

The Beauty 151

Chapter 151 Night Exploration (Part 2)

The man in the white lab coat stood outside the back door entrance, pulling a cigarette from behind his ear and started smoking it leisurely. He seemed to be enjoying himself, as if he was out to satisfy his craving for nicotine.

Seeing Tang Yuan beside him making eye signals, Ling Chen gestured for him to be patient.

The entrance at the back door was secured with an electronic password lock, which could not be cracked immediately, so they had to quietly wait for the right moment. When the cigarette was finished, the white lab coat turned back, entered the password, and with a light 'click', the door opened automatically.

The moment the white lab coat stepped through the back door, Ling Chen quickly took three steps in two strides, rushing forward to catch the door before it could close.

Listening as the footsteps inside faded away, he let out a slight sigh of relief, then opened a small crack in the back door and peered inside.

"Safe!"

Ling Chen signaled to Tang Yuan and darted into the back entrance.

Upon entering, they faced a corridor, with an elevator door at the end. Other than that, there was no other way.

Looking at the elevator not ten meters away, Ling Chen did not proceed directly but pointed to the surveillance camera outside the elevator. Tang Yuan understood immediately, pulling a thumb-sized sphere from his pocket and gently rolling it across the floor.

When the sphere rolled beneath the surveillance camera, Tang Yuan pressed a button lightly, and instantly, the sphere burst open releasing an invisible flash of electricity.

"OK!"

Ling Chen nodded, quickly advanced to the elevator door, and opened it.

Although the Ghost Organization was small in size, they possessed all the top military technologies in the country. The sphere had emitted a scrambling signal, momentarily disabling the surveillance camera for a few seconds, which was enough for Ling Chen and Tang Yuan to make their move.

Entering the elevator, Ling Chen pressed the button for the underground parking garage. Shortly after, they reached the floor where the parking garage was located.

The parking garage was over a thousand square meters large and housed more than twenty vehicles, with suited bodyguards stationed throughout.

Ling Chen scanned the area but did not notice the whereabouts of the large shipping container; it had probably been moved already.

Tang Yuan patted Ling Chen's shoulder and jerked his chin towards a nearby slope. Ling Chen focused and saw two forklifts slowly returning up the ramp from the parking garage.

In an instant, Ling Chen understood his hint. Those forklifts had moved the shipping container; what they were looking for should be at the bottom of that slope.

The two of them crouched behind a car and in less than ten minutes, the suited bodyguards gradually withdrew, and even the big doors of the underground parking garage were closed.

"Let's go!" Whispering softly, Ling Chen took the lead, nimbly dodging the surrounding surveillance cameras and sneakily making his way to the bottom of the slope using the blind spots.

However, once they reached the bottom of the slope, they were surprised to find that there was a warehouse over a hundred square meters large. Besides some scattered miscellaneous items piling up, there was no sign of the shipping container.

Tang Yuan muttered, "Could we have come to the wrong place?"

Ling Chen scanned the surroundings, his eyes suddenly lit up and he said with a slight smile, "The place is right. Look!"

In the corner formed by two walls of the warehouse, a surveillance device was installed, with the camera facing the opposite wall. If there wasn't something important here, why bother to install a surveillance camera, and particularly in that direction?

At the moment, he walked to the corner of the wall, patted his own shoulder, and gestured for Tang Yuan to stand on it.

Within two minutes, with their combined efforts, the surveillance camera was quickly dealt with. Once the screen was frozen, Tang Yuan put away the equipment and hurried to the wall.

The wall was coated with a layer of snow-white paint. Ling Chen and Tang Yuan searched for a long time on both sides, but couldn't find any mechanism.

Seeing this, Ling Chen helplessly spread his hands and said, "There's nothing we can do; this door can probably only be opened from the inside."

"What should we do then?" Tang Yuan was somewhat unwilling. After finally finding this secret of the mental hospital, were they supposed to leave empty-handed?

"If you ask me, we..."

Before Ling Chen could finish his sentence, suddenly, the wall began to rise slowly.

Exchanging a glance, Ling Chen and Tang Yuan reacted quickly, swiftly dashing to the sides of the wall and hiding behind some piled-up clutter.

Before long, the entire wall had risen, and a forklift carrying a shipping container slowly drove out from behind it.

Ling Chen watched the forklift's tires and nodded to himself. When those two forklifts had brought the shipping containers in earlier, he had noticed the tires getting almost crushed, indicating that the containers were very heavy. Now, with only one forklift transporting the container, the contents must have been unloaded.

Taking advantage of the wall not being fully closed yet, Ling Chen rolled on the spot and entered behind the wall.

However, as he passed through the wall, he happened to see two armed guards walking away from him. He was slightly startled, glanced around, and quickly moved towards some iron boxes placed nearby.

Just after hiding, the two guards seemed to hear a noise from behind and immediately turned back. But, Ling Chen had already preemptively hidden out of their sight.

After the two guards walked away, Tang Yuan stealthily came from the other side, whispering, "What in the world is this place?"

"This appears to be an air-raid shelter left from before," Ling Chen guessed. "They're quite clever to have converted this into a secret base."

Finishing speaking, he changed the subject, "Old Tang, let's split up and try to gather enough evidence. We'll meet back here in half an hour."

"Alright, take care of yourself."

Despite it being midnight, the secret base was still brightly lit. Nearby, several doctors in white lab coats were bustling about, moving in and out of rooms.

Ling Chen looked at the surrounding structures, grabbed the steel beams connected to the wall surface, and climbed to the top of the air-raid shelter, looking down over this secret base.

The base was divided into three areas: a laboratory, a warehouse, and a living area. At a glance, there were nearly a hundred people in the base. In addition to the scientific staff, there were security personnel and workers.

What worried Ling Chen was the high level of security there. There were frequent guard posts and watch points, heavily guarded.

His mission this time was to gather intelligence, necessitating a stealthy infiltration without leaving any trace to avoid startling the enemy. After observing for a few minutes, he suddenly noticed several men pushing movable iron beds towards the warehouse. It seemed like there were people lying on those iron beds, covered with white cloths.

"Ling Chen, I've reached the laboratory."

Hearing Tang Yuan's voice through the earpiece, Ling Chen made a quick decision to go check out the warehouse.

Since the security personnel were all located on the ground level, to avoid their gaze, Ling Chen decided to sneak in through the ventilation ducts.

Chapter 152 Night Exploration (Part 3)

The ventilation duct was extremely cramped; Ling Chen crawled on the ground, unable to extend his arms fully and could only inch forward by alternating his elbows. He had already determined the general direction to the warehouse and, after traveling about forty meters along the ventilation duct, a wire mesh appeared in his line of sight.

Gazing through the wire mesh, he saw a sealed room filled with numerous boxes on the outside.

Seeing that there was no one in the room, Ling Chen dug his fingers into the wire mesh, preparing to push it aside. But at that moment, he caught a glimpse of a red light out of the corner of his eye and was suddenly startled, hastily halting his hand.

After confirmation, he felt a surge of relief; it was fortunate he had noticed it in time, otherwise, he would have surely alerted the base's security.

An infrared surveillance device had been installed outside the ventilation duct. If he had pushed the wire mesh open, it would definitely be detected and trigger an alarm.

Immediately, he took out a small pair of needle-nose pliers and cut a slit in the wire mesh. Then, he extended his arm out, touching the infrared surveillance device, found its wiring, and gently snipped it.

After the device had been disabled, he let out a breath, pushed the wire mesh aside, and leaped into the warehouse.

After successfully entering the warehouse, he looked around and headed straight for a steel box about half a person's height. However, the steel box was controlled by a six-digit code lock. Without knowing the combination, it was very difficult to force open, and there was no time for such attempts.

He felt the surface of the steel box, which was ice-cold to the touch. Clearly, the steel box was equipped with a built-in refrigeration system. Such boxes were generally used to store medicine or other biological materials.

Moving elsewhere, Ling Chen opened several ordinary boxes, each filled with various medical equipment.

Based on these things alone, there wasn't enough evidence to convict. He believed that what was inside that steel box was likely to be the crucial evidence, but unfortunately, he couldn't open it.

After searching the warehouse for ten minutes, Ling Chen found another door adjacent to the warehouse.

The door was not locked, and Ling Chen pushed it open and entered. Instantly, a chill hit him. Looking around, the room—no larger than a hundred square meters—housed dozens of iron beds, all covered with white cloths.

"Is this... a morgue?"

His expression changed slightly as he quickly approached an iron bed nearby, lifted the white cloth, and a pale male corpse was immediately revealed.

Looking at the male corpse, Ling Chen's brow furrowed tightly.

The corpse had been dissected, leaving a long incision in the abdomen that had not been sewn up, vaguely revealing the body's internal organs. Looking at the corpse's face, it was terrifying, with an agape mouth and wide-open eyes, indicating the immense pain endured before death.

Additionally, with a keen eye, he also noticed four or five tiny needle holes on each of the corpse's arms.

For a hospital to have a morgue wasn't strange, but this was a psychiatric hospital, primarily focused on convalescence, and moreover, this morgue was located in a secret facility, which definitely wasn't ordinary.

With this thought, he took out the miniature camera he carried and photographed the corpse, not overlooking any detail.

Then, he checked over ten more bodies, with each case being broadly the same. However, what he found odd was that almost all the bodies placed here were male, with no females.

After collecting evidence, he turned around to leave the morgue, ready to meet up with Tang Yuan. Tang Yuan had infiltrated the laboratory; he presumably had gathered more direct and effective evidence.

Walking past the warehouse, Ling Chen was about to return the way he had come. But at that moment, he suddenly stopped in his tracks, then immediately cast his gaze around.

"There's a noise!"

He was certain he hadn't misheard; indeed, he had just heard a faint sound while walking over.

After a moment of hesitation, he went back the way he came, and after a dozen meters, the sound came again. But the warehouse was empty—where was the sound coming from?

In his puzzlement, a thought struck him, and he looked down at his feet.

The floor of the warehouse was laid with square steel plates, but on the steel plate beneath his feet, there was also a pull ring.

He grabbed the pull ring and slowly lifted it. As the steel plate opened, numerous eyes focused on Ling Chen.

"This..."

Upon seeing this scene, Ling Chen was immediately stunned. Below the steel plate, dozens of people were imprisoned, mostly men, including a few women and two or three teenage boys.

These people looked at Ling Chen with faces full of fear and apprehension, drawing back in fright, with terror reaching an extreme in their eyes.

"Let me out, please let us out!" a man pleaded.

As soon as he spoke, others began to plead, asking Ling Chen to spare them.

"Shh!" Fearing to attract the attention of the guards outside, Ling Chen quickly made a silencing gesture, "I'm not a bad guy, don't be afraid." After speaking, he continued to ask, "How were you captured?"

A woman sobbed and said, "I was at the hospital for a check-up, and then I suddenly passed out unwittingly. When I woke up, I was already lying inside a container with other people."

A container?

Ling Chen's mind stirred; it turned out that the container he had seen before was filled with these people.

"Everyone, calm down for now, I'll find a way to rescue you all."

Standing up, he walked aside and pressed the intercom, "Old Tang, respond if you hear this."

"I hear you. I've almost finished gathering evidence on my end. Any findings on your side?"

Ling Chen glanced at the imprisoned people and let out a wry smile, "I've got a big haul on my side. I discovered over thirty detained citizens in the warehouse; they must have been brought in through the container we just saw."

"What should we do?" Anxiety tinged Tang Yuan's voice.

"No matter what, we must save these people."

Tang Yuan suggested, "Why don't we pull out for now, submit the evidence, and come back with people tomorrow?"

"That won't do. They've captured so many people, they definitely plan to use them for experiments. If we delay even a day, there's no guarantee some won't die. Immediately contact Mr. Han and have him dispatch people to surround this psychiatric hospital. Anyway, since we've collected the evidence, it should be enough to convict them."

"Okay. Prepare yourself, because gathering a team on short notice might take at least an hour even if they hurry."

"No matter, if it comes to it, we'll take direct action. Lives are at stake; we have to get these people out first."

"I'll cover you from outside, you be careful."

After the conversation, Ling Chen turned off the intercom, looked at the people imprisoned below, and said, "Stay inside for now, don't make any noise, backup is on the way. I promise, when it arrives, I will definitely rescue you all."

"Thank you."

Ling Chen gave a slight smile, "You can thank me after you've escaped."

Chapter 153 Change of Plan

Closing the steel panel, Ling Chen walked alone to a secluded corner of the warehouse and hid away, quietly waiting for reinforcements to arrive.

He checked the time, it was just past midnight, and the reinforcements called by Tang Yuan wouldn't arrive until around 1 a.m.

At this moment, outside a luxurious villa in East Sea City, Zhu Hong stood with his hands behind his back, his gaze fixed on the entrance of the community, eagerly anticipating.

Soon after, a Mercedes sedan slowly drove up and stopped outside the door.

Zhu Hong's mouth curved into an attractive smile as he quickly walked to the rear car door and opened it. Immediately, a woman as gentle as water stepped out from the car.

"Xiaozhu, it's been a long time."

Zhu Hong spread his arms, pulled Zhu Xiaozhu into his embrace, and gently stroked her hair.

"Big brother." Zhu Xiaozhu couldn't suppress the happiness in her eyes, her face beaming with joy.

"Sorry for calling you so late. The last time I returned to Beijing, you were in East Sea City, and I didn't see you. I called Mom and Dad today, they said you are in East Sea City, so I couldn't wait to see you."

Zhu Xiaozhu smiled, "It's okay, we haven't seen each other for years, I would come no matter how late it is."

"Let's go inside and talk."

Zhu Xiaozhu nodded and let Zhu Hong take her hand and walk into the villa.

Once seated, Zhu Hong waved his hand and had the suit-clad bodyguards leave the living room, then picked up a bottle of red wine, "Little sister, would you like some?"

"Thank you, but I'm not too fond of alcohol."

"Red wine is good for the skin, but of course, my sister is naturally beautiful and doesn't need any enhancement to surpass other women," Zhu Hong praised generously.

"Big brother, where have you been all these years? We heard nothing from you, and the family was very worried."

"In the past few years, the company was keen on charity work, assigning me to a remote area with tough conditions, no water, no electricity. It took five years to build a hospital there, improving the local environment and allowing the poor local population to connect with society. I was too busy and it was not convenient, so I hardly contacted the family. But, my hard work during those five years was not in vain; look, I am now the head of Boyang Pharmaceutical in Asia."

Zhu Xiaozhu nodded with a laugh, her eyes filled with admiration, "I heard from our parents when I last went home. Big brother, you're capable, and I've always believed you'd make something of yourself. Your achievements today also bring glory to the Zhu Family."

"Little sister, it's been years since we met. I heard from our parents that you haven't settled down yet," Zhu Hong changed the subject.

Zhu Xiaozhu's face turned slightly red, "I'm still young, not in a hurry."

"You're already in your twenties, it's better for women to marry early, can't delay too long. I know many talented young men, would you like your big brother to introduce you to some?"

"Big brother, I appreciate your kindness. However, I value fate more; when the right time comes, everything will naturally fall into place."

While saying this, Zhu Xiaozhu unconsciously thought of that man.

"Alright, alright, since you're unwilling, I won't force you. I hope you can find your ideal man soon. When you get married, I will definitely give you a big gift."

"Thank you, big brother."

"Oh, by the way, little sister, I heard you've been staying at Qingyun Martial Arts Hall in East Sea City? I will be staying in East Sea City from now on. Whenever you come to East Sea City, just stay here at my place, don't bother others. After all, we are family, and outsiders are still outsiders, we should not always trouble people."

"It's okay, Mr. He is a good person. Besides, as an elderly, he sometimes needs company too."

"As far as I know, besides Mr. He, there is also a little girl named Little Hua living there."

At the mention of Little Hua, Zhu Xiaozhu smiled suddenly, radiating beauty like a blooming begonia.

"Little Hua is a wonderful girl, adorable and smart. Next time, I'll bring her along to meet you."

"Great, I'll treat you all to a meal when you're free."

...

In the blink of an eye, half an hour had passed.

Ling Chen sat in the corner, patiently waiting.

"Hey, Ling Chen, hold on, reinforcements will arrive in forty minutes."

Hearing Tang Yuan's voice from the earpiece, Ling Chen silently prayed, hoping to calmly get through these forty minutes.

However, the more you worry about something, the more likely it is to happen.

Just after finishing the conversation with Tang Yuan, a series of footsteps immediately reached Leng Xuan's ears. He immediately stood up, touched the box, carefully lifted his head, and looked in the direction from where the sounds were coming.

Instantly, he saw two uniformed security guards walking side by side, picking up something from the floor.

"You, and you, come out," one of the guards pointed at two people.

"No, I don't want to go out!" the two men named backed away fearfully.

Seeing they were not complying, the guard cocked his gun, pointed it at one man's head, and said sternly, "I'll count to three, and if you don't get out, believe it or not, I'll shoot you."

At this moment, Ling Chen quietly moved behind the two guards.

Taking advantage of their unawareness, he suddenly charged forward, grabbed both their heads with his hands, and then forcefully banged them together.

Accompanied by two muffled groans, the two guards immediately collapsed onto the floor.

"Don't be afraid, I'm here."

With that, Ling Chen closed the steel door again and dragged the bodies of the two guards into the corner.

"Old Tang, I'm afraid we can't wait forty minutes. I just dealt with two guards, they'll soon discover."

"Understood, let's play it by ear."

Less than two minutes later, the walkie-talkies on the two guards began to ring.

"Hello, Zhang Qiang, why haven't the people been brought over yet, respond."

Ling Chen turned off the walkie-talkies on them, his gaze fixed on the entrance of the warehouse.

"Ling Chen, six people are heading your way."

Hearing Tang Yuan's warning, Ling Chen replied with a 'got it.' Then, he got up and moved to the side of the warehouse entrance, crouching down, holding Wolf Kiss tightly in his hand.

Soon, with a 'click', the electronic door opened, and six security guards entered in single file.

The moment the electronic door closed, Ling Chen, who was lying in wait, suddenly leapt up and pounced towards the last security guard.

Wolf Kiss slashed, and a spray of blood splattered. Before the other five could react, Ling Chen had already easily dispatched one enemy.

Taking advantage of the moment they turned their heads, Ling Chen pounced again, sticking close to their bodies, denying them any opportunity to shoot.

In less than ten seconds, the sharp fangs of Wolf Kiss had passed over the necks of the five men, leaving six bodies on the ground.

...

Inside the villa.

Zhu Hong sat on the luxurious leather sofa, still chatting with Zhu Xiaozhu, reminiscing about the past.

Just then, a suited bodyguard hurried over, whispering a few words in his ear. Instantly, Zhu Hong's face changed dramatically, and he stood up abruptly.

"Big Brother, what's wrong?"

"Little sister, I have an urgent matter to attend to, I can't stay with you any longer, I'll have someone send you back later." After speaking, Zhu Hong strode out.

Chapter 154 Crisis

Watching Zhu Hong hurry away, Zhu Xiaozhu felt something odd, given it was so late, what emergency could there be?

She followed Zhu Hong out of the villa and saw three Mercedes-Benz cars parked at the door; Zhu Hong got directly into the middle one. Although Zhu Hong never mentioned what happened, Zhu Xiaozhu could tell that Zhu Hong's face was ashen, a far cry from his usual gentle smile, his eyes revealing urgency.

As the three Mercedes-Benz cars left the villa, a suited bodyguard approached Zhu Xiaozhu, respectfully saying, "Miss Zhu, your car is ready, I'll take you back."

After a twenty-minute drive, Zhu Xiaozhu finally returned to Qingyun Martial Arts Hall.

Entering the hall of the martial arts academy, Zhu Xiaozhu saw Little Hua sitting alone on a chair, eating something.

"Xiaozhu!" Seeing Zhu Xiaozhu return, Little Hua immediately bounced and jumped to greet her, affectionately grabbing her arm.

"Why aren't you sleeping at this late hour?"

"The master went out and told me to wait for you at home."

"Mr. He left?" Zhu Xiaozhu was surprised; in her memory, He Ziyun always stayed in the academy and rarely went out, especially this late at night, "Did Mr. He say what he was going to do?"

Little Hua grinned and said, "I don't know, he didn't tell me. Xiaozhu, will you sleep with me tonight?"

Zhu Xiaozhu nodded gently, but felt an inexplicable unease rising in her heart, leaving her mood unsettled for a long time.

...

Located in the psychiatric hospital's secret base.

Ling Chen cleaned up the previously dealt bodies, moved them to a place unseen, then continued guarding in the warehouse, secretly protecting the captured citizens.

"Ling Chen, you'd best move them quickly, the base's security personnel are already heading toward the warehouse."

Hearing Tang Yuan's reminder, Ling Chen frowned slightly, "Can you help me buy some time?"

"Okay, I'll try my best."

As soon as that was said, a burst of gunfire immediately rang out outside the warehouse.

Seizing the moment, Ling Chen quickly pulled open a metal plate on the floor, urging, "Everybody, come out quickly."

Then, with Ling Chen's help, over thirty citizens climbed out. "Follow me." Ling Chen looked around, then led them into the morgue.

Upon seeing the room full of dead bodies, everyone's faces turned pale, feeling an eerie and penetrative horror.

Ling Chen instructed, "Everyone, stay here and don't go out." After saying that, he quickly walked out of the morgue, locked the door, and alone returned to the warehouse.

At that moment, outside the warehouse, a fully armed combat squad was assembled, ready to storm in and capture the intruder.

Just as the combat squad was about to act, a researcher in a white lab coat hurried over, anxiously shouting, "Put down all your guns, none of the operatives are to carry guns."

The squad leader's face turned cold, "Are you joking with me?"

"This warehouse contains experimental agents stored at low temperatures. If a bullet accidentally hits those thermal boxes, causing the agents to leak, it would be unimaginable, no one in the entire base would survive."

Hearing this, the squad members hesitated.

After contemplating for a moment, the squad leader compromised, saying, "Everyone switch to stun guns."

Minutes passed, Ling Chen leaned against a box, listening to the noises outside, his hand tightly gripping Wolf Kiss. Soon, the shutter door of the warehouse slowly rose, three or four smoke grenades were thrown in first, followed by several 'bangs' noises, filling the warehouse with smoke.

Ling Chen smirked, as expected, standard combat procedure. These smoke grenades, while covering their tracks, could also provide him cover.

Then, he crouched and sneaked around from behind the boxes, charging into the spreading smoke.

The visibility in the smoke was very low, but Ling Chen didn't need his eyes; instead, he located the enemy's position by their footsteps. Soon, he locked onto one of them and quickly closed in.

Reaching behind the man, he suddenly stretched out both hands, grabbed the man's head, and twisted forcefully.

There was a cracking sound, and the enemy's neck was instantly broken, his body limp on the ground.

Following that, Ling Chen searched the man's body, found two smoke grenades, and continued to throw them around.

"Who? Who is throwing smoke grenades?" a man shouted.

Hearing the voice, Ling Chen didn't hesitate and immediately rushed towards the man's location. In just moments, he had taken down another enemy.

At this time, researchers in white coats outside the warehouse were directing their subordinates to begin the evacuation process, destroying all computer data, and packing and transporting valuable items away. Besides the two combat teams responsible for capturing the intruders, an additional security team of more than twenty people was tasked with ensuring the safety of the evacuating personnel.

"What about the experimental drugs in the warehouse?"

"This..." The man in the white coat hesitated, those experimental drugs were the base's most important assets, and they absolutely could not fall into outsiders' hands.

While he pondered, his cellphone suddenly rang.

"Hello, Mr. Zhu."

"How much longer until you evacuate?"

"We can finish in ten minutes."

"Move the confidential files and the experimental drugs, never mind the rest."

"Mr. Zhu, those experimental drugs are stored in the warehouse; our people are still there capturing the intruders, we might not have enough time."

Mr. Zhu on the phone paused for a moment, his tone suddenly turned cold: "Don't worry about those, take your men and evacuate immediately. I'm only giving you ten minutes, you better hurry."

"Yes."

After hanging up, the white-coated man quickly urged his subordinates to move everything to the evacuation route.

Boyang Company Headquarters.

In the spacious office, Zhu Hong was sitting beside his desk; front of him were two monitors displaying more than ten surveillance feeds, all streamed in real-time from the secret base.

Watching the chaotic base, Zhu Hong's face was ashen, his eyebrows tightly knitted, and his right hand on the desk clenched into a fist.

"Do you know who did this?" he gritted his teeth, squeezing a few words out through clenched teeth.

"Boss, we haven't found out yet."

"A bunch of useless trash," Zhu Hong scolded angrily, "I spent so much money on the security system, and it didn't even detect the intruders, what use do I have for you?"

A group of people stood opposite the desk, heads down, not uttering a word, not daring to meet Zhu Hong's gaze.

Zhu Hong exhaled, trying to calm his raging emotions, and coldly asked, "How is the evacuation proceeding?"

"The lab's research staff and important confidential files have been safely evacuated."

"What about the others?"

"There are still more than sixty people in the base..."

"Forget about them, immediately seal all passages, activate the self-destruct program, and leave no traces."

"Yes."

Chapter 155 Self-Destruct Program

Several minutes passed, and the smoke inside the warehouse gradually dissipated. The ground was littered with eliminated enemies, with only Ling Chen standing.

He holstered Wolf Kiss, wiped off the fresh blood remaining on his hand, and then contacted Tang Yuan on the walkie-talkie.

"Old Tang, where are you?"

"I'm outside the warehouse. Ling Chen, you'd better get out quick, we're in big trouble."

Hearing this, Ling Chen immediately rushed towards the outside of the warehouse.

Coming out of the warehouse, Ling Chen saw that there were still many people in the base, but these people were all minding their own business, and no one was paying attention to him.

"Ling Chen, over here."

Looking up, Ling Chen quickly went to Tang Yuan's side and asked, "What's the matter?"

"The exits of the base have all been sealed, and there's this." Tang Yuan gestured towards the LCD monitor installed on the wall.

Instantly, a row of red numbers on the monitor's screen kept jumping.

Six minutes forty seconds!

Six minutes thirty-nine seconds!

...

Watching the numbers gradually decrease, Ling Chen needed no explanation to understand their meaning.

"They've initiated the self-destruct sequence."

Tang Yuan nodded, his expression grave, "I've just checked, the steel plates at the exits are ten centimeters thick; it's impossible to break through. Those doors are remotely controlled, and they can't be opened from inside the base."

"What about backup?"

"It will take another ten minutes to arrive."

Ling Chen's pupils tightened. By the time the backup forces arrived, they would have long been blown to smithereens. No, they must find a way to escape the base.

Thinking this, he quickly returned to the warehouse. Soon after, he came back to Tang Yuan's side with a pile of grenades.

"Let's try this."

Tang Yuan immediately caught on, took a few grenades, lined them up, and placed them in the gaps of the iron door, linking them with a thin rope.

After everything was ready, the two retreated thirty meters away, hiding in a corner of the wall. At Ling Chen's signal, Tang Yuan gently pulled the thin rope.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Suddenly, a series of earth-shattering explosions erupted, and the blast waves caused the entire base to tremble, with dust falling from above.

Ling Chen waved away the swirling dust in front of him and eagerly looked towards the iron door. However, the result was greatly disappointing; the iron door was completely undamaged.

At this moment, in the Boyang Company's office.

Zhu Hong watched the monitoring screen tremble slightly with a massive amount of smoke appearing, and he couldn't help asking, "Has the self-destruct sequence detonated?"

"No. We've just detected an explosion inside the base, but it wasn't the self-destruct program."

Zhu Hong frowned slightly, "Then what happened?"

As soon as he finished speaking, a computer technician stood up, carrying a laptop, and came to the office desk, placing the notebook in front of Zhu Hong.

"Boss, I've locked onto two suspects through the monitoring footage. I've checked the base's personnel list, and these two aren't on it." With that, he tapped the keyboard twice, and two images captured from the monitor were immediately enlarged.

"It's them!"

Seeing the two men in the picture, Zhu Hong's face immediately fell.

"Ling Chen, it's you again, ruining my plans." He clenched his fists, teeth gritted, his eyes showing a hint of viciousness.

"Keep a close eye on him for me; I want to watch him be blown to pieces."

"Yes, boss."

Time passed by the second.

For Ling Chen, time now could only be counted in seconds, with minutes feeling extravagantly long.

With only six minutes left, he must figure out a way to escape within six minutes, otherwise, they would undoubtedly die.

At this time, the internal staff of the base had gathered in front of a round iron door, shouting loudly at the surveillance cameras, in hopes that someone would open the evacuation passage and let them escape.

But no one responded to them.

Ling Chen entered the laboratory, turned on the computer, and pulled up the base's blueprint, searching for an exit.

"Old Tang, the ventilation ducts should lead outside."

"It's no use, I've tried it. All ventilation ducts have been sealed off; we can't get out. Once the self-destruct sequence is activated, all exits are sealed without exception, unless we can break through that iron door."

Ling Chen frowned slightly; if that were true, they really had no hope left and would just be waiting to die. However, he wasn't someone who would resign himself to fate. As long as there was a glimmer of hope, he wouldn't give up.

While speaking, Ling Chen saw a man in a suit sitting in a corner of the laboratory, pale, covering his face, and crying.

He approached, patted the man's shoulder, and asked, "Are you a staff member here?"

"I take care of the logistics, everything from food to accommodation."

"Do you know this base well enough to tell if there are any other exits?"

"If I knew that, why would I be sitting here waiting to die?"

"Then do you know who controls this base?" Tang Yuan asked.

"Apart from the key personnel, no one knows. The laboratory here is off-limits, we're not qualified to enter. They say they're doing cancer research, a national secret project. Everyone who works here has to sign a confidentiality agreement."

Hearing this, Tang Yuan couldn't help but curse, "Those bastards, using the nation as their cover."

Ling Chen was somewhat helpless, having asked all this time without useful information.

He stood up and continued to search the laboratory. Before long, he found a folder left on the floor.

The folder detailed the cargo numbers; Ling Chen looked through them one by one until his gaze was suddenly caught by a few of those numbers.

"Old Tang, follow me."

Without any suspicion, Tang Yuan quickly followed behind Ling Chen, both entering the warehouse.

"What now?"

Ling Chen pointed to the iron boxes in the warehouse and said, "These boxes have the same numbers as the goods in the laboratory. They must be necessary items for the lab; maybe the contents can tell us what experiment they're conducting."

Tang Yuan took a quick look, slightly knitting his brows, "These boxes are equipped with six-digit electronic password locks and independent power supplies. How do you plan to open them?"

"This..." Ling Chen hesitated for a moment, his gaze shifted elsewhere, and his eyes suddenly brightened. He walked over to a previously eliminated enemy's body, bent over and picked up a stun gun.

Returning to the iron box, he aimed the stun gun at the password lock and rapidly pulled the trigger.

Accompanied by a flash of electric light, the previously lit password lock immediately went dark. Seeing this, Ling Chen's mouth curled into a slight smile. The stun gun's charge was very high, enough to damage the electronic lock and the power supply's circuitry, causing a short circuit.

"Old Tang."

Following Ling Chen's gesture, the two lifted the heavy box lid together and carefully opened it.

Chapter 156 Strengthening

With a gust of cold air, Ling Chen instantly saw a large number of glass tubes arranged inside the iron box, each filled with purple liquid.

"Turns out it's this thing."

In an instant, Ling Chen reacted.

Tang Yuan looked at him puzzled, "Have you seen this before?"

"This is exactly the enhancement drug I told you about." Ling Chen inwardly gasped in alarm, the last time he'd seen only a few milliliters, but the reserves of enhancement drugs at this base were so extensive. Apart from this iron box, there were four others nearby. One could imagine how terrifying the quantity of these drugs was.

"Old Tang, take a photo and send it out, these are all incriminating evidence."

"Just photos alone probably won't be of much use unless we can prove that this stuff is a banned substance."

Seeing a box full of enhancement drugs, Ling Chen pondered for a moment and asked, "How much time is left in the self-destruct program?"

"Less than four minutes."

"Old Tang, I have an idea, it's all down to luck whether we live or die now." Saying this, Ling Chen pulled out a glass tube filled with the purple liquid and quickly walked towards the lab.

Soon, he found a syringe.

Seeing his actions, Tang Yuan immediately understood and exclaimed in alarm, "Are you crazy?"

"Well, we are set to die anyway, might as well give it a try, maybe there is a glimmer of hope." Ling Chen explained.

Last time, he had witnessed in person the consequences of someone injecting the enhancement drug; strength and various functions had been significantly improved, perhaps it could help them escape.

In any case, he didn't want to just sit there and wait for death.

There were more than twenty milliliters of enhancement drugs in this glass tube, and without hesitation, Ling Chen drew it all into the syringe.

"Old Tang, get ready to film." He instructed.

Whether or not they could escape, at least record the process, it could later serve as direct evidence to prosecute those people.

Under Tang Yuan's tense gaze, Ling Chen bit down on his teeth, jabbed the syringe into his own vein, and as he pressed down on the plunger, all of the purple liquid was injected into his body.

After pulling out the syringe, Ling Chen sat quietly in the chair, eyes closed, feeling the changes in his body.

Suddenly, he opened his eyes wide, veins bulging all over his body, muscles undulating non-stop, and visibly swelling at a noticeable rate. In less than ten seconds, his arms had expanded several times, becoming horrifyingly massive.

Ling Chen clenched his teeth, sweat pouring down his forehead. Only at this moment did he truly realize how intensely painful the enhancement drug was.

No wonder the bodies in the morgue were all contorted in agony; they must have died due to the unbearable pain.

Tang Yuan stood by, eyes widened in disbelief as he watched Ling Chen's transformation. He considered himself to have a strong mentality, but this scene still left him utterly shaken.

Watching Ling Chen's agonized expression, Tang Yuan asked urgently, "How are you, are you okay?"

Ling Chen seemed not to hear him, gasping heavily as if he had lost control over his bodily functions, saliva and mucus all streaming out.

Not only that, but Ling Chen's hair was growing rapidly, and in no time, his close-cropped hair had grown long enough to brush his shoulders.

"Ling Chen..."

Seeing his change, Tang Yuan was at a loss for words to describe his shock.

Suddenly, Ling Chen's head snapped up, his pupils turned a fearsome red. Without waiting for Tang Yuan to speak, Ling Chen's legs kicked out, and he vaulted over Tang Yuan's head, charging towards the exit's iron door.

His fist hammered out, accompanied by a crisp 'clang' sound, and an indent immediately appeared on the surface of the iron door.

Tang Yuan, who was hurrying from behind, watched with his eyes wide and tongue-tied as Ling Chen, with sheer force of a single punch, dented the iron door that was ten centimeters thick—a door that even a grenade couldn't destroy.

That strength-enhancing drug was just too monstrous.

At this moment, Ling Chen seemed to have gone mad, pounding the iron door with punch after punch tirelessly.

The thick iron door gradually dented inward, forming a crack.

...

In the Boyang Company's office, Zhu Hong stared at Ling Chen's performance through the surveillance footage, his gaze frozen, sitting there in a daze. Ling Chen's demonstrated abilities had already stunned him.

It took a while before he came back to his senses and hurriedly said, "Record it, quickly record it."

When he said this, his tone was tinged with excitement.

The organization's newly developed drug wasn't suitable for everyone because human body functions vary, resulting in different levels of rejection—mild cases are bedridden, severe cases end in death.

The research experiments they had been conducting aimed to adjust the components of the strength-enhancing drug so that it could be used by everyone.

Just now, he had witnessed Ling Chen inject himself with twenty milliliters of the strength-enhancing drug.

If it were anyone else, they would have succumbed to the effects of the drug and died from bodily explosion by now, but Ling Chen had persevered, which was undeniably a breakthrough. Through this, they might find a way to improve the formula of the drug.

At this moment, there was less than two minutes left before the self-destruct program activated.

Under Ling Chen's continuous assault, the surface of the iron door had already cracked. However, the crack was only large enough for a child around four or five years old to squeeze through; it was hopeless for an adult.

Just then, Ling Chen, who had been throwing punches, suddenly paused. Following that, he spat out blood and fell backward.

"Ling Chen!"

Tang Yuan was shocked and rushed to his side, lifting his head up.

"Ling Chen, wake up!" he yelled loudly.

However, Ling Chen seemed to have fallen into a deep coma; although he was still breathing, no matter how much he was called, he couldn't be woken up.

"How is his condition?"

In this critical moment, an elderly voice suddenly came from outside the iron door.

Tang Yuan looked up and saw a person appearing outside the crack in the door—it was He Ziyun.

His face lit up with relief, "Old Leader."

"Step aside!"

Tang Yuan responded and hurriedly moved Ling Chen to a distance.

In an instant, a long sword struck, forcefully piercing through the iron door. Then, with a 'bang', the crack Ling Chen had made widened further, now just large enough for an adult to pass through.

Seeing this, Tang Yuan, without another word, immediately took Ling Chen out.

"Old Leader, you go ahead and take Ling Chen to safety, I'll go rescue the others."

"Be careful yourself." After saying that, He Ziyun sheathed the ancient Han Dynasty long sword and, with one hand holding Ling Chen and a light tap of his foot, whisked away like a swift gust of wind.

Having escaped the base, He Ziyun placed Ling Chen on the ground and reached out to check his breath, his eyes suddenly grew solemn.

Ling Chen's vital signs were fading; if they didn't find a way to stabilize him quickly, it wouldn't be long before even a deity could not save him.

Chapter 157 Saving Lives

Time was of the essence; there was no time for hesitation. He Ziyun reached into his chest and grasped five Golden Needles, thrusting them straight into Ling Chen's chest.

In an instant, all five Golden Needles disappeared into Ling Chen's body. At the same time, Ling Chen seemed to have been injected with a shot of adrenaline, his eyes snapping open as he gasped for air.

"Hang in there!" He Ziyun shouted softly, hoisting Ling Chen's body onto his shoulders. With his feet firmly on the ground, he leapt forward at great speed, covering over ten meters in the blink of an eye.

Not long after they left, Tang Yuan led the others out of the base.

Boom!

As soon as everyone barely escaped the base, a violent blaze burst forth, causing the ground to collapse and the psychiatric hospital that stood on the surface to crumble. In an instant, the flames engulfed everything, shooting up to the sky.

The shockwave from the explosion spread, affecting those who had not managed to get far away, knocking them to the ground.

Tang Yuan turned his head back to look at the raging flames spreading across the grounds, feeling a sense of relief as though he had narrowly escaped death. However, the thought of Ling Chen's uncertain fate immediately tensed his heart again.

Two minutes later, eight Chevrolet SUVs arrived at the scene, along with two ambulances. As backup rushed in, the situation quickly came under control, and everyone who had escaped from the base was detained.

At that moment, a cellphone rang. Tang Yuan saw that it was Han Bing calling and hurriedly answered.

"How's the situation over there?"

"Everything's under control, and we've almost collected all the evidence, but..."

"But what?"

Tang Yuan said in a deep voice, "Ling Chen's in trouble, it's serious, his condition is unknown, the old chief has already taken him away."

"Head to the old chief's place right away, you must save Ling Chen's life no matter what," Han Bing uttered urgently.

"Understood, I'm on my way."

Boyang Company's office.

Zhu Hong looked at the surveillance screen that lost its signal, stood up slowly, walked to the floor-to-ceiling windows, stood with his hands behind him, and gazed at the night outside without a word.

"Boss, our people have confirmed it, a total of fifty-seven people were caught, should we..."

"No need to worry about them, the core personnel of the lab have escaped. Those people don't know much, they won't be able to provide any valuable clues."

"I'm concerned that the higher-ups will blame us for the destruction of Base 3."

"It doesn't matter, I'll take the responsibility for this. Besides, although Base 3 is destroyed, we didn't come away empty-handed. At least we found a breakthrough from Ling Chen. Copy the surveillance footage we just recorded for me. As long as the people above see it, I believe they'll keep quiet."

...

Qingyun Martial Arts Hall.

A car screeched to a stop at the door, the door opened, and He Ziyun leapt out of the driver's seat, carrying Ling Chen from the back seat and hurriedly rushing into the Martial Arts Academy.

As soon as the door opened, two busy figures, one tall and one short, hurried to meet them.

"Mr. He, how's Ling Chen?" Zhu Xiaozhu, seeing Ling Chen's pale face and bloodless lips, grew anxious, her eyes full of concern.

"Don't ask too many questions right now. Did you prepare everything I asked you to?"

"It's all ready, in the room."

Without another word, He Ziyun quickly carried Ling Chen straight to the bedroom.

Before getting back, He Ziyun had already notified Zhu Xiaozhu and explained the situation, asking her to prepare the medical equipment.

Ling Chen lay on the bed, opening his eyes in a daze. All he could make out was blurry figures and his consciousness was drifting. His mouth was dry and his tongue parched, as if all the blood in his body was about to evaporate. He desperately wanted water.

"Water... water..." His mouth gaped open, as if muttering in delirium, incessantly calling for "water."

"The water's here." Zhu Xiaozhu hurriedly brought over a cup of water, supported his head, and brought the teacup to his lips.

However, before he could swallow a sip of water, Ling Chen suddenly started coughing, and tea mixed with fresh blood spewed out.

"Ling Chen..."

Seeing the bloodstained water on the bed, Zhu Xiaozhu felt at a loss. Even though she was skilled in medicine, she had never seen such a situation before. Seeing Ling Chen's unclear consciousness and his deeply furrowed brows, her heart felt as if it was being gripped by a giant hand; her moist eyes shimmered with tears.

"Give him water; it will make him feel better."

Hearing He Ziyun's words, Zhu Xiaozhu again brought the teacup to Ling Chen's lips. But at this moment, Ling Chen seemed to pass out, losing consciousness. As water was poured into his mouth, it immediately flowed out from the corners of his mouth.

Seeing this, Zhu Xiaozhu hesitated for a moment, then picked up the teacup, took a sip of water, and bent over. Ignoring the astonished looks from He Ziyun and Little Hua, her soft red lips gently touched Ling Chen's, delivering the tea water into his mouth.

Suddenly, Ling Chen seemed to respond, his lips parting ever so slightly, greedily sucking on Zhu Xiaozhu's lips.

Their lips pressed together, under Ling Chen's greedy demand, Zhu Xiaozhu felt her body heat up, a tingling sensations engulfing her, her eyes hazy with intoxication, as if she was about to sink into it at any moment.

Finally, having fed him a sip of water, Zhu Xiaozhu barely lifted her head, aware of the stunned looks from He Ziyun and Little Hua. She felt her pretty face flush red, as if on fire, her innocence laced with a hint of tempting allure.

He Ziyun cleared his throat slightly, averted his gaze, and motioned, "Continue."

Zhu Xiaozhu nodded lightly, suppressing the embarrassment in her heart, continuing to feed Ling Chen the water from the teacup until it was all gone.

With the replenishment of water, Ling Chen's condition gradually improved. His furrowed brows finally relaxed and his breathing became smooth.

"That should be enough."

Zhu Xiaozhu asked with concern, "Mr. He, will he... will he get better?"

"I don't know, it's up to his fate now."

As he finished speaking, He Ziyun walked to the bed, placed his hand on Ling Chen's chest. Abruptly, he shouted softly, his fingers forcefully pressing down, and the five Golden Needles previously inserted into Ling Chen's body immediately popped out.

As the Golden Needles were removed, Ling Chen's breathing was immediately disrupted, becoming more and more rapid, as if he could suffocate at any moment.

Seeing this, He Ziyun did not hesitate, quickly stripped Ling Chen, and flipped his body over, back facing up.

"Xiaozhu, apply the needles."

"Bai Hui, Water Gutter, Feng Fu, Qu Pool, Yanglingquan, He Gu, Taichong..."

Listening to the acupuncture points He Ziyun called out, Zhu Xiaozhu, having collected herself, inserted silver needles one by one.

Before long, Ling Chen's back was fully studded with silver needles.

Once all the needles were applied, countless beads of sweat emerged from Ling Chen's pores, emitting a strange scent.

He Ziyun straightened his body, letting him sit up on the bed, allowing the beads of sweat to slide off his skin.

Watching the beads of sweat gradually lessen, He Ziyun couldn't help but cast a glance at Zhu Xiaozhu beside him.

She clearly understood his meaning, but with Ling Chen's safety at stake, she put aside the shyness in her heart. At that moment, Little Hua had already proactively brought the tea water to her.

Chapter 158 Sober

After continuously feeding several cups of water, until the sweat on Ling Chen's body had stopped, He Ziyun finally nodded, signaling her to stop.

"The residual medication in his body has been cleared out. Now we can only leave it to fate and see how strong his willpower is."

Zhu Xiaozhu gently placed the blanket over Ling Chen, looking at his distinct, heroic, and handsome face, her lips slightly pursed, her eyes barely concealing her concern.

"Mr. He, what happened to Ling Chen? Why is he injured?"

"You don't need to ask too much about this; there are some things that it's better you don't know. Little Hua, you stay here with Xiaozhu to take care of Ling Chen, I need to step out for a moment."

"Yes, Master." Little Hua obediently nodded her head.

After He Ziyun left, Little Hua, with great interest, looked at Zhu Xiaozhu, who still had a blush on her cheeks, and couldn't help but tug at her sleeve.

"What is it?"

Little Hua giggled, "Xiaozhu, how did it feel just now?"

"What feeling?" Zhu Xiaozhu was momentarily dazed, then immediately understood what 'feeling' she was referring to, her face suddenly flushed red, and she gently pinched Little Hua's chubby cheek, saying annoyed, "You're just a child, why ask so many questions?"

"Lightly... lightly... it hurts!"

Little Hua quickly begged for mercy, finally evading Zhu Xiaozhu's torment, she pouted her lips, a face full of grievance, "I was just curious, just asking casually."

"What's most important now is Ling Chen's safety."

Little Hua's eyes darted around, she whispered, "Xiaozhu, when brother wakes up, should we tell him about what just happened?"

"No, you mustn't say a word, or else, be careful I'll spank you."

"Xiaozhu, you gave him your first kiss, don't you want him to take responsibility for you?"

"That doesn't mean anything." Zhu Xiaozhu was looking down, her gaze unconsciously drifting towards the sleeping Ling Chen.

She didn't know why, but she had impulsively made that gesture earlier. Although it was for treating him, that was still her first kiss, and she had given it to him.

However, considering that she had gone through that incident that night, what was a first kiss in comparison.

Asking herself, she didn't regret it in her heart, but instead, there was a slight anticipation. As for what she was anticipating, she couldn't quite say.

Now, she only hoped that Ling Chen would recover soon; that was the most important thing.

...

It was unclear how much time had passed, but amidst the haziness, Ling Chen finally regained some clarity of mind.

However, even though his mind was clear, his body was still unresponsive.

"Am I not dead?" he thought to himself.

The events of that night were vivid in his mind; he faintly remembered injecting more than twenty milliliters of a strengthening agent and then losing consciousness, knowing nothing after that.

"Where am I?"

He struggled to open his eyes, but his body seemed to have lost control, showing no response at all.

Suddenly, a warm current emerged from nowhere, slowly flowing through his body, through his limbs. As it circulated, he felt the fatigue in his body gradually disappearing, seeming to regain some strength.

Originally, he had hoped that the warm current would revive him, but it only lasted for a moment before dissipating without a trace within his body.

"Ling Chen, wake up!"

Suddenly, a familiar voice sounded by his ear. With the little strength he had just regained, Ling Chen struggled to open his eyes and saw He Ziyun by the bedside, saying weakly, "Mr. He."

He Ziyun smiled and nodded, "You're finally awake."

"Mr. He, please help me up."

"You are too weak now, better to keep lying down. Xiaozhu has gone to prepare medicine for you. Drink the medicine and rest a bit more; in a few days, you should recover."

Ling Chen turned to look outside the window, seeing the bright sunlight and a brand new day.

"Mr. He, about last night..."

"What last night? It was the night before last. You've been unconscious for a whole day and two nights."

Ling Chen was shocked, not realizing he had slept for so long.

"Don't worry, everyone has been rescued." He Ziyun knew what he was concerned about and continued, "Tang Yuan has gathered all the evidence from that base and has already handed it over to Beijing. Just focus on your recovery, don't worry about anything else."

Changing the subject, he asked, "When I was checking your pulse just now, I noticed a very full Qi within you. Have you practiced Inner Strength before?"

"I practiced for a bit, but it wasn't effective, so I gave up."

"If I remember correctly, when we first met, you told me that all your skills came from a secret tome."

"Right."

His tome was not only about Martial Arts techniques but also encompassed astronomy, geography, medicine, divination, and much more, all recorded in ancient texts, likely essentials passed down from ancient times.

However, because the records in the tome were overly complex, it was impossible to master them all in a lifetime. Therefore, he only learned some fist and foot techniques and medical skills, not delving into the rest.

He Ziyun said gently, "Your martial skills aren't bad, but Martial Arts is an extensive and profound field. It's often said, 'train the body externally, Dantian internally; from external to internal for great mastery.' You've perfected your external skills, but your Inner Strength is just beginning. If you want to progress further, you should focus more on Qi Cultivation. Only by integrating internal and external can you become a true Martial Arts master."

"You managed to survive this ordeal thanks to your strong physical condition. Anyone else would not have been able to bear it."

"Mr. He, since you are so skilled, could you teach me how to cultivate Qi." Ling Chen humbly asked for guidance.

Becoming stronger was a good thing, of course, he desired it. Before, all his skills were self-taught from the secret tome, relying solely on his own interpretations and practical experience. To put it simply, he had always carved his own path without guidance from others.

Train the body externally, Dantian internally.

The former is easy to understand: with hard work and effort, anyone can achieve it. However, cultivating the Qi in the Dantian is extremely difficult. Moreover, the records in the tome were obscure and difficult to understand; he had studied them for half a year initially and only grasped the basics, barely crossing the threshold. Since then, his cultivation of Qi had stagnated.

"Old virgin, I knew this guy had a strong life force, definitely would be fine."

While he was pondering, a carefree voice came from outside the door.

Ling Chen turned his head to see Tang Yuan and grinned, "I've been to the gates of hell too many times, even King Yan refuses to take me in, there's nothing I could do."

"You should really thank the old chief. If it wasn't for the old chief's help that night, you would have lost your life."

Hearing this, Ling Chen turned his gaze to He Ziyun, unaware of this matter.

He Ziyun explained, "The night you guys carried out the operation, Qiao Zhen called me and asked me to secretly back you up, just in case."

Chapter 159 - Betting

So that's how it is!

Ling Chen nodded, "Old Tang, have you greeted the Nanrong Family about the situation?"

"Don't worry, I've told them that you've been feeling unwell recently. I've requested a few days off for you. You can return to work once you've recovered."

"The medicine is ready."

At that moment, Zhu Xiaozhu, accompanied by Little Hua, came in with a bowl of traditional Chinese medicine.

"Ling Chen, you rest up, we won't disturb you further."

"Big Brother." Little Hua climbed up to the bed with a giggle, "You're finally awake. These past few days, Xiaozhu has been taking care of you day and night. She's exhausted."

Zhu Xiaozhu's face turned red, and she scolded gently, "Stop pouting."

Meanwhile, He Ziyun who was walking to the door turned back and said, "Little Hua, come with me, I have something to tell you."

Little Hua glanced at Ling Chen, then at Zhu Xiaozhu, and unwillingly glared at He Ziyun with pursed lips, following him and Tang Yuan out of the room reluctantly.

"Drink it while it's hot."

Zhu Xiaozhu helped him sit up, leaning against the headboard, then handed over the traditional Chinese medicine.

Enduring the bitterness that assaulted his taste buds, Ling Chen gulped it down, took a long breath, and smiled, "Thank you for taking care of me."

"We're friends, no need for formalities." As she spoke, Zhu Xiaozhu pulled out a white handkerchief and gently wiped the remnants of the medicine from the corner of his mouth.

This intimate gesture suddenly made Ling Chen somewhat uncomfortable, experiencing an indescribable feeling.

"Xiaozhu, you..."

"You've just woken up, you should rest more." After she spoke, Zhu Xiaozhu put away the bowl and turned to leave.

Ling Chen felt puzzled, sensing an inexplicable coldness in Zhu Xiaozhu's words. Strange, he didn't think he had offended her. Besides, she had just helped him wipe his mouth a moment ago, so why this sudden change?

As he was contemplating, Zhu Xiaozhu suddenly turned back and handed him a cell phone, "You've been unconscious these last few days, and your phone has been with me. Several people have called you. I was afraid it might cause misunderstandings, so I didn't answer for you."

"It's fine."

Ling Chen gave a slight smile, watching Zhu Xiaozhu leave, then picked up his phone to see several missed calls. Two from Nanrong Wanqing, one from Su Lin, four from Nanrong Hao, two from Leng Feifei, and one from Liu Xiyao.

Nanrong Wanqing, Su Lin, and Nanrong Hao—he could guess, they must have learned he was ill and called to check on him. Leng Feifei was not surprising, since he had saved her that day, and she was probably calling to thank him. But Liu Xiyao, he had treated her less than a month ago, made him wonder what she wanted.

Just as he was pondering, he saw Little Hua sneak back into the room from the door.

"Big Brother."

Ling Chen chuckled, "Why did you come back?"

Little Hua pouted her lips, looking aggrieved, and on the verge of tears said, "Don't you want to see Little Hua?"

"Who said that, of course I do." Ling Chen quickly corrected himself, fearing the little girl would cry.

At those words, Little Hua immediately cheered up and with a beaming smile asked, "Big Brother, what did Xiaozhu say to you?"

"Say what? She didn't say much. What's wrong? Eh! Little Hua, don't you stay with Xiaozhu all the time? When Xiaozhu came just now, she seemed a bit off. I don't think I've offended her."

"How have you not offended her, it's because you don't realize it." Little Hua leaned in close to his ear and whispered, "Let me tell you, Xiaozhu is very unhappy right now, you had better go comfort her."

Ling Chen was full of confusion, "I've only just woken up and hardly spoken a couple of words to her, how could I have made her unhappy?"

Little Hua hummed, "It's because you're entangled with so many women."

Er... Ling Chen suddenly realized, could it be because of those missed calls? That couldn't be, just a few calls, is it necessary to be unhappy?

Could it be...

He had a sudden shock, an idea involuntarily sprang to mind, stuttering, "That... Little Hua, you're not trying to tell me that Xiaozhu is... jealous, are you?"

Little Hua looked at him with an expression that screamed 'teachable child' and said with a giggle, "Seems like there's still hope for you."

"This..."

Ling Chen found it somewhat unbelievable, feeling like his brain was about to crash.

Zhu Xiaozhu likes him?

This news had come too suddenly, and he wasn't mentally prepared at all.

"Little Hua, are you sure? You can't joke about this kind of thing."

"Big brother, trust me, as a woman, my sixth sense is very accurate, it never fails."

Ling Chen gave her a once-over and curled his lips, this little girl hadn't even fully developed yet, and she dared to call herself a woman. Little Hua, sensing the doubt in his eyes, immediately felt disgruntled and put her hands on her hips, "If you don't believe it, how about we make a bet?"

"What's the bet?"

Little Hua's big, shiny eyes began to turn slightly, and a devilishly clever smile appeared on her chubby cheeks.

"If you lose, you have to kiss Xiaozhu in front of all of us."

"Kiss her by force? No way, I'm not doing that."

If it were just the two of them, he might have accepted, but to do it in front of others, let's not talk about his embarrassment, Zhu Xiaozhu probably wouldn't be able to accept it either.

"Little girl, if I lose... how about I buy you two lollipops, how's that?"

Little Hua's eyes widened, "Big brother, you're so shameless, thinking you can get rid of me with just two lollipops. Final offer, two boxes of lollipops, not one less."

"OK!" Ling Chen smiled broadly, "Tell me, how are you going to prove it?"

"Don't rush, I will make the arrangements, just you wait and see," Little Hua said with full confidence.

...

After resting for three days at Qingyun Martial Arts Hall, Ling Chen's body finally started to recover.

"Mr. He, Xiaozhu, Little Hua, thank you for taking care of me these days."

"Why the courtesy." He Ziyun said with a casual smile, "If you're free in the future, come to the Martial Arts Academy, and I'll teach you Qi Cultivation."

"Sure, I'll definitely come."

With that, he glanced at Zhu Xiaozhu, who was looking down, seemingly intentionally avoiding his gaze. He then turned his attention to Little Hua.

This little girl kept saying she would help prove that Zhu Xiaozhu liked him, yet there had been no movement these past few days, leaving him to wonder what she was scheming.

Seeming to understand what he was thinking, Little Hua winked at him and said with a chuckle, "Big brother, remember to keep in touch."

"I'll be going back now."

Waving his hand, Ling Chen turned and walked out of the Martial Arts Hall with Tang Yuan's company.

He had just got into the car when Little Hua came hopping over and leaned on the car window, looking at Ling Chen inside the car.

"Little girl, is there something else?"

"Big brother, are you free tomorrow evening?"

"I should be."

"Fine, I'll contact you tomorrow evening, and when things work out, don't forget my lollipops."

"Don't worry, I won't forget. Bye!"

The car started, and Tang Yuan drove onto the road, curious, "What's happening tomorrow evening?"

"Why ask so much, just drive your car."

Ling Chen turned to look out of the car window, feeling inexplicably a mix of anticipation and nervousness. To say he had no feelings for Zhu Xiaozhu would be a lie. However, as a gloriously inexperienced virgin who had never been in a relationship, he felt somewhat at a loss on how to proceed with such matters.

Chapter 160 - Returning to the Company

Today is Thursday, and Nanrong Wanqing is still at work in the company, so Ling Chen and Tang Yuan drove directly to the headquarters of Hongyu Group.

"Hey, Old Tang, didn't Mr. Han ask you to personally escort that exoskeleton armor to Beijing? When are you leaving?" In the elevator, Ling Chen casually asked.

"It'll be a few more days. Just after such an incident occurred, Mr. Han and the others are busy dealing with it and don't have the energy to take care of too many things right now."

"Be careful when you do."

During the conversation, they heard the 'ding' of a crisp sound, and the elevator arrived at the top floor of Hongyu Group.

Walking into the chairman's office, Ling Chen saw Nanrong Wanqing sitting in a wheelchair, buried in paperwork at the desk, with a cup of coffee placed aside, its steam already dissipated.

Hearing the door, Nanrong Wanqing lifted her head, her beautiful eyes slightly lighting up as she saw Ling Chen approaching, her thin lips brimming with a faint smile.

"Are you feeling better? Tang Yuan said you've been sick recently, and you haven't been answering calls; everyone's been worried about you."

Ling Chen smiled and patted his robust chest, "I'm fine, thank you for your concern. Chairman, if there's nothing else, I'll go find Captain Zhong now."

He had meant to let Nanrong Wanqing know last time that he had returned to the team.

"Wait a minute!" Nanrong Wanqing pushed her wheelchair around from the desk, "Tang Yuan, you go down first. I have something to talk to Ling Chen about."

"Alright, you two have a good chat." Tang Yuan smiled, sent a suggestive look to Ling Chen, and walked out of the office.

"Take a seat."

Ling Chen, unceremoniously, sat down on the sofa and with a lazy posture said, "What does the chairman want to talk with me about?"

"Nanrong Hao has partnered with others to open several courier companies, did you know that?"

"Did he tell you that?"

Of course, he knew about it. Not only did he know, but Nanrong Hao and his partners also gave him twenty-five percent of the shares. He intended to refuse, but Nanrong Hao, Jiang Hao, and Zhao Zhengxiong all made their stance clear, so his refusal was of no use.

"No, he didn't tell me; I heard it from others. I heard that he even went to negotiate with someone that day."

Ling Chen immediately realized that there was no wall in the world that did not let some wind through. That night, he took Nanrong Hao to see Qi Jianhui and invoked the Nanrong Family name, which must have been why the matter spread.

Nanrong Wanqing, who controlled the top enterprise of Hongyu Group in East Sea City with substantial assets, had a brother who ran off to start courier companies, which inevitably led to criticism and mockery. Nanrong Wanqing must have heard plenty of gossip, hence her seeking a conversation.

"I know about this, and I was involved. What's the matter, do you have an opinion on his involvement in this?"

"I have no objections. As long as he is on the right path, I won't stop whatever he does. But I neither support nor oppose this matter. Besides, if he wants to stand on his own, he can't use the Nanrong family's name anymore. Otherwise, it wouldn't be meaningful for him."

Hearing this, Ling Chen immediately understood her meaning and nodded, "I agree."

If Nanrong Hao used the Nanrong Family's name for business, others would definitely give way and not dare to trouble him too much; some might even take the opportunity to ingratiate themselves with Nanrong Hao to court favor with the Nanrong family. In this manner, it wouldn't be hard for Nanrong Hao to smoothly build a business.

But Nanrong Wanqing did not wish for this to happen. If one wants to stand on their own, they must learn to endure the hardships; without facing rains and storms, how can one see the rainbow? Only through constant trials can one grow through setbacks.

Her thoughtful intentions as an older sister were commendable.

"I will make it clear that all of Nanrong Hao's affairs have nothing to do with Hongyu Group. I will not intervene on his behalf, nor will I acknowledge any favors he accepts."

"Okay, I will pass the message on to Haozi, I believe he will be very happy."

"Thank you for that."

After she finished speaking, Nanrong Wanqing pushed her wheelchair back to her desk and continued to busy herself with the company's affairs.

Ling Chen stood up, walked over to her, picked up the cup of coffee that had gone cold, and replaced it with a cup of warm water.

"Drink less coffee; it's not good for your health. If you need to stay alert, just call me. I can give you a massage to relieve the fatigue."

Nanrong Wanqing rolled her eyes and her face blushed slightly, but her heart felt warm, with an indescribable taste of sweetness.

Leaving the chairman's office, Ling Chen took the elevator straight down to the security department on the first floor.

As soon as he entered, he saw Tang Yuan sitting at the desk, chatting with Wei Jun, while Zhong Wei was busy organizing documents.

"Ling Chen, perfect timing, there's something I want to discuss with you."

"Captain Zhong, what's up?"

"Today, the company held a job fair outside, and there will be a few interviews later. I want to recommend a few former comrades to join the first security team, have a look at them."

"Captain Zhong, you decide on these matters. As they are all your comrades, there should be no problem."

Right now, the first team has too few members, only five including him, Tang Yuan, Zhong Wei, Liang Zhao Hui, and Zhou Qing. Tang Yuan is a ghost member who joined the Hongyu Group because of a mission. Once he delivers the exoskeleton armor back to Beijing, his mission in East Sea City will end, and then there will be only four members left, which will cause a shortage of manpower.

"That won't do. The chairman has ordered that from now on, any personnel arrangements for the first team must have your consent. Besides, it's a good opportunity to get to know them," insisted Zhong Wei.

Ling Chen scratched his head. When did Nanrong Wanqing give him this authority? He had no idea.

"Alright, just let me know when they're here."

"Hey, by the way!" Tang Yuan fiddled with a pen in his hand and casually said, "Snake King has been quiet recently, do you think he has given up?"

"You know him as well as I do. Without a good opportunity, he won't make a move. In any case, everyone should not let down their guard."

After lunch and a half-hour nap in the office, Ling Chen received a call from Zhong Wei, asking him to join the interview in the meeting room in a few minutes.

With some time to spare, he took the opportunity to go to the restroom and wash his face.

At that moment, a young man with gold-framed glasses rushed in, standing in front of the mirror, looking nervous, continually washing his hands under the tap.

Ling Chen glanced at him and, noticing his unfamiliar face and discomfort, couldn't help asking, "Friend, you alright?"

"I'm... I'm fine," replied the young man, managing a strained smile.

"Are you a staff member of the company?" He seemed too nervous for comfort, and as security personnel, Ling Chen couldn't help but be suspicious.

"Not yet, I hope to become an employee of this company in the future."

Ling Chen instantly understood; the young man was here for an interview, no wonder he was so nervous. Smiling, he said, "Don't be afraid, perk up, have confidence in yourself. I wish you success in your interview in advance."

"Thank you!"