

## PROTEGE 226

### Chapter 226: EACH SECOND MATTERED

Four Eyes didn't hesitate. He shoved his door open with frantic force and ran. His feet barely touched the ground as adrenaline coursed through his veins, his mind screaming at him to move faster and get there before it was too late.

But Pharsa and Goldie were already ahead of him.

They had seen it coming — the moment Fatty threw his car too hard, the instant his trajectory sealed his fate. They had known even before the crash that Fatty's last maneuver had been doomed.

The rescue team was already moving, agile, prepared, and relentless — racing against the flames.

Fatty was unconscious. His body slumped against the crushed remains of the cockpit, the heat licking dangerously close.

Each second mattered.

The responders tore him from the wreck, the force of their grip barely enough to keep him stable as they hauled his limp form out, shielding him from the relentless fire licking at the steel. The fire crew was in perfect coordination, blasting the wreck with extinguishers, suffocating the flames before they spread further.

Chatty's car skidded to a halt nearby, the tires leaving deep marks against the pavement. He staggered out, wide-eyed, barely able to process the chaos before him.

"No way — " The words left his mouth, but they carried no strength, only shock.

It was a race against time. Pharsa climbed into the ambulance beside Fatty, her expression unreadable — controlled, but the tightness in her jaw betrayed the tension thrumming through her veins. She was

expertly checking Fatty's condition. She had done this many times, and she couldn't fail. This man is her man's best friend.

The sirens wailed, piercing the atmosphere as they sped toward Camp Blaze.

Goldie jumped into another vehicle with Four Eyes and Chatty already on the phone. "Mushu," He barked the moment he picked up, "we've got an incident. Fatty's in bad shape."

Four Eyes, his hands slightly shaking, sent a message instead. He knew Ling Li was in an important meeting with Otako — he couldn't afford to interrupt her. But his fingers felt numb against the screen, the gravity of what had just happened crashing down on him.

Shi Min, fresh out of the shower, muscles sore from training, glanced at his phone and froze.

Fatty was injured.

Without hesitation, he grabbed his jacket and bolted out the door, his mind racing. Fatty was his stepfather's best friend. He couldn't ignore this.

Word spread like wildfire. El Padre and El Capitan, stationed deep in their underground offices, received the emergency notification at nearly the same time. The moment their eyes landed on the message, their expressions darkened.

One of their own was down.

Every force tied to their world was moving.

At Camp Blaze, the infirmary staff had already mobilized, prepping every necessary resource for Fatty's arrival.

Lily barely registered the phone slipping from her grasp, the world around her narrowing into a single, deafening thought — Quan Ye was hurt. Badly.

The blood drained from her face so fast she felt lightheaded, her legs buckling for a fraction of a second before sheer instinct kicked in. She had to find Ren.

Lily didn't care about decorum, didn't care about knocking, didn't care about anything — she ran.

The grand halls blurred past her, the sharp pounding of her footsteps echoing against the polished floors. Her breath came in frantic, uneven gasps, her chest tightening with every desperate inhale.

She wasn't ready for this. She couldn't be ready for this.

With trembling hands, she shoved open the study hall doors without a second thought. The wood banged against the frame, startling Ren and Old Tutor Chen from their quiet discussion.

Ren's head snapped up, his eyes widening in alarm the instant he saw her disheveled, tear-streaked face.

"Lily?" She was already standing, her voice edged with nerves. "What happened?"

Lily choked on her words as she tried to force them out, her body shaking violently, her mind struggling to piece together coherent sentences. But it was too much, too fast —

Seeing this, "Lily, relax. Breath. Slowly, breathe in, breathe out..." Ren said.

"Big Sister... Quan Ye...."

Quan Ye was in an accident!" Lily nearly screamed, her voice breaking at the end. "He's seriously injured!"

The room FROZE.

Ren's expression drained of color, her breath catching at the sheer weight of Lily's words. Old Tutor Chen, despite his age and wisdom, stiffened, his sharp gaze flashing with concern.

A brief pause. Then — Old Tutor Chen spoke, his voice steady but urgent.

"Ren, go and help your sister first."

There was no hesitation, only gratitude. "Thank you, Tutor Chen." Ren barely got the words out before moving swiftly.

"Go," Old Tutor Chen reinforced, giving a firm nod. "Settle your family matter first."

Ren wasted no time. His fingers moved swiftly across his phone as he called Reginal and Leeroy.

"Prepare the car," she ordered, voice clipped, controlled — but barely masking the underlying fear threading through it.

When she reached Shun, her mind racing with urgency, she found that Old Tutor Chen had already anticipated the situation — he had already informed Tutor Ma and was leading Shun toward them.

Within minutes, the three of them were on the road, racing toward Camp Blaze, trying to calm Lily — but it was impossible.

Lily sat stiffly between them in the car, her hands clenched in her lap, her body still trembling despite the warmth of Ren's reassuring grip on her shoulder.

She wiped at her face furiously as if trying to erase the terror twisting her expression. But no amount of effort could stop the flood of worry crashing through her chest.

Her mind screamed one thing over and over.

'Let Quan Ye be okay.'

But now, the question hung heavy in the air.

Would Fatty make it through?

The moment the ambulance screeched to a halt at Camp Blaze, a full medical team was already in position — three doctors, several nurses, and emergency personnel standing at the entrance prepped for immediate action. Every second counted.

The doors flew open, and Fatty was swiftly pulled onto a stretcher, his limp form secured as the team raced toward the operating room. The scent of antiseptic and adrenaline filled the corridors, the urgency thick in the air.

#### Chapter 227: THE GRIM DISCOVERY

Pharsa's strides were controlled yet brisk as she kept pace with the stretcher, her sharp eyes scanning every detail — Fatty's breathing pattern, his pallor, the subtle signs of trauma beyond the visible injuries. Despite the chaos, her mind remained calculated, filing away what she already knew. Right knee — dislocated. Already fixed. Right leg — broken. Surgery required.

Inside the sterile glow of the operating wing, monitors beeped in a steady rhythm, the hum of machines blending with the clipped voices of the doctors preparing for the tests and scans.

Not long after, Shi Min stormed into the room, his posture rigid with barely concealed urgency. He moved straight to Pharsa, not wasting a second.

"What's the situation?" His voice was sharp and precise — his instincts fully locked into surgeon mode.

Pharsa barely looked away from the monitors as she responded, her tone level but laced with quiet intensity.

"According to the X-ray, his right leg is broken and needs surgery. His left knee was dislocated — I already reset it. We're waiting for the head and neck scan results now."

Shi Min's jaw tightened, but he nodded briskly, mentally preparing for the worst possible scenarios. He crossed his arms, his fingers tapping against his forearm — a subtle sign of tension despite his outward composure.

Then — the results arrived.

The doctors emerged with the scans, handing over the films with practiced efficiency. Shi Min took them immediately, flipping through the images with methodical precision.

A pause. Then — his expression dimmed.

"There are torn ligaments in his neck and a slight concussion on his head." His voice was steady, but the weight of the words settled over the room.

Pharsa's gaze flickered toward him, waiting for the call.

Shi Min exhaled sharply, setting the films down with finality.

"Let's leave this part to Mom. She can fix this without surgery." His decision was immediate. There was no hesitation.

Shi Min's eyes remained locked onto the films, his expert gaze dissecting every detail with ruthless precision. But the further he examined, the deeper his frown etched into his face. His jaw tightened, a cold, sinking weight settling in his chest.

"There are two aneurysms on his brain." His voice was grave and calculated, but the underlying tension in his tone was unmistakable. This was a grim discovery.

The room stilled. The air, once filled with hurried medical instructions, seemed to pause - heavy, suffocating, charged with the weight of an unforeseen complication.

"These aneurysms may have been here for some time," Shi Min continued, his fingers gripping the edges of the films slightly harder. His mind raced through possibilities, dangers, the unknown factors that could determine the next critical moments.

He exhaled sharply, shifting his stance. "This accident — despite its brutality — was a blessing in disguise. If we hadn't found them now, they would have been a ticking time bomb inside his skull." His gaze flickered toward the surgical team. They couldn't afford hesitation and immediate action was required.

Shi Min's voice cut through the tension like steel.

"Prepare the surgery — I'll operate on his leg and brain aneurysm. Get the catheter, stent, and coils ready for recoiling."

No objections. No wasted words. No delays.

The team moved with precision and urgency, with nurses scrambling to prep instruments, doctors confirming procedures, and assistants double-checking medications. Every movement was synchronized, a well-oiled machine built for situations exactly like this — life or death.

Shi Min didn't waste another second. He strode into the scrub area, rolling up his sleeves, methodically cleansing his hands, the sterile scent of disinfectant filling his lungs. His mind was clear. His focus is absolute.

Pharsa followed, her expression unreadable, but the tension in her shoulders betrayed her thoughts. She knew the risk. She knew that brain aneurysms were delicate monsters — waiting, lurking, ready to rupture with the smallest provocation.

"The aneurysms could burst at any time," she murmured, her voice low but firm. "Especially if his pain escalates or his body grows agitated during the operation."

Shi Min nodded briskly. "Then we don't give them a chance." His hands remained steady despite the severity of the situation. "We go in, we fix this, and we bring him back."

The Operation Begins.

Inside the brightly lit surgical room, monitors beeped in a steady rhythm, Fatty's vitals displayed in a delicate balance. The hum of machines filled the space as Shi Min took position, his surgical gear meticulously secured, his mind calculating every step ahead.

Failure was not an option.

Pharsa stood nearby, her eyes locked onto the monitors, ready to react to the slightest shift in Fatty's condition.

The anesthesiologist counted down softly, preparing Fatty for deep sedation.

The moment Shi Min steps into the operating room, a familiar tension settles in his chest. It's not fear — it is focus. Aneurysms are unpredictable and fragile. The risk of rupture is always lurking. But today, in this sterile-lit room, his job is to make sure that doesn't happen.

The patient now lies still, unconscious beneath the hum of machines. On the monitor, the aneurysm glares at everyone — an unspoken challenge, a silent plea for intervention. Shi Min exhales slowly. 'This is what we trained for. Every movement now matters.'

Shi Min took a breath. The moment of truth.

"Catheter," he commanded.

And the first step was made.

Shi Min made the first puncture, threading the catheter into the femoral artery. His hands are steady, though his mind races ahead, mapping the delicate path through twisting vessels. The screen guides Shi Min — each millimeter forward feels like navigating a minefield. One misstep could mean disaster.

There. The aneurysm looms before them, fragile as a whisper. No time for hesitation. Shi Min slides the stent into position, the mesh structure unfurling across the aneurysm's neck like a bridge over turbulent waters. A safeguard, a barrier between danger and life.

Next, the coils. The moment they enter the aneurysm, Shi Min holds his breath. Each coil curls into place, filling the sac-like intricate threads in a tapestry. Blood begins clotting around them — a sign of success. Slowly, it shuts itself off from circulation. It's working.

## Chapter 228: LILY'S FIRST LOVE

A pause.

A final scan.

The aneurysm is sealed.

Relief washes over Shi Min and everyone in the room — not in an outward show, but in the quiet realization that today, they've won.

Beyond the operating room, the rest of the group started pouring in one after the other, their expressions a mix of concern, anxiety, and barely contained panic.

Goldie was the first to arrive, with Four Eyes and Chatty. Phone still in hand, his eyes scanning the hospital's corridors for any sign of updates.

Four Eyes and Chatty — Chatty looks visibly shaken, unable to erase the haunting image of Fatty's flaming wreck from his mind.

Ling Li, though in the middle of an important meeting, had received the message. She did not respond — she didn't need to. She was already on her way.

The doors to the infirmary slammed open, the sound echoing against the sterile white walls as Lily burst inside, flanked by Ren and Shun.

Her world was crumbling. Her breath hitched, sharp, and uneven — she could barely walk straight, each step like trudging through a nightmare she couldn't wake from. Her vision blurred, not from exhaustion but from the sheer panic twisting her insides.

Lily was still so young, and Fatty was her first love.

The weight of that realization crushed her chest, suffocating, pressing down on every fiber of her being.

She couldn't lose him.

Her hands trembled violently, clutching at the fabric of her sleeves as if they were the only thing holding her together. She felt like she was unraveling.

Tears clung to her lashes, refusing to fall — but her face was already streaked with remnants of earlier sobs, her cheeks flushed with the overwhelming fear consuming her.

Ren was tense beside her, her movements swift yet careful, her usual calm demeanor shattered by the urgency of the moment. Shun walked on her other side, and his jaw clenched, his gaze sharp, scanning the hallway for any sign — any glimpse — of Fatty's condition.

Ren kept a steadying hand on Lily's shoulder, but even she couldn't mask the quiet dread tightening her expression. Her grip was firm and reassuring, but it barely kept her from collapsing under the weight of uncertainty.

They rounded the corner, the waiting area outside the operating room coming into view — and then, they saw them.

The weight of waiting was evident.

Four Eyes and Chatty stood rigid, their faces pale, drained of every ounce of energy. Neither had moved since the surgery began.

The room was thick with unspoken tension, the air heavy, suffocating.

Chatty had his hands shoved deep into his pockets, but his fingers twitched, jittering slightly, betraying his barely contained nerves. He kept shifting his weight as if standing still for too long would make the reality of the situation crash down on him.

Four Eyes were different — frozen, still, like a statue carved from pure distress. His eyes were locked onto the sealed doors of the operating room, burning holes through them as though sheer willpower alone could force them open, make the doctors step out, make them say something — anything.

Lily felt her stomach drop, a sickening lurch that made her head light and her throat dry. This was real.

She stumbled forward, nearly gripping Four Eyes' arm, her stepfather, without thinking, seeking something — someone — anything to hold on to.

Four Eyes finally turned toward her, his hands tightening into fists for a fleeting moment before he exhaled slowly, unsteadily.

The silence stretched unbearably before he spoke.

"He's in surgery," he said quietly.

His voice was strained, flat as if speaking the words aloud made them heavier.

Lily felt her knees buckle, her legs trembling beneath her, unable to hold the weight of the fear crushing her.

Ren caught her before she collapsed, her grip firm as she held her upright, forcing Lily to look at him.

"Lily," she said firmly, her voice steady despite the worry thick in her eyes. "Quan Ye is strong. Shi Min is there. They'll do everything possible."

"Yes," it was the only word Four Eyes could add.

Ren Almost rolled her eye's. 'Pap's can you add more comforting words?' She silently thought.

But Lily wasn't listening.

She didn't want rationality.

She wanted certainty.

And right now — there were none.

Ling Li moved swiftly down the hallway, her coat flowing behind her like a steady tide, a storm contained within the sharp, purposeful strides of her feet. The fluorescent lights hummed above her, casting a cold, sterile glow upon the waiting area, where grief hung thick in the air — a suffocating weight pressing against each chest.

She took in the scene in an instant—the exhaustion lining their faces, the tension rippling between bodies, the hushed whispers that carried unspoken fears like ripples over still water. Her family. Her disciples. Her people. But instead of the warriors she had forged, she saw them crumbling, shaken, undone.

And then — Lily.

Her daughter sat stiffly, locked in place between Ren and Four Eyes, her hands gripping the fabric of her sleeves so tightly that her knuckles had turned bone-white. Her breath hitched, uneven, and fragile, like glass on the verge of shattering. Ling Li's stomach clenched at the sight of her child — so young, so small, drowning in sorrow that even years of training had not prepared her for.

Lily's once bright and defiant eyes were swollen, and her face streaked with the tracks of silent tears. The tremors that wracked her body, despite the firm, grounding hand on her shoulder, spoke of the depth of her terror — one that had taken root deep within her bones.

Ling Li swallowed the ache that clawed at her heart. But she did not falter.

She was their leader. Their pillar. The one thing that could not afford to collapse beneath the weight of grief. She needed to show them what is true strength was amidst the chaos.

She had spent so much time molding them, sharpening their minds like steel, fortifying their bodies with relentless discipline — preparing them for battles more perilous than a single accident.

And yet, here they were. Shattered. Crumbling at the first taste of true crisis.

A sharp breath.

#### Chapter 229: SOME VICTORIES DOESN'T NEED AN AUDIENCE

Then — Ling Li's voice cut through the thick silence, edged with a steel that had seen countless hardships, carrying both disappointment and expectation.

"How can you all break down this way for a mere accident?"

Her words were cold, controlled — every syllable precise, deliberate, piercing.

"I feel like I'm not doing enough as your Master if this is how you react in moments of uncertainty. What have you all been training for?"

A ripple passed through the room, the weight of her words striking each of them at the core.

Four Eyes looked up, his jaw tightening — not in defiance, but in realization. His wife — his formidable, unshaken, always-composed wife — stood before him like an unmovable force. The thought struck him hard — 'I need to learn more from her. I need to be stronger, not just for myself, but for everyone.'

Chatty's fingers curled slightly, his gaze flickering downward, shame creeping in as he realized just how deeply fear had sunk its claws into him.

Shun inhaled sharply and straightened, composure settling into his bones like armor. He was being groomed to be the next national ruler — weakness had no place within him.

Ren pressed her lips into a thin line, swallowing the conflict that roiled in her chest. She understood what her mother meant. But Lily — Lily was different. She was still young. She was afraid.

Ling Li's gaze softened ever so slightly as she turned back to her daughter. The tightness in her chest did not ease, but she knew — there was no logic that could erase the terror consuming Lily, no words that could truly extinguish the suffocating grief choking her.

Yet — this moment mattered.

It was the difference between breaking beneath adversity or rising above it.

Instead of offering empty comfort, Ling Li offered certainty — solid, unwavering certainty.

"Quan Ye is strong, and Shi Min is the best surgeon you could ask for," she said, her voice steady, unshaken, a pillar amid the storm.

"Crying won't heal him. But strength — endurance — your ability to handle pain alongside him, to be here when he wakes up... that will matter."

Lily sniffled, her fingers still trembling—but something in her mother's words cut through the suffocating hopelessness that had swallowed her whole. A reminder that she wasn't helpless.

Ling Li gave Lily a small, firm nod, then met Four Eyes' gaze — silent understanding passing between them.

Then, without another word, Ling Li turned and entered the operating room, her coat sweeping behind her like a battle flag — an unyielding force stepping into the unknown.

Back in the operating room, Shi Min's focus was locked on one thing only - getting Fatty through the surgery without complications. While outside, the tension only grew.

This wasn't just an accident.

This was survival.

"Let's proceed with his broken leg," Shi Min said.

The operating room is cold and sterile, yet alive with quiet urgency. Fatty lies unconscious, his leg unnaturally twisted — a clear fracture. The X-rays confirmed it: a displaced tibia and fibula fracture.

This will require open reduction and internal fixation.

Shi Min took a deep breath, steadied his hands, and began.

"Scalpel,"

The first incision was made and precise, slicing through layers of skin and muscle. Blood pools, but Shi Min's team is ready — suction clears the field. The fractured bone is exposed, jagged edges stark against the bright surgical light.

Carefully, Shi Min realigns the tibia, fitting the pieces together like a puzzle. The fibula follows, its smaller frame needing equal attention. The metal plate and screws are prepared. One by one, Shi Min secured them, reinforcing the bone's structure. Each screw tightens with a satisfying click, locking the fracture into place.

Shi Min paused, inspecting his work. The alignment is perfect. Stability restored. The body will do the rest — healing and rebuilding. Shi Min close the incision, layer by layer, suturing the skin with practiced precision.

Shi Min stepped back, exhaling slowly as he studied the unconscious Quan Ye. The monitors beeped in their rhythmic pattern — steady, reassuring. His pulse was strong. His vitals held firm. He would wake up soon, unaware of the battle waged in this room.

But that was okay.

Some victories didn't need an audience — only a steady hand and an unwavering resolve.

Shi Min turned slightly at the sound of footsteps, watching as Ling Li entered the operating room after scrubbing in. Her presence was sharp and commanding, the tension in the room shifting under the weight of her arrival.

“How is everything? What exactly happened?” she asked, her tone controlled, but the urgency beneath it undeniable.

Pharsa, standing beside Shi Min, stiffened slightly. Guilt weighed heavy in her chest as she replayed the events of the race — the reckless chase between Fatty and Four Eyes, the high-speed battle that had ended in devastation.

She swallowed hard before speaking, her voice tight. “It was the race... The finish line—things went wrong.”

Ling Li's gaze sharpened, but she remained silent, listening.

“Fatty and Four Eyes had challenged each other under the scorching heat of the race track, the roar of engines swallowing their surroundings as they pushed their cars to the limit.

Fatty, always eager to prove himself, had been neck-and-neck with Four Eyes in the final stretch—his grip tightening around the wheel, his foot pressing just a fraction harder on the accelerator.

Four Eyes, never one to back down from a challenge, had matched him pace for pace, their cars weaving dangerously close, tires screeching as they fought for dominance.

But just as Fatty veered slightly, attempting to claim the lead, a split-second miscalculation shattered everything.

His rear tires lost traction, and the car swerved violently. Four Eyes reacted instinctively, braking hard, but Fatty's vehicle spun out of control.

The impact came fast. Brutal.

Metal crunched against the barricades lining the track. Glass exploded in sharp fragments. The force of the collision sent Fatty's car rolling — once, twice — before coming to a brutal halt and catching fire."

The silence afterward had been deafening.

Pharsa swallowed hard, guilt gnawing at her from the inside out. She forced herself to continue, but the weight of responsibility sat heavily on her chest.

Chapter 230: RECKLESSNESS BORN FROM ADRENALINE

"Fatty was pulled from the wreck with a ruptured cervical ligament, a compound tibial fracture, and a dislocated patella," Pharsa said, her voice uneven. "The impact was severe — the force of the crash caused rotational trauma, worsening the ligament tear in his neck. He suffered serious injuries from the crash, but..."

Pharsa hesitated, the words catching in her throat.

Shi Min stepped in, his voice carrying the weight of the discovery. "We found something unexpected. A blessing in disguise."

Ling Li's sharp gaze fixed on him, her expression unreadable.

Shi Min straightened, adjusting his gloves with careful precision before delivering the news. "Mom," he began, his tone measured but firm, "during the cerebral angiography, I identified two large intracranial aneurysms — ones we weren't aware of before. One is pressing dangerously close to the middle cerebral artery, and if it ruptures..."

He didn't need to finish. The silence that followed was heavy.

Ling Li's fingers curled ever so slightly, a flicker of tension passing through her usually composed demeanor. She did not react outwardly, but the weight of the revelation settled deep in her mind.

Shi Min pressed on, his voice now steadier but carrying a thread of urgency. "I managed the worst of it using endovascular coiling, stabilizing the vascular integrity without compromising blood flow. But there are two smaller saccular aneurysms I didn't touch — they were too delicate to recoil without creating a perfusion deficit. If I interfered, there would be no viable pathway for cerebral circulation."

A sharp inhale.

Shi Min's eyes locked onto his mother's. "I'm leaving this part to you."

He exhaled, settling his hands at his sides as he continued, "And the cervical ligament rupture — it's extensive. If we don't intervene carefully, we risk affecting his atlantoaxial stability, which could lead to long-term complications."

Ling Li stepped forward, her gaze sweeping over Fatty's unconscious form. The rhythmic beeping of the monitors filled the sterile air, each pulse a confirmation that time was still on their side — for now.

An accident.

A recklessness born from adrenaline.

But now, an even greater battle to fight.

Ling Li nodded once, her stance unwavering.

“Let me see the full preoperative and postoperative scans,” she ordered.

Shi Min swiftly handed her the medical imaging reports. Ling Li studied them with razor-sharp focus, her mind processing each detail — the trajectory of blood flow, the integrity of the vascular structures, and the strain on the cervical spine.

Silence stretched in the room as she absorbed the data, her mind already mapping out the course of action.

Finally, she exhaled, cool and confident.

Ling Li’s gaze remained steady as she studied Shi Min, reading the weight of exhaustion in his stance — the way his shoulders carried the burden of the battle fought inside this sterile chamber.

“Son, you did well,” she said, her voice firm but carrying an unmistakable thread of maternal pride.

“The surgery was executed perfectly. There is no need for further intervention.” She let the tension settle for a moment before delivering her next words with precision.

“I will handle the rest through integrated acupuncture therapy and manual manipulation techniques.”

Shi Min exhaled, relief flashing across his features for the briefest of moments. He had made the right call. He had protected the vascular integrity without compromising cerebral perfusion. But he knew — his mother’s methods would be just as calculated, just as precise. He gave a slight nod, trusting her expertise without hesitation.

Pharsa, still grappling with the weight of what had happened, clutched her arms tightly as though trying to contain the anxiety threatening to unravel her. Guilt still lingered — sharp, unforgiving— but she didn't question Ling Li's decision.

Ling Li never spoke without certainty.

“Send him to his ward,” she instructed, her tone carrying finality — an unspoken command that left no room for doubt.

The room snapped into motion.

Nurses moved swiftly, efficiently disconnecting the vascular monitoring systems, securing the cervical brace, and preparing Fatty for transfer. The overhead surgical lights cast stark reflections on the gleaming instruments, now unnecessary — at least for this battle.

Ling Li remained still, watching as they wheeled Fatty out, her expression unreadable—yet her mind moved with sharp calculation.

One accident.

One revelation.

One choice that might alter Fatty's future forever.

Ling Li flexed her fingers briefly before stripping off her surgical gloves with smooth precision, each movement methodical, decisive, and unyielding.

Without another word, she stepped away, already strategizing her next move.

Shi Min and Pharsa fell into step behind her, trailing in her wake — silent but ready.

Ling Li stood at Fatty's bedside, her fingers hovering just above his pulse points, feeling the faint rhythm beneath her touch. His breathing was stable, but the tension in his muscles — especially around his neck and spine — was undeniable. His body had absorbed the trauma in ways that surgery alone could not fully correct.

Shi Min, Mushu, and Pharsa stood nearby, watching as she assessed him.

Without looking up, she spoke, her voice measured, precise.

“There are two main problems remaining - the cervical ligament rupture and the small untreated aneurysms in his brain. Surgery could further disrupt vascular flow, but acupuncture will allow controlled stimulation of his autonomic nervous system to regulate blood circulation naturally.”

She reached for a tray of sterile golden acupuncture needles entrusted to her by Shen Sei. Holding one between her fingers for emphasis.

“Integrated acupuncture therapy combines traditional meridian points with modern neurological targeting. By inserting needles at specific points, I can regulate his cerebral blood flow and prevent excessive strain on his vascular integrity. In short, we control his body's natural healing response.”

Shi Min's gaze flickered toward the tray. “And the torn ligaments? The instability in his cervical spine?”

Ling Li nodded, shifting her stance. “That's where manual manipulation techniques come in. The trauma has caused misalignment in his cervical vertebrae, which could lead to chronic pain and mobility issues if left untreated. Rather than surgery, I'll use gentle but targeted mobilization — adjusting his cervical spine through controlled pressure and movement.”

Pharsa frowned slightly, watching closely. “How will that work without damaging him further?”