

## PROTEGE 141

### Chapter 141: LING LI LOST CONSCIOUSNESS

The original team of twenty-eight men had been reduced to twelve. Yet, they marched on, their spirits unwavering despite the hardships they had endured. They had faced incredible dangers, encountered legendary creatures, and learned valuable lessons from their Master. The journey had been arduous, but the breakthroughs they each experienced strengthened their bodies and deepened their commitment to their cultivation.

With hearts full of determination, they pressed on, ready to confront any challenge that lay ahead. The trials of Mystic Mountain had not only tested them but also prepared them for even greater challenges in their quest for immortality.

Upon her return to Camp Phoenix, Ling Li stepped into the laboratory, her eyes widening at the scene before her. Mushu spotted her and signaled for silence, understanding Ling Li's desire to observe unnoticed. Ling Li was eager to see what was unfolding without the fanfare of her arrival.

Shi Min stood nearby, looking haggard with his unkempt hair and unshaven face, a deep contrast to his usual clean and strict demeanor. He was meticulously examining four human androids standing before him, which he had skillfully accomplished.

"Do you feel any discomfort? You should start experiencing sensations on your human side by now," Shi Min inquired with a tone of professional concern.

"Yes, Grand Master, I feel almost normal," the android responded, its voice tinged with an unusual blend of mechanical precision and human warmth.

"Grand Master, we don't know how to thank you for giving us another chance at life," the second android added, gratitude evident in its tone.

"Grand Master, can we still... you know, do it?" another android hesitantly asked, drawing curious glances from those nearby.

Shi Min chuckled heartily, understanding the question. "I did my best to restore everything. We can only know if it's working if you try it."

Ling Li couldn't help but interject with a playful tone, "You just recovered, and you're already thinking about that? Brat!"

Laughter erupted, and the gathered team turned to greet Ling Li warmly.

"Supreme Commander, it's so good to see you again!"

"Supreme Commander, welcome back."

"Mom, you're back," Shi Min said, his face lighting up with a rare smile.

Ling Li approached, her gaze sweeping over the group. "Son, I can't believe you actually made them. But this news must be kept secret. They need new identities, or they'll be targeted beyond imagination."

"Yes, Mom. I understand. Don't worry. Dane and Wusheng are working on hyper-silicone masks for their new faces," Shi Min explained.

"Madam, I requested a Korean KPop face!" Dr. Erick exclaimed with a hint of mischief.

Ling Li laughed heartily. "That's very you, Dr. Erick."

"Madam, how could you recognize me with my face all bandaged?" Dr. Erick, one among the androids, asked, puzzled.

"How could I not recognize you? You're Dr. Erick, Dave, Froilan, Andres, and Dr. Norman," Ling Li identified them effortlessly, pointing to each in turn.

"Madam, you are truly awesome!" came the unanimous chorus, their voices filled with admiration.

Mushu chuckled softly, thinking, 'She is far more awesome than they know.'

Ling Li's heart swelled with pride. "I'm happy that you're all well! Welcome back, all of you!" she declared, her voice ringing with genuine warmth and relief.

Turning to Shi Min, she said, "Shi Min, congratulations," but then she suddenly staggered and lost consciousness.

"Mom!" Shi Min cried out in alarm.

"Madam!" Mushu echoed, his voice thick with worry.

"Supreme Commander!" The four human androids unanimously called out in shock.

Shi Min and Mushu rushed to her side, and Shi Min caught her just before she hit the ground.

"Mushu, to the main infirmary!" Shi Min ordered, his voice steady despite his racing heart. He swiftly carried Ling Li in his arms and ran towards the main infirmary, which had all the important advanced medical equipment they produced. Dr. Erick and Dr. Norman followed closely behind. The rest of the team remained, ensuring they didn't disrupt the urgent proceedings.

In the main infirmary, Shi Min gently laid Ling Li on the sick bed and immediately took her pulse, his face a mask of concentration. As the seconds ticked by, the worry on Shi Min's face transformed into a relieved grin.

"Mushu, check her pulse. See if I'm not mistaken," Shi Min instructed, his voice tinged with newfound anticipation.

Mushu, nervous yet hopeful, felt for Ling Li's pulse. His eyes widened, and a broad smile spread across his face. "It's a happy pulse, Grand Master," he confirmed.

"Dr. Norman, draw some blood for thorough testing. Dr. Erick, please get the ultrasound machine," Shi Min commanded as he tenderly brushed strands of hair away from his mother's face.

"Our family is getting bigger, Mushu!" Shi Min exclaimed, unable to contain his excitement.

"Yes, indeed, Grand Master," Mushu replied, his own joy evident.

Dr. Erick returned with the ultrasound machine, and Dr. Norman took the necessary blood samples. Shi Min personally performed the ultrasound, his heart racing with anticipation. As the image appeared on the screen, a wide smile broke across his face.

Dr. Norman returned with the blood test results. "Her sugar and hemoglobin levels are low, which probably caused her collapse," he reported to Shi Min.

Shi Min rubbed his temples, knowing his mother's physique very well, and was deep in thought. 'How could she have such low levels of hemoglobin and sugar?' Shi Min wondered. 'Unless she used her skills excessively without realizing she was pregnant. But when could it have happened? Where did she go? Did she visit Paps and fly all the way here?' His mind raced with possibilities.

"Give her some nutrients," Shi Min instructed the two doctors, ensuring they took immediate action.

Moments later, Ling Li's eyes fluttered open, and she saw Shi Min standing beside her. Seeing his mother awake, Shi Min signaled Mushu and the rest to leave them alone.

"Son, what happened?" Ling Li asked, her voice weak but curious.

"Mom, you lost consciousness. I know you very well, and losing consciousness is the last thing that should happen to you," Shi Min began, his voice a mix of concern and frustration. "Tell me, where did you go?"

"Son, I was tired and didn't get enough rest," Ling Li replied, trying to downplay the situation.

## Chapter 142: WHO SAID I'M PREGNANT?

"Mother, I'm not a child. With your strength, you can stay awake for half a year without collapsing!" Shi Min said, his anger barely contained. His eyes blazed with frustration as he paced the room. "Mom, did you visit Paps?"

Ling Li's eyes darted away, guilt written all over her face. "Oh, that... yeah..." she admitted guiltily, her voice barely above a whisper.

"And you should know you are pregnant! Flying is the last thing you should have done!" Shi Min scolded his mother, his voice rising with each word. He clenched his fists, trying to keep his emotions in check.

"Who said I'm pregnant?!" Ling Li retorted, disbelief and irritation evident in her voice. Her eyes narrowed as she crossed her arms defensively.

Shi Min waved the ultrasound report he printed in front of her mother.

"Mom, you've been neglecting yourself. You should have realized this on your own." Shi Min's voice softened, a hint of concern creeping in.

Indeed, martial artists are acutely aware and sensitive to their bodies. If they want to know if something is wrong or if they have undergone any changes, they can easily detect it.

"And Mom, since when did you become a multiple-baby producer?" Shi Min teased with a chuckle, trying to lighten the mood.

Ling Li's eyes widened in shock. "What do you mean? I transformed myself into a pig?! You brat! And what do you mean by the multiple-baby producer?" she retorted, half-annoyed, half-amused.

"Mom, you have three babies in your womb. Add another two, and we can form a basketball team!" Shi Min joked, a mischievous grin spreading across his face.

Ling Li snatched the ultrasound result from Shi Min's hand and examined it. She was stunned. "Indeed, I'm having triplets," she chuckled, the reality sinking in. Her eyes softened as she placed a hand on her belly.

"Mom, no one from our family has had multiple babies, but you've managed it twice!" Shi Min exclaimed with amusement, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Oh, that... your Paps has the genes. His father was a triplet, but the other two died because of their black magic," Ling Li explained, her voice tinged with sadness.

"Now, I understand," Shi Min replied, finally putting the pieces together. He placed a comforting hand on his mother's shoulder.

"Mom, I have finished my task here. We can go back to Russia so you can rest well. Dane and Wushen can finish the rest," Shi Min said, his voice determined.

"Oh, you Paps and the rest will be out of the Mystic Mountain in two days. Otako informed me last night," Ling Li said, her eyes lighting up with hope.

"Otako informed you? Did you meet with Otako?" Shi Min asked, his curiosity piqued.

"No, he sent me a message. Here." Ling Li took out her phone and showed Shi Min a text message in Greek.

"And you have Otako's phone number?" Shi Min asked, raising an eyebrow.

"How can I not? Of course I do. But it is not that I could call or message Otako at any time? I'm not that brave," Ling Li said, while Shi Min narrowed his eyes while looking at her mother.

"Hmmm, I see. Stay here, and finish your nutrients. Your glucose and hemoglobin are too low. It's not good for my siblings," Shi Min chuckled as he said this to her mother. "I don't want my brothers to blame me if they come out malnourished. Ha ha ha!"

"Oh, you are hoping to have three brothers," Ling Li said, a smile tugging at her lips.

"Yeah, it's so boring to be surrounded by all the girls," Shi Min replied, rolling his eyes playfully.

"You!" Ling Li exclaimed, swatting at him lightly.

"I was just joking, Mom," Shi Min replied playfully. Mom, when do you plan to make your relationship with Paps official? Now that you are carrying another set of children, maybe you should consider it," Shi Min said, his tone turning serious.

"Son, you are truly very thoughtful. Indeed, I should make plans. What do you think if we arrange the wedding on the same day as the twins' first birthday?" Ling Li suggested, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"This could be a big double celebration. I think this could work," Shi Min agreed, nodding.

"Yes, then help me plan the wedding. Oh, and can you keep my pregnancy a secret first? I will announce it during the wedding," Ling Li said, her voice filled with anticipation.

"Sure thing, Mom, I can help you with this, but Ren and Lily would truly be happy to prepare the wedding for you," Shi Min said, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

"Yeah, it's only a couple of weeks away. Those two can definitely do a lot. But please assist them too," Ling Li said, her voice filled with gratitude.

"You don't have to worry about that. I will arrange a team to handle it, Ren and Lily can supervise," Shi Min assured her, his voice filled with confidence.

"Shi Min, thank you," Ling Li said, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Oh, come on, Mom, why are you so cheesy?" Shi Min whined, "You will make me cry, ha ha ha!"

"Mom, stay here and rest. I will bring you dinner after a while. Let's leave in two days. We pick up Paps and the rest and go home," Shi Min said, his voice filled with determination.

"Sure, son," Ling Li replied, her heart swelling with pride.

Shi Min left the infirmary, his footsteps echoing down the hallway as the door closed behind him, Mushu and Pharsa entered the room, their expressions a mix of concern and frustration.

"Ling Li, how could you make yourself collapse?" Pharsa reprimanded, her voice laced with worry and irritation. She placed her hands on her hips and glared at Ling Li. She had been patrolling the camp when Ling Li returned, and she was truly worried when she heard Ling Li collapse.

"Okay, stop it. My son has already scolded me a lot," Ling Li responded, her voice weary but resolute. She took a deep breath and continued, "We will be busy for a while. I will marry Chu Yan on the same day as the twins' first birthday. I will ask the children to arrange the wedding."

#### Chapter 143: SHE'S AWAKE

Mushu and Pharsa exchanged surprised glances before Mushu nodded. "Understood, Madam."

"Mushu, you coordinate with Shi Min and arrange the security of all the venues. Pharsa, you and Goldie prepare the guest list, coordinate with Ren and Lily, and pull out some of your staff to arrange all the guest transportation and accommodation," Ling Li instructed, her tone firm and authoritative.

"And do not disclose to anyone about my pregnancy. I will announce it at the wedding. Oh, lastly, the group will be out of the mystic mountain in two days," Ling Li added, her eyes narrowing slightly.

Pharsa's brow furrowed in confusion. "Don't they still have three weeks to go?"

"I know. I was also surprised to receive Otakos' message," Ling Li replied, her voice tinged with skepticism. Mushu, have you recently checked the cottage?"

"I didn't leave Shi Min's side, so I asked Pharsa and Wusheng to do it," Mushu answered, glancing at Pharsa for confirmation.

Pharsa nodded. "Yes, we've been keeping an eye on it."

"Madam, are we just leaving Nina there? Are you not afraid it will cause so much trouble in the future?" Pharsa asked, her irritation evident.

Ling Li sighed, rubbing her temples. "I'd like to check on her tomorrow," she said. "Leave me for now; I want to rest."

Early the next morning, Ling Li, Wusheng, Mushu, and Pharsa arrived at the little cottage. The air was crisp, and the morning sun cast a golden glow over the surroundings.

When Ling Li stepped into the cottage, she could already tell from the sound of the machines attached to Nina that she had recovered. However, since Nina's eyes were still closed, she would follow the performance they wanted to portray.

Ling Li gently took Nina's pulse, her fingers firm yet gentle. Confirming her suspicion, she smirked slightly.

"She will recover soon, but the damage on her body is irreversible; the people who saved her should have just let her die. The pain she will feel at least twice a week will be too intense; she would wish for death. Right now, she's still given these anesthetics. But once they stop, I don't know how they expect her to endure," Ling Li explained Nina's overall condition, her voice cold and clinical.

"Nina might not even be aware of her future predicament. She might be thankful that someone saved her but doesn't know the physical pain she would come upon; surely, her savior won't tell her about it. She's just a tool to be used as a knife," Mushu said, shaking his head in disapproval.

"You are right, let's go," Ling Li said, her voice firm. She turned on her heel and headed for the door.

When they were in the truck, Pharsa couldn't contain her curiosity any longer. "Madam, when will she wake up?" she asked, her voice a mix of irritation and curiosity.

"She is awake," Ling Li flatly said as she looked at the cottage one last time, her gaze hard.

"Do you mean she was pretending to be unconscious earlier?" Pharsa asked, her eyes widening in disbelief.

"Yeah, she should have been awake for two days now," Ling Li responded, her voice matter-of-fact.

"When I came here three days ago and took her pulse, I could tell she was still unconscious," Pharsa replied, her voice filled with confusion.

Sure enough, when the group left, Nina opened her eyes with a smile. "Wait for my comeback, Ling Li! I will let you suffer!" she viciously uttered, her eyes glinting with malice.

However, when Nina recalled what Ling Li said, it made her furrow her brow, and she wondered if they were true. It made her heart skip a beat. Nina indeed had felt excruciating pain when she woke up; she thought she would die, and it lasted for more than an hour.

When Nina thought of it again, she shivered. 'Will I truly feel the same pain twice a week?' she thought. Cold sweat even started to build on her forehead. She didn't want to be in that kind of pain again, and she panicked in her heart. Since she woke up, she had not seen anyone from the people who had saved her, and she had been wondering who they could be.

Nina's mind raced, her thoughts a jumble of fear and determination. 'I have to find a way out of this... I won't let them see me weak,' she resolved, gritting her teeth. With a clenched fist, 'And when I recover, Ling Li will regret ever crossing paths with me.' Nina made a solemn vow.

Two days later, Ling Li, Shi Min, Mushu, Pharsa, and several bodyguards waited for the soldiers at the entrance of the Mystic Mountain early in the morning for their return. The atmosphere was charged with anticipation, the cool morning air buzzing with excitement.

"I wonder how much they have improved? It makes me excited," Shi Min said, a glimmer of excitement in his voice. He paced back and forth, his eyes scanning the horizon.

"Let us wait and see. It won't be long for the group to come out, as per Otako's notice. They are guided by a beast, so they will no longer encounter any more fights on their way back," Ling Li explained, her eyes reflecting a mix of anxiety and hope.

"Mom, sit down first and have some hot porridge. I asked the kitchen to make it for you early this morning; I knew you would be too excited to meet Paps!" Shi Min sheepishly said as he handed his mother a bowl of porridge. The bodyguards had set up a foldable tent for them to sit and wait.

"I don't know if you are comforting me or making fun of me!" Ling Li scornfully said to Shi Min as she took the porridge from him. If not for Shi Min's constant reminder, she would keep forgetting that she is pregnant.

"Ha ha ha, Mom, how dare I make fun of you! Alright, Pharsa, ask them to set up the food and the tents so that when the group comes out of the mountain, they can have warm food to nourish them," Shi Min instructed, his voice filled with authority.

#### Chapter 144: YOU! GO BACK!

Ling Li watched Shi Min thoughtfully, her eyes filled with both pride and nostalgia. "You were very young when you came to train. How old were you then?" she asked softly, her voice tinged with maternal warmth.

Shi Min's gaze became distant as he delved into his memories. "I was seventeen or eighteen years old; just a few months after I came out of the battleground, you directly threw me here at Mystic Mountain," he said, shaking his head as if he could hardly believe the passage of time. His tone carried a mix of disbelief and admiration.

"And you did well," Ling Li said with pride, her voice firm and unwavering. She looked at her son with a sense of accomplishment.

Shi Min's face lit up with a coy smile. "How can I not? My Master is so great and taught me well," he teased, causing Ling Li to nearly choke on her porridge. "Not everyone can have a strict, loving mother as their Master," he added cheekily, his eyes twinkling with mischief.

Ling Li laughed heartily, the sound echoing through the room like a melody. "Ha ha ha, now you are saying I was too tough with you! Ha ha ha," she said between bursts of laughter, her eyes sparkling with joy.

"Yeah, but I'm grateful for all my achievements; it's all thanks to you, Mom," Shi Min said earnestly as he sat down beside Ling Li and poured some water for her, his voice filled with genuine gratitude.

Ling Li tapped Shi Min's head affectionately. "Why are you so dramatic today?" she asked with a smile, her eyes filled with love and amusement.

"Mom, who are you calling dramatic? Anyway, when my three little brothers come out, let them train harder than me and let them beat all the old geezers at Hidden Valley," Shi Min declared with a determined glint in his eyes, his voice filled with resolve.

Ling Li chuckled, shaking her head. "Ha ha ha ha, you hate those people so much," she said, her laughter infectious. Before Shi Min could retort, the sound of footsteps drew their attention to the Mystic Mountain barrier.

The twelve soldiers from Mystic Mountain emerged, their faces etched with exhaustion and determination. They greeted, "Supreme Commander, Grand Master, Chief," as they saw Ling Li, Shi Min, Mushu, and Pharsa standing to welcome them. Their voices were filled with respect and reverence.

Ling Li and her companions, with their high cultivation levels, quickly assessed the soldiers' current cultivation levels. Shun and his two friends, Nicu and Ailun, followed the camp soldiers. Fatty and Chatty came out together, and finally, Four Eyes and Jack walked side by side. The Enfield wrapped around Four Eyes' shoulder immediately caught Ling Li's gaze.

Four Eyes felt the Enfield on his shoulder tremble and wondered as he moved forward to Ling Li. They were still waiting for more people but realized no one else had come out. "Only twelve survived?" Ling Li asked, her voice tinged with concern, her eyes scanning the weary faces before her.

Four Eyes nodded solemnly, his eyes filled with a mix of sorrow and resolve. He wanted to embrace Ling Li, but she pointed to the cowering Enfield on his shoulder. "What's with this beast?" Ling Li asked, her tone curious yet cautious, her gaze fixed on the trembling creature.

"I saved him," Four Eyes replied, his voice quiet but firm. The simplicity of his words carried the weight of his actions, and Ling Li's gaze was stern as she looked at the trembling beast.

However, Ling Li's heart ached for the lost soldiers, but she knew they had fought bravely. She placed a hand on Four Eyes' shoulder, her grip steady and reassuring. "You did well, all of you," she said, her voice carrying the authority of a leader and the warmth of a mother. The soldiers' eyes shone with gratitude as they stood before their Supreme Commander, ready to face whatever came next. The bonds they had forged, and the trials they had overcome would serve as their strength in the days to come.

Chatty's eyes sparkled with joy as he exclaimed to Pharsa, "Honey, I can talk to the beast!" and wrapped her in a tight embrace.

Pharsa, her joy mixed with embarrassment, noticed everyone's eyes on them. She quickly pushed Chatty away, her cheeks flushing. "Who is your Honey?" she retorted with a snort, trying to maintain her composure.

"You are my only Honey," Chatty responded earnestly, his eyes filled with affection. Anticipating Pharsa's wrath, he added quickly, "This beast stuck with Chu Yan from the moment he saved it, but it was also this beast that made us offend the guardians!" he explained, his voice a mix of excitement and concern.

The Enfield could sense Ling Li's immense cultivation, which was so advanced that it was beyond its comprehension. Its trembling was palpable, and it feared offending someone with such formidable power.

Ling Li's gaze pierced the Enfield. "You made them offend the guardians?" she asked, her voice icy and commanding.

The Enfield's voice trembled as it replied, "Deity, I didn't mean to; I truly wanted to give my savior the scarlet fruit and the snow ginseng so he can cultivate faster." Its fear was evident in every word.

Ling Li's tone turned stern. "These are guarded mystic treasures of the mountain, and you dared to let him take them? Can you protect him and his companions from the guardians' wrath?" she demanded, her eyes narrowing with suspicion.

"The scarlet fruit should be guarded by a bear and the snow ginseng by a three-headed dragon; how did you manage to escape?" Ling Li inquired, her voice filled with disbelief.

"Otako came," Four Eyes answered simply, his voice steady.

"Otako came? No wonder he informed me you were coming back. If Otako hadn't arrived in time to save you, we wouldn't have even been able to recover your corpse when you died under the guardians' hands," Ling Li explained gravely, her eyes reflecting the weight of her words.

Ling Li's voice rose as she addressed the Enfield. "You! Go back!" she commanded.

#### Chapter 145: LEAVE EVERYTHING TO ME

The Enfield whimpered and rubbed its head against Four Eyes' face in a gesture of farewell, its eyes filled with gratitude and sorrow.

Chatty translated the message for Four Eyes: "The beast says it wishes you well and a great journey in your cultivation. It also said it will be forever thankful to you and that you will be its only Master for the rest of its life." Chatty's voice was filled with emotion as he conveyed the beast's words.

Four Eyes patted the Enfield's head gently. "You can go back," he said softly, his voice filled with warmth.

Ling Li turned to Chatty, her expression softening. "Chatty, you are very impressive. You are half-steps to the true origin, and you have gained a special animal telepathy. Congratulations," she said, her voice filled with pride.

"Thank you, Madam," Chatty replied smugly, a proud smile spreading across his face.

Shi Min clapped his hands, drawing everyone's attention. "Alright, you must all be hungry. Grab some food while it's still hot. I know you are all famished," he announced, tapping Shun's shoulder. "You all did well," he added, his voice filled with genuine admiration.

Ling Li's eyes filled with affection as she looked at Four Eyes. "Honey, I'm glad you're fine. And you did great! Your advancement is quite fast and impressive!" she said, her voice filled with love and pride.

Four Eyes embraced Ling Li tightly. "I miss you," he whispered, his voice filled with emotion.

"I miss you too," Ling Li replied, her voice trembling with emotion as she returned the embrace. She almost choked on her words as she remembered she was pregnant. "Honey, the twins are learning to walk; they can already take one step at a time!" she informed Four Eyes excitedly.

"Really? Let's go home quickly!" Four Eyes exclaimed, his excitement palpable.

"We will go home straight from here. You eat first with the rest; you must be hungry," Ling Li said, guiding Four Eyes toward the food.

"But I would rather eat you now," Four Eyes whispered playfully in Ling Li's ear, causing her face to flush red with embarrassment.

"Alright, Mother and Paps, don't let us singletons here eat too much dog food. Come and eat with us," Shi Min joked, his voice filled with playful humor.

"You! It's your fault!" Ling Li scolded Four Eyes in a low voice, making him chuckle as he took her hand. As he held her hand, Four Eyes couldn't ignore the familiar sensation reminiscent of when Otako had held his hand. 'They truly feel the same,' he thought, glancing at Ling Li.

"What's wrong? Why are you staring at me? Do I have dirt on my face?" Ling Li asked, noticing his gaze.

Four Eyes shook his head silently. "Your hand feels exactly the same as Otako's," he uttered, causing Ling Li's heart to skip a beat before she quickly recovered.

"Otako held your hand? When? Where? Why did he hold your hand?" Ling Li asked innocently, her voice filled with curiosity.

Four Eyes squinted his eyes, sensing that Ling Li was hiding something. He decided not to press her, opting to wait until she was ready to tell him the truth.

"When he gave me the scarlet fruit to eat," Four Eyes replied, watching her intently.

"I was wondering why your cultivation jumped to the fourth level; did Shun also eat the scarlet fruit?" Ling Li asked, her eyes filled with understanding.

Four Eyes nodded.

"Leveling up from the third to the fourth level of cultivation is especially hard; some take years, while others are not even lucky enough. Scarlet fruit is one of the secrets to doing it, but as you can see, it is extremely hard to obtain, and the process of breaking through is extremely painful. It was very painful, right?" Ling Li looked up at Four Eyes, who had started to eat.

Four Eyes nodded again.

"Scarlet fruit improves the whole body by enhancing the vitality of your blood and strengthening your muscles and bones by destroying and reconstructing every single one of them to a new level. This process is why the breakthrough is truly painful," Ling Li explained. Her voice carried a tone of both wisdom and concern. However, as Ling Li finished speaking, she felt her stomach churning violently. The potent smell of the food in the camp made her nauseous. She wanted to vomit but was afraid that Four Eyes would discover her pregnancy.

Four Eyes noticed her sudden paleness and panicked, his face draining of color. "Honey, what's wrong?" he asked, his voice full of concern and his eyes wide with worry as he reached out to steady her.

Four Eyes' worried tone caught Shi Min's attention. The young warrior, with a sharp eye for detail, immediately sensed something amiss and quickly walked over to them. His gaze alternated between his mother's ashen face and his stepfather's anxious expression.

"Paps, Mom has been very tired; we recovered the camp in China, and it was a big endeavor. Why don't we go home ahead? Let's leave Little Jack with the rest of the group," Shi Min suggested, his voice calm

but firm, knowing his mom's intention to hide her pregnancy from his stepfather and give him the big news on their wedding day as a surprise.

"I'm okay, son. Maybe it's also the weather here; it's too humid," Ling Li retorted, trying to downplay her discomfort. Her voice was strained, and she forced a weak smile, hoping to convince them.

Shi Min's eyes filled with a questioning look, silently communicating with Ling Li, 'How could you not block your sense of smell to avoid being found out by Paps?'

Understanding Shi Min's silent question, Ling Li glanced at him apologetically, her eyes saying, 'I forgot, sorry.'

Four Eyes looked between them, sensing the unspoken conversation but not understanding it. Four Eyes placed a protective arm around Ling Li's shoulders, his voice becoming firmer. "Let's go," he said, already standing up and giving Shi Min a look that said they should leave now.

"Leave everything to me, Grand Master. You should go home with the Supreme Commander. I'll take care of the rest here," Jack enunciated clearly. He stepped forward with determination, knowing the Supreme Master wasn't feeling well. His confident tone and steady gaze reassured the group.