

Middle Age 301

Chapter 301: The Backer Becomes a Mountain on My Shoulders

After Luo Yang left, Qi Yun picked up the teacup on the table and took a sip, then looked at Zhang Dayong with a heavy gaze.

"The thing I need your help with is related to this case too. I suspect the old ghost was likely secretly taken away by people from the government office."

Zhang Dayong's expression froze momentarily: "What do you mean?"

Qi Yun sighed, picked up a cigarette from the table, lit it, and took two hard drags before slowly saying, "I had the old ghost deliver something to Deputy Squad Leader Zhou's house a while ago. I think they might have discovered him through some clue."

"Deliver something? What was it?" Zhang Dayong pressed him.

Qi Yun stared at Zhang Dayong for a few seconds without directly answering the question. Instead, he asked, "Do you remember the last project bid at the New District Branch?"

The question reminded Zhang Dayong of the situation last time.

Originally, everything was arranged for that project, and the bid was practically guaranteed for Qi Yun. But at the last minute, during the bidding announcement, he received a call from Deputy Squad Leader Zhou, and the bid ended up going to some big shot instead.

"Does it have anything to do with the two of them?"

Qi Yun nodded, choosing not to hide it: "Those two have a deep connection."

"I have a grudge with that Re Lijiang. Last time I got into trouble with the authorities, it was because of him pulling strings behind the scenes. Later, I inadvertently found out that he has a ledger documenting some secrets between him and that person."

"So the old ghost secretly borrowed that ledger and placed it in that person's study."

Qi Yun gave Zhang Dayong a brief overview in just a few sentences, and upon hearing it, Zhang Dayong immediately furrowed his brow tightly.

After a long silence, he finally spoke: "If that's the case, then the old ghost might indeed have been taken away by people from the government office, as you suspect."

"So you're asking me to gather some inside information?"

Qi Yun nodded: "Yes, first confirm the situation. If the old ghost was indeed taken away by people from the government office, then I hope you can think of a way to get him out of there."

Upon hearing this, Zhang Dayong's brows furrowed even tighter.

He also picked up a cigarette from the table, reluctantly saying, "Brother, this might not be easy to handle. After all, the person in question is the city's second-in-command. If he arranged it, my words... might not be very useful."

He spoke conservatively, actually wanting to say it probably wouldn't work at all.

"I know, just help me find out first. If it's confirmed to be arranged by him..." Qi Yun paused, "I have a piece of information that I'm sure your superior would be very interested in."

Upon hearing this, Zhang Dayong's hand, holding the cigarette, hung in mid-air, looking at him in surprise.

Qi Yun gave him a faint bitter smile: "Don't look at me like that. I don't want to get involved with your government matters. Even if I pass on the information, you'd better find a suitable reason."

"I understand." Zhang Dayong nodded.

...

As Qi Yun left the teahouse, the sky outside was already turning dark.

Just as he got into the car, a call came in from Zhao Qing, asking when he'd be home.

"I just finished up some things, I'm heading back now."

Hearing he was coming back soon, Zhao Qing was immediately happy and said, "Then I'll go make you dinner. What would you like to eat tonight?"

"Hmm... how about braised chicken with mushrooms."

"Alright, Boss Qi, I'll make it for you right away." Zhao Qing responded with a smile.

It was the evening rush hour, the streets were terribly congested, and it took Qi Yun more than an hour to get back to the Golden Collar Villa.

Once inside, his daughter, whom he hadn't seen in a long time, eagerly leaped into his arms, joyfully shouting, "Daddy!"

He hadn't seen her in almost a month, and the little girl seemed to have grown taller. Children this age really do change daily.

Qi Yun smiled and bent down to pick up his daughter, kissing her cheek: "Nuannuan, did you miss Daddy?"

"I did! Daddy, I missed you so much!" The little girl wrapped her arms around Qi Yun's neck, her braids brushing against his chin, "Some friends came to play with me earlier, but I didn't go, I stayed home just to wait for you."

Qi Yun beamed with joy, raising a hand to gently tweak the little girl's nose: "Yes, you're really Daddy's little sweetheart."

"Hehehe." The little girl giggled, leaned close to Qi Yun's ear, and in a gossipy tone, whispered, "Daddy, I have a little secret for you."

"Hmm?" Qi Yun looked at his daughter with curiosity, playfully asking, "What's the secret? Tell Daddy."

"Sister Qing..."

"Nuannuan!" The little girl was interrupted by Zhao Qing, who came out with a plate, "You promised not to tell anyone."

Seeing this, the little girl shrank her neck, made a grown-up gesture, and spread her hands toward Qi Yun: "Sister Qing won't let me say, so I won't tell you."

Qi Yun didn't mind, laughing as he pinched his daughter's cheek: "Okay, okay, if you won't tell, you won't tell. I'll ask Sister Qing later."

"You two, wash your hands and get ready to eat." Zhao Qing put the freshly cooked dishes on the dining table, giving the father and daughter a glance.

Qi Yun quickly responded, carrying his daughter to the bathroom to wash their hands.

By the time they returned to the dining room, Zhao Qing had already served them rice. Qi Yun had been busy since getting off the plane in the morning and was famished, so he picked up his chopsticks and started eating heartily.

Zhao Qing kept adding food to his bowl, speaking softly, "You didn't eat well while out again, did you? Look, you've lost weight."

Qi Yun shook his head: "I'm not used to foreign food, it's always either bread or Western dishes."

"Home-cooked meals are the best."

Zhao Qing smiled and wiped the corner of his mouth: "Was the trip smooth this time?"

"Smooth." Qi Yun didn't want her to worry and only spoke about the interesting parts.

Chapter 302: The Backer Becomes a Mountain on My Shoulders

After dinner, Qi Yun went to the kitchen to prepare his medicinal soup.

Since the day of going to South Africa, he hadn't taken his medicine for more than twenty days. Although he felt no obvious change in his body, the "Inner Canon of Huangdi" said this formula should be taken daily. So if he could, he would definitely prefer to have a bowl every day.

Zhao Qing came in after tidying up the dishes and saw him putting herbs into the casserole, she tried to dissuade him, "Why don't... why don't you drink this tomorrow instead..."

Qi Yun suspiciously turned his head to look at her, "Hmm? What's the matter?"

Zhao Qing put down the dishes, clutched the towel in her hands, showed a somewhat awkward expression, and finally gave Qi Yun a fierce glare before turning to leave.

What did that mean? Qi Yun scratched his head, a bit puzzled.

...

Elsewhere, inside a very ordinary residential building.

Old Ghost was tied to a chair, his head drooping, with quite a bit of blood on his face. His bent posture seemed unnatural.

In the adjacent living room, two young men were sitting on small stools by the coffee table, eating boxed meals.

Just then, there was a sudden knocking at the door, and the two young men immediately sat up straight, alert.

When they heard the knocking pattern was three long and two short, they relaxed, and one of them, with a crew cut, got up to open the door.

Standing outside was a slightly overweight middle-aged man. The young man who opened the door said nothing, moved aside to let him in, and then locked the door again.

"How's he doing? Has he talked?" the middle-aged man asked, putting a plastic bag full of cigarettes and drinks like Red Bull on the coffee table.

The crew-cut shook his head and replied, "No, this guy's pretty tight-lipped. It's been from the day before yesterday until now, not a single word."

The middle-aged man's brows furrowed upon hearing this. He tapped the ash from his cigarette into a water bottle and said, "It's fine, if he's willing to keep quiet, you can accompany him patiently, but take care not to overdo it and accidentally kill him."

The crew-cut wiped his mouth, "Understood, we'll be careful."

The middle-aged man nodded and stepped towards the bedroom inside.

The light in the bedroom was brighter than in the day; not only was there a lamp overhead, but there was also a bright incandescent light aimed directly into Old Ghost's eyes.

The middle-aged man came closer, raised his hand to brush aside Old Ghost's hair that was covering his face, but halfway through, he seemed to find the long unwashed hair dirty.

So he withdrew his hand, took out a lighter from his pocket, and used it to move Old Ghost's hair aside.

Under the light, Old Ghost looked utterly weary, struggling to open his eyelids, even worse off than a gaming café guru who just pulled an all-nighter.

"Can we talk?" the middle-aged man asked.

Only silence answered him, as if Old Ghost hadn't heard.

The middle-aged man wasn't annoyed, he took a puff of his cigarette, and slowly said, "It's meaningless to keep quiet like this; since we could find you, you should know why."

Old Ghost remained silent.

"Heh-heh." The middle-aged man sneered, "To be honest, I've seen plenty more stubborn than you, but in the end, they talked obediently."

"I know folks like you value loyalty, but what era is this? Can loyalty feed you? While you're suffering here, others might be indulging in fine dining outside."

"You should know who you're messing with; if you don't want to talk, no one can save you."

"But if you tell me everything, I won't trouble you, and can let you go right away. You and I, we're essentially just doing jobs for others; there's no need for us to make it hard for each other. Consider it."

Upon saying this, the middle-aged man put away his lighter and turned to leave.

In the living room, he tossed the cigarette butt into the water bottle, saying calmly, "I'm leaving now, notify me if there's any news."

"Yes." The two youths stood up and replied.

The middle-aged man waved his hand, adding a reminder, "Remember what I told you, this matter must be kept absolutely confidential, don't tell anyone."

The two young men immediately responded, "Got it."

Only then did the middle-aged man nod satisfactorily and head out.

Just as he touched the door handle, he suddenly turned back and said, "That light in his room still isn't bright enough, he's dozing off. Xiaobing, go buy another lamp later, a brighter one."

...

At Golden Collar Villa, inside the study.

Qi Yun lit a cigarette, with an invigorated look on his face. After a two-hour intense session, he didn't feel the slightest fatigue, but rather somewhat eager for more.

He walked to the window, looking at the moonlight outside, again pondering over Old Ghost's situation.

Although he had paid for the other's services, if that man was captured, Qi Yun felt no guilt. After all, the price asked was high, reflecting the task's difficulty and risk.

However, Qi Yun admired Old Ghost's skills and had planned to recruit him; unexpectedly, this incident happened shortly after.

On another note, if he could rescue Old Ghost, it might reduce his own exposure risk, acting as a form of self-preservation.

"Hmm, let's see if there are any findings in today's system intelligence..."

[Current intelligence points: 35]

After visiting Changbai Mountain and then South Africa, he hadn't checked the intelligence messages much, now accumulating 35 intelligence points, enough to enhance green intelligence once.

[Today's Intelligence 1 (Red): Zhou Wenbin is currently deliberately cutting off contact with Big Hair, and suggesting to his subordinates to sabotage him, causing funds in multiple projects in Birds' Market to fail to return, nearing collapse.]

Seeing this intelligence message, Qi Yun's mouth curled into a smile, looks like the ledger was starting to work; the former patron of Big Hair had now become a big burden on him.

This can be considered revenge for the grievance from before.

[Today's Intelligence 2 (Red): Under pressure from upper levels, the cases of Tomb Raider Hu Dashan and three others have concluded; the Procuratorate will file a public lawsuit to the New District Intermediate People's Court tomorrow. Hu Dashan has not revealed the whereabouts of the eight precious artifacts.]

He didn't spill it, meaning they must still be buried under the culvert, right?

[Today's Intelligence 3 (Blue): At this moment, in the greenery outside Golden Collar Villa, a homeless man who hasn't eaten for two days is sleeping. This man is the thirteenth generation descendant of a traditional Chinese medicine family.]

"A homeless man?" Qi Yun was a little stunned.

To his knowledge, traditional Chinese medicine currently earns more than Western medicine, with prescriptions easily costing several hundred yuan, sometimes even thousands. And on top of that, you'd still have to say thank you.

How could he end up as a homeless man?

Also, why is this man rated as blue intelligence?

Zhong Rui, after all, came from Tilanqiao Advanced Study College, and was only rated red intelligence back then.

Could this man be more valuable than Zhong Rui?

Thinking this, Qi Yun went to the desk, extinguished his cigarette, and since he wasn't quite sleepy yet, he planned to go out to take a look, and perhaps have two barbecue skewers of kidney.

At the doorway, he put on his jacket and quietly left home.

Just a couple of steps out, Chen Wei silently followed him at some point, "Heading out?"

Qi Yun shook his head at him, "I am just going to the neighborhood entrance, take a rest, no need to follow."

However, Chen Wei was unmoved; when it came to Qi Yun's personal safety, he had considerable autonomy, which was an agreement made between the two initially.

Seeing this, Qi Yun couldn't be bothered to argue, and turned towards the neighborhood entrance.

Fifty meters from the main entrance was a strip of greenery.

The Golden Collar Villa area is considered a high-end neighborhood, usually seldom visited by homeless people, and Qi Yun easily spotted a dark figure under a tree.

The man wore a dirty jacket, with "Jiajia Supermarket" printed on the back, and was curled up into a ball.

Although it's spring now, strictly speaking, Jiang Province only has summer and winter, so the night temperature's still a bit chilly, sleeping like this on the lawn overnight could easily make one sick.

Qi Yun approached and turned off his flashlight, squatting down to pat the guy's arm, "Hey, buddy."

The man drowsily opened his eyes, turning his head to look at Qi Yun, "Huh? Is sleeping not allowed here? I'll leave now."

Saying this, he got up from the lawn, picked up his only possession—a large Coke bottle filled with boiled water, ready to leave.

Chapter 303: Featured on CCTV

"Wait a moment." The man had just taken two steps when Qi Yun called out to him from behind.

The man turned his head suspiciously, his figure appearing somewhat thin under the streetlamp, with messy hair and a scraggly beard on his face.

Qi Yun got up and walked over, asking, "Why are you sleeping here? Are you in trouble?"

The man stared at him in a daze, without making a sound, his eyes lacking any spark.

Qi Yun chuckled, unsure whether the guy just didn't like talking to people or was simply too hungry to think straight.

"Hungry? How about some barbecue nearby? My treat!"

Upon hearing the word "barbecue," the man unconsciously licked his chapped lips, and his stomach let out an uncooperative "grumble." He nodded frantically without a second thought.

Seeing this, Qi Yun knew that the information wasn't wrong; the guy was truly hungry.

"Let's go, I'm a bit hungry myself. Let's grab a drink together."

The man nodded and followed Qi Yun to a nearby grill stall.

Even though it was already past midnight, the charcoal fire at the barbecue stall was still burning brightly, with small groups of diners drinking beer, eating skewers, and talking big.

Qi Yun found a corner seat and then called out to Chen Wei not far away, "Brother Wei, join me for some late-night snacks."

Chen Wei instinctively wanted to decline but ultimately came over and sat down after giving it a thought.

"Boss, thirty skewers of grilled meat, three grilled kidneys, and a case of beer," Qi Yun waved to the owner.

The barbecue over here in Jiang Province is not as delicate as the mainland; for ordinary people, five or six skewers are usually enough to be full. He only ordered this much because he thought the guy was hungry for two days.

Soon, the grilled meat and beer were served one after another.

The man immediately started devouring the food ravenously, finally slowing down his speed after consuming about ten skewers.

Qi Yun picked up the beer and poured a cup for him, then asked, "What's your family name, brother? Why are you lying in the greenbelt so late at night?"

Finally, the man spoke, "My surname is Pang; I'm called Pang Zefeng."

"I got kicked out by the construction site foreman two days ago; he said I wasn't strong enough and couldn't handle the work. I have nowhere else to stay, so I had to rough it out on the lawn for a night."

Qi Yun looked at the man's hands for a moment. Though a bit dirty and with a few band-aids, there were no calluses at all — definitely not the hands of someone accustomed to manual labor.

"What did you do before?"

Pang Zefeng was silent for a while before replying, "I was a doctor before."

Qi Yun nodded upon hearing this, his instincts telling him it matched up, so he continued asking, "Why did you go from being a doctor to working at a construction site?"

Pang Zefeng fell silent again, then drank a cup of beer in one go, tears tracing lines down his dusty face.

Realizing he touched a sore spot, Qi Yun quickly poured another cup for Pang Zefeng.

"I was framed; my medical license was revoked," Pang Zefeng said with a hoarse voice. There's no telling how much bitterness was hidden behind those words.

Qi Yun didn't press further, not wanting to dig deeper into painful wounds, instead asking, "What about your family? Why don't you go back home?"

This question made Pang Zefeng, who was trying hard to control his emotions, break down instantly, crying uncontrollably.

This drew the gaze of several nearby patrons.

Qi Yun clicked his tongue, realizing he might have asked the wrong question. He intended to avoid painful memories, yet managed to strike directly at the heart.

Pang Zefeng, perhaps suppressing emotions too long, cried for over ten minutes, a mournful stream of snot and tears.

Only after he finished crying did Qi Yun pass him a pack of cigarettes, "Do you smoke?"

Pang Zefeng shook his head, took another sip of beer, and answered Qi Yun's earlier question: "I have no family; my parents passed away, and my wife left me when I went bankrupt."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun's hand holding the cigarette froze mid-air, a hint of shock on his face.

Isn't this just like my ex-wife?

He furrowed his brow, finished the cigarette, then continued to ask, "Why didn't you look for a medically related job?"

Pang Zefeng shook his head, "I've got a blemish now; places refuse to take me. I don't want to fool anyone by hiding the revoked license incident."

"I see."

Qi Yun took a sip of beer, suddenly struck by a thought.

That formula he had, could it be possible to replace those few expensive medicinal herbs with ordinary ones and make it into a health product?

With its potent effects, wouldn't it beat any 'brain platinum'?

Previously, he lacked funds and a pharmacological expert, and while Cao Yufei knew a bit, he was far from being able to develop a product.

Now, with three hundred million earned abroad, the money problem was solved.

This 13th-generation inheritor from a family of traditional Chinese medicine just came to him — everything seemed ready!

The only issue was his inability to fully trust Pang Zefeng yet. The formula held immeasurable value, making him reluctant to hand it over without reassurance.

He must first observe for a while and test the person's character.

With that in mind, Qi Yun looked up and said, "If you don't have anywhere to go, I'll introduce you to a job."

Pang Zefeng agreed without hesitation: "Alright, thank you."

Qi Yun laughed, "Don't you want to ask what kind of job it is?"

Pang Zefeng replied calmly, "Judging by your appearance, you have the fortune of wealth, with full energy and kindness in your heart — you're probably not a bad person and wouldn't have me do anything illegal."

Chapter 304: Featured on CCTV (Part 2)

"As for the type of job, it doesn't matter to me. I don't have much ambition now. As long as I have a meal to eat and a bed to sleep in, that's enough."

"You even know how to read faces?" Qi Yun asked, somewhat surprised.

Pang Zefeng said unconcernedly, "I learned traditional Chinese medicine from my father since I was a child. Anyone who has seriously studied ancient medical texts knows a bit about face reading."

Qi Yun laughed upon hearing this and pointed to Chen Wei, who had been silent beside them, "Then take a look at him. What's his face like?"

Pang Zefeng turned and looked at Chen Wei, his gaze lingering on his stern face for a moment. "This brother has a square skeleton, a full forehead, and a good face overall."

Qi Yun laughed and patted Pang Zefeng on the shoulder, "You have a good eye for people."

"I have a friend who owns a pharmaceutical factory. If you don't mind, I can arrange for you to find a job there tomorrow."

Pang Zefeng nodded, picked up his glass, and thanked sincerely, "Thank you. I don't have many skills, but I do have some research in traditional Chinese medicine. If there's ever anything you need from me, just let me know."

"Alright." Qi Yun handed over a skewer of grilled kidney, "Eat some more, don't let it go to waste."

After finishing the late-night snack, he handed Pang Zefeng a thousand yuan so he could stay at the hotel near the community entrance for a night.

Pang Zefeng initially didn't want to accept it, but finally, Qi Yun said he could pay it back after getting his salary, which led him to accept the money.

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The next day, after getting up, Qi Yun first called Ma Baoguo, asking him to have a message sent to Hu Dashan at the detention center, telling him the matter had been taken care of.

He had previously made an agreement with Hu Dashan that if the latter distanced Shi Feng from the detonator incident, he would send five hundred thousand to each of the four families before the trial.

Liu Meng handled this matter when he returned from repairing houses in Kuche.

After having breakfast with his family, Qi Yun picked up Pang Zefeng from the hotel at the entrance and then headed to Cao Yufei's pharmaceutical factory.

The car had only just reached halfway when he received a call from Dong Shanshan, the host from the TV station.

"Mr. Qi, this is Dong Shanshan." A very ethereal voice came from the other end of the line.

Qi Yun responded, "Hello, Miss Dong, is there something you need from me?"

Dong Shanshan replied with a laugh, "I called to inform you that the airing time of the exclusive interview you recorded last time has been set, and it's tonight at 9 PM."

"Really? On which channel will it be broadcast?"

"It'll be on the local channel and CCTV9."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun was overjoyed. Although fewer people watch TV now, CCTV's influence remains considerable.

It's not that he wants to be famous. Mainly, he wants to add some chips for himself, so in the future, if facing certain risks, he'll have some leverage.

"Okay, I understand. Thank you, Dong Shanshan."

Dong Shanshan's laughter was pleasant, "No need to thank me, Mr. Qi. If you want to thank someone, thank Director Yu; he's the one who arranged everything."

"Alright, I will be sure to thank him." Qi Yun naturally wouldn't forget that little old man.

"Then I won't disturb you any longer, Mr. Qi. Goodbye."

After hanging up, Qi Yun found Director Yu's number and dialed it. However, it was answered by his secretary, who informed him that Director Yu had gone to some excavation site for inspection, so Qi Yun had to put it aside for the time being.

Soon, the car drove into the pharmaceutical factory.

The factory looked similar to the last time he saw it, the only change being the warehouse looking emptier.

In the office, when Cao Yufei saw Qi Yun bringing a stranger, he greeted them with curiosity.

"Old Qi, who's this?"

"This is Pang Zefeng, he used to be a doctor, in traditional Chinese medicine. Can you find him a job?" Qi Yun introduced.

Cao Yufei was momentarily stunned and felt puzzled, but still extended a hand towards Pang Zefeng, "So you're Pang Zefeng, nice to meet you. I'm Cao Yufei."

Pang Zefeng shook hands with Cao Yufei with both hands, "Hello, President Cao."

Once they got acquainted, Qi Yun turned to Pang Zefeng, "Well, Zefeng, why don't you take a walk around the factory to get familiar with it? Meanwhile, I'll have a word with President Cao."

"Alright." Pang Zefeng turned and headed out the door.

After the office door closed again, Qi Yun took out a cigarette and handed it to Cao Yufei, "How's the factory doing lately?"

Cao Yufei took the cigarette and sighed, "Hopeless. I'm already contacting people about selling the factory."

Qi Yun lit a cigarette, took a couple of puffs, and leaned back on the sofa, "I have an idea."

"What idea?"

"I'll buy your factory and produce health products. Then I'll give you some shares, and you help me manage it."

Cao Yufei was slightly taken aback, "Are you serious?"

Qi Yun smiled, "When have I ever joked with you?"

Cao Yufei frowned slightly, advising, "The health product industry is deep waters, and the conscientious ones barely make any money."

It's a fact.

Stuff that really works can't possibly be bought for just a few hundred yuan.

However, Qi Yun wasn't planning on telling Cao Yufei about the formula just yet. He tapped the ashes off his cigarette and continued, "Don't worry, have you ever seen me do something I've no confidence in?"

"That Pang Zefeng you just met, his family has been doctors of traditional Chinese medicine for thirteen generations; he's highly skilled. I plan to have him help with research and development."

Cao Yufei was a bit surprised, "That's a real talent, but there's nothing much going on here. Aren't you overdoing it for him to come here?"

Qi Yun smiled and explained, "He had some issues before, lost his medical license, and had some problems at home, so he's not in great shape."

"I brought him here so he'd have something to do temporarily and also for you to observe him for me to see if he's trustworthy."

"You get what I mean?"

Cao Yufei nodded, somewhat amazed, "Got it, don't worry, I know what to do."

Qi Yun put out the cigarette and patted Cao Yufei on the shoulder, then stood up and said, "The matter with the factory is settled then. Figure out the amount, and I'll have finance transfer it to your account."

Cao Yufei saw his resolute attitude and didn't persuade further, just nodded in agreement, "Alright, I'll get the paperwork ready in the next couple of days."

"Uh-huh, the person is in your hands now; I have something else to attend to, so I'll head off first."

After leaving the pharmaceutical factory, Qi Yun headed to the company.

It had been almost a month since he last set foot inside the company.

He hadn't been present, but was well-informed about the state of the two companies, as Zhong Rui would call and update him frequently, and Peng also communicated with him from time to time.

"Boss, you're here." In the office, Zhong Rui saw Qi Yun, whom he hadn't seen in a long time, and hurried over.

Qi Yun nodded towards him and asked, "You mentioned a company wanted to meet today. What was the name again?"

Zhong Rui picked up the prepared materials from the table and handed them over, "Giant Stone Technology. I've gathered some information on them here."

Qi Yun took the folder and pulled out a chair to sit down.

After skimming through a few pages, he already guessed their intentions were likely similar to the last time with Tianhong Games.

The difference was, this company was a local enterprise. Though they didn't have a massive backer like NetEase, their own strength wasn't weak, with a valuation exceeding a billion, making them a leader in the gaming industry in Jiang Province.

Qi Yun closed the folder and looked up at Zhong Rui, "Go call Mengmeng for me."

"Yes, Boss." Zhong Rui responded and quickly headed to the nearby office.

Half a minute later, accompanied by a slight tremor of the floor, Xie Mengmeng walked in.

"Mr. Qi, you wanted to see me?"

Qi Yun nodded, gesturing to the chair opposite him, "Have a seat."

"Okay." Xie Mengmeng sat down slowly.

"Last time I asked you to refuse Tianhong Games, what did they say afterward?" Qi Yun asked.

After meeting them, he had gone abroad, and later on, that woman, Yan Xirui, called him twice, but he hadn't answered.

Xie Mengmeng replied calmly, "They still want to push for the deal, offering new terms, but not much different from before, so I didn't report it to you."

Qi Yun nodded, passing the materials to her, "Alright, this company's people will be here soon. Meet with them on my behalf."

"Do you understand the approach?"

"Got it." Xie Mengmeng nodded with a smile, "Only go for the meat, not the soup. If they're not willing to give us the best part, we'll just do our own thing."

Qi Yun was pleased, patting her on her plump shoulder, "Not bad."

He was quite satisfied with Xie Mengmeng, a graduate of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich. She was smart, capable, and not only managed tasks for him, but also ran the trading company smoothly, being Peng's right-hand.

The forty thousand yuan salary was well deserved.

Chapter 305: Come in Alone, I'm Afraid of Crowds

"By the way, how's the person I asked you to find last time?"

Before going abroad, Qi Yun had also arranged another matter for the other party, which was to help poach a senior operations person from Aunt Wang's side.

"Already made contact, the other person is willing to come, just waiting for your word," Xie Mengmeng replied.

Qi Yun nodded, not really surprised by this result.

Work is work, doesn't matter where you do it. Bosses like myself, probably the kind of boss every worker dreams of.

Pay is good, and there's none of that cutthroat competition or pua tactics. If I had met the current me back then, I'd definitely work under myself for a lifetime.

"Okay, see when he's available, set up a meeting, I'll have a chat with him."

"Alright, Mr. Qi, I'll contact her later."

After giving instructions to Xie Mengmeng, Qi Yun got up and went to Brother Peng's office.

He opened the door, greeted by a thick smell of smoke. Brother Peng was frowning at a few sheets of paperwork on the desk.

Qi Yun waved his hand in front of his nose: "How much did you smoke?"

Brother Peng stubbed out his cigarette and straightened himself up, greeting him, "You're back."

"Yeah." Qi Yun responded, sitting on the sofa beside him, "What's up?"

"Well, we've hit a snag in transport. A batch of our goods was held up in Goose." Brother Peng sighed.

Qi Yun frowned upon hearing this: "Why was it held up? Missing paperwork?"

"It's not the paperwork," Brother Peng shook his head, "We've got everything, legal and compliant. I notified Mendeleyev to check it out as soon as it happened."

"He said Goose's railway department at some station suspects the train car is carrying dangerous goods and wants to hold and inspect it."

Qi Yun was puzzled: "Come on, a bunch of second-hand computers and speakers, how are they tied to dangerous goods?"

Brother Peng rubbed his temples: "Anyway, that's their claim now, kinda seems like they're looking for trouble."

"Damn bastards." Qi Yun cursed, sensing the complexity of the issue, "They want a first bite, huh? Have Mendeleyev grease the wheels; if that doesn't work, let that Nokovic handle it."

Faced with such matters, there's no choice but to deal with it. He had foreseen such problems from the beginning.

After all, Goose is notorious for its rough environment and those local officials aren't any better than South Africa's, something evident from dealing with Tuva's top brass - Nokovic.

The reason for this business is mainly because of the lucrative profits. Second-hand speakers bought for a few hundred can sell for two to three thousand over there, a near double profit.

After deducting various costs, there's still a significant gain.

"Mendeleyev already went out to handle it yesterday, but it's been a whole day and no news has come back; I guess it's not going smoothly," Brother Peng said with another sigh, "This batch is our largest shipment, costs alone over eight million."

Qi Yun grabbed a bottle of mineral water from under the coffee table, unscrewed and drank a couple of sips, comforting: "Don't rush, let's wait a bit longer, if it really doesn't work, I'll think of something."

The Fu Family has business in Moscow too. Though it's not as large as in other European countries, the influence is considerable anyway.

If it really doesn't pan out, they can offer some perks to ask Li Yaohua to introduce some Goose officials, solving such minor problems should be manageable.

Seeing Qi Yun's confident demeanor, Brother Peng also felt somewhat reassured: "Alright, I'll contact Old Men tonight and ask about it."

In the midst of their conversation, Qi Yun's phone suddenly started ringing.

He took out his phone and saw Luo Yang's name on the screen, immediately heading to an empty conference room nearby.

"Hey, Mr. Luo."

Luo Yang's voice on the other end was quite low: "One of my guys picked up some info; the night of the 1st, someone saw three guys take Old Ghost from a motel."

"You know who they are?" Qi Yun asked, frowning.

"Not sure." Luo Yang paused and then continued, "I'm at the motel now, how about you come over so we can discuss?"

"Sure, send me the location, I'm coming over."

After hanging up, Qi Yun told Brother Peng he was off, then quickly left the company.

More than half an hour later, he appeared with Chen Wei beside a rundown city village street.

At the entrance of an inconspicuous motel, Luo Yang was squatting and smoking, while his guys were asking around the shops on the street.

After getting out of the car, Qi Yun glanced at a small lane three hundred meters to the left, remembering that Old Ghost's rented room was somewhere down there.

He wasn't taken from the rented room, but from a motel.

Looks like Old Ghost might have noticed he was being watched, didn't dare return to his rented room, didn't want to alarm them, so he went to a motel instead to seek an opportunity for escape.

As for why he didn't manage to escape later, that's unknown...

Qi Yun turned back, went to the motel and greeted Luo Yang, then asked: "Is there surveillance in the motel?"

Luo Yang tossed the cigarette butt on the ground, spat, and stood up: "There is, but that bastard usually doesn't turn it on, only plugs it in when there's an inspection."

Qi Yun was momentarily stunned but quickly understood the situation.

Such a motel, where you can stay for tens of bucks a night without an ID, gets all sorts of patrons; the owner understandably doesn't want trouble.

If something does happen, he just claims "the surveillance is broken," which is a lot simpler than closing down for a few days to cooperate with an investigation.

"Got any other leads?"

Chapter 306: Come in Alone, I'm Afraid of Crowds (2)

Luo Yang shook his head: "He only mentioned one useful thing, that the three people who took Old Ghost away didn't look like they were from the underworld."

Qi Yun frowned slightly upon hearing this; this piece of information didn't seem much of use either.

According to his speculation, those who took Old Ghost away were either from the slick-back group or from the government office.

The people from the slick-back group were definitely bodyguards or similar, and the government office people need not be said, neither was from the underworld.

Qi Yun glanced at the storefronts on both sides and across the street; none had surveillance cameras outside. It seemed unlikely Luo Yang's little brothers would find any useful information.

So he stepped into the small motel and asked the skinny boss, "What time did they take the person away?"

The boss glanced at Luo Yang at the door, not daring to slack off, and replied weakly, "I think it was around nine o'clock."

Qi Yun smiled at him, pulled a cigarette from his pocket, and handed it over: "No need to be nervous, have a smoke."

The boss took the cigarette with both hands and tucked it behind his ear. After furrowing his brow and thinking some more, he said, "It should be around nine-forty, yes, nine-forty!"

"How are you sure it's nine-forty?"

The boss chuckled a little bashfully: "I like that female streamer who starts her stream at nine-thirty in the evening."

"That night, I was watching the live stream when you guys came looking for that person. I had just given him the room key when three more people came in and took him away."

"It all happened in a few minutes, so I said it was nine-forty."

Qi Yun nodded slightly upon hearing this and continued to ask, "Were they driving? Did you see the license plate?"

The boss shook his head: "They drove, but I don't know the license plate. In such situations, I avoid it as much as possible, wouldn't dare to get involved."

"I only saw that it seemed to be a black SUV."

Black SUV, nine-forty...

"Alright, got it. Thanks, boss."

The boss quickly waved his hand: "You're welcome, you're welcome."

After leaving the motel, Qi Yun instructed Chen Wei: "Brother Wei, drive towards the village exit at normal speed. See how long it takes to reach the first traffic light with a camera."

Chen Wei nodded silently and walked toward the parked car.

Qi Yun then turned to Luo Yang and said, "Mr. Luo, maybe let your guys check out the larger stores nearby, see if they have surveillance there. As long as we can find the license plate, I'll contact Director Sun to find a way to track it."

Luo Yang also thought this was the only way for now, so he immediately took out his phone and called his men.

About ten minutes later, Chen Wei returned in the car.

"There aren't any cameras on this side of the road, the nearest is at the fork just outside the village, took me four minutes and fifty seconds to drive there at normal speed."

Hearing this, Qi Yun took out his phone and recorded the time.

At this point, Luo Yang's subordinates also reported back that there was a pharmacy ahead with surveillance outside.

Qi Yun and the others immediately rushed over.

Upon arriving at the pharmacy, the shopkeeper was a young girl, who was startled when several burly men suddenly stormed in.

"Wha... what do you guys want?"

Luo Yang's lackeys had tattoos up to their necks, looking anything but decent. Even though Luo Yang wore a suit, he still had a thug look in his eyes.

Though Chen Wei didn't have those issues, his stern face still made him seem unapproachable.

Only Qi Yun seemed relatively normal, so he cleared his throat and said, "Hey, miss, don't be afraid, we just want to ask you about something."

After speaking, seeing the girl still looking panicked, he said to Luo Yang, "Mr. Luo, how about letting your guys wait outside? They're scaring her."

Upon hearing this, Luo Yang gestured to the men behind him, and the lackeys immediately left.

The girl, now relieved, still clutched her phone, ready to call the police at any moment.

Qi Yun turned back, looking at the girl with a gentle expression.

"Miss, I was wondering if your surveillance outside is working properly?"

The girl nodded in confusion, saying nothing.

Qi Yun continued, "A few days ago, my electric scooter was stolen from outside your door. Can I take a look at the surveillance footage?"

"Huh?" The girl froze, waited two seconds, then asked, "That's all?"

Qi Yun nodded: "Yes, that's all."

Only then did the girl put her phone down, patting her chest: "Oh my, you scared me! I thought you were from the Black Society."

When she spoke, her accent was a thick Northeast dialect, completely different from her earlier delicate demeanor.

Qi Yun awkwardly glanced at Luo Yang, thinking that the girl had a good eye.

Luo Yang quickly looked away, pretending nothing happened.

"You can come see for yourself; the surveillance videos are stored on the computer. Come alone; too many people scare me."

"Alright, thanks," Qi Yun said as he went behind the counter.

The girl vacated the spot in front of the computer but didn't go far, just stood behind watching.

Qi Yun gripped the mouse with his right hand, found the footage from the 1st, and dragged it to nine-forty p.m. to start playing.

The camera angle was facing the rough road outside, not a great angle, and the footage was very blurry, obviously not HD.

The only good news was that there weren't many cars in this urban village; most workers rode motorcycles or electric bikes.

As the video timeline moved along, at 9:43, sure enough, a black SUV appeared in the footage, but it was too blurry to read the license plate.

Qi Yun rewound the video by a few dozen seconds and played it at 0.2x speed.

But even then, he couldn't capture the license plate...

Frustrated, he straightened up, shook his head at Luo Yang, then closed the surveillance video.

"Thank you, miss," Qi Yun said, expressing gratitude before stepping away from the counter.

In the next half hour, they visited another pharmacy and a slightly larger store, with results similar to the first attempt.

Qi Yun sighed, choosing not to rely on those surveillance videos anymore, and said to Luo Yang, "I'll contact Director Zhang to investigate further. I'll let you know if there's any news."

Luo Yang nodded: "Alright, I'll keep looking into it here, too."

"Okay, I'll be off then." With that, Qi Yun waved goodbye, turned around with Chen Wei, and left.

Back in the car, he didn't immediately call Zhang Dayong, watching Luo Yang drive away before instructing Chen Wei, "Brother Wei, drive to that alley ahead."

Chen Wei did as he was told.

Once the car stopped by the alley, the two got out, passed through the alley, and arrived at the rented room Old Ghost had previously occupied.

"Can this door be opened?" Qi Yun asked.

Old Ghost bent down to examine the lock, then pulled out his telescopic baton from his back and struck the lock with a thud, and it opened.

Qi Yun pushed the door open and stepped inside.

Looking around, the room remained as musty as it was on their last visit, a sharp smell of mold in the air.

He had come to test his luck, to see if he could find any clues.

But after searching high and low, he found nothing—no clues, not even anything valuable.

Frustrated, he left the room, re-locking the door.

Back in the car, Qi Yun took out his phone and dialed Zhang Dayong's number.

"Hey, Brother Zhang, any updates on that matter?"

"Nothing yet," Zhang Dayong sighed, "I inquired at the city bureau, but none of the people brought in lately matches the one you're looking for."

"If it's as you suspect, he might not have been brought back to the bureau but secretly detained elsewhere."

Qi Yun nodded in response, "Probably, I also found something here. Let me update you on it."

"What did you find? Go ahead."

Qi Yun immediately recounted the recent events.

Zhang Dayong fell silent for a moment after listening.

"Around nine forty-five, right? I'll have someone check the surveillance from that intersection and get back to you with anything we find."

Chapter 307: The Secret of Thirty Million

At night, still at the tea house next to the New District Branch, Qi Yun and Zhang Dayong met here.

While pouring tea from a teapot, Zhang Dayong said, "At the time you mentioned, there indeed was a black SUV appearing at the entrance of Tugou Village, and the surveillance captured it clearly, we already know who took the person away."

"Who?"

"The captain of the city bureau's XJ team."

Qi Yun's brow instantly furrowed upon hearing this, which aligned with his prior suspicions. Although the captain acted, the person behind it must be Deputy Squad Leader Zhou.

He originally thought that if the slicked-back man took the person away, Luo Yang could step in and retrieve Old Ghost.

Now, he could only dismiss this idea. It wouldn't be feasible to snatch someone from the authorities; if things went wrong and guns started firing, it would be a scandal of unimaginable proportions.

After a brief reflection, he pondered aloud, "What's your relationship with this captain like?"

Zhang Dayong shook his head, sighed, "You still don't understand how the system works; even if I were his brother, he wouldn't release the person."

This sentence made things clear, and Qi Yun naturally understood the implication.

"Is the person behind you influential?"

Upon hearing this, Zhang Dayong fell silent, picked up a cigarette from the table and lit it, exhaled a smoke ring and replied, "You know the current situation is sensitive, such a request is like asking someone to change allegiances."

"Even if he intervenes, he might need to make some promises."

"Honestly, I don't have the influence to make him speak."

Qi Yun wasn't surprised by this, pulling a pre-prepared note from his pocket, which recorded the address of a luxurious estate in the suburbs.

He pushed the note to Zhang Dayong, speaking in a deep voice, "In the study room of this house, there's a secret compartment with thirty million in cash, and the owner of the house is also surnamed Zhou."

Zhang Dayong stared at the address on the note, and the cigarette filter he was about to place in his mouth paused in mid-air.

He looked up at Qi Yun, eyes full of surprise, "Is this the information you mentioned?"

Qi Yun nodded in acknowledgment.

Zhang Dayong took a drag of the cigarette, cautiously confirming, "Is this information accurate?"

"It's been over a month, but I guess they wouldn't have moved such a large sum of cash unless something unexpected happened, so it's likely still there," Qi Yun replied.

After hearing this, Zhang Dayong's fingers tapped on the table. If the information was accurate, he wouldn't be just helping Qi Yun but benefiting alongside him.

Thirty million! If this matter were to be investigated quietly and verified, it could directly corner the other party.

Of course, the person controlling the matter needs to be sufficiently powerful, like the one behind him. If it were an ordinary person...

"You wait here for my news, I'm going to see him now." Zhang Dayong said, preparing to get up.

Qi Yun waved his hand, interrupting him, "Have you thought of a reason? Try not to get me involved."

Zhang Dayong laughed, "Don't worry, we all have informants, and Old Ghost is also my informant."

"Alright, you handle it," Qi Yun finally stopped interrupting.

"Just wait for me here, I'll come find you once it's done." With these words, Zhang Dayong walked towards the private room door.

...

Meanwhile, in a humble residential building nearby.

Old Ghost, who hadn't slept well for several days, appeared somewhat dazed, his head drooped powerlessly to his chest, and his eyes were bloodshot.

Two spotlight lamps not far away shone brightly like the sun, his skin felt the scorching heatwave.

"I'm telling you, dragging this out is useless, you're the one suffering, just confess and we'll let you go," a young man nearby endlessly repeated into his ears.

But Old Ghost was like a deaf-mute, he didn't respond to anything the man said.

No wonder Shi Feng thought so highly of him—just for this professional integrity, it's worth doubling the reward.

Gradually, the young man questioning him was also losing patience. Just as he was about to erupt, a noise of the front security door opening unexpectedly sounded.

The young man hurried to the living room.

The newcomer was still the middle-aged man from last time, carrying a plastic bag filled with grilled lamb skewers.

"How's the questioning going?" The middle-aged man went straight to the point.

The two young men shook their heads in frustration, "Haven't gotten anything out yet."

The middle-aged man placed the bag on the coffee table, removed the cigarette clamped between his lips, and asked sternly, "How much longer will it take?"

The young men kept their heads down, not responding, uncertain of how long it would take.

"They're already pressing us from above. I can only give you one more day, can you get him to confess?"

The two young men exchanged glances, one of them responding quietly, "The guy's tight-lipped, no matter how we ask, he doesn't say a word, and we don't have the equipment here..."

"That's not what I want to hear," the middle-aged man interrupted by waving his hand, "Just tell me whether you can or can't do it, if you can't, I'll have someone else come."

Upon hearing this, the two men dared not say anything else, quickly nodding and promising, "We can, we'll definitely make him confess by tomorrow."

Only then did the middle-aged man's stern demeanor slightly soften, he went into the room where Old Ghost was, and observed his condition.

"Still planning to hold out without speaking? This is your last chance, I advise you to recognize reality."

Old Ghost remained unchanged from before, not even lifting an eyelid.

Seeing this, the middle-aged man let out a few cold laughs, "Oh well, if you like holding out, you can continue. There will come a time when you regret it."

With that, he didn't waste any more time on Old Ghost, turned and walked outside.

Closing the door, he went to the living room, and reminded the two young men once more, "As I said, I don't care how you question him, but he better not end up dead, got it?"

"Understood!" The two young men replied, standing straight.

The middle-aged man nodded slightly, preparing to leave with his hands behind his back.

Before reaching the door, a call suddenly rang from the phone in his pocket, and seeing the display, his expression became one of surprise.

He didn't immediately pick it up but went outside, closed the door behind him, then pressed the answer button.

It was unclear what was said on the other end, but the middle-aged man's expression changed continuously, from a supportive fake smile to hesitation, finally settling into determination...

After a few minutes, he returned indoors and instructed the two young men, "No more questioning, send him back."

The two young men were stunned, not reacting for a moment.

One of them bravely asked, "Where do we send him?"

"Send him back where he came from!" The middle-aged man shot them a glance, snapping.

"No more questioning?"

"No more questioning, you had your chance but couldn't seize it, now send him back!"

"Yes!"

Chapter 308: The Most Dangerous Profession

In the tea shop, Qi Yun was drinking tea while waiting for Zhang Dayong.

At that moment, the screen of his phone on the table suddenly lit up, and a WeChat message popped up.

He picked up the phone and looked at it; the message was from Xiao Jing, whom he had met at the bank yesterday.

"Mr. Qi, do you have time? My friend from France brought me two bottles of red wine, and I'd like to invite you to try them."

Qi Yun thought for a bit and decided to pretend he hadn't seen it, putting the phone back down.

But two minutes later, the other party unexpectedly sent another message.

This time it was a photo, or more accurately, an extremely seductive selfie.

In the photo, Xiao Jing was wearing a black silk nightgown, holding a bottle of red wine.

From the photo's composition, it seemed like it was about the red wine, but it was full of hidden hints, with subtly revealing curves and long, fair thighs.

Qi Yun stared at the photo on the phone screen, tapped the table lightly with his fingers twice, and then didn't reply, carefully deleting the chat record.

Just then, the private room door was pushed open, and Zhang Dayong walked in quickly.

The untamable joy on his face showed that things were progressing smoothly.

"Did it work?"

Zhang Dayong nodded: "It worked, he called personally."

Qi Yun sighed in relief, somewhat surprised that the other party would personally handle this rather than let a secretary do it.

But after thinking about it, it was understandable; that position, though only at a deputy level, was critical within the city bureau.

Zhou Wenbin would probably lose sleep again after hearing the news.

It's like in ancient battles, just as one side's troops are about to charge, a key general defects to the enemy camp.

But this is just the beginning; his big troubles lie ahead...

"They're going to send the person back to that hotel; you arrange for someone to pick them up," Zhang Dayong added.

Hearing this, Qi Yun immediately picked up his phone and sent a message to Ah Jiao, instructing her to go with Lao Hei to pick them up.

After sending the message, he stood up and said, "Alright, thanks, if there's nothing else, I'll be going."

"Hey, don't rush off." Zhang Dayong quickly called out.

Qi Yun looked at him suspiciously and sat back down: "Is there something else?"

"Yeah, I have a favor to ask you."

"If you have something to say, just tell me, no need for formalities," Qi Yun laughed.

Zhang Dayong picked up the teacup on the table, took a sip, and slowly began, "The person above me is about to retire, and I think, thanks to your influence, I might make another step forward soon."

"I was hoping you could help me get two paintings; I don't understand these things, but I'll visit him..."

"Don't make them too expensive, but to be honest, I've been working for so many years and don't have much savings; I can only spare up to 200,000."

Qi Yun smiled genuinely: "That's great news, don't worry, I'll handle it for you."

Zhang Dayong nodded: "Okay, I'll transfer the money to you later."

Qi Yun didn't refuse, instead curiously asked, "But with that person's word, do you still need to make rounds?"

Zhang Dayong sighed: "Having someone speak on your behalf is indeed good, but necessary gestures still need to be made, or it comes off as insensitive, leaving a bad impression."

"The twists and turns in your field are too many," Qi Yun chuckled, standing up, "I'll arrange it and have it sent to your home, if there's nothing else, I'll head off."

"Okay."

...

Outside a small hotel in Tugou Village, along the roadside.

A black SUV was parked by the road, and Lao Gui opened the car door, trembling as he got out.

He didn't know why the other party suddenly released him; at this moment, he just wanted to close his eyes and get a good sleep.

Just then, a man and a woman approached the hotel's entrance ahead, it was Ah Jiao and Lao Hei.

"Are you Lao Gui?" Ah Jiao asked.

Lao Gui struggled to lift his eyelids, glanced at the two, and said nothing.

He thought these two were part of the same group that captured him earlier, expecting to set him up since they couldn't get anything from him.

Seeing this, Ah Jiao didn't hesitate, after looking him over, she took out her phone and called Qi Yun.

"We've picked him up; you can talk to him," she said handing the phone to Lao Gui, "My boss, Qi Yun."

Lao Gui hesitantly took the phone and put it to his ear. Qi Yun's voice came through the receiver: "It's me, just go rest with them, I'll come find you tomorrow."

After hearing this, Lao Gui said nothing more and handed the phone back to Ah Jiao.

Ah Jiao continued speaking into the phone: "He's injured, should we take him to the hospital first?"

"Yes, take him there, I'll send Brother Wei to meet you later."

"Okay."

After hanging up, Ah Jiao opened the door of a nearby business car and said to Lao Gui, "Get in."

This time Lao Gui didn't refuse, dragging his weary steps into the car.

...

The next day, after breakfast, Qi Yun planned to visit Lao Gui in the hospital but received a call from Brother Peng.

"Did Liu Meng tell you about the issue at home?"

Qi Yun was puzzled: "No, what's happened?"

Brother Peng explained, "He called me this morning requesting a week's leave, so I asked around; his brother-in-law passed away."

"Passed away!?" Qi Yun was surprised; he had met his brother-in-law, Li Jie, before; he was only in his early twenties.

After the vegetable market scam, he even stole his father's savings to dabble in the stock market.

Though not very stable, it's still a shame for someone so young to die.

"How did he die?"

Brother Peng sighed, "Liu Meng said that the kid secretly went with a friend to learn to be an engineering diver for quick money, ended up being buried during a piling collapse right after training."

"This..." Qi Yun was momentarily speechless, that kid was really daring...

That job isn't for just anyone, dubbed engineering diver at best, but vulgarly it's called a water ghost, living on the edge.

The pay's good, 20,000 if you make it, but 2 million for your life if you don't.

Yet it's a life gamble, one of the most dangerous jobs out there, a hundred times riskier than mining.

Qi Yun shook his head, sighing, feeling some regret for Li Jie, who ultimately paid dearly for his impatience.

After a few seconds of silence, he said, "I'll visit his home later to see if there's anything I can do to help."

Brother Peng nodded, "Also about that load of goods, Lao Men replied last night that the other party refused to budge."

"The detained station is not within Tuva's territory, so even if Nokovic interceded, they still wouldn't cooperate."

"Can you think of a way, if not, I'll have Mengmeng go and appeal to their railway department."

Qi Yun nodded: "Okay, got it, I'll contact Lao Men later to check the specifics."

Chapter 309: Barely Finished the Job and Got Burned

After finishing the call with Brother Peng, Qi Yun got up from the sofa, intending to visit Liu Meng's house.

But just as he reached the door, he noticed the navy blue jacket he was wearing and felt it was a bit inappropriate, so he returned to the bedroom to change into a black one.

When he arrived outside Liu Meng's yard, he happened to meet Liu Meng and his wife preparing to leave.

Both of them looked quite unwell, especially Liu Meng's wife, Li Cuixia, her eyes were swollen from crying, visibly saddened by her brother's death.

Liu Meng was not much better off, looking very weary, but upon seeing Qi Yun arrive, he still pulled himself together to greet him.

"Why are you here?"

Qi Yun first offered his condolences to Li Cuixia, then turned to Liu Meng and replied, "Brother Peng called me earlier, I came to see if there's anything I can help with."

Liu Meng patted Li Cuixia on the back, "You go ahead and get a taxi, I'll have a chat with Qi."

Li Cuixia nodded and left first.

Once his wife had walked away, Liu Meng took out a cigarette and handed one over, saying, "Hey, they are the only child in the Li family, the father-in-law was urging to have grandkids before the New Year, and now this happened..."

Qi Yun took the cigarette between his fingers, also sighed, "Has the body been brought back?"

Liu Meng shook his head, "Yesterday the police reported from the construction site, the body was taken away. They said they need to do another autopsy to determine the cause of death. They called this morning to ask family members to claim it."

"Burials are not common here, it'll be sent directly to the funeral home later."

Qi Yun nodded slightly upon hearing, "What's being said about compensation?"

Though it's a bit inappropriate to talk about money at this time, with the person gone, the living elderly need to secure pension money.

Speaking of this, Liu Meng's face turned even worse, angrily saying, "From the accident till now, no one in charge from the site has shown up. I plan to go to the site this afternoon to find them."

Qi Yun was a bit surprised, feeling that this attitude was inappropriate, even if not talking about compensation, a death occurred at the site, there should at least be consolations to the family, right?

However, it's possible they feel the family is emotionally unstable now, wanting to avoid for a couple of days.

"Alright, I won't hold you up, if you need help, just call me anytime." Saying this, Qi Yun patted Liu Meng's shoulder.

Liu Meng nodded, took a deep drag on his cigarette, discarded the butt, and rode away on his motorcycle.

Qi Yun watched his departing back, sighed, and then moved toward the parked car next to him.

In the car, Chen Wei turned and asked, puzzled, "Something happened at Liu Meng's house?" He hadn't gotten out of the car but overheard pieces from inside.

"Yes." Qi Yun immediately recounted the situation with Li Jie.

Upon hearing, Chen Wei also sighed, perhaps as someone in a similar high-risk profession, he could better understand the feeling of living dangerously.

...

Half an hour later, outside a ward in the city hospital.

Ah Jiao was resting on the bench, while Lao Hei was alert, constantly scanning the corridor on both sides.

Seeing Qi Yun and Chen Wei approaching, he raised his hand intending to wake Ah Jiao, but was stopped by Qi Yun with a shake of his head.

Looking through the window of the ward, he glanced inside then pushed the door to enter.

On the bed, Lao Gui, after a night's rest, finally had his exhausted state somewhat relieved, though the bruises still limited his movement.

Qi Yun sat on a chair beside, glanced at the drip hanging by the bed, and asked, "Was the injury serious?"

Lao Gui shook his head, "It's not much, a few days of rest will be fine."

Hearing this, Qi Yun felt relieved, continued, "Tell me in detail what happened."

Lao Gui propped himself up on the pillow, his Adam's apple moving as he spoke, "That night... later they took me to a community house to interrogate me, trying to find out who hired me."

"I didn't say a word."

"Afterwards, they just let me go."

Qi Yun nodded slightly upon hearing, Lao Gui's account was basically what he suspected.

Though he didn't mention details from those days in captivity, the bruises on his face clearly showed he had suffered.

Shi Feng had said more than once that Lao Gui would never sell him out, and he had always wanted to believe him, thankfully, the outcome did not disappoint.

"Though they released you, it was due to me leveraging other forces. Later on, there might still be people looking for you."

Lao Gui's face showed no change upon hearing, "I earn my living this way, not afraid of being targeted."

Qi Yun chuckled, knowing he meant it.

"How about not taking jobs in the future, work with me instead?"

Lao Gui glanced at him, asking, "Do what with you?"

Qi Yun pointed to the door, "Like those two, normally you don't have to do much. I'll contact you when you're needed."

"The treatment can be discussed, should anything happen I can get you out, likely safer than taking outside jobs."

He thought he had shown sincerity, assuming the other wouldn't refuse.

But unexpectedly, Lao Gui smirked, "Yeah right." He gestured with his needle-free hand towards Qi Yun, "Five years!"

"I haven't had any trouble for five years! Just finished working for you and got nailed..."

Qi Yun showed a bit of embarrassment, "Are you saying I'm bad luck for you?"

"Bad luck or not I don't know, but your job indeed carries considerable risk." Lao Gui said blandly.

Qi Yun didn't argue, patiently persuaded, "Risk and rewards are equivalent, and I never stingy treating friends."

Lao Gui kept silent for a moment before saying, "Talk again when I'm healed, let me think it over."

Chapter 310: Barely Finished the Job and Got Burned

"Alright." Qi Yun didn't insist further. Old Ghost's skill was just one of the aspects he valued; more importantly, the other party was reliable and trustworthy.

In the future, as the business expands, he needs trustworthy people to help manage all facets; he can't do everything by himself.

"By the way, is that Luo Yang your junior?"

Old Ghost was slightly stunned upon hearing this and asked back, "How did you know?"

Qi Yun smiled at him, "You can ask him yourself later. He played a significant role in getting you out this time."

With that, he got up and left the ward.

Outside, Ah Jiao had just washed her face and came back. Seeing the dark circles under her eyes, Qi Yun said to her and Lao Hei, "You two should go back and rest. Luo Yang will bring people over later, and then he will have his people monitoring here."

"Luo Yang!?" The two's expressions changed as soon as they heard the name.

The other party had sent people all over to capture them before; Lao Hei even got injured because of it.

Qi Yun slapped his forehead, remembered he hadn't told them yet, and proceeded to explain, "I talked to him the day before yesterday. Your matters have been settled."

Their expressions immediately relaxed after hearing this, feeling they could finally ease up a bit. Constantly hiding was no good.

"Thank you, boss!"

"Thanks, boss!"

Qi Yun waved them off, "No need for that. Since you call me boss, I'll definitely help you out when there's trouble."

"Alright, quickly go back and rest."

The two didn't say much more, bowed solemnly, and then headed towards the elevator.

Once the elevator doors closed, Lao Hei turned to Ah Jiao and asked, "Does the boss have that much face now? Even someone like Luo Yang is compromising."

Ah Jiao gave him a sideways glance and said irritably, "Are you stupid? Is Luo Yang so easy to talk to? We scammed his brother-in-law out of five million, and last time, Chen Wei even injured one of his men to save us."

"Though he spoke so casually just now, he's sure to have paid a hefty price for this."

Lao Hei scratched his head, "Then how should we repay the boss?"

"Do the tasks he assigns us and never betray him. That's the only thing he needs from us..." Ah Jiao murmured.

She said it to Lao Hei, as well as to herself.

Qi Yun naturally wasn't aware of their conversation in the elevator. He hadn't sat at the ward door for long when Luo Yang arrived with a few subordinates.

Thanks to this cooperation and successfully rescuing Old Ghost, the relationship between the two had somewhat warmed.

Qi Yun valued certain aspects of Luo Yang's influence, and Luo Yang also sensed that Qi Yun's connections weren't simple, both interested in building a friendship.

"How's Old Ghost doing?" Luo Yang glanced inside the ward and asked.

Qi Yun replied, "He looks alright; shouldn't be any major problems."

"Did the authorities take him?"

"More or less." Qi Yun didn't elaborate much.

After a few exchanges, they agreed to have a meal together next time, and Qi Yun took his leave.

Leaving the hospital, he had Chen Wei drive to Antique Street while he leaned back in the rear seat and dialed Mendeleyev's number.

"Hello, Old Qi." The geese over there were five hours behind domestic time, so it was just dawning, and Mendeleyev's voice sounded a bit hoarse.

"I heard from Brother Peng about that batch of goods. Tell me the specifics, and I'll see if I can find someone to help." Qi Yun, without further chit-chat, got straight to the point.

Mendeleyev cleared his throat and began to narrate, "That batch of goods was detained at Minsk Station. I asked Nokovic to step in and contact their manager, even prepared a hundred thousand USD, but they refused."

"I'm trying to reach other channels to smooth things over."

Qi Yun raised an eyebrow after listening, "Won't even take money? What are they playing at?"

"I guess someone is jealous of our business; they've likely been lured away." Mendeleyev offered his thoughts.

Qi Yun was slightly stunned, "Is competition there so fierce now? Our sales volume isn't that large, right?"

Mendeleyev sighed, "The situation is worse than when you came here two months ago. Inflation is severe, many businesses have closed, various goods production has drastically reduced, and prices are soaring."

"So our goods have great advantages here and are immediately snatched up by those merchants."

After pondering slightly, Qi Yun mused, "So you mean those firms are playing dirty?"

"Very likely!" Mendeleyev confirmed, "I've arranged to meet a Lower House senator tonight, to see if he's willing to step forward and help resolve it."

Regarding the situation over there, Mendeleyev was undoubtedly more knowledgeable, and seeing him say so, Qi Yun naturally chose to trust him.

"Alright, get in touch first, and let me know once there's a result."

"Okay."

After hanging up, Qi Yun sighed deeply, musing to himself that with the current environment, business is indeed hard to do; any slightly profitable venture is fiercely contested.

If it weren't for the system's existence, he'd probably find it tough to get back on his feet.

Without time for more reflections, the car sped along the road and soon stopped at the entrance to Qiuyue Pavilion.

Just as he stepped inside, Shi Feng grabbed him to inquire about Old Ghost's situation.

"How's it going? Got any news about Old Ghost?"

"He's fine, already rescued." Qi Yun immediately recounted the story briefly.

After listening, Shi Feng finally felt at ease and jokingly said, "As long as he's alright; that guy still owes me two hundred thousand dollars."