

The 80s 731

Chapter 731: The Chiang Family Suffers a Big Loss

Flowers bloom on both branches, each displaying a single blossom.

While Cheng Su's family was still mired in trouble, far away in Beijing, the Chiang Family was equally in disarray.

Jiang Conghe finally met with his immediate superior, but what he received was a reprimand. He was criticized for being a commander who allowed his wife to commit violence, assisted his daughter in snatching a husband, failed to distinguish right from wrong, and caused an extremely adverse impact, chilling the hearts of the soldiers.

Jiang Conghe could only say it was all a misunderstanding and an accident; his wife didn't seek to take someone else's husband but was merely apologizing to the daughter, and an unexpected incident occurred. For this, he also expressed deep regret.

The primary reason for the incident was that Chiang Qing suddenly lost control of her emotions and experienced some mental issues, which led to such consequences.

As he spoke of his sorrow, Jiang Conghe even shed a few tears, saying he would kneel before Commander Qi to seek forgiveness if he could.

Given the significance of the upcoming military parade later in the year, and the nature of the scandal, everyone knew that it couldn't be allowed to spread; it had to be dealt with privately.

Now that Jiang Conghe had voiced his concerns, Director Wang wouldn't push him to the brink. After all, there are two sides to every story, and resolving the issue without impact was the best outcome.

Nevertheless, this didn't mean Jiang Conghe was off the hook. The incident would be marked against him, and he still needed to offer reassurances to Qi Taiguo and others, considering they were excellent soldiers whose spirits shouldn't be dampened.

Jiang Conghe had no choice but to accept the resolution, yet he clenched his teeth in hatred.

Having this mark against him was a blemish, which would significantly affect his future prospects. But not covering it up could lead to even worse consequences.

"Commander Chiang, about the schedule report for consoling Comrade Qi Taiguo, the military parade is looming in the second half of the year. Please resolve this matter at your earliest convenience!" Ning Gang stated emphatically to Jiang Conghe.

A flash of annoyance passed through Jiang Conghe's eyes as he replied with a forced smile, "Thank you for the reminder. Rest assured, I will provide an explanation to our soldiers."

Ning Gang's lips curled slightly as he walked past him.

Jiang Conghe was so angry he felt like he could smoke.

For a commander to plead and mollify a company commander was a slap in the face, like silently eating a bitter pill— it felt as though he had swallowed needles, pricking painfully at his throat.

And then there was Ning Gang, with his smug look; Jiang Conghe truly wanted to tear his face apart.

Seething with rage, Jiang Conghe got into his car and commanded, "To the Loo Family."

The Old Master Loo was a spirited old man with a ruddy complexion and bright eyes. If one looked closely, they could see the cold ruthlessness and cruelty that occasionally flashed through his demeanor.

Upon hearing his son-in-law's tale, Old Master Loo snorted and glared at him, "You managed to mess up such a small matter, and now you're blaming Qingqing? Is that the extent of your capability?"

Jiang Conghe had come for advice, but his first response was a scolding. His face turned purple with barely suppressed fury.

Old Master Loo, seeing his reaction, grew colder and scolded him, "Am I wrong? Blaming an innocent daughter is a good tactic? Claiming your daughter is mentally ill will ruin her prospects for marriage. You really don't have a brain!"

Jiang Conghe dared not argue, he simply bowed his head, thinking bitterly that if he had come for advice earlier, why hadn't the elder come up with a better solution then?

"Has Shufen been confirmed suspended?" Old Master Loo asked.

"Yes," Jiang Conghe replied.

Upon hearing this, Old Master Loo became furious. He smashed his favorite purple sand pot and exclaimed, "You've taken such a loss at the hands of an unknown company commander, you're all very capable, indeed!"

With his daughter suspended and his son-in-law consoling others, the Loo Family had taken a silent loss. Most importantly, they had lost face, which had never happened to the smoothly sailing Loo Family before.

Chapter 732: Old Master Loo's Scolding

Old Master Loo was truly furious. After expending so much manpower, financial resources, and various connections to lift his son-in-law up, and now that he had risen to the rank of commander, not yet reaping any benefits from this position, he had already been slapped on the left cheek. With such an incident, how was he supposed to climb higher?

With Jiang Conghe and the Loo Family becoming inseparable and forming a unit, if he couldn't ascend, neither could the Loo Family. That's why Old Master Loo felt such annoyance.

"Father-in-law, what should be done now?" Jiang Conghe asked, taking a deep breath.

Old Master Loo glanced at him and said, "What else can you do? Just do whatever those above you want you to do. The other party is not some low-ranking soldier, but a captain with a military rank."

Jiang Conghe choked, his expression extremely ugly.

"The situation is tense right now, this setback, whether you like it or not, has already been suffered. You can only keep a cool head, don't rush. Once you're stable, a mere captain, can't you handle him?" Old Master Loo added.

Jiang Conghe replied, "Yes!"

"During this period, just keep a low profile and first deal with the problems at hand, especially Qingqing, who needs to be cured. As for Shufen, also offer a few words of persuasion. Whether she continues as a team director or not doesn't matter, wait for this controversy to blow over, and then you can transfer her somewhere else," Old Master Loo, with his hands behind his back, instructed.

"I understand. Qingqing has also come to terms with it and is actively cooperating with the treatment," Jiang Conghe said, sighing with relief.

Upon hearing this, Old Master Loo's brows furrowed slightly. He knew the child's temperament, especially the Loo family's temperament—would she be so compliant?

However, he never paid much attention to the affairs of young love. Having endured such a blow, it was good that she had come to terms with it. As for that Qi surname, hmph! There would be a day to deal with him!

"Qingqing is a good child; she was just misguided for a while. Now that things have come to this point, you shouldn't blame her anymore. She's still young and doesn't understand much," Old Master Loo always protected his granddaughter and said to Jiang Conghe, "The child is already suffering from her illness; as her parents, you should show her more love and care."

"Yes!"

With his hands behind his back, Old Master Loo paced back and forth in the study, his thoughts returning to Jiang Conghe, "As for Director Wang's future retirement, it will be either you or Ning Gang who succeeds him. Now that you have encountered this issue, even if you have lost a move, you must be cautious at all times, and not give him any more leverage over you."

Jiang Conghe's heart shuddered, "Father-in-law, I understand."

"Hm!" Old Master Loo was very satisfied with his attitude and said, "Once this matter is over, you come with me to visit Gao Hongbo."

Jiang Conghe was startled, "Gao Hongbo? Isn't he about to retire?"

"Don't let his title as secretary fool you. When he was young, he saved Director Wang's father," Old Master Loo said with an indifferent glance.

Jiang Conghe was no fool and instantly grasped the key point, "I understand. Thank you, father-in-law, for the comprehensive planning."

Old Master Loo snorted, "You are my son-in-law. If it weren't for Shufen insisting on marrying you, I would not have agreed." Thinking of the grievances his daughter had suffered before, he said, "I heard that your son from before has come to see you?"

Jiang Conghe's heart tightened slightly as he carefully replied, "The boy came to show his filial piety."

Old Master Loo sneered, "That is to say, you intend to acknowledge him again?"

Jiang Conghe lowered his head, "There's no question of acknowledging or not acknowledging, he is of the Chiang family's bloodline."

Old Master Loo's expression darkened as he said, "As long as you know what you're doing. Just don't become the foolish Mr. Dong Guo, nurturing a wolf that could harm others and yourself!"

Jiang Conghe kept silent. While he felt very uncomfortable with his father-in-law's reprimand, thinking to himself—what Mr. Dong Guo, what wolf—that was his son, Jiang Conghe's son!

Chapter 733: The Pleasure of Self-Harm

Jiang Conghe left the Loo Family's house and sat in the car, seething with resentment. Back in the day, as a lowly squad leader, he had caught the eye of Lu Shufen, and the two had married. However, due to his humble origins, he had been looked down upon by the Yue family and had never been able to hold his head high.

Years had passed, and he had always been suppressed by the Yue family, obedient to Shufen in every way. Now that he was a Commander, it was unthinkable that he was still being suppressed by his father-in-law, unable to hold his head up.

They said his son was a wolf, but what did that mean? Did they look down on Jiang Conghe's own bloodline? Dafang was such a good kid, having started his own business without relying on the older generation. Wasn't that more capable than the Loo family? Hmph! Why look down on the bloodline of the Chiang family?

And their treatment of him was the same, always resenting that he hadn't turned out better, never giving him any respect. That old man was simply domineering.

Jiang Conghe muttered to himself with a heart full of discontent and defiance, and instructed the driver to head home.

Upon entering his home, he heard the melodious sound of a piano; it was Chiang Qing's piano, which hadn't been touched in a long time. Why was there piano music today?

Lu Shufen came to greet him with tears in her eyes, pointing to the piano in the living room, she said, "Old Chiang, Qingqing is playing the piano again!"

The piano music was pleasant and lively. Jiang Conghe breathed a sigh of relief in his heart, thinking that if she was playing the piano, it meant her mood must be good, and the treatment must be working. It would be good if the girl didn't act out anymore.

Once she was completely well, he would simply send her overseas. Letting her find a son-in-law there seemed best; out of sight, out of mind. That way, she wouldn't cause any more trouble that became unmanageable.

"Old Chiang, I'm talking to you, did you hear me?" Lu Shufen said as she brought him back from his reverie with a push.

Jiang Conghe gave an "ah" and replied, "I heard, it's nice!"

As the piano music stopped, Lu Shufen hurriedly began to clap. Jiang Conghe watched his daughter turn around with a graceful curtsy, and couldn't help but smile.

Indeed, she seemed to be getting better.

"Daddy, you're back!" Chiang Qing came over with a smile.

"Mhm." Looking at his daughter's face, which was gradually regaining its rosiness, Jiang Conghe said, "You played the piano today? That's good, play more often to relax. Forget the messy things of the past, and once you're well, go abroad for a trip! Have your mother accompany you for a change of scenery. As a girl, you should travel and see the world."

Chiang Qing lowered her eyelids, hiding the flicker of emotion in her eyes, and said with a smile, "Okay."

"Go upstairs, I need to talk to your mother about something. Remember to take your medicine and get plenty of rest." Jiang Conghe was satisfied with her conduct, as his daughter seemed to be slowly recovering. Good.

Chiang Qing obediently nodded and went upstairs.

After closing her bedroom door, her smile vanished. She walked to the bathroom, took out her medication from the cabinet, looked at it in her palm for a moment, and curved her lips into a smile.

She swallowed the medicine, looked at herself in the mirror with a smirk, and then took a razor from the cabinet. Rolling up her sleeve, the pristine white arm revealed several scars, some healed and some fresh, a ghastly sight.

Chiang Qing raised the razor and gently made another cut on her arm. As the blood welled up, the excitement from self-harm shone in her eyes like two bright stars, twinkling away.

Then she brought her arm close to her mouth, licked the blood clean with her tongue, and began to laugh at her reflection in the mirror.

The blood-red scene was eerie and horrific, but the people downstairs remained blissfully unaware.

Chapter 734: Apology? Not Convinced

Neither Jiang Conghe nor Lu Shufen knew anything about Chiang Qing's self-harming behavior; they both reveled in their daughter's apparent improvement.

"Qingqing seems to be getting better; it's such a stroke of luck. I think she will fully recover after a bit more time!" Lu Shufen's greatest joy was her daughter's recovery.

"Don't get careless, after all, it's psych..." Jiang Conghe caught his wife's warning glance and didn't finish his sentence, coughing instead and saying, "Anyway, the treatment must continue. Doctor Zhong is an authoritative doctor; unless she says it's okay, we must continue. You need to keep a close watch, the medication can't stop, she's our only daughter!"

"Yes, I know that," Lu Shufen replied. "But I think it's about time. Qingqing herself wants to go out for a walk; she says it's too stifling staying at home."

Jiang Conghe frowned upon hearing this.

"What? Is there a problem?" Lu Shufen, observing his expression, couldn't help but ask.

"It's better to recuperate at home for now. Once this commotion has died down, then she can go out," Jiang Conghe said hesitantly.

"What commotion? My daughter isn't a criminal," Lu Shufen was disgruntled and said, "People outside are quick to make assumptions based on rumors, always talking nonsense. How is one to get better if they're cooped up at home every day?"

"Of course, I know she needs to go out, but what if she hears what people are saying about her? What if she's affected by that?" Jiang Conghe said, adding that there was something he hadn't mentioned: the focus was currently all on the Chiang Family, and if they were to make a spectacle of themselves now, that focus would not shift away.

Lu Shufen was speechless.

"The main thing now is for Qingqing's illness to improve, isn't it?" Jiang Conghe comforted her.

Lu Shufen's eyes reddened as she said, "This way, neither of us can leave the house, but I don't have the face to go out anymore!" She had been genuinely suspended from her job.

"I just came back from my father-in-law's place. Dad said if you're not a director anymore, then you're not. Later we can transfer you to another department. For now, while you're resting, stay at home with Qingqing. When you're free, you can arrange flowers or learn tea ceremony or something. I hear it's quite popular in our circles now," Jiang Conghe reassured her.

At the mention of this, Lu Shufen felt even more distressed, voicing her grievance: "What's the use of learning that, when all those people probably don't know how to view us, mother and daughter alike? You have no idea how arrogant Xiao Meilan sounded over the phone when she told me about the suspension."

Lu Shufen had been proud for most of her life and never expected to stumble over something like this now that she was older.

It was all that bitch with the surname Cheng's fault!

"Forget it, forget it. Don't bother with them. Dad said we need to keep a low profile for now. Once this blows over, it'll all be fine!" Jiang Conghe said. "Prepare some nutritional supplements or something; I'll send someone to Qing City. The Chief said that I should take good care of Qi Taiguo."

"The decision has been made?" Lu Shufen was startled.

Jiang Conghe nodded, saying, "They noted an infraction on my record, which is why I'm telling you to keep a low profile. Once I rise higher up, you'll have plenty of people trying to curry favor with you, even kneeling and licking your shoes!"

Lu Shufen scoffed, "Having to apologize to those lowlifes is so revolting. Director Wang is doing this on purpose, isn't he? Just to make a laughing stock out of us." "Don't talk like that anymore. Whether or not I can occupy that position depends on him!" Jiang Conghe warned.

Lu Shufen sullenly said, "Regardless, I just can't accept it, it makes me uneasy."

For people like them to have to apologize to someone of lower status, what kind of situation was that?

Jiang Conghe's expression grew very grave, and after a long while, he finally said, "Don't worry, we'll get our own back eventually!"

Qi Taiguo, hmph, what's he compared to us!

Chapter 735: Earthquake and Mountains Tremble

As April drew near, veiled in drizzle, Cheng Su followed Technician Zhu into the apple-producing area he had introduced. She feasted her eyes on the pastoral scenery and tasted the fruit from several orchards. Indeed, the apples were crisper, sweeter, and more delicious than those from Qing City, with an exceptionally rich fragrance.

Moreover, the sweetness of these apples was fresh and crisp, not at all cloying or throat-tightening—perhaps due to their proximity to the west, where the days were longer.

Cheng Su ordered several boxes of apples to be sent back and also discussed preliminary cooperation intentions with two orchards. If the sauces turned out satisfactorily, she would choose one of them as a supplier.

Having been out for several days and on the run, by evening, Technician Zhu had taken Zhu Lifan to eat that yak hotpot.

Cheng Su, still recovering and tired from the days of travel, with an uneasy stomach, declined to accompany them, asking only that they bring back some food for her. She laid down to rest in the hotel.

Outside the window, the sky seemed to darken particularly fast today. She wondered if a heavy rain was approaching, with the clouds blanketing the sky, the air stifling and humid, adding a sense of heavy pressure that made one's heart restless. Even from a distance, the sound of dogs barking could be heard.

She wondered what Qi Taiguo had been up to these past days, how he was doing, whether he missed her or not.

Maybe he was still angry at her willfulness.

Only after a few days apart did she realize how intense her longing was and how she couldn't truly let go.

Cheng Su's nose tingled, and her eyes grew warm. She rested her head in her hands, staring blankly up at the darkened sky, consciousness blurring until she quickly fell asleep.

In her sleep, the earth shook violently as if someone were violently shaking her body. Cries, screams, and the sound of objects being smashed came rushing towards her.

Thump!

Cheng Su fell from the bed. Had someone pushed her off?

Not only that, they were shaking her body.

In a daze, she opened her eyes to darkness—it was night.

Her body shook. Who was shaking her?

With a crash, something fell to the floor with a clear sound.

It was the sound of breaking glass. Cheng Su snapped awake, finding herself lying on the ground, her body rocking as though she was on a boat, waves slapping against the sides, making the boat sway.

No, it wasn't her body rocking, it was the building!

The building was rocking?

Cheng Su jolted upright on the floor, confusedly looking around at the pitch-dark surroundings.

Another thump—the bedside cabinet had fallen onto the ground, prompting Cheng Su to scream out loud.

Her eyes now adjusted to the darkness, she saw nothing but chaos—the cabinets were on the floor, the wardrobe had fallen over, and the building kept shaking violently.

Not far away, someone yelled, "Earthquake! Run! It's an earthquake!"

"Help!"

An earthquake!

No wonder the ground was shaking—it was the hand of God moving the tectonic plates.

Cheng Su tried to get up but was thrown onto the ground again by another tremor.

"Ah, ah!" Cheng Su cried out, her face pale, forcing herself to calm down.

Stay calm; she had to stay calm and get out of there.

She attempted to rise again, but before she could stand, an even stronger tremor knocked her back onto the floor. This time, the iron-framed bed was also overturned.

"Ah, Qi Taiguo!" Cheng Su screamed, clutching her head with both hands.

With a bang, the door was forcefully kicked open from the outside and flung aside. Someone rushed in quickly. Seeing the scene, they hurriedly embraced Cheng Su, using their body to shield her from the falling iron-framed bed.

Chapter 736: Escape

The earthquake was something Cheng Su had never experienced in either of her two lifetimes; she had only seen its devastation on the news, particularly the earthquake that struck Sichuan one year, which had deeply shocked her. That year, she had donated an entire month's salary to the disaster area.

Unexpectedly, in this lifetime, she would personally experience an earthquake, and it was indeed as horrific and despairing as she had imagined.

The whole world seemed to be shaking, as if the hand of God prevented anyone from standing, everything upright kept collapsing, houses cracked, and the sounds of steel and concrete bursting were clearly audible.

Cheng Su screamed in terror. In the moment when the bed seemed to be crashing down on her, she thought to herself that this was it, it was really over, she was going to die, and she would never see Qi Taiguo again.

Qi Taiguo, her love. How wonderful it would be to see him again, but now, she never could.

Cheng Su cried out in despair.

The bed did not fall on her as expected; someone was protecting her, and a familiar groan was heard.

A familiar scent surrounded her, and Cheng Su's head buzzed as she subconsciously called out, "Qi Taiguo?"

"Mhm, I'm here," Qi Taiguo pushed the bed away.

"Qi Taiguo?"

"Mhm!"

"Qi Taiguo? Qi Taiguo?" Cheng Su called out three times incredulously. How could this be? How could he possibly be here?

"Mhm!"

Upon hearing his steady response, Cheng Su's tears streamed down, and she suddenly clutched at his clothes.

"Follow me!" Qi Taiguo said as he pulled her, crawling on the ground toward the exit.

With Qi Taiguo by her side, Cheng Su's heart instantly calmed.

As long as he was there, as long as he was by her side, dying was no longer something to fear.

The shaking continued, and the house kept trembling; from afar, the sounds of massive collapses mixed with cries and shouts could be heard.

Cheng Su tried to stand up, but Qi Taiguo pressed down on her, saying, "Don't stand up, you can't hold your ground, stay low and move."

"Taiguo, earthquake, they say to find a place to hide during an earthquake," Cheng Su said calmly, recalling what she had learned.

"We can't hide now," Qi Taiguo wanted to say that the house was about to collapse, but was afraid of scaring her, said, "Follow me, we can still get out now."

Upon hearing this, Cheng Su followed him, moving forward continuously.

Debris kept falling, the darkness enveloped everything, and Cheng Su, led by Qi Taiguo, quickly made her way through the corridor and down the stairs.

Cheng Su couldn't see the path clearly, her hand was tightly held by Qi Taiguo, endlessly moving forward, descending.

Fortunately, buildings of that era were generally not very tall, and they soon reached the first floor, with Qi Taiguo pulling her along rapidly.

With a thunderous roar and dust filling the air, the entrance collapsed, blocking the exit.

Cheng Su screamed, inhaling dust and starting to cough.

"What do we do now?" she asked, trembling.

"Cover your mouth, crouch down," Qi Taiguo said, extraordinarily calm as he observed the surroundings in the dark.

The shaking began to slow. Overjoyed, Qi Taiguo quickly pulled Cheng Su to a window, smashed it with his bare hands, then climbed up and kicked open the window frame, extending a hand to Cheng Su: "Come up quickly."

Cheng Su reached out, and he pulled her up.

Qi Taiguo glanced down outside the window; it wasn't very clear, but there were definitely broken stones and such. One could sprain an ankle or get stabbed, but there was no time to worry about that now. He said, "Jump down and protect your head."

Cheng Su jumped down and felt a sharp object scratch her foot, causing a sudden sharp pain. She couldn't care less, shouting loudly, "Get down quick, jump far, there are sharp stones here!"

Just as Qi Taiguo was about to jump down, his ears twitched and he looked back inside.

A faint coughing sound arose, followed by a child's cry: "Wuwu, Mommy."

Chapter 737: Breaking the Ice

"Come down quickly," Cheng Su called out in the darkness, reaching for Qi Taiguo, "I'll catch you."

Qi Taiguo said, "You run to an open area and wait for me. I'll come to find you shortly."

Cheng Su's face changed, her voice shrill, "What are you planning to do? Qi Taiguo, come down quickly, don't make me hate you."

Qi Taiguo yelled back firmly, "Listen to me, run to an open place and wait for me, there's a child here. Hurry!"

Cheng Su bit her lip and stared steadily at him, "Qi Taiguo, if you don't show up, I'm going to divorce you!"

Qi Taiguo had already moved away from the windowsill, and hearing this, he laughed and called out, "Don't worry, you won't get the chance!"

He had vanished from sight, and Cheng Su's tears fell. She clenched her teeth, looked behind her, and ran towards the more open and spacious area, squatting down in a relatively safe spot.

The tremors started intensifying again, continuously bringing down houses while people screamed and ran.

Darkness engulfed everything as if she had fallen into a bottomless black hole.

Her eyes were fixed on the distant hotel, and although she couldn't make out anything, she still stared, praying fervently in her heart.

Heaven, please stop the shaking, hold back, it's enough already!

Whether it was the wind or dust, it blurred Cheng Su's vision, but the tears that flowed washed it away again.

The trembling continued, and the sounds of despair were relentless.

Cheng Su's prayers turned into worry, for Qi Taiguo had not yet appeared.

Please don't, don't take him from me.

Cheng Su stood up and strained her eyes into the distance.

Coolness touched her face suddenly, something had landed on her face, a drop, then another.

It was raining.

The clouds parted.

The sky was not so dim anymore.

Suddenly, the ground shook violently again, and Cheng Su fell to the ground, watching the direction of the hotel in horror.

With a thunderous noise and a cloud of dust, it collapsed.

The hotel had fallen!

Cheng Su turned pale, her legs gave way, and she knelt on the ground, screaming, "Qi Taiguo."

It couldn't be, he must have made it out, he couldn't possibly be inside.

Muttering to herself, Cheng Su stared blankly into the distance.

The shaking began to subside, and gradually, it stopped.

Cheng Su scrambled to her feet and staggered toward the hotel. Her shoes were already missing, her feet were hurt by the pebbles, causing her pain.

But she didn't care, she kept running toward that place. Along the way, people cried out, scrabbling through the collapsed buildings, calling for help.

Cheng Su turned a deaf ear, with only Qi Taiguo's name on her mind.

He couldn't just die, he couldn't; she hadn't borne him a child yet, they hadn't grown old together, he hadn't accompanied her through life.

"Qi Taiguo?" Cheng Su stopped in her tracks.

She watched as a figure approached from ahead, carrying something on his back, clutching something else in his hand, his steps firm, his presence commanding.

"I told you to wait for me in an open area, what are you doing here? Why don't you ever listen!" the man scolded her.

Cheng Su's eyes filled with warmth, and she rushed over, not caring that he was carrying someone on his back and holding a child under his arm, wrapping her arms around him, "You scared me to death, I thought, I thought you... wuwu!"

Qi Taiguo's heart softened, "What are you crying for? Aren't I fine?"

Cheng Su continued to cry.

"Stop crying, swollen eyes would make you ugly. As I said, you won't get a chance to divorce me," Qi Taiguo said as if he was scoffing.

Cheng Su glared back at him, wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him on the lips.

The ice, it broke.

Chapter 738: Life After a Disaster

Qi Taiguo led Cheng Su and the others to an open space where many people were already sitting or squatting, waiting.

This was a small county town, blanketed in darkness. The electricity had been cut off, and it was unknown how many casualties there were. Looking far into the distance, many houses had already collapsed.

Some were crying loudly, some groaned in pain, and others were screaming for help.

Cheng Su clung to Qi Taiguo's arm in fear, pressed tightly against him, feeling her heart pounding chaotically.

Next to them was a mother and daughter—the very two Qi Taiguo had turned back to save. Cheng Su recognized them; they were the innkeeper and her daughter from the hotel.

The innkeeper moaned in pain. Qi Taiguo asked her, and she clasped her abdomen, uncertain if she had been struck by something. The little girl, possibly having been protected during the ordeal, seemed unharmed but was crying out in fear.

Cheng Su glanced at her watch subconsciously; it was already 7 p.m. The sky had turned completely dark. Without electricity or light, it was impossible to make out the situation following the earthquake.

"What do we do?" Cheng Su asked, shivering as she leaned against Qi Taiguo.

It had rained not long ago, and her clothes were soaked through. It wasn't even April yet, and the late spring chill was especially harmful. She trembled with cold.

Qi Taiguo embraced her, saying in a low voice, "We don't know if there will be aftershocks; it's not safe to seek shelter indoors."

No sooner had he spoken than the ground, as if in response to his words, began to shake again.

Cheng Su screamed in fright, clutching his waist tightly.

Qi Taiguo pulled her down to squat, also bringing the little girl close to protect her, waiting for the aftershock to pass.

This aftershock was much lighter than the initial quake, but aftershocks could still cause harm. Buildings that had not collapsed earlier might fall now, and there was no telling if there would be any casualties.

The aftershock was over quickly. Qi Taiguo sat down, holding Cheng Su, and said, "We have to wait."

It was dark already, and without lights, it was impossible to predict when the next aftershock might occur. They could only wait in the open space. Otherwise, moving to other places might mean not being able to take cover in time if another aftershock hit.

Cheng Su nodded in agreement, gripping his clothes, resting her head in the crook of his shoulder, drawing warmth from his body. It felt like a reprieve after a close encounter with disaster.

Qi Taiguo shared this sensation. He was thankful he had quietly followed her; otherwise, might he have lost her?

Thinking back to the scene from just a moment ago, Qi Taiguo felt a wave of dread and subconsciously tightened his hold around her waist, as if only by doing so could he truly feel her presence.

"How did you get here?" Cheng Su, feeling more settled, asked.

When he appeared, she still couldn't believe it wasn't a dream, suspecting that everything happening now might be just that. However, the pain in her feet reminded her that it was all real.

An actual earthquake had occurred, and he was indeed by her side.

"You said you had a business trip, and I couldn't persuade you not to go, so I took leave to accompany you. I was afraid you'd be upset if you knew, so I didn't tell you. I'm glad I did," Qi Taiguo explained.

Cheng Su's heart tightened. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have been so willful," she said.

If it weren't for her insistence on coming, they wouldn't have faced such a disaster.

"Whether it's a disaster or misfortune, it can't be avoided if it's fated. Everything is Tianyi's will. Don't speak like that," Qi Taiguo said, kissing her gently. "The most important thing is, we are together."

Cheng Su's throat felt tight, and she nodded, embracing him tighter.

"Mommy, what's wrong? Are you okay, Mommy?" the little girl suddenly cried out.

Chapter 739: I Won't Allow You to Leave

The little girl's crying interrupted their conversation, and Qi Taiguo hurriedly looked over. After checking, he said to Cheng Su, "She might have fainted from shock, probably has some internal injuries."

When he had found them, they were under a cabinet, the woman was pinned down by it, and her daughter was protected beneath her.

Qi Taiguo pressed firmly on the woman's philtrum, and after a while, she came to, beginning to groan in pain.

"We must get her to a doctor," Qi Taiguo said.

"But where can we find a doctor now?" Cheng Su was on the verge of tears; the whole county was without electricity, it was pitch dark, and it was hard to see the roads.

This was the main difficulty, and Qi Taiguo was also at a loss.

"Let's hope for rescue to arrive soon," Qi Taiguo finally said after a long while.

It was just past seven o'clock. When would rescue come? During the seemingly endless night, without power restoration, even rescue operations were difficult to carry out. Their only hope was that the earthquake had occurred in the evening when everyone was still awake and could escape.

"I have two coworkers, I don't know how they are either," Cheng Su said leaning on him, silently praying in her heart, waiting and hoping they had managed to escape in time.

Qi Taiguo held her hand and said, "Fortune favors the brave, don't worry too much."

Cheng Su nodded, hoping for divine protection.

In the disaster, time seemed to pass especially slowly, and they experienced three more aftershocks. There were people shouting for help.

In the darkness, suddenly lights shone, one after another, the round glows of headlights.

In those days, few people could afford cars, yet they weren't nonexistent. These few headlights were like guiding lights, illuminating the world.

More vehicles arrived, sounding their horns. Qi Taiguo stood up, squinting to see, and said, "Those are fire engines, military vehicles, it must be the rescue team arriving."

A weight lifted off Cheng Suxin's heart, but listening to the sobs that grew louder and softer, she felt she couldn't take it anymore.

A nightmarish night.

Cheng Su was roused by the crying, and when she awoke, daylight had broken. She was covered with a coat, and upon opening her mouth, she felt a painful dryness in her throat and her body felt extremely heavy.

"Qi Taiguo?" Cheng Su sat up, and not seeing his figure nearby, panic surged within her.

She stood up with the military coat, and upon seeing the scene before her, her face turned deathly pale.

The world was shattered, with broken and collapsed buildings everywhere, and people searching through the debris.

Heartrending cries came from the left. Cheng Su turned to look and saw soldiers covering a body with a white cloth, standing in silent tribute, while a woman threw herself onto it, wailing in despair.

Not far away, a child barely a few years old was crying loudly for their parents.

Cheng Su took two steps back in shock, hands covering her mouth, her eyes reddening as tears welled up instantly.

A natural disaster, the unstoppable force of nature, unavoidable by anyone, an earthquake that had left countless without homes, many children orphaned.

Cheng Su knelt down on the ground, overwhelmed by sorrow for the world, for these compatriots.

"What's wrong? What happened?" Qi Taiguo ran over.

At the sound of his voice, Cheng Su turned her head, got up, and threw herself into his arms, crying, "Where did you go?"

"I went to get some water for you. You were a bit feverish, you need to hydrate," Qi Taiguo lifted the water in his hand to show her.

Cheng Su, weeping, said, "Don't, don't leave me, I won't let you go away."

"Alright, alright. Let's go, I asked around, and the hospital wasn't damaged much, many people have headed there. You need treatment; let's go," Qi Taiguo pulled her along.

Cheng Su nodded, took a step, and suddenly winced in pain.

Chapter 740 Participation in the Rescue

Cheng Su's cry of pain made Qi Taiguo look down, and he saw that her originally fair foot was now ghastly, cut by something unknown, the flesh turned inside out, the blood already coagulated, dark red in color.

"How come... I asked you last night if you were injured anywhere, why didn't you say anything?" Qi Taiguo felt somewhat annoyed, as he hadn't noticed her injured foot.

"I, I didn't think about it," Cheng Su said with a wry smile as she looked down.

After such a disastrous event, being alive was a blessing from Heaven; she had not even thought about her foot. Compared to a human life, let alone such a minor injury, even losing a foot would have been lucky.

Qi Taiguo picked her up around the waist and said, "I'll carry you over!"

Cheng Su buried her face in his chest as they made their way to the hospital, which was even more tumultuous, a scene of chaos, filled with cries and groans all around.

Qi Taiguo took her to a nurse, requested fever-reducing pills, and got antiseptic and bandages to clean the wound, handling the dressing himself.

"President Cheng? President Cheng! Thank Heaven, you're really okay!" Zhu Lifan ran over.

Cheng Su was also very surprised to see her and asked, "Lifen, are you all okay?"

"We're fine, we're fine. It's just that Technician Zhu got hit on the head, but he's been treated now. We're all good. We were all worried about you, thankfully you're also okay, truly thank Heaven," Zhu Lifan said, laughing and crying as she held Cheng Su's hand.

"It's good that you're okay, it's good that you're okay!" Cheng Su truly relaxed.

Only then did Zhu Lifan notice Qi Taiguo and paused, "Commander Qi? What's going on?"

"He followed us here," Cheng Su said with a smile.

Zhu Lifan was astonished. In such circumstances, she didn't feel it was appropriate to ask more and said she would go tell Technician Zhu to come over as well.

Cheng Su nodded and agreed that it was better for them to arrive and leave together.

After Qi Taiguo finished bandaging her, Cheng Su asked, "Are you okay?" Seeing him nod, she finally took a deep breath of relief and said, "So when do we leave?"

Qi Taiguo hesitated a bit.

Sensing something was off, Cheng Su asked, "What's wrong?"

"Susu, the situation outside is still very unclear. I've asked around, and the earthquake didn't just affect this county but two neighboring ones as well. The rescue efforts can't keep up, so they're pulling in troops from outside to help with the rescue," Qi Taiguo explained.

Hearing this, Cheng Su turned pale and asked, "So, you're going to join the rescue here?"

Qi Taiguo pursed his lips and nodded slightly.

"But, you don't have that duty," Cheng Su said urgently, holding his hand, "You're just on leave, and there's organization and discipline in the military. How can you just run off like this?"

"Susu, this isn't running off!" Qi Taiguo held her hand and said, "I am a soldier."

A soldier, to protect the country and the people. Right now, with disaster at hand and the fate of fellow citizens unknown, perhaps beneath those collapsed buildings, many young lives were waiting for help, waiting to be reborn.

Cheng Su fell silent, her eyes gradually reddening as she said, "But I'm scared!"

She knew he was a soldier, and it was his duty, but she was just a small woman, who only wanted him to be safe. In this disaster zone, who knew if there would be more aftershocks.

She was afraid he would get hurt, afraid she would become like that woman in despair, losing the person she cherished.

Qi Taiguo held her in his arms, patting her back and said, "I promise you, I will take good care of myself. You don't need to worry, okay?"

In silence, Cheng Su began to cry.