

Middle Age 191

Chapter 191: Qi Yun's Proposal

[Today's Intelligence 3 (Blue): 100 kilometers west of Tashtagol, buried under the ruins, lies a cache of Soviet-era weapons, specific coordinates are N****]

Qi Yun stared blankly at the intelligence before him, a bit dumbfounded. Wow, they even brought out military arms, as expected of the big goose.

He was a bit hesitant to touch this stuff. Even if he found it, he wouldn't dare sell it. One wrong move and he might lose his head.

Dealing with arms is no small matter in any country...

The next day, after a few of them had breakfast at the hotel, they followed Mendeleyev to his supermarket.

The supermarket was located in the city center. It wasn't small, probably two or three thousand square meters over two floors.

When everyone walked into the supermarket, it was full of a wide variety of goods, from food to daily necessities. The shelves were stocked with various Russian specialty products, and some packages had Chinese writing on them.

Mendeleyev introduced as they walked: "This is my supermarket, which only started operating last year."

Qi Yun looked around. He saw only a few scattered customers shopping, not even more than the number of supermarket employees. It seemed the situation was indeed as bad as Mendeleyev had said.

"Have you tried holding some promotional events to bring customers back?" Peng asked.

Mendeleyev sighed helplessly: "I've tried. As soon as I hold an event, the others do the same immediately, with even better deals than mine."

Qi Yun furrowed his brows at this: "Why are they targeting you? Is there a grudge?"

Mendeleyev shook his head with a wry smile: "I don't have any deep grudges with them. It's really just a conflict of interest."

"My supermarket is relatively large and in a central location, so business is better than theirs. The market here is only so big, and they're worried I'll take their business, so they've united to suppress me."

Qi Yun nodded slightly after hearing the explanation. This kind of thing was nothing new to him.

Next, Mendeleyev took them to see his KTV and other businesses. Overall, things were decent, but like he said, the market here is too small, not even as big as a small county back home.

Around noon, they found a restaurant to eat at.

Qi Yun turned to Mendeleyev and asked, "How did the cashmere carpets and the batch of cotton fabrics you brought back last time sell?"

Mendeleyev put down his utensils upon hearing the question and answered, "I sold some in the supermarket, but most were wholesaled to merchants in the capital."

Qi Yun pondered for a moment after hearing this and sighed: "Honestly, the market here is too small. I personally think competing with them doesn't make much sense."

Peng nodded in agreement: "I think so too. Even if we provide you with some domestic products, it won't be long before they find channels to compete with you."

Mendeleyev was naturally aware of this truth, but his investment in the supermarket was huge, so he couldn't give up so easily.

"Do you have any good suggestions?"

Qi Yun lit up a cigarette, took a deep puff, and then said slowly: "Why don't you just cooperate with them? It's just a conflict of interest, no other grudges."

"In the future, you can give them some of the products we provide you, shift your focus to the capital, and explore new markets. After all, this place is too small."

Mendeleyev nodded and sighed: "I've thought about it too, but the business environment here is different from back home. Without certain connections, it's hard to establish a foothold."

"My business in the capital is currently in a half-dead state, frequently encountering trouble."

Qi Yun clicked his tongue after hearing this and was momentarily speechless.

After a while, he suddenly remembered the piece of intelligence about the arms. If Mendeleyev told a certain leader in the capital about this, could it win their favor?

After all, he didn't dare touch those things himself. It might as well be given to Mendeleyev to help him build connections.

Once he establishes himself here, there will be plenty of opportunities for him to make money in the future.

With this thought, he pretended to take out his phone and stood up: "I'll make a call to think of a way to help you."

About five minutes later, Qi Yun returned to his seat after finishing a cigarette outside.

He looked around, leaned closer to Mendeleyev, and lowered his voice: "A friend told me a secret. He knows a place where Soviet-era arms are hidden."

"If you report this to a leader in the capital, can you connect with them in the future?"

"Arms...arms?" Mendeleyev was startled and looked incredulous, "Are you sure?"

Qi Yun nodded, calmly saying: "My friend already gave me the location. It's about a hundred kilometers from here. We can check to see if it's true or not."

Mendeleyev gulped unconsciously, then cautiously checked that no one around could hear them before he started to speak: "In Tuva, anything related to arms is very sensitive. If your friend is telling the truth and the arms aren't in small quantities, then I'm confident I can connect with an influential figure."

"Alright then, we'll verify it later." With that, Qi Yun casually picked up his chopsticks again, adding, "By the way, do you guys have those container blind box auctions around here?"

The sudden change of topic left Mendeleyev a bit confused, but he responded, "Yes, there's a warehouse rental center up ahead, and they often hold these events. Many people like to try their luck, hoping to find something valuable in a container."

"Why ask all of a sudden?"

Qi Yun smiled, took a bite, chewed it up, and said, "I just thought of it. I saw it on TV before and wanted to experience it."

Mendeleyev grinned broadly and said, "Sure! After lunch, I'll take you there to check it out."

They finished their lunch in a whirlwind and then drove to the warehouse rental center in East City.

In a spacious yard, there were dozens of large and small warehouses, along with some rusty containers.

Mendeleyev led them to a bulletin board that listed information about today's auctioned warehouses, including starting prices and general origins.

Qi Yun glanced at the information for Warehouse 68, with a starting price of 60,000 Rubles, roughly equivalent to 5,000 RMB.

A short distance away, a group of about a dozen people had gathered in front of a warehouse, seemingly in the middle of an auction.

Qi Yun couldn't understand their excited chatter, but he could see their emotions were very high.

Finally, after a bidding war, the contents of the warehouse were bought by an older woman for 120,000 Rubles, Mendeleyev said.

Next was the blind box reveal. The woman eagerly took the key from the staff and opened the iron door of the warehouse.

As soon as the door opened, a somewhat musty smell hit everyone in the face. The warehouse was filled with boxes, all containing sweaters, knitwear, and similar clothing.

The old lady's previously excited expression instantly turned somber; clearly, the goods in this warehouse weren't particularly valuable.

The surrounding crowd let out a series of disappointed sighs, while some felt secretly relieved that they hadn't bid higher earlier.

The auctioneer also shook his head, leading the crowd to the next warehouse.

The warehouse door bore the number 68, mentioned in the information.

Qi Yun took out a cigarette and lit it, then said to Mendeleyev, "Help me bid on the items in this warehouse, anything below one million Rubles is fine."

Upon hearing this, Mendeleyev was slightly taken aback but seeing Qi Yun wasn't joking, he nodded and agreed, "No problem, if you want to play, let's indulge you a bit."

As soon as he finished speaking, bidding voices started rising from the crowd.

"Sixty-five thousand!"

"Seventy thousand!"

Mendeleyev followed Qi Yun's instructions and slowly increased the bid, "Eighty thousand!"

As the price continued to rise, some people gradually bowed out of the competition.

Yet, a man in sunglasses continued to challenge Mendeleyev.

"One hundred thousand!" shouted the man with sunglasses.

Mendeleyev kept bidding, "One hundred and ten thousand!"

The man with sunglasses seemed somewhat hesitant and bit his lip before shouting, "One hundred and twenty thousand!"

Mendeleyev glanced at him and said coolly, "One hundred and fifty thousand!"

With this, the man with sunglasses opted out, shaking his head helplessly.

Mendeleyev nodded at Qi Yun, who then paid up and received the key from the staff.

Once the warehouse door opened, several crates nailed with wooden planks came into view, the largest was about 1.5 meters high and 2 meters long.

Qi Yun knew this probably contained the Harley motorcycle.

The crowd couldn't help but inch closer out of curiosity, generally believing the contents were likely valuable enough to break even.

As the crates were opened, the items inside gradually came to light.

Aside from the expected Harley motorcycle, there were some parts and tools.

The motorcycle was covered with a thick layer of dust, with a unique design and sleek body lines, resembling those ridden by biker gangs in movies.

The crowd gasped in surprise, while those familiar with it immediately recognized its origin, excitedly inspecting the bike and muttering things Qi Yun couldn't understand.

"Your luck is really something," Mendeleyev smacked his lips, somewhat envious, then translated, "He said this Harley motorcycle was produced in 1970 and is of excellent quality."

Qi Yun smiled and replied, "Can you ask him if he's interested in buying it?"

Mendeleyev nodded and turned back to converse with the knowledgeable person.

The two of them exchanged in quick Russian dialogue, occasionally pointing to various parts of the motorcycle.

After a while, Mendeleyev turned to Qi Yun and said, "He says he likes the motorcycle a lot but doesn't have enough money to buy it."

"However, he knows some friends who are into motorcycles. He'll contact them now to see if anyone's willing to make an offer."

Qi Yun nodded and replied, "Alright, we'll wait for him for half an hour."

Upon hearing this, the man quickly took out his phone and stepped aside to call.

After about ten minutes, the man ran back excitedly, speaking rapidly to Mendeleyev.

Upon listening, Mendeleyev showed a surprised expression and turned to Qi Yun, saying, "He says the most they can offer is two million Rubles."

Qi Yun promptly shook his head in refusal, as two million Rubles converts to merely tens of thousands in RMB.

This motorcycle looks quite new. Even if it doesn't fetch the \$250,000 like some, it should still be worth two or three hundred thousand RMB.

The man, seeing no agreement, showed a trace of reluctance, circling the motorcycle again and engaging in further conversation with Mendeleyev.

"He says he can't determine the true condition of the bike yet, asking for your lowest selling price," Mendeleyev relayed.

Qi Yun pondered for a moment then replied, "Three million Rubles, I won't sell for less."

Mendeleyev translated his words to the man, who frowned slightly, showing a hint of hesitation.

He paced around a bit before taking out his phone again, conversing with someone on the line.

"Is this motorcycle really worth that much?" Peng Ge asked, approaching.

Qi Yun nodded, "Seems it's not cheap."

After a while, the man hung up and said a few words to Mendeleyev.

"He says three million is fine, but they need to transport the bike to a repair shop first to check if the engine is functioning properly. If there are issues, they'll have to renegotiate the price," Mendeleyev explained.

Qi Yun thought for a moment and agreed, saying it's best to deal with it locally, sparing him the trouble of transporting it back home.

Mendeleyev communicated another round with the counterparts, then called one of his own people to join the others.

Having secured the motorcycle, Qi Yun lost interest in watching further auctions, beckoning Mendeleyev to head towards the place where the munitions were buried.

Chapter 192: Excitement in Chen Wei's Eyes

The road conditions on this side of Tuva are absolutely terrible. Of the total one hundred kilometers or so, more than half are full of potholes. It took Qi Yun and his group over three hours to finally reach their destination.

After getting out of the car, Mendeleyev looked at the village in front of them, which had been abandoned for who knows how many years, and asked suspiciously, "Are you sure the coordinates are correct?"

Qi Yun nodded and pointed to the ruins of a two-story house ahead, saying, "The place he mentioned should be right over there."

With that said, he started to walk forward, but was suddenly stopped by Chen Wei beside him.

"What's up, Brother Wei?" Qi Yun asked quizzically.

Chen Wei looked at the ruins ahead, which were overgrown with weeds, with no traces of human habitation.

He explained in a deep voice, "Those collapsed houses were blown up; this place was most likely a battlefield before. Let me go ahead and check first; there might be landmines or things like that."

After hearing this, everyone's expressions became serious. They stopped walking and dared not move forward.

Qi Yun nodded and cautioned, "Be careful. If the situation seems off, we'll head back. Don't take any chances."

Chen Wei nodded slightly and walked towards the ruins, his footsteps light and his sharp eyes scanning around.

Fortunately, he didn't find anything unusual. After checking the house, he waved to the group, indicating it was safe.

Only then did Qi Yun and his group carry their folding shovels and head over.

"Brother Wei, is there anything dangerous around here?"

Chen Wei shook his head, "Not in this house, but it might be different in other places. Don't wander around."

Qi Yun breathed a sigh of relief and then asked, "If there are weapons buried down here, can we use a shovel to dig them out directly?"

"Yes," Chen Wei explained, "Military weapons and ammunition are usually stored in special wooden boxes, generally not dangerous."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun lowered his head and kicked the ground, realizing he couldn't move it at all.

The temperature in this region is very low, causing the soil to become extremely hard. Working in such a place is much more effortful than digging sand in the desert before.

Seeing this, Mendeleyev rolled up his sleeves, raised the folding shovel in his hand, and forcefully inserted it into the ground, then pried it up hard, flipping up a large chunk of earth.

He was tall and strong enough to dig like this.

Qi Yun and Brother Peng needed to use their feet to help move the soil.

"Let's dig a few shovels first to test it."

The group immediately started swinging their shovels, beginning to dig.

After a short while, everyone except Chen Wei had beads of sweat on their foreheads, which quickly froze in the cold air...

Peng Brother panted, gritting his teeth and saying, "This soil in this godforsaken place is really hard, harder to dig than stone!"

As he spoke, his shovel seemed to hit something hard, making a "clang" sound.

Peng Brother immediately felt a tightness in his heart and quickly said, "I think I hit something."

Upon hearing this, the others stopped their actions and gathered around.

Chen Wei squatted down and carefully cleaned the surrounding soil, revealing a corner of a somewhat moldy wooden box.

"Is this what we're looking for?" Mendeleyev frowned, showing a puzzled expression on his face.

Chen Wei didn't speak, focusing on clearing the surrounding soil with the shovel, as a rectangular wood box gradually emerged.

The surface of the box had some white symbols, but after such a long time, they were no longer legible, and parts of the wooden boards had already started to rot.

Chen Wei stared at the wooden box for a moment, then directly worked to pry open the lid.

Inside the box were neatly arranged, long items tightly wrapped in oil cloth, which had yellowed over time.

Chen Wei unwrapped one piece of oil cloth, revealing a black rifle to everyone's eyes.

"This is a Mosin-Nagant rifle; it was one of the main standard rifles during the Soviet period."

As he spoke, he took the gun in his hand, fiddled with it a bit, and skillfully operated the bolt action.

"It's preserved quite well and still usable."

Mendeleyev leaned over, squatted to examine the rifle in Chen Wei's hands closely, his face lighting up with a hint of an excited smile: "We really found it."

"Old Qi, how did your friend know there were weapons buried here?"

Qi Yun looked at him, amused but nonchalant, "What friend? We came here to hunt, and these weapons were discovered by accident."

Mendeleyev was slightly taken aback, then quickly understood, smiling awkwardly: "Yes, yes, hunting, hunting."

He naturally understood Qi Yun's meaning; it's best to know less about such sensitive topics, and some things shouldn't be casually spoken.

So when he reports to the people above, he'll say it was discovered by accident.

At this moment, Brother Peng interjected, "Regardless of how he knew, we've found the stuff now. This is quite an achievement, Old Men. When you connect with the bigwigs in the capital because of this, don't forget about us."

Mendeleyev stood up, patted Brother Peng's shoulder, and laughed, "Am I that kind of person?"

"Alright, let's continue digging while it's still daylight to see how much is buried down there." Qi Yun spoke up.

Upon hearing this, the others raised their shovels and started swinging away.

A few people continued digging for a while and gradually unearthed more than thirty wooden boxes.

Upon opening them, besides rifles, there were also ammunition, and even several boxes of grenades.

The guns were fine since they wouldn't go off accidentally, but the grenades made everyone except Chen Wei a bit apprehensive.

The group moved all the wooden boxes aside and stacked them neatly, then Qi Yun said to Mendeleyev, "There are quite a few items here, enough to make an impact. You can make the call now."

Mendeleyev nodded, took out his phone, and sat in the car to make a call.

He wasn't afraid the others would hear; it was just that the wind outside was quite strong.

Qi Yun could see through the car window the cautious look on Mendeleyev's face as he spoke. It seemed like he was really contacting some important figure.

Mendeleyev stayed in the car making the call for quite a while, his expression gradually changing from initial nervousness to a bit more composed.

Finally, he ended the call, pushed open the car door, and walked out.

"Did you get in touch? What did they say?" Brother Peng hurriedly asked.

Mendeleyev nodded, a relieved look on his face, "I got through. I told him we accidentally found a stash of weapons here. He's very interested and has already sent people over."

His wording was subtle, saying 'he's very interested' instead of 'he regards it as important' or something similar.

Qi Yun and Brother Peng exchanged a glance, both understanding the implication.

But it didn't really concern them, as long as the person on the other end benefited, it would be fine when push came to shove.

Qi Yun lit a cigarette, thought for a moment, and said, "Our identities aren't very convenient to reveal, right?"

Mendeleyev nodded in agreement, "It's good you're thinking ahead. Why don't you drive back first, and I'll notify a few other people to come over."

Qi Yun looked up at the heavy snow filling the sky, a bit uneasy about leaving him here alone.

"Why don't you warm up in the car first, and when your people are close, we'll leave."

Mendeleyev nodded, "Okay."

With that, they got back into the car. After starting the engine, a few minutes later, the heater finally began blowing warm air, gradually bringing sensation back to their numbed bodies.

"Are you sure your contact is reliable? They won't take the goods and then take you with them, will they?" Qi Yun asked, staring out the window.

Though he hadn't experienced such things before, he'd been around the block long enough to know how treacherous people could be, especially in a place as unstable as this.

Mendeleyev was slightly startled, his brow furrowing unconsciously. After a moment of silence, he shook his head and said, "No, I've worked with him before. Although it cost me a lot, he did solve the problem for me."

Qi Yun nodded in understanding, saying no more.

The other guy was a savvy veteran with his own judgment.

Just then, Brother Peng in the back seat suddenly exclaimed, "Damn! What is that?"

He stared wide-eyed ahead, disbelief written all over his face.

Following his gaze, the others saw a massive figure moving slowly through the vast snow ahead.

The figure was covered in brown fur and looked like a huge bear, at least two meters tall, with a weight likely around four to five hundred kilograms, exuding an intense pressure from afar.

Everyone's hearts leapt into their throats, eyes fixed on the brown bear approaching.

In this icy, snowy landscape, none of them expected to encounter such a dangerous creature.

"Should we drive away first?" Brother Peng suggested.

Mendeleyev shook his head, "These things can run up to 60 km/h. The car can't outrun it in this terrain, and it might provoke its hostility."

"They generally don't attack unless provoked. Let's just stay in the car."

As he spoke, he quickly turned off the engine, shut off the lights, then turned around and retrieved a hunting rifle from the side of the car seat.

Seeing this, Qi Yun's mind was filled with 'Damn!' Fighting spirit was indeed different, carrying such a thing casually.

In the back seat, Chen Wei remained calm, discreetly gripping a knife in his hand.

When Qi Yun turned his head, he distinctly saw a hint of excitement in the other's eyes.

With the rifle in hand, they felt a bit more at ease, but still didn't dare let their guard down.

They watched the brown bear closely, seeing it come closer with each step, each one landing heavily on their hearts.

The bear's eyes glimmered eerily in the snow, its nose sniffing the air occasionally as if discerning some scent.

The low growls from its mouth echoed through the silent snowfield, sending a chill down their spines.

As the bear drew closer, it finally stopped about five meters from the car, its head slightly lowered, with its forepaws uneasily pawing at the snow.

Seeing this, Mendeleyev muttered, "Not good."

"This is its action before attacking; the bear has caught our scent and might be very hungry."

With that, he gently rolled down the window, extended the barrel outside.

His finger on the trigger, eyes fixed intently on the bear ahead, ready to fire at any moment!

Chapter 193: The Disappeared Lao Men

The air inside the car seemed to have solidified, so oppressive it was almost suffocating.

Qi Yun and Brother Peng dared not even breathe, their eyes fixed intently on the grizzly bear ahead and the hunting rifle in Mendeleyev's hands, their hearts in their throats.

The next second, a vicious glint appeared in the bear's eyes; it suddenly rose up, let out a low growl, and charged rapidly towards the vehicle.

"Bang!"

A flash of fire, and the sharp crack of gunfire shattered the silence of the snowfield, as Mendeleyev fired the moment the grizzly began its charge.

No one could tell which part of the grizzly's body the bullet hit, but its massive body abruptly halted, its initial leap forward interrupted, stumbling back instead.

"Roar!"

The grizzly let out a deafening roar, echoing across the open snowfield, shaking the snow off the nearby trees.

It was hard to tell whether the roar was one of pain or anger.

But Mendeleyev didn't care about that; seeing that the creature hadn't gone down, he adjusted his firing stance and immediately pulled the trigger again.

"Bang!"

"Bang!"

Another series of gunshots rang out.

Perhaps it was because of the poor visibility at night that Mendeleyev didn't hit the vital spots, or perhaps the grizzly's thick hide and flesh were just too resilient.

Despite emptying five rounds, the bear's body only trembled violently, yet it stubbornly refused to collapse.

It howled at the sky, the force of its voice rolling through the air, making their eardrums ache.

Mendeleyev's arm trembled slightly from the rifle's recoil as he swiftly retracted his body from the window to reload.

At that moment, Chen Wei suddenly opened the car door, leaving a quick "Stay in the car!" before swiftly getting out.

This action shocked the three people in the car.

Qi Yun's heart tightened, the word "don't" stuck in his throat as he saw Chen Wei's figure reach the front of the car.

Just as Chen Wei gripped his knife, ready to leap forward, the grizzly suddenly turned its body, limping away in retreat.

Chen Wei was taken aback; it ran?

The battle intent he had been building up dissipated instantly, his initially tense body relaxing somewhat, but he maintained his vigilance, tightly gripping the knife and watching the grizzly's retreating figure to prevent it from making a sudden return.

Qi Yun and the others snapped back to their senses and quickly opened the car door to approach the scene.

Brother Peng looked at the sparse blood trails on the snow, clicked his tongue, and turned to the imposing Mendeleyev with the hunting gun, joking, "Old Men, a master at outlining human figures, are you?"

Mendeleyev laughed awkwardly, feeling a bit embarrassed, "Haven't shot in a long time, my marksmanship's a bit rusty..."

Qi Yun didn't pay attention to that, patting Chen Wei's shoulder, sighing, "Brother Wei, don't take such risks next time."

Chen Wei nodded slightly, "Don't worry, I know what I'm doing."

Seeing this, Qi Yun said no more, knowing the other had confidence because of his skills.

Suddenly, a beam of white light appeared in the distance, accompanied by the roar of a car engine, getting closer.

"Should be my men arriving," Mendeleyev said.

Soon, an off-road vehicle pulled up beside them.

The car door opened, and two burly men stepped out of the vehicle.

"****"

After Mendeleyev gave some instructions to the two, they returned to the car.

"You guys can take my car and head back to the city first, we'll wait here."

Qi Yun nodded at this and asked, "When will the other people arrive?"

Mendeleyev checked the time on his phone, "Should be another two hours."

"Alright, be careful." Qi Yun patted him on the arm, advising, "Let us know when it's done."

Mendeleyev gave a reassuring smile, "Don't worry." With that, he handed over the car keys.

Qi Yun took the keys, looking at Chen Wei and Brother Peng, "Then let's go first, leave this side to him."

...

After another three hours of rough travel, they could vaguely see the city lights ahead.

Qi Yun frowned, turning to Brother Peng, "Brother Peng, try contacting Mendeleyev; theoretically, they should have arrived."

Brother Peng nodded, pulling out his phone and dialing Mendeleyev's number.

However, only a busy tone came from the other end, unable to get through.

Seeing the full signal bars on the screen, Brother Peng frowned, tried again, but with the same result.

"Can't get through to him," Brother Peng said to Qi Yun as he kept trying.

Hearing this, Qi Yun felt a surge of unease.

Based on Mendeleyev's previous comments, he seemed to have some trust in that person from the capital. Surely the other party wouldn't do something like backstabbing, would they?

However, Qi Yun had little contact with people from the Big Goose, so he wasn't sure of their ways...

"Perhaps they're on their way back; I remember there's a stretch of road with no signal." Brother Peng suggested with a frown.

Qi Yun pondered for a moment, then sighed, "Let's hope that's the case."

For now, they could only pin their hopes on this reasoning, since they didn't even know who the other party was; even if Mendeleyev was indeed taken away, they didn't seem to have a move.

Before long, the car stopped at the hotel entrance, and the three returned to their room.

Brother Peng continued trying to call Mendeleyev, and Qi Yun also tried several times, all to no avail.

Another twenty minutes had passed since earlier. Even if they had been crossing the no-signal stretch, they should have been reachable by now.

The outcome was quite clear.

"Old Men probably ran into trouble!"

"Should we go back and take a look?" Brother Peng suggested.

Qi Yun didn't answer immediately. He stood up, walked over to the window, lit a cigarette, and after thinking for a while, he said, "We're not fit to show up; if the other party did take Mendeleyev away, the only reason I can think of is they're worried about the arms shipment news leaking."

"We still know nothing about the situation; rushing back could not only fail to help but also put us in danger, giving the other party a chance to wipe us out."

Brother Peng frowned, scratching his head, thinking of a plan.

It was then that Chen Wei, who had been silent, spoke up.

"Let me go alone. I'll park the car far away; there's a forest over there. I'll walk through the woods. Even if they're still on the scene, they won't notice me."

Hearing this, Qi Yun thought for a moment, then nodded, "Alright, Brother Wei, take a trip. Be sure to stay safe, don't force it."

"Peng and I will try to contact Mendeleyev's wife, see if we can get some information, and maybe get in touch with the other two."

Chen Wei nodded slightly, "Don't worry."

With the plan set, the three immediately began to act.

Chen Wei turned Mendeleyev's Wrangler around back, while Qi Yun and Brother Peng rented a car from the hotel and headed straight for the KTV they had visited earlier in the day.

It was already half past midnight; the supermarket must have closed by now, so they could only try their luck here, hoping the people in charge could connect them to Mendeleyev's wife.

Chapter 194: Powerful Connections

Fortunately, the result didn't disappoint the two of them.

After Qi Yun met the KTV manager, he immediately used his phone to translate his intentions clearly.

The manager had seen him during the day, so he didn't doubt much and promptly took the two to Mendeleyev's place.

Mendeleyev lived in an apartment complex in the city center, and with the manager leading the way, the three arrived at an apartment building a little over ten minutes later.

"It's the one with the lights on," the manager said, pointing to a window on the fourth floor.

The three of them went upstairs, and the manager raised his hand to knock on the door.

After a short while, the door opened slowly, revealing the face of a woman.

The woman had a physique that matched Mendeleyev's well; she was also tall and sturdy, estimated to be about five foot nine.

The manager jabbered away with the woman for a few moments and then took Qi Yun's phone and translated, "She's the boss's lover, Katusha, and she's been waiting for him to come back."

Qi Yun nodded slightly, quickly took the phone back, and said, "Katusha, we're friends of Mendeleyev. We can't reach him right now, and we're very concerned about his safety. We hope to learn some information from you to see if we can find him."

Upon hearing the translation, Katusha's already haggard face was instantly filled with panic. She hurriedly asked, "What happened to him?"

Qi Yun shook his head, "It's hard to explain in a sentence or two. I'll tell you later. But right now, I need to ask you some questions, so please tell me everything you know."

At his words, Katusha bit her lip, tears welling up in her eyes as she said tremblingly, "Alright, please come in first."

As she spoke, she stepped aside to let them in.

Once seated on the sofa, Qi Yun straightforwardly asked, "He has two henchmen, very tall and sturdy. One of them has a scar on his forehead. Do you know them?"

"Yes, I know them. The two brothers are responsible for delivering liquor to the KTV," the manager replied after listening.

Hearing this, Qi Yun hurriedly continued, "Can you call them now and see if you can get in touch? Mendeleyev is with them."

After hearing the translation, the manager quickly took out his phone, found their number, and dialed it.

However, the call also couldn't get through...

Seeing this, Qi Yun's heart sank instantly, confirming that Mendeleyev and his group had definitely encountered some kind of mishap.

After a moment of thought, he spoke again, "Do you know about Mendeleyev's connections in the capital? Does he know any big shots?"

The two exchanged glances after hearing this and both shook their heads.

The room fell into a silence, and Katusha, worried about her man's safety, couldn't help but let tears flow down her cheeks.

After a long pause, she seemed to suddenly recall something, raised her head to look at Qi Yun, and said, "He never talks about business at home, but his cousin helps him manage his business in the capital. He might know something."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun's eyes sparkled with hope again, quickly saying, "Please contact him right now."

Katusha nodded, took out her phone, and made a call to her cousin.

After some communication, she turned to Qi Yun, "He says Mendeleyev knows some people in the capital, but he's not sure who exactly you're asking about."

Qi Yun gestured for her to place her phone on the coffee table, then put it on speaker, and picked up his phone to translate.

"Mendeleyev told me that last time when he went to that person for help, he paid a high price, and the person finally helped him solve the issue, so they must be quite influential."

After hearing this, the person on the other end of the call paused for a while before answering, "Yes, there was such an incident. Last time, we had a conflict with a businessman over business matters, and behind that businessman was actually the leader of the Zuohe District."

"Later, my cousin found someone to connect us and paid a price of 40 million US dollars to get the number three in the capital to step in and completely resolve the matter."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun was momentarily daunted. It was likely that this was the third top guy.

Although he had known in advance that the person was influential, he hadn't expected them to be this powerful.

Even though Tuva was a small country with a small population, the power of a number three in the capital shouldn't be underestimated. Coming after common folks like them would be effortless.

"I understand the situation. I need to think this through carefully. I might need your cooperation later. Wait for my call."

"OK!" The person listened and hung up without asking further.

Qi Yun looked up at the manager again and said, "I need you to find me a Chinese-speaking translator first thing tomorrow morning. Have them come to this hotel to find me. Price is no issue." With that, he found the hotel he was staying at on the map and showed it to the manager.

Constantly using phone translation was indeed quite tiring.

The manager hastily agreed after hearing him, "Alright."

"Alright, you can go back now. I have a few words to say to Katusha alone."

The manager nodded without saying much and stood up to leave.

After the manager left, Qi Yun spoke to Katusha, "We're friends of Mendeleyev from China. He invited us over this time..."

He told her everything, including the arms deal, without holding back.

After all, she was Mendeleyev's wife, and in this situation, she had the right to know what was going on.

Katusha listened with furrowed brows, her hands unconsciously gripping the hem of her clothes.

After hearing everything, her eyes reddened and with a sobbing voice she asked, "What should we do now? I can't lose him."

Qi Yun took a deep breath, trying hard to make his tone sound calm: "Katusha, we will definitely find a way to locate him, I have another friend who's already returned to the scene to look for clues."

Katusha nodded helplessly, unable to stop the tears at the corners of her eyes.

Just then, Qi Yun's phone on the coffee table rang, displaying Chen Wei's name on the screen.

He hurriedly grabbed the phone, eagerly asking, "Brother Wei, how is it? Did you find anything?"

On the other end, Chen Wei's voice carried a bit of weight: "Apart from the tracks of our two vehicles, there are other tire marks at the scene, confirming that someone else came after we left."

"All the arms have been moved."

"There's no sign of a struggle or fight at the scene, either they left voluntarily with the other party, or they were coerced."

Chen Wei briefly described the situation at the scene.

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun's expression turned graver, leaning more towards the latter conjecture of abduction, because if Mendeleyev had left voluntarily, he wouldn't lose contact; he would definitely notify us.

"Okay, I got it, Brother Wei, come back first."

"Alright."

After hanging up, Qi Yun took a deep breath and turned to Katusha, saying, "It's certain Mendeleyev was taken, now I think you should go and report this to the police immediately."

"Would reporting to the police help? That person isn't from the capital..." Katusha raised her head, eyes full of tears.

Qi Yun shook his head, interrupting: "Regardless if it helps or not, you should report it first, but don't mention us to the police, including the person from the capital, and certainly not the arms deal, just say..."

If it weren't for the involvement of arms in this matter, and the inconvenient identities of the three, he would have reported to the police as soon as they returned to the city.

Currently, there's no evidence proving that Mendeleyev was indeed taken by the third-ranking official from the capital; everything is inferred based on circumstances here.

Even if he was taken by them, he still needs to probe their intentions, see what exactly they want.

Hence, he needs a plausible excuse.

For instance, the senator's cousin receives a midnight call from his cousin's wife knowing his cousin was missing, then finds the third-ranking official the next day to ask him to help investigate the matter.

Otherwise, if you directly approach to question, even a fool would guess that you must be aware of Mendeleyev's dealings with them; otherwise, why would you come directly?

After carefully instructing Katusha, Qi Yun drove her to the entrance of the police station, letting her go in alone to report the case.

Once she got out of the car, Peng pulled out a cigarette, offering it, asking, "Do people here really conduct affairs with such little integrity?"

Qi Yun lit the cigarette, took a deep puff, and frowned, "I can't figure it out right now, something just feels off."

Peng inquired further, "What seems off?"

Qi Yun thought for a moment, then slowly said, "Since Mendeleyev took the initiative to inform the other party about the arms, it proves he certainly wouldn't leak this information to others, otherwise, he'd just be courting trouble."

"The other party surely understands that logic."

"And even if he wanted to prevent the leak of information, taking the person directly complicates things; he's a high official, handling an ordinary merchant shouldn't be difficult, right?"

"If it were me, I definitely wouldn't do that; someone who reaches such a position surely isn't foolish."

"So, I feel something is strange about this..."

Peng nodded in agreement, pondering aloud, "It is indeed so."

Qi Yun let out a long puff of smoke, extinguished the cigarette, and as he thought, a light screen appeared before him.

He murmured to himself, hoping for information about old Mendeleyev...

[Current Intelligence Points: 1]

[Today's Intelligence 1 (Red): Two smugglers have purchased a batch of bear paws, planning to smuggle them to Finland, currently staying at room 201, Tenaaya Hotel in the capital]

Not in the mood for other matters, Qi Yun directly skipped.

[Today's Intelligence 2 (Blue): Due to the continued economic sanctions from the EU and the US, Tuva's agri-material merchant plans to raise fertilizer prices by 10 points again in two days]

Seems profitable, a blue intelligence item, but not what he wants at the moment...

[Today's Intelligence 3 (Blue): Yushenkov, an official from the capital, hid one million US Dollar cash last night at his secret location, the address is Manske Apartment 2-301 on Central Street, also hiding a ledger there]

"Sigh~"

Qi Yun sighed, still no intelligence regarding Mendeleyev.

Previously, he heard from Mendeleyev's cousin that the third-ranking official in the capital is named Nokovic, not Yushenkov.

Otherwise, he could really utilize this intelligence well...

Chapter 195: Are You Teaching Me How to Do My Job?

A little over an hour later, Katusha came out of the police station.

Once inside the car, she took out her phone, translated a message, and handed it to Qi Yun, then looked at him expectantly.

"I followed your instructions. My husband will be alright, right?"

Qi Yun nodded at her reassuringly, "I'll do my best to find him. Let's get you home first."

...

The next day, the manager of the KTV arrived at the hotel early with a bearded translator.

Qi Yun exchanged a few words with the bearded man. Although his Chinese accent was somewhat odd, it was understandable and passable, so they drove straight to the capital.

On the way, he had already contacted Mendeleyev's cousin, agreeing to meet outside the government building.

After a two-hour drive, the group finally arrived in the capital.

In terms of infrastructure and population, this place far exceeded Tashtagol, and the streets were bustling.

Outside the government building, just as Qi Yun stopped the car, a thirty-something man ran over. It was Mendeleyev's cousin, Griff.

With the translator, their conversation became much smoother. Qi Yun told Griff to find the third official and probe him.

He had even thought of the dialogue in advance; Griff just needed to repeat it.

Griff was no novice. Although he didn't fully understand the whole situation, he vaguely sensed something was amiss.

But for his cousin's safety, he didn't ask much, agreeing to do as Qi Yun said, then got off the car and headed toward the building.

Watching Griff's departing figure, Brother Peng worriedly said, "Won't he be held too?"

Qi Yun shook his head and replied, "It's broad daylight, and that man is just a third official; he can't cover everything on his own."

"Moreover, Griff doesn't know about that incident; he poses no threat to that man."

After hearing this, Brother Peng nodded silently and didn't say more.

Meanwhile, in front of the government building, Griff adjusted his clothes, took a deep breath to calm himself, then stepped into the lobby.

The third official couldn't be seen just like that; an appointment needed to be made, depending on whether he was willing to meet.

So after Griff explained his purpose to the secretary, she asked him to wait outside, and he waited for over two hours.

Sitting restlessly, Griff realized he had to think of something; otherwise, he probably wouldn't be able to meet Nokovic.

After pondering for a while, he went to the stairwell, took out his phone, and gave instructions to the person on the other end.

About half an hour later, a young man hurriedly found him and handed over a folder.

Griff took it, opened it, and inside was an envelope containing five thousand US Dollars in cash.

He nodded to signal his subordinate to leave first, then took the folder to find the secretary once more.

Inside, the secretary was on a call and showed displeasure when Griff came in rudely interrupting again.

Griff, with a fawning face, put the folder on her desk and tapped it lightly twice.

The secretary immediately understood, hung up the phone, and opened the folder halfway. When she saw the pile of USD, an unmistakable greed flashed in her eyes.

She discreetly closed the folder, looked at Griff, and her attitude wasn't as cold as before.

"Mr. Nokovic is currently handling documents. I'll report in ten minutes, but I can't guarantee whether he'll meet you."

Griff hurriedly nodded, smiling broadly, "Of course, thank you very much."

"Please remember to tell Mr. Nokovic that I'm Mendeleyev's cousin."

The secretary nodded, gesturing for him to wait outside.

A few minutes later, the secretary went to an office door, listened for sounds, then knocked and entered.

Inside the office, a well-dressed man in his forties was leaning back in his chair, sending messages.

The secretary took a couple of steps forward and said, "Mr. Nokovic, there's a man named Griff outside who wishes to visit you; he's been waiting for three hours. Should I let him in?"

Nokovic shook his head, "I don't know him; let him go."

"Alright," the secretary nodded, turning to leave, then adding, "By the way, he said he's Mendeleyev's cousin."

Nokovic paused mid-tap on the screen, his eyes sharpening instantly upon hearing "Mendeleyev."

He put down his phone, sat up straight, and his expression became serious.

"Wait, did you say he's Mendeleyev's cousin?" Nokovic asked again.

"Yes, sir," the secretary replied respectfully.

Nokovic thought for a moment, then changed his mind, "Let him in."

The secretary acknowledged and turned to go.

Soon, Griff was led into Nokovic's office.

Upon entering, he slightly bowed, with a habitual fawning smile, saying, "Mr. Nokovic, hello. Thank you so much for seeing me."

Nokovic reclined in his large leather chair, silent, his sharp gaze fixed on Griff as though trying to see through him.

After a moment, he slowly spoke, "Go ahead, what's your business with me?"

Griff took a deep breath and awkwardly started, "Mr. Nokovic, I've come this time seeking your help."

"My cousin Mendeleyev disappeared yesterday, and there's still no news. We've already reported it to the police, but the local police station didn't take it seriously and only sent two people to search."

"I know you have great influence, so I want to ask you to help find my cousin. Rest assured, I..."

"Your cousin is missing!?" Griff's words were interrupted.

Nokovic's eyes narrowed, his hands pressed on the table, leaning forward, staring at him intently, and asked again, "Where did he disappear!?"

Griff was a bit bewildered by the sudden reaction but quickly remembered Qi Yun's instructions, answering while unobtrusively observing the other's expression.

"He heard yesterday that there were brown bears appearing on the west of Tashtagol, so he took two people there to hunt, then there was no contact. The phone calls to the two people with him also didn't go through. Last night we just..."

After listening, Nokovic's face gradually turned somber. He lit a cigarette, leaned back on his chair without speaking, his right hand's Dupont lighter lightly tapping the table.

Seeing this, Griff didn't make a sound and just stood silently.

After Nokovic's cigarette burned out, he snapped out of his thoughts and waved a hand at Griff, saying, "You go back first. I'll send people to look into Mendeleyev's matter."

Griff tensed up inside; although unclear on specific details, he sensed something odd about Nokovic's attitude, as if he was particularly... surprised about his cousin's disappearance?

He hesitated for a moment, then bravely said, "Mr. Nokovic, please make sure to send more people to help find my cousin, over in Tashtagol..."

Nokovic looked up, a trace of displeasure flashing in his eyes, and coldly said, "Are you teaching me how to do things? I said I'd send people to search, why are you nagging?"

Griff shrunk his neck, quickly waved his hands with a face full of forced smiles, "No, no, Mr. Nokovic, I definitely didn't mean that."

"I'm just too worried about my cousin, anxious for a moment, please don't take it to heart, I'll take my leave now."

Finishing, Griff cautiously exited the office, gently closing the door behind him.

Once he left the office, he quickened his pace, swiftly heading to the car to meet up with Qi Yun.

"Everything's done."

"Tell me the detailed process from when you met him."

Griff steadied himself, starting to recount in detail, "When I first entered his office..."

After listening, Qi Yun's brow furrowed into a knot, thinking for a moment before asking, "You mean, he acted very strangely upon hearing about Mendeleyev's disappearance?"

Griff nodded heavily, responding with certainty, "That's right, even when I brought up the reward, he didn't seem too concerned."

Brother Peng also looked puzzled upon hearing this and interjected, "What's this old fox up to? Putting on a show for him?"

Qi Yun shook his head and slowly said, "If he wanted to hide something, he wouldn't act this way; perhaps we're mistaken, and Mendeleyev wasn't taken by his people."

Brother Peng frowned, pondering for a while, then nodded in agreement, "That seems right, his behavior is indeed strange."

"But about what happened yesterday, only he and us know. If not his people, then who else could it be?"

Qi Yun lit a cigarette, took a deep puff, and replied, "We need to go ask him, I have a feeling he might know something."

"You mean we should go see him?" Brother Peng asked in surprise.

Qi Yun nodded, "That's right, we know too little. We don't know Old Mendeleyev's current situation, we must talk to him face-to-face."

Brother Peng hesitated, "Shouldn't we let Griff handle it? Us going directly might not be appropriate."

Qi Yun glanced at Griff, slowly shook his head, "The fewer people who know about this, the better. Otherwise, the other side will be uneasy. I'll go; you guys wait for me in the car."

"I'll go with you," Chen Wei, who had been silent, suddenly said.

Qi Yun smiled at him, "No problem, Brother Wei. Just with our household registration, the other side wouldn't dare do anything to me, especially during broad daylight."

Brother Peng also patted his shoulder, "He's right, let him go."

Chen Wei, upon hearing this, silently nodded, not saying more.

Although Griff didn't understand what the few were talking about, seeing Qi Yun heading towards the government building, he instantly understood what he was up to.

He hurriedly got out of the car and quickly followed, speaking a few words in rapid succession.

Seeing he didn't understand, Griff then motioned to the translator in the car, and the bearded translator hurriedly got out and jogged over.

"Are you going to see Nokovic?" the translator asked Qi Yun.

Qi Yun nodded, "Yes, I'll talk with him; he might know something about your cousin."

"I'll take you, otherwise you might not be able to see him."

Qi Yun was momentarily stunned, almost having forgotten about this detail...

...

Inside the office, Nokovic looked somewhat surprised at the Chinese person before him.

Griff stepped forward to introduce, "Mr. Nokovic, this is my cousin's friend from China. He says he has some news about my cousin and wants to tell you."

Nokovic furrowed his brows, sizing up Qi Yun, then nodded, pointing to the sofa in front.

Qi Yun patted Griff's arm, signaling him to wait outside, then went over to sit on the sofa.

Due to the sensitivity involving arms dealing, Qi Yun hadn't brought their bearded translator along.

Just as he was about to ask if Nokovic spoke English, the latter spoke first.

"What do you have to tell me?" Nokovic asked, speaking fluent Chinese.

Chapter 196: Saving Private Mendeleyev

Nokovic's accent was completely different from Mendeleyev's, lacking that strong Northeast inflection, and his pronunciation was precise.

Qi Yun gave the other person a slightly surprised look, then immediately got to the point.

"Mr. Nokovic, before we begin our conversation, I'd like to ask you a question first."

Nokovic nodded lightly, "Go ahead."

"I want to know if it was someone you sent who took Mendeleyev." Qi Yun didn't beat around the bush; he needed to confirm his suspicion first.

Upon hearing this, Nokovic was slightly taken aback, his hand that had been playing with the lighter paused too. He stared at Qi Yun for two seconds, then said calmly, "Seems like you know quite a bit."

Qi Yun's lips curled up slightly, not quite a smile as he awaited the other's response.

"He wasn't taken by my people; by the time my men arrived at the scene, they didn't so much as see his shadow," Nokovic answered.

As expected.

Qi Yun thought to himself, since Mendeleyev wasn't taken by them, it at least indicated that they were not enemies.

So he didn't hold back, explaining the situation at the scene to the other person, only replacing Peng Ge and Chen Wei with Mendeleyev's two subordinates.

After hearing this, Nokovic frowned deeply, looking sharply at Qi Yun again to confirm, "Can you be sure that Mendeleyev didn't tell anyone else about that batch of arms?"

Qi Yun nodded seriously, and with certainty in his voice, said, "Absolutely not, he only called you."

Nokovic leaned back into his chair, his fingers rhythmically tapping the armrest, his eyes deep, seemingly pondering something.

The air in the room seemed to have frozen until only the occasional soft click of the lighter being pressed could be heard.

After a long moment, he picked up the phone on the table and dialed a number.

"Gather everyone who knew about last night's incident; someone has leaked the information."

"You have an hour to find out the truth."

With that, he hung up the phone, and silence fell over the room again, with Qi Yun quietly waiting without saying a word.

Time passed, and it was unclear how long it had been before Nokovic's phone rang at last.

He picked up the phone, listening to the report from the other end, his face gradually growing somber. He hung up without saying a word.

"The information was leaked by someone I sent. That batch of arms and Mendeleyev were probably taken by my political rival."

Political rival?

Qi Yun's face also turned very grim; he never imagined that this matter would end up involving political rivalry.

After a moment of contemplation, he tentatively asked, "Mr. Nokovic, would it be possible to negotiate with the other side to release him? I could offer a certain amount of money as an exchange."

Nokovic shook his head helplessly, sighed lightly, "The head of the capital is about to retire, and Yushenkov is competing with me for this position. His target is not money."

Upon hearing the name "Yushenkov," Qi Yun immediately sat up straight, his pupils suddenly dilated, with an astonished expression on his face.

"You just said the other party is called Yushenkov!?"

Seeing his reaction, Nokovic looked puzzled and curiously asked, "Do you know him?"

Qi Yun smacked his lips, silently thinking that he had unexpectedly found a lead when there seemed to be none—the protagonist of last night's intelligence was indeed called Yushenkov.

He carefully considered his words and spoke slowly, "I have a very confidential piece of information about Yushenkov, but I'm not sure if the Yushenkov I'm referring to is the same as the one you mentioned."

On hearing this, Nokovic curiously asked, "What information? Tell me."

Qi Yun did not hold back, disclosing Yushenkov's secret base and the fact that it contained USD and ledgers to the other person.

After listening, Nokovic's gaze instantly turned sharp, he leaned forward slightly, and his eyes locked tightly on Qi Yun.

"Is everything you said true!?"

Qi Yun nodded and replied, "You can send someone to verify it; I wouldn't risk my friend's safety."

Upon seeing this, Nokovic no longer doubted and immediately picked up his phone to give some instructions to the person on the other end.

After hanging up, Nokovic leaned back in his chair with his eyes partially closed, seemingly contemplating the next steps.

More than an hour passed, and the phone on the table rang again. After reading the message, Nokovic's eyes sparkled.

Qi Yun discreetly observed him, and seeing him in this state, he understood that the two Yushenkovs were likely the same person.

After setting down his phone, Nokovic looked at Qi Yun with eyes full of curiosity. His tone had noticeably changed from before: "May I ask for your name?"

"My name is Qi Yun."

Nokovic nodded and continued, "Mr. Qi Yun, my people did indeed find what you mentioned at that location. Rest assured, I will rescue Mendeleyev as soon as possible."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun felt a bit more relieved.

In Nokovic's tone, Qi Yun could tell that the contents of the ledger must hold crucial evidence against Yushenkov, and the other party was bound to make a compromise.

"Mr. Qi Yun, I wonder if you're free this evening? I'd like to invite you for a meal."

"To be honest, I actually studied in China many years ago; it's like my second home. So hearing you speak Chinese makes me feel very close, and I'd like to chat more with you." Nokovic's face bore a gentle smile, and at this moment, there was not a trace of airs about him.

Joking aside, Yushenkov is the second-in-command of the capital, with a rank higher than even his. For someone to have information on such a person, they must have considerable power behind them.

If they can uncover Yushenkov's secrets, then my own secrets...

Qi Yun, being an old fox, knew why the other's attitude had changed. He pondered, "Mr. Nokovic, there's no rush for the meal; I still hope to see my friend Mendeleyev first."

Nokovic nodded slightly, his smile unwavering, "Mr. Qi Yun, I completely understand your feelings. Mendeleyev is also a friend of mine, and I am concerned for his safety as well."

"Rest assured, I will find a way to get him back."

Qi Yun nodded, stood up, and said goodbye, "Thanks to Mr. Nokovic, I won't disturb you from your work. Please contact me if there's any news."

Nokovic also stood up, "Mr. Qi Yun, you're too polite. This is what I should do. You should go back and rest. I will notify you immediately with any news."

After speaking, he accompanied Qi Yun to the elevator. Only after the elevator doors closed did his smile fade.

...

Back in the car, Qi Yun asked the bearded translator to buy him a pack of cigarettes, then recounted the situation to Brother Peng and the others, skipping over the information about Yushenkov.

Brother Peng was stunned upon hearing this and hesitated, "Will Yushenkov really release him?"

Qi Yun exhaled a smoke ring and sighed, "I think he will. Political matters are all about the exchange of interests, and Nokovic's stance is very clear. We just have to wait for news."

Brother Peng nodded and said no more.

After the bearded translator returned with the cigarettes, they drove to Griff's office to wait for news.

Time seemed to drag on. Two hours passed, and there was still no news from Nokovic.

Qi Yun sat on the sofa, his fingers tapping the armrest unconsciously, his face expressionless.

Griff paced back and forth in the office, looking visibly tense and worried.

Brother Peng chain-smoked one cigarette after another...

Outside, the sky gradually darkened. Qi Yun glanced at the time—it was already seven in the evening, four hours since he had left Nokovic's office.

Qi Yun pulled out his phone, intending to contact the other party to ask about progress.

Just then, Nokovic's call came in.

Qi Yun's heart tightened and he quickly answered the call, "Mr. Nokovic, how's it going?"

Nokovic's voice came from the other end, and he said with a laugh, "Mr. Qi Yun, I've just met up with Mendeleyev."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun couldn't help but show a joyful expression, nodding to the others in the room.

Brother Peng and Griff immediately understood his expression, their faces also lighting up with surprise and joy.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Nokovic. How is Mendeleyev? Is he hurt?" Qi Yun continued to ask.

"No need to thank me, Mr. Qi Yun. I'll hand the phone to him so he can tell you himself."

After a couple of seconds, Mendeleyev's booming voice came from the other end, "Hey, Old Qi."

Hearing this energetic voice, Qi Yun felt completely at ease and asked, "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine, no need to worry," Mendeleyev chuckled.

"Where are you now? Should we come pick you up?"

There was a pause on the other end before he replied, "Mr. Nokovic said he wants to invite us to dinner tonight as an apology. What do you think?"

Qi Yun thought for a moment, then nodded in agreement, "Alright, we'll be there."

He would not refuse. The initial goal was to establish a connection with the other side. Although it had been quite an ordeal, the goal was ultimately achieved without incident.

...

At the dinner table, Nokovic first sincerely apologized to Mendeleyev, and then Mendeleyev graciously thanked him for his rescue.

Although he was unsure why the other's attitude was so warm, he knew it must be related to Qi Yun and the others.

After several rounds of drinks, Nokovic's tongue loosened, and he began to talk about his political ambitions and future plans for the capital.

He also mentioned that they were all friends now, and they could come to him with any issues in the capital.

However, they took this as mere courtesy. Real attempts to foster closer ties would still require mutual interests.

Taking the opportunity to use the restroom, Mendeleyev called his cousin aside, first learning from him about the past few days, then whispering a few instructions.

The cousin nodded and quickly left.

"By the way, I didn't catch what line of work you're in, Mr. Qi Yun?" Nokovic raised his glass and asked.

Qi Yun knew the man was probing for his background, but he maintained a composed smile and replied leisurely, "Mr. Nokovic, you're too polite, I'm just an ordinary businessman in China."

Upon hearing this, Nokovic smirked as he looked at Qi Yun, with a hint of disbelief in his gaze.

The more he spoke like this, the more Nokovic suspected that his identity was anything but simple—how could an ordinary businessman have such inside information?

But seeing that Qi Yun was unwilling to reveal more, he decided not to press further, "Mr. Qi Yun, you are too modest. I hope we can collaborate more in the future."

Chapter 197: I'll Even Give You a Back Massage!

After a round of toasting, Nokovic received a call and had something to handle temporarily, so he apologetically explained to Qi Yun and left first.

Seeing this, Mendeleyev quickly got up and followed Nokovic outside, quietly handing over a briefcase.

Nokovic didn't refuse, a meaningful smile on his lips as he gently patted Mendeleyev's shoulder, signaling his approval of their future collaboration.

With the outsiders gone, the few remaining people felt free to speak more openly. Mendeleyev raised his glass and downed it in one gulp before recounting the events of last night.

It turned out that shortly after Qi Yun and the others left, several cars arrived at the scene. Mendeleyev thought they were sent by Nokovic and didn't put up any defense.

However, seven or eight people got out of the cars and, without a word, detained them.

Mendeleyev wanted to resist initially, but faced with the trained henchmen, he and his two associates stood no chance and could only temporarily submit.

They were taken to a courtyard on the outskirts of the capital and kept there until noon today when someone came to interrogate them, asking who they'd sold the arms to.

Mendeleyev noticed a camera on the chest of the person interrogating them and thought they were sent by Nokovic to test him, so he said nothing, and his two associates knew nothing anyway.

Just as they were about to be beaten, the person in charge of the interrogation suddenly received a call, then stuffed them into a car and dumped them on the street, after which Nokovic's people picked them up.

He'd already found out from his cousin what was going on. Those who grabbed him weren't sent by Nokovic, so thinking back on it now, he couldn't help but feel a bit frightened.

If Qi Yun hadn't exerted influence outside to rescue him, he might have ended up with serious injuries...

"Old Qi, no need to thank me with words. From now on, I'm willing to go through fire and water for you, even give you a back rub if needed!"

Qi Yun smiled gently, "Looks like you didn't really suffer that much."

Mendeleyev sighed, "This time was genuinely unlucky; I never thought I'd get involved in that kind of power struggle."

"But it's a blessing in disguise. From now on, we're fully connected with Nokovic, and we should be able to enter the capital's market freely without anyone daring to cause trouble."

Brother Peng frowned upon hearing this, "That guy Yushenkov, will he hold a grudge against you?"

Mendeleyev shook his head, "While we were in the car, Nokovic mentioned this and told me not to worry. I guess they've reached some sort of agreement."

Qi Yun nodded in response. At such a level of conflict, if both parties get what they want, it's unlikely they'll fight to the death.

"By the way, Old Men, do you know anyone in the fertilizer business?"

"Fertilizer?" Mendeleyev looked surprised and asked suspiciously, "You want to get into that? I have a friend in agricultural supplies, but the market hasn't been good lately."

Qi Yun took a puff of his cigarette and didn't continue, "Let's talk about it tomorrow. Are we heading back to Tashtagol tonight? Your wife must be worried sick by now."

Mendeleyev laughed, "Let's go back. I called her earlier; she won't be reassured until she sees me in person."

That night, they set off on their journey back to Tashtagol.

When they arrived at the hotel, it was already past one in the morning.

Tired after a day of tense nerves, Qi Yun took a quick shower before falling into a deep sleep on the bed.

The next morning, Mendeleyev appeared at his room door, bright and early, holding a small bag.

After entering the room, he opened the bag and handed it to Qi Yun, saying, "This is from my wife as a thank you."

Curious, Qi Yun looked into the bag and saw a hand-woven wool scarf of good quality, though its color was a bit... too bright.

"Should I wear this?"

Mendeleyev laughed heartily, patting his shoulder, "No one's asking you to wear it. Give it to your woman."

Qi Yun smiled and nodded, taking the bag, "Thank your wife for me."

"No need to be so formal with me," Mendeleyev grinned and then changed the subject, "By the way, what was that fertilizer thing you wanted to discuss last night?"

Qi Yun pulled over a chair to sit down, pondered briefly, then spoke, "If in the next couple of days, the price of fertilizer in Tuva goes up by ten percent, do you have a way to profit from it?"

"Ten percent?" Mendeleyev's eyes widened in shock, "With the heavy sanctions on Big Goose, the import of agricultural supplies has significantly decreased, and prices are already high. Can it still go up ten percent?"

Qi Yun handed him a cigarette, his tone calm, "Yes, I heard it's a joint decision by several major agricultural supply merchants in Tuva."

Mendeleyev took the cigarette, lit it, and took a deep drag, frowning, "If they're manipulating it together, then it makes sense."

"I do know someone in the agricultural supply business. I can get him to help us stock up in advance, but the quantity can't compare to those big players."

Qi Yun nodded, took a drag of his cigarette, and continued to ask, "How much can you stockpile?"

Mendeleyev thought for a moment and slowly said, "If we want to complete it today, it's estimated to be at most two to three million USD worth."

After hearing this, Qi Yun thought to himself, three million USD, that's about twenty million Yuan, but he didn't have that much money on hand...

"Do things like agricultural supplies also need to be paid in cash?"

Mendeleyev glanced at him, instantly understanding his meaning, and replied, "No, you don't need to for these goods. Typically, a portion of the deposit is paid first, and the remaining payment can be settled later."

"But are you sure you want to do it?"

Qi Yun nodded slightly, extinguished his cigarette, and slowly said, "I'm in. I'll transfer 3.5 million to your account, and you handle this for me."

"Alright." Mendeleyev didn't hesitate any longer after hearing this and immediately took out his phone to make contact.

After a while, he hung up, looked at Qi Yun, and said, "My friend has no issues, he'll contact the suppliers as soon as possible."

"Okay." After transferring the money, Qi Yun looked up and asked, "What's your plan for today?"

Mendeleyev also pulled out a chair and sat down, answering, "I'm planning to follow your advice and go talk to those competitors today. I'm tired of competing with them. I'll give them a share of the imported goods and focus on expanding the capital's market."

Qi Yun nodded in agreement: "There's nothing worthwhile to fight for in this small place. Once you finish handling things here, we can visit the capital market and do a thorough study."

...

After breakfast, Mendeleyev took Qi Yun and a few others to meet his competitors.

Once both parties met, Mendelejev stated his purpose directly and introduced Qi Yun as a businessman from China.

The few people, upon hearing this, all showed curious expressions.

One man with a beard was the first to speak: "Mendelejev, you suddenly called us together and introduced such a friend, it can't be just to let us get acquainted, right?"

"And about sharing some of the imported goods with us, how exactly do you plan to do that?"

Mendelejev smiled, unhurriedly saying, "I won't beat around the bush with everyone. We've been vying for this small place for so many years, yet none of us can truly dominate the market. Instead, it's made us all exhausted."

"Now I have a new plan. I want to focus on developing the capital's market, so I'm willing to let you have a share of the imported goods I have."

"Of course, I'm not giving it away for free. We can negotiate a reasonable price."

Another tall and lean man frowned, skeptically asking, "You aren't playing tricks, are you? I've heard that you couldn't make a move in the capital and were nearly driven out."

Mendelejev, upon hearing the skepticism, didn't show anger. He confidently smiled and said, "Indeed, I did encounter some trouble in the capital before, but that's all in the past."

"I'm not at liberty to disclose the specifics. In short, this time I've come with sincerity, hoping to reach a collaboration with you all so we don't have to fight each other anymore."

"In fact, you could participate in my business in the capital in the future. Whether I'm being truthful or not, you'll soon see for yourselves."

Qi Yun also stood up in time, smiling as he promised the others, "Gentlemen, the Tashtagol market is too small. If you continue fighting like this, none of you will make any money. Why not cooperate? I guarantee..."

After Mendeleyev translated, the expressions on their faces changed noticeably, and their thoughts began to waver.

Mendeleyev wasn't in a hurry. He gave them time to think before leading Qi Yun and the others away, heading back to the capital.

...

After some on-site inspection, Qi Yun found that the entertainment industry here was very outdated, with old equipment in places like KTVs and internet cafes.

Back home, these places were just starting to phase out old equipment like second-hand speakers and computers, which were quite cheap. If we could open up the market here, there's a lot of potential.

During the meal, after Qi Yun shared his thoughts, both Peng and Mendeleyev nodded in agreement.

"That's true, domestic second-hand equipment is being upgraded quickly and is cheap. We could first transport a batch over here to try," Peng agreed.

Mendeleyev also rubbed his chin and said, "I have another good idea. The bathhouse environment here is really poor. I feel like the bathing culture in your country is very good. I'm thinking about opening a bathhouse in the capital. What do you think?"

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun exchanged a look with Peng, both recalling when this guy had to take the blame last time.

Peng smacked his lips and asked, "What kind of bathhouse do you want to open?"

Mendeleyev gave him a look that all men would understand: "Of course, it's much more lenient here than in your country."

Qi Yun silently smoked, not commenting.

Chapter 198: Air Raid Alarm

Next day, Qi Yun was woken up by a piercing air raid alarm.

He sat up abruptly from the bed, his brain not fully awake yet, but his heart had already started beating uncontrollably due to the sudden incident.

Without thinking too much, he quickly grabbed his coat and ran towards the door.

As soon as he opened the door, he saw Chen Wei knocking on doors in the hallway, urging Peng Fei and others to come out quickly.

After hearing a response from inside the room, he hurriedly shouted, "Quickly downstairs! Hide in the underground parking lot!"

With that said, he swiftly stepped forward and pulled Qi Yun's arm, running towards downstairs.

Luckily, their room was on the third floor, and within a minute, the two had already reached downstairs.

At this time, the hotel lobby was already chaotic, everyone was in a panic.

Due to his professional habit, Chen Wei had already familiarized himself with the hotel structure upon check-in, easily leading Qi Yun through a fire exit door and down the stairs to the underground garage.

Qi Yun was worried about Brother Peng, wanting to go to the stairwell to meet them, but Chen Wei held him tightly, refusing to let go.

"You stay here! I'll go find them!" With that, Chen Wei quickly retraced his steps.

Qi Yun hadn't even managed to say anything before the other person was already gone from view in the stairwell.

The piercing air raid alarm could still faintly be heard inside the garage, making him more anxious.

Just then, a disordered sound of footsteps came from the stairway, as several frightened guests were led by hotel staff to the underground garage.

Qi Yun's heart was in his throat, his eyes fixed tightly on the stairwell, every second felt exceptionally long.

Finally, he saw Chen Wei and Mendeleyev helping Brother Peng hobble while rushing towards him.

Qi Yun hurriedly stepped forward, "Are you okay?"

Brother Peng's face was pale, sweat covered his forehead as he gasped, "I'm fine, just twisted my ankle rushing down the stairs earlier."

After a few helped Brother Peng sit on the ground beside them, Qi Yun finally turned to the equally shaken Mendeleyev and asked, "Do you know what's going on?"

Mendeleyev snapped out of it, shook his head blankly, "No idea, this has never happened before!"

Qi Yun frowned, looking up at the ceiling of the garage, his heart felt tightly gripped.

The feeling that danger could arise at any moment was utterly terrifying.

At this time, people in the garage whispered among themselves, the atmosphere of panic started to spread within the crowd.

Someone quietly sobbed, others cursed loudly, various speculations and complaints intertwined, making the already oppressive space more stifling.

"Everyone please be quiet!" A hotel manager stood at a height, speaking separately in Russian and English, trying to calm down the noisy crowd.

"The situation outside is still unclear, please stay calm and wait patiently for the alarm to be lifted!"

However, his calls weren't very effective, as the commotion continued among the crowd, most of whom were ordinary people, untrained, find it hard to stay calm in such situations.

Mendeleyev took out his phone, seeing there were two bars of signal, he quickly dialed his wife's number, wanting to confirm if she was safe.

However, the phone kept ringing endlessly on the other end, yet no one answered.

Mendeleyev's face grew increasingly grim, his hands unconsciously trembling slightly.

"Pick up the phone..." he murmured softly, his eyes filled with worry.

On his fifth attempt to dial, finally, Katusha's voice came from the other end.

"How are you! Are you okay?!" Mendeleyev asked urgently.

"Huh?" Katusha seemed puzzled, "I was just making breakfast, why ask that, did something happen?"

Hearing she was alright, Mendeleyev's tense nerves instantly relaxed, afraid of worrying Katusha, he didn't elaborate, found an excuse to hang up.

"Everything's normal in Tashtagol." He whispered to the others.

Upon hearing this, Chen Wei's brows that were knitted tight slightly relaxed, "It shouldn't be a large-scale air raid, perhaps something like UAVs."

Qi Yun also let out a long breath, this place is really damn dangerous, next time he wouldn't come here no matter what.

The air raid alarm continued for a few more minutes before finally quieting down.

After making a phone call to clarify the situation, the hotel staff then explained to everyone, "Dear guests, we just got information, this air raid alarm was due to unknown flying objects entering the nearby airspace."

"Now the relevant departments have already dealt with it, the alarm is lifted, please return to your rooms in order, we apologize for the inconvenience caused."

A wave of relieved sighs emerged from the crowd, their taut nerves finally relaxed, began slowly moving towards the stairwell.

Qi Yun and the others helped Brother Peng, also merging into the crowd.

Everyone first returned to their rooms to dress properly, then drove Brother Peng to the hospital.

After an examination, the doctor said Brother Peng's ankle injury wasn't serious, just a simple sprain, rest for a couple of days with a plaster and it would be fine, only then did everyone breathe a sigh of relief.

Upon leaving the hospital, the group found a restaurant to eat, at this time the news on TV was reporting about the earlier air raid alarm incident.

After watching, Mendeleyev translated with a solemn expression, "Two drones from Russia attacked the suburban oil depot, causing an explosion."

Upon hearing that, Qi Yun frowned slightly, his face turned serious, and asked, "Is the situation over here really that dire now?"

Mendeleyev sighed, somewhat helpless, "Tuva has always been very safe before, this is the first time being attacked, but we had long thought this day might come."

Chapter 199: Air Raid Alarm (Part 2)

Qi Yun nodded, knowing that ultimately it's the ordinary people who suffer in such turmoil.

Instead of staying in Russia for a few more days to survey the market, after what just happened, he's a bit shaken and just wants to return home quickly.

So he immediately voiced his thoughts and discussed it with several others.

"Let's finish the remaining tasks today and return tomorrow."

Mendeleyev was reluctant, but given the situation, he couldn't persuade him to stay.

"Rest assured, once you return, we'll proceed with establishing the trade company, and you'll receive the goods soon." Qi Yun patted his shoulder as he spoke.

Mendeleyev nodded: "I'm certainly confident in your handling things. I'll keep an eye on the fertilizer issues, and once the transaction is complete, I'll transfer the money to your account."

"Alright."

Over these few days, their relationship had grown closer, and Qi Yun felt he could trust him on this.

After the meal, Qi Yun went back to the car to call Zhao Qing and inform her he was safe, and let her know he'd be returning tomorrow.

Upon hearing this, Zhao Qing was overjoyed, asked about the flight time, and planned to pick him up at the airport.

After hanging up, Qi Yun lit a cigarette, brought up the system panel, and started checking today's intelligence content.

[Current Intelligence Points: 2]

[Today's Intelligence 1 (Blue): Sixty kilometers north of the city, in Kovado Town, there's an abandoned Orthodox church. Under the third step of the church, there's a buried Orthodox Golden Holy Image from the Tsarist Russia era]

"Orthodox Golden Holy Image?" Qi Yun was puzzled.

He knew little about the history of Tsarist Russia and initially thought this object was a golden statue. After some searching on his phone, he realized he was mistaken.

This Orthodox Golden Holy Image is actually a painting created using a special technique on wooden or plaster boards.

But since it carries the word 'golden,' there's definitely some gold involved, even though it's minimal, with just a bit of gold leaf for decoration.

Despite this, such works hold significant value, considered antiques with a history spanning over a thousand years.

There was once an Orthodox Golden Holy Image sold at a London auction for thirty thousand British Pounds.

[Today's Intelligence 2 (Red): Four soldiers from the second faction are hiding in a forest thirty kilometers west of the capital, planning to attack two oil depots in the Tuva capital's suburbs today]

...

If only I had seen this sooner, I wouldn't have been so frightened earlier.

[Today's Intelligence 3 (Red): Nokovic personally killed a reporter from Tuva Daily last night. The reporter possessed substantial evidence of the other party's illegal activities, all stored in a mini USB hidden under the late wife's tombstone]

"Hiss!"

Seeing this piece of information, Qi Yun's heart tightened. Nokovic really is ruthless.

Dealing with such people is dangerous, relationships are based solely on benefits, not friendships.

Even though Mendeleyev has boarded that ship, if something unexpected happens, he might be thrown into the river without hesitation.

Qi Yun took a deep drag from his cigarette, thought for a moment, then called Mendeleyev into the car to give him some advice.

Peng watched curiously from outside the car window, unsure what the two were secretly plotting, only noticing Mendeleyev's expression becoming increasingly serious...

After escorting the injured Peng back to the hotel, Mendeleyev took Qi Yun to visit some local merchants to understand market demands.

By the afternoon, Qi Yun said he had things to handle, then quietly left the city with Chen Wei.

...

Over an hour later, they drove and appeared outside Kovado Town.

Qi Yun thought he could easily retrieve the item from the abandoned church, only to be blocked by a few soldiers in uniform upon arriving at the town.

He tried communicating with them but discovered they only understood the word 'China.'

Once they realized Qi Yun and his party were Chinese, the soldiers remained friendly and didn't intentionally make things difficult, using gestures to indicate that passage was prohibited.

Qi Yun, having come all this way, felt reluctant to turn back.

He opened the car door, got out, and discreetly slipped five hundred USD into one soldier's hand, then translated via his phone: "I'm a tourist from China, wanting to visit the church in the nearby town."

The soldier glanced down at the green USD in his hand, a hint of hesitation on his face.

But that hesitation didn't last long, disappearing in an instant.

In the next moment, he quickly pocketed the money, glanced around ensuring no other team members noticed, then lowered his voice and translated on the phone: "This area is sealed off, we're hunting the second faction soldiers. I can't let you through today, come back tomorrow."

After finishing, he gestured again for Qi Yun and his group to leave.

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun frowned, knowing he wouldn't be able to come back tomorrow as he'd be leaving.

He looked at the soldier, held up one finger, and dropped his voice: "One thousand!"

The soldier shook his head, not tempted by the money: "Sorry, tomorrow."

Qi Yun gave him a glare, thinking, why did you take my money but refuse to let me through?

Unwilling to give up, he returned to the car, contemplated for a moment, then dialed the number for the iron-fisted killer—Nokovic.

"Mr. Qi Yun, glad to receive your call. Is there something I can help you with?" Nokovic's voice sounded quite warm.

But Qi Yun knew well that this guy was definitely a smiling facade.

"Mr. Nokovic, you're too kind. I do indeed have a favor to ask." Qi Yun replied.

Nokovic laughed cheerfully: "Mr. Qi Yun, just tell me, as long as it's something I can do, I'll certainly help you with it."

Qi Yun, seeing this, didn't beat around the bush: "Haha, here's the matter, my friend and I want to visit the church in Kovado Town, but the soldiers on duty here aren't letting us through. Can you help make an exception?"

Nokovic paused on the other end of the phone, not responding immediately, quickly weighing the pros and cons internally.

The order to seal a sixty-kilometer radius came from the military, and as a government official, he technically lacked the authority to intervene.

But politics is like the marketplace; who doesn't have a few friends? As long as he made a call, this wouldn't be too big a deal.

What he was weighing was whether helping Qi Yun with this favor would pose a risk.

After all, the military set up the blockade to capture those second faction soldiers, and if his intervention let them escape, he'd definitely be in trouble.

Although only two oil depots got bombed in the morning, with no casualties reported, an attack on Russian soil reportedly even alarmed the Kremlin, so he had to be cautious.

After thinking it over, he responded: "Mr. Qi Yun, you aren't traveling with anyone from the second faction, are you?"

"Of course not," Qi Yun replied without hesitation, "it's just my bodyguard and me."

"Then it's no problem, I'll make some calls for you, although your vehicle still needs to be inspected to proceed."

Nokovic ultimately decided to help Qi Yun because he believed Qi Yun had significant influence, which might provide strong assistance in the future.

So even if this posed some risk, he wanted to lend his help.

"Certainly, we will cooperate with inspections. Thank you for your assistance, Mr. Nokovic." Qi Yun responded with a smile.

"Haha, we are friends, Mr. Qi Yun, no need for formalities."

After the call ended, Qi Yun parked the car by the roadside and sat quietly inside, waiting.

A few minutes passed, and the soldier from earlier ran towards them.

Upon reaching them, he stood straight-legged, saluted, then handed back the five hundred dollars with a fawning smile through the car window.

"Sorry sir~"

Chapter 200: 5.4 Million (Double-Length)

Kovado Town seemed uninhabited, except for those soldiers earlier, Qi Yun actually didn't see anyone else in the town.

He drove the car all the way forward and finally found the church in the center of the town.

The church's exterior was dilapidated, with peeling walls revealing mottled bricks and stones. Most of the windows were broken and had been roughly boarded up. It seemed abandoned for a long time.

After parking the car, Qi Yun picked up a crowbar and turned to Chen Wei, saying, "Brother Wei, wait for me in the car."

Chen Wei, who had been vigilantly observing the surroundings, paused for a moment after hearing Qi Yun's words and nodded in response, "Shout if anything happens."

"Okay." Qi Yun replied, pushed the door open, and stepped out of the car, walking towards the church.

Looking at the spider-web-covered wooden door in front of him, he took a deep breath and slowly pushed it open.

As the door opened, a mixed smell of dust and decay rushed at him, making him frown slightly.

The lighting inside the church was dim, with only a few strands of sunlight streaming through the broken windows, casting beams of light onto the ground.

This Eastern Orthodox church seemed much like the Christian churches seen on TV, except it had been abandoned for so long that it felt eerie.

Qi Yun lit a cigarette to bolster his courage and stepped inside.

After walking past rows of seats, he went straight to the front altar.

"The third step, here it is."

The wooden steps were already riddled with holes. Qi Yun crouched down and wedged the crowbar firmly into the gap between the steps.

The decayed wooden board creaked and didn't require much effort before a corner of the step was pried open.

Qi Yun pulled out his phone from his pocket to light the area and looked into the gap. Sure enough, there was something wrapped in a cloth.

Feeling a rush of joy, he picked up the crowbar and pried open the boards of the adjacent steps, finally retrieving the item carefully.

Unwrapping the dust-laden cloth, a wooden board approximately fifty centimeters long and wide was revealed. The material of this board was unknown, but even after a thousand years, it showed no signs of decay.

On the board was a painting of a woman holding a baby, it was the Eastern Orthodox Golden Holy Image.

The large gold leaf in the painting had long lost its former brilliance and now appeared somewhat dull. To restore it to its original state, it might need a bit of professional restoration.

Qi Yun didn't have the time to examine it closely. He tossed the somewhat dingy cloth aside and hurried out of the church with the board.

Returning to the car, he sat in the back seat and said to Chen Wei, "Brother Wei, you drive us back to the hotel."

Chen Wei did not ask any questions, nodded, took his place in the driver's seat, and started the car to head back the way they came.

On the way, Qi Yun began to consider how to handle this item.

Taking it back to the country was definitely not feasible, not to mention if it could pass customs smoothly, the transport process itself was not guaranteed. If it got damaged, there would be nothing left but regret.

Either find a professional agency to ship it back home or deal with it here in Russia.

After thinking for a while, he decided to first consult Mendeleyev when they got back.

...

In the hotel room, Mendeleyev held the Eastern Orthodox Golden Holy Image, his eyes wide with disbelief.

"This... where did you get this!?" His voice trembled slightly with excitement.

Qi Yun sat down beside him, lit a cigarette, and asked without addressing the question directly, "Got any leads on selling it?"

Mendeleyev slowly put down the icon, the shock on his face not entirely faded.

He looked at Qi Yun, a barely concealed excitement in his eyes, "If this hits the market, there would be plenty of wealthy buyers fighting over it."

"You might not know, but the status of Eastern Orthodoxy in Russia is akin to Taoism in your country. Many wealthy people are Orthodox believers and like to keep things like this at home."

Qi Yun glanced at him, somewhat surprised, said, "Really? And you?"

Mendeleyev smacked his lips and answered honestly, "I only believe in money."

Qi Yun chuckled lightly at his words, flicked ash from his cigarette, "Alright then, if this thing is so marketable, I'll leave it to you to handle."

Mendeleyev rubbed his hands, his eyes gleaming with a spark, "No problem, leave it to me."

He grabbed the painting and was about to leave. Near the door, he seemed to remember something, turned back halfway.

"By the way, that thing has been found."

Qi Yun looked at him with a serious tone, reminded, "Make sure it stays hidden unless they intend to harm you. That thing can save you or end you."

Mendeleyev nodded solemnly, replied, "Don't worry, I won't gamble my life."

...

The next morning, they said their goodbyes outside the airport.

No direct flight to home from Tuva is currently available, so they needed to go to Moscow first and then transfer planes.

"Take care!" Mendeleyev hugged each of them in turn, somewhat reluctantly.

"You take care too. If things keep worsening here, I suggest you hide somewhere else for a while." Qi Yun patted Mendeleyev's shoulder, a trace of concern in his eyes.

Mendeleyev squeezed out a smile, replied, "Don't worry, if things go south, I'll temporarily move to Moscow."

Qi Yun nodded, said no more, as they dragged their suitcases into the airport hall.

On the return flight, Qi Yun turned to Chen Wei and asked, "Brother Wei, how much was your monthly salary working as a bodyguard before?"

Chen Wei still maintained that stern visage, seemingly unmoved by anything.