

THE REAL PROTÉGÉ

#Chapter 91: HOW DID YOU GET INJURED? - Read THE REAL PROTEGE Chapter 91: HOW DID YOU GET INJURED?

Chapter 91: HOW DID YOU GET INJURED?

Four Eyes looked at Ling Li with curiosity. "What is in that water?" Four Eyes asked.

"Do you feel better?" Ling Li inquired, her eyes searching his for any sign of discomfort.

"Yes," Four Eyes replied, a hint of surprise in his voice.

"It's a formula that I created together with this medicine," Ling Li explained. "Let me apply this on you so we can go home and rest. I'll tell you about it in the future and teach you how to make it."

After carefully applying the medicine to his wounds, Ling Li helped Four Eyes dress.

They emerged from Ling Li's room to find the rest of the team gathering, all looking slightly more refreshed but still burdened by the night's events. The camp, bathed in the soft glow of the rising sun, felt almost peaceful for a moment.

"But Pharsa and Chatty still need to be around," Ling Li noted, glancing around with concern. "Where are Chatty they?"

"They haven't come out from Pharsa's room," Reginald replied, his voice tinged with worry.

"Let's go see what is happening to them," Ling Li suggested. Together, they made their way to Pharsa's room, hoping for the best but bracing themselves for whatever they might find.

When they entered the room, the dim light revealed Pharsa still diligently stitching Chatty's wounds. The sight made Ling Li's heart sink. "Is he severely injured?" Ling Li asked.

Pharsa nodded, her focus unwavering as she continued to stitch. Ling Li stepped closer, her eyes scanning Chatty's battered body. The extent of his injuries was overwhelming, and she sighed deeply. "He is severely injured, and there are too many wounds to suture," Ling Li uttered.

"Mushu, let us give Pharsa a hand," Ling Li said, grabbing the necessary supplies. Mushu quickly joined her, his hands steady despite the urgency of the situation.

"Let me help, too," Shi Min volunteered, stepping forward. With the four of them working together, they moved with a synchronized rhythm, their combined efforts making quick work of Chatty's numerous wounds. In less than an hour, they had finished.

"Pharsa, let Chatty soak in the solution. I will have Reginald come back for you. We will send the rest home to rest," Ling Li instructed, her voice gentle yet firm.

"Yes. Thank you," Pharsa replied softly, her gratitude evident in her eyes.

As they prepared to leave, Pharsa felt a wave of exhaustion wash over her. She was overwhelmed by the sight of Chatty's injuries and the realization of how much she cared for him. Pharsa couldn't quite understand why she felt this way, but perhaps she had accepted that Chatty was her future.

With a sigh, Pharsa carefully lifted Chatty and carried him to the tub, the warm water enveloping his battered body. The room fell into a hushed silence, the only sound the gentle splash of water as Pharsa tended to Chatty, her heart full of hope and determination.

Ling Li and the group arrived home early in the morning, the sun barely tingeing the horizon with hints of gold and orange. The air was cool and fresh, filled with the soft scent of dew on the grass. Ling Li, her eyes still heavy with fatigue, gently guided Four Eyes to his room, making sure he was comfortable before closing the door softly behind her. She sensed the weight of the night's events lingering in the stillness of the house.

Shun slipped quietly into Ren's room and saw Ren sleeping, his heart racing with a mix of anticipation and anxiety. Ren lay there peacefully, her dark hair fanned out like a halo against the pillow. Shun changed into his comfortable pajamas. As Shun carefully slipped under the covers beside Ren, every movement was like a whisper, afraid to disturb the serenity of her slumber.

In her dreams, Ren felt a warm presence beside her. It was familiar, enveloping her in a sense of security that she couldn't quite name. She instinctively hugged the warmth, thinking she was still lost in a sweet dream. Shun's heart swelled at that moment; Shun embraced her back. He had been worried about her while he was on the training ground, and he felt relieved to be back and have her in his arms.

An hour passed like a gentle stream, and Ren stirred, the scent of Shun wrapping around her like a favorite blanket. Her heart leaped in joy when she opened her eyes and saw Shun beside her.

"Shun! You're back!" Ren nearly squealed, her excitement breaking the morning calm. She lunged forward and enveloped Shun in a tight embrace, the joy of his return igniting a spark of warmth in her chest.

"Whoa!" Shun gasped as he felt the sudden pressure against his injuries, a mix of surprise and pain flickering across his face.

"Did I hurt you?" Ren pulled back quickly, her eyes wide with concern. Shun managed a smile, brushing a hand through his hair to reassure her.

"I'm fine, really! Just a bit sore. How is my favorite person?" Shun caressed her hair gently, wanting nothing more than to ease her worry. "I'm okay, don't worry about me. How are you? I miss you."

"You look... different," Ren said, her brow furrowing as she examined Shun closely. The exhaustion under his eyes, the slight bruises peeking from beneath the edges of his pajama sleeves—these signs of struggle were hard to miss.

"Just a few scrapes," Shun replied lightly, but Ren was having none of it.

"No! You're not telling the truth! Let me see! Let me see!" Ren insisted she was familiar with Shun. He wouldn't tell her if he was in pain. Ren insisted with a ferocity that made him chuckle despite himself. She knew him too well, her intuition like a sixth sense.

Shun drew Ren back to him and hugged her tightly.

"I want to see! Let me see! How could you get injured? Shi Min said you were training, but how did you get all injured?"

"I'll show you later; let me sleep more. I'm still tired."

"Shun Chang!" Ren yelled.

Shun sighed dramatically, knowing he wouldn't win this battle. He pulled the blanket down slightly, revealing his legs, which bore the evidence of his ordeal—bruises and cuts that stood in stark contrast against his pale skin. Ren's eyes widened in horror. "

Chapter 92: REN READY TO FACE HER FATE

Ahhh! You call these 'little injuries'?" Ren's voice broke into a cry, tears welling up as she saw the evidence of his suffering. "Why?! How did you get like this?"

"Ren, calm down," Shun urged, the warmth of her concern fluttering in his chest. "This is all part of our training. I'm actually better off than Murphy and Quan Ye. You should see them; they're in much worse shape. Your dad took good care of me after it happened, so don't worry too much."

"But how could you get hurt like this? You're not just training like before!" Ren exclaimed, her voice a mixture of disbelief and worry. "Shi Min said you were pushing through some intense drills!"

"Trust me, I'll show you later. Right now, I just need a little bit of rest," Shun said, pulling Ren closer again, wanting nothing more than to bask in her presence while tuning out the world outside.

"Shun Chang!" Ren yelled again, her tone playful yet commanding, which made Shun chuckle, and he knew then that he was utterly helpless against her determination.

Reluctantly, Shun revealed more of his injuries, but the warmth of her worry wrapped around him, making the pain seem less significant in the grand scheme of things.

Come here and stay with me while I sleep. I want to rest more." Shun pulled Ren back into his arms.

Ren silently complied with Shun's request with tears in her eyes, embracing Shun to sleep, careful not to touch his wounds again.

As Ren lay beside Shun, Shun watched the way Ren's brows furrowed with concern, and he felt a pang of guilt but also a swell of gratitude for her care. "It's not as bad as it looks, I promise," Shun whispered, closing his eyes and leaning back into the comfort of their shared moment.

After some time, when Ren finally saw Shun sleeping soundly, Ren gently peeled herself away from his embrace, her curiosity overpowering her urge to stay close and prepared to look for her mother and brother. She wanted answers, especially since her mind was racing with questions about his injuries and the training he'd endured.

In the quiet of the house, Ren found Mushu, who was stirring from his post, a goofy grin spreading across his face. "Mushu, where are Mom and Shi Min?" Ren asked.

"Good morning, Young Miss. They are in the study." Mushu replied.

"Thanks, Mushu. And good morning to you, too," Ren replied, her expression shifting towards urgency as she made her way to her mother's study, failing to knock before entering.

Inside, Ling Li and Shi Min looked up in surprise. Desks piled high with papers, and the scent of fresh tea lingered in the air, a curious contrast to the tension hanging in the room.

"Mom! Shi Min! Why is Shun severely injured?" Ren's voice pierced through the serenity, terror, and worry evident in her teary eyes.

Ling Li exchanged a concerned glance with Shi Min before kneeling to meet Ren's gaze. "Ren, sit down. We need to talk about this," she said, her tone gentle but firm.

"Mom, you need to tell me what happened! This isn't some random injury!" Ren's voice trembled, a mixture of fear and disbelief forming a knot in her stomach.

"Ren, we have not been able to discuss this with you, but now is the right time for you to know. "Shun was given a critical mission by Otako, and you need to be ready yourself."

"Shun needs to train harder than the rest of them. You have to be prepared for what lies ahead. We cannot defy Otako. You have to be prepared for what lies ahead, Ren, to be beside Shun in the future when he takes over the Chinese government." Ling Li explained the mission to Ren, her voice steadying her daughter.

Ren's heart raced as her mother's words echoed in her mind. "When did they even meet Otako? And when are they leaving for the Amazon?" The questions spilled like water from a broken dam.

"They met Otako before the training began," Ling Li replied softly, her gaze unwavering. "They'll leave in less than two weeks for the Amazon."

Ren knew she couldn't change the events and needed to accept that these were facts she needed to face. But the information she just heard is too much to take all at once.

A sense of helplessness washed over Ren. The reality settled like a stone in her stomach. The world was shifting beneath her feet, and all she could think about was Shun. "Why? Why Shun?" Ren murmured, the disbelief making her voice falter.

Ling Li reached out and held Ren's hands, grounding her in the face of this daunting truth. "You need to understand this is bigger than us. Shun has a role to play, and so do you."

The air in the dimly lit room buzzed with tension, punctuated by Shi Min's unsettling revelation. "The Chinese President's son is also named Shun Chang," he began, his voice low and serious. "This makes it a lot easier when we capture the President's son and swap their identities. He is well hidden, and no one knows his real identity."

Ren's heart raced, each beat echoing in her ears like a war drum. The gravity of Shi Min's words settled heavily on her shoulders. 'So, this is inevitable, and Shun will truly take over the Chinese government as the Chinese President's son.' Images of Shun flooded her mind, his earnest smile and fierce determination etched against the backdrop of an uncertain future. Doubt twisted in Ren's stomach like a coiling serpent.

"Ren, are you alright?" Ling Li's voice cut through Ren's swirling thoughts, concerned and maternal. The warmth of her presence was a tether in the storm.

"Mom, what should I do? I am not as strong as you," Ren replied, her voice thick with emotion. Desperation clung to her words as tears welled in her eyes, blurring her vision.

Ling Li leaned closer, her gaze steady and reassuring.

"You love Shun very much. I've seen how powerful and capable he is. You need to have trust in him. Being with Shun will make you firm and stable. We are all here for both of you. While Shun is in training, focus on your training as well." Ling Li's words were a lifeline, pulling Ren from the depths of self-doubt.

Chapter 93: WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FACE?

Shi Min's eyes sparkled with a mix of mischief and support. "Since Lily is taking online classes, train her in your office. Gradually hand over your company to her. It's time she learns the business, anyway."

"What must I learn to prepare for Shun's future?" Ren asked, her brows knitting together as she pondered the daunting road ahead.

Ling Li and Shi Min exchanged knowing smiles. Ren could feel a subtle shift within her, a flicker of acceptance igniting hope. Shi Min moved beside Ren, playfully nudging her shoulder.

"Do you realize you will be the first lady in the future?" Shi Min said, feigning a serious tone but unable to suppress the grin tugging at his lips.

"My sister will be the first lady of the Chinese Republic. What can I say?" Shi Min added while putting his arm around Ren, chuckling.

Ren punches Shi Min on his shoulder. "How could you even joke with me when I'm so stressed out?! So tell me, what do I need to learn?"

Shi Min feigned indignation but couldn't help but chuckle again. "First, you need to study Chinese politics. Understand the intricacies of it all to assist Shun effectively. You also need to immerse yourself in their culture and heritage. This will be your primary role: promoting Chinese culture and being a role model for the citizens. That's the responsibility of the first lady!"

Ren rolled her eyes but felt a warmth spreading through her heart. "Oh, we also need to adjust your fashion statement," Shi Min continued, laughter dancing in his voice. "We can't have you wearing skimpy clothes that show your stomach!"

The absurdity of it all broke the tension like sunlight piercing through clouds. Ren laughed, pushing him away playfully. "Of course, I know that! Brat! Shi Min, remember I'm older than you!"

Ling Li cleared her throat, bringing them back to the task at hand. "We have two years to prepare. While that sounds substantial, it's swift. We need to maximize our time for your training."

Ren nodded as Ling Li continued, "You need to learn self-defense, even the basics. It cannot be avoided. I will have your brother and Mushu in charge of your training. I'll ensure you have all the necessary materials to delve into Chinese politics. You can always ask either of us if you have questions."

"I need to discuss my business with Lily," Ren said, determination lacing her words like steel.

"It should not be a problem for Lily to take over your business," Shi Min assured with a confident nod.

The conversation shifted as Ren's thoughts turned to Shun, a worry threading through her heart. "Shun, his injuries, how bad is it?"

Memories of the earlier flooded back; the sight of Shun, pale and injured, ignited a rush of dread within her.

"Shun will be alright," Shi Min assured, his voice steady. "We've given him medicine, and he's soaked in the herbal formula Mom made at the camp. He's doing better than Fatty and Chatty." Shi Min's attempt at humor laid a balm over Ren's worries. "Don't fret too much; Mom was supervising the training, and we're aware of the limits."

"Does he need further medication?" Ren asked, her heart clenching with concern.

"We provided a cream for him. He should have it regularly," Ling Li chimed in, her voice laced with calm.

"I see. I'll go back and check on Shun again," Ren said, feeling a surge of resolve. She bid them farewell before stepping into the quiet of her room.

As Ren entered, the comforting scent of sandalwood wrapped around her like a soft blanket. Shun lay deeply asleep, the faint rhythm of his breathing a soothing lullaby. Shun looked serene as if the weight of the world had momentarily lifted from his shoulders.

Slipping into bed beside Shun, Ren leaned her head against Shun's shoulder, her heart swelling with fierce emotion. Observing his face, those strong cheekbones, the slight furrow of his brow even in rest, she couldn't stop the tears that flowed freely.

"Why do you carry this burden alone?" Ren whispered to Shun, her voice thick with emotion. In her heart, she felt the gravity of their circumstances pressing down.

In that moment of vulnerability, faced with the impending challenges, Ren felt her resolve harden. She would stand by Shun, a silent partner in an unwritten saga. No matter the trials ahead, they would navigate this tumultuous path together, armed with love and unwavering support.

When Four Eyes finally stirred from his slumber, the golden afternoon sunlight poured through the half-drawn curtains, casting warm patterns across his room. He rubbed his eyes, feeling the weight of sleep still clinging to him. A low rumble from his stomach reminded him of the hours he'd lost. With a resigned sigh, he threw off the covers, changed quickly, and made his way downstairs, each step echoing softly in the stillness.

As Four Eyes descended the staircase, he spotted Shun, Fatty, and Chatty gathered at the bottom, laughter bubbling among them. The scent of something delicious wafted from the kitchen, intensifying his hunger.

"It looks like we all woke up at the same time," Fatty remarked, a cheeky grin spreading across his face as he scratched the back of his head.

"My stomach woke me up; I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!" Chatty exclaimed, his voice a series of animated gestures, eyes wide and expressive.

"Murphy, how are your injuries? Do you feel better?" Fatty inquired, concern creeping into his tone, glancing briefly at the faded bruises visible on Four Eyes' arms.

"At least I don't have a scar on my face like you!" Chatty shot back playfully, his laughter ringing out like a bell.

"Do I need to push you down the stairs to give you the same scar?" Fatty countered with a mock seriousness, raising an eyebrow dramatically.

Their laughter harmonized, filling the hallway with camaraderie that momentarily chased away any remnants of tension from their recent training session.

Their playful banter was interrupted when Lily's sharp voice cut through the warmth of their humor. "You! What happened to your face?!" Lily almost screamed, her eyes wide with worry as she spotted Fatty's bruised and injured cheek.

Chapter 94: WE ARE LUCKY TO HAVE YOU

Fatty immediately locked eyes with Lily, uncertainty flickering across his expression. Fatty knew that Lily, vibrant and full of life, had a protective streak, and her alarm was genuine.

"Young Miss Lily," Mushu, ever the poised guardian, interjected from his watchful stance near Ling Li's study, "they were in training. It was an intense session, and while

everyone sustained injuries, only Quan Ye received a wound on his face. It will heal over time and shouldn't leave a scar."

Just then, Ling Li and Shi Min emerged from the study, the air thick with the gravitas of their conversation.

"Butler Peng, kindly ask the kitchen to prepare lunch," Ling Li commanded, her voice cool and authoritative yet underlined with concern for her husband and friends.

"Yes, Madam," came the dutiful reply. Butler Peng hurried away, the rustle of his crisp uniform vanishing into the kitchen.

"Mom, can you do something about Quan Ye's wound on his face?" Lily asked, tilting her head with the endearing hopefulness of youth, her concern radiating in her soft features.

"There's no need to fret," Ling Li reassured her, her maternal warmth filling the room. "Mushu personally stitched him up. As long as he diligently applies the medicine, it should heal beautifully without a trace."

Lily nodded and turned to Fatty, "You! Don't slack on applying the medicine to your face," Lily admonished playfully, her tone a mix of teasing and genuine concern, directing it at Quan Ye.

Fatty met Lily's gaze, warmth flooding through him, a bashful smile breaking across his features. With a hint of a blush that deepened the color of his cheeks, he replied, his voice steady and sincere, "I promise, I'll be diligent."

Despite the lightness of the moment, Fatty was acutely aware of the boundaries between them. Lily was still young, and he valued the trust placed in him by Ling Li as well as his friendship with Four Eyes.

Just as Fatty joined in to echo Lily's sentiment, assuring her he would take care of his injuries, Pharsa stormed in like a whirlwind, her expression a mixture of worry and exasperation.

"I told you to rest in bed! How could you make yourself so injured?" Pharsa scolded Chatty, hands on her hips, each word laced with a fierce protectiveness.

Chatty, unfazed yet slightly sheepish, chuckled. "Well, it's hard to rest when the food beckons, and I don't want to miss out on any fun!"

The sound of laughter reverberated through the space again, a soothing melody breaking through the threshold of worries and imperfections, an unbreakable bond forged in the fire of friendship and shared experiences. It was a moment cocooned in

warmth and hope, a brief distraction from the chaos of their lives, yet emblematic of the journey that lay ahead.

"You!" Pharsa's finger jutted out like a dagger, piercing the air as she directed her anger at Chatty. The room crackled with tension, her fierce gaze locking onto him with a mix of disappointment and exasperation.

"But I'm so hungry!" Chatty whimpered, his stomach growling in protest. "And, besides, six of our comrades didn't make it back. Don't you think I deserve a little grace for surviving? I'm injured, but I'm still here." His earnest eyes shimmered, reflecting a flicker of defiance underneath the hurt.

Pharsa's jaw tightened. "I trained you. Of course, you are expected to survive. You can't afford to think you're a hero just because you're still breathing." Pharsa's voice was cold, but beneath the frost was a palpable determination to uphold the standards she believed in. The weight of loss hung heavy in the air, making her words even more biting.

Chatty felt the sting of defeat echo in the silence that followed. He knew he wouldn't win over Pharsa in any discussion. His bravado waned as he lowered his eyes, the spark of rebellion extinguished.

"Lunch is ready," Butler Peng announced, stepping into the atmosphere with the grace of someone who often played mediator in this turbulent environment. His voice was warm and inviting, a stark contrast to the tension.

Ren's eyes widened in disbelief. "Wait, are you saying someone died during training?" Panic laced her tone, drawing the attention of the group. Shadows of fear danced across her face, the weight of uncertainty gripping her heart.

Chatty nodded, his voice barely above a whisper. "Yes, six of them..." The truth escaped a bitter reminder of their grim reality.

Shun instinctively placed a comforting hand on Chatty's shoulder, a gentle warning to temper his words. Shun understood how fragile Ren's disposition was; she had a tendency to spiral into anxiety when faced with the harsh truths of their world.

"Let's eat," Shun said, his tone firm yet nurturing, guiding the group away from darker thoughts with an air of authority and care.

"Come on, everyone! Gather 'round," Ling Li chimed in, the natural ringleader, her presence lightening the mood as she expertly steered the group toward the dining area.

There was a calmness about Ling Li, a sense of safety that enveloped everyone. "I asked the Chef to prepare nourishing foods just for us." Her smile was bright and infectious, a balm for Ren's frayed nerves.

"Ren, you have to understand that those who didn't make it were just... unlucky," Ling Li continued, her eyes soft with empathy. "You need to trust me; I won't let anything happen to Shun." Her comforting words wrapped around Ren like a cozy blanket, and they both knew that the weight of their losses could be soothed, even if only for a moment.

"Mom, I'm counting on you." Ren's voice trembled as she spoke, a tug of emotion threatening to spill over. "I trust you and Shi Min with his training. I just... I couldn't bear to lose him." She fought back the tears threatening to surface, desperate to maintain her composure. Shun had already sacrificed so much, and she wanted to be strong for him, to shoulder her part of their heavy burden.

"I know, Ren. Just have faith. Shun will come back to you safe," Ling Li reassured her, placing a hand over Ren's, her grip steady and reassuring.

As they gathered around the dining table, a wave of warmth enveloped them. "Paps," Ren turned her attention towards Four Eyes, her tone shifting slightly. "Shun told me you took care of him while you were hurt, too. Thank you." Her gratitude spilled over into everything she said, genuine and heartfelt. "We're lucky to have you."

Chapter 95: MARTIAL ARTISTS EXIST

Four Eyes, his face framed by the light filtering in from the window, simply nodded, the corners of his lips tugging into a fatherly smile. "We are family, Ren," he replied, his voice deep and resonant.

Fatty, always eager to contribute to the conversation, chimed in, "He's like a father to all of us! No one can care like he does. That crocodile blood... it's phenomenal!" His eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, recalling the events with a hint of nostalgia.

Chatty, feeling empowered from the warm exchange, added, "Yeah! At first, I thought applying that crocodile blood was disgusting. But after hearing everyone rave about how it alleviated their pain, I had to try it! It was truly magical!" The memory of relief washed over Chatty, a reminder of the miracle in their darkest times.

"I still have some leftovers," Four Eyes mentioned casually, "It's in my backpack." His voice exuded pride as if sharing a secret treasure.

"Oh, I would love to have them!" Ling Li replied eagerly. "I can make so much out of that! Think of the elixirs and meals I could concoct!" Her enthusiasm was infectious, drawing smiles from everyone at the table.

As they settled into the warmth of food and camaraderie, the burdens of the day began to dissipate, if only momentarily. It was in these shared moments of laughter and stories that their bond grew stronger, weaving a fabric of resilience against the world beyond their walls.

Everyone chatted animatedly around the dining table, the clink of utensils mingling with bursts of laughter. Ling Li, seated at the head of the table, observed her companions with a mix of warmth and resolve. She could sense the camaraderie swelling in the cozy room as the casual conversation interwove memories and shared experiences. However, a cloud of seriousness loomed over her thoughts. Just before the energy in the room started to fizzle out, she raised her hand, silencing the chatter.

"Can we gather in the living room for a moment? I need to discuss something important," Ling Li called out, her voice steady yet commanding.

Intrigued, everyone followed her, the lively ambiance shifting to one of curiosity. The living room, adorned with eclectic furnishings and warm lighting, became the backdrop for what Ling Li understood as the beginning of a new Chapter. As they settled onto plush couches and scattered cushions, she took a deep breath, her gaze meeting each of them in turn.

"You've faced trials in the training ground—pushing limits, testing resolve. But believe me, it's merely a baby step toward where you truly belong," Ling Li began, the gravity of her voice capturing their attention.

"Shun, we need to erase your digital footprint. Delete all your social media," Ling Li instructed. The words hung in the air, creating a moment of disbelief before Shun's brows furrowed in understanding.

"Ren, this applies to you too. Remove every photo with Shun. We must make people forget as much as possible," Ling Li continued the resolute tone in her voice unyielding.

Murphy and Quan Ye exchanged glances, a flicker of apprehension mingling with the excitement of the unknown. Ling Li was aware that their lives would transform drastically. "Your identities must remain concealed, just like Shun's," Ling Li said, her eyes pinning them down, transmitting unspoken truths of weighty responsibility.

Fatty and Chatty nodded in unison, their minds already whirling with the implications. They had tasted the fervor of the hidden world after meeting Otako, and now, that thrill ignited again within them.

"I want you all to cultivate martial arts," Ling Li declared, a fierce glint igniting her depths as her excitement spilled over. "In this age of technology, true martial artists are often overlooked, even forgotten. Yet, they exist, and they remain a powerful force worthy of respect and fear."

Ling Li reached into her pocket and pulled out a small, intricately designed case, delicate and gleaming in the soft light of the room. With a practiced flick of her wrist, she opened it, revealing five exquisite-looking pills nestled within a velvet lining. Each pill shimmered as if holding a universe within.

"Take these," Ling Li urged, her voice firm yet encouraging. "These pills are designed to enhance your vital energy, allowing you to break through into the first level of martial arts cultivation."

An awed silence descended upon the group as Shi Min leaned in closer, his eyes brightening. "This isn't just any pill; it's personally refined by my mother. The ingredients exceed imagination; there are only ten in the world."

Four Eyes raised an eyebrow, skepticism battling curiosity. "And you're not going to keep one for yourself?" His tone carried a hint of disbelief.

Ling Li gently shook her head, her hand brushing against his reassuringly. "No. This is for you. All of you. We're in this together," she replied, her conviction resonating like a bell tolling through their shared space.

"Just place the pill in your mouth and let it melt," Ling Li instructed, watching attentively as each of them gingerly took a pill, fingers trembling with anticipation.

As they swallowed them, Ling Li's expression softened into a smile brimming with hope. "There are seven levels in martial arts cultivation, each with nine stages. I want you to reach the first level before your journey to the Amazon."

With determination, Ling Li reached for a stack of books resting on her desk, ancient volumes filled with knowledge passed down through generations. "Study these. They'll teach you how to cultivate your vital energy. And remember, practice every night for at least two hours to make the most of the pill's potential."

The room buzzed with questions, excitement mingling with trepidation. "What if we don't understand something in the books?" Chatty interjected, her brow wrinkling in concern.

"If you don't understand, ask! It's vital. Misunderstanding can lead to harm rather than growth," Ling Li urged, her voice layered with urgency.

"How will we know if it works?" Four Eyes piped in, the burning question echoed in the eyes of the others.

Ling Li smiled, her expression haloed by confidence. "You'll start feeling something building inside you. It might cause discomfort at first, but don't worry; it's a sign that something's happening. Remember your training, position yourself accordingly, and you'll feel your strength grow," Ling Li explained, her eyes glinting like shards of hope.