

Ice Age 201

Chapter 201: Surrender

Fatty Xu's simple and honest appearance gave Zhang Yi an inexplicable sense of familiarity. He had known people like this before.

People who were not good at socializing, who grew up in ordinary environments, often developing a sense of inferiority. Their poor social skills made it hard for them to make friends as they grew up. So, when someone showed them a bit of kindness, they would give their all. After being betrayed by their so-called friends, they would start doubting reality and immerse themselves in anime.

Fatty Xu exhibited these traits, especially his excessive empathy. He could even consider things from Zhang Yi's perspective, the man who had killed hundreds of people from Xu Dong Village.

Seeing Fatty Xu like this, Zhang Yi's desire to kill him diminished. However, he didn't fully trust him and intentionally said, "You're quite magnanimous, aren't you? Surely, I killed some of your relatives this time? Don't you want to avenge them?"

Zhang Yi stared intently at Fatty Xu's face. If there was any unusual expression, he would act immediately and take him down first!

However, the sudden change in expression he anticipated did not appear. Fatty Xu merely lowered his eyelids, slightly saddened, and said, "My parents... they both died shortly after the snowstorm."

"My dad had a heart attack on the first day of the drastic temperature drop. The snow was too heavy. We couldn't get him to a hospital or find an ambulance, so he died at home."

"And my mom, who was in poor health, died in bed a week later."

Fatty Xu's face showed a hint of apology: "I'm Sorry. I didn't mean to tell you these things."

"After all, there's nothing happy about them. I apologize if it affected your mood."

He smiled awkwardly, looking somewhat embarrassed.

Zhang Yi was silent momentarily before asking, "What about the rest of your family? Aren't the people in Xu Jia Village all one family?"

"One family? Hmm... sort of!" Fatty Xu's expression was slightly confused, as if he didn't see a problem with this statement but also found it puzzling.

"Though we're of the same clan, no one in my family ever thought much of me. In their eyes, I'm probably just a worthless guy who only knows how to play on the computer at home!"

Fatty Xu scratched his head and smiled, "You see, they all treat me like this. How much feeling can I have for them?"

"So, I don't hate you for killing the people of Xu Jia Village. On the contrary, I admire you."

"You were so cool, chasing us down with a sniper rifle while driving!"

At this point, Fatty Xu looked at Zhang Yi with eyes full of admiration.

He dreamed of being a hero as cool as that, making everyone in the village admire him and stop seeing him as a useless fat nerd.

Zhang Yi stared at Fatty Xu for a long time. Fatty Xu was also very nervous inside. He knew little about Zhang Yi's abilities and could only guess they were related to space. But one thing was sure, Zhang Yi's abilities completely restrained him. So, if they fought, he had no chance of winning at this distance!

After a full minute, Zhang Yi slowly spoke, "Alright, since you've come to make peace, I'll give you a chance!"

"I have no interest in your village. Those muggles can't affect me much. But you, you're interesting. For your sake, I'll spare Xu Dong Village!"

Zhang Yi knew exactly how to deal with people like Fatty Xu. He was timid and sensitive but would give his all if you showed him some recognition. He needed to be treated gently, not coerced.

Sure enough, Fatty Xu was thrilled to hear this. For his sake? Did this mean Zhang Yi recognized him? It was a great honor for someone as powerful as Zhang Yi to recognize him!

"Thank you!" Fatty Xu said, moved.

"Don't be in such a hurry! I have other conditions."

Zhang Yi continued, "From now on, you must follow my orders! You cannot refuse any of my demands."

Zhang Yi very much wanted a powerful ice-based ability user under his command. Since killing him and the people of Xu Dong Village wouldn't benefit him, he might as well show kindness to Fatty Xu and recruit him.

Fatty Xu hesitated a bit upon hearing this condition. "Any demand?"

This vague concept worried him. What if Zhang Yi had his eyes on him one day?

Zhang Yi saw his concern and smirked. "I won't send you to your death!"

Keeping Fatty Xu was to have a useful helper when facing tough enemies in the future.

Seeing Fatty Xu's hesitation, Zhang Yi thought for a moment and pulled out his trump card.

"A die-hard otaku like you shouldn't be able to resist this!"

Zhang Yi reached out and took something from a huge warehouse in another space, then handed it over.

"If you follow me, you won't be mistreated."

Fatty Xu looked up and saw what Zhang Yi had handed over. His eyes were glued to it, and his whole body trembled with excitement.

"Rei Ayanami!!!"

What Zhang Yi took out was an unopened Rei Ayanami figure. It was a limited edition from 2024, with only 50 released worldwide, and its online price had soared to 25,000 yuan, but it was still hard to get!

This was the most coveted treasure for an old otaku like Fatty Xu!

Fatty Xu couldn't believe his eyes and pointed at himself, "This... is this for me?"

Zhang Yi nodded, "I have plenty more like this. I also have some generational rare collectibles."

"If you follow me, I guarantee you'll have enough figures, pillows, and game cartridges!"

You need to use the right means for the right person. For someone like Fatty Xu, other things might not work, but this definitely would!

Fatty Xu let out an excited yelp, pounced on the precious Rei Ayanami figure, and hugged it tightly, his eyes burning with passion.

"Zhang Yi, you're an otaku too! Do you... like Ellie?"

Fatty Xu looked at Zhang Yi with anticipation.

Zhang Yi was silent for a moment and then slowly shook his head. "I'm not a kid anymore."

Fatty Xu's face fell, and he lowered his head in disappointment.

"Yeah... that's true."

Zhang Yi sneered, "Only newbie otakus like you would like her! In my heart, Rinko Nanase is the true eternal goddess!"

The light in Fatty Xu's eyes, which had dimmed, lit up again. It was the feeling of finding a kindred spirit.

Chapter 202: The Best Tool

Just like that, Zhang Yi and Fatty Xu unexpectedly became partners. Zhang Yi naturally liked Fatty Xu because this harmless little fatty seemed easy to handle. Being around someone without any scheming always gave a sense of security, much like having a pet cat or dog. Of course, the main reason Zhang Yi took him in was his powerful ice ability. If Fatty Xu grew stronger, he would become a valuable asset under Zhang Yi's command.

And for Fatty Xu? As an adult man who loved anime but was misunderstood by those around him, it had always been a source of pain. Meeting someone like-minded in Zhang Yi made him instantly feel close.

"Zhang Yi, let's add each other on WeChat! Then we can talk about anime more often, hehe!" he said, sidling up to Zhang Yi. "I've got 100TB of great stuff! Some limited editions from Japan you can't find here!"

Zhang Yi's expression twisted a bit. "Actually... I have a girlfriend."

Fatty Xu's face stiffened, then he bitterly retorted, "Three-dimensional women are so boring!"

Zhang Yi ruthlessly replied, "You only say that because no real woman likes you, right?"

Fatty Xu's face turned pale, and he stepped back, looking at Zhang Yi in horror. "How did you know? Why did you have to say it out loud?"

"And it's not true that no one likes me. Hmph, there's a pretty girl chasing after me right now, and I'm just thinking about whether to accept her or not!" he added stubbornly.

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, "Oh, really?" He didn't believe it for a second.

"But since you're here, I need a favor," Zhang Yi said as an idea popped into his head.

Fatty Xu blinked, "What favor?"

"Follow me, and you'll see!" Zhang Yi replied, pulling out a snowmobile from thin air.

This display of pulling objects from thin air made Fatty Xu even more envious and awestruck. "Time can't compare, space is king! Brother Zhang, your ability is unique in the whole world!"

Zhang Yi opened the car door and got in, curious, "Where do you get these theories? They're quite elaborate."

Fatty Xu chuckled, "It's from our anime circle."

Zhang Yi sneered, "Time is hiding, space is king?" He suddenly thought of something about himself. When he was on the brink of death, he had traveled back to the time before the apocalypse—wasn't that a form of time travel?

"Could it be that I have a time-related ability that hasn't been developed yet?" Zhang Yi had always suspected this. His rebirth, or time reversal, might be linked to his awakened powers. But so far, he hadn't found any signs of such abilities.

"No matter. My abilities are just in their early stages. Maybe I'll discover higher-level uses with more practice and refinement," he thought.

Fatty Xu excitedly sat in the passenger seat, looking around curiously after fastening his seatbelt. "It's been a long time since I've been in a car! The last time was two years ago when I visited my dad in the hospital."

Zhang Yi glanced at him, "You don't go out often?"

Fatty Xu nonchalantly replied, "I rarely go out unless my mom forces me to go downstairs for some activity."

Zhang Yi nodded, "Oh, your mom forced you."

Fatty Xu nodded, "Yeah, my mom forced me."

As they chatted, Fatty Xu slowly realized something was off. "Wait, why does it feel like I've been insulted?"

Zhang Yi held back his laughter and started the car, driving away.

"Brother Zhang, where are we going?" Fatty Xu asked.

"Taking you to find something good!" Zhang Yi replied, heading towards a large gas station ten kilometers away.

The shelter consumed a lot of energy; with his current reserves, it would only last about five years. Cautiously, Zhang Yi wanted to stockpile more. However, if he had to do it himself, he would have to use a digging machine, which would be time-consuming. That's why he hadn't rushed to do it yet.

But with Fatty Xu, the perfect ice-based tool, Zhang Yi first thought of using his ability to excavate the resources buried under the snow!

They stopped in a vast, snowy expanse. Zhang Yi checked the surrounding buildings to confirm the location, then told Fatty Xu, "Help me clear out this snow!"

Fatty Xu didn't know what Zhang Yi was planning, but since he had acknowledged Zhang Yi as his leader, he obediently complied. He walked over, extended his hands towards the snowy ground, and his eyes glowed an icy blue.

Zhang Yi felt a familiar surge of power from Fatty Xu, similar to the one he felt when he used his precision shooting skills.

Quickly, the snowy ground began to tremble violently. The accumulated snow, compacted into a solid layer like ice, started to crack, making a deep rumbling noise.

"Poof—"

"Poof—"

"Crack—"

The ground cracked like a dense spiderweb, and then large chunks of ice and snow floated up and were thrown to the sides.

Zhang Yi observed Fatty Xu closely. Although Fatty Xu had surrendered and became his subordinate, Zhang Yi still needed to understand his skills. As the saying goes, "Never drop your guard."

Fatty Xu's expression was relaxed initially, but as he cleared more snow, he began to strain. After five minutes, he had cleared a ten-meter-wide pit, revealing the gas station buried underneath.

"Huff—" Fatty Xu withdrew his power and collapsed to the ground, panting heavily. "Brother Zhang, is this good?"

Zhang Yi nodded, maintaining a calm exterior but feeling ecstatic inside. With Fatty Xu as a top-tier tool, acquiring resources would be so much easier in the future!

He handed Fatty Xu two chocolate bars. "Eat something to replenish your energy!"

Fatty Xu's eyes lit up at the sight of the chocolate bars. They were his favorite, but he hadn't had any in a long time. "Thank you, Brother Zhang!"

He took the chocolate bars, tore open the wrappers, and stuffed them into his mouth. The rich cocoa flavor melted in his mouth, and he felt like crying with happiness.

Meanwhile, Zhang Yi slid down the edge of the snow pit and collected the fuel stored in the gas station's underground tanks.

Chapter 203: You Really Are a Genius

With this haul, Zhang Yi secured several years' worth of fuel. Climbing out of the snow pit, he saw Fatty Xu and nodded, "Yes, it's done."

This statement acknowledged the successful fuel collection and praised Fatty Xu. Without his help, this task wouldn't have been completed so easily.

Fatty Xu was thrilled, clapping his hands, "That's great! Brother Zhang, you're amazing!"

His genuine admiration made Zhang Yi feel a bit embarrassed. In reality, all Zhang Yi did was use his spatial ability to collect the fuel tanks. Fatty Xu did the heavy lifting.

"Didn't you guys ever think about digging for resources before?" Zhang Yi asked.

Fatty Xu sighed, "Of course we did. But we couldn't venture far from the village with the bitter cold. Even with sled dogs, our breeds aren't suited for prolonged activity in such harsh conditions. So, we just excavated nearby supermarkets and granaries, which were enough for us. There was no need to go further."

Zhang Yi smiled warmly at Fatty Xu, liking him more and more. He was a top-tier helper. "That's not a problem for me. Just stick with me, and you won't be shortchanged!" Zhang Yi said slyly, "I'll even give you a can of the diesel and gasoline we collected!"

Fatty Xu was initially pleased, but then his face fell. “Brother Zhang, I appreciate the thought, but I cannot transport a gasoline can back home.”

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, “Oh, that’s a shame. I’m not the kind of guy who shortchanges his brothers. I guess I’ll have to compensate you another way.”

He pulled out a backpack from his spatial storage—the one he had given Xu Hao. It was packed full of food. Handing it to Fatty Xu, he said, “Here’s some food as a reward for your help.”

Fatty Xu’s eyes lit up as he eagerly took the backpack. It was so heavy that he almost dropped it. Opening the zipper, he saw it was filled with high-quality food—chocolate, chicken legs, cream bread—all from well-known brands, unlike the small, inferior products from his village’s supermarket.

“Brother Zhang...” Fatty Xu’s eyes filled with tears. No one had treated him this kindly since his parents passed.

“Aren’t these too much?” Fatty Xu asked, feeling a bit shy. He felt he hadn’t done much—just clearing some snow while Zhang Yi did the main work.

“I always treat my people well. If you stick with me, you’ll eat and drink well!” Zhang Yi assured him, patting Fatty Xu on the shoulder with a smile.

Determination filled Fatty Xu’s eyes. He saw Zhang Yi as a mentor who recognized his worth. “Yes, Brother Zhang! I’ll follow you and work hard!”

Zhang Yi thought that otaku was so easy to please.

With the needed supplies secured, Zhang Yi drove Fatty Xu back. On the way, he asked about how Fatty Xu awakened his abilities. Fatty Xu’s face turned beet red, clearly uncomfortable. Zhang Yi, sensing something was odd, pressed him for answers.

Unable to evade, Fatty Xu hesitantly explained, “After my mom died, I didn’t want to live either. But I couldn’t bring myself to commit suicide, so I just lay in bed, hoping to starve to death. It seemed easy enough, since we were out of food.”

Zhang Yi asked, “So you awakened your ability when starving?”

“No, not exactly,” Fatty Xu scratched his chubby face awkwardly. I was warm under the covers, and since I hadn’t starved yet, I decided to enjoy myself one last time. My parents always warned me that too much self-gratification was bad for your health and lifespan, but I didn’t care about that anymore.”

“So, I overindulged a bit,” Fatty Xu admitted.

Zhang Yi’s eyelid twitched, understanding how Fatty Xu awakened his ability. “How many times?”

Fatty Xu’s face almost buried itself in his pants. “I lost count. Maybe twenty times? Until I couldn’t feel anything anymore.”

“Then, after I passed out, I felt a strange and wonderful change in my body,” Fatty Xu added.

Zhang Yi was speechless. Awakening an ability from excessive self-gratification was unheard of! He could only think that everyone has their unique path.

Zhang Yi dropped Fatty Xu off by the river. Fatty Xu looked at the several-hundred-meter-wide Lujang River and timidly asked, “Brother Zhang, can’t you take me across?”

Given his physique, running several hundred meters was challenging. Zhang Yi smiled, “My car slides easily on ice.”

After the car broke down on the river last time, Zhang Yi had been extra cautious. This was Fatty Xu’s territory; Zhang Yi needed to stay alert.

Fatty Xu asked, “Isn’t your car a snowmobile?”

"Yes, but it's not an icebreaker. It can only drive on snow, not ice," Zhang Yi explained.

Fatty Xu thought the explanation made sense, though he remembered Zhang Yi driving across the river skillfully the night before. However, he didn't question it and unbuckled his seatbelt to get out.

Before he left, Zhang Yi warned, "Chunlei, be careful."

Fatty Xu felt a surge of warmth hearing his name. "Brother Zhang, what is it?"

Zhang Yi seriously replied, "The apocalypse is dangerous. Your Xu Jia Town is famous for its grain and vegetable production. People might come to steal your food. Be cautious!"

Fatty Xu gulped nervously. "Yes, Brother Zhang, I'll remember!"

Chapter 204: Tranquil Times

Fatty Xu trudged along the ice-covered Lujang River, heading back. Meanwhile, Zhang Yi drove back to Cloud Manor. He had a deeper purpose for telling Fatty Xu those words. Warning the people of Xu Jia Town? He wasn't that kind-hearted. They had attacked him twice; if they were wiped out one day, he wouldn't feel a thing.

Zhang Yi knew that other groups might attack Cloud Manor in the future. Xu Jia Town, nearby, served as a natural shield. By instilling this mindset in Fatty Xu, anyone approaching would be seen as a potential enemy. This way, Xu Jia Town could help absorb some of the animosity aimed at Zhang Yi.

"Having such a tool is not bad at all," Zhang Yi mused, watching the clumsy figure on the ice. However, he knew he must remain vigilant. Fatty Xu sought his protection because of his displayed strength. Without it, he might have already been killed by Xu Dong Village.

From now on, Zhang Yi needed to continue strengthening himself to remain a formidable force. He turned away, feeling confident about his secure rear.

But there was one thing Zhang Yi hadn't anticipated: Fatty Xu, the strongest fighter in Xu Dong Village or Xu Jia Town, wasn't the one with the most power in the village.

Back at the village, Fatty Xu excitedly reported the good news to the current clan leader, Xu Dongtang. He believed that making peace with Zhang Yi meant safety for the village. However, Xu Dongtang's face darkened after hearing the report.

After a long silence, Xu Dongtang coldly said, "Who told you to act on your own?"

Fatty Xu expected praise, so Xu Dongtang's reaction felt like a cold slap. "Sixth Grandpa, but... I prevented our village from being attacked! You've seen Zhang Yi's strength; we can't compete with him."

Xu Dongtang sneered, "You dare speak of yesterday's events? Would we have lost so many people if you hadn't hesitated?"

Fatty Xu's face paled, unable to retort. Xu Dongtang continued, "If not for you, would your third grandpa be dead now? You made peace without permission and think it's a great achievement!"

"Your arrogance is astounding!"

Fatty Xu felt a stinging pain and deep disappointment on his face. "But... I promised Third Grandpa that I would protect the village. Peace is the best way..."

"Silence!" Xu Dongtang's sudden shout silenced Fatty Xu. His elder's authority made him avert his eyes. "That was presumptuous and foolish! I am the clan leader now; you must seek my permission for any action! No more acting on your own!"

Fatty Xu looked down, feeling very wronged. He believed he had done the right thing.

Xu Dongtang's tone softened, patting Fatty Xu's shoulder, "Chunlei, I know you meant well, but you're young and inexperienced. Because of you, our family suffered greatly. I stood up for you, or they would have expelled you from the village."

He sighed, "You need to stay here and atone. Don't do anything foolish again. Just follow the village's orders. Understand?"

Fatty Xu, feeling like he had no choice, nodded. "I understand."

"Good, you can go now. Remember, no more unauthorized actions!"

Fatty Xu left Xu Dongtang's house, feeling despondent. Xu Dongtang watched him go, adjusting his glasses, and muttering, "Young people, you are so arrogant. Don't think you can disrespect your elders just because you have some ability!"

He then took out his phone and messaged the heads of the village's branches, "Don't worry about Zhang Yi. I've contacted him, and he agreed to a truce. He won't threaten our safety anymore!"

The heads, who had been worried about Zhang Yi attacking, breathed a sigh of relief and praised Xu Dongtang.

"Sixth Grandpa, you're amazing! You settled that scoundrel immediately!"

"We should have made you the clan leader earlier. Third Grandpa was too old and confused, making such mistakes."

"Let's not speak ill of the dead."

"Having Sixth Grandpa leading us is a blessing."

Back at Cloud Manor, Zhang Yi discussed the situation with Fatty Xu and Xu Dong Village with Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya, hoping to ease their worries.

Yang Siya patted her chest, "That's such a relief!"

Zhou Ke'er teased, "Really? You were that scared?"

Yang Siya huffed, "I wasn't! I just... didn't want to see such bloodshed again."

If the fighting had continued, Zhang Yi would have wiped out the entire village of a thousand people. Zhang Yi could definitely do it.

Zhou Ke'er smirked, "Yeah, yesterday you were vomiting like crazy."

Yang Siya blushed with embarrassment, "Zhou Ke'er!"

"Hmph!" Zhou Ke'er, smugly holding Zhang Yi's arm, said, "Honey, you're amazing!"

Zhang Yi shrugged, "Those villagers are just like stray cats and dogs, no threat to me. But if some underground forces show up, that will be troublesome."

Yang Siya comforted him, "You always think the worst. Since we've solved the immediate problem, let's celebrate!"

Zhang Yi thought, trouble will come if you don't think ahead. But seeing their happy faces, he didn't voice his concerns.

Zhou Ke'er walked to the bar, picking out two bottles of Burgundy wine, "Let's have a drink tonight to celebrate!"

Yang Siya's eyes gleamed mischievously, "I'll cook my best dishes!"

Known for her social prowess and impressive drinking skills, she planned to teach Zhang Yi and Zhou Ke'er a lesson.

Zhang Yi chuckled, "Just a little. I'm not good with alcohol."

Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya laughed even more. "Tonight's special! We'll drink just enough."

The three of them ended up drinking until they were senseless.

Late at night, Zhou Ke'er was the first to pass out. Yang Siya, who drank half a bottle more, also succumbed. Only Zhang Yi, supposedly a poor drinker, sat at the table, completely sober.

Watching the two women who tried to get him drunk, Zhang Yi smiled. "I forgot to mention, I used to work in the alcohol sales business."

But looking at them, his throat tightened. Both women, dressed in light pajamas, lay on the couch, their clothes in disarray. Yang Siya's slip dress exposed her smooth shoulders and half of her bosom, while Zhou Ke'er's disheveled pose exuded a wild allure.

Zhang Yi remembered Yang Siya's earlier request and couldn't help but smile wickedly.

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After teaching Xu Jia Town a painful lesson, they never crossed the Lujang River again. Zhang Yi's days were peaceful, enjoying time with two beautiful women. With ample supplies and entertainment, life was enjoyable.

On the other hand, Zhang Yi frequently received messages from Fatty Xu.

"Brother Zhang, I'm bored at home. When will you take me on a mission?"

"Brother Zhang, we should form a superpower team. Five members, each representing a color. You'd be the leader, Flame Dragon Hero, and I'd be Snow Mastiff Hero."

"Brother Zhang, why aren't you responding? If you don't like it, we could be the Rainbow Team. I'd be the Blue King, and you'd be the Colorless King. How about that?"

Since meeting Zhang Yi, Fatty Xu felt he had found a kindred spirit. Alienated in his village after the battle, he longed for Zhang Yi's companionship and comfort.

To win him over, Zhang Yi chatted with him occasionally and gathered information.

Over time, Zhang Yi found it hard to keep up. Fatty Xu had too much energy with no girlfriend, sending hundreds of messages a day. Even without replies, he kept talking.

"Fatty, don't you have anything better to do?" Zhang Yi asked, exasperated.

After a brief pause, Fatty Xu's shocked voice replied, "Damn! Brother Zhang, how did you know? Are you that calculating? Impressive, I'm convinced!"

Zhang Yi: "..."

Covering his face, Zhang Yi was speechless. He understood that people like Fatty Xu were often unappreciated. They'd give their all for someone who treated them well, even if it was for ulterior motives. Feeling pity, Zhang Yi used ChatGPT to respond to Fatty Xu. It only took a few "Oh," "Hmm," or "Really?" to make him happy.

Wait, am I acting like a jerk? Zhang Yi shook his head, dismissing the thought.

Days passed peacefully. Yang Siya tended to the garden, reviving many withered plants. She also planted vegetables, especially scallions, and peppers, which tasted best when fresh.

Zhang Yi inspected the shelter, eliminating many safety hazards. Yet, one problem lingered: cybersecurity.

Looking at the huge supercomputer in the control room, Zhang Yi frowned. This computer controlled the shelter, providing numerous conveniences. Without it, the shelter would be paralyzed.

If the shelter's network were hacked, the consequences would be dire. "How to solve this problem?" Zhang Yi pondered.

He recalled Lu Fengda, who easily accessed his personal data. Even Fatty Xu found his phone number. Network security was a significant issue that must be addressed to prevent the shelter from falling to a top-tier hacker.

Chapter 205: Yang Siya's Secret

When the sky was dark that night, Yang Siya quietly tiptoed into the living room and carefully walked upstairs. She glanced at Zhang Yi's room, a complex expression flashing in her eyes. Changing direction, she approached Zhou Ke'er's door and gently knocked.

"Come in," Zhou Ke'er whispered, her beautiful face appearing as she opened the door. Seeing Yang Siya, she said softly, "Come in."

Yang Siya slipped into the room, and Zhou Ke'er cautiously checked Zhang Yi's room before slowly closing the door. Yang Siya took out her phone and handed it to Zhou Ke'er. Sitting on the bed, Zhou Ke'er looked at the message on the phone and immediately frowned deeply.

"This..." Her expression was very complicated, filled with conflict and reluctance. She seemed at a loss for what to do.

Yang Siya walked over and pleaded softly, "Ke'er, you have to help with this. You've been with Zhang Yi for a long time; he'll listen to you more than to me."

Zhou Ke'er looked very hesitant. She placed her white hand on her chest and helplessly said, "I understand how you feel. But I know Zhang Yi too well. He won't do something like this!"

Yang Siya grew anxious. "But we can't just watch and do nothing! She's your sister, too!"

Zhou Ke'er bit her lip, and her eyes were pained. "But we don't even know what's happening over there. Zhang Yi is excessively cautious, and that's what's kept us alive. He won't take this risk!"

Yang Siya closed her eyes and took a deep breath, and when she opened them, her gaze was firm. "If we don't try, how will we know it won't work?"

Zhou Ke'er, seeing her determined expression, curiously asked, "What do you plan to do?"

Yang Siya's right hand moved down her neck, over her chest, and down her body. "A woman's best weapon is her body."

Zhou Ke'er suddenly grew wary. "So, you're planning to seduce him, right?"

Yang Siya blushed. "It's not like that! I'm doing this for Xin Xin!"

Zhou Ke'er snorted. "Don't think I don't know what you've been up to!"

Yang Siya's eyes avoided Zhou Ke'er's as she said, "Just tell me if you'll help or not."

Zhou Ke'er frowned slightly. "Help you?"

She was a smart woman and quickly understood what Yang Siya meant. Her face turned red with embarrassment. "I... I won't do that! It's too shameful!"

While the two women discussed how to win over Zhang Yi, there was a knock on the door. Both Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya were startled. The only person who could be knocking at this time was Zhang Yi.

Yang Siya's heart raced. They hadn't finished their conversation, and now Zhang Yi was here. How would they explain?

Zhou Ke'er hurried to open the door. Zhang Yi stood there in black pajamas, looking at her and the seated Yang Siya with a playful expression. He had noticed Yang Siya sneaking upstairs. His cautious nature, or perhaps his spatial abilities, made him sensitive to his surroundings.

He was curious about what these two women had to discuss at night that couldn't wait until daytime. Both women were in pajamas, Zhou Ke'er in pink and Yang Siya in purple, both very revealing as Zhang Yi had chosen them.

These pajamas covered just enough while revealing tantalizing glimpses of their skin. The sight of their white legs, exposed cleavage, and small, bare feet was highly stimulating.

Zhou Ke'er blushed, and Yang Siya looked like a child caught with her hand in the cookie jar, making Zhang Yi suspicious. "Are you two that close?" he asked, tilting Zhou Ke'er's chin and looking into her eyes.

"You don't have to hide it from me. I'm pretty open-minded. If you ever want to do this again, feel free to do it in front of me."

"People are naturally curious," Zhang Yi teased.

Even Zhou Ke'er, normally innocent, understood his insinuation. "Oh, you're awful! I'm not into girls!" she protested, playfully hitting Zhang Yi's chest.

"Oh, you're not? Then why are you two in bed together in the middle of the night? Sharing techniques?" Zhang Yi asked, looking at Yang Siya with playful suspicion.

Yang Siya, quick on the uptake, explained, "It's not like that, Zhang Yi. We were just discussing a family matter."

"Family matter?" Zhang Yi paused. His parents had passed away years ago, and his relatives in Tianhai City were distant. He had no close family ties. However, not everyone was like him.

Zhang Yi entered the room, closed the door, and sat with the two women on the bed. "Tell me. I hope there are no secrets between us."

Zhang Yi smiled at them. "Do you have any relatives you want to bring here?"

They had grown close, having spent time together. If they wanted to leave, Zhang Yi would be reluctant but wouldn't stop them.

"It's not that," Zhou Ke'er shook her head, looking sad. "I lost contact with my family after the snowstorm. I don't know if they're alive or dead."

Zhou Ke'er's family was far away, some even abroad, making communication impossible. They were likely dead in the snowstorm.

Zhang Yi nodded and looked at Yang Siya, who seemed uneasy. "Actually... my family contacted me."

Chapter 206: The Genius Female Hacker

Hearing this, Zhang Yi lowered his eyelids. He hadn't spent much time with Yang Siya; from the beginning, she never gave up on the idea of leaving. He hadn't expected this day to come so soon. But so be it. Though he felt a bit reluctant, he wouldn't cling to her—after all, everyone had to move on with their lives.

"Are they coming to take you away?" Zhang Yi asked.

Yang Siya quickly shook her head. "No, it's not like that! Actually... actually..." She hesitated, her black-stockinged feet curling uneasily.

Zhang Yi found this strange. "What do you mean? I don't understand. Your family has found you, but they don't want to take you away?"

Yang Siya gave a bitter smile. "It's true that a family member contacted me. But it's not about taking me away. It's that..."

She struggled for a while before looking at Zhang Yi with pleading eyes. "It's that she's in danger and hopes I can save her!"

Her pleading look was heart-wrenching, making Zhang Yi want to hold her and never let go. Understanding why she had kept this from him and secretly discussed it with Zhou Ke'er, Zhang Yi smirked.

"Oh—so that's how it is!"

Save someone unrelated to him? Was he supposed to be some saint? Realizing her secret was out, Yang Siya threw caution to the wind. Crawling over the bed, she clung to Zhang Yi's arm, begging, "Zhang Yi, please help me this once! She's my only family; I can't lose her!"

Her scent wafted into Zhang Yi's nose, intoxicating. She was using her body to persuade him—an age-old tactic. Even Zhou Ke'er joined in, "Zhang Yi, I know this has nothing to do with you, but she's our family. If we let her die, we'll feel guilty forever!"

Zhang Yi smiled at them, "You want me to rescue someone? Do you know what's going on outside?"

"My information is already out there. Many people covet my resources and this super shelter! Leaving here means venturing into danger. Why would I do that for a stranger?"

Without hesitation, Zhang Yi refused. Beauty tricks didn't work on him. Time spent together didn't cloud his judgment.

Seeing his resolute refusal, Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er grew desperate. This was their last hope to save her.

"Zhang Yi, I can't just watch her die!"

"If you save her, I'll do whatever you ask from now on!" Yang Siya was willing to sacrifice everything to save her cousin. Zhou Ke'er, too, bit her lip and whispered something into Zhang Yi's ear, lighting his eyes up.

"Really?" Zhang Yi asked.

Recently initiated into intimacy, Zhou Ke'er had been shy about trying new things. Yet now, she suggested some bold ideas, which greatly tempted Zhang Yi.

"So, will you do it?" The two women looked at him expectantly.

Taking a deep breath, Zhang Yi was about to refuse when Yang Siya added, "Xin Xin's legs aren't good. In this cold, she won't survive long outside. Just thinking about it breaks my heart!"

Zhang Yi paused. "Xin Xin?"

He remembered this name. Yang Siya mentioned her cousin, Yang Xinxin, who had studied at a prestigious school in Tianhai City. Eighteen years old, very beautiful, and a top-notch hacker.

Eighteen, beautiful, and a top hacker.

These keywords made Zhang Yi think—she was a rare gem! His main concern now was cybersecurity. Finding a reliable computer expert was challenging in these times, and trust was paramount. If not for trust issues, he would have brought in Lu Fengda, the computer expert.

But Yang Xinxin was Yang Siya's cousin and Zhou Ke'er's relative, making her trustworthy. An eighteen-year-old, paralyzed beauty fit the criteria of "beautiful, talented, and tragic."

Swallowing his initial words, Zhang Yi held Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er's hands, looking at them affectionately. "Alright, you don't need to say more!"

"If she's your sister, she's my sister too! How could I ignore her danger?"

Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er were overjoyed, especially Zhou Ke'er, who couldn't believe these words came from Zhang Yi, known for his selfish pragmatism. His agreement made her incredibly happy.

Zhou Ke'er thought sweetly: Zhang Yi must be doing this for me. He really loves me!

With tears of joy in her eyes, Yang Siya exclaimed, "Thank you so much, Zhang Yi!"

Wiping her tears, Zhang Yi told them, "Do you think I'm a heartless person who only cares about benefits? My coldness is just a facade. For those close to me, I'm very caring!"

He kissed their hands lightly, making the two women blush. Their opinions of him changed significantly. Zhou Ke'er felt even more in love, and Yang Siya suddenly became attracted to him.

The two women exchanged glances and then playfully pushed Zhang Yi onto the bed. Biting her lip, Yang Siya gazed at him seductively, "Zhang Yi, let us reward you once tonight!"

This was the only way she could think of to repay him.

Raising an eyebrow, Zhang Yi teased, "Just once? You underestimate me?"

"How many times depends on your ability!" Yang Siya retorted, biting her cherry lips.

Chapter 207: The Monster

Zhang Yi decided to rescue Yang Xinxin. After all, the shelter's biggest issue was cybersecurity. An automated house under network attack could pose unimaginable threats. This decision wasn't made lightly; Zhang Yi planned it carefully and gathered all necessary information beforehand.

After a tiring night, Zhang Yi called Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er to discuss the rescue plan.

"Tell me in detail about her current situation," Zhang Yi said cautiously.

Zhou Ke'er glanced at Yang Siya. "You should tell him. You're closer to Xinxin and know more."

Yang Siya, sitting upright, spoke seriously, "Xinxin is trapped at Tianqing Academy!"

"Tianqing Academy is the top private school in Tianhai City. It's not open to the public, so ordinary people know little about it. It's an integrated school from kindergarten to university, only for the children of the elite and a few geniuses."

"Everyone who graduates from there becomes a key player in politics and business."

Zhang Yi nodded, familiar with this. By 2050, education had become polarized. Ordinary people, elites, and the powerful received entirely different levels of education with no intersection. This led to the creation of exclusive educational institutions, or aristocratic schools. While degrees still mattered to ordinary people, they meant little to the true upper echelons.

"If she's in school, how has a disabled girl survived until now?" Zhang Yi wondered. Schools were densely populated with limited resources. Survival might be possible through fighting for food, but Xinxin, who had polio from childhood, seemed unlikely to survive such conditions.

Yang Siya explained, "Tianqing Academy has food supply channels with ample stored food. Xinxin and others took refuge in the school cafeteria, so they didn't starve."

Zhang Yi nodded, finding this reasonable. "But if she could contact the outside world, why didn't she reach out sooner? Why wait until now?"

This puzzled Zhang Yi. In dire straits, people would try every possible way to survive, seeking help from anyone. Why did she wait almost two months into the apocalypse?

Yang Siya was stumped by this question, her expression uncertain. "I was so worried I didn't think to ask her," she said.

She took out her phone. "I'll call her now."

Zhang Yi nodded, watching her silently. Yang Siya dialed the number on the speaker.

"Beep—beep—beep—"

"Sorry, the number you dialed is temporarily unavailable. Please try again later..."

Yang Siya looked embarrassed. "I've tried calling her again, but it's always unavailable."

Zhou Ke'er covered her mouth, laughing, "Maybe she thought you were dead and didn't call you!"

"Not true!" Yang Siya glared at her.

Zhang Yi rubbed his left hand with his right. "How far is Tianqing Academy from here?"

Yang Siya thought for a moment. "About ten kilometers."

"About?" Zhang Yi chuckled at her vague grasp of distance. He pulled out his phone and checked the map. Though signals were poor and satellite positioning was problematic, pre-apocalypse maps were still useful for distance measurements.

After some searching, Zhang Yi found the answer. "Tianqing Academy is in the West Hill area. From Cloud Manor, it's 22.6 kilometers as the crow flies."

"Given that distance, it's a miracle you got through once."

Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er suddenly understood. "No wonder!"

Zhang Yi teased Yang Siya, "But it's also possible she thought you were dead and didn't bother calling."

Yang Siya clenched her fists, "No way! I'm an adult, you know!"

Zhang Yi stood up, "Follow me to the control room."

Ordinary phones couldn't use the Nebula satellite chain to transmit signals, but the super server could. Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er, who knew little about computers, followed Zhang Yi obediently.

Zhang Yi used the computer in the control room to make a network call to Yang Xinxin. Soon, a static-filled noise came through, suggesting strong interference.

"They must be in an area with very unstable signals," Zhang Yi concluded.

After a few seconds, a soft, cute voice came through. "Who are you?"

Hearing this, Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er became excited. "It's Xinxin!"

Yang Siya quickly leaned in, "Xinxin, it's your sister! Where are you? Tell me, and I'll come get you soon!"

The voice on the other end was intermittent and full of static. "I'm at the school cafeteria... very dangerous... take me... away..."

Hearing "dangerous," Zhou Ke'er and Yang Siya grew tense, and Zhang Yi's eyes sharpened.

"What's the danger?" Zhang Yi asked.

"Cats... they... kill..."

The noise grew louder, making it hard to hear. Suddenly, a chilling scream came through, not a human sound but a long, eerie howl. Zhang Yi, Yang Siya, and Zhou Ke'er all felt a chill down their spines. Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er, terrified, clung to Zhang Yi.

Chaos erupted on the other end. "Run!"

"Mon-mon-mon... monster!"

The voices were filled with terror and despair. The eerie howl continued without pause. Zhang Yi even heard the sounds of flesh tearing and bones being chewed. These sounds were more horrifying than anything he had heard while surviving in Yue Lu District.

"Crack... crash..."

"Beep—beep—beep—"

The call abruptly ended, leaving only a busy signal echoing urgently.

Chapter 208: Three Superhumans

The call abruptly ended, leaving only the “beep beep” sound echoing in the control room. Zhang Yi sat in his chair, eyes half-closed, deep in thought. Initially, he thought it would be a simple rescue mission, but now it seemed more complicated, involving unexpected dangers. He disliked complications.

At this moment, Yang Siya nervously clung to Zhang Yi’s arm. "Zhang Yi..." Her eyes were full of pleading, even teary. Her sister’s danger made her desperate, hoping Zhang Yi would save her.

Zhang Yi smiled reassuringly at Yang Siya and Zhou Ke’er. "Don’t worry. I said I would save her, and I will."

Though the situation might be troublesome, it wasn’t difficult for Zhang Yi now. After all, he had two superhuman allies. With Uncle You acting as a tank in front, Fatty Xu controlling the field as a mage, and Zhang Yi finding the right moment to strike from behind, the formation was perfect. In the early days of the apocalypse, a trio of superhumans could sweep through most territories. Besides, he desperately needed a top-tier computer expert now.

With Zhang Yi's promise, Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er felt relieved. After comforting them, Zhang Yi contacted Uncle You and Fatty Xu, asking them to join him for the rescue mission. Uncle You agreed immediately. Fatty Xu, not daring to disobey Zhang Yi, saw it as a simple rescue operation and agreed too.

Given the potential danger surrounding Yang Xinxin, Zhang Yi decided to depart for Tianqing Academy the next day. As for the eerie, ghostly wail heard during the call, Zhang Yi could guess its nature. It was either a gene-mutated superhuman or another mutated creature. Though it sounded terrifying, the fact that Yang Xinxin, a paralyzed girl, had survived a month suggested it wasn't beyond their capability to handle.

The night before departure, Zhang Yi meticulously checked his weapons and equipment. Facing mutants required more caution than dealing with ordinary people. Despite their higher recoil, he even switched his handguns to models with greater power, loaded with armor-piercing rounds. All equipment was prepared as usual: small items carried on him, large weapons stored in his spatial space, ready for immediate use.

The next morning, Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er prepared a lavish breakfast for Zhang Yi. He wasn't going to take them along. Despite their exposure to some brutal scenes, they would likely freeze up in a life-and-death situation, having no combat skills and becoming liabilities.

Seeing the table full of food, Zhang Yi ate sparingly, sampling each dish but avoiding overindulgence. Eating too much could hinder his actions, and drinking too much soup or porridge could lead to inconvenient bathroom breaks in the freezing weather, risking frostbite. Having learned from past mistakes, Zhang Yi never ate too much before going out and drank little water. If he exhausted his energy, he had ample food and water in his spatial space.

After breakfast, Zhang Yi's phone rang. It was Fatty Xu. He answered, "Hello."

"Brother Zhang, I've crossed the river! Waiting by the roadside for you!"

Fatty Xu knew Zhang Yi's area was full of traps and didn't dare approach. Under the snow lay the buried bodies of his second brother and sixth grandpa.

"Wait for me. I'll be there soon."

Zhang Yi hung up and turned to Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er. "I'm leaving now. For your safety, stay in the basement while I'm gone."

Yang Siya, puzzled, asked, "Why the basement? Isn't this house safe?"

Zhou Ke'er tugged at her sleeve. "Just do as he says!"

Zhou Ke'er knew Zhang Yi too well and understood his intention. The information came from Yang Siya and Zhou Ke'er, and the person to be rescued was their relative. There was a chance this was a trap they set up. Though this was highly unlikely, Zhang Yi never trusted probabilities, only himself.

Feeling confused, Yang Siya followed Zhang Yi and Zhou Ke'er to the basement. Zhang Yi locked them in separate alloy rooms with his high-security key, ensuring no one could let them out until he returned.

"This way, even if someone breaks in, they won't threaten your safety," Zhang Yi said with a smile. He left them with enough food and water, and the rooms had private bathrooms, so cleanliness wouldn't be an issue.

Zhou Ke'er smiled warmly. "Thank you, Zhang Yi. We'll wait for you to come back!"

Now understanding the situation, Yang Siya felt slightly uncomfortable being suspected but wasn't angry since Zhang Yi was risking his life to save her sister. "Zhang Yi, please bring Xinxin back safely!"

Zhang Yi patted his nose, smiling. "If she's safe when I arrive, I'll bring her back safely."

With his promise, Yang Siya sighed in relief, her ample chest rising and falling. She blew Zhang Yi a kiss. "I'll be waiting to keep you company when you return!"

"Now I have to hurry back, or I'll feel bad for neglecting you," Zhang Yi replied with a grin. Sweet words, though cheap, were effective.

Yang Siya shyly bit her lip, murmuring, "As long as you care for me, I'll be happy."

This promise to rescue her sister stirred something in Yang Siya's heart, making her believe Zhang Yi was doing it for her. If this wasn't love, what was there to hope for?

A gentle ripple spread in her heart, lingering long after.

...

Locking the two women in the alloy rooms, Zhang Yi left the house, taking a deep breath. He didn't like guarding against those close to him, but to live safely in these times, he had to be cautious and never let his guard down.

Moreover, the basement rooms were comfortable and warm, and he left them plenty of food. They were much better off than him, who had to face danger outside. With this thought, Zhang Yi felt his actions were justified.

Chapter 209: Tianqing Academy

Zhang Yi headed down the road towards the river. Fatty Xu, bundled up tightly, stood with his hands in his pockets, stomping his feet to stay warm. Upon seeing Zhang Yi, he waved enthusiastically. "Brother Zhang, I'm here!"

Zhang Yi approached, saying, "I told you to meet at nine in the morning. What time is it now?"

Fatty Xu scratched his head and chuckled. "I was worried I'd be late and delay your plans, Brother Zhang."

Zhang Yi sighed. He took the snowmobile out from his spatial space, opened the door, and said, "Get in. It's too cold outside!"

Fatty Xu happily climbed into the passenger seat, and Zhang Yi turned on the car heater. Despite the high fuel consumption due to the cold weather, Zhang Yi wasn't concerned since Fatty Xu's abilities made fuel acquisition easier.

With the heater on, Fatty Xu relaxed significantly, thinking gratefully, "Brother Zhang is so considerate, worried I might freeze."

"Brother Zhang, where are we going today?" Fatty Xu asked.

"We're going to a school to rescue someone," Zhang Yi replied.

"Rescue? Oh, I see! It must be someone very important to you, right?" Fatty Xu looked serious.

Zhang Yi smirked slightly. "Important? You could say that." Yang Xinxin's computer skills were indeed critical to him now.

After a brief moment of gratitude, Fatty Xu's chatty nature resurfaced. He chattered endlessly about his life, making Zhang Yi wish he could use his smart speaker to fend him off. Without earplugs, he could only let Fatty Xu's words in one ear and out the other.

"Our village's Xu Lili, she's totally into me! Every time she looks at me, it's different from how she looks at others. She even came over to thank me! Girls these days are just shy. If she likes me, she should just say so!"

Zhang Yi's forehead was full of black lines. If not for the upcoming mission, he would have kicked Fatty Xu out of the car.

"By the way, what's the village's current attitude towards me?" Zhang Yi asked.

Fatty Xu's babbling ceased abruptly, and his expression turned awkward. "Uh... well..."

Did it even need to be said? Zhang Yi had killed or maimed half the village's men. They would never be grateful. If not for fear of Zhang Yi's power, they would seek revenge. But Fatty Xu couldn't say this out loud. At least Zhang Yi enjoyed a moment of silence.

As they waited, a black snowmobile approached from the distance.

"He's here," Zhang Yi said.

Fatty Xu looked curiously towards the approaching vehicle. Soon, Uncle You parked his snowmobile nearby.

"Zhang Yi, long time no see!" Uncle You greeted cheerfully.

Zhang Yi's eyes lit up with admiration. Uncle You's ability was a physical enhancement, increasing his bodily strength and cell activity, making him a perfect tank. Despite the heavy clothing, his robust physique was evident.

"Long time no see, Uncle You. You're looking great!"

Uncle You proudly flexed his arm. "I feel ten years younger, like a man in his thirties. My stamina and strength are at their peak!"

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow, smirking. "Especially your stamina, right?"

Uncle You chuckled. "All of it."

After some friendly banter, Zhang Yi introduced Fatty Xu to Uncle You.

"This is Fatty Xu—Xu Chunlei, an ice-based superhuman who can manipulate ice and snow."

"And this is Uncle You, You Jiguang, a physical enhancement superhuman and a respectable veteran."

Fatty Xu and Uncle You greeted each other, though both were puzzled by the gathering of three superhumans. In the early days of the apocalypse, superhumans were rare. The odds of three of them coming together were slim.

Uncle You, unable to hide his curiosity, asked, "Zhang Yi, what mission needs the three of us?"

Fatty Xu was also curious.

"Three superhumans for this task means the enemy must be formidable," he said.

Zhang Yi waved his hand dismissively. "It's not that complicated. We're just going to a school to rescue a girl."

"A girl?" Uncle You and Fatty Xu's eyes lit up.

"What grade in college?"

"What grade in elementary school?"

Zhang Yi glared at Fatty Xu. "Keep your otaku tendencies in check!"

Fatty Xu innocently covered his mouth.

Zhang Yi explained, "She's my girlfriend's sister. We just found her in a school about 20 kilometers away. There seem to be some anomalies there, possibly mutated creatures. For safety, I called you both."

Uncle You nodded. Fatty Xu noticed something odd in Zhang Yi's wording.

"Mutated creatures? Not superhumans?"

Zhang Yi sneered. "Who said only humans can mutate? Any cellular organism can mutate. It could be a pet or seafood from the market. Who knows what's mutated?"

"It could be human, but if so, they've gone insane," Zhang Yi added, recalling the eerie sound that couldn't come from a normal human.

Uncle You laughed heartily. "No matter what it is, with the three of us, we can handle it."

Zhang Yi nodded. "Exactly. With the three of us, nothing can threaten us."

Uncle You agreed. "So, let's get going!"

"Alright, let's move out!" Zhang Yi and Fatty Xu got on the snowmobile, and Uncle You rode the motorcycle Zhang Yi had given him.

Zhang Yi used his smartphone's GPS to navigate to Tianqing Academy. Despite the satellite issues, positioning still worked fairly accurately.

Once positioned, Zhang Yi drove towards Tianqing Academy, with Uncle You riding alongside on his motorcycle.

Chapter 210: The Survivors

[A Few Days Ago]

At the original site of Tianqing Academy, the entire campus was buried under white snow, with only a few bell towers and the tips of tall buildings protruding above the surface. This once bustling elite school, spanning 2,000 acres, had completely vanished under the snow. It was hard to believe anyone could still be alive beneath this icy cover.

The students' survival was due to the sturdy construction of the Tianqing Academy buildings and the immense funds invested in their construction. After all, the children studying here were the offspring of

high-ranking officials and wealthy businessmen. The quality of their school was a hundred times better than that of public schools.

A group of students had taken refuge in one of the school's gyms. Beneath the snow, the air was thin, and the terrifying events they faced left everyone physically and mentally exhausted. Small groups huddled together, faces pale and filled with fear and anxiety. Their teacher had just gone to the warehouse for food, leaving them to rest.

In a corner of the gym, a long-haired girl in a wheelchair stared blankly at the basketball court floor. Her skin was sickly pale, even whiter than the snow outside. Her frail frame seemed like a breeze could blow it away. But beneath her black hair was an exquisitely beautiful, small and delicate face, with features resembling Yang Siya but a different demeanor.

Yang Siya's face always bore a look of determination and strength, while this girl's delicate and pitiable appearance could stir any man's protective instincts. In short, she was an absolutely pitiful beauty, as fragile as a flower that might wither at any moment. She was Yang Siya's cousin, Yang Xinxin.

Despite being a genius hacker, Yang Xinxin looked lonely. Only one long-time friend stayed by her side; the other students kept their distance, looking at her disdainfully. It wasn't that Yang Xinxin had done anything wrong—she was simply a burden due to her disability and the fact that she was still alive.

Everyone feared the unknown terror lurking in the shadows in these dire times. Having a cripple around meant more trouble. Their teacher, a person of strong moral integrity, insisted on taking her along whenever danger approached. Initially, everyone sympathized with and took care of Yang Xinxin. However, their attitudes changed as their numbers dwindled from over a hundred to just a few dozen. Yang Xinxin, despite doing nothing wrong, became a scapegoat, with some blaming her for the deaths of their friends.

"Why are you still alive when others are dead?"

"Is it your fault everyone's dying?"

In the face of death, some humans reveal rare kindness, while others unleash hidden malice. The latter is easier, as hatred is easier learned than forgiveness. This malice twisted their hearts. Under the pressure of death, they needed an outlet for their negative emotions. Bullying the weak provided a perverse satisfaction.

With oxygen running low, the students had little energy left. They leaned against the walls or sat on gym mats, starting to converse.

"Do you think we can survive?" a girl asked slowly.

The nearby girls, their faces weary, showed fear and resignation. Another girl hugged her knees, trembling, "We will survive. We must."

"But so many have died!"

"Li Huimin, Yuan Sisi, Zhao Huan, Tong Siya..."

Each name sent a chill through their hearts. These were their classmates, people they had watched die.

At this moment, a girl with wavy hair glanced at Yang Xinxin in her wheelchair. A surge of loathing rose within her.

"Why is this cripple still alive when so many are dead?"

Once started, this topic was hard to stop. The students found an outlet for their anger, glaring at Yang Xinxin.

"We always have to bring her when we run. It's so annoying! If only we could feed her to the monsters!"

"Yeah, what's the point of her living? She might just die from her illness anyway."

"I think she's a jinx. Instead of dying, she drags us down!"

Their expressions grew twisted with perverse delight. Criticizing Yang Xinxin gave them a twisted sense of pleasure in their despair. They convinced themselves that her death would save them all.

Similar discussions about the necessity of protecting Yang Xinxin arose on the boys' side.

"We've protected her long enough. Isn't that enough?"

A boy with a buzz cut frowned. "Maybe we should stop bringing her."

Leaning against the wall, a boy with styled hair spoke wearily, "Does it matter? Teacher Liang never leaves anyone behind. But people keep dying."

He was the class monitor, Wu Chengyu.

Then, a girl with a ponytail stood up among the first to criticize Yang Xinxin. With a strange smile, she approached Yang Xinxin.

Yang Xinxin looked up, fearful, "Zhang... Zhang Mengning..."

Zhang Mengning stood over her, her gaze growing venomous. She bent down and whispered, "Yang Xinxin, why don't you just die?"

"You're a total burden, so disgusting!"

The harsh words hung in the cold air, and the resentment of the group seemed to crystallize in their hearts, directed squarely at the frail girl in the wheelchair.