

Endless 70

Chapter 70: Invitation

Ring—

The ringing echoed repeatedly in the night, as if calling for something.

Amidst the silence and chill, the ringing was especially jarring.

Bologue stared at the red phone booth. Around him, there was only himself, as if the ringing was calling Bologue alone.

He paused for a few seconds, ignoring the ringing, and continued forward, marching down a seemingly endless street.

The ringing gradually faded, and the red phone booth slowly disappeared into the darkness behind. But at some moment, the distant ringing froze; as Bologue moved forward, it did not fade away. Instead, it became clearer until Bologue stopped again.

Another red phone booth, with its incessant, piercing ring.

Bologue glanced at the phone booth, then at a road sign nearby, ensuring he hadn't gotten lost and returned to where he began. Such public phone booths were common in Opus, found everywhere.

Bologue grew vigilant, sensing the ringing seemed to be pursuing him.

What's going on?

Common people might just find it eerie, or think it's some kind of supernatural event. But Bologue knew that in this world, Extraordinary Power truly existed. Every anomaly concealed some force, coming with different purposes.

His hand reached into his coat, grasping a cold folding knife, a portable weapon that Bologue always carried. One never knew when it might come in handy, whether to slay an enemy or to open a can.

The feeling was quite peculiar, as if, in a moment, Bologue stepped from reality into illusion, entering a horror film.

He quickened his pace, heading for the nearest station, while the ringing pursued him like an unyielding phantom. Even more bizarre was that Bologue hadn't seen any other pedestrians along the way.

The unease inside him grew stronger.

In a moment, the moment the film ended, the moment he rose to leave, in one of those countless moments, Bologue was exiled from this world, arriving in a world familiar yet utterly strange.

In this world, he was utterly alone.

A weak electric arc flashed in the darkness, and Bologue came to a sudden stop, remaining where he was, swiftly drawing his folding knife with its bright blade held in hand.

He looked at the street before him. It seemed normal, but completely deserted. The cold night wind swirled up leaves and newspapers, whisking them from a corner of the street, vanishing into the vast night.

Footsteps sounded.

Those weren't footsteps ordinary people could make.

A dull, rhythmic collapse sounded, as if a giant was approaching. Meanwhile, streetlights extinguished one by one, along with the glow of the buildings, all dimming.

The light was driven away, and Bologue felt like he was on an isolated island, with darkness relentlessly closing in, the dull collapsing sounds like approaching drumbeats, the muffled thunder of a brewing storm marching toward him.

Finally, the darkness stalled right in front of Bologue.

In the endless darkness, only Bologue remained, along with the single streetlamp overhead illuminating his figure, and the red phone booth between darkness and light, emitting a continuously jarring ring.

Apart from that, there was nothing else unusual.

Taking a deep breath, Bologue did not fear death, but no one knew what the unknown truly was. The unknown itself was endless possibility, the most chilling fear imaginable.

He sighed, revealing a helpless smile, seemingly out of options as the other party was leaving Bologue no room to refuse.

He walked towards the red phone booth, opening the door. The cramped space could only accommodate him alone.

So far, Bologue hadn't been threatened with death. The peculiarities before him seemed more like they were meant to get Bologue to answer the phone. The figure on the other end grew impatient with Bologue's evasion, finally intercepting him with such rough tactics.

Now Bologue grew curious about who could possibly be calling.

He picked up the phone, placing the receiver to his ear. A gracefully low male voice rang out.

"Hello, Mr. Bologue Lazarus."

Bologue guessed it might be a man like an ancient noble, sitting in deep darkness, overlooking the world.

"Who are you?" Bologue asked in return.

"An observer? An admirer? A wealthy man looking to 'invest' in you? Whatever, does identity really matter?" the man chuckled.

"What is your purpose?"

Pursuing questions seemed meaningless, yielding no answer, so Bologue shifted to ask something else.

"I wish to establish a closer connection with you."

Upon hearing this, Bologue chuckled, his gaze fixed on the darkness outside the telephone booth. "Is this supposed to be an invitation? Such a ridiculous way to invite someone?"

"Please allow me to apologize for that, some reasons make it unsuitable for me to appear directly before you. It might raise the alarm for certain people... But if you need, advancing our meeting isn't impossible either."

The man first apologized, then extended another invitation to Bologue, a more profound invitation.

As his words faded, it was evident that the surrounding darkness became even deeper, followed by a sweeping chill.

Bologue stared at the glass of the telephone booth; although winter hadn't arrived, a layer of frost had unknowingly settled on it, spreading at a visible speed, like wild-growing vines, ready to devour everything in minutes.

The earth was trembling slightly, nurturing something unknown beneath, but Bologue knew that when it broke through the soil, it would mark the beginning of a nightmare's invasion.

"It's better this way, I feel comfortable with the distance for now. Actually meeting, I fear I might split your skull open with one strike."

Bologue tactfully declined the meeting, his hand tightly grasping a folded knife, with sweat squeezed between his fingers.

A low, resonating laugh sounded through the phone. As it echoed, the spreading frost halted, then slowly began to melt, accompanied by the sound of water trickling all around.

"I know you won't easily trust me; I never intended for a single conversation to make us intimate."

The man continued speaking.

"This is merely a friendly greeting. We will meet again, Mr. Lazarus."

"I think it's best we don't have any connection."

Bologue rejected the idea; he didn't know who the man really was, but something had vaguely surfaced in his mind, from deep, dark depths, things loathed by all creation.

Just through the phone, Bologue could already smell the suffocating stench of decay.

"Don't be so quick to refuse, Mr. Lazarus, we are destined to meet again."

The public telephone in front of him began to tremble slightly, emitting a metallic ringing sound, shaking the entire booth.

Bologue did not panic, he continued listening to the man's voice.

"This is merely a gift for our meeting; you know how to use it."

The phone call ended, and just then, the trembling of the booth ceased, along with the retreat of the darkness outside, as the electricity returned and the streetlights lit up one by one, restoring Bologue to the normal world.

Bologue quietly observed all, the faint sounds of clamors arriving, followed by vehicles and pedestrians passing through the streets, endless noise.

It was over.

A crisp clinking sound arose, and a coin bounced out from the telephone's coin-return slot, golden and dazzling.

Bologue picked it up.

On the coin's front were countless strands, converging from all directions, entwining together into a giant egg, its contents nurturing unknown.

The coin's reverse depicted a mound of gold coins, the man named "Mammon" greedily embracing the wealth, yet no matter how hard he tried, he could never gather it all into his arms.

It wasn't a Weng Coin, but a Mammon Coin that only appears at crossroads of hesitation.

The sound of knocking echoed.

Not yet relaxed, Bologue's nerves heightened again as he looked behind. A woman was knocking at the door, shouting.

"Are you done with the phone? Don't hog the spot!"

"I... I'm done, sorry."

Bologue reluctantly spoke, exhaling the breath suppressed in his chest.

He exited the narrow phone booth, followed by the woman who went inside, her voice audible, the surrounding clamor drawing him closer to the real world.

The darkness and frost, all anomalies vanished, as if everything just now was an illusion of Bologue's, yet the cold coin in his hand perpetually reminded him.

This wasn't a hallucination, it was absolute reality.

Lowering his gaze to the dazzling Mammon Coin in his hand, then toward the endless long night, Bologue raised his hand to toss it into the sewer, but just before he did, his actions halted.

Gazing at the brilliant golden color, Bologue's hand moved unconsciously to slip it into his pocket, whispering.

"Tyrant."