

Middle Age 451

Chapter 451: You Have Already Chosen the Path to Death

Anti-Smuggling Bureau, inside the interrogation room.

Qi Yun had barely rested the whole night, looking utterly exhausted. Only now did he truly understand the torment Old Ghost went through when he was captured last time.

"Creak."

The door to the interrogation room opened, and Director Han walked in, holding a cup of tea. He eyed Qi Yun up and down, noticing the latter was reaching his limit, then waved to the two officers who had been interrogating for several hours.

"You two, step out, and turn off the surveillance."

The two officers exchanged a glance and followed orders, exiting as they switched off the surveillance camera's power in the corner.

Only Qi Yun and Director Han were left in the interrogation room, the fluorescent light casting contrasting expressions on their faces.

Director Han set down his tea cup and casually sat on the table in front of Qi Yun, smiling as he asked, "How is it? Not feeling too great, huh?"

Qi Yun raised his eyelids slightly, his eyes bloodshot, "Director Han, you turned off the surveillance just to say this to me? Do you think I should beg you?"

The smile on Director Han's face faded a bit, as he crossed his arms over his chest, "Whether or not you beg is up to you, but you must understand, the one who can decide if you get out of here isn't the person backing you."

"I had people check the surveillance all night. That batch of goods you picked up from the airport was stored in the warehouse opposite the New District Branch, am I right?"

"I only need to give the order, and my people can immediately seize your batch of goods. Even if you don't cooperate, I can still pin you down!"

As he said this, he leaned down towards Qi Yun's ear and lowered his voice, "I'll also give you another piece of news, Captain Ge from the National Security just came by, but you're still locked up here. Understand what that means?"

After hearing this, Qi Yun didn't react as Director Han expected, with panic or fear. His face remained expressionless.

He checked his watch, then calmly shook his head, "I don't understand, if you have something to say, just say it."

Director Han was taken aback by Qi Yun's nonchalance, and his face instantly turned dark as he glanced back at the surveillance to ensure the red light had indeed gone out. Then, he glared at Qi Yun, speaking word by word, "I originally thought you were a smart person, but it looks like you lack the sense of measure."

"You should know what I want. Hand over the items, and you can walk out of here peacefully and continue your role as Commissioner Qi."

"Otherwise..."

"Otherwise what?" Qi Yun interrupted with a cold laugh, looking disdainfully at the other, "Can you sentence me to death?"

Director Han couldn't accept Qi Yun's contemptuous attitude, and his face turned ashen instantly.

He poked Qi Yun's chest with his finger and gritted his teeth, "Don't be ungrateful, I may not be able to sentence you to death, but I can certainly have you spend three to five years locked away, want to bet on that?"

"What would happen to your company, your wife, and children then, I don't need to spell it out for you, do I?"

Qi Yun staggered a bit from the poke, but still showed no signs of backing down. He shoved away Director Han's hand and his gaze turned cold.

"You're good, I'll remember you."

Using family as a threat clearly touched Qi Yun's bottom line, in his eyes, Director Han already sealed his own fate.

Director Han sneered with disdain in his tone, "Do you think you still have a chance? Do you know who's targeting you?"

Qi Yun didn't reply, closing his eyes and ignoring the other, a stance that effectively rejected Director Han's offer.

Seeing this, Director Han stood up with a gloomy face and called out to the outside, "Xiao Liu!"

Soon, a young officer walked in, "Director Han, you called me?"

Director Han glanced at Qi Yun and said sternly, "Notify the first and second teams to assemble downstairs!"

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Zhongshan Road, No. 479.

In front of a magnificent office building, Director Duan pushed open the car door and got out. He stood in front of the building, observing for a couple of seconds before stepping onto the stairs.

A few minutes later, he took the elevator to the 19th floor, where a middle-aged man, looking around thirty-five or six, greeted him in the hallway. Seeing Director Duan exit the elevator, the middle-aged man immediately approached and extended his hand, "Director Duan, long time no see."

Director Duan paused, seemingly surprised to find the man waiting there, but quickly regained his composure and shook the man's hand, "Haha, it has been a while, sorry to have kept you waiting, Secretary Ji."

The middle-aged man called Secretary Ji had small, triangular eyes that nearly disappeared when he smiled.

"Director Duan, you're joking, no waiting, no waiting, the leader is busy right now. Let me take you to the lounge to sit for a bit," Secretary Ji said, gesturing with his hand.

"Alright." Director Duan nodded and followed him down the hallway.

Inside the lounge, Secretary Ji poured a cup of tea for Director Duan and whispered, "The leader's in a bit of a mood today, scolding the people from the Development and Reform department inside."

"Oh? What happened?" Director Duan asked curiously.

"Seems like it's an issue with a project; the people from Development and Reform aren't following the rules, they're overstepping and trying to meddle with finance matters too," Secretary Ji explained casually.

Director Duan paused, teacup in hand, looking at him with a meaningful glance but said nothing.

They're both seasoned veterans; he understood the subtext of what was said, and it was clear why Secretary Ji waited by the elevator: to convey this very message.

"Director Duan, please sit for a bit. I'll go check if the leader is done and come call for you when they're ready," Secretary Ji said politely, setting down the teapot.

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Director Duan nodded, "Alright, sorry to trouble you."

"It's my duty." Secretary Ji replied and then turned to leave the lounge.

About ten minutes later, the door to the lounge was pushed open, and under the guidance of Secretary Ji, Director Duan walked into a very spacious office next door.

Behind the desk, an elderly man, appearing to be in his fifties with an imposing presence, was reviewing the documents on the table.

"Leader, Director Duan is here," Secretary Ji whispered.

The elderly man put down the pen in his hand and looked up, "Oh, Duan, what brings you here today? Have a seat."

Director Duan smiled, "Haha, I heard from Secretary Ji that you have some time today, so I thought I'd come over to report work to you."

The elderly man got up from behind the desk, moved to the seating area, and gestured for Director Duan to sit down, "Come, have a seat and talk."

Director Duan nodded, waiting for the other to sit down first before he sat down himself.

Secretary Ji poured tea for the two of them and then left the office, closing the door behind.

The elderly man glanced at Director Duan, smiling faintly, "You look much older recently, all the work has fallen on you while Lao Wan is recuperating, hasn't it?"

Director Duan touched his graying temples, "Haha, it's alright. Our work is relatively straightforward. There isn't too much that requires my attention, unlike you who are busy every day."

"Hmm." The elderly man took a sip of tea, his gaze lingering on Director Duan, "You've done an excellent job lately. Lao Wan has always said you have a big-picture view, and he's at ease entrusting the work to you."

"Do the work at hand sincerely and diligently. If there's anything you need from us locally, feel free to say."

Hearing this, Director Duan internally sighed. Although the other party didn't explicitly say it, he already understood their stance.

The two chatted in the office for more than ten minutes, after which Director Duan took his leave.

After stepping out of the office building, he glanced back and then took out his phone to dial a number.

"He's not willing to give us this face."

"Ah, it was expected." The person on the other end of the call sighed.

Director Duan rubbed his lower back, saying somewhat helplessly, "That guy has indeed made significant contributions, and he has certain connections abroad. We can't just give up on him, right?"

There was a long silence on the other end before a determined voice responded, "Doesn't he follow the rules? Let him pick two people for Ge Dabao to investigate, and we'll also show him the rules."

Director Duan immediately perked up, his previously slouched posture straightening, a sharp glint flashing in his eyes, "Alright, I understand."

"Hmm, go ahead with it."

Back in the office building, after sending off Director Duan, Secretary Ji returned to the previous office.

The elderly man stood in front of the huge floor-to-ceiling window, asking without turning his head, "How are things on their side?"

Secretary Ji shook his head, "Still not willing to admit."

"The anti-smuggling bureau has found solid evidence and is proceeding to confirm it. Once the evidence is secured, the prosecution will take over, and by then he will most likely not be able to withstand it."

The elderly man nodded slightly, "Quickly get what he has in his hands."

"We've underestimated this guy a little, didn't expect his background to be so noteworthy. Not only has Lao Duan approached us, but even some people from Shanghai are reaching out to me."

"Shanghai?" Secretary Ji was taken aback.

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On the other side, at the entrance of the warehouse opposite the New District Branch, Chen Wei sat in a business vehicle with Lao Ying and Lao Bai.

Lao Bai yawned and asked, "Are you guys hungry? I can go grab something to eat."

Lao Ying wiped his face, replying somewhat tiredly, "Sure, get some pilaf, I want the lamb leg."

"Where would you find pilaf this early in the morning?" Lao Bai replied somewhat speechlessly.

"Then get some baked buns."

"Alright." Lao Bai nodded, opened the door, and got out to buy food.

After he left, Lao Ying sat up from the back seat and took two sips from a water bottle, "Do you think anyone will find us here?"

At the driver's seat, Chen Wei shook his head, "I don't know, but what's inside is very important to the boss."

He was constantly by Qi Yun's side and understood him best, knowing how important the artifacts in the warehouse were to Qi Yun. So after confirming Zhao Qing and Nuannuan's safety last night, he came here with his men to keep watch.

"You should get some sleep; I'll keep watch." Lao Ying patted his shoulder, "When we came over that night, I checked and no one was tailing us."

Chen Wei's expression was serious, pointing to a nearby surveillance camera, "They will certainly be able to find this place too."

Qi Yun had once told him about the matter of the USB, so Chen Wei knew who was targeting Qi Yun. Given their capabilities, finding this place wouldn't be difficult.

Just as the two were talking, seven or eight cars with a "Customs" logo suddenly appeared on the road ahead.

Chen Wei's pupils contracted sharply, his expression immediately tensing. If those arriving were official personnel, the three of them could do very little...

Lao Ying also straightened up, squinting at the convoy of cars.

In just a minute or two, the seven or eight vehicles stopped directly in front of the warehouse, and then more than twenty officers quickly got out of the cars, heading this way.

A vehicle belonging to the New District Branch was also parked in front of the warehouse, and the officers inside, seeing the others heading towards the warehouse, immediately got out of their car and blocked the way.

"What are you doing?"

Leading the way, Director Han, looked at the two New District Branch officers who suddenly appeared, his face unmoved, as if he had anticipated it.

He took out his credentials and flashed them, "Anti-smuggling bureau on business! We received a report suspecting that there are illegal smuggled goods in this warehouse. We need to conduct a search according to the law!"

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The officers of the New District Branch frowned and stood in front of the warehouse's iron door. Zhang Dayong had tasked them with staying here 24 hours a day, not allowing anyone to approach the warehouse.

But with the Anti-smuggling Bureau conducting a legitimate investigation and without reasonable grounds to obstruct them, they momentarily didn't know how to respond.

"This is a private warehouse. Do you have a search warrant?" Chen Wei's voice came from the side as he and Eagle stood in front of the warehouse door, signaling to the two officers from the New District.

The two officers understood and immediately took out their phones, moving aside.

Director Han turned to look at Chen Wei, squinting his eyes. They had investigated Qi Yun thoroughly and naturally knew the identities of Chen Wei and Eagle.

"Bring it over."

With those words, an officer behind him pulled out a document from a briefcase and handed it to Director Han.

He extended the document to Chen Wei, with a cold smile at the corner of his mouth: "A search warrant, issued by the city's prosecution office, targeting the evidence related to the Qi Yun's suspected smuggling case, including this warehouse."

The red seal on the document was clearly visible, with complete numbers and a date of issue. At first glance, there was nothing wrong with it, and it was apparent they had come fully prepared.

With the prosecutor's document, Chen Wei and the others had no reason to obstruct, or else it would be obstructing law enforcement.

Even so, he and Eagle still showed no intention of stepping aside, continuing to block the warehouse door.

"You'll have to wait a while; we need to verify the authenticity of this search warrant." Eagle took out his phone, pretending to ask Chen Wei, "Should we verify this with the case management office of the prosecution office? Do you know their phone number?"

Director Han's face instantly darkened, staring at the two blocking the door: "My patience is limited. I'll warn you one last time. If you don't step aside, I'll arrest you immediately!"

Eagle put away his phone, shrugged, and then willingly stretched out his hands: "Then sentence me to death?"

Chen Wei also stood his ground, resolute.

Director Han let out a cold laugh and shouted through gritted teeth: "These two are obstructing official duties. Take them away!"

With his words, several officers behind him stepped forward, ready to flex silver handcuffs for Chen Wei and Eagle.

Just then, a sudden rush of footsteps sounded from behind.

Director Han quickly turned around and saw Zhang Dayong leading several officers briskly walking over from the gate of the New District Branch, including Ma Baoguo.

The warehouse was just across the street from the New District Branch, so as soon as the two officers on guard sent word, Zhang Dayong immediately brought people over.

"Stop! You can't arrest them." Zhang Dayong sternly commanded as he approached.

"Why not?" Director Han frowned, knowing exactly why Zhang Dayong appeared, "I'm enforcing a search warrant issued by the prosecution office. These two hindered our investigation. Arresting them is legal and compliant."

Zhang Dayong ignored him and went straight to Chen Wei, patting his arm, then turning to Director Han with an unequivocal tone: "This warehouse was requisitioned by the National Cultural Heritage Administration two days ago as a temporary transfer point for overseas cultural relics, with special approval documents from the National Cultural Heritage Administration and our branch's records. It is classified as a storage point for classified cultural relics."

His attitude was very firm, completely disregarding Director Han, even though they were of similar rank, the authority weight was vastly different.

Director Han paused after hearing this: "Requisitioned by the National Cultural Heritage Administration?"

Ma Baoguo, standing behind Zhang Dayong, stepped forward, took an A4 paper from a folder, shoved it into Director Han's face, and said in a deep voice: "This is the National Cultural Heritage Administration's 'Temporary Storage Point Record Notice' issued on June 24th. Do you need to have a look?"

Ignoring Ma Baoguo's sarcasm, Director Han took the paper and looked at it.

The content on the paper was clear, designating the warehouse as a transfer point for overseas returned cultural relics, storing items, including Western Zhou bronze artifacts and the Yuanming Garden Twelve Bronze Heads, totaling 23 pieces, all of which are national level 1 protected relics, with a confidentiality level of top secret.

The document also bore the red seal of the National Cultural Heritage Administration and a number, which, like the search warrant, was genuine.

Last time, Qi Yun inquired Yu Qixuan about the lack of documents regarding this batch of artifacts. Yu Qixuan confidently assured him that there would be no issues.

However, Qi Yun knew the level of opponents he was facing, so he didn't feel secure, worried that the other side might find a loophole. Thus, he cautiously had Yu Qixuan contact the National Museum, obtaining this document.

As for why the document was issued by the National Cultural Heritage Administration, and not the National Museum, it was because the National Museum is just a public institution and cannot directly request local cooperation.

The National Cultural Heritage Administration was different, as it's a directly affiliated administration unit with authority equivalent to the public security, prosecution, and judiciary departments.

Even though such direct contact with the police station to cooperate is rare—usually, they would first contact the local government for coordination.

But if they really acted this way, the local authorities wouldn't have much to say...

After reading the document, Director Han's face became extremely unpleasant. After pondering for two seconds, he re-took the previous search warrant: "We suspect there are illegal smuggled items hidden in this warehouse. This is the prosecution office's search warrant."

"Even if this warehouse was requisitioned by the National Cultural Heritage Administration, we still have the right to search!"

Upon finishing, Ma Baoguo seemingly took out another piece of paper, shoved it in his face, and sarcastically said, "I wonder how you typically enforce the law? Do you really understand the law?"

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"According to the 'Regulations on the Implementation of the Cultural Relics Protection Law,' a search of a top-secret cultural relics storage site requires joint approval from the S-level Cultural Relics Bureau and national security departments. The standard criminal case search warrant from the prosecution does not apply!"

"If you want to investigate, you must first complete the secret approval process! Understood?!"

"Consider this a free lesson; go back and study well."

Ma Baoguo's rapid-fire speech turned Director Han's face into the color of a liver. He clutched the search warrant tightly, speechless.

As Ma Baoguo said, he indeed wasn't very familiar with the details the other party just mentioned. Even though he worked in the anti-smuggling bureau, he might not encounter such a case in his lifetime. Who would memorize those clauses anyway?

However, he believed Ma Baoguo wouldn't dare to speak recklessly about such matters...

"What? Not leaving yet?" Today, Ma Baoguo fully assumed the role of the villain, directly mocking face-to-face, "If you have nothing to do, you're welcome to sit in our bureau for a while. The canteen will make stew for lunch."

The surrounding anti-smuggling bureau agents looked towards Director Han, somewhat at a loss.

Director Han was also in a dilemma at this moment. Before setting out, he specifically called Secretary Ji, patting his chest and promising to handle the matter well. But now, it turned out like this.

Actually, with his rank, he couldn't have obtained this search warrant because they still didn't have direct evidence to pin down Qi Yun. The prosecution couldn't possibly issue such a document.

So how did the document in his hand come about? The answer needs no further explanation.

You made a request, and they arranged everything for you. The job isn't done yet, so how do you explain to them?

Although the fault may not lie with him, given the objective factors, will the higher-ups listen to his explanations?

In this thought, Director Han wished he could slap himself twice, regretting his hasty promise.

"Withdraw!"

Director Han whispered fiercely and then glared at Zhang Dayong, almost spitting fire from his eyes.

He didn't childishly make any harsh comments, just quickly left with his subordinates in dejection.

Once those cars drove away, Zhang Dayong waved his hand, "You guys head back first."

The officers behind him nodded and walked across the street.

Ma Baoguo stayed behind, glanced at the cars leaving, and asked Zhang Dayong, "Now that they don't have evidence, Qi should be released, right?"

Zhang Dayong shook his head, looking grave. Although he didn't know who wanted to deal with Qi Yun, he could guess their rank.

Even if they couldn't find concrete evidence in the smuggling matter, those people, once they drop their facade, could easily find other reasons to keep you locked up.

Moreover, his actions today were already considered a risk. Though he reported to his superior beforehand, he had genuinely offended someone, and who knows when he might be ousted to resolve grievances...

This was for Qi Yun, which is why he was willing to risk his political future.

"This is not something we can meddle with... You hurry back and keep an eye on yesterday's case. Complete the evidence chain and close the case as soon as possible!" Zhang Dayong instructed sternly.

Ma Baoguo knew he was referring to the incident at the West Mountain Cemetery yesterday, worried it might become another breakthrough point.

"Alright."

After everyone left, Zhang Dayong turned to Chen Wei: "Note down my phone number. Inform me immediately if there's any situation either here or at his house!"

Chen Wei nodded, took out his phone, and noted down the latter's number.

Even so... the content I submit is often revised after review.

So, if time permits, I'll certainly try to update more, after all, word count and manuscript fees are directly linked, who wouldn't want more income?

Once again, thank you to all the esteemed readers for the monthly tickets and for subscribing, you're the providers of my livelihood!

Chapter 455: Use Job Titles While Working

No. 30, East Nanhu Road, Building F, City.

In an office with the best view on the east side, Zhang Dayong hurried over after dealing with matters at the warehouse.

Behind the broad mahogany desk, a middle-aged man in his forties sat facing the window.

"Have they left?"

Zhang Dayong stood to the side: "Yes, they came with a search warrant."

The middle-aged man nodded: "Old Liang explained to me, Ma Chaoyang gave them a heads-up."

Zhang Dayong was not too surprised upon hearing this; he had already had a premonition.

The office fell into a brief silence, only broken after a long pause.

"So you already knew what was in that warehouse?"

The middle-aged man's tone remained as calm as before, but the words hit Zhang Dayong like a thunderclap.

Instantly, he clenched his hands tightly behind his back, palms sweaty.

Regarding the national treasures in the warehouse, Qi Yun had told him that night to keep it confidential, so he hadn't mentioned it to anyone before today, including the person in front of him.

Seeming to notice Zhang Dayong's tension, the middle-aged man chuckled softly and walked to the window: "Don't overthink it, with the letter from the National Cultural Heritage Administration, it indeed needs to be confidential."

Zhang Dayong didn't dare to respond rashly; he recognized this as a veiled warning, quickly thinking about how to reply.

However, the middle-aged man didn't seem intent on pursuing the matter and changed the subject: "Do you have a good relationship with Qi Yun?"

"Fairly good, he helped me solve two cases before, so I'd say we're friends." Zhang Dayong glanced at the man's back cautiously.

"Hmm." The man nodded slightly and finally turned around, "Do you know why the anti-smuggling bureau wants to arrest him?"

Zhang Dayong's Adam's apple bobbed. That question seemed simple, but was he really only asking the literal meaning?

The anti-smuggling bureau arrests for smuggling, what else could it be? Does this even need asking?

After two seconds of silence, Zhang Dayong carefully started: "I know a bit, but I'm not clear on the specifics."

The middle-aged man smiled, patting Zhang Dayong on the shoulder: "Alright, go and get busy."

"When you have the chance, pass a message to Qi Yun for me, just say I want to have a chat with him."

Zhang Dayong was taken aback and didn't immediately grasp the meaning behind the words.

Qi Yun is still in custody, how can I convey a message to him?

Could it be... he's going to be released?

At this thought, Zhang Dayong couldn't help but feel a hint of joy.

Standing at the foot of the mountain, there are many things he cannot see clearly, but those at the summit can often see much more clearly.

Without time to think deeply, Zhang Dayong hurriedly nodded: "Alright, I'll relay it when I have the chance."

"Then I'll let you get back to work, I won't disturb you any longer."

The middle-aged man waved his hand: "Mm, go on."

After leaving the office, Zhang Dayong breathed a long sigh of relief, proceeding to the elevator and heading downstairs, while wondering privately why they would want to meet with Qi Yun.

As the elevator reached the first floor and he stepped off, he heard someone calling him from behind.

"Director Zhang! Wait!"

Zhang Dayong turned around, puzzled, and when he saw who called him, he quickly turned and went up: "Secretary Jiang, you were looking for me?"

The man called Secretary Jiang smiled: "The leader wants to see you, come with me."

Zhang Dayong was momentarily stunned, surprised by the unexpected summons.

The leader referred to by Secretary Jiang was actually Ma Chaoyang, the deputy director, whom the middle-aged man had just mentioned.

Ma Chaoyang is not only a second-in-command but also directs a governmental department, essentially being Zhang Dayong's superior's superior.

Generally, any assignments would not be given directly to him; they would be issued to the city bureau first and then distributed as specific tasks.

Therefore, bypassing the city bureau to summon him directly seemed quite unusual.

The only thing Zhang Dayong could connect it to was the incident that happened at the warehouse in the morning.

The two hurriedly made their way to an office on the ninth floor, which was decorated similarly to the one Zhang Dayong left, also with a very good view overlooking distant forests and lakes.

"Leader, you wanted to see me." Zhang Dayong greeted, wearing a very cautious smile.

Ma Chaoyang lifted his gaze from behind the desk, gave a soft "Hmm" and pointed to the chair opposite him: "Sit, I called you to ask you something."

"Yes, please go ahead." Zhang Dayong cautiously sat on the chair but only sat on a third of the seat.

Ma Chaoyang continued perusing the document in his hand, speaking casually: "I heard that the anti-smuggling bureau was in your jurisdiction this morning handling a case and almost clashed with your people. Is that true?"

Upon hearing this, the cold sweat on Zhang Dayong that had just subsided quickly reappeared, and his back was soon drenched.

Wasn't it more than likely that they already knew the details?

Moreover, that search warrant was orchestrated by the very person in front of him...

"There was a small misunderstanding, the anti-smuggling bureau wanted to search a warehouse that is actually a confidential area under the National Cultural Heritage Administration, which sent a letter directly to our division, and we..." Zhang Dayong made a pained expression as he spoke.

Ma Chaoyang put down the files and looked directly at Zhang Dayong, his tone carrying a hint of reproach: "When did you receive the letter from the National Cultural Heritage Administration? Why didn't you report it?"

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Zhang Dayong was at a loss for words; this question was basically the same as the one asked by the previous person.

In terms of procedure, the letter from the National Cultural Heritage Administration had confidentiality requirements, and he wasn't obligated to report it upward, but in actual work, no one did this.

Zhang Dayong remained silent and didn't respond; he had already prepared himself for punishment before entering this office.

The other party, even if dissatisfied, would only scold him verbally for a few words. At least until that matter, which had been brewing for several months, completely cleared up, there was no way they could really act against him, unless Zhang Dayong foolishly exposed a vital weakness.

After a round of scolding, Ma Chaoyang seemed to have vented his anger: "Alright, you may go now."

"Alright, alright, you go ahead with your work, leader." Zhang Dayong got up as if he had received an amnesty and walked towards the door.

Just as he reached for the handle, a voice came from behind: "Don't think that just because it's always sunny, you don't need to carry an umbrella; who knows if it will rain tomorrow."

Zhang Dayong paused, nodded in acknowledgment: "Yes, I will remember that."

Ma Chaoyang gave him a glance: "Hmm, I hope you really do remember."

After Zhang Dayong left, Ma Chaoyang picked up the phone on his desk and dialed a number. After two rings, the call was quickly answered.

"Hello, Secretary Ji, is the teacher available now?"

"Yes, I didn't expect it either, not even the National Cultural Heritage Administration is involved."

"Alright, please convey to the teacher that I'll be there shortly."

After hanging up, Ma Chaoyang immediately called in Secretary Jiang, instructing him, "I'm heading out for a bit; you don't need to follow. When Director Fang from customs arrives, have him wait in the lounge for me."

Secretary Jiang nodded: "Alright, leader."

Over half an hour later, in the office where Director Duan had previously been, Ma Chaoyang met the elder.

Before he even had a chance to sit down properly, Ma Chaoyang hurriedly spoke: "Teacher..."

"How many times have I told you, refer to titles during work. Why are you still acting like an impatient young man?" the elder admonished discontentedly.

Though the words were of reproach, it also subtly indicated their unusual relationship.

"Yes, yes." Ma Chaoyang bowed his head, looking humble and receptive to guidance. He knew that the elder was not dissatisfied with him calling him 'teacher', but with his own display of impatience.

But as the saying goes, until the knife is at your throat, you don't know fear.

Given the elder's status, even if someone with ulterior motives held evidence, they couldn't do anything to him. But it was different for himself; not having a robust build meant he would definitely face consequences.

Moreover, Ma Chaoyang was currently at a very critical juncture and was doing his utmost to avoid any possible upheavals. Even a small ripple could potentially lead to his downfall.

And once a step is taken, it's not just him who would benefit...

This was also why shortly after Brother Biao's downfall, Qi Yun was hastily taken away without concrete evidence.

The elder also settled onto the sofa, crossing his legs, he said, "Just received word that a team from the National Museum is coming over, arriving this afternoon."

"The National Museum?" Ma Chaoyang was momentarily startled, but quickly responded, cautiously asking, "Are they here for those relics or for Qi Yun?"

The two are indeed not the same; if they are here merely for the relics, there are ways to manage it. But if the other side wants both the relics and to protect Qi Yun, things might get complicated.

After all, the National Museum, though a public institution, has significant influence; the intricacies are profound.

The elder shook his head, holding the teacup, he sighed: "It's unclear for now."

Hearing this response, Ma Chaoyang felt a bit restless, clearly caring more about the matter than anyone else.

"For now, don't worry about their stance; the most important thing is to handle the current issue well, and nip the danger in the bud," the elder sipping tea, turned to look outside the window, "As for the rest, I will do my best to hold them off for you."

Hearing this, ten thousand wild horses ran through Ma Chaoyang's mind; what does he mean by help me hold them off? We share the spoils, but I take the fall alone?

But these words he only dared to think; outwardly, he nodded repeatedly: "Alright, alright, thanks, teacher, I will arrange it."

The elder nodded, saying faintly: "Alright, you may leave now; I still need to meet with that person."

"Okay, then I'll take my leave. Teacher, please take care." Ma Chaoyang said and left.

Once the office door was closed again, the elder placed the teacup down, sighed, and muttered to himself, "Hope it can be stopped..."

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Smuggling Bureau.

After finishing a call outside, Director Han walked into the interrogation room where Qi Yun was, with a sullen face.

Upon entering, he had the two officers inside leave, turned off the monitoring, and then approached the interrogation table, pressing down his fury, staring intently at Qi Yun.

"This will be my last conversation with you; I urge you to cherish this opportunity, or it will be too late for regrets."

Qi Yun turned his head to look at Director Han's angry face. Although he didn't know what happened outside, he could guess some from the other's expression.

He ignored the warning in the words, allowing a cold smile to slip onto his lips: "So, Director Han's not in the best mood, I see?"

Director Han's fists clenched tightly, making cracking noises, finally bursting into an angry laugh: "Alright, alright, let's see how long you can keep up this act."

With that, he turned towards the door and shouted: "Someone! Cuff him! Take him away!"

Two officers entered upon hearing the command, seized Qi Yun, and led him outside.

Qi Yun had no idea where they were taking him, forced to put on a pair of free silver bracelets, and was then held till they reached a car awaiting outside.

This time, unlike when he was captured, there were fewer people involved—just Director Han and three officers, using a private vehicle.

The car exited the customs compound, heading south, finally stopping at the gate of a large estate in the suburbs. The estate had high walls, and the gate was thick, with very few gaps, making it almost impossible to see inside.

"You all stay here!" Director Han ordered before getting out of the car first.

He approached the iron gate, knocked on it; after a while, a window opened, revealing a man's face.

"Where's the person?"

Upon hearing this, Director Han turned and beckoned: "Bring him over!"

Qi Yun, being led by two officers, deliberately slowed his pace, quickly scanning the electrified fencing atop the walls and the hidden cameras on the gate posts.

This place didn't seem like a detention center or an interrogation point; it seemed more like a privately set detention site.

"What are you looking at!" one of the officers pushing his shoulder, not allowing him time to delay.

Once they reached the gate, it opened from inside, two dark-skinned, burly men stepped out, dragging Qi Yun in and locking the gate behind.

"Go!" Director Han ordered, taking the officers back to the car.

After the car started, one of the officers in the back hesitated before asking, "Director Han, doing this... won't cause any trouble, will it?"

Evidently, he knew Qi Yun's identity, knowing well that what they did was against the rules, causing him to worry.

Upon hearing this, Director Han turned around, initially wanting to rebuke but decided to soften his tone: "Don't overthink it, though he has some identity, he got involved with someone he shouldn't have."

"Besides, when the sky falls, the tall ones will hold it up; what are you worried about?"

The officer on the back seat fell silent, saying nothing more afterward.

Director Han also turned back, leaning on the seat, lit a cigarette, took a couple of puffs. Then sat up, surveying everyone, his expression stern as he reminded them: "Remember! Don't disclose this to anyone!"

"Yes!" all the officers responded promptly.

Satisfied with their understanding, Director Han nodded, resuming to puff on his cigarette.

At that moment, he had not realized that the tall one he mentioned also included himself.

...

At 2 p.m., a flight from Beijing landed at Tianshan International Airport. Yu Qixuan, who had been informed in advance, along with the leaders of Jiang Province Museum, personally awaited at the exit to greet.

Chapter 457: Tong Yangming's Interrogation

Airport, special passage exit.

The first to appear was an elder wearing a Zhongshan suit, his gray hair meticulously combed, carrying a slightly worn leather briefcase. His pace was slow but carried an invisible aura.

The elder was Tong Yangming, the deputy director of the National Museum, and also a domestic cultural artifacts expert and a lifelong researcher at the National Museum.

Three young individuals followed him, two men and one woman, all dressed in white short-sleeved shirts.

"Director Tong, thank you for your efforts!" The director of Jiang Province Museum approached warmly, extending his hand in greeting.

Tong Yangming extended his hand for a brief shake, "Director Wang, you are too kind, it wasn't much effort. The flight was delayed, sorry to keep you waiting."

After the polite exchange, his gaze swept over Yu Qixuan behind Director Wang, a smile appearing on his face, "Old Yu, you look quite well."

From Tong Yangming's demeanor, it was evident he was old acquaintances with Yu Qixuan.

Yu Qixuan stepped closer, casually replying, "You're not looking too bad yourself."

Both laughed heartily, and Tong Yangming patted Yu Qixuan's arm, "Alright, let's go."

Director Wang raised his hand, following behind towards the Coaster not far away, "Director Tong, lunch has been arranged, everyone's had a long journey, we can rest after eating."

Tong Yangming waved his hand, "No need for lunch arrangements, we ate on the plane, just take us directly to see the artifacts."

Director Wang heard this, a trace of embarrassment flashed across his face, but he quickly hid it, "Okay, okay, let's go directly then."

"Old Yu, get in touch with that young man and have him prepare things."

Yu Qixuan froze slightly, he had been calling Qi Yun since ten in the morning but couldn't reach him, thinking the guy was asleep, planning to call later, but still couldn't get through by noon.

Helplessly, he personally went to Shi Feng's antique shop to inquire, only to find that Shi Feng also couldn't reach Qi Yun.

Later, he was called over by Director Wang over an hour early to wait, having to ask Shi Feng to help find Qi Yun at home.

Tong Yangming noticed Yu Qixuan's strange behavior and asked, "What's wrong?"

Yu Qixuan could only truthfully reply, "That kid probably has something urgent, I can't reach him."

Tong Yangming hadn't spoken yet when Director Wang became anxious, reprimanding dissatisfiedly, "What's with him, such an important..."

"Alright, maybe something urgent delayed him." Tong Yangming raised his hand to interrupt the other's complaint, "We can go after reaching him, it's the same."

Director Wang didn't dare to say more, nodding repeatedly, "Yes, yes, old Yu, hurry and ask again."

Yu Qixuan took out his phone, just about to call Shi Feng, when the latter called first; Yu Qixuan glanced at it and immediately answered.

"Hello, have you found him?"

"Something's happened! Qi Yun has been arrested!" Shi Feng responded anxiously.

"What!? Arrested?" Yu Qixuan was stunned, unable to react for a moment.

Tong Yangming and the others nearby turned to look at him upon hearing this.

"Yes, I went to Qi Yun's home but didn't find him, later heard from his friend at the police station that he was arrested by the anti-smuggling bureau last night!"

"His friend at the police station also said that if people from Beijing are here, you can contact him, he'll tell you the specifics; I'll now send you his phone number."

After hanging up, Yu Qixuan looked at Tong Yangming, opening his mouth, "Qi Yun has been arrested by the anti-smuggling bureau..."

Tong Yangming frowned, "Why was he arrested?"

Yu Qixuan shook his head, looking at the phone number sent by Shi Feng, "The details need to be asked from this person."

...

Over an hour later, in the reception room at the New District Branch.

Zhang Dayong, Yu Qixuan, and Tong Yangming and his three associates were seated.

"What exactly happened?" As soon as he sat down, Yu Qixuan eagerly asked.

Zhang Dayong didn't indulge in unnecessary pleasantries and began narrating the incident's course, "Last night..."

"So, you've already shown the National Cultural Heritage Administration's document to the anti-smuggling bureau and they still won't release Qi Yun?" Yu Qixuan's face turned extremely grim upon hearing.

He had personally assured Qi Yun that there was nothing to worry about regarding the artifacts' paperwork, yet now they had been arrested for smuggling.

This wasn't just a slap to him but also to the National Museum and Cultural Heritage Administration.

Zhang Dayong nodded, "Yes."

Yu Qixuan fell silent, turning with anger-filled eyes to Tong Yangming.

The latter, unlike Yu Qixuan's agitation, pondered for a moment before speaking, "Director Zhang, are those artifacts still in the warehouse?"

Zhang Dayong placed his hands on his knees, responding politely, "Leader, you can just call me Xiao Zhang, those artifacts are still there and I've assigned officers for twenty-four-hour protection."

His address of "leader" was accurate; in terms of rank, Tong Yangming was indeed his superior, even higher than the one behind him.

Tong Yangming nodded, continuing, "Alright, Xiao Zhang, please help me contact the anti-smuggling bureau's director, I'd like to speak with him."

"Yes." Zhang Dayong complied, immediately taking out his phone to search for the number.

Once the call connected, he spoke in a very firm tone, "Director Fang, hello, this is Zhang Dayong from the New District Branch."

"Oh, Director Zhang, hello, is there something you need?"

"It's like this..." After explaining, Zhang Dayong stood up and handed the phone to Tong Yangming.

The latter took the phone, speaking calmly, "Director Fang, hello, I am Tong Yangming from the National Museum!"

"Hello, Director Tong!"

"I'm contacting you to inquire about what reason you're using to detain Qi Yun?"

"Director Tong, it's like this, Qi Yun is currently suspected of a smuggling case and we're investigating him." Director Fang responded politely over the phone.

"Is there conclusive evidence?" Tong Yangming asked again.

"Well... we have surveillance..."

Director Fang hesitated, wanting to explain, but Tong Yangming didn't want to hear such ambiguous words, sternly asked, "Director Fang! I'm now representing the National Museum to inquire with you!"

"Mr. Qi Yun intends to donate a batch of national treasures to the country, this matter is highly prioritized at the top, and they specifically sent me to handle it, so please give me a clear answer!"

Anti-smuggling bureau, director's office.

Director Fang held the phone in one hand, using the other to wipe sweat continuously; after Director Han reported to him earlier, he realized trouble was brewing.

With the National Cultural Heritage Administration's personal endorsement, regardless of what's in that warehouse, it has nothing to do with illegal smuggling items.

The current situation is that they want to prosecute Qi Yun but have no conclusive evidence; releasing him requires the top's order, which he can't do without, hence he feels stuck on a grill.

After half a minute's deliberation, Director Fang sighed and replied, "Sorry, Director Tong, I'm just following the orders from above, so I can't answer your question. Please communicate with the superior authority."

"As soon as they say release him, I'll do it immediately!"

Chapter 458: Entering the Arena

New District Branch, inside the reception room.

Tong Yangming handed the phone back to Zhang Dayong, and Yu Qixuan next to them quickly leaned over to ask, "What did they say?"

Zhang Dayong, also feeling a bit tense, looked over anxiously, waiting for him to give an answer.

Tong Yangming showed no emotion on his face, he simply shook his head and turned to instruct his accompanying female assistant, "Xiao Qing, call the administrative office and have them send a letter in the name of the National Museum to the W corporation here, asking them to cooperate with our work."

After saying this, he looked at his watch to check the time and continued, "We'll go to Province F this afternoon."

The female assistant nodded gently, took her phone out of her bag, and went outside to make the call.

Nanjing Road, inside a very inconspicuous office building.

Ge Dabao was pointing at the projection screen in the conference room, assigning tasks to a dozen subordinates.

"According to the information we already have, the children of these three people received donations from a scholarship foundation while studying abroad, a foundation whose background is questionable. Now, we've been ordered to bring these people back for questioning!"

"Team One, go to W corporation and bring back Secretary Jiang."

"Team Two will handle the City Construction Bureau."

"Team Three, I'll personally lead, going to the City Bureau!"

"This mission requires strict adherence to confidentiality rules! Do not disclose any information to anyone unrelated!"

Upon hearing this, everyone straightened up and said, "Yes!"

"Alright, if there are no questions, set off immediately!"

Just as Ge Dabao finished speaking, the deputy captain cautiously reminded, "Shouldn't we notify the discipline department?"

"No need! This is a direct order from the director!" Ge Dabao waved his hand assertively, "Let's go!"

"Yes!"

...

In a dark basement in the suburbs, Qi Yun was tied to a chair, the corner of his eye swollen as if bitten by a venomous mosquito.

His face was bruised, and his body was covered with bloodstains, obviously having suffered quite a bit.

A burly man beside him, grabbing Qi Yun's hair, was menacing and frightening: "You're tough, huh? Think I can't figure you out?"

"he tui"

Qi Yun spat out a mouthful of blood and glanced at him with a mocking smile, "Do you dare to kill me?"

Thanks to drinking herbal soup these past few months and constant training, he managed to withstand this recent wave of attacks.

If it had been his previous physical condition, he would have been subdued long ago.

The burly man, upon hearing this, increased his strength, grabbing a tuft of Qi Yun's hair.

He stared hard at Qi Yun for a few seconds, then suddenly broke into a creepy laugh, "Heh, the higher-ups haven't given the word, so indeed, I don't dare to kill you."

"But I don't mind screwing you over."

With that, he let go of Qi Yun's hair and reached for his waistband, "Damn it, it's been so long since I got out, I've almost forgotten what it's like."

Hearing this, Qi Yun felt like a demon was whispering in his ear.

His pupils shrank suddenly, his legs instinctively clamped together, and cold sweat trickled down his back.

"What... what the hell are you going to do!?"

The burly man's sinister laugh echoed in the dim basement as his fingers touched the metal buckle of his belt...

"What?" He licked his cracked lips, his eyes surveying Qi Yun like a venomous snake, "I'll make you feel my power! After we're done, let's see if you still dare to be stubborn with me!"

"Damn! That's too damn ruthless!" Qi Yun was truly terrified this time; taking a beating he could handle, but this... who wouldn't be afraid?

"Stop! Stop! I give up!" Just as the brute was about to take off his pants, he quickly shouted.

The burly man paused his actions, his hands resting on his waistband, eyes squinted as he sized up Qi Yun: "Oh really, you give up?"

"I give up, really," Qi Yun nodded with difficulty, "You're impressive!"

"If you had cooperated earlier, it would've been over by now, acting all tough." The brute snorted disdainfully and fastened his belt again, "Now tell me, where is it."

"Pfft~" Qi Yun spat out with revulsion, then leaned back on the chair to catch his breath, "After all that, is it too much to ask for a cigarette to ease up?"

The burly man frowned, took out a crumpled half-pack of cigarettes from his pocket, took one, placed it on Qi Yun's lips, and lit it.

"Stop playing tricks, smoke it quick and talk."

"Hiss~ phew..." Qi Yun took a deep drag, the nicotine sliding down his throat, slightly numbing the pain on his body, "Brother, what time is it now?"

The brute glared at him fiercely, "What the hell does it matter to you, are you going somewhere? Just say it, quick!"

Qi Yun blew a smoke ring, speaking calmly, "I put the stuff in a bank's safe deposit box, you can't get it after the bank closes, so I need to know the time."

The brute hesitated, then took out his phone to check the time before looking back at Qi Yun, "If you say it now, it's still doable. If I don't get it today, I'll definitely have fun with you tonight."

Hearing that it's still possible, that the bank hadn't closed yet, Qi Yun sighed inwardly.

He had been locked up since last night, with no contact with the outside world, unaware of what's happening, not knowing when the National Museum people would come today.

But he wasn't pinning all his hopes on this; what truly gave him confidence to deal with this situation, besides the National Museum, was the National Cultural Heritage Administration.

The day before yesterday, Director Xiao's secretary called him, asking to meet Director Xiao at the National Cultural Heritage Administration at six today. If they can't reach him by then, they will definitely find another way to inquire.

Chapter 459: Entering the Arena

And he wasn't taken away secretly, so as long as those above investigate a little, it would be easy to find out what's going on.

This is why the other party wouldn't use official power to deal with Qi Yun unless absolutely necessary; if you follow the normal procedures, there's no secrecy at all.

Whether it's Qi Yun expending great costs to forcibly retrieve those national treasures from a foreign warship or discovering the tomb of Genghis Khan and the relics of Loulan Ancient City, each of these could be considered a great achievement.

So he believes that once the higher-ups understand the situation, they won't stand by idly; at the very least, ensuring his safety should be no problem.

Even if some changes occur, he still has another plan in reserve...

"What the hell are you thinking about? I've let you smoke, and you're still playing tactics with me, huh?" The burly man saw that Qi Yun was hesitating to speak and slapped the back of his neck again, almost knocking the cigarette out of Qi Yun's mouth, "I'm warning you, this is your last chance, speak up quickly."

Qi Yun gritted his teeth, not daring to act rashly, fearing that this brute might really strip him naked if angered.

"The item is at the New District branch. Get my phone, and I'll give their director a heads-up, then you can go and get it directly."

The burly man's eyes lit up upon hearing this, and then he slapped the back of Qi Yun's neck again, "Still playing mind games with me, huh? Do you need to give them a heads-up? Which street's branch in the New District!"

...

On the other side, after Tong Yangming and his group left the New District Branch, Zhang Dayong stood at the entrance, pondered for a moment, and then took out his phone to call a friend in the city zx to explain the situation.

The zx unit is quite special; it doesn't have much authority, but it cannot be easily ignored, as the people there are very influential.

Previously he didn't make this call because they had bypassed the city zx and directly obtained procedures from the szx, so even if the city zx stepped in, it wouldn't be useful.

But now it's different, with other core forces leading and getting involved, it's time to start aligning each piece; every additional force can put more pressure on the other party.

Within an office in the zx work area of the city F building, Vice Secretary Peng, who is responsible for daily affairs, received the news and looked extremely grim.

Without solid evidence, bypassing their city zx to directly arrest someone, whether from procedural or legal perspectives, there are flaws and somewhat gives the impression of disregarding them.

Vice Secretary Peng immediately picked up the desk phone, dialed a number, and after communicating with the person on the other end for a few minutes, he stood up, walked towards the core office area upstairs, and while walking, took out his mobile phone to send a message to the Bird City Chamber of Commerce President.

Vice Secretary Peng quickly arrived at an office on the ninth floor, where Secretary Jiang stood up to greet him looking surprised: "Vice Secretary Peng, what brings you here?"

Normally, apart from attending important meetings, zx rarely appears on this floor.

So when Peng suddenly came by, Secretary Jiang, being a close associate of Ma Chaoyang, naturally could guess the reason.

Vice Secretary Peng nodded with a somber expression: "I'm here to see Director Ma, does he have some time now?"

As soon as he finished speaking, the office door inside opened, and Director Fang from the anti-smuggling bureau came out looking a bit anxious.

This was already his second time walking out of this office today; why would he frequent the place? Naturally, because he was uncertain...

However, this old fellow is also quite shrewd, having rushed over to report immediately after receiving Tong Yangming's call, afraid the blame would ultimately fall on him.

Director Fang was taken aback upon seeing Vice Secretary Peng, but he didn't initiate a greeting, knowing that they had little interaction and were unfamiliar, so he nodded to Secretary Jiang and walked out.

As he was about to reach the door, hurried footsteps sounded from the corridor outside.

The next moment, several men in plain clothes, with stern expressions, blocked his way.

Seeing this, Director Fang's slightly settled heart immediately tensed up again.

Their sharp gazes and daunting aura gave him a sense of danger.

The leader simply glanced at Director Fang before bypassing him to walk into the office, heading straight towards Secretary Jiang.

"Jiang Bohong! We're from the national security agency, please come with us for an investigation!" The group leader said, raising his hand to show his credentials.

The room fell into silence at his words.

Secretary Jiang's face turned deathly pale; he stared at the national security credentials, his Adam's apple moving violently, then forced out a stiff smile, "Comrade, is there some misunderstanding? I'm Secretary to Director Ma..."

"You don't need to explain anything here, say what you have to when you come with us!" The group leader's words were icy cold, and his face showed no expression.

This statement was like a heavy blow to Jiang's chest, causing him to stagger back a step, hitting the desk.

Director Fang, who had not yet left the doorway, looked into the room with anxiety; the national security agency taking Wang Secretary away was significant, and he was well aware of its implications.

Yet Vice Secretary Peng, standing aside, had a barely noticeable curve of satisfaction at the corners of his mouth.

The commotion outside finally alerted those inside, and as Ma Chaoyang opened the door to see the scene outside, his previously grim face froze in disbelief.

His appearance instantly gave Secretary Jiang a sense of hope as if he had found his pillar.

"Director Ma! They're taking me away! I haven't done anything illegal!" Secretary Jiang's voice was tinged with sobs as if clinging to his last hope, he reached for Ma Chaoyang.

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However, his shoulders were firmly held by the national security officer, and a group leader spoke up to warn: "Jiang Bohong! From the moment we entered this office, all your words and actions will be recorded! This is my last warning, cooperate with the investigation! Come with us immediately!"

Ma Chaoyang's expression became even darker than before. He knew that the words were not just a warning to Secretary Jiang, but also a warning to him!

However, he couldn't just let Secretary Jiang be taken away without saying a word, as that would send a signal of weakness to the outside world.

More importantly, it would leave Secretary Jiang uncertain, thinking he might be abandoned, and if he couldn't withstand the pressure and became a breakthrough point, Ma Chaoyang would also suffer.

After two seconds of silence, Ma Chaoyang spoke with a calm tone: "Comrade, Secretary Jiang is my secretary and has worked by my side for five years. His political integrity can withstand any test. Perhaps you have made a mistake?"

He spoke politely, as the department they came from was too special, even he couldn't directly give them orders.

And since they said everything said and done would be recorded on file, he needed to be extra careful with his words.

The group leader raised his eyes to meet his gaze, still without any emotion, "Ma fsj, we have orders to take him back for cooperation with the investigation. If you have any questions, please communicate with my superiors."

After saying this, he didn't wait for Ma Chaoyang to respond and directly gestured: "Take him away!"

The national security officers behind him immediately stepped forward, grabbing Secretary Jiang by the shoulders on either side and escorted him outside.

Secretary Jiang's cries erupted in the corridor: "Ma sj! Ma sj!"

Ma Chaoyang clenched his fists tightly, his face dark enough to drip water, yet he remained rational, watching silently as Secretary Jiang was taken away.

"Ma sj..." Director Fang murmured, trembling at the door, "... I'll head back to the anti-smuggling bureau now."

Ma Chaoyang ignored him and turned to Vice Secretary Peng: "Did you need to see me for something?"

Vice Secretary Peng nodded, maintaining a composed tone: "Yes, Ma sj, there's something I'd like to discuss with you."

"Come in and talk." Ma Chaoyang said, turning back to the inner office.

Vice Secretary Peng glanced at Director Fang before following him inside.

The two didn't talk for long, only about five or six minutes, and then Vice Secretary Peng got up to leave. Once the office door closed again, Ma Chaoyang, looking troubled, picked up the phone and dialed a number.

"Hello, teacher, Secretary Jiang was just taken away by national security people."

Silence lingered for a few seconds on the other end before a stern, authoritative voice of an elder spoke: "Why panic? The sky won't fall."

Ma Chaoyang held the phone tightly, still worried: "The National Museum also sent a letter just now, their wording was very strong... and the city's zx also came to see me..."

"Ignore those things." The elder's voice was extremely calm, "They can't stir up much trouble, I will handle it."

Hearing the elder speak with such confidence, Ma Chaoyang's previously restless mood slightly calmed.

...

Zhongshan Road, No. 479.

Inside the office, the elder had just hung up the phone when there was a knock on the door, followed by Secretary Ji hastily entering.

"Leader, people from the National Museum are here, they're in that person's office and have requested you to go over."

Upon hearing this, the elder's fingers gradually released the grip on the phone as he looked up at Secretary Ji, slightly furrowing his brows, yet his face showed no panic: "Understood."

With that, he stood up, walked to the coat rack, and slowly put on a dark coat. In the mirror, his temples were graying, but his sharpness was unconcealed.

"How does that person's face look?" the elder asked casually while tidying his sleeves.

Secretary Ji replied in a lowered voice, cautiously watching the elder's back, "Not... not very good..."

The elder paused for a moment, then resumed as normal, dusting off imaginary particles on his shoulder, and walked towards the door, with Secretary Ji quickly following.

Passing through a red-carpeted hallway, the two reached the door of an office upstairs, and just as Secretary Ji was about to announce their presence, the elder raised a hand to stop him and entered the room on his own.

...

Nanjing Road, No. 28, inside the national security office building.

Ge Dabao walked in front, followed by a few national security officers, with a middle-aged man escorted in the middle.

As soon as the middle-aged man entered the building, a hint of panic appeared on his previously calm face. Even with the air-conditioned ventilation in the corridor, sweat was still visible on his slightly bald forehead.

The group reached the end of the corridor, and Ge Dabao waved his hand: "Please have Director Li go in to cooperate with the investigation."

With those words, the officers escorted the middle-aged man into a nearby interrogation room.

Ge Dabao didn't follow them inside but went directly to Director Duan's office to report.

"All three have been brought back, should we start digging?"

Director Duan closed the document in his hand and sighed: "This time we've really torn our relationship apart with them."

Ge Dabao curled his lips: "Well, if we're to tear it apart, then tear it apart. If they broke the law, they should be arrested!"

"You... you, your approach is always so straightforward, you'll trip yourself up someday." Director Duan said with a hint of helplessness, "Breaking the law certainly requires arrest, but the timing isn't ripe yet."

"Sigh~ if it hadn't been to save that young guy, we could've uncovered more important clues..."

Ge Dabao scratched his head and changed the topic: "I heard from Zhang Dayong that people from the National Museum have also come, aiming at Qi Yun as well."

"That's correct." Director Duan nodded slightly, "And they directly went to the S Prefecture."