

Ice Age 831

Chapter 831: I Don't Owe Them Anything

Zhang Yi waved his hand, signaling Old Tian to prepare a lifeboat for them.

Old Tian approached and whispered in Zhang Yi's ear, "We only have two lifeboats prepared. If we give them one..."

Zhang Yi glanced at him. "Just toss them a rubber dinghy to make it look good. Did you actually plan to give them a proper lifeboat?"

Old Tian immediately understood and grinned as he led some crew members to fetch an inflatable raft.

Though Zhu Yunque and others had some objections about Zhang Yi's decision, after witnessing Yamada Masami being thrown overboard, they found it easier to accept the fate of the two remaining Neon Pirates.

Look, at least Zhang Yi gave them a boat instead of directly tossing them into the sea.

Such is human nature.

If you propose opening a window in a wall, people will find countless reasons to oppose it.

But if you threaten to tear down the entire wall, they'll quickly compromise by suggesting—why not just open a window?

When Old Tian brought over the inflatable raft, the two Neon Pirates wailed pitifully for a while.

Yet Zhang Yi's gaze remained icy—he couldn't care less about whether these two lived or died.

Actually...

Truth be told, he hardly cared about the survival of most people on this ship.

Out of basic humanity, Zhang Yi provided them with three days' worth of rations before casting them adrift.

This gesture suddenly made everyone perceive Zhang Yi as surprisingly compassionate.

After dealing with the three individuals, Zhang Yi waved dismissively. "Everyone, disperse!"

The crew members scattered back to their cabins, each lost in their own thoughts.

Most showed no sympathy toward the Neon Pirates' plight, even joking about the incident.

"Those Neon bastards hid themselves well! I never noticed them before."

"Hah! They got what they deserved. I think Mr. Zhang did the right thing. What right did they have boarding our Huaxu Kingdom's ship?"

"Just thinking about those dogs causing havoc on Huaxu soil makes my blood boil! If I'd been there, I would've fought them to the death!"

Only some foreigners among the Rockflow Group expressed unease about the situation.

Before leaving, Che Haicheng made sure to approach Zhang Yi and pledge his loyalty.

"Mr. Zhang, I'll report to you immediately if I notice anything unusual!"

"You can count on me—I won't allow anything to displease you!"

Che Haicheng was a useful dog. Perhaps not the most loyal one, but definitely reliable when it came to betraying peers to save himself.

Zhang Yi smiled and patted Che Haicheng's cheek with moderate force.

"Good. Keep an eye on them for me. But remember—don't bite indiscriminately. I dislike unnecessary chaos on my ship."

"Otherwise, you'll be the first one I deal with. Understood?"

Che Haicheng gulped and nodded vigorously.

"Mr. Zhang, loyalty above all!"

After everyone left, Zhang Yi noticed Zhu Yunque leaning against the railing, watching the distant inflatable raft with sorrowful eyes.

Did miracles exist in this world?

Perhaps.

But no one looking at that tiny boat adrift in the frozen ocean would believe its occupants could survive.

Zhang Yi had no intention of comforting her. Let her learn the world's harsh realities firsthand.

Yet Zhu Yunque suddenly spoke: "Mr. Zhang, don't you feel some sick pleasure when stripping people of their right to survive?"

Zhang Yi turned, raising an eyebrow curiously.

Zhu Yunque bit her red lip, staring directly at him.

"Answer me—if Yamada Masami had been an ordinary Neon citizen instead of a criminal, would you still have thrown him overboard?"

Zhang Yi responded without hesitation: "Obviously. Frankly, it makes no difference to me."

"I don't owe them anything. Whether they're good or evil, they've done nothing for me."

"So if it pleases me, I can kick them off my ship whenever I want."

He smiled chillingly. "Besides, they should thank me. I gave them extra days to live!"

Zhu Yunque frowned. "If they'd never boarded this ship, they might still be alive now!"

Zhang Yi threw his head back and laughed.

"Miss Zhu, oh Miss Zhu," he said with icy amusement, "how delightfully naive you are."

The moment he'd set foot on Rockflow Island, everyone connected to Li Zongyu had only two choices—leave with him or die.

Not a single detail about the Divine Source could be risked leaking.

A look of horrified realization dawned on Zhu Yunque's face.

Zhang Yi ignored her and headed below deck with Zhou Ke'er. Unlike the idealistic Zhu Yunque, Zhou Ke'er had stood quietly by his side throughout, completely unfazed by everything that transpired.

Meanwhile, among the Rockflow Group...

Che Haicheng swaggered downstairs, even humming a cheerful tune. Today had been his moment to shine—thanks to him, Zhang Yi had rooted out the two hidden Neon Pirates.

This effectively made him Zhang Yi's eyes and ears, granting him special status in the middle deck where the Rockflow Group resided.

The moment he arrived, several people grabbed him.

"Che Haicheng! Why did you expose Nenji Naoko and Sawa Akira?"

A furious Rockflow member seized his collar, eyes blazing. "What did they do to deserve death?"

Che Haicheng remained unfazed.

"Hey, I'm from New Rohan! Hating Neon people is our national pastime!"

"Besides, you should thank me for saving you! Everyone knows Mr. Zhang despises Neons. If we'd kept quiet, can you guarantee he wouldn't have punished us all? Can you?"

His shout silenced the group. No one could confidently predict Zhang Yi's actions.

None wanted to risk suffering collateral damage.

Che Haicheng contemptuously shook off the man's grip and straightened his collar.

"Your priority should be your own survival!"

Gazing out at the terrifying frozen ocean through the window, he said gravely:

"Until this ship reaches land, none of us are guaranteed to make it."

"So we must do whatever it takes."

Li Zongyu watched silently. Instead of confronting Che Haicheng, he quietly returned to his cabin after hearing these words, deep in thought.

Inside, Zhang Weiwei, entrepreneur Ma Wenzheng, and several moderate Rockflow members awaited.

Chapter 832: Panic Among the People

As soon as Li Zongyu entered the room, he spoke with mixed emotions:

"Mr. Zhang's methods were too harsh. Now I'm starting to question whether seeking help from the Jiangnan Region was the right decision."

He sat on the edge of the bed with a complicated expression.

Zhang Weiwei approached and hugged him from behind to comfort him. "This isn't your fault. If we'd stayed on that island, we wouldn't have survived another month."

Meanwhile, Ma Wenzheng stood with his arms crossed and calmly stated:

"Although his methods are quite severe, I don't believe he's a bad person."

Hearing their spiritual leader speak, everyone in the room looked up at him.

Ma Wenzheng shrugged and seriously analyzed for the group:

"These are extraordinary times. From what I've learned about the outside world during this period..."

"Actually, the world beyond Rockflow Island is even crueler. People have to pay a much higher price just to survive."

"In such an environment, those who manage to live can't afford to be soft-hearted."

"As the saying goes, desperate times call for desperate measures. His strict management isn't unreasonable. At least he's provided us with food and decent living conditions."

After Ma Wenzheng's analysis, everyone nodded slightly, feeling somewhat relieved.

However, Zhang Weiwei held a different opinion.

Frowning, she said, "But I still think taking personal grudges out on an entire group went too far."

"Yamada Masami committed serious crimes, so his punishment was justified. But the other two were truly innocent."

Ma Wenzheng shook his head helplessly.

"In an avalanche, no single snowflake is innocent. Everything follows the cycle of karma and retribution."

"Though I couldn't do it myself, I can understand his actions."

Ma Wenzheng's meaning was clear.

Those two were pitiful, but what about the billions who died in the apocalypse?

What about the tens of thousands of Huaxu Kingdom citizens who survived the apocalypse only to be killed by the Moon of Corrosion?

In chaotic times, compassion requires strength as its foundation.

...

In the room where White Mo and others stayed.

This room mainly housed foreigners, including several overseas Chinese.

White Mo had fainted from fear when confronted by Zhang Yi and was carried back by others.

After waking up, he kept muttering: "Oh, my God!"

Terrified, he feared he might end up like Yamada Masami - thrown into the sea to become an ice statue.

"This is too horrible, everything is too horrible!" White Mo groaned, clutching his head.

Eisenmann, sleeping opposite him, quickly made a silencing gesture, then glanced meaningfully at the others and the door.

White Mo suddenly realized.

After Che Haicheng betrayed the two Neon Pirates from the Rockflow Group, fear spread among the ship's foreigners.

Showing dissatisfaction with Zhang Yi or the crew might get reported.

He hastily covered his mouth, then after a long pause, deliberately declared loudly:

"Mr. Zhang's actions were completely justified! Actually, I've always hated Neon Pirates - they deserved to die long ago!"

Eisenmann chimed in: "We firmly support all decisions made by our captain!"

Once these two spoke up, the others quickly followed suit, each trying to outdo the others in proclaiming loyalty.

Because Che Haicheng might be eavesdropping outside.

Or anyone in this room could report them.

Che Haicheng chose this moment to push the door open, his face full of mockery at the scene before him.

"My, my, when did you all become so ideologically enlightened?"

"Too bad," he closed the door behind him, "they're not here to hear your declarations."

His fleshy face wore a smirk as his cold gaze swept across them.

"From now on, I am Mr. Zhang's representative. I suggest you refrain from inappropriate remarks, especially about him or the other officers."

An icy chill ran down everyone's spine, making them shrink instinctively.

...

After Yamada Masami and the two other Neon Pirates were thrown overboard, Che Haicheng came running to see Zhang Yi the next day.

Those from lower decks needed permission from guards to go upstairs.

Given Che Haicheng's previous meritorious reporting, the guard agreed to notify Zhang Yi.

Zhang Yi opened the door and asked what the guard wanted.

The guard said: "That New Rohan guy wants to see you. Looks like he's hoping to curry favor by reporting someone again!"

A mocking smile appeared on Zhang Yi's lips.

This dog was quite skilled at biting his own people.

"And that's not all. Since last night, several people have secretly come to report on others."

"Captain, they seem to have strong opinions about you behind your back. Should we... deal with them?"

The guard made a cutting gesture.

Zhang Yi glanced at him indifferently.

"Back when I had an office job, colleagues would curse management daily, threatening to quit."

"Yet five years later, the same people were still there, greeting bosses like devoted sons."

"People's words behind backs are always the worst. Even best friends talk trash about each other, let alone strangers!"

Crossing his arms, Zhang Yi said coolly: "I hate this culture. Tell them not to bother me with trivial matters."

The guard nodded thoughtfully.

"Then... what counts as important matters?"

"Hmm..."

Zhang Yi actually chuckled at the question.

Truthfully, nothing really qualified as "important" to him anymore.

With absolute power, ordinary people's actions were just amusing spectacles.

"You decide."

Zhang Yi waved him off.

The guard scratched his head and left, only partially understanding.

The failed informant Che Haicheng was frustrated.

He'd hoped to gain Zhang Yi's trust through reporting, climbing the ship's hierarchy to become a privileged figure.

This tactic had served him well among New Rohan's elite.

Unfortunately, the Golden Edge's supreme ruler didn't appreciate such methods.

By suppressing this culture of mutual reporting, Zhang Yi actually improved his image among people like Ma Wenzheng and Li Zongyu.

Regardless of their views on his previous actions, this incident showed Zhang Yi wasn't one to play power games or manipulate hearts.

Chapter 833: Su Nuanxi's Repentance

The next day at mealtime.

Su Nuanxi wore a hat to cover her face.

After yesterday's incident, she couldn't face anyone anymore.

Although she had eaten that kind of thing before, being tricked by an old man into consuming it as a health supplement was a completely different matter.

When she arrived at the cafeteria, Su Nuanxi joined the queue, waiting for Old Xie to serve her food.

"One standard meal, half portion of rice."

The crew members burst into laughter when they saw her. "Little Su, we heard you cried yourself to sleep again yesterday?"

Su Nuanxi's face turned pale, veins visibly popping on her forehead.

"Nonsense! I... I would never cry! That was snoring, just snoring sounds!"

Another crew member shouted, "Stop lying! I saw your red nose from crying with my own eyes!"

"This... sighing, it was just sighing. How could a refined lady's lamentation be considered crying?"

The cafeteria immediately erupted in cheerful laughter.

Xie Changming watched her with amusement but handed her a standard meal from below the counter.

"This is your ration for today."

Su Nuanxi didn't inspect it carefully, quickly taking the food back to her room to eat alone.

She lacked the courage to stay there any longer, afraid of becoming the crew's gossip topic.

Back in her room, she scooped a spoonful of food into her mouth.

After a few bites, she frowned at the strange taste.

At first she thought it might be today's special dish, but the more she ate, the more something felt off.

"Bleh!"

She spat it out, only realizing after chewing that the food had gone bad!

The rice was passable, but the fried vegetables were definitely spoiled, and the frozen chicken wasn't fresh either.

The hot oil had masked the taste initially.

But after several bites, her discerning palate couldn't ignore the problem.

"What's wrong with today's food?"

Poking at her meal, she suddenly spotted mold growing on it!

"Urgh—"

She collapsed by an old bucket, vomiting violently.

After recovering, she stormed back to confront Xie Changming.

"Old Xie! Why did you serve me spoiled food today?" she raged.

Xie Changming and others were eating at the table, all wearing identical mocking smiles.

Their synchronized expressions of anticipation made Su Nuanxi extremely uncomfortable.

"Why are you all looking at me like that? I got bad food!"

Xie Changming pointed at her plate with his chopsticks.

"Forgotten already? Yesterday you said spoiled food wouldn't kill anyone. So the captain ordered me to serve you this for the next week."

"Surely a noble lady like you keeps her word and won't complain?"

Su Nuanxi froze, then stamped her feet tearfully. "But this isn't fit for humans! It's pig slop! I can't eat this!"

Old Tian corrected her: "That's inaccurate. Where I'm from, pigs get quality feed. Nobody feeds them rotten food."

"You... you're all bullying me!" Su Nuanxi cried, her "little pearls" of tears falling rapidly.

The crew showed no sympathy, roaring with laughter instead.

"You asked for this yesterday!"

"Nothing we can do - this is your ration standard for the week."

"Your own words - it won't kill you!"

The thought of enduring this for seven days made Su Nuanxi retch again.

But no one pitied her; they just enjoyed the spectacle like it was entertainment with drinks.

Truthfully, they didn't need her to have a good time.

Finding no sympathy, Su Nuanxi tearfully went to Zhu Yunque for comfort.

But Zhu Yunque was already at her limit.

Tommy's incessant crying had frayed her nerves beyond repair.

Sometimes she even caught herself imagining hands around his neck.

"Why did I take on this burden?" she thought bitterly.

So when Su Nuanxi came whining, Zhu Yunque had no patience left.

"You made your bed. Just endure it - only a week."

"But I'll get sick!"

"Yesterday you said it wouldn't kill you, no?"

Zhu Yunque's sharp tone reflected her irritation.

Too scared to argue, the crestfallen Su Nuanxi retreated to her room.

Curled in a corner hugging her knees, she felt utterly abandoned.

Yet her stomach's hunger pangs were undeniable.

If this continued, she'd have no proper food for seven days.

After hours of deliberation, she resolved to negotiate with Zhang Yi.

Knocking on his door, she called softly, "It's me, Su Nuanxi. Commander Zhang, may we talk?"

Zhang Yi opened the door to find red-eyed Su Nuanxi biting her lip nervously, fingers twisting together.

His lips curled in amusement. "What do you want?"

Su Nuanxi sniffled, tears already falling. "Commander Zhang, I... I've come to apologize."

"After serious reflection, I truly understand now how wrong I was yesterday."

"I feel deep shame for my ignorance and stubbornness."

"I accept your criticism and want to make amends—I genuinely recognize my mistake."

Covering her mouth, she sobbed, "So please don't make me eat expired food! Waaah!"

Zhang Yi nodded approvingly. "Repentance merits forgiveness. Good you recognize your error."

Peeking between her fingers, Su Nuanxi asked hopefully, "Then... I don't have to eat spoiled food anymore?"

Zhang Yi smiled.

And shook his head.

"No."

"Tears mean nothing here. You'll remember better after more meals like that."

"But I'll die!" she wailed. "Even pigs wouldn't eat that! What if I get sick?"

Zhang Yi grinned confidently. "No worries - we have excellent doctors."

Su Nuanxi: "..."

Chapter 834: Unrest in the Lower Deck

Su Nuanxi suffered from a terrible stomachache that very night, writhing in agony.

Fortunately, this issue was easily resolved—with Zhou Ke'er around, such minor ailments wouldn't be life-threatening.

At most, it would make Su Nuanxi endure some misery.

Zhang Yi detested her self-righteous, do-gooder attitude, so he had instructed Zhou Ke'er to treat her—but not too thoroughly.

She needed to suffer a little.

Zhou Ke'er smiled sweetly. "That's easy. If a doctor wants a patient to suffer, there are a hundred ways to make it happen."

With that, she set aside the ordinary painless syringe and pulled out a large glass one instead—the kind typically used for injecting pigs.

In short, Su Nuanxi soon experienced true torment, learning firsthand what it meant to "wish for death rather than live."

Barely able to stay alive, she no longer had the energy to trouble Zhang Yi.

Yet, as the old saying goes: where there are people, there will be conflict.

This brief peace didn't last. Soon, the lower deck erupted into chaos again.

One evening a few days later, Zhang Yi strolled along the deck as usual, scanning the sea for potential dangers.

Suddenly, a cacophony of noise reached his ears—like a terrible village band playing violently inside the ship, accompanied by loud shouts.

"What's going on?"

Zhang Yi frowned, pinpointing the source: the lower living quarters.

That was where the survivors from Rockflow Island—both overseas Chinese and locals—were housed.

Their living conditions on the Golden Edge were the poorest aboard—though only by comparison. Zhang Yi ensured they had food and clothing, a far cry from their plight on Rockflow Island.

If not for Zhu Yunque's pleading and Zhang Yi's consideration of repopulating Tianhai City, he might not have brought them along at all.

Just then, Old Tian and several crew members marched past, weapons in hand, cursing as they headed from the control room toward the commotion.

Spotting Zhang Yi on the deck, Old Tian hurried over.

"Captain! The folks below are causing trouble. I'm going to check it out."

Zhang Yi glanced at the icy sea under the night sky, where something ominous seemed to lurk in the depths.

Marine life habits dictated that giant creatures usually dwelled in the deep, rarely surfacing.

Encountering a massive sea monster wasn't likely.

With nothing else to do, Zhang Yi decided to see what the fuss was about.

"Let's go together," he said.

They headed to the lower deck.

The living quarters were divided into three levels. To reach the lowest, they had to pass through the middle deck—where the Rockflow Group resided.

By now, the unrest had spread there.

Dozens of lower-deck residents had climbed up, banging pots, pans, and anything else that could make noise, shouting demands:

"We're starving! Give us food!"

"Why do you upper-deck folks get meat and fish while we can't even fill our stomachs with rice?"

"Feed us! Feed us!"

The middle deck's doors were usually locked, restricting movement between levels.

But the lower-deck residents had broken through.

Zhang Yi ordered armed crew to stand ready.

"If they riot, shoot on sight," he said coldly.

"Yes, sir!" The crew grinned darkly in unison.

These men were no strangers to killing; a minor uproar meant nothing to them.

A crewman opened the cabin door, revealing a cramped hallway packed with lower-deck residents.

The Rockflow Group members hid in their rooms, too afraid to come out.

The crowd's noise dimmed slightly at the sight of Zhang Yi and Old Tian.

Their authority still carried weight—especially since Zhang Yi's group had guns.

That spoke louder than any words.

Still, a few at the front mustered their courage.

"Mr. Zhang!" one man shouted. "You promised us enough food! We're starving now—you can't go back on your word!"

Others joined in: "Yeah! Why do the upper decks feast while we scrape by on porridge? It's unfair!"

"We want to live too! We need food!"

Zhang Yi slowly raised a finger to his lips.

He didn't yell. His voice was calm, icy.

"Shut your mouths."

The killing intent in his eyes made even the boldest protesters fall silent.

"Old Tian," Zhang Yi said, "I ordered fixed rations for everyone. What happened?"

Old Tian barked at a subordinate, "Go get Old Xie! Find out what's going on!"

Seeing Zhang Yi addressing the issue, the crowd quieted, waiting.

"Don't just stand here," Zhang Yi said. "The cold wind's pouring in. Let's move somewhere else to discuss this properly."

Zhang Yi never skimped on food—but he didn't overindulge them either.

His Dimensional Space held ample supplies.

If these refugees claimed starvation, something was fishy.

He intended to find out.

If someone had withheld their rations, Zhang Yi would punish the culprit.

But if they'd wasted food out of greed or dissatisfaction, or were demanding upper-deck meals—he wouldn't tolerate it.

This marked the first major unrest since leaving Rockflow Island ten days prior.

Zhang Yi summoned everyone aboard to a storage room on the upper deck for an impromptu investigation.

Within twenty minutes, aside from a few crewmen guarding the control room, all had assembled.

Groups clustered by deck, standing or sitting on the floor where chairs were scarce.

Zhu Yunque frowned. "What's happening?"

Zhang Yi glanced at her. "You'll see soon enough."

He called forward the protest's ringleader—a fisherman named Lu Dahai, who'd fled to Rockflow Island by boat after the apocalypse.

He had two brothers: Rong Lei and Yu Gang.

The three had been business partners on the same vessel.

Chapter 835: The Stowaways on the Ship

Lu Dahai stepped forward and boldly stated the fact that the lower deck was lacking food supplies.

"Our food rations have always been short. We never know if we'll get a full meal each day."

"Mr. Zhang, we didn't complain at first. We're already grateful you mercifully saved us by taking us aboard. So even when there wasn't enough food, we endured it. At worst, we'd just go hungry for a while!"

Zhang Yi frowned.

"Everyone's food ration is fixed - no one gets less. Unless some of you have unusually large appetites, in which case you should reflect on yourselves."

"You should eat less. When you're hungry, you only have one worry. But when you're full, countless worries emerge."

Lu Dahai quickly responded, "We don't eat much! Adults only get half-full, children about seventy percent full."

"Though some of us are fishermen used to hard labor with bigger appetites, the shortage shouldn't be this severe."

Xie Changming became displeased at this point.

He stepped forward and pointed accusingly at Lu Dahai.

"Don't you fucking beat around the bush! Are you implying I've been skimming your rations?"

Lu Dahai kept his head lowered, sneakily glancing between Xie Changming and Zhang Yi. Though he didn't respond, his meaning was clear.

Zhang Yi remained unperturbed and continued questioning.

"If that's the case, why did you suddenly decide to cause trouble now? Did someone starve to death?"

At this point, several crew members looked uncomfortable.

Even Zhu Yunque sitting beside Zhang Yi subtly frowned, as if something was difficult to say aloud.

Zhang Yi naturally sensed this strange atmosphere - something had clearly happened without his knowledge.

But he couldn't understand why food would be lacking.

Xie Changming wouldn't withhold food - keeping extra would be meaningless for him.

The crew ate much better fare anyway.

"Old Tian."

Zhang Yi gave Old Tian a meaningful look full of inquiry.

His meaning was obvious.

Daily ship operations were Old Tian's responsibility.

If such things occurred without Zhang Yi's knowledge but Old Tian remained unaware, it would be his dereliction of duty.

Old Tian smiled awkwardly.

"Mr. Zhang, here's what actually happened."

Old Tian explained the situation, allowing everyone to understand the full story.

It turned out the lower deck's food shortage had existed from the beginning.

The reason was unclear, and Old Tian's team hadn't bothered investigating.

After all, the lower deck ate communal meals - they just delivered the buckets daily and let them distribute it themselves.

Zhang Yi's allocated supplies weren't the issue - they were correctly portioned per person and theoretically sufficient.

But somewhere along the line, something went wrong.

If it were just this, resentment wouldn't have grown.

Not full, but not starving either.

But then came the age-old problem.

After long periods at sea, the crew grew lonely and needed physical and emotional comfort.

So they frequently visited the lower decks to find women (and some men) from the Rockflow Group or lower decks.

The Rockflow Group had fewer women, while the lower decks had relatively more.

The food shortage ironically gave the crew bargaining chips for exchanges.

As these interactions increased, lower deck residents began visiting middle/upper decks and seeing their food.

Humans can endure darkness until they glimpse light - then desire awakens.

Those perpetually hungry below gradually learned how lavishly the upper two decks lived.

Some vividly described the sailors' meals - fish and meat at every serving.

Even middle deck residents regularly received ample protein.

This finally drove the lower deck to emotional outbursts, culminating in today's disturbance.

Not sudden, but long-simmering.

Lu Dahai looked at Zhang Yi, his dark skin reflecting harsh light.

"Mr. Zhang, we're not ungrateful. We don't want to oppose you. But we're fellow countrymen - why do these foreigners eat their fill while we starve?"

"We're willing to work for our meals!"

He pointed accusingly at the Rockflow Group's foreigners, startling White Mo and others.

"Don't spout nonsense! What's wrong with foreigners? I can work too! I love Huaxu Kingdom too!"

Zhang Yi rubbed his hands together.

"I've understood the whole situation. The root issue is insufficient food, correct?"

The lower deck crowd nodded in unison.

Zhang Yi glanced at Xie Changming.

"Old Xie, explanation?"

Xie Changming hurriedly defended himself:

"Mr. Zhang, I wouldn't dare disobey your orders to withhold their food even if you gave me a hundred more guts!"

"Besides, what would I do with extra rations?"

Zhang Yi nodded. "I see, I see."

His gaze passed over Zhu Yunque, whose face clearly showed discomfort.

Zhang Yi smiled oddly.

He rose from the sofa and walked to the warehouse center.

"The food supply hasn't decreased. So why are people still hungry?"

The crowd looked confused.

Zhang Yi raised a finger.

"It's simple math even elementary students understand!"

He approached a lower deck boy and patted his head.

"Little one, let me test you. If total food stays the same, what makes each person's share decrease?"

The boy answered immediately: "More people!"

Zhang Yi smiled and ruffled his hair. "So smart!"

"There's only one truth - there are stowaways on the lower deck!"

Zhang Yi declared cheerfully.

Chaos immediately erupted throughout the warehouse.

"Stowaways?"

"Impossible! Boarding was so strictly controlled!"

Old Tian urgently told Zhang Yi:

"Mr. Zhang, we thoroughly screened all boarders! No one could have slipped through!"

Zhang Yi recalled those he'd seen climbing aboard with grappling hooks.

Some Southeast Asian nationals were expert climbers.

Some might even be part-time pirates.

"Normally impossible, unless there was inside help."

Zhang Yi's playful gaze landed on Zhu Yunque, who froze as if plunged into icy water, instinctively averting her eyes in extreme discomfort.

Chapter 836: Granting Their Wish

On the Golden Edge, Zhu Yunque theoretically held the second-highest authority after Zhang Yi.

After all, everyone knew she was the niece of the Jiangnan Region's commander.

Zhang Yi would humor her on minor matters to save face.

Let alone someone like Old Tian.

At that time, only two people aboard could have helped the stowaways sneak into the lower deck undetected.

Either Zhu Yunque or Zhou Ke'er.

But Zhou Ke'er wasn't foolish enough—she always prioritized Zhang Yi's interests.

That left Zhu Yunque as the sole possibility.

Seeing Zhu Yunque's evasive gaze confirmed Zhang Yi's suspicions completely.

Zhu Yunque squirmed uncomfortably, bracing for Zhang Yi's scolding.

The truth matched his speculation—she had indeed smuggled a group of stowaways aboard.

Around twenty people.

They'd risked their lives climbing onto this massive ship to survive.

Initially, over a hundred had attempted the same, but most were shot off the hull by Old Tian's crew, their bodies plunging into the frozen sea like dumplings into boiling water.

Witnessing this carnage, Zhu Yunque's conscience compelled her to conceal the survivors and guide them to the lower deck.

The crew's diverse appearances and multilingual chatter minimized interaction, making detection unlikely if they kept to themselves.

Zhu Yunque's plan was simple: establish their presence as a fait accompli.

Even if discovered later, surely Zhang Yi wouldn't heartlessly toss twenty-odd people overboard?

Biting her lip, she thought: At worst, he'll reduce my rations or confine me. I can endure that!

Yet Zhang Yi ignored her entirely.

He could practically read her mind.

Did she fancy herself some noble martyr?

Sacrificing herself for stowaways?

Excellent. Zhang Yi always enjoyed granting wishes—he'd give her that very opportunity.

His gaze swept across the crowd, pinpointing the trembling stowaways with their panicked, darting eyes.

A headcount by Old Tian would expose them instantly.

But what purpose would that serve?

Beyond painting himself as a monster and hardening Zhu Yunque's misguided resentment? No reflection on her part.

So Zhang Yi concocted a far more entertaining alternative.

The sheer amusement of his scheme nearly made him grin ear-to-ear.

"Miss Zhu, Su Nuanxi—how should we handle these stowaways?" Zhang Yi suddenly asked the two women.

All eyes turned to them in confusion.

The stowaways stared desperately, clinging to their presence like drowning men grasping at straws.

Zhu Yunque misread Zhang Yi's intent as humiliation.

Still, she clenched her jaw and insisted, "They're living beings! Having survived, we can't abandon them now!"

"We should take them to Huaxu Kingdom and arrange their resettlement."

Gratitude flooded the stowaways' faces as they gazed at her.

Su Nuanxi studied Zhang Yi oddly before her inner saint emerged.

"Of course we forgive them! They only wanted to live—what's wrong with that?"

Old Tian and some Rockflow Group members exchanged knowing smirks or resigned headshakes.

"They really don't understand Mr. Zhang. Given his temperament, he'd never tolerate stowaways!"

Zhang Yi nodded approvingly.

"Then forgiven they are. Since they're aboard, they'll stay!"

Everyone: "???"

Even Old Tian and Zhu Yunque gaped at him as if he'd been body-snatched.

Only Zhou Ke'er tilted her head with dawning comprehension, smiling knowingly.

"Zhang Yi's definitely plotting something."

The stowaways exhaled in relief, overflowing with gratitude.

Standing among them, Zhang Yi proclaimed, "In this apocalyptic era, life is cheaper than grass! Haven't we all fought tooth and nail to survive?"

"Precisely now must we unite, clinging together like family!"

"I know many view me as some cold-blooded villain. But earlier actions were necessities of circumstance."

"In truth, I'm usually exceedingly kind."

Some hung their heads, ashamed for doubting him.

"Therefore," Zhang Yi declared, sweeping his arm grandly, "I decree they remain, joining our shared struggle!"

"What say you all?"

His speech electrified the chamber.

"YES!"

"YES!"

"YES!"

The crowd roared in jubilation.

Satisfied, Zhang Yi concluded, "Then no further blame shall be assigned. It's late—all return to rest!"

The stowaways scurried away like pardoned convicts.

Most spectators, touched by Zhang Yi's apparent benevolence, dispersed while Rockflow Group members unaffected by the affair drifted off.

Lu Dahai lingered near the rear, frowning.

Despite the celebratory atmosphere, something felt... off.

After pondering, he suddenly realized—

Wait! This makes no sense!

Their initial protest was about food shortages.

All this drama changed nothing about the core issue!

Slapping his forehead, he rushed toward Zhang Yi—only to be blocked by crew.

Zhang Yi was already speaking privately with Zhu Yunque.

Eyes shimmering with wonder, Zhu Yunque whispered,

"You... you're not angry?"

"Surely you know I acted alone. I expected harsh punishment..."

She bit her lip, looking down.

Zhang Yi internally scoffed: As if I'd waste energy punishing you. Too many damn theatrics.

Outwardly, he beamed with saintly patience.

"Not at all. You meant well—simply ensuring everyone's survival."

Chapter 837: Uh... Me?

Zhu Yunque laughed cheerfully after hearing Zhang Yi's words.

"Mr. Zhang, I never expected you to be so reasonable!"

She tilted her head, her sparkling eyes fixed on Zhang Yi.

"My opinion of you has changed quite a bit now. In fact, I'm starting to like you a little."

Su Nuanxi chimed in from the side, "Though you've often done annoying things in the past, this time I have to look at you differently. Not bad!"

Zhang Yi smiled without responding and changed the subject.

"It's getting late. Everyone should go rest!"

He turned and walked away.

Seeing this, Lu Dahai hastily called out, "Mr. Zhang! Mr. Zhang! I have something to discuss with you!"

A profound glint flashed in Zhang Yi's eyes.

"Come over here if you have something to say."

Lu Dahai followed Zhang Yi outside, where a few people from the lower deck still lingered, including Lu Dahai's two brothers, Rong Lei and Yu Gang.

They had all realized the issue wasn't resolved and stayed behind to demand an explanation from Zhang Yi.

"Mr. Zhang!"

"Mr. Zhang!"

...

Zhang Yi approached them and asked calmly, "Everyone, why haven't you gone back yet? It's freezing out here—can you handle it?"

The sub-zero temperatures were indeed torturous. Unlike Zhang Yi, who wore top-tier cold-resistant gear, they had to endure the chill to fight for their meals.

Lu Dahai spoke up, "Mr. Zhang, the problem isn't solved! Those stowaways are staying—can we at least get more food supplies? Otherwise, it still won't be enough."

The group nodded vigorously in agreement.

Zhang Yi glanced at him and chuckled. "How much reserve food do you think the ship has?"

"We sailed here from the Huaxu Kingdom, a two-month journey. We didn't resupply at Rockflow Island, and now we're heading back immediately."

"You're a fisherman, right? You should know how little provisions are left under these conditions."

Lu Dahai's expression darkened instantly—his experience told him the ship's supplies were dangerously low.

Zhang Yi sighed. "I'm barely managing the ship's resources as it is. I never planned to take all of you back."

"But since I'm kind-hearted, I gritted my teeth and agreed to bring everyone."

"Food distribution must be strictly controlled, or we'll all starve in the end. Do you understand?"

Only then did the lower-deck passengers grasp Zhang Yi's predicament. The fishermen, especially, knew better than anyone the hardships of long voyages.

"Sorry, Mr. Zhang. We've caused you trouble."

"But... I've seen others on the ship eating pretty well!" Yu Gang muttered, then cautiously watched Zhang Yi's reaction.

Zhang Yi replied, "They're crew members—their rations take priority. In any case, there's nothing I can do. Your food is allocated based on the initial passenger count."

He paused, then emphasized heavily:

"It's calculated based on the most reasonable portion for the original number."

"Now that there are twenty-plus stowaways, everyone will have to tough it out. Show some solidarity!"

"Shared hunger is better than letting them die, no?"

A sudden realization dawned on Lu Dahai as he listened.

Zhang Yi patted his shoulder amiably. "Lu Dahai, right? You're a good man. I trust you understand my position."

"Food is limited. Extra mouths mean no easy solutions."

He sighed. "If only we'd controlled the boarding numbers earlier."

"Fewer people would've meant enough to eat."

With that, Zhang Yi turned and vanished into the night, leaving Lu Dahai standing there, deep in thought.

Rong Lei and Yu Gang approached. "Brother Lu, what did Mr. Zhang mean? Did he solve the food problem or not?"

Lu Dahai looked up at his two brothers and slowly said, "Figure it out."

Rong Lei and Yu Gang: "Huh? So is it solved or not?"

Lu Dahai exhaled deeply. "Think. Think harder."

A shadow crossed his gaze. Instinctively, he glanced at the vast, dark icy sea.

The ship felt like an isolated island, its passengers stranded survivors. But food shortages would inevitably spark conflict.

He vaguely sensed Zhang Yi was hinting at something—but missteps could be fatal.

"Let's head back. It's freezing out here." Rong Lei shivered, hugging himself.

Lu Dahai nodded and ushered his brothers toward the lower deck.

Meanwhile, as soon as Zhang Yi returned, Zhu Yunque intercepted him.

"Mr. Zhang, you left in quite a hurry."

Arms crossed, she studied him with a peculiar look.

"What's wrong? Is there still an unresolved issue?" Zhang Yi blinked, smiling.

Zhu Yunque uncrossed her arms. "Come with me. We need to talk about how to handle these late-boarding passengers."

She referred to the stowaways as "late-boarding passengers."

"It was my fault for not consulting you earlier. But now that you've accepted them, we must ensure their needs are met."

"So I hope you'll address their food situation. It's not right to keep the lower-deck passengers hungry."

Zhang Yi looked stunned, pointing at himself.

"Uh... Me?"

"No way, no way! Miss Zhu, you can't be serious."

He waved his hands dismissively.

"Don't tell me you brought them aboard without planning how to feed them?"

He shook his head firmly.

"That's impossible. Someone as sharp as you wouldn't make such a basic mistake. You're joking, right?"

"This isn't funny."

Zhu Yunque froze.

"I..."

Panic flickered across her face.

Truthfully, when she'd helped the stowaways board out of kindness, she hadn't considered their meals—just shoved them into the lower deck to live off the existing passengers.

As a privileged young lady of the Zhu family, when had she ever worried about food and supplies?

Chapter 838: This Has Nothing to Do With Me

Zhang Yi pointed at Zhu Yunque. "You really shouldn't joke with me like this. I believe you've already made plans, haven't you?"

Zhu Yunque gave a light cough.

"Ahem, of course."

She looked up at Zhang Yi with a smile. "Isn't that what you're here for? You're the mighty captain of the investigation team after all. I know your capabilities—a spatial ability user who can carry an enormous amount of supplies."

"I'm sure providing food for just over twenty people would be a trivial matter for you."

Zhang Yi sneered inwardly.

So you get to play the saint while I handle all the messy work?

Thank god you're not my superior, or I'd have died from frustration already.

Outwardly, Zhang Yi wore an expression of helplessness.

"Now, now, Miss Zhu, this joke really isn't funny."

"My storage space is only about the size of a small warehouse, packed with all sorts of things. Weapons, ammunition, and fuel supplies for the Golden Edge alone take up over half the capacity."

"As for food, I did bring quite a lot. But as you know, this voyage will take at least four months round trip with no resupply points along the way, and now we've added over a hundred extra mouths to feed."

"Haven't you wondered why I meticulously ration everyone's food, even differentiating portions by status? Precisely because our reserves are running low."

"Plentiful? Far from it."

Zhang Yi shook his head.

"So this time I genuinely can't help you."

"It's not that I don't want to, but my hands are tied!"

Zhu Yunque's eyes widened. "You... are you serious?"

She began feeling anxious.

Because relying on Zhang Yi had been her best solution.

Where else could she possibly find food for those twenty-plus people in this endless frozen ocean?

There were still nearly two months left on the return journey.

Even calculating just half a kilogram of rations per person daily, they'd need six to seven thousand jin!

Zhang Yi said calmly, "I'm not heartless. If possible, I would've saved every last person on Rockflow Island back then!"

"But do you truly have no concept of our daily consumption rates?"

Embarrassment flooded Zhu Yunque's face.

This was her first long-distance mission—what experience could she possibly have?

"Then... what should we do? We can't just let them starve, can we?"

Zhang Yi took two steps back and waved his hands.

"You shouldn't say 'what should we do,' but 'what should I do.'" "

"You brought them aboard, so the responsibility falls entirely on you. To avoid any conflict of interest, I won't be involved!"

Zhang Yi raised both hands in surrender before retreating with a smile.

The moment he turned around, that smile twisted into a smirk.

In truth, his Dimensional Space still contained massive stockpiles—enough to supply the entire shelter for two centuries.

But why should he use his own resources to clean up this foolish woman's mess?

Let her deal with the consequences of her own bleeding heart.

Zhu Zheng had made it clear this was meant to be Zhu Yunque's trial anyway.

Without Zhang Yi's intervention, chaos would inevitably erupt in the lower deck.

When that happened, the outcome promised to be quite entertaining indeed.

The thought made Zhang Yi's smirk widen.

Humming a tune, he strolled leisurely toward his quarters.

"Beyond darkness lies light, beyond light lurks shadow. Who gets to define justice or evil..."

Washing his hands of Zhu Yunque's predicament, Zhang Yi couldn't be bothered with her mess.

This left her in a genuine dilemma.

For the first time in her privileged life, the Zhu family heiress found herself troubled by something as basic as food.

But in this vast ocean, where besides Zhang Yi could she possibly obtain supplies?

Yet Zhang Yi had refused point-blank.

She'd taken people aboard without his permission first—she had no moral high ground.

Frowning deeply, Zhu Yunque returned to her room to brainstorm solutions.

There, she recounted everything to her temporary confidante Su Nuanxi.

Upon hearing this, Su Nuanxi immediately flared up. "That Zhang fellow is utterly unreasonable! He's deliberately making things difficult for you! As a Zhu family heiress, how could you possibly trouble yourself with menial matters like food and sanitation?"

"Clearly he doesn't know his place."

"You've been too lenient with him. With your uncle's connections—"

Zhu Yunque cut her off.

"Enough! I'm not the type to throw my weight around."

She couldn't bring herself to admit she had no authority over Zhang Yi.

Coming from an official's family, face still mattered.

"But without his approval, where can I possibly get enough food for those twenty-plus people in the lower deck?"

Su Nuanxi counted on her fingers. "And that's not all! Beyond food, daily necessities will run short too."

"Sanitary pads, brown sugar, medicine, toilet paper, fresh water... none of it will last."

The mounting problems gave Zhu Yunque a headache. She sighed heavily.

Suddenly, Su Nuanxi had a flash of inspiration.

"I've got it! A brilliant idea!"

Zhu Yunque immediately looked at her. "What is it?"

Grinning, Su Nuanxi revealed her plan without further ado.

"Zhang may be difficult, but surely the other crew members wouldn't dare refuse you?"

"Hmph! Those sailors eat like kings every day—so much waste when they throw leftovers overboard!"

"Why not have them conserve part of their rations? If everyone donated just one-third of their portions, it would easily feed the lower deck!"

Zhu Yunque's eyes darted thoughtfully. This did seem feasible.

Zhang Yi had always been generous with his crew.

Their rations were exceptionally lavish—not only abundant, but each portion equaled a day and a half for ordinary people.

This created a stark contrast with the middle and lower decks, where leftovers had to be discarded daily.

A gleam of triumph appeared in Zhu Yunque's eyes.

She decided to approach Old Tian tomorrow with this request.

Given her status, surely they'd comply for face's sake.

While the quantities wouldn't be enormous, it could sustain those twenty-plus people temporarily.

At least it would resolve the most pressing issue.

"Zhang Yi, just watch me handle this ship's problems."

Zhu Yunque snorted lightly, temporarily setting aside her worries.

Suddenly, a baby's wails pierced the air again.

Su Nuanxi exclaimed, "Oh no, he wet himself again!"

As the two women scrambled to change the diaper, neither noticed the infant's severely chafed bottom.

Chapter 839: "The Brilliant Plan"

Early the next morning, Zhu Yunque found Old Tian during breakfast.

"Chief Mate Tian, could we talk for a moment? There's something I'd like to discuss with you," Zhu Yunque called out cheerfully to Old Tian.

Old Tian held a chicken drumstick in his hand, his face full of confusion.

Zhu Yunque normally exuded an aloofness from her very bones - even her smiles carried an instinctive distance. But today, she seemed deliberately friendly.

"Unwarranted kindness often hides ill intentions," Old Tian muttered to himself, but still walked over with a smile.

"Miss Zhu, what's the matter? Is the breakfast not to your liking?" Old Tian followed Zhu Yunque to a corner of the mess hall and asked amiably.

He still had to be careful about pleasing this young lady from the Zhu family.

Zhu Yunque shook her head. "That's not the issue. While the food isn't gourmet, it's edible enough."

"I came to ask for your help with something. Surely you won't refuse me this favor?" She looked at Old Tian with questioning eyes.

Old Tian gave a hollow laugh. "Now why would you say that? Whatever you need, just say the word to the captain, wouldn't that be better? Coming to us subordinates seems beneath your status."

Zhu Yunque coughed lightly. "This matter isn't important enough to bother Commander Zhang about."

Old Tian frowned slightly. "Then please tell me what it is."

Zhu Yunque said, "I want to ask you to help with a charitable act."

She laid out her plan completely - she wanted the dozen or so crew members to save part of their daily rations to distribute to the stowaways in the lower deck.

"Your daily meals are so abundant that you can't even finish them all. I've even seen you throwing leftover rice into the sea before."

"Look, since it's going to waste anyway, why not use it to do some good? I would certainly appreciate your kindness." Zhu Yunque smiled sweetly at Old Tian.

She was certain Old Tian would agree to her request. After all, it wasn't difficult to do, and it would earn him favor with the niece of the regional commander. Why wouldn't he?

But contrary to her expectations, things didn't unfold as she imagined.

After listening quietly, Old Tian didn't give an immediate answer but instead asked, "Have you discussed this with our captain?"

Zhu Yunque's expression changed slightly.

If Zhang Yi found out, wouldn't she just be inviting his sarcastic remarks? That's why she had decided to act first and report later, going straight to Old Tian to settle the matter.

"This sort of thing doesn't need to trouble Commander Zhang!" Zhu Yunque said uncomfortably.

Hearing this, Old Tian's eyes took on a knowing glint, and he straightened his posture.

"In that case, this becomes rather difficult for me!" He sighed deeply, putting on an expression of extreme reluctance.

Zhu Yunque widened her eyes. "How is this difficult? Just share the food you can't finish! At worst, pick the things you don't like as much! What's so hard about that?"

Old Tian explained, "The ration standards for each crew member were specially set by our captain."

"Ocean voyages are extremely demanding on one's willpower to begin with."

"The captain has been very considerate, maximizing our satisfaction with food provisions."

"Only with full stomachs can the crew maintain peak performance at work."

"As for throwing away leftovers... these things are unpredictable."

"Someone might lose their appetite one day and eat less. When heavy work comes up, appetites increase and people eat more."

"If I did as you suggested, coordinating rations would become problematic."

"If people don't eat well, they won't work well. That could lead to accidents in the middle of the vast ocean."

Just as Zhu Yunque opened her mouth to argue, Old Tian cut her off decisively: "All ration standards were carefully considered by the captain before being implemented."

"How about this - discuss it properly with the captain first. Only if he gives the order would I dare make changes. Otherwise, this isn't something I can decide!"

Zhu Yunque never imagined she couldn't even command Old Tian's cooperation.

Yet Old Tian spoke so convincingly that she didn't know how to refute him.

"So... there's really no good solution?" Zhu Yunque's tone carried a note of pleading.

Hearing this, Old Tian didn't dare alienate Zhu Yunque completely.

He wasn't Zhang Yi - he didn't have that kind of boldness.

Old Tian stroked his thick beard and thought carefully before offering a compromise.

"How about this - every day after we finish eating, we'll collect whatever leftovers remain and send them over. That way at least a few people could get a bite or two."

Zhu Yunque rejected this proposal without hesitation.

"Absolutely not!"

"They're human beings, not livestock! How could you make them eat your scraps?"

Old Tian chuckled. "Miss Zhu, in times like these, human life is cheaper than grass. When I was suffering in Tianhai City, I've eaten not just slops but actual spoiled food!"

Zhu Yunque kept shaking her head, unable to accept this approach.

"That's impossible. There are over a hundred people in the lower deck. If some get normal food while others get scraps, it will definitely cause unrest."

Old Tian snorted disdainfully at the mention of the stowaways.

"They might fight over our leftovers!"

What was wrong with slops? Their crew rations were top-notch!

The leftovers still had fatty meat and chicken bones - already better than the lower deck's provisions.

Hadn't she heard? Last century, New Rohan's common folk used to happily cook and eat garbage thrown away by Columbus Ocean soldiers.

They even gave it a fancy name - "army stew."

Refugees couldn't be held to normal standards.

Giving them any food to survive was already an immense mercy.

Zhu Yunque kept shaking her head, refusing to agree no matter how Old Tian tried to persuade her.

Old Tian also grew helpless.

"Then I'm out of ideas. You'll have to figure it out yourself!"

Zhu Yunque gritted her teeth. "Wait, if that approach won't work, I have another idea."

She had thought all night and come up with her own "brilliant plan."

Old Tian listened attentively.

Zhu Yunque pointed at the vast ocean. "We're at sea, and the ocean is full of fish - excellent food sources."

"I want to organize everyone to go fishing to replenish our food stores."

"This way, we might not only solve the food shortage but even expand our reserves!"

Zhu Yunque was quite proud of her clever idea.

After sailing for so long, Zhang Yi had never considered supplementing their food through fishing.

However, Old Tian rejected her proposal without hesitation.

"Miss Zhu, it's a nice idea, but completely impossible!"

Zhu Yunque grew displeased. "Why not? Old Tian, I've been out at sea often too, gone fishing from yachts before. The ocean has huge fish - one could feed several people for a meal."

"Why can't we do this? Answer me!"

Chapter 840: Hitting a Wall

Old Tian mercilessly shattered her beautiful fantasy.

"Do you think this is the same as your expensive leisure trips?"

"Deep-sea fishing always targets rich fishing grounds with premium bait."

"But look where we are now! The ocean isn't uniformly full of fish. Without choosing specific spots, it's completely normal to catch nothing all day."

"Besides, fishing requires bait. Do you expect us to give you our food supplies?"

Old Tian pointed outside.

The Golden Edge was advancing at high speed.

"At this speed with such rough waves, nobody can stay outside for long."

"If you don't believe me, take a fishing rod out there yourself. Just standing steadily on deck would make you remarkable!"

Zhu Yunque's face flushed red then paled under Old Tian's blunt assessment.

Her carefully devised brilliant plan was nothing but a joke to the seasoned sailor.

"If this won't work and that won't work, how exactly are we supposed to solve the food shortage?" Zhu Yunque demanded angrily.

Old Tian covered his mouth with his hand, coughing forcefully several times.

Otherwise, he might have burst out laughing right then.

Difficult?

Then don't bother!

Who asked you to meddle and create this mess in the first place?

"Like I said before, if you truly want to solve this, you'll have to discuss it with the captain," Old Tian concluded before excusing himself to eat.

He joined the sailors' table, picking up a large bowl of rice alongside plentiful dishes of chicken, duck, fish and meat - all frozen provisions skillfully prepared by Xie Changming into delicious meals.

The more Zhu Yunque watched, the angrier she grew, losing her appetite entirely.

Just then, Su Nuanxi approached carrying a metal food container.

"Senior Sister, how did the discussion go? Did the crew agree to share food with those in the lower deck?"

Zhu Yunque shook her head.

"No."

Su Nuanxi shot the carefree sailors a disdainful glance as they laughed heartily over their abundant meal.

"How utterly heartless!" she declared. "Come, Senior Sister! Let's give our food to those poor starving souls!"

Her own rations were specially prepared and barely edible anyway - no great loss.

She could always mooch off Zhu Yunque's meals later.

Blinded by anger, Zhu Yunque likewise had no appetite.

She considered Old Tian and his crew as cold-blooded as Zhang Yi.

But she was different.

As a Western-educated intellectual who respected human dignity, she must shine brighter in such circumstances - her moral superiority highlighting Zhang Yi's pettiness.

With this self-righteous conviction, even her plain meal seemed sanctified, like communion bread during Mass.

"Wait, I'll fetch Zhou Ke'er," Zhu Yunque decided, feeling two portions were insufficient and that the gentle Zhou Ke'er might join their charitable act.

Soon, the pair marched resolutely to Zhang Yi and Zhou Ke'er's cabin.

Knock knock knock!

"Zhou Ke'er!"

...

Knock knock knock!

"Zhou Ke'er!"

...

Knock knock knock!

"Zhou Ke'er!"

Only after the third round did the door crack open, revealing Zhou Ke'er in a black nightgown, her silky hair cascading over voluptuous curves with effortless allure.

"Why are you two visiting instead of eating breakfast?" she asked sleepily.

Peeking past her, Zhu Yunque saw no sign of Zhang Yi though she knew he was inside.

"We're taking food to help those poor refugees," she announced loudly. "Lisa and I are sharing our meals with them. Will you join us?"

Zhou Ke'er barely suppressed her amusement at their metal food containers.

"You're actually going through with this?"

"Of course! We know you're compassionate too!" Zhu Yunque pressed, secretly hoping Zhou Ke'er's participation would force Zhang Yi to indirectly support the refugees through his personal food stores.

Zhou Ke'er chuckled. "I just finished eating!"

"Oh..." Both women feigned disappointment.

Zhou Ke'er eyed their containers. "But honestly, how many people can you feed with so little?"

Su Nuanxi sniffed. "It's the thought that counts! This demonstrates our kindness and humanity!"

Nodding with a smile, Zhou Ke'er mused, "Admirable intentions. I just worry that with so many hungry people and so little food... might cause fights."

The revelation stunned Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi into exchanging uneasy glances.

But Zhu Yunque quickly recovered, unwilling to give Zhang Yi satisfaction.

"Impossible! The Rockflow Island survivors are civilized people. They'd never act like animals."

Zhou Ke'er smiled. "Well then, best of luck with your charity."

As they departed for the lower decks, Zhou Ke'er closed the door and rejoined Zhang Yi, who was lounging on a sofa chatting via satellite phone - though Zhu Yunque's loud declarations were impossible to ignore.

"Those silly women are off to do something stupid again," Zhou Ke'er remarked with a bewitching smile.

Zhang Yi didn't glance up from his call. "Spoiled women who've never known hardship will always be naive." His lips curled. "But I dislike sanctimonious flies buzzing around me."

Meeting Zhou Ke'er's gaze with predatory amusement, he concluded:

"Let's use this opportunity to teach them a proper lesson."

Meanwhile, Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi reached the lower decks, requesting a crew member to unlock the refugee quarters.

The sailor hesitated. "Miss, I should warn you - conditions down there aren't ideal."

Zhu Yunque dismissed him. "They'll only thank us for bringing food."