

THE REAL PROTEGE

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Suddenly, one of their comrades, who was standing guard, shouted, "Something is moving behind those bushes!"

In an instant, everyone was on their feet, weapons at the ready, their senses heightened, prepared for whatever lurked beyond the foliage.

"Prepare your spears! It sounds like alligators!" Jack's voice cut through the chaos. "Aim for their eyes, mouth, or nose if they attack! Let's move!"

They sprinted, adrenaline fueling their steps, even as they carried their injured comrades. The urgency of their situation pushed them to their limits; their legs burned, but the fear of being caught by the alligators kept them moving.

"Damn!" One of the trainees exclaimed, halting abruptly. In front of them lay the ominous lake where they had lost a comrade. "We're back here!"

"Don't get close to the lake! Let's throw the alligators there instead," Jack commanded.

Turning to face their pursuers, they saw the alligators, a living wave of danger, piling on top of one another.

"There's too many of them!"

"Remember our aim! Eyes, nose, and mouth! When hurt, they tend to retreat! Try to kick several together and toss them into the lake! Pair up!" Jack's expertise showed as he led with authority.

The standoff was tense, each side waiting for the other to make the first move.

Suddenly, an alligator from the back lunged, leaping an astonishing five feet into the air.

Jack and Four Eyes, who seemed to have read each other's mind, moving in unison, ran towards it with their spears. In perfect sync, they struck the alligator and hurled it into the lake from mid-air.

That mysterious lake just consumed the alligator in seconds, leaving the group in stunned silence.

"Focus!" Four Eyes's command cut through their distraction. Despite his few words, he always knew how to command attention and action. The group quickly refocused, prepared for the next move in this deadly game of survival.

With only thirty able fighters among them, they faced an overwhelming wave of a hundred alligators. Their odds seemed impossible, but fortune was on their side. The alligators attacked in waves rather than all at once, giving the trainees brief, critical moments to regroup and strike back.

Spears were thrust with precision and desperation. Jack and Four Eyes led the charge, their moves synchronized like a well-rehearsed dance. Each stab was aimed with the knowledge that a precise hit to the eyes, nose, or mouth would deter the fierce creatures.

The trainees moved with a fluid rhythm, pairs working together to fend off and drive the alligators toward the lake. Each successful throw into the water was a small victory, the lake consuming the beasts in a matter of seconds.

The air was filled with grunts and the splashes of bodies hitting the water. Tension tightened the muscles of every person there, their breaths labored but determined. They couldn't afford to falter, not with the odds stacked against them.

Finally, as the last of the alligators was hurled into the lake, the trainees stood panting but victorious. Their numbers were still intact, their spirits bolstered by the unity and the sheer will to survive.

"Let's keep this one!" Jack exclaimed as he held onto an alligator, his voice echoing with determination.

"What for?" Chatty yelled, his fear palpable. He was so scared to death earlier during the battle with the alligators. If there was one thing that terrified him, it was alligators.

"Food!" Jack replied, a hint of a smile playing on his lips.

"I remember this place. I'll find some woods." one of them offered, eager to keep moving.

"It will be dark soon. I will go with you to find more." another chimed in, everyone's eyes darting around warily.

"Be on guard!" Another soldier warned, his voice carrying the weight of their situation.

Jack took out his water bottle, drank most of it, and discarded the rest. Chatty looked at him in surprise.

"Why did you throw your water?" Chatty asked, he was perplexed.

Jackson need not answer him. He took his dagger, punctured the alligator, and collected its blood.

"Don't tell me you're gonna drink its blood!" Chatty said, shaking his head in disbelief.

Jack was grinning from ear to ear, his white teeth gleaming, looking at Chatty.

"Alligators' blood is extraordinary, especially for the wounds. It has a natural healing effect and is anti-bacterial. It's like an antibiotic." Jack explained.

Four Eyes, overhearing what Jack said handed him his water bottle after taking a drink.

"Here, apply this to our injured fellow." Jackson passed Chatty the bottle.

"Are you sure this is safe?" Chatty asked, still skeptical and not so eager to believe.

"Certainly!" Jackson answered with confidence, smiling again, showing his completely white teeth.

"Apply some to your wounds as well," Jack added.

"Come on, let's go and do it!" Fatty, more pragmatic, took the bottle and grabbed it from Jack, ready to put the advice to use.

Shun returned smiling with two men beside him after two hours of hunting.

"Guess what we got?" he said, emptying his backpack of mushrooms and fruits. Another carried firewood, while the third had two rabbits ready to cook.

Six of them were preparing the crocodile meat while the others were taking turns treating their wounds and standing guard.

"Go treat your wounds. Go to Quan Ye," Four Eyes instructed Shun.

Shun nodded, and his two companions followed him without question, leaving the rabbit to Four Eyes.

'Seems Shun has found two followers.' Four Eyes thought, feeling a surge of pride for his friend.

Four Eyes, observing Jack, sat beside him with the rabbits to cook.

Sitting beside Jack, Four Eyes started cooking the rabbits. "How did you join the camp?" he asked, curious about Jack's background.

When Jack heard the question, he smiled again, showing his perfect white teeth. However, his eyes held a deeper story. "It is all thanks to our Supreme Commander and Grand Master," he began, referring to Ling Li and Shi Min.

"Our whole village in Uganda was burned by a powerful businessman who wanted to control our land. But our village captain refused to give in to their demands.

Our Supreme Commander happened to be visiting the next village from us, saw the fire, and came to our village and rescued us. Both my parents died fighting, my younger brother was only months old and didn't survive the toxic smoke, and I was only eight then." Jack paused and seemed to go back to his past.

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Four Eyes tapped Jack's shoulders to assure him he was not alone anymore.

Jack realized he had been carried away thinking of the past. He looked at Four Eyes and smiled at him, but his smile didn't reach his eyes this time.

"Our Supreme Commander and her son helped us restore the village and look for families to care for those who became orphans. I was amazed by their extraordinary skills and asked if I could be one of them.

Our Grand Master was very impressive. I found out he was only fourteen then; he was very friendly to all of us. I kept following the Grand Master wherever he went, and I didn't stop until he agreed to take me back with him," Jack told Four Eyes and laughed.

"When he finally agreed, I was ecstatic to announce it to our village.

It also turned out that more people from our village wanted to return with them. In the end, thirty of us orphans joined the camp. It is our great honor to serve our benefactors, and we have pledged our sincere loyalty to them with our lives," Jack said with pride.

Four Eyes nodded at him as they continued cooking.

"This is almost done." Four Eyes said, looking at the meats on fire.

"Yep, mealtime!" One yelled and started distributing the food around.

"Chu Yan! This crocodile blood is truly awesome! Only after an hour, those severely wounded don't feel the pain as much as before." Chatty said excitedly. "Here, apply some to your wounds too."

Four eyes nodded with a smirk and looked at Jack, who had heard what Chatty said. He was only smiling, and all his teeth were brightly showing on his face.

"Here, there is still one bottle untouched." Chatty handed the bottle to Jack.

Jack glanced at Four Eyes, "You can keep it." He said.

Four Eyes secured his original water bottle in his backpack, thoughts briefly lingering on his wife, Ling, who might find some use for it. His longing for Ling Li momentarily softened the harsh reality they faced. He missed Ling Li and his twins.

After their meal, one of their comrades stood up and announced, "Let's get moving before it gets dark. Remember, we are just around the area where the wolves attacked us."

The group nodded in agreement, their senses sharpening with the reminder of the recent danger. As they continued their journey, the sound of growling grew louder.

"Shhh..." Their comrade in front signaled for silence, urging everyone to move slowly and carefully.

The trainees strained to hear and identify the sounds. As they peered through the dense plants and bushes, their eyes widened in shock. A shiver ran down their spines, and some could only swallow hard as they glimpsed a pack of hyenas, their eyes glinting with predatory hunger. The trainees knew they had to stay as quiet and still as possible, hoping to avoid drawing attention to themselves while devising a plan to navigate this dangerous encounter safely.

"That is a whole pack of hyenas!" A comrade whispered in fright.

Indeed, they are watching the hyenas wildly feasting on the dead wolves and mastiffs they fought last night.

Their comrade in front, a Class A, signaled them to retreat back in silence, understanding the dire situation.

"We don't have anywhere to go unless we cross the lake," one of the trainees said, a hint of desperation in his voice.

"No way!" Nearly everyone responded at once, the fear of the mysterious lake outweighing even the threat of the hyenas. They couldn't think of themselves crossing the mysterious lake. Just thinking of the idea made them tremble.

"Those hyenas, did you see? There were hundreds of them. We can't fight them head-on, and they will find us soon."

"How do you plan to cross the lake?" One curiously asked.

"Make some rope," someone suggested.

Four Eyes looked at Jack. When their eyes met, Jack shook his head.

"Making rope takes time. The hyaenas would find us ahead before we finish the needed ropes." Jack said.

The group looked at Jack with wide-open eyes before reality sank into them.

"So we can only fight the hyaenas?" Chatty asked, his voice unsteady from terror.

"Yep, or we can try walking around them silently while they are still eating. Let's hope we don't get their attention," Jack suggested.

"Lead the way," everyone urged Jack.

Jack nodded to them without hesitation; Four Eyes followed him closely, while the rest had no choice but to stride their feet to follow against their will.

Jack took out his daggers, and the rest did the same as they walked, crunched in silence with sweats forming on their foreheads. The tension was palpable.

Seeing a clear path, Jack began to run, the rest matching his speed. They managed to pass the pack of hyenas, although the looming threat still lingered in their minds.

After several hundred meters, they came to an abrupt stop, stunned by what lay ahead. The unexpected sight left them momentarily speechless, their hearts pounding from the adrenaline and anticipation.

"Who can do this?" one of the trainees murmured, his voice trembling with disbelief.

"Lions. Only lions can kill hyenas," another replied, eyes wide with fear.

"Tigers and leopards, too," added a third, casting a wary glance around.

They stared at the pile of dead hyenas, the number too large to be the work of just one predator. "That won't be just one lion," someone whispered.

"Obviously not," came the calm response.

"Come on, let's move forward," the Class A comrade urged, breaking the spell of fear that had momentarily frozen them.

Their steps were cautious but determined, each one knowing that whatever had taken down the hyenas might still be lurking nearby. Every rustle in the bushes made their hearts race, but they pressed on, driven by the will to survive and the knowledge that standing still was not an option.

"Really, Mom? Hyenas? Are you sure you're not trying to kill them?" Shi Min's voice carried a mix of disbelief and concern as he watched the monitors. Shi Min couldn't believe his mother's guts.

"You must have some people on standby near them. Otherwise, I don't guarantee Paps and Shun won't get hurt," he added, his worry evident.

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Ling Li knew her son well. Shi Min's tough exterior masked a soft spot for his loved ones.

"Don't worry, son; Mushu and Pharsa must be following them by now," Ling Li said, her calm tone intended to soothe his nerves.

Shi Min felt a wave of relief wash over him at his mother's words. The knowledge that capable allies were nearby offered a measure of comfort amidst the chaos.

"Mom, how long have you known Otako?"

Ling Li didn't expect Shi Min's question and caught her off guard; Ling Li couldn't seem to contemplate her answer.

Without looking at Shi Min, "It has been a while. Why do you ask?"

"Otako seems to have high regard for you and even mentioned you are the protege. But why does Otako want to take over the Chinese government?" Shi Min asked, curiosity piqued.

Ling Li sighed, "Otako had a tough life. Their ancestors were from China, but the war displaced them, forcing them to migrate and become slaves. They were abused and mistreated.

Otako mentioned their grandmother to me, who was a slave to a wealthy family. Every night, their employer put her and her fellow servants in a sack and hung them in a tree, afraid they would escape. They won't be given food for days. One day, their grandmother was whipped for eating a piece of bread she took from the table because of her hunger.

This sad story was why Otako aimed to succeed and earn a lot of power: never to let any member of the family suffer again. Otako despised those who took advantage of others and vowed to create a shield of influence and wealth to protect those he loved." Ling Li conveyed this to Shi Min.

"Have you met Otako's family?" Shi Min inquired with curiosity.

Ling Li, who had a reputation for knowing everyone worth knowing, shook her head with a chuckle. "I can hardly meet the man himself, let alone his family."

Shi Min's eyes sparkled with youthful curiosity. "Mom, what are Otako's businesses? Why is he so wealthy?"

Ling Li's expression turned thoughtful. "Otako is a magnate in the oil and gas industry. Have you heard of 'The Nuke'?"

Shi Min's jaw dropped. "Mom, who hasn't heard of 'The Nuke'?! So, does Otako own all the companies under the Nuke brand? They have numerous international brands of oil and gas stations, not to mention the winery, its prestigious wines, and the expansive vineyards."

Ling Li nodded with a smile. "Yes, Otako's reach extends far beyond what we see. He also owns several pearl farms across the globe and 'The Axis.'"

Shi Min was astounded. "The Axis?! The renowned diamond and gold supplier?"

"Indeed," Ling Li confirmed. "Otako also commands an impressive fleet of massive vessels that transport oil and gas worldwide."

Shi Min, feeling a pang of inadequacy, confessed, "Mom, with the business I'm handling, I'm already overwhelmed with the number of our employees. I can't even fathom the scale of Otako's empire." Shi Min felt he was still too small compared to Otako despite him already being burdened by his work.

Ling Li chuckled warmly, ruffling her son's hair affectionately. "And yet, here you are, doing splendidly."

Ling Li's gaze turned contemplative. "Taking over the Chinese government might not be an attack on the country, but rather a move against the President personally." Ling Li remarked while still deep in thought. "I couldn't think of another reason. We have seen the President's erratic behavior in the group. Otako likely detected it long before we did."

Shi Min's voice was filled with intrigue. "Do you think the Chinese President is collaborating with someone else?"

Ling Li nodded, her face serious. "Most probably. Camp Phoenix couldn't have been compromised without insider help."

Shi Min leaned closer, "That's understandable. Is this the reason why you were stalling retrieving it?"

Ling Li sighed, the weight of her secrets pressing down on her. "Precisely. Prematurely Moving could jeopardize everything."

Ling Li's face set in determination, "But now we must get it back as soon as possible. When this group leaves for the Amazon, we will proceed to Camp Phoenix."

Shi Min frowned, hesitation evident in his voice. "We cannot walk in without knowing what's going on. Wait, did you see anything when you asked the heavens?"

Ling Li's gaze turned distant as she recalled the eerie vision. "It was very odd. I saw the living dead, but I couldn't tell... these people are being manipulated."

Shi Min's expression grew darker. "And the whole system must have been tampered with," he said, trying to process the enormity of the situation. He was about to say more when Shi Min's eyes caught the flickering monitor, and his voice trailed off.

On the screen, the group of soldiers was desperately trying to fend off a pack of relentless hyenas, their fate seeming all but sealed. It was a frantic struggle, a brutal fight for survival.

As Shi Min and Ling Li watched, their hearts pounded in their chests.

Suddenly, out of the dense foliage, four majestic lions appeared. With ferocity and precision, they attacked the hyenas, their powerful roars echoing through the wilderness. The battle raged for over an hour, the lions proving their dominance over the hyenas.

As the dust settled, two of the lions vanished as swiftly as they had appeared, melting back into the jungle. The remaining two lions stood their ground, their golden eyes fixed on the group of men, a silent challenge in their gaze. Time seemed to stretch, each second an eternity, as neither side dared to move.

After what felt like an endless standoff, the lions finally turned and walked away in the opposite direction. Only then was the group able to breathe and realize their injuries. They were all bleeding bloodily.

"No!" The heart-wrenching cry echoed through the camp as one of their comrades fell to his knees, sobbing uncontrollably beside a motionless body.

"We lost him. I lost him," the soldier choked out between sobs, his tears falling onto the lifeless face of his best friend. They had entered the camp together and trained together, and now, he had to face the harsh reality of losing his partner.

"Another one here."

"Another one here."

"Here, too."

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"How many did we lose?" Four Eyes asked, with his arms and legs bleeding, and took out the bottle of crocodile blood from his bag.

Jack, with a sad look on his face, carefully surveyed the group. He was the one who had come out of the recent skirmish with the least severe injuries, but the weight of their losses hung heavily on his shoulders. "We lost five this time," Jack said, his voice tinged with sadness as he spoke, his head bowed in respect for the fallen.

Four Eyes, his hands stained with the crimson of battle, rushed to Shun's side. Shun winced as Four Eyes applied the soothing crocodile blood to his wounds, an unexpected gesture of care from his future father-in-law. Shun's eyes filled with gratitude and warmth as he watched Four Eyes tending to him amidst the chaos.

Concern etched on his face, Four Eyes hurried over to Chatty, who lay wounded and in pain. Overwhelmed, Four Eyes called out for Jack, his voice betraying his anxiety.

"You're lucky to be alive, bro. Don't worry. Apply the crocodile blood. I'll find some herbs to help him," Jack reassured Chatty before setting off in search of medicinal plants.

As the group tended to their injuries and mourned their fallen comrades, Jack returned with a fellow survivor, bearing a bounty of herbs, fruits, and a deer.

'This man sure is such a talent.' Four Eyes thought as he glanced at Jack. Four Eyes couldn't help but admire Jack's resourcefulness, recognizing the invaluable contribution he made to their survival.

With a heavy heart, the group gathered around a crackling fire, the warmth offering a brief respite from the chilling reality of their losses. Jack, his eyes reflecting the weight of their situation, hushed the group as they settled in for the night. Each member felt the emotional toll of their journey, but amidst the darkness, they found a glimmer of resolve.

The night stretched on, shrouded in silence, as they steeled themselves for the challenges that lay ahead.

The sun had long since vanished beyond the horizon, casting an eerie darkness over the jungle. The only light came from the flickering fire they huddled around, its warmth a small comfort amidst the rising tension.

"Quiet," Jack whispered, his voice cutting through the crackling of the flames. His eyes darted around, listening intently.

A moment later, a chilling sound broke the uneasy silence—a sinister rattle that seemed to come from all directions.

"Shit! That's... That's a rattlesnake!" someone exclaimed, their voice tinged with panic.

"Grab some fire!" Jack commanded, his tone urgent but composed. They scrambled to grab sticks and pieces of wood, desperately trying to keep the fire going.

Soon, the men were holding makeshift torches, their flames casting dancing shadows on the jungle floor. As they raised the torches, the rattlesnakes emerged from the underbrush, their slithering forms illuminated by the firelight.

"All snakes are afraid of fire," Jack reassured them. "Don't try to fight them. Just bring the fire close, and they'll retreat."

They followed his instructions, waving the torches in front of them. The snakes hissed and recoiled, their fear of the flames evident.

"There's too many of them!" one man shouted, his voice rising in desperation.

"Make more fire!" Jack ordered. Several men turned their attention to gathering more wood, frantically adding it to the fire. The flames grew higher, creating a barrier of light and heat between the men and the encroaching snakes.

Sweat poured down their faces, mingling with the dirt and blood from their earlier injuries. Despite the chaos, they worked together seamlessly, driven by a shared

In the dimly lit monitor room, Shi Min's expression was a mix of determination and concern as he watched the screens showing the injured group.

"Mom, they are all severely injured, and we have lost six members. Let's get them out in the morning," he urged, his voice trembling slightly with urgency.

Ling Li, her gaze fixed on the monitors, remained silent, her face betraying no emotion.

"Mother, can you hear me?" Shi Min repeated, his patience waning.

Ling Li finally turned to look at her son, her expression softening. "Shi Min, you have such a soft heart. If that is what you wish, go ahead," she agreed, a gentle smile touching her lips.

Shi Min sighed with relief, though his mind remained restless. He glanced at his watch, noting the two hours until the first alarm would ring. Shi Min silently hoped his mother had no more traps set for the group on their way back. His brows furrowed as he returned his focus to the monitors, vigilantly watching every movement.

Meanwhile, in the jungle, the group had finally managed to fend off the rattlesnakes.

They slumped to the ground, their exhausted and battered bodies barely holding up.

The sudden blare of an alarm startled them.

"Isn't that supposed to tell us to return to the exit door?" Chatty asked, a spark of hope igniting in his eyes.

"Yes, that's two hours before they open the door for us!" another voice confirmed.

"This means they are letting us out earlier than scheduled," someone exclaimed, their weariness momentarily forgotten.

"Let's go!" Jack urged. They gathered themselves, helping the severely injured to their feet, and began the arduous journey towards the exit.

After an hour of trudging through the dense jungle, they halted abruptly, fear creeping back into their hearts.

"Seriously!" one of them muttered, eyes wide.

"There are not as many as before," another observed, trying to stay positive.

"Chatty, use your gun if they attack you. Stay on the side," Four Eyes instructed, handing Chatty his own gun. They pressed on, every step heavy with the weight of their fatigue and the anticipation of reaching safety.

The wolves lunged at them with ferocity, and the group fought back with every ounce of strength they could muster. The severely injured, with only three bullets each in their guns, resorted to their daggers once the ammunition ran dry. The moonlight cast a cold, unforgiving light over the chaotic scene, highlighting the raw desperation in their faces.

Four Eyes found himself surrounded by five wolves, each snarling and baring its teeth. Four Eyes' grip on one of his daggers slipped, and it clattered to the ground. A wolf pounced on him, knocking him off balance, and he hit the forest floor hard. Two wolves seized the opportunity, snapping at his neck.

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In a frantic scramble, Four Eyes remembered the knife Ling had tucked into his boot. He immediately took it. His fingers closed around the dagger and stabbed one of the wolves in its neck while kicking the other. He was able to get up. Still, another wolf attacked Four Eyes and was able to bite his arm. Jack saw his predicament and ran towards him, killing the wolf that wouldn't let go of Four Eyes' arm.

It was fortunate that the group had learned from their previous encounter with the wolves. Their movements were more precise, their attacks more coordinated, and their resolve unshaken. Each thrust of a dagger, each gunshot that rang through the night, was executed with a grim determination to survive.

Despite their injuries and exhaustion, they managed to fend off the wolves with surprising efficiency. The howls of the defeated animals gradually faded into the distance, leaving the group in an eerie silence.

As they caught their breath and tended to their new wounds, the second alarm pierced the night air, startling them.

"That's the second alarm," Chatty said, a mix of relief and urgency in his voice. "The door must be open by now."

"Let's move!" Jack urged, his tone resolute. They gathered their belongings and helped the severely injured to their feet, every step forward fueled by the hope of escape.

The journey was agonizingly slow, each minute feeling like an eternity. The path was treacherous, the darkness oppressive.

As the cold night breeze whispered through the camp, the tension was almost palpable. Waiting at the entrance of the battleground, Shi Min, Ling Li, Mushu, Pharsa, the Camp Commander, and a handful of high-ranking officials stood by anxiously with the medical team, their breaths visible in the chilly air. Together with another team, the grim task of retrieving the remains of their fallen comrades loomed heavily over them.

The world seemed to hold its breath. Shun, the first to emerge, staggered forward, his steps faltering. Just as Shun's knees buckled, Shi Min lunged and caught Shun, wrapping an arm around his waist. "Hold on, I've got you," Shi Min whispered, his voice filled with a mix of relief and urgency.

Shi Min half-carried, half-dragged Shun toward the infirmary, the soft glow of lanterns casting long shadows on the ground. Each step felt like an eternity as the tension around the camp grew heavier.

Then, through the doorway came Four Eyes, limping but determined. In Four Eyes' arms, he cradled Chatty, whose lifeless form seemed to weigh down the entire world.

Ling Li rushed forward, her arms outstretched to embrace Four Eyes, but the sight of Chatty stopped her in her tracks. Her heart pounded in her chest. "Four Eyes, are you okay?" Ling Li asked, her voice trembling with worry.

Four Eyes could barely manage a nod, his gaze never leaving Chatty. "Pharsa!" Ling Li cried out. "Get Chatty! He is seriously injured!"

Pharsa's eyes widened in shock at the sight of Chatty's injuries. Bloodied and bruised, he was barely recognizable. Pharsa quickly slipped her arms under Chetty, lifting him onto her back with surprising strength. Pharsa's heart raced as she sprinted towards the infirmary, her breath coming out in short, panicked bursts.

As the evening air grew colder, the camp buzzed with the quiet hum of urgency and concern. Mushu hurried over to Fatty, who staggered in with a deep gash on his cheek, blood trickling down his face. Mushu, with firm hands and a worried expression, guided Fatty towards the infirmary, their footsteps echoing softly in the crisp night air.

Ling Li's heart clenched as she saw Chu Yan. Tears welled up in her eyes as she rushed to his side, gently taking his arm. "Chu Yan!" Her voice trembled with a mix of relief and sorrow. Ling Li led Four Eyes carefully to her resting area, her grip on his arm tender yet firm.

Ling Li brought Four Eyes to her room and

Once inside, Ling Li directed Four Eyes to the bathroom. She helped him remove his dirtied clothes, the fabric stiff with dried blood, and helped him shower, cleaning his wounds and body. As she gently washed away the grime and blood, she whispered soothing words, her touch as gentle as a summer breeze. Ling Li then eased Four Eyes into a tub filled with a special medicinal concoction. The water was tinged with herbal mixtures that filled the room with a calming scent.

"Honey, stay in this solution for an hour. All of you are now soaking in this; it is a special medicine that our camp formulated and is one of our top-secret formulas. You'll regain strength and heal in no time." Ling Li explained.

Amidst the cold, early morning light, the camp buzzed with the quiet hum of activity. The air was filled with a blend of medicinal herbs and the subtle scent of antiseptic. Ling Li moved with practiced grace, her hands gentle yet firm as she cleaned and stitched Four Eyes' wounds. Her touch was tender, her love for Four Eyes palpable in every careful movement.

"Just relax and close your eyes. I will treat your wounds, but some are too big and need stitches," Ling Li whispered, her lips brushing against his forehead. Four Eyes closed his eyes, his exhaustion overcoming him. His body, now soaking in the medicinal bath, began to feel the effects of the special formula Ling Li had created.

Meanwhile, Shi Min tended to Shun, his hands steady despite the worry gnawing at her heart. Shi Min couldn't afford to let anything happen to Shun, not with the mission still looming and the thought of facing his sisters if anything went wrong. The very idea of his eldest sister's wrath made Shi Min feel dizzy. Shi Min stitched Shun's wounds with precision and let him soak in the same healing solution, hoping it would restore his strength.

As the sky lightened, signaling the dawn of a new day, Ling Li gently shook Four Eyes awake. "Honey, get up," she said softly. Four Eyes stirred, groaning as he opened his eyes.

"Let us get you out of the water and apply medicine to your wounds." Ling Li stated.