring engine—it all screamed urgency.

And then, abruptly, the siren cut out, replaced by the crackling voice of the vehicle's intercom.

Most of the bikers expected the usual police broadcast—some half-hearted plea to pull over or surrender.

What they didn't expect was mockery.

"Are you boys and girls so free that you need to seek attention like this?"

"Do you have any idea what could go wrong if things get out of hand—or if an accident happens?"

"Next time, grow up. Be responsible men and women. Don't seek validation from strangers. Discipline yourselves. Improve yourselves. Pull your stunts in a private club, not on public roads."

"As much as I'd love to beat your asses, I'm sorry—we've got real emergencies to deal with. There are better people than you who actually need us."

The voice was female.

Relax with steele will and force.

Normally, when a policewoman spoke, suspects didn't pay much attention.

Some didn't show respect—especially male offenders—thinking they were physically superior.

Typical bully behavior.

But in Province N? A female police officer often sent chills down spines.

Why? Because the odds were high she was from Spirit Fox.

The unit's notoriety had grown to such ridiculous levels that even 'innocent' citizens tried to avoid any interaction—out of fear that some buried sin from their past might be exposed—little offense included.

For small-time offenders, getting caught by the police was one thing.

Getting caught by Spirit Fox was a nightmare.

And for bikers like these, it was even worse.

If the police car was covert—no markings, just a blacked-out civilian SUV—then the likelihood it belonged to Spirit Fox rose significantly.

As if confirming their fears, the Volvo's windows rolled down on both sides.

Inside were two operators, visibly armed and kitted out in tactical gear.

Red and blue lights strobed above the vehicle, giving everything a harsh, flashing hue.

And the moment the bikers caught a glimpse of the unit inside, their expressions changed. Fast.

Some smiled awkwardly, feigning innocence.

Others waved weakly, their bravado melting into nervous tension.

They might have dared to outrun the police because the latter exercised caution even to avoid harming suspects and criminals.

But no one in their right mind dared to play chicken with Spirit Fox—because Spirit Fox wouldn't hesitate to crash right through them.

They paid no heed to the injuries or aftermath suffered by suspects in their hands.

After all, Spirit Fox operated with surgical precision. Their missions rarely, if ever, affected unrelated bystanders.

There had been public doubts—especially during harsher operations—but time and time again, their accuracy had proven itself.

The Volvo SUV dashed away, leaving behind the startled bikers and grumbling road users.

It weaved through lanes, accelerating to a staggering speed as it headed toward the nearest exit.

Surprisingly, none of the annoyed drivers complained—despite the earlier biker chaos.

Why? Because Spirit Fox had declared they were responding to a higher-priority emergency.

Whatever had caught their attention had to be serious. Even the punks knew that.

They sighed in relief—and, somewhere deep down, they genuinely hoped the operators would make it in time.

After all, despite their reckless behavior, not all of them were bad people.

Meanwhile, in the police control center, the AI system—gifted by Ling Qingyu to Yang Qingyue—blared an alert.

It wasn't unusual. These types of emergency notifications popped up often.

All public and recommended residential cameras were connected to the system.

A dedicated department had been created to monitor the AI's alerts and respond accordingly, dispatching units to relevant sectors.

Right now, the AI had flagged a situation that demanded human review.

A policewoman sitting at the monitoring desk immediately clicked on the notification.

A live video feed popped up—footage from a residential building floor.

It appeared to be only seconds old.

These residential building cameras weren't forced by law but were encouraged through strong recommendations.

And even then, officers did not actively watch interior footage unless permitted by AI in emergencies.

Normally, the AI simply monitored in silence, only stepping in when something required action.

Only two people—Yang Qingyue and Cai Ning—had unrestricted access to direct feeds without AI approval.

Not that either had the time or interest to abuse the privilege; they weren't voyeurs.

The control room officers usually monitored public spaces—streets, plazas, parks—and even then, most did so out of boredom.

Now, the policewoman leaned in, preparing herself to assess the footage and respond.

The video showed a woman arriving at her apartment with her daughter.

The little girl barely reached her mother's waist in height.

They approached the door, the woman unlocking it with her key. Nothing seemed unusual.

But then—

A man's head appeared from the stairwell above.

The next second, he charged.

The woman and daughter turned at the sound—but froze in shock.

The man sprinted straight toward them.

There was no hesitation.

He forced his way inside after a brief struggle, dragging the woman through the doorway.

The daughter tried to flee, but the man snatched her up in mid-run.

Then—

The door slammed shut.

Violent. Sudden. Calculated.

The entire clip was barely a minute old.

And now, the situation inside that apartment was about to escalate into something much worse.

The policewoman inhaled sharply, her fingers trembling for a split second.

Then she moved—fast.

She hit the dispatch button, called for backup, and summoned her supervisor with a second press.

Help had to come now.

Her fingers flew across the keyboard as she requested aid through the system, typing in the incident address and key details as situational notes.

The alert was immediately relayed to the nearest precinct, where a dispatcher would take over and coordinate the response teams, along with the closest available patrol units.

Unfortunately, the nearest patrol was still 10 to 15 minutes out, even though the system showed they were responding.

She had done everything she could—and now, all that was left was to pray.

Her breath grew shallow. Her chest rose and fell rapidly as her body rocked back and forth in the chair, nerves refusing to settle.

She called out sharply to nearby colleagues, her voice cracking through the tension.

With a few rushed sentences, she explained the stakes. Eyes turned toward her in alarm.

Officers gathered, and a brief burst of chaos followed.

Some began trying to contact the building's management—checking if any security guards were on-site and available to assist.

Just as despair began to settle in—just as the horrifying realization set in that the victims might have to endure the attack before help arrived—two icons blinked onto the system's map.

Two new symbols had appeared.

Closer than any of the previously responding units. Sudden presentation out of nowhere.

The policewoman stared at the screen—then blinked in disbelief.

A smile crept up despite her dread. Hope sparked in her eyes.

The units was gunning down fast.

The new icons were unmistakable: a stylized fox imprinted on a shield, accompanied by a curved sword, with the acronym CAITO—Containment Assault Intervention Tactical Operatives—etched underneath.

Spirit Fox.

They were already nearby.

Chapter 713: Intervening

Technically, Spirit Fox operators responded before the events even happened.

That was why they were known in the force as the fastest responders.

Unlike standard AI detection systems, which only issued alerts once emergencies were underway, Athena—or more specifically, her sub-program—processed incoming data and simulated short-term future events.

This allowed it to predict crimes with extremely high probability before they occurred.

Data was everything.

In this instance, the sub-Athena had already flagged suspicious behavior: a man appearing multiple times near the mother and daughter—not directly following them, but showing up in their vicinity repeatedly.

It was enough to raise a quiet alarm in the background.

Then the man vanished—momentarily easing the suspicion—only to reappear in front of the apartment building before the mother and daughter arrived.

His loitering around the stairwell—pacing up and down—triggered a deeper warning.

He seemed unconcerned about the visible cameras. Or perhaps he simply didn't care.

His focus was on the act he was about to commit.

When he was identified as the ex-husband of the woman—a man previously reported for repeated domestic abuse—the risk assessment skyrocketed.

Sure, Athena's sub-AI could be accused of overthinking.

But by the time this debate might even be had, Athena had already handed over control to one of her subordinate programs.

If Ling Qingyu ever discovered that Athena had already "given birth" to daughters—and that they were now spawning their own decision-making routines—she might just reward Athena handsomely, once the AI completed building herself a body.

Anyway, the very moment the man forcefully dragged the two victims inside, the alarm spiked across the Spirit Fox network.

The alert pinged directly into the vehicle's system, already synced with Spirit Fox headquarters—managed by Athena herself.

This particular vehicle had just exited the highway at lightning speed, fresh from an encounter with the street bikers.

A bland, low-pitched, annoying drone erupted from the dashboard—an unmistakable emergency tone.

The case had been classified as requiring immediate intervention.

Not long after, a second alert came through: a nearby unit was also being pulled toward a similar incident. Clearly, Province N's Police Command Center had picked up the signals and was coordinating.

The Spirit Fox operator in the passenger seat wasted no time. She tapped the response button, confirming their acceptance of the mission.

Within a second, another Spirit Fox patrol showed up on the screen—also responding.

The driver didn't wait. Her foot pressed harder on the accelerator.

The Volvo surged forward, tires screeching as they swung into the next intersection—only to slam to a halt.

A complete traffic jam.

The wailing siren shattered the dull hum of honks and idle engines.

Drivers looked up, startled, some unsure of how to respond.

Fortunately, the operator in the passenger seat grabbed the intercom:

"Emergency! Please make way! Thank you!"

She repeated the call several times. A narrow channel began to open.

The siren shifted into a lower, throaty rumble as the Volvo pushed through, squeezing between vehicles with barely an inch of clearance between side mirrors.

The driver handled it with ease. Not a bead of sweat.

Screech!

She twisted the wheel sharply—pivoting toward the sidewalk. Compared to the conventional route, this one might be faster, plus the AI-aided directions also agreed with her opinion.

Luckily, a zebra crossing provided some space. Though pedestrians scattered in alarm, they were quick on their feet.

Of course, the Spirit Fox operators weren't reckless. They slowed down when necessary—never endangering civilians.

Unlike in some countries, the sidewalks here were wide—large enough for two trucks to pass side by side.

And that didn't even include the extra margin where electric bikes and scooters were usually parked on both sides.

The surrounding eyes were filled with worry and unease.

They could only hope that whoever the police were rushing to save was going to be okay.

After all, they had never seen an emergency vehicle so desperate that it risked driving full-speed onto the pedestrian walkway.

The next minute stretched like an hour.

The two Spirit Fox operators held their breath—the Volvo was just two blocks away.

From a distance, another siren howled into earshot. Neither operator said a word.

They already knew: more Spirit Fox.

As for the local police or nearby responders, the datalink showed they were still farther away—at least two more minutes before the choking traffic would stop impeding them.

Then—screech!

The Volvo slammed on the brakes, making a sharp turn into the designated street.

The target area wasn't tucked inside a residential complex but instead sat just slightly inward from the main road. Still, it wasn't smooth driving.

Street vendors and illegal signboards cluttered the way.

Loose objects scattered as the vehicle roared through, swept aside by its sheer momentum.

The operators cranked the siren to maximum volume—a deafening warning meant to disorient the perpetrator and buy precious seconds.

It was a classic police tactic: scare the criminal, save the victims.

Catching the suspect was important—but saving lives always came first.

Besides, where could anyone hide once Spirit Fox had locked onto them?

The web woven across Province N wasn't just for show.

The Volvo rammed through a carelessly parked tricycle.

The flimsy frame stood no chance against the armored beast—it was flung away like scrap.

Neither operator spared it a glance.

If damages occurred? Ling Qingyu would cover it.

They had full confidence to raise hell if necessary.

Ling Qingyu: "..."

They passed several buildings before the Volvo drifted into a slanted parking position, siren still active.

The copilot launched out the moment the vehicle stopped—rifle at a low port, already moving.

Her door had flung open before the car even finished skidding.

She sprinted toward the chain-linked gate at the stairwell—only to find it locked.

"Damn it," she muttered.

Reaching for the lock, she wrapped her hand around it and ripped the mechanism clean off—barehanded, fueled by superhuman strength.

No time to wait. No time to fiddle.

She'd already absorbed the mission summary from both the police report and Ling Qingyu's side. So had her partner.

She tore the gate open and entered.

As she ascended the stairs, two startled elderly residents appeared—a couple.

One of them held the key to the lock.

Maybe they were just about to go out.

Or maybe they had been going down and returned after hearing the sirens.

Their eyes widened in disbelief at the operator's raw, brute-force entry.

If not for the Spirit Fox tactical uniform and official markings, they might have screamed—or collapsed from the shock.

The operator didn't waste a glance.

Just behind her came the driver—now armed with a rifle and a crowbar.

After skidding to a stop, she'd secured the vehicle to prevent unwanted attention and grabbed the breach tool from the rear compartment.

A crowbar was light, simple, and perfect for this kind of indoor op.

She didn't forget to greet her partner—though she knew what that tense silence meant.

Another Spirit Fox unit was less than a minute away.

Both operators sprinted up the stairs, skipping steps in between. Several floors ahead. The two's breath didn't fluctuate at the high intensity, nor their speed decreased.

10th floor.

The building was twelve stories high and old—no elevator.

The pointwoman nearly cursed aloud in frustration when she reached the door.

Locked.

And it opened outward. She kicked it anyway—only for it to bulge slightly inward with a dull thud.

Useless.

There was no point kicking a door that opened the other way.

She couldn't use too much force either. The door might shatter completely, causing splinters or debris that would slow them down.

She'd only go that route if she were alone.

Not to mention—there was a camera watching.

Anything out of protocol had to be avoided, if possible.

"Be patient. I've got a crowbar," her partner said, rescuing her from the awkward standoff.

"Thanks," the pointwoman muttered.

"If only you'd use your head more than brute force..." her partner added with a click of her tongue. But her hands moved fast—she aimed the 90-degree claw into the small gap between the frame and the door.

No further words were needed.

The pointwoman, already impatient, raised the butt of her rifle and hammered it against the claw like a nail into wood.

Swish.

The metal claw punched in with a sharp sound.

Using the doorframe as a fulcrum and her weight as leverage, the breacher heaved the crowbar back.

Crack! Snap!

The door creaked open with resistance, then gave way—swinging outward, weak and defeated.

Without hesitation, the pointwoman stepped forward, snapping the muzzle out from the high ready posture.

"Province N Special Police! Stop what you are doing and turn yourself in!"

Her partner followed immediately, tossing the crowbar aside and moving in behind.

The scene was chaos—scattered furniture, a trail of mess that screamed of struggle.

They cleared the room quickly, prioritizing the direction of rapid, retreating footsteps.

"Living room clear!"

"Kitchen clear!"

They didn't have the luxury to follow the safest protocol—each operator was clearing alone.

Or, more accurately, one-woman clears.

Still, they were professionals. Highly skilled. And the current threat level was considered low.

In the real world, flexibility trumped textbook.

The layout unfolded fast. Living room first.

Kitchen tucked behind.

Left—balcony.

Right—a narrow, L-shaped hallway leading to several rooms, plus a small play area clearly meant for children.

The operators canted their rifles for better maneuverability in tight quarters and pushed forward with urgency.

At the first door, the pointwoman stopped, snapped the door open, and held the threshold—

Her rifle instantly dipped down into a safe angle.

A small girl was curled under a study desk, sniffing.

Tears streaked her face as she cowered in silence, frozen in fear.

Chapter 714: Mother and daughter rescued

The commotion drew attention.

As the siren grew louder, curiosity followed—and tension spiked when tire screeches echoed down the street.

People patted their chests nervously, eyes darting from building to building, wondering where the police were heading.

That tension turned to alarm when they saw who had responded.

Spirit Fox.

Province N's elite unit, only dispatched for the most dangerous and critical situations.

The siren's wail rose to a chaotic crescendo. Whispers spread like wildfire.

More bystanders gathered, asking each other—What happened? Who was involved?

But upstairs, far from the murmuring crowd, reality darkened.

The man had already ripped the woman's clothes.

He had waited days—stalking from the shadows—and couldn't bear seeing his ex-wife and daughter living peacefully after the divorce.

The woman tried to push him away, weakly, trembling.

Her resistance was no match for his weight and strength.

Futile.

Her face was sore and red—fresh from repeated blows meant to beat her into submission.

What remained in her eyes was a flickering defiance, wrapped in tears.

But pain had worn her thin. Not everyone could endure violence and remain unbroken.

He had slapped her over and over until she stopped screaming.

Maybe out of twisted pity—or selfish lust—he had avoided striking her face to the point of disfigurement.

But his cruelty only deepened. His hands gripped her hair like reins, yanking her at will.

Torn clothes. Bare skin.

A predator's rhythm, oblivious to her pain.

Ruthless. Mechanical.

He was about to make the final move.

And then—

The siren hit full volume. A scream of justice descending.

The sound shattered the moment.

His pent-up madness jolted. Guilt crept in—

Even though he'd heard sirens countless times before, this time, it clawed into his ears.

Because when someone's committing evil,

even the wind sounds like a warning.

He froze.

Tried to breathe. Calm himself.

Just ignore it, he thought.

But the siren screamed louder—

directly beneath him.

The sound came from right outside his building.

What was going on?

He didn't notice the woman's eyes—once dulled in defeat—flicker with a glint of hope.

Even if the odds were slim, if there was even a chance the police were responding to her case... she clung to it.

What if...

The man, curious and cautious, stepped out of the room to check—

Bang!

A loud crash at the door made him jump.

Then came the unmistakable sound of someone trying to force it open.

His heart sank.

Police.

It had to be. Nine out of ten, it was the police.

Panic overtook him. He turned to run, but the door was already cracking open too quickly.

His mind spiraled.

What now? What do I do?!

He looked around frantically.

There was nowhere to go—no way to escape from this height.

A hostage? That might buy time—

No, that would only make things worse.

Surrender? Maybe?

He had no idea how he even stumbled back toward the woman's room, but when he saw the door closing on him—his blood boiled.

She had heard the sounds too. She knew.

She was trying to lock him out. Trying to protect herself and wait for rescue.

"Woman, think about your child! Don't be naïve!" he shouted through the crack, voice filled with venom.

Her grip on the door wavered.

She hesitated—for her child. As a mother, her rationality lost when her child was at risk but the moment of hesitation allowed the man to barge in.

That was all he needed.

He forced the door open and shoved his way in.

"How could you?! She's your daughter too!" the woman screamed.

"Why should I care?"

That was the commotion the Spirit Fox operators heard as they breached the apartment.

The operator saw the lost child shivering beneath the desk and felt a pang of distress—but there was no time. More pressing matters demanded attention.

Her partner had already moved past her position, advancing down the hallway. She quickly picked up her pace, rifle held at a high ready.

As they hurried toward the source of the noise, the lead operator spotted a door that had just shut—followed by the sound of a lock turning. Cries. Curses.

She signaled with a gesture. Her partner squeezed her shoulder in response: ready.

They skipped over the unchecked rooms, rifles trained forward. The rear operator kept watch behind to guard against surprises, even though the intel indicated only a single hostile.

No time to waste.

The pointwoman raised her leg and kicked the doorknob, flinging the door open. She charged in, clearing the left side.

"Police!"

Her partner mirrored her, clearing the opposite corner. Both swept in and extended along the walls.

The man was on top of the woman, who had collapsed to the floor. Disheveled, near naked—there was no mistaking what had been happening.

Twin beams of red laser danced across his body, aimed at center mass. He froze, terrified.

"Stay away from the woman!"

"On your knees! Right now!"

As commands rang out, the lead operator didn't hesitate. She lunged forward, hook-kicking his ankle and sweeping his foot out from under him. Before he could react, she smashed her rifle's buttstock into his back, throwing him further off-balance.

He collapsed with a thud.

Without pause, she grabbed him by the neck and slammed him into the hard floor with force that made the room tremble. She didn't care about the injuries—he didn't deserve care.

For good measure, she struck his waist again with a sharp blow, then slung her rifle behind her shoulder to pull out a zip tie. Swiftly, efficiently, she cuffed him.

Her partner stayed vigilant, covering her during the takedown—but once the man was restrained, she turned her focus to the victim.

Gently, she knelt beside the trembling woman and wrapped her in the nearest discarded clothing to cover her shame.

"My daughter, please!" the woman sobbed, voice barely coherent.

"She's okay. We found her in the other room," the operator reassured, calm but warm.

"Can you... can you take me to her?" the woman begged, clutching the clothes tighter.

"Of course," she nodded, then glanced over at her partner—and gave a small twitch of her lips.

There was no worry about leaving her behind.

Her partner stood tall, boot pressed down firmly onto the man's back, most of her weight pinning him to the ground.

He groaned in pain.

She didn't flinch.

Stepping on a suspect was probably against protocol.

The operator shook her head with a faint smile. Rules and restraints like those didn't bind them—not Spirit Fox.

The mother, now rescued, patted her chest and exhaled deeply, still in disbelief.

Saved.

Just like that.

So quickly, so easily.

For a moment, she had thought it was over. No one had noticed the incident. Everything had happened too fast—she hadn't even had time to scream or struggle before being dragged inside the apartment.

Her daughter had cried out, yes—but would any neighbor have really noticed? Or cared?

She looked at her ex-husband, cuffed and pinned to the floor, and her expression darkened. Her jaw clenched.

A part of her wanted to end him right there, to remove any chance of future danger.

The nearby operator noticed. She stepped beside the woman, gently nudging her shoulder, fingers pressing lightly against the soft skin.

"It's over," she said in a calm, grounding tone. "Don't worry. He won't be getting out."

The woman nodded stiffly, trying to compose herself. "Thank you, officers."

Only then did she realize who had saved her: Spirit Fox.

The infamous unit—known to handle the province's worst cases.

Suddenly, she turned toward the man and, to everyone's surprise, kicked him.

Hard.

Then again.

And again—each strike aimed at his side, a mix of fear and fury erupting all at once.

She couldn't believe she had once loved this man. Couldn't believe she'd married him.

Before the wedding, he had been the perfect gentleman: calm, collected, attentive. His masculinity carried gentleness, and that contrast had charmed her heart.

But it was all an act.

Within six months, the mask had slipped. The truth had emerged.

Violent. Controlling. Manipulative.

Thinking of all that time wasted, the betrayal, the pain—her heart twisted.

Tears spilled.

Her kicks didn't stop.

The operators watched closely but didn't interfere. They monitored her, ready to intervene if she crossed a line—so she wouldn't do anything she'd regret, or anything that might earn her legal trouble.

Then, softly, the operator beside her patted her shoulder again. "Let's go to your daughter."

The mother blinked and slowly nodded. Her rage eased as the instinct of motherhood returned.

At least... at least her daughter was her pride. The only good thing that came from that failed marriage.

Under the operator's gentle guidance, she left the room, walking to console her frightened child.

Tonight, both mother and daughter had suffered something deep. Something that might scar for a long time.

Meanwhile, the operators radioed in.

"Intervention complete," she said. "Requesting medical support and domestic response units."

Minutes later, another siren rose outside, followed by the heavy rhythm of boots rushing up the stairwell.

"Province N Police!" a female voice called out from the hallway.

"Over here!" the operator replied, guessing the comers were her fellow sisters reinforcing them.

Two more officers—female operators—entered and quickly assessed the situation. One of the newcomers approached to ask about the situation and the other moved toward the mother and daughter.

Fortunately, women, after all, were often best suited for these moments.

To comfort the ones left in pain.

To tend to the wounds no medic could see.

Shortly after, more police units—alerted by the dispatch code—began flooding in. The specialized response team for this type of case was still en route, but the scene was already drawing significant attention.

The commotion had grown so loud that several neighbors were now crowding around the apartment doorway, trying to get answers. The newly arrived officers immediately began pushing them back, keeping the area clear.

Moments later, the medics arrived, weaving through the gathering crowd. Now, the entire street was clogged with emergency vehicles, their flashing lights painting the surrounding buildings in a chaotic dance of red and blue.

Detectives followed not long after. Female patrol officers—trained specifically to care for victims and gently extract testimony—took over from Spirit Fox. The operators stepped back, their job done.

From an external, almost utilitarian perspective, one could argue that Spirit Fox's deployment had been overkill. A regular police response team would have sufficed.

But then again—who made Spirit Fox so free, so fast to respond, and so precise with their intel?

The answer was simple: Athena.

Their detection systems had no rival.

Chapter 715: Threatening

"Let me hand him over myself. My hands are itchy," said the operator who still had her boot planted on the man's back, halting the approaching detectives and officers.

She reached down, grabbed the man by the waistband of his shorts, and yanked them up along with his body. Then, without hesitation, she seized a fistful of his hair and pulled hard.

"Hiss—" the man groaned in pain.

"Hiss? Where was that hiss when you were hitting that woman?" Her tone was cold, devoid of mercy. She didn't even spare him a glance of pity.

Some younger officers nearby flinched, their idealism and textbook protocol nudging them to intervene. But the veterans stopped them with a glance and a subtle shake of the head.

Technically, yes—cases like this should be handled strictly by the police. But when Spirit Fox insisted on taking part, no one dared oppose.

And this wasn't formal procedure anymore—it was a message. A lesson.

It wasn't right by the book. It was beyond the law. But the older officers understood the deeper truth.

This man would be arrested, charged, maybe even imprisoned.

But would that be enough?

Too often, such men walked free after light sentences, only to return with a festering grudge and a sharpened knife.

They didn't see themselves as criminals—just victims of accusation. Of betrayal.

The person who reported them became the target of their hatred.

And that's why Spirit Fox took it a step further—not out of cruelty, but caution.

To imprint fear.

To brand a warning deep into his psyche: Don't come back.

That was how Spirit Fox operated. Like the older officers, Spirit Fox operators, who usually dealt with dangerous organized criminals and gangs, understood deeply about the perilous psychology and rebellious attitude, particularly against the weak.

It wasn't about upholding moral obligations—it was about protecting the vulnerable. Not because they had to, but because their humanity demanded it.

The operator exchanged a knowing nod with the officers preparing to write the reports. Somewhere else in the apartment, others were likely taking statements from the mother and daughter.

As she marched the cuffed man toward the door, she intentionally let his head bump hard against the frame.

He whimpered, but she didn't slow down.

"Ouch!" the man cried out in pain.

"Oops. Walk properly. Don't try to struggle," the operator sneered, the expression hidden beneath her hood.

As the two stepped outside, she suddenly hooked her foot behind his ankle, sending him stumbling into the wall. Before he could recover, she grabbed him by the neck and barked, "I said—don't move!"

"Ah!" he yelled again, his voice rising as sharp, cold pain shot through his limbs. She was pressing down on precise pressure points—one along his forearm where her grip tightened like a vice, and another near the base of his neck. His whole body stiffened in agony.

She leaned in close, forcing his cheek against the rough wall and tugged harshly on his ear.

Her voice was soft. Almost sweet. But the threat beneath was unmistakable.

"We haven't even reached the stairs yet. You know... accidents happen when suspects resist arrest. I mean, I'm just human too, right?"

The man opened his mouth, wanting to complain—but another squeeze at the pressure point silenced him. The pain was unbearable.

The operator ignored the uneasy looks from some of the nearby officers. Soon, she was out of sight, beyond the line of those who had witnessed her harsh methods.

One of the officers ahead reached out to help, but she waved them off with a dismissive flick of her hand.

"Oops... there you go again. Can't you just stop resisting and avoid making things worse?"

The man hit the floor again with a grunt and hissed in pain after being tripped by a furniture standing in the way. This time, he didn't dare utter a word. His lips clamped shut like a locked case.

Watching from the hallway, his ex-wife let out a long, deep sigh of relief.

She wasn't sure if the operator's "bullying" was calculated—but it certainly felt like justice.

If not for the presence of the other officers, she might have applauded.

The operator once again signaled for privacy, gesturing that she wanted to be alone with the suspect. She led him down the staircase, away from the apartment.

By now, a sizable crowd of neighbors had gathered near the building entrance. Fortunately, enough officers had been dispatched to keep the situation under control.

Once the operator reached a floor where there were no civilians—only a few officers trailing behind to monitor her actions—she grabbed the man by the neck and leaned in close.

"Don't think I don't know what's going on in that rotten mind of yours," she whispered.

"You disgusting piece of scum. You really thought you could exploit morality and hide behind your status as an ex-husband? Playing on that poor woman's trauma and psychology... Not a bad plan. Too bad it failed."

She sneered coldly. "Frightening her, manipulating her until she was too scared to report you... and planning to slip away when no one was watching. You really thought the court would go easy on you, didn't you?"

The man remained silent, but the flicker of acknowledgment in his eyes said enough. He knew she was right.

The operator tightened her grip on the back of his neck. "Listen closely. The law may be limited—but prison? That's a different game entirely. People like you? There's a special kind of hell waiting."

She leaned in further. "You know who we are, right? Spirit Fox. That means you should also know—we know people. Especially in prison. Especially... gangs."

Her tone turned oddly nostalgic. "Speaking of which, there's this one gang leader. Dangerous guy, sure, but he had principles. Organized crime, but he hated scum like you. He's got his own ways of 'correcting' inmates. I think he'd be happy to help."

"You..." The man muttered, horror dawning on his face.

The operator let out a low, amused hum, enjoying the fear in his darting eyes. She chuckled darkly.

The officers behind her said nothing. Just stood in awkward silence.

"Enjoy your time in prison. Reform yourself—if you can. And don't even think about doing something stupid once you're out. We have ways to make sure you never get out. Maybe I can't do it directly, but I guarantee—if you go in upright, you'll come out horizontal."

"Officers! Help! She's breaking the law!" the man suddenly screamed, his panic bubbling over. "You can't do this—it's illegal! Mmmph—"

The operator calmly pressed a mute pressure point. His words died in his throat, leaving only muffled sounds and wild, pleading gestures.

The officers nearby exchanged weary glances. Spirit Fox's reputation wasn't just hearsay. They really did speak openly about crossing the line.

Of course, maybe she was just bluffing. Maybe it was just to scare him straight.

But in truth, they were wrong.

If the man showed no signs of remorse—or worse, hinted at future retaliation—Spirit Fox wouldn't hesitate. They would be merciless.

And with Athena, their AI partner and massive database always watching, they had the time and precision to track every small detail. Even if the operators forgot, Athena wouldn't. She'd quietly send reminders—clean, untraceable—and ensure that all loose ends were dealt with.

No hands would point back. No trails would lead home.

And if justice by law failed, special justice would step in.

Yang Qingyue had long worked with Ling Qingyu to scrub such misconduct from their records. But sometimes, darkness knew how to hide—and how to survive.

After all, evil couldn't exist without good. And where there was light, there would always be shadow.

Soon, the operator escorted the man into the prison van. The effect of the acupuncture pressure points would wear off shortly, and he'd be able to speak again.

Meanwhile, the mother and daughter were gently guided into the ambulance, their heads covered with blankets to shield them from unwarranted cameras.

Sometimes, the sharpest knives came not from weapons, but from the mouths of people who vented their frustrations on society—gossiping, speculating, condemning.

Technically, Athena could intervene and disrupt the flow of such information. But too much interference could backfire, drawing even more unwanted attention.

It was better to let things unfold naturally—at least on the surface. After all, if the situation spiraled out of control, Athena would react accordingly.

No matter the level of concealment, the neighbors would eventually piece things together and rumors would spread. It was smarter for the police to issue official statements early—better than some reckless netizen.

Waving goodbye to the mother and child with a sweet smile, the operator watched as the ambulance drove off, followed closely by another police vehicle.

Now came the less glamorous part of the job—reporting everything they'd seen and done. The paperwork was tedious, but necessary.

Fortunately, Spirit Fox's reporting system was streamlined by Athena. It saved both energy and time.

A/N: The event really did happen. The woman didn't report it until three days later. While the police did eventually arrest the suspect, what still infuriates me is how public opinion reacted at the time—around three years ago. People didn't seem to care. In fact, many treated it as a joke, dismissing it as just another "family dispute" because the perpetrator was her ex-husband. Some even blamed the woman for not calling the police sooner.

Victims of abuse often face layered trauma: not just from the act itself, but from the societal reaction that follows. When someone like this woman finally gathers the strength to report, only to be met with

mockery or blame, it's an injustice that compounds the original one. It tells victims: "Even if you survive, we won't protect your dignity."

Three days is nothing in trauma time. Shock, dissociation, fear of retaliation, and especially societal shame can delay action. Add in gendered stigma, and the delay becomes almost inevitable. Expecting immediate reporting in such conditions is deeply ignorant of psychological reality.

Who can report something like that sincerely and clearly while still in shock? Most victims are confused and terrified in the immediate aftermath. It takes time just to process what happened, let alone take action—especially in societies where public judgment is harsh, norms are conservative (arguably), and blame is often placed on women instead of the abuser.

In conservative societies, especially those that emphasize female silence, obedience, or honor, women are discouraged from speaking out—not because they're weak, but because they know the moment they do, they become targets again, not just from the abuser, but from the community. And that fear is real.

Chapter 716: Handling the aftermath

The operators glanced around, observing the gossiping onlookers as they quietly assessed whether public sentiment would tilt in a positive or negative direction in the days to come.

A policewoman soon approached them, requesting official statements about what they had witnessed and the actions that followed.

As expected, the Spirit Fox operators, moving in silent accord, kept their testimonies focused on the essentials—demonstrating strict adherence to procedures and the rule of law in their reports.

Still, the policewoman recording their statements couldn't help massaging her throbbing temples, sneaking a glance toward the prison van where the suspect had been dumped. Her ears were nearly calloused from hearing the man's repeated complaints—excessive force, threats, demands to sue Spirit Fox.

She and her colleagues had nearly laughed out loud. Sue Spirit Fox? Would any judge even dare take that case?

Every suspect held a grudge after enduring Spirit Fox's notorious treatment—but without exception, every one of them had been guilty. Spirit Fox operators never harmed the innocent, even when bending or outright breaking the law. That restraint, that brutal precision, only broke down when they encountered the truly vile.

So, the policewoman and her fellow officers ignored the suspect's whining, though they couldn't help but feel curious about what exactly had transpired in those blind spots.

The operators, likely aware of that curiosity, exchanged helpless glances—then turned collectively to shoot accusing looks at the teammate responsible for the rough treatment.

The culprit simply shrugged and muttered, "He deserved it."

One of her colleagues shook her head and said, "Why don't we go check on the woman and her daughter? It wouldn't hurt to accompany them, maybe ease their minds a bit."

"I suspect you just want to kill time under the guise of comfort."

"Come on, sisters. Our shift's nearly over. Let's do something decent to end it."

With that, the four operators quietly withdrew, leaving the remaining mess for the local police station to clean up.

Two of their vehicles rolled off in the direction of the hospital. After all, the woman—still trembling, still clutching her child—deserved more than just legal justice. She needed reassurance, safety, and human warmth.

They had broken her door, damaged parts of the apartment during the arrest—intentional or not, it was their responsibility to see it through. That was the code they followed, the one passed down by Ling Qingyu.

Their boss rarely explained how she handled aftermaths or rooted out deeper causes, but her actions always spoke louder than words. Time and again, the sisters of Spirit Fox had witnessed her brilliance—not just in solving problems, but in curing them at the root.

Not once had she left a loose end for opportunists to exploit, or a survivor vulnerable to retaliation. Even when nobody noticed, she ensured her people shielded those they saved—until the very end.

This level of thoroughness extended far beyond the battlefield. In business matters too, the same meticulous precision prevailed. Even the so-called "silly sisters" from Spirit Fox—who usually had no grasp of the financial world—couldn't help but feel a chill when witnessing the absolute control of the chessboard and the uncanny foresight in calculating future outcomes.

Before long, they reunited with the mother and daughter at the hospital. This time, the duo was under careful protection, thanks to a request from the police.

There wasn't much needed in terms of physical treatment—just tending to a few minor injuries from the initial battery and struggle the mother endured.

But it was the emotional and psychological trauma that posed a greater threat. Recognizing this, the police had sent over counselors and a policewoman for support.

Perhaps it was because Spirit Fox had been the ones to save them when they were in danger, but the mother and daughter showed clear trust in the operators. Their presence visibly lifted the atmosphere, offering a sense of safety and warmth.

Soon, the little girl's curiosity returned in full force. She peppered the operatives with endless questions, bouncing with energy. The operators responded with soft smiles, indulging her cheerfully.

Their own fatigue seemed to melt away in the face of the child's innocent joy. Truly, there was no better cure for the weight of the adult world than a child's carefree laughter.

Later, the doctor declared the mother and daughter well enough to be discharged. Spirit Fox could have easily leveraged the benefits of keeping them at the hospital longer—but they weren't about to manipulate the situation or burden the medical staff.

Yet sending them home wasn't an option either—not while the apartment remained damaged and unsafe.

After a quick internal discussion, Spirit Fox arranged for temporary accommodation—either at a hotel funded by the Spirit Foundation (a charitable organization established by Tao Ling under Ling Qingyu's initiatives), or, if they preferred, a week's stay at the Imperial Resort until repairs were complete.

Surprisingly, the mother declined the offer, even after reassurances that it was the operators' moral duty to take responsibility for breaking into the home and that the foundation existed precisely for such support.

She politely insisted on staying at a modest hotel instead. In her eyes, being rescued from the clutches of evil was more than enough. As for the damage to her property, that was an unavoidable consequence—she wasn't the type to nitpick compensation or exploit legal loopholes for personal gain.

It wasn't until the operators expressed concern for her daughter's safety that she finally relented and accepted the arrangement.

The operators, in turn, gladly offered to escort and assist them for the evening, casually noting that they were available to help settle them in, despite their shift already over.

Their kindness brightened the sorrowful mother's heart, reigniting a fragile belief in humanity. At the very least, there were still people willing to help.

Even if society pushed her toward despair again in the future, she now held the confidence to endure.

Sometimes, careless words could push someone over the edge—but even the smallest act of presence and kindness could pull them back.

Shortly after, the group departed from the hospital. One vehicle transported the mother and daughter, while the other bid farewell and opted to make a short patrol nearby before heading back to base.

When the daughter mentioned she was hungry, the two operators gladly took a small detour to the nearest snack restaurant.

They insisted on treating the mother and daughter—completely ignoring the mother's polite refusal, leaving her helpless in the face of their determination.

They chose a KFC. The operators, feeling a bit hungry themselves, decided to order something too. The service wasn't particularly good, but not terrible either.

One operator went inside to place the order, while the other stayed outside to keep the mother and daughter company.

If not for their intimidating uniforms and Spirit Fox reputation, perhaps the staff wouldn't have taken their presence seriously. The operator overheard multiple customers complaining about missing items and repeatedly going up to the counter.

Still, she chalked it up to a new staff member. Everyone had those early days filled with mistakes—the key was to grow and learn from them.

Of course, employers had to be prepared to endure a bit of chaos during a new hire's adjustment period.

Soon, the operator returned to find her partner and the mother-daughter duo sitting on a bench outside on the sidewalk.

"Wow, enjoying yourself like a tourist, huh?" she teased.

"Thankfully, you're so aware—junior," her partner shot back with a smirk.

The mother smiled gently, a soft laugh escaping her lips. She wondered if these amiable, playful Spirit Fox operatives were truly real—not the ruthless figures their reputation suggested.

"Here you go, child. Eat up," one of the operators said, handing over the food.

"Thank you, Sister," the little girl replied politely.

"It's Aunty, not Sister," her partner joked.

The girl looked thoughtful and apologized sincerely. "Oh, Aunty. I'm sorry I called you wrong."

"No, you're not wrong, hon. It's this ba—baddie who's teasing you," the operator corrected with a mock glare at her partner.

"How much for the chicken and fries? I'll pay," the mother offered quietly.

"Please, don't worry about it," her partner replied, waving it off. "Once we make up our minds, no one can change them."

She then pulled out a card and added, "If you run into trouble at work or in the neighborhood because of what happened tonight, don't hesitate to call this number and report your situation truthfully. They take confidentiality seriously—just like we do."

The mother glanced at their uniforms—hoods, helmets, tactical gear—everything covered except their eyes.

"You know," one of the operators said, tone softening, "back then, we didn't even dare interact too much with residents. We were afraid criminals would retaliate and hurt the people we spoke to."

Now that the province is finally peaceful—compared to the chaos of the past—I never imagined I'd be sitting here, casually chatting with someone like you."

The mother inwardly guessed whether she was expanding her network with Spirit Fox operators, not knowing that she thought too much, inexplicably.

The two operators had nothing to do and wanted to enjoy life. At the same time, they were also considering caring for a single-parent family to the most possible extent without affecting their lives.

Chapter 717 - Slice of life?

A group of four—well, three women and a little girl—shared a takeout dinner, the simple scene radiating unexpected warmth.

If only the Spirit Fox operators' uniforms didn't disrupt the atmosphere with their bulky, tactical fierceness. Still, the two had already pushed their hoods back, revealing their faces beneath the helmets.

The mother and daughter, especially the little girl, exclaimed in delight, "Pretty!"

Neither of them had expected that the women working in such a dangerous line of duty could possess such captivating allure.

Of course, the faces they revealed were masked by subtle holographic projections to conceal their true identities. But even then, their real faces underneath weren't far off—they were genuinely beautiful.

After all, Spirit Fox girls exercised regularly, ate nutritious meals, and maintained their health with discipline. Regardless of genetics, their appearance was naturally elevated by the alluring physiques honed through years of intense training. There was a vibrant, magnetic energy within them—an aura that couldn't be faked.

On top of that, the ancient sutras they practiced enhanced both their bodies and even their genetic potential in imperceptible ways.

With such graceful curves and strength in form, it was only natural for these operators to be considered beauties. Many of them had even grown from their once shorter statures into healthy, model-like proportions.

In fact, on average, all of them ranked slightly above standard beauty norms. That was why Ling Qingyu always praised herself so proudly when she was with Tang Ziyi, declaring that her harem was the most beautiful in the world.

How much good karma must she have accumulated in her past life to deserve such a stunning view? Even if her girls were absolute monsters in terms of strength and ability, in her eyes, they were adorable.

No—correction—they were handsome.

Either way, the mother and daughter felt even happier, believing they'd seen the operators' real faces, deepening the emotional bond between saviors and saved.

The mother even pledged to treat them to a proper home-cooked dinner once everything was resolved. Her offer, however, was politely declined—gently, but firmly—so as not to burden her further.

Besides, the operators were keenly aware that Spirit Fox still had enemies out there, even with past missions concluded successfully.

There were remnants lurking in the shadows, ready to exploit any act of kindness. The operators could show compassion—but not to the extent that they risked putting the mother and daughter on an open stage for retaliation.

"Madams, I don't know how to express my gratitude. You're like angels," the mother said, her voice soft with sincerity.

"I think you're overpraising us. It's just our duty and responsibility," one operator replied gently, while her partner playfully teased the daughter nearby.

Joyful, peaceful laughter erupted from time to time. Hopefully, this child was doing okay—surviving the trauma, bit by bit.

With warmth like this, perhaps she wouldn't suffer too many nightmares in the future.

"I almost forgot—just in case you face any problems at your workplace or anywhere else, remember the contact I gave you," the operator added, her tone turning more serious. She was concerned the woman might dismiss it or underestimate its importance.

The number led directly to Spirit Foundation, an organization spearheaded by Tao Ling—a woman personally recruited and entrusted by Ling Qingyu to manage the foundation's operations.

The Spirit Foundation provided more than just words. Financial assistance, legal consultations, volunteering support, aid to orphanages—its reach was wide and growing.

Although recently established, its foundation was rock-solid. Backed by Ling Qingyu herself, it took no effort to gather competent professionals—including a number of righteous, fearless lawyers who weren't afraid to stand up against the tide.

The reason was clear: Ling Qingyu had founded the group to fight back against those who exploited the weak, especially the kind of capitalist predators, political elites, and second-generation bullies that crushed struggling families under the weight of law and money.

And behind Ling Qingyu stood Gu Yi, ever firm, though her support remained veiled beneath the surface—tied together by mutual interests.

While Tao Ling served as the foundation's public face, a certain man held the role of vice-director. He was a capable lawyer, but recruiting him had given Ling Qingyu a massive headache.

Why? Because he happened to be closely acquainted with one of her friends abroad—and worse, he was an admirer.

The process of negotiation had numbed her brain. She really didn't want to owe favors, especially not when it involved someone with false hopes.

But in the end, she admitted: with his help, the recruitment process was much smoother than expected.

One good recruit led to another. Then to four. Then to dozens. With competitive salaries and a mission backed by solid principles, Spirit Foundation attracted a formidable collective of righteous legal practitioners.

And now, that inner contact—quietly passed from the operator to the mother—was a lifeline.

Should anything ever turn against her, she wouldn't be left to fend for herself. The Spirit Foundation would stand behind her.

In the event the mother lost her job, the Spirit Foundation could also help find an open position—either within its circle or through external networks.

While two operators stayed behind, warmly keeping the mother and daughter company, the other two, who had parted ways earlier, found themselves stuck in traffic—bored and restless.

Their vehicle was a few cars behind the lead one. The pair exchanged helpless glances as loud music blared from a nearby vehicle next to the lead car. A hand shot out from a window, flailing wildly in rhythm with the beat. At the song's climax, the driver even pointed at the lead vehicle, triggering a ripple of movement as the passengers inside started dancing.

From the two operators' perspective—through weirded-out and mildly entertained eyes—the vehicle shook with enthusiastic force. Back and forth, side to side, matching the tempo of the music.

"At night, people really lose it," the copilot muttered.

"You can join in and catch the frequency. Doesn't hurt to move your hips a little," the driver joked.

"Bullshit," the copilot retorted.

Fortunately, the embarrassing display ended as the traffic light turned green and the convoy surged forward.

The driver took it slow—no need to rush up to more potential eyesores. But at the next red light, something else caught their attention.

A motorbike pulled up beside their SUV. The rider was a woman clad in all-black gear with a white jacket over it. From her stature and curves, she was clearly one of the stunners out there.

The two operators didn't think much of it. If anything, their eyes were just glad not to be tortured again.

But then, a man stepped out of another vehicle and strode toward the female biker.

Even though the SUV's windows were up, voices at this range still reached the operators inside.

"Hey! Unveil your mask," the man said, trying to sound suave and confident—completely unaware of how cringeworthy and intrusive he came off. The girl visibly flinched, panic flashing across her face from the abrupt, aggressive approach.

"Excuse me, this is a little—" she tried to respond politely.

"What's your number, girl?" he pressed, ignoring her discomfort.

The operators sensed the shift in atmosphere immediately—tension thickened, clearly outweighing any awkwardness. Still, as long as the man kept his distance and didn't escalate, it wasn't quite harassment... yet.

Besides, the woman hadn't voiced a firm rejection—perhaps out of fear. Maybe she worried that upsetting the man would provoke reprisal. After all, it wasn't uncommon to hear stories on the news about people being attacked—or worse—for turning someone down.

Her hesitation was perfectly understandable, and the operators inside the Land Rover silently prepared to act. If things went south, they wouldn't hesitate.

Watching the man continue to pester the biker without the slightest hint of guilt or awareness of personal boundaries, the two sighed in unison.

Then he stepped in closer—his hand moving toward her phone.

That was the final straw.

Who does he think he is? Driving a flashy car made him a hero? A king?

The driver flipped the switch. The siren blared once—Whoa!—as blue and red lights burst into life. At the same time, the copilot slid down her window, exposing part of her uniform and face.

The result was instant. The man straightened up like a kid caught stealing, hastily adjusting his expression as if nothing had happened.

"Officer, it's not illegal to ask a girl for her number, right?" he said, trying to sound innocent and unbothered.

"Of course not," the operator replied with a stern frown. "Provided you don't make her uncomfortable."

Words like narcissistic and toxic drifted through her mind. She hoped every woman this man encountered in the future would see right through him and stay far away.

"She didn't say no," he argued.

"She didn't say yes either, sir," the operator shot back, her eyes locking onto his with intensity.

The man coughed, trying to recover, but his bravado had already wilted. His momentum faltered as realization dawned.

At first, he'd assumed they were just regular patrol officers. Then, maybe SWAT. But now—looking closer at their bearing, their gear, their presence—he almost bit his own tongue.

Damn. Thank heaven he hadn't said what he was about to—some sexist garbage about how women need to be "guided."

"You're not seriously assuming that not saying no means yes, are you? That's a bit extreme," the operator challenged.

"Well... sometimes people say a guy needs to be brave to succeed," the man offered weakly.

"Bravery and being a creep don't exactly align, do they?"

Just as the copilot started to get impatient and reached for the door handle to step out, the man raised both hands in surrender and backed off, retreating into his car without another word.

The operator turned to the biker. "Ma'am, are you alright?"

"Thank you, officer," the woman replied softly, lifting her visor just enough to reveal a pair of striking eyes.

"You're welcome." The operator cracked a smile. "You weren't seriously thinking about giving him your number, were you? I'd feel guilty if you did—and scared that I'm doomed to be single forever."

The biker chuckled. "Officer, you're so funny."

"Take care of yourself," the operator said, her tone softening. "And if anyone bothers you again, don't hesitate to call. Unfortunately, what he did didn't quite cross the line into actionable territory. Civil rights cases can be tricky—and messy."

"Will do, officer. I'm just now recovering. Honestly, I barely reacted—it's scary how all my thoughts and movements froze," the biker admitted.

"That's a normal stress response when you feel threatened," the operator reassured her. "But I don't think it's as bad as you're imagining. Sometimes, our emotions make it feel worse than it really was. From what I saw, you held up just fine."

As she spoke, her eyes flicked briefly toward the man who had retreated into his vehicle.

Suddenly, the operator's expression altered but she managed to hide one because of darkness.

Chapter 718: Giving a help

The driver subtly mirrored her partner's movements. A soft chime rang in their ears—the kind of tone only the operators could hear through their encrypted headsets, directly linked to the intelligence network managed by Athena.

As for the ongoing debate—whether Athena was an AI or simply a person using an AI-styled voice to communicate with Spirit Fox—neither of the two operators cared. The entity had been helping them without fail. That was enough. Any suspicions, if warranted, were for Ling Qingyu to handle as their leader.

Still, the message that came through sent a chill down both their spines. The operators stiffened for only a moment. They didn't even need to look at each other to coordinate—instinct and experience had already pinged a plan into motion.

Although both had flipped their visors up earlier—since it wasn't an active engagement and keeping the face shield down was impractical for normal interaction—they still had their headsets on to receive real-time updates. In fact, dropping the visor would activate an internal HUD that streamed tactical data directly into view.

And so, without making a scene, they lowered their visors. Information flowed across the transparent screen.

"Warning. Probable dangerous individual. Voice, physical frame, and facial data match approximately 70%. Exercise caution." Athena's mechanical tone cut through the air in their earpieces.

Even if the confirmation was only partial, it didn't hurt to heed the warning.

The copilot operator opened her door and stepped out casually.

"Ma'am, are you riding alone?" she asked the biker.

"Yeah. If not, I wouldn't be getting harassed like some street-side mannequin," the biker sighed, briefly averting her gaze. Her eyes narrowed, like something had finally clicked in her mind.

"Right? It used to be worse," the operator agreed, walking up beside her with measured ease.

Inside the vehicle, the driver's hand subtly gripped the door lever. Her other hand was already resting on her thigh—holding a Glock 17 that had long been unholstered the moment her partner stepped out.

On her visor's screen, a classified file began unfolding. She read quickly while maintaining a calm posture.

Even so, uncertainty lingered. They couldn't risk reckless action unless they confirmed the target's identity. The standard rules of engagement and their own internal doctrine forbade it.

For all they knew, this biker might just be an ordinary woman on a late-night ride, who just happened to match with dangerous personnel list.

Shooting a potential civilian based on unconfirmed intel was not only unlawful—it was against their core operating procedures.

Still, there was reason to be cautious. If the suspicion Athena flagged proved correct, this person could be connected to something far larger—a false alarm, or a spark in the powder keg that was Province N. The former should be the most preferred case.

The best course was to dig deeper and ensure no threat lurked beneath the surface.

"Indeed, it's thanks to you guys, who quelled the chaos. Otherwise, I wouldn't be out here," said the biker girl. "Is there any reason, for the...officer to come out, by the way?"

"Well, that depends," the operator said, aware that the biker had already caught on to their subtle shifts. "Can you show me your ID card?"

"I mean... what exactly did I do? What's the probable cause?"

"Miss, you should know we're not here to bury you in protocol. It's just an ID check—to keep things simple for everyone."

"But that would be a blatant violation of my rights."

"I'm afraid someone who truly felt grateful wouldn't be so hesitant to cooperate," the operator replied, voice calm but firm.

Meanwhile, five kilometers away from the incident, a trio of Spirit Fox operators were patrolling on foot.

Two of them exchanged helpless glances toward their teammate up front.

The girl had been tailing a man walking a dozen meters ahead, too concerned for his safety to keep proper distance.

But the two couldn't exactly blame her. The man was blind, navigating his path with a white cane. Judging by his steady pace and confident steps, he likely had a phone connected to a Bluetooth device feeding him GPS data in real time.

Still, the discomfort of shadowing a blind civilian was hard to ignore. It wasn't just awkward—it was emotionally taxing. None of them had ever seen a blind man stroll the streets alone like this before.

But perhaps that was the point.

With the province's security steadily improving, it might not be long before more people with disabilities could enjoy the simple pleasure of walking outside unafraid.

It hadn't always been this way. Not long ago, the streets belonged to gangs, thugs, and opportunistic criminals. Disabled people were among the easiest prey.

Most had either fled the province or confined themselves indoors. But no one—introverted or not—could stay locked away forever. Eventually, the pressure would mount. People needed fresh air. Freedom.

Now, thanks to the sweeping reforms brought by Spirit Fox, those fears were slowly dissolving.

Of course, not all problems disappeared overnight. The blind man still had to worry about inconsiderate civilians—people who parked on sidewalks or dumped objects across the guiding strips embedded in the pavement.

Many residents didn't realize that the patterns and grooves etched into sidewalks served specific functions. The long, straight ridges, for instance, gave blind pedestrians directional guidance through tactile feedback from their canes.

While Province N was on the rise, most advanced accommodations still remained limited to City N, the provincial capital. Rural and outskirt regions had to catch up gradually.

Still, it was already a huge win that random potholes and sudden sinkholes weren't springing up anymore to ruin lives—something that used to happen regularly before Ling Qingyu's intervention.

Her billion-dollar investments weren't just about optics or political sway. Roads were being built, sidewalks restructured, public spaces secured.

It was all part of a bigger goal: to connect villages, towns, and cities seamlessly. To raise the standard of living while simultaneously boosting economic flow.

After all, all businesses thrive on consumption. And to drive consumption, one must empower the people first. That was the essence of a virtuous economic cycle.

If things continued this way, Ling Qingyu would likely earn back two, maybe three times her initial investment in the coming years—alongside the growing reputation she needed to solidify her role in the region's future.

Technically speaking, Ling Qingyu had already established her roots and earned a measure of prestige among the elite circles of Province N.

Her connection with Gu Yi—while officially unacknowledged—could be uncovered with only a modest level of scrutiny. Still, there was a world of difference between being someone's pawn and being a true player on the chessboard.

Ling Qingyu understood that distinction well. To cement her place as a force in her own right, she needed tangible merit. No one currently regarded her as a mere lackey, but as her status evolved beyond that of an ordinary businesswoman, taking deliberate steps to prove her independence became essential.

Back on patrol, the trio of Spirit Fox operators kept close behind a blind man making his way down the sidewalk. The woman up front—clearly more invested—shadowed him with quiet care. Subtle, but obvious to her teammates.

If a scooter or e-bike came barreling toward his path, she raised her hand or signaled them to yield. Most road users were understanding and didn't need much prompting, helping out without a word.

"Sis... don't tell me you're falling for this guy?" one of the girls behind teased with a sly grin.

The lead operator flushed. "No! I'm just... making sure he doesn't get into trouble. You know, some punk might try to take advantage."

"Uh-huh. Not because he's handsome or anything," the other one teased, laughing.

"Well, I mean... he is. But that's not the point!"

"Ohhh..." They didn't push further. What was wrong with wanting to protect someone you happened to fancy?

Even if the chances of something blooming were slim to none, it was still satisfying in a way—emotionally, maybe even a bit vain. Quietly, the girl in question was already thinking of submitting some suggestions to Ling Qingyu, advocating for more infrastructure and policies to support people with disabilities in the province's next development phase.

Unbeknownst to them, passersby had noticed. The public appreciated their attentiveness—at least, inwardly. Quiet praise lingered among those watching.

Soon, the blind man reached a crosswalk. There were proper traffic lights equipped with auditory cues for the visually impaired, but that didn't ease her worry.

Her partners started ribbing her again, half playfully and half nervously. After all, there was always a faint concern: What if she got swept away—emotionally or even literally—by someone outside Ling Qingyu's inner circle?

Ling Qingyu projected warmth and generosity on the surface, but her reputation included rumors of ruthlessness beneath. Even if it was unlikely she'd act against her own people, those whispers had planted lingering doubt.

But sometimes, people simply overthought.

Suddenly, tires screeched nearby.

The sound ripped through the night, cutting through streetlights and car beams that muddled visibility. For a few seconds, no one could quite make out what was happening.

Then—a car burst out of its lane, swerving into the opposite side of the road, accelerating rather than slowing.

It was barreling straight toward the crosswalk.

Some pedestrians scattered instinctively. Others froze, watching as if it were a show. Some even pulled out phones—popcorn not in hand, but definitely in spirit.

And even though this wasn't officially within their jurisdiction, the Spirit Fox team didn't hesitate.

The lead operator stepped forward, arm stretched out in a firm stop signal. Her eyes locked on the blind man, still mid-stride across the zebra crossing.

Chapter 719: Hit-and-run

Seeing that the car wasn't slowing down—its trajectory locked onto both the blind man and herself—the operator made a split-second decision.

She lunged forward.

"Be careful!"

The man toppled over from the sudden shove, rolling just far enough to escape the path of the vehicle. But she wasn't as fortunate.

Though she tried to twist away using her momentum, the car's hood tracked her like a predator. The bumper slammed into her thigh, knocking her legs out from under her. Her body hit the ground hard.

Then—front wheels, back wheels—crushed her calf.

She was literally trampled, her body dragged into the arc of the car's turning radius before it skidded off.

Her teammates' eyes widened in horror. No one expected this.

In fact, the girl shouldn't got 'injured' at all but her act of heroism landed her to the precarious situation.

Of all scenarios, they'd thought she'd emerge unscathed—especially with the protection talisman Tang Ziyi had provided. Bulletproof, sure. But could it withstand the crushing momentum of a vehicle?

Anger flared in their minds, directed at the reckless driver. But that frustration turned to dread in the blink of an eye.

One of them caught a glimpse of the passenger's face.

Vicious. Intentional.

Their instincts screamed—ambush.

In the very next second, the passenger yanked out a MAC-10.

A criminal's favorite. Compact. Loud. Simple. Brutal. No finesse needed.

The weapon snapped up.

And then—pure chaos.

Ratatatatat!

Muzzle flash lit the inside of the car as the MAC-10 barked. Rounds sprayed in wide arcs, tearing through the air toward the remaining two Spirit Fox operators.

There was not the slightest update, intel or signs from Athena. Their most powerful omniscient weapon missed it.

No warning. No time to react. No time to dive for cover. Plus, their current position was in the worst place.

They barely managed to duck, bodies moving on reflex rather than conscious thought. Their heads cowering to minimize their stature.

Too late to snap their rifles up to counter.

The first rounds hit—thighs, arms, shoulders, chest, even across the face. Dust kicked up from the impacts on the tactical clothing.

Pings rang sharply as bullets ricocheted off their helmets and gear.

But their visors... they'd left them raised.

The two operators collapsed backward under the force, limbs going slack. Their bodies crumpled onto the pavement as shocked screams erupted from the surrounding crowd.

Some stray bullets caught unrelated pedestrians nearby.

Panic swallowed the street. Civilians fled, some ducking behind cars, others frozen in place. Those stuck inside the vehicles for the traffic trembled, hearts pounding.

In just a few seconds, a peaceful patrol turned into a bloody ambush.

Screech!

After rolling over the operator, the car didn't stop—it merely slowed for a heartbeat, then veered off sharply, tires squealing as it drifted away into traffic.

A textbook hit-and-run. Cold. Calculated.

This wasn't an accident—it was an ambush, pure and simple.

The two operators who'd taken the brunt of the MAC-10's spray were lucky. Lucky that Ling Qingyu's gear wasn't just military grade—it was borderline absurd in its protection level. Even then, they weren't unharmed. The impacts bruised, stunned, and battered them.

The one who took a hit to the helmet lay sprawled out, dazed—vision blurred, ears ringing from the shockwave and blunt trauma.

But the other recovered faster.

Still on her back, grit biting into her uniform, she thrust her rifle forward, propping it against her elbow. Safety off. No stance. No breath control. Just pure instinct.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Semi shots.

She dumped rounds in the direction of the fleeing vehicle.

Sparks burst across its frame as bullets peppered the metal. The rear windshield cracked and spiderwebbed under the assault.

Seven rounds under one and a half second, her eyes narrowed—she saw the passenger slump violently. A confirmed hit.

She immediately shifted her muzzle toward the driver's seat.

Pop! Pop! Two more rounds.

The car wobbled. The driver swerved, clearly panicked—either from watching his partner get hit or from the sudden realization that Spirit Fox didn't hesitate to return fire.

But traffic swallowed the vehicle before she could follow up.

She stopped firing, reluctantly.

They weren't vigilantes. Every bullet had to be accounted for. No stray shots. No bystanders hit.

Biting down her frustration, she lowered the rifle and exhaled through clenched teeth. She stumbled to stand up and reached out for her radio.

"Fallen Angel. Fallen Angel. Net call! I say again—FALLEN ANGEL!"

Her voice cut through the comms like a blade. Spirit Fox had just been ambushed.

She switched channels and fired off a rapid sitrep. Vehicle type. Direction. Attack method.

No use mentioning the plate—everything was a blur in the chaos.

"Athena copies. Stay vigilant and secure the scene. Reinforcements en route."

"Roger."

The operator turned back toward her fallen teammates. One was moaning, disoriented, shaking her head from the helmet impact. But she could wait.

Her focus snapped to the one lying still—crushed by the car. No movement. No sound.

She rushed forward, limping from earlier bruises, and dropped to her knees beside her downed partner.

Bullets weren't the problem. Not with their armor and Tang Ziyi's protection protocols. But the talisman—meant to activate only in life-or-death—hadn't triggered.

No defense is perfect. And in that moment, fear trumped logic.

"Hey—girl! Talk to me!"

She slapped her partner's cheek. Once. Twice. Then a third, harder than necessary.

A groan.

"It hurts."

"Where?! Where does it hurt?!" she demanded, panic slipping into her voice. She wasn't used to this—not after everything they'd trained through. Spirit Fox girls didn't complain about pain unless it was serious.

Then the victim's reply came.

"Your hands. Why the hell do you slap that hard? I'm not a rag doll."

The operator blinked. Speechless.

Her partner rolled her eyes and muttered, "You're lucky I'm too injured to return the favor."

"You—!" Her hand twitched as if about to slap again—but instead she exhaled, half in relief, half in exasperation.

The operator was speechless and almost beat this cheeky face. "You wasted my damn heart."

"Ahem... I'm serious when I say pain," her partner groaned.

The operator's heart, which had sunk to her stomach, lifted a little.

"I think I snapped my foot."

"That's it?" she asked, exhaling hard in relief.

"That's it."

"Alright then, let me snap it back for you."

"Fuck you!"

"Oh my god, they survived!"

"Yeah! They were shot up and still fought back. Unreal..."

"Officers, are you okay? I already called emergency responders—help's coming."

"Is there anything we can do?"

The crowd, finally shaken from shock, surged forward with concern. Voices piled over each other, hands reached out. Some people ran up with water, jackets, even tissues. No one questioned how the trio had miraculously survived a brutal gun attack and a car running someone over—they all conveniently ignored that part.

Volunteers stepped in. One operator lay sprawled from the car hit. Another sat dazed and vacant, her mind clearly still rebooting.

But her expression wasn't quite blank. Her eyes tracked every movement with cautious hostility.

She was still on alert. Deeply so. She appreciated the help, truly—but what if someone in the crowd was a second wave? What if another shooter was hiding in plain sight?

The odds were low. But low wasn't zero.

"Oops! Over here! Someone needs help!"

"I think this couple got hit—yeah, they're bleeding!"

Cries of pain snapped her focus around. Her partner, already sensing it, nudged her. "Go. Civilians need you."

She glanced around—sure enough, two people lay on the pavement, bleeding but conscious.

She met her partner's eyes and gave a subtle nod, a warning look that meant: Stay alert.

Then, she trotted heavily over to the injured, feigning pain with each step. Even though she felt fine—miraculously so—she couldn't drop the act. Not now.

If she moved like nothing happened, someone might question how she wasn't hurt. And they couldn't risk exposing their most confidential protection measure.

So, she dragged herself forward, like each step drained her soul. A performance worthy of an Oscar.

And it worked.

Some people in the crowd teared up at the sight. One stepped forward, voice thick with emotion. "Let me help you walk."

"It's alright. Please give us some space."

"Sure, sure! I'm sorry."

"Sorry..." Your support at \* keeps the series going.

A wide perimeter formed around her. Inside that circle, she dropped to one knee and assessed the wounded couple. Bullet wounds. Bad, but not fatal—thankfully missing vital organs.

Still, they needed immediate first aid.

She pulled a medical pouch from her vest and began treating them.

"Let me help—I'm a nurse!"

"I'm a doctor... well, resident, but I can assist!"

The two professionals had been frozen earlier, stunned by the sudden violence. But seeing her struggle to move—even in pain—spurred them into action despite their fear. Together, they patched up the bleeding, working fast and clean.

The operator handed over gauze, bandages, coagulant. Let the experts take over. She stepped back and observed quietly.

A few people whispered kind words. Someone gently patted her shoulder.

She felt... guilty.

Their presence had caused this. Civilians got hurt because of them.

But then she turned and caught sight of her two fellow operators.

One was lying back with a bandage on her leg, soaking up sympathy. The other still sprawled like a tragic damsel, eyes closed while people cooed and fawned over her.

And suddenly, the guilt vanished.

Why the hell am I the one stuck pretending to be injured while those bastards just lay around being pampered?

Afterward, she switched her attention to the medical workers and remembered something—Welp, how could the trio continue to pretend to hide in front of these professionals.

She had headaches. Look at her friends, these bastards hadn't realized the stakes yet.

Chapter 720: Another?

On the Street, With the Wounded Operator

Especially that silly one—her eyes locked onto the blind man who had tripped after being shoved.

Girl... that man can't see you. And maybe worry about our situation first?

The operator nearly screamed in frustration at her hopeless partner.

Then there was the other one, sprawled out like she'd just been dumped by her high school sweetheart, basking in everyone's pity.

Could you stop pretending to be roadkill just to get pampered?

She didn't want to suffer alone. Once the nurse and doctor started properly checking wounds, they'd be so close to getting exposed.

Sure, she could always leverage Spirit Fox's power—and Athena's reach—to silence every single mouth involved. But you could never really silence sympathy once it had spoken.

Fortunately, her teammates knew how to respond fast. Athena had already pinged in, and the sirens she heard were Spirit Fox's—closer than she expected. A few local law enforcement units were tagging along, too.

Just as she feared, the doctor and nurse shifted their attention back to her.

The doctor jogged over, already asking diagnostic questions. The nurse reached for her leg as she limped.

She really wanted to confess. Just come clean and admit she was faking.

But alas, one lie demanded a thousand more to cover it. That ancient saying had never felt more true.

If she were dealing with cunning agents or ruthless informants, she wouldn't bat an eye. But against kindness—empathy, genuine concern—it was guilt that overwhelmed her more than any injury.

Thankfully, her sisters came rushing in, their sirens wailing just far enough to buy her time.

"I'm fine," she quickly said, trying to redirect the situation. "Really. It's nothing serious."

"No, you need proper medical attention. You were limping. We have to be sure," the doctor insisted.

"Thank you, Doctor. Miss Nurse. Truly. But I can't afford to lower my vigilance—not until my team secures the perimeter." She tried to sound professional, calm, steady.

"As expected of Spirit Fox," the nurse said admiringly. "Still, it's best if you let us check your injuries—just to be safe."

"Well, why don't you check on my sister over there instead? She's the one who got run over by a car," the operator said dryly, gesturing toward the dramatic figure still lying in the street.

"Oh—right! I almost forgot!" The doctor and nurse rushed off.

The operator didn't feel the least bit guilty.

Let them deal with it. Sisterhood meant suffering together.

Elsewhere—A Quiet Street Bench

Two other Spirit Fox operators were providing comfort to a mother and daughter who had just finished a quiet dinner outside. Neon lights from nearby shops lit the sidewalk, and the flow of vehicles and pedestrians gave the street a rare, serene evening charm.

For a better reading experience, visit [M\(VLEMPYR\)](#).

That calm shattered the moment they heard the code crackle over the channel:

"Fallen Angel."

They froze, instantly snapping to full alert. Their posture changed subtly, their attention sharpened.

One positioned herself between the civilians and the open street. The other turned her back to the bench, scanning the surroundings with her hand inching toward her sidearm.

The mother sensed the tension shift. Her smile faded.

"Officers... is something wrong?"

"Yes," one of them nodded grimly, exchanging a quick glance with her partner.

"Please, get in the vehicle," the other said. Her voice was calm, even soft—but it carried the unmistakable weight of urgency.

The mother obeyed instantly. She didn't understand what was happening, but she knew one thing: it was serious.

Just as the mother and daughter were about to board the SUV, a motorbike screamed toward them from the opposite end of the street.

Ordinarily, the two operators might have dismissed it—just another pair of rowdy teens riding like they owned the road. But the Fallen Angel code had sharpened their senses to a razor's edge.

That heightened vigilance paid off in the next second.

There were two riders. An ordinary commercial bike. Nothing tactical. But the passenger on the back wasn't just riding along—he was staring directly at them. His hand moved behind his back.

The operators reacted instantly. They snapped their bodies together, forming a human shield around the mother and daughter.

Their sidearms were already drawn low, close to the abdomen. The moment they confirmed the shape of a firearm in the attacker's hand, they extended their barrels and fired without hesitation.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Screech!

Boom!

A brief, brutal symphony shattered the night's peace. The first shots came from both sides, but the operators had the faster draw. Still, the assailant managed to get off two, maybe three rounds.

One operator felt a solid thud in her abdomen. But apart from that—nothing.

The final sounds came from the motorbike skidding and slamming into a parked car, the attackers tumbling violently.

One operator moved forward, checking the fallen threats. Both incapacitated—soon dead, no matter how fast EMTs arrived.

All shots had been center-mass, methodical and efficient, each threat finished with a round to the head.

There was no time to apply picture-perfect CQB techniques in such a sudden engagement—but that was the point. For Spirit Fox, this wasn't deliberate execution. Their bodies simply moved. Years of muscle memory kicked in before thought had time to catch up.

While one operator kept her sights on the downed threats, the other turned immediately to the civilians. Her eyes swept over the mother and daughter—and she exhaled sharply in relief. No injuries.

She herded them into the SUV, slammed the door shut, and keyed her comms.

"—We reacted to contacts. Two unknown attackers. Possible Fallen Angel. Request backup and immediate site lockdown."

Fallen Angel—a code to declare that Spirit Fox operators were being specifically targeted. It triggered a red alert.

Command had debated this possibility for months, analyzing every retaliation scenario possible—gang revenge, paramilitary strikes, rogue agents. Nothing had happened until now. But their planning paid off. A rapid response could prevent full chaos from spiraling.

Inside the SUV, the mother felt her world had collapsed.

First a rescue, then a shootout. Now an ambush?

What kind of misfortune is haunting us today? she wondered. But she swallowed the fear and turned toward her daughter, who was shivering uncontrollably. Pulling the child close, she began to hum a lullaby, soft and soothing.

Her eyes strayed to the rear window.

She had seen it—clear as day. One of the operators had taken a round to the stomach. She was certain.

Even if a bulletproof vest had saved her, the thought wouldn't go away. These women—these strangers—had saved them. Protected them. Treated them with kindness most people wouldn't offer friends, let alone strangers.

Outside the vehicle, neither operator spoke. They simply stared down the street.

This wasn't random.

Two attacks in minutes. Too fast. Too close. Too coordinated.

This was no coincidence. And the worst part?

It had only just begun.

Thanks to Ling Qingyu's extreme caution and Tang Ziyi's tireless tinkering with her latest inventions, no one ended up in truly dire danger.

Otherwise, they didn't dare imagine attending a fellow sister's funeral—though they'd all accepted that possibility the day they signed up to be bodyguards.

Those from the army were even more mentally prepared, especially since their recruitment had been overseen by Big Sis Su Ruomei.

Still, curiosity sometimes made fools brave enough to scratch a tiger's butt.

And once Spirit Fox found out who was behind this, they'd be sure to bare their fangs.