

The Beauty 161

Chapter 161 - The Whereabouts of Nanrong Gang

Entering the conference room, Zhong Wei had already arrived, sitting in front of him were two men, both around thirty years old, with crew cuts, wearing crisp suits, meticulous, exuding a tough aura.

Ling Chen sized them up and nodded inwardly; even after leaving the military, ex-servicemen still maintained a rigorous style, complied absolutely with orders, which is why many large corporations prefer to hire them for security.

Upon seeing him approach, the two men promptly stood up, behaving very politely.

"Have a seat," Ling Chen grinned, "You are all Captain Zhong's old comrades and our own people. No need for such courtesy."

"Ling Chen, let me introduce you. This is Song Xiong, he used to be a communications soldier in the military, recognized for his outstanding performance with three second-class merit medals and one first-class merit medal. And this is Lu Haifeng, a special forces soldier with a rich combat experience. He has participated in numerous external missions, and the military wanted to retain him to become an instructor, but personal reasons led him to choose to discharge."

Ling Chen said with a smile: "Since both of you caught Captain Zhong's eye, there's definitely no question about your capabilities, and I trust you. However, our first security team, though under the security department, acts more like private bodyguards. Moreover, with the chairman's personal safety being threatened recently, there are certain risks involved. Both of you need to think it over clearly."

"Mr. Ling, rest assured, Captain Zhong has already made things very clear to us. We wouldn't be here otherwise," replied Lu Haifeng earnestly.

"That's good to hear. Since neither of you have objections, on behalf of Hongyu Group, I welcome you aboard."

During the conversation, the meeting room's door was pushed open, and a young man with gold-rimmed glasses peeked his head in timidly.

"Excuse me, is this where the interview is taking place?"

Seeing him, Ling Chen's lips curved up slightly; wasn't this the guy he just ran into in the restroom?

"You're in the wrong place, this is the security department's interview. The room next door is where your interview should be," Zhong Wei hinted.

"I'm sorry for the interruption," said the young man, his face slightly red, as he hurriedly retreated.

Ling Chen found it amusing; how could such a grown man be so timid like a woman.

After sorting out the recruitment matters, Ling Chen was about to return to his office when his pocket suddenly vibrated with the ringing of his phone.

Upon seeing the caller ID, Ling Chen's heart lightened – it was Hu Fei.

"Hello, Fatty, have you recovered from your injuries?"

"I've been fine for a while now. Are you guys free tonight? Let's go out for dinner to celebrate my narrow escape. Plus, I have something to tell you."

"Alright, you set the time and place, and Old Tang and I will be there."

In the evening.

After dropping off Nanrong Wanqing at home, Ling Chen and Tang Yuan drove to a small restaurant.

This small restaurant was tucked away in a side alley by the road, rather basic surroundings. When they entered, there were few diners inside, who appeared to be local laborers based on their attire.

The only private room in the restaurant, already reserved by Hu Fei, had him sitting at a greasy round table fiddling with a bottle of his own Moutai.

Tang Yuan complained, "I say Fatty Hu, you're worth at least ten million, yet you invite us to this place for dinner, isn't that too stingy? After all, I am your lifesaver."

Hu Fei glared, "Am I that petty? Let me tell you, despite this restaurant's poor conditions, they serve the most authentic boiled fish in East Sea City. If it weren't for my relationship with the owner of this restaurant, you wouldn't even get the chance to taste it."

"Don't take Old Tang seriously; he's just got a loose tongue," Ling Chen laughed, "We aren't fussy about the place, as long as there's good food."

"Come on, this is the treasured Moutai I've kept. Fill everyone's glasses," Hu Fei said eagerly as he poured the liquor for them, and then he picked up his cup and sipped it contently.

While waiting for the dishes to arrive, Ling Chen asked, "Didn't you say you had something else to tell me?"

"You didn't remind me, I almost forgot. Remember you asked me to look for someone named Nanrong Gang, right? I've used quite a few resources, and I haven't let you down."

Ling Chen's eyes sparkled, "Where is he?"

Hu Fei pointed downwards with his hand.

"What do you mean?"

"That Nanrong Gang has already been buried."

"Dead?" Ling Chen's face was filled with surprise and disbelief, "Are you sure he's dead?"

"Do I look like I'm lying to you? Absolutely sure." Saying so, Hu Fei pulled out an envelope from his pocket and tossed it on the table, "Look for yourself."

Ling Chen tore open the envelope; there were several photographs inside, one of which was of an old man in his sixties or seventies, with a wrinkled face, bald head, white beard, and a malnourished appearance.

Just by looking at his face, he bore some resemblance to Nanrong Yong.

Another photo was of a graveside tombstone, detailing the old man's death, which happened three years ago.

"He has been living abroad all these years, never returning home. According to the information I've gathered, he lived a hard life abroad, relying on government assistance," Hu Fei stated.

Ling Chen nodded, put the photos back in the envelope, and asked: "Does he have any descendants?"

"None, he lived alone abroad all these years, with no wife or children. Although, he was married when he was young, but they divorced before he went abroad, no children then. I wanted to look up his ex-wife for you, but with all these years passed, aside from a name, there's nothing, don't even know what she looks like, too difficult to track."

"No need to look into that."

With that, Ling Chen furrowed his brows and thought to himself.

Last time Nanrong Yong told him in person that the person behind the threats to Nanrong Wanqing was Nanrong Gang. But now Nanrong Gang had died, and judging by his life abroad, he couldn't possibly have afforded to hire the Snake King.

Being amongst the top ten on the assassin list, the Snake King's fee wouldn't be low, at least several million.

If it wasn't Nanrong Gang orchestrating everything from behind the scenes, then who could it be?

Probably only Nanrong Yong would know.

Soon, a big pot of boiled fish was brought into the room. The owner of the restaurant, a man in his forties with yellowish complexion and an honest look, someone who has endured hardship.

"Boss Hu, enjoy your meal. Call me if you need anything."

"Alright, Liu, you go ahead."

Fatty Hu whispered to them with a mysterious smile, "You guys don't need to ask, come on, let's eat while it's hot."

After the meal, Ling Chen and Tang Yuan couldn't stop praising the taste of the boiled fish. Both were seasoned foodies, having eaten all around from south to north, domestically and internationally, yet agreed that the small restaurant's dish was even more authentic than those crafted by so-called top chefs.

Chapter 162 - Shall We Make An Appointment?

Returning to the Nanrong Family house, it was already past eight o'clock.

After sending Tang Yuan back to his room, Ling Chen went alone to the bedroom where Nanrong Yong resided.

"Ling Chen, what brings you here today? Please, have a seat." Nanrong Yong warmly welcomed him into the room and personally brewed a cup of tea for him.

Ling Chen, feeling flattered, said: "Elder, you are too kind."

"You saved Wanqing, you are a great benefactor of our Nanrong Family. Serving you tea is the least I can do," after saying this, Nanrong Yong shifted the topic, "What brings you here so late? Is there something you need?"

"Elder, last time you asked me to help find Nanrong Gang's whereabouts, I've found him."

Upon hearing this, Nanrong Yong's expression changed drastically, his smile vanished instantly and he asked with a slightly cold tone, "Where is he?"

"You should see for yourself." With that, Ling Chen handed over a few photographs to Nanrong Yong.

Viewing the photographs, Nanrong Yong's gaze became fixed, and he did not shift his eyes for a long time, his expression complex.

"Elder, is this the person?"

"Indeed, it is him," Nanrong Yong nodded slightly, sighing deeply, "I never thought he was already dead."

"Elder, you previously suspected that the person who plotted against the chairman was Nanrong Gang, but Nanrong Gang died three years ago, indicating that it wasn't him who was covertly targeting the chairman. Do you have any other suspects?"

"I don't know. If anyone in this world hated the Nanrong Family enough, he was the only person I could think of. All these years, whatever the Nanrong Family has gone through, I believed it was his revenge, but now... alas!" Nanrong Yong leaned back against the sofa, his aged eyes reflecting a trace of fatigue.

"Ling Chen, let this matter of Nanrong Gang rest; there's no need to investigate further. As for Wanqing..."

"Elder, rest assured, I will not utter an extra word."

"Much obliged."

After Ling Chen left, Nanrong Yong got up and approached the safe, pulling out a patterned wooden box.

Opening the box, he picked up a yellowed photograph and stared at it for a long time. In the photo, two young men in shirts were embracing each other's shoulders, smiling brightly at the camera.

"After so many years, to think I didn't even get to see you one last time; did I really misjudge you?"

Back in the villa.

Ling Chen passed through the living room, intending to head to his bedroom. At that moment, he saw Su Lin lying on the couch, wearing a cute pajama set, her head resting on her arms, deeply asleep.

The neckline of the pajama was originally rather low, and with Su Lin lying on her side, half of her bust was exposed, revealing the allure beneath without obstruction.

This unexpected temptation nearly made Ling Chen nosebleed.

This girl really wasn't careful about her image; wasn't she afraid of a wardrobe malfunction?

While he contemplated, Su Lin in her sleep stretched a hand to scratch an itch on her legs, consequently pulling up the hem of her pajama, suddenly uncovering a pair of snow-white beautiful legs for Ling Chen to see, making him swallow his saliva.

There was no helping it; the girl's posture was too enticing. If it weren't for his strong self-control, he might have already lost his composure.

"No, no..." he muttered to himself, fearing that he might lose control over the primal energies within him if he continued looking. Although he thought this, his eyes remained unblinkingly fixed on that deep cleavage.

He really wanted to dive into it.

Amitabha Buddha, even food and lust are natural; the Buddha himself said so, staring a bit longer is only reasonable.

"Ling Chen, what are you looking at?"

"Just then, Nanrong Wanqing's voice came over, startling Ling Chen, who grinned like a thief and said, 'No, I wasn't looking at anything, I'm going to take a shower first.' After speaking, he quickly walked into his room.

Nanrong Wanqing strangely wheeled herself down the staircase rail and headed straight to the sofa, looking at Su Lin's seductive pose, her pretty face couldn't help but blush slightly. No wonder Ling Chen looked so odd just now, as if he had a guilty conscience.

With that thought, she gently patted Su Lin's cheek to wake her up.

'Wanqing...' Su Lin rubbed her sleepy eyes, 'What's up?'

Nanrong Wanqing scolded softly, 'You know there's a man in the house, yet you're so careless. From now on, sleep in your room, or you might be seen.'

'Man, what man?' Su Lin's still sleepy face was puzzled.

'Ling Chen is back, did you forget?'

Su Lin looked at her own messy pajamas and shyly said, 'I was so tired at school today, um... did Ling Chen just get here? Did... did he see anything?'

'He saw whatever there was to see.'

Su Lin's face turned red as she muttered, 'That pervert.'

'How can you blame him, it's your own fault for not being careful.'

Hearing this, Su Lin's eyes gleamed, and she laughed playfully, 'Wanqing, you've changed quite a bit lately, even starting to take his side.'

'Not at all, I'm just being objective.'

'Really?' Su Lin looked meaningfully at her, 'Wanqing, you've always refused to tell me what happened during those two days in the woods. But since that day, your attitude towards Ling Chen seems different. Come clean, did something inappropriate for children happen when you two were alone?'

'What inappropriate? Nothing like that.' Nanrong Wanqing's neck turned crimson as she replied angrily, 'Your mind is getting increasingly impure.'

'I don't believe it. A man and a woman alone, and nothing happened? If truly nothing happened, would you let him teach Zhu Hong a lesson? Wanqing, you might deceive others but not me. I know perfectly well how important Zhu Hong is to you, your neutrality that day said it all.'

After this, she glanced at Ling Chen's bedroom and whispered, 'Wanqing, tell me truthfully, do you have feelings for him?'

'Who, who likes him? Don't talk nonsense.'

Angered and embarrassed, Nanrong Wanqing picked up a cushion and threw it hard, 'Say that again, and see if I don't kick you out?'

'Okay okay, I won't say anymore.' Su Lin caught the cushion thrown by Nanrong Wanqing, her eyes teasing, 'Wanqing, if it were before, you would have kept a straight face, not saying a single unnecessary word, even refusing to defend yourself, but now... stop, don't throw anymore, isn't it okay if I stop talking?'

Ignoring Nanrong Wanqing's reproachful look, she giggled softly, 'I'm going back to my room.'

Running upstairs, Su Lin suddenly turned her head back, seriously saying, 'Wanqing, although you're usually cold, I think this is the real you.'

Watching Su Lin reach the second floor, Nanrong Wanqing lowered her head, reflecting on Su Lin's words just now, a complicated expression flashing through her beautiful eyes. She could feel it too, whenever Ling Chen was mentioned, her tranquil heart would ripple subtly.

At this moment, the bedroom door opened, Ling Chen appeared in his boxers, bare-chested, wiping his wet hair with a towel as he walked into the kitchen.

Passing the living room, he noticed Nanrong Wanqing and looked up.

Simultaneously, Nanrong Wanqing turned her head, meeting his gaze.

Their eyes locked, and seeing his robust chest, recalling how she once nestled against it, two streaks of red flew up her cheeks, her eyes full of uncontrollable shyness, her beauty beyond measure.

Captivated by her demurely charming demeanor, Ling Chen found himself staring, unable to look away for a long time.

'Um... are you free tonight?' he blurted out unintentionally.

'Free. What's up?' Nanrong Wanqing looked at him curiously.

'Well...' Ling Chen grinned, recalling a popular online phrase, 'Wanna hang out?'

Chapter 163 Watching a Movie

"What?" Nanrong Wanqing was momentarily stunned in place, thinking she had heard wrong, and stared blankly at Ling Chen.

"There's nothing." Ling Chen scratched his head. Those two words had just blurted out on a whim, and he really didn't dare to say such flirtatious words in front of Nanrong Wanqing, fearing that he would be too abrupt for the lovely lady.

"Wanqing, do you just stay at home after work and not go out?"

"Uh-huh." Nanrong Wanqing nodded, "It's too dangerous to go out at night, I don't want to trouble Zhong Wei and the others."

"Isn't that very dull?"

Staying at home all day, if it were someone else, they would probably be bored to death. Thinking about Nanrong Wanqing's situation, she must be quite bored too, stuck in the office during the day and cooped up at home at night. Such a life was truly uninteresting.

With that in mind, he couldn't help but feel some sympathy for Nanrong Wanqing. If it weren't for her inconvenience with her legs, why would she need to live like this?

"It's still early tonight, how about we go out for a walk?" Ling Chen didn't know whether it was a devil or god who prompted him, but he suddenly blurted out.

"Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere, East Sea City is so big, there are plenty of places to have fun."

"But..." Nanrong Wanqing seemed tempted yet hesitated, "Won't that trouble everyone too much?"

"It's fine, Captain Zhong and the others will stay at home, I'll accompany you alone. With me by your side, are you still afraid of danger?" Not waiting for Nanrong Wanqing to refuse, Ling Chen had already turned and walked back to the bedroom, "Sit for a while, I'm going to change my clothes."

Watching Ling Chen disappear at the door, Nanrong Wanqing felt her pretty face heat up with her fingers tightly intertwined.

Him accompanying her alone, is this... is this a date?

Unconsciously, the usually calm and smart Wanqing couldn't help but entertain all sorts of wild thoughts.

In just a few minutes, Ling Chen, now properly dressed, came out of the bedroom and then pushed the wheelchair toward the Nanrong Family's house. On the way, no one noticed them.

At the doorstep, Ling Chen brought out his classic muscle car.

A few days ago, this muscle car, which had been damaged in a collision, had been fixed, costing nearly eight hundred thousand, all of which was reimbursed by the company, saving Ling Chen a considerable expense.

Sitting in the passenger seat, Nanrong Wanqing watched the car slowly drive onto the road and couldn't help asking, "Where to?"

Ling Chen checked the time; it had just turned nine. At this hour, the only places to have fun were bars and nightclubs, but he definitely couldn't take Nanrong Wanqing to those kinds of places. After a moment's thought, his eyes suddenly brightened with an open smile, "Sit tight."

With that, he stepped on the gas pedal, and the car's speed instantly picked up.

Reaching the city center, Ling Chen parked the car on the side of the road and said, "Wait for me," before getting out alone.

Soon after, he returned to the car and handed a baseball cap and a face mask to Nanrong Wanqing, "Here, try these."

"What are these for?"

"You'll see in a bit."

After ten or so minutes of cruising the city, Ling Chen finally drove to their destination.

Following Ling Chen's instructions, Nanrong Wanqing put on the face mask and baseball cap to hide her stunning beauty, then, holding onto his neck, sat back in the wheelchair.

As they entered the elevator with Ling Chen, Nanrong Wanqing's heart was still filled with curiosity, still unsure where this man intended to take her.

Ding!

With a crisp sound, the elevator slowly reached the floor.

As the elevator doors gradually opened, Nanrong Wanqing saw the large letters that came into view and immediately understood.

It turned out to be a movie theater.

"Hey, what kind of movies do you like to watch?" Ling Chen asked, pointing to the film schedule.

Nanrong Wanqing spoke softly, "I... I'm fine with anything."

At this moment, her thoughts were not on the movies at all, but on why Ling Chen would bring her to the movie theater. Could this be... a date, as this is a place that couples come to?

As she thought about it, a faint blush appeared on her cheeks. Thankfully, the mask covered her face, so Ling Chen beside her didn't notice.

"Sir, which movie would you like to watch?" The young ticket seller, with a professional smile, asked politely.

"Um... do you have any good movies you can recommend?"

Ling Chen rarely watched movies, so he wasn't sure how to choose.

The ticket seller glanced at Nanrong Wanqing, who was sitting in the wheelchair, and enthusiastically said, "We have a newly released film that is perfect for couples to watch."

Upon hearing the word 'couples', Nanrong Wanqing unconsciously lowered her head to hide the shyness in her eyes.

Ling Chen glanced at her from the corner of his eye and coughed lightly, "Then, please give me two tickets."

"Sure," the ticket seller drew out two freshly printed tickets, "Sir, that will be a total of one hundred and twenty yuan." As she said this, she turned towards Nanrong Wanqing in the wheelchair and said, "If your girlfriend has a disability certificate, she can get half off."

Ling Chen frowned secretly, the ticket seller really brought up an unwelcome topic. He had wanted to take Nanrong Wanqing out for some fun and relaxation, but now her mood was probably spoiled by these three words.

Although Nanrong Wanqing had never expressed anything, he was very aware that she cared deeply about this matter.

After a moment's thought, he was about to refuse outright, "No need, I..."

"I have a disability certificate."

Before Ling Chen could finish speaking, Nanrong Wanqing had already taken out a disability certificate and handed it over.

Noticing this, Ling Chen was slightly taken aback, paying attention to the change in Nanrong Wanqing's expression. However, unexpectedly, Nanrong Wanqing was very calm.

After buying the tickets, Ling Chen pushed Nanrong Wanqing into the cinema's lobby.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know she would..."

"It's okay." Nanrong Wanqing's tone was serene, "I have already gotten used to it, not to mention she isn't wrong—I am indeed disabled, and that is an unchangeable fact."

"I believe you will get better one day."

"I hope so."

Upon entering the lobby, the movie hadn't started yet, and the large cinema was occupied only by the two of them.

Ling Chen placed the wheelchair to the side and then carried Nanrong Wanqing to sit in the back row of the cinema. Seizing the moment before the movie started, he went to buy a bucket of popcorn and a drink.

"Have you brought other girls here to watch movies before?" Nanrong Wanqing asked softly, out of curiosity or perhaps some other reason.

"No, you're the first,"

"Oh." Nanrong Wanqing responded, her eyes moving, and her pupils shone with an unusual light, as though she was thinking about something.

A few minutes later, as the lights in the hall dimmed, the movie finally began.

In the spacious hall, large enough for a hundred people, only the two of them were present. With the lighting dim, Nanrong Wanqing felt comfortable removing her cap and mask, unafraid of being recognized by anyone.

Ling Chen placed the popcorn between them, his gaze fixed on the giant screen, quietly watching the film.

However, as soon as the opening scene of the movie appeared, both Ling Chen and Nanrong Wanqing were momentarily stunned.

Chapter 164 Holding Hands

On the big screen, the first to appear was a young man and woman, tenderly entwined in bed. Although there was visual editing and objects blocking the view, this not-suitable-for-children scene still made Ling Chen and Nanrong Wanqing very uncomfortable.

There was no helping it, they had chosen the movie themselves and had to watch it to the end even with tears in their eyes.

Besides, everyone was an adult, and watching such scenes wouldn't hurt anyone. Plus, he hadn't purposely chosen it; it was recommended by the ticket seller as a couple's movie.

He had originally thought it would be a pure romance movie, but now he understood that so-called couple's movies were actually about creating opportunities for couples.

As for what kind of opportunities, every man understood.

After finally getting through the first few minutes of the passionate opening scenes, the movie at last entered the regular plot. Ling Chen quietly breathed a sigh of relief and occasionally stole glances at Nanrong Wanqing beside him with the corner of his eye.

Nanrong Wanqing watched intently, her fair and smooth cheeks still flushed with a touch of red. Under the dim light, she looked even more charming and alluring.

Thinking back on the passionate scenes they had just watched, and with a beautiful woman by his side, Ling Chen felt an unnamed flame rising in his belly that he couldn't control.

At that moment, he crossed his legs, trying to conceal his awkwardness, and cursed in his heart that this couple's movie was really quite harmful.

Halfway through the movie, the scenes on the big screen suddenly changed, once again shifting to passionate bedroom scenes that were even hotter than before, with every line dripping with seduction.

Ling Chen swallowed hard and crossed his legs even tighter, continuously reaching for the popcorn bucket.

It wasn't just him; Nanrong Wanqing also unconsciously sped up her popcorn eating, as if that was the only way to cover up the awkwardness between them.

At that time, Ling Chen suddenly froze, his hand in the popcorn bucket stiff and at a loss.

Just as he reached in, Nanrong Wanqing's little hand happened to be in the popcorn bucket too. Both of their eyes were focused on the movie screen, paying no attention to the popcorn bucket.

So, coincidentally, Ling Chen's big hand intended to grab popcorn but instead grasped Nanrong Wanqing's small hand.

Although this wasn't the first time they had physical contact, the smoothness of Nanrong Wanqing's little hand still made his heart flutter.

Seconds later, Ling Chen realized that Nanrong Wanqing hadn't withdrawn her hand but allowed him to hold it.

Not pulling away, what did that mean?

As an old virgin who had never been in a relationship before, a complete novice, even if Ling Chen was slow to catch on, as a man, how could he not understand the implications?

This meant that Nanrong Wanqing did not reject him.

Thinking of this, he couldn't help but feel a bit excited.

Nanrong Wanqing didn't withdraw her hand, so naturally, he couldn't let go either; otherwise, what kind of man would he be?

At this moment, Nanrong Wanqing's body was tense, completely unaware of what the movie was about, the only thought in her head being that Ling Chen had taken the initiative to hold her hand.

Did he... did he do it on purpose?

God knows, if Ling Chen realized what was on her mind, he would feel wronged; he just wanted to eat popcorn and had accidentally grabbed her hand.

But Nanrong Wanqing didn't think so; in her heart, she felt it was Ling Chen's initiative.

They had held hands, so what would the next step be?

He wouldn't want to...

Kiss?

At that thought, her cheeks turned crimson, as if aflame, and she bit her thin lips lightly, feeling extremely nervous inside.

But, one minute... two minutes... three minutes passed, and Ling Chen still held onto her small hand without any further action. Seeing this, she suddenly felt an indescribable mix of complex emotions. Was it disappointment? Or relief?

For the past twenty-three years, everything she cherished had been taken by the man before her. Whether it was her first kiss or her pure and innocent body, although he hadn't breached the final line of defense, in her eyes, this man had taken everything from her.

Perhaps it was because of the Nanrong family's traditions, deep down she had always been a traditional woman.

To a traditional woman, the most important thing is her first time. In her opinion, a woman's purity should only be given to one man.

For this reason, every time Ling Chen made an intimate gesture, she tried not to resist. In other words, she was trying to accept it.

If it were any other man who brought her to see this kind of movie, she probably wouldn't stay for even a second longer.

Only Ling Chen enjoyed this special treatment.

Time ticked by, second by second. Neither Ling Chen nor Nanrong Wanqing knew what the movie was about; their minds were completely elsewhere.

Ling Chen continued to hold Nanrong Wanqing's small hand, which was placed inside the popcorn bucket, and never drew it out. The two had maintained this position for a long time.

Watching Nanrong Wanqing, who was looking straight ahead without moving her eyes, Ling Chen's heart was extremely conflicted; he was unsure of what to do next.

Kiss her?

What if he was rejected? How embarrassing that would be.

For a moment, he was torn.

After a while, he gritted his teeth. Damn it, as a man, what is there to be afraid of? If I chicken out at such a crucial moment, am I still a man?

With this thought, he steeled his resolve, turned his head, preparing for the next step. But at this moment, with her face blushing red and looking down, Wanqing whispered softly, "I... I want to eat some popcorn."

Uh...

With an awkward smile, Ling Chen reluctantly let go of her hand.

What a pity!

Now even the chance was gone.

One and a half hours passed, and the two of them finally finished watching the movie amidst their 'painful' endurance.

Upon exiting the hall, the young girl who was in charge of ticket sales looked at them with a smiling face and politely said, "We welcome both of you to come again."

"Definitely, definitely," Ling Chen mumbled perfunctorily, quickly pushing Nanrong Wanqing into the elevator.

All the way back to the car, Nanrong Wanqing remained silent, just fiddling with the hem of her clothing.

"Are you hungry?" Ling Chen broke the silence between them, asking.

Nanrong Wanqing nodded lightly, "A little."

"Let's go, I'll take you to eat something." Saying that, he started the car and slowly drove onto the road.

Before long, they drove to the most bustling area of the city center. This was Snack Street, full of street stalls featuring delicacies from all over the country. As soon as night falls, visitors swarm the area, creating a lively atmosphere.

Pushing the wheelchair, Ling Chen pointed to a stall selling mung bean cakes, "Want to try? The taste here is very authentic."

"Okay."

Nanrong Wanqing looked eager to try. To a commoner, a five-star dinner might be a luxury, but to the truly wealthy, isn't street food a kind of luxury as well?

Both watching a movie and trying street food were things she wanted to experience, and Ling Chen had brought her to see them tonight. She was curious about how Ling Chen knew of these interests of hers, could it be... a telepathic connection?

Chapter 165 Street Snacks

She had no idea that last time, while injured in the woods and slipping in and out of consciousness, she had mentioned many of her likes, all of which Ling Chen had memorized without missing a word. However, she completely forgot what she had said once she came to.

Walking along, browsing the stalls, and snacking away, Nanrong Wanqing's pretty face was lit up with a bright, happy smile. She had almost forgotten how long it had been since she felt this happy.

After finishing some mung bean cakes and pine flower pastries, Nanrong Wanqing's eyes suddenly sparkled as she pointed at a stall ahead, excitedly saying, "Ling Chen, they have rice noodle rolls over there, I want some."

"Alright, let's go get some."

Ling Chen smiled faintly, pushing Nanrong Wanqing to the stall, "Vendor, two bowls of rice noodle rolls, no chili."

Seeing a round table set up beside them, Nanrong Wanqing couldn't help but suggest, "Let's sit down and eat. You must be tired from walking so much."

"It's nothing." Even though he said that, Ling Chen still sat down at the table.

Before long, two bowls of rice noodle rolls were brought to them.

"How does it taste?"

"Delicious," Nanrong Wanqing said with a satisfied smile, "These rice noodle rolls have to be eaten fresh. Lin used to buy them for me, but the taste changes by the time she brings them home."

"Take your time, there are over a hundred stalls here, we can go through them one by one."

"No, I can't... I'm afraid of gaining weight," Nanrong Wanqing said shyly. "I seldom eat late-night snacks, this is the first time I'm making an exception."

"You have such a good figure, you won't get fat. Just eat to your heart's content without worrying."

Hearing his compliment, Nanrong Wanqing smiled slightly and continued to savor the delicious rice noodle rolls.

Before long, more and more people arrived at the stall, and the round table was filled with patrons. However, everyone's gaze seemed to settle on Nanrong Wanqing.

No wonder, as one of East Sea City's golden flowers, Nanrong Wanqing's charm was irresistible. Despite the disability in her legs, her delicate beauty and demeanor were akin to a goddess descending to Earth.

Moreover, her sitting in a wheelchair added a touch of vulnerability, eliciting an instinctive tenderness from the depths of people's hearts.

"Beautiful lady, hello, let's get acquainted. My name is Jiang Yunkai," a young man sitting nearby initiated a conversation.

Nanrong Wanqing gave him a brief glance without a word, focusing on her rice noodle rolls instead.

"Beauty, I..."

"Pal, stick to your rice noodle rolls and don't bother others for no reason," Ling Chen interrupted him impatiently.

Jiang Yunkai sized up Ling Chen and smiled showing his teeth, "Ah, so you have a boyfriend."

Ling Chen nodded, appreciating that the guy got the hint.

"But having a boyfriend doesn't matter. Haven't married yet, and even if you are married, divorce is always an option."

This sudden statement from Jiang Yunkai instantly irked Ling Chen.

"Ling Chen, I'm done eating, let's go," Nanrong Wanqing put down her chopsticks and spoke softly.

Seeing her speak up, Ling Chen abandoned the idea of bickering with the other man, pushed the wheelchair back onto the street, and continued their stroll.

Jiang Yunkai's mouth twitched into a smirk as he stood up and started to follow them, matching their pace.

Seeing that he kept following them, Ling Chen frowned slightly, this guy really didn't know when to quit.

Afraid that he would take action, Nanrong Wanqing advised, "There are plenty of people like him, no need to get into a squabble."

Not too far away, Ling Chen noticed a grilled skewer stall by the road and stopped, "There are skewers over there, do you want some?"

Nanrong Wanqing was a bit eager but hesitated seeing so much meat.

Knowing what she was thinking, Ling Chen grinned widely, "It's fine, eating one or two won't make you fat."

"Well... okay then," Nanrong Wanqing ultimately could not resist the temptation of delicious food.

"Boss, give me five skewers."

"Okay..." The stall owner was about to respond, but his face suddenly changed, and he corrected himself: "Sorry, we're all sold out."

Ling Chen pointed to the heaps of skewers nearby, "Are you treating me like I'm blind? There are so many here, aren't they yours?"

"I already said they're sold out, what's with all the useless talk? Hurry up and move, don't block my business."

As he spoke, the stall owner cautiously glanced behind Ling Chen.

Noticing his gaze, Ling Chen immediately turned his head and saw Jiang Yunkai standing behind him with a smile.

"Boss, give this lady here a few skewers," Jiang Yunkai stepped forward and greeted the owner.

"Alright! Brother Jiang, please wait a moment, they'll be ready shortly."

Ling Chen looked at Jiang Yunkai with a playful gaze, noticing that this young man wielded some clout on this street; even the stall owner seemed to fear him.

Having dealt with Jiang Hao and the others for so long, he was all too familiar with such characters.

"Ling Chen, let's go back, it's getting late and we have to work tomorrow."

Nanrong Wanqing spoke up, not wanting him to get into a conflict.

"Okay."

Ling Chen hesitated for a moment and then nodded.

But at that moment, suddenly, from the opposite side of the street came a burst of cursing, followed by a clanging noise, as if something had been smashed to the ground, sending numerous tourists running over here with panic on their faces.

Beside him, Jiang Yunkai's expression turned cold as he walked straight over.

Before long, a group of more than thirty thugs wielding steel rods surged forward, smashing all the stalls on the street, striking people without mercy.

"Stop it!" yelled Jiang Yunkai.

"Brother Jiang is here."

"Brother Jiang, you must stand up for us."

The stall owners around saw Jiang Yunkai as if they had seen a lifesaver, and they ran over to him one after another.

Seeing the actions of these stall owners, Ling Chen was somewhat surprised. He had originally thought Jiang Yunkai to be a common street thug, which is why these stall owners were afraid of him. Now, it seemed that was not the case.

It looked like the stall owners respected Jiang Yunkai quite a bit; such respect was not typically accorded to an ordinary street thug.

"Everyone, step back. I'll handle this."

With those words, Jiang Yunkai stepped forward, gave the thugs a scan, then fixed his gaze on the leader and frowned, "Huang Zhan, I've warned you, you can't touch this street. Did you take my words as a joke?"

"Jiang, don't get too cocky. From today on, this street is under the control of the Green Tiger Gang. If you dare to interfere, don't blame me for being unkind."

The Green Tiger Gang?

Ling Chen's mind stirred; wasn't Qi Jianhui the boss of the Green Tiger Gang?

As he contemplated, he heard Jiang Yunkai say: "Come at me if you have the guts. If I take a step back, then I'm not Jiang Yunkai."

"Fine, you're asking for it. Brothers, grab your weapons, charge!"

Facing more than thirty thugs, Jiang Yunkai was calm and unabashed, aggressively charging forward.

His arms twisted, his waist turned, and with a simple move, a thug was knocked to the ground.

Watching his movements, Ling Chen's eyes lit up, thoughtfully observing Jiang Yunkai.

Chapter 166 Jiang Yunkai

Jiang Yunkai's movements were as fluid as drifting clouds and flowing water, without a hint of stagnation. Each motion seemed to have been honed a thousand times, picked up effortlessly, very casual. Yet, each move contained a powerful force. With just a light touch, a hoodlum was sent flying far away, crashing heavily to the ground, crying out in pain.

Ling Chen watched quietly, nodding occasionally and praising Jiang Yunkai's martial arts skills.

His skills were honed in real combat, focusing on lethal intent, with big and bold moves where every strike was meant to kill. Thus, his martial arts had no fixed routines; every punch and kick aimed to quickly eliminate the enemy.

But Jiang Yunkai was different; the aura he exuded clearly indicated a well-trained background. Judging by his moves, he likely practiced traditional martial arts, Xingyi Fist.

Xingyi Fist is one of Huaxia's traditional martial arts, celebrated alongside Tai Chi Boxing and Trigram Palm as one of the three major Inner Boxing styles.

Assessing martial arts isn't just about observing the physical form; the most important aspect lies in the artistic conception. If it possesses only form without substance, it's merely a useless decoration.

The reason Jiang Yunkai's martial arts captivated Ling Chen was that every move contained the essence of Xingyi Fist, demonstrating that he had grasped the profound mysteries and essence of the boxing technique.

Such a person can truly be called a master.

Jiang Yunkai had interrupted his and Nanrong Wanqing's private moment earlier, which initially annoyed him. However, after witnessing Jiang Yunkai's martial arts, he grew increasingly intrigued by him.

At such a young age to possess such skills, his mentor must be extraordinary.

In no time, Huang Zhan's thugs were all knocked down by Jiang Yunkai.

"Isn't it time for you to leave?" Jiang Yunkai stood with his hands behind his back, looking down at Huang Zhan on the ground with a cold tone.

Huang Zhan clenched his teeth: "Jiang, don't get cocky. Offending our Green Tiger Gang won't make your life any easier. Brothers, let's go!"

Watching the gang of hoodlums flee dejectedly, the surrounding vendors burst into applause and cheers.

"Jiang is really tough."

"Indeed, thanks to Jiang, we can run our businesses smoothly."

"..."

Suddenly, the crowd was filled with words of praise for Jiang Yunkai.

Jiang Yunkai smiled slightly, then turned to look at Nanrong Wanqing and walked over to a roadside stall, "Boss, are the skewers ready?"

"They're ready, Jiang. From now on, skewers for you are on the house."

"Thanks!"

Jiang Yunkai took the skewers without any reserve and approached Nanrong Wanqing with a radiant smile, "Beauty, your skewers."

Nanrong Wanqing shook her head lightly, murmuring distantly, "These are your skewers." After speaking, she shifted her gaze towards Ling Chen.

The latter patted Jiang Yunkai on the shoulder and grinned, "Buddy, I know you're great, but even if you are, flirting with my girlfriend in front of me is not right."

Jiang Yunkai didn't even turn his head, "I've said it before, as long as this beauty isn't married, everyone has a chance to pursue her. Beauty, I don't even know your name yet?"

"Boring." Nanrong Wanqing coldly spit out two words, then turned her wheelchair and left.

Feeling Nanrong Wanqing's icy demeanor, Jiang Yunkai was momentarily stunned, seemingly not expecting such a frosty reception. He's good-looking and skilled in martial arts; don't all women like men who can provide a sense of security?

"Beauty, don't go."

Seeing Nanrong Wanqing walking away, he immediately chased after her.

However, having just taken two steps, he felt someone grab his shoulder.

Turning his head, he saw the smiling Ling Chen behind him, and Jiang Yunkai frowned, "Take your hand off."

"Pal, stop chasing. The world is full of beauties, why don't you go find another one?"

"You also know the world is full of beauties, so why don't you let me have this beauty and you go after other women?"

Ling Chen's smile remained unchanged, but his eyes narrowed, "Buddy, I'm advising you nicely, don't overstep."

"Or what, you want to teach me a lesson?" Jiang Yunkai said dismissively, "I'll say it again, take your hand off."

Ling Chen did not move, his hand still gripping his shoulder.

Seeing this, Jiang Yunkai snorted lightly and leaned his shoulder back forcefully, trying to push Ling Chen away and make him retreat. But as soon as he made his move, his expression changed. Ling Chen's hand was like an iron clamp, firmly locking onto his shoulder. He couldn't make a move or even budge; all his strength seemed to be dissolved invisibly.

At this moment, the disdain in Jiang Yunkai's eyes gradually receded, turning solemn.

"So it turns out you're also a martial artist."

"I'm different from you; I practice unorthodox methods, I can't compare with someone from a proper lineage like you."

Jiang Yunkai frowned slightly, a glint flashing in Mo Che's eyes. He then gathered his strength and struck again. However, Ling Chen stood firm like a rock, rooted to the ground. No matter how hard he tried, Ling Chen's body did not move an inch.

Having used less than half of his strength in his first attempt and going all out in the second one, yet still unable to free himself from Ling Chen horrified him.

After two failures, he immediately gave up the idea of trying again.

His face turned serious, and he bowed with his hands clasped, "I didn't expect to meet a master like you in East Sea City. I was rash before, please forgive me."

"No worries, just don't try to snatch my girlfriend again." Saying this, Ling Chen looked towards Nanrong Wanqing not far away, "Brother Jiang, I have to go now, we'll chat another time."

"Sure, I live on this street, ask any vendor here, they all know me. Oh, right!" Jiang Yunkai seemed to remember something, quickly handing over some skewers he was holding, "Sorry about earlier, please apologize to your girlfriend for me."

"It's fine, she won't mind. Let's go!"

Ling Chen waved his hand and quickly returned to Nanrong Wanqing's side, pushing her wheelchair out of the street.

Eating the tasty skewers, Nanrong Wanqing curiously asked, "What were you guys talking about just now? I thought you were going to fight."

"No, Jiang Yunkai isn't a bad person."

"How do you know? Just because he gave you some skewers for free?"

Ling Chen chuckled, "You're overthinking."

In fact, when Jiang Yunkai fought with those hoodlums earlier, Ling Chen had already noticed. Jiang Yunkai was measured in his strikes, and those hoodlums only suffered superficial injuries, nothing serious.

For martial artists, moral character is crucial, and this can be discerned from how one conducts themselves. Thus, through Jiang Yunkai's actions, Ling Chen knew he wasn't a bad person. If it weren't for that, he would have knocked him down with a punch much earlier.

In this East Sea City, it's rare to encounter a young person of similar age with remarkable skills. Although they only exchanged a few words earlier, both had the intent to make further acquaintance.

Chapter 167 The Cunning Little Hua

Back at the Nanrong Family.

Ling Chen escorted Nanrong Wanqing to the living room, watched her ascend the stairs, and then turned back to his own bedroom.

At that moment, Nanrong Wanqing suddenly looked back, and seeing Ling Chen about to enter his room, she couldn't help but speak out, "Ling Chen."

"Hmm?" Ling Chen turned around, "What's up?"

"Thank you for your company tonight, I haven't been this happy in a long time."

Ling Chen grinned, "Why be polite? If you feel like going out again, just let me know, and I'll take you out."

Nanrong Wanqing nodded slightly and went straight back to her room.

After taking a shower, Ling Chen lay in bed, smiling foolishly to himself as he thought about the evening spent alone with Nanrong Wanqing. He remembered when he first joined the company, Nanrong Wanqing was extremely resistant to him, wishing to drive him out. Now, her attitude towards him had greatly changed.

This transformation began after they returned from the forest last time.

Upon reflection, Ling Chen realized that Nanrong Wanqing was indeed an alluring woman. Despite her disability, it didn't stop her from being a golden flower of East Sea City.

Beautiful, talented, and wealthy – these were probably the main reasons she was considered a golden flower.

Thinking of her legs, Ling Chen sighed internally; that must be the only blemish on her beauty.

If only he could cure her legs, that would be wonderful.

At that thought, he suddenly got up from bed, turned on the light and computer, and logged into a website, then accessed a private cloud storage. After layers of decryption, the contents of the cloud storage finally appeared.

Within this cloud storage, there were dozens of images, all of which were copies of content from an ancient tome that he kept online for easy reference.

No one would have imagined that this hidden cloud storage contained valuable ancient manuscripts.

After a while, Ling Chen found those images related to medical records. These images were filled with ancient seal script, which he had even learned to read fluently to understand these manuscripts.

The pictures documented many ancient prescriptions, each with various effects. Unfortunately, the medical skills he learned from them were only superficial. Many of the profound techniques were beyond his grasp, and he never had the opportunity to try them.

After studying for two or three hours, seeing that it was getting late, Ling Chen decided to print those images and planned to discuss them with Zhu Xiaozhu the next day.

Zhu Xiaozhu was proficient in ancient Chinese medicine and he believed she could offer a lot of advice.

Just as he thought of Zhu Xiaozhu, Ling Chen slapped his forehead, suddenly remembering something. Today, on his way back from the Martial Arts Academy, Little Hua placed a bet with him, having arranged to meet the next evening to prove that Zhu Xiaozhu liked him.

Thinking of the date with Nanrong Wanqing tonight and facing Zhu Xiaozhu tomorrow, he scratched his head. If it was true as Little Hua said, that Zhu Xiaozhu liked him, should he accept it? If he did, what would happen with Nanrong Wanqing?

He could feel that Nanrong Wanqing did not resist interacting with him, which meant something to him beyond any doubt.

To say he had no feelings for Nanrong Wanqing would be a lie. After all, they had shared adversity, and he had taken a great advantage of her hospitality. It wouldn't be right to just walk away as if nothing had happened.

Thinking of all this, he felt a tremendous headache.

Damn it, he thought. Previously, when he wanted to find a girlfriend, he couldn't; now, two exceptional beauties appeared in his life simultaneously. As a man, he naturally wished to have both. However, that was clearly impossible.

Leaving aside that the law would not permit it, both Nanrong Wanqing and Zhu Xiaozhu were renowned talents. Any talented woman has her pride and would not share a man with another woman – that was just impractical.

Moreover, Nanrong Wanqing and Zhu Xiaozhu had grievances between them.

"Let it be, we can talk about this tomorrow." He thought to himself. Perhaps he was overthinking it; Zhu Xiaozhu didn't like him at all.

A night passed.

The next day.

Qingyun Martial Arts Academy.

"Xiaozhu."

Early in the morning, Little Hua pushed open the door and rushed into Zhu Xiaozhu's room. Seeing Zhu Xiaozhu still asleep in bed, a sly glint flickered in Little Hua's round eyes. Then she quietly climbed onto the bed and burrowed under the covers.

"Ah!"

Suddenly, the room was filled with a high-pitched scream of embarrassment and anger.

"Xiaozhu, what are you shouting for?"

Zhu Xiaozhu's cheeks flushed with embarrassment as she glared at Little Hua, pushing her off, and said irritably, "You're not allowed to pinch me there again next time... pinch me there, or else I'll spank you."

Little Hua hugged her smooth, delicate arms, giggling, "We're both women, Xiaozhu, are you still embarrassed? Xiaozhu, I heard that a woman's breasts need to be massaged to grow bigger, is that true?"

Zhu Xiaozhu's face turned even redder as she scolded, "You little rascal, who's been telling you these things?"

"Come on, Xiaozhu, just tell me, you're a medical student, you must know the truth."

"What does a little kid like you need to know that for?"

Still laughing, Little Hua said, "If you don't say it, I'll take it as you agree." Then, leaning close to Zhu Xiaozhu's ear, she whispered softly, "I just gave you a little massage, and I feel like you still have room for improvement. Why don't you give it a try, maybe they'll grow."

"That's easy for you to say." Zhu Xiaozhu's eyes were shy and annoyed as she raised her arm and gently patted Little Hua's butt.

Little Hua didn't care about Zhu Xiaozhu's punishment, "If you don't want to massage them yourself, then find someone to help you. Or... maybe ask big brother to do it, I think he'd be quite suitable."

"You..."

Hearing her mention Ling Chen, Zhu Xiaozhu's pretty face grew even redder, provoking a desire to cherish her.

"Xiaozhu, do you like big brother?"

"Who said that?"

"So you don't like him then." Little Hua pretended to sigh heavily, disappointed, "Poor big brother."

Zhu Xiaozhu asked in confusion, "Why is he pitiful?"

"Big brother told me the other day that he likes you a lot. But he's also afraid of being rejected by you, so he's never dared to confess. He said that right now he doesn't have a house or a car, and doesn't have any savings, so he's worried that you'd look down on him, so..."

Before she could finish, Zhu Xiaozhu interrupted, dissatisfied, "I'm not that kind of materialistic woman."

"Right, that's what I told big brother too. He asked me to pass on a message to you, but since you don't like him, I guess there's no need for me to relay it." Saying this, Little Hua sneaked a glance at Zhu Xiaozhu and got ready to get out of bed.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to return a call to big brother, tell him to give up on this idea. My Xiaozhu doesn't think highly of him."

Zhu Xiaozhu suddenly became anxious and blurted out, "Don't!"

Chapter 168 The Plan Succeeds

"What?" Little Hua turned her head, pretending not to have heard, but a mischievous, triumphant grin twinkled in her bright, large eyes.

"I... I said..." Zhu Xiaozhu stammered, finding it somewhat difficult to express herself.

"Xiaozhu, if you don't say it now, I'll have to make a phone call. Alas, if Big Brother finds out, he probably won't come to our Martial Arts Academy again, and who knows if there will be another chance to see him in the future."

Hearing this, Zhu Xiaozhu quickly grabbed her hand, and with a touch of shyness asked, "What... what message did he ask you to pass on to me?"

"Big Brother said that he has reserved dinner tonight at a restaurant and would like to invite you. If you're interested in him, then go meet him. If not, I'll make an excuse for you."

"Which restaurant?"

Little Hua said with a beaming smile, "Xiaozhu, by the look of it, are you planning to go?"

"I..." Zhu Xiaozhu, with her head lowered, hesitated.

"Xiaozhu, think it over. Big Brother is a good man. He's helped us so many times. You really shouldn't miss this chance. If Big Brother takes a liking to some other woman later, you'll regret it." Little Hua continued to spur her on, eagerly persuading.

Zhu Xiaozhu bit the corner of her lip, and after a while, she spoke hesitantly, "Tell me the restaurant's address and time, I'll think about it."

Little Hua snickered secretly; she knew Zhu Xiaozhu too well. Such words meant she had already agreed.

After leaving behind the restaurant's details and the time, Little Hua bounced out of the room. Just as she left, she bumped into He Ziyun, who was in the midst of his Breathing Control in the courtyard.

"You little rascal, did you secretly use my money to book the restaurant?"

Little Hua replied discontentedly, "Old man, why are you so stingy? It's just a few thousand bucks. Besides, don't you want Big Brother to be together with Xiaozhu? If things work out, I can just ask Big Brother to pay you back. Hmph, he still owes me two boxes of lollipops."

He Ziyun shook his head helplessly. "You, you're betraying your Xiaozhu for two boxes of lollipops. If she found out, who knows how sad she'd be."

"I'm thinking of her lifelong happiness," Little Hua defended.

During this conversation, there came a knock at the door from outside the Martial Arts Academy.

"Who is it?"

Little Hua was a bit puzzled—it was early morning, who would come here? Could it be Big Brother couldn't wait to see Xiaozhu?

With that thought, she hurried to the door and opened it. Instantly, a well-dressed man greeted her politely, "Hello, may I speak with Miss Zhu?"

"Who are you? What do you want with Xiaozhu?"

"Not him seeking, but I need to find her." As the words fell, a handsome young man with a gentle smile approached, escorted by several suited bodyguards, "Little sister, you should have seen me at Nanrong's house last time. My name is Zhu Hong, and I am your Xiaozhu's brother."

"I remember you."

"May I see her now?"

Little Hua hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "Come in, then."

Upon entering the room, Zhu Hong looked around and asked, "Little sister, why don't I see the others?"

Little Hua was also perplexed; the old man was still here just a moment ago, and now he was nowhere to be seen.

"They haven't gotten up yet," she replied offhandedly. "Please have a seat, Xiaozhu will be here soon."

A few minutes later, Zhu Xiaozhu, fresh from her morning routines, gracefully walked into the main hall of the Martial Arts Academy.

Seeing her, Zhu Hong immediately stood up from the chair, welcoming her with a smile, "Xiaozhu."

"Big Brother, why are you so early today?"

"An urgent matter at the company, I have to take a trip out of town soon. I wanted to see you before I leave. I didn't disturb your rest, did I?"

"No, it's fine. I was already awake."

Zhu Hong nodded, then suddenly asked, "Xiaozhu, how are you and Ling Chen getting along?"

Zhu Xiaozhu was taken aback, somewhat surprised, and unsure why Zhu Hong would suddenly bring up Ling Chen.

"It's fine. We are friends." As she said this, her thoughts inadvertantly turned to the evening's appointment, painting a touch of blush on her pretty face. "Big Brother, do you need to see him for something?"

"Not really," Zhu Hong waved his hand. "It's like this; I have a misunderstanding with Ling Chen that may not be resolved in a few words. Since he's your friend, I wouldn't want our issues to affect your relationship, so I wanted to tell you in advance."

"Misunderstanding? What kind of misunderstanding?"

"That... let's not talk about it. It's hard to clarify in a few words. Alright, let's not talk about him now. I came especially to see you. Also, I brought some Beijing delicacies you love."

"Thank you, Big Brother."

"We're siblings, no need for formalities." After finishing, he looked at the time and stood up, "It's getting late. I need to catch my flight. I'll call you after I get back."

"Sure, Big Brother, travel safely."

After leaving Qingyun Martial Arts Hall, Zhu Hong got back into his car and looked at the man beside him, asking, "How's it going?"

"All set up, and the signal is stable." The man tapped on his laptop for a bit before turning the screen towards Zhu Hong. In an instant, the screen displayed several surveillance feeds, with Zhu Xiaozhu passing through one of them in the courtyard.

"Very good."

Zhu Hong nodded his approval. During his chat with Zhu Xiaozhu, his guards had discreetly installed micro-cameras around the Martial Arts Academy, allowing them to monitor the entirety of the establishment.

"By the way, boss, the information you requested has been found."

With that, the man beside him handed over a folder.

Zhu Hong took it and browsed through, his brows soon furrowing, "You've investigated for so many days, and this is all the information you've found?"

"Boss, that Ling Chen's background is quite mysterious, and this is all the information available. The records show that he was previously in the army; I think he must have been a member of Huaxia's secret forces. People like him, once discharged, have their records sealed by the government, making them very hard to trace."

"Secret forces?" Zhu Hong murmured to himself. After pondering for a while, he said, "Get in touch with our contacts; use their resources. I want to see what kind of background this Ling Chen really has."

"Yes, sir."

8:30 in the morning.

Ling Chen was punctual in dropping off Nanrong Wanqing at her office. Just after returning to his own, he received a call from Little Hua.

"Xiyuan Restaurant, 7:30 tonight... Okay, got it. Uh... will Xiaozhu also be there?"

Little Hua giggled mysteriously on the phone, "You guess?" Leaving him with two exasperating words, she hung up.

This girl!

Ling Chen shook his head; with the restaurant already booked, it was certain that Zhu Xiaozhu would be there.

Checking the time, there were still eleven hours to go. At the moment, however, he couldn't help feeling nervous. Along with the nerves, there was also a little hint of anticipation.

Chapter 169 Clay Pot Rice

After dozing off in the office all morning, Ling Chen found it dull. Initially, he was supposed to escort Nanrong Wanqing back home at noon, but due to the company being busy, Nanrong Wanqing decided to stay and work overtime.

Following Tang Yuan and Wei Jun to the cafeteria, the three of them ordered some meals and found a spot to sit down.

They were just chatting when a slender, well-mannered young man with glasses approached with a tray in hand. Looking around and seeing that all the seats were taken except for a few empty ones, he hesitated before setting his sights on the vacant seat next to Ling Chen and headed over.

"Excuse me, may I... can I sit here?"

Ling Chen glanced at him and immediately grinned, "No need to be polite, have a seat."

Ling Chen had seen this bespectacled young man before—a couple of times at the restroom and once during a job interview when he accidentally walked into the conference room.

Among hundreds of people at Hongyu Group, it was interesting that they could bump into each other again; seemed like fate.

"Hey, I'm Ling Chen, this is Tang Yuan, Wei Jun, we're all members of the security department. How about you?" Ling Chen initiated a conversation.

"My name is Ji Beizhao, I work in the Market Research Department."

Ji Beizhao spoke in a gentle and quiet voice, nearly like a woman, and even blushed talking to so many people, which everyone found amusing.

Ling Chen was curious; employees in the Market Research Department have to deeply engage with the market and interact with people, was Ji Beizhao's character really suited for this?

Wei Jun casually remarked, "Hey, Ji, based on your accent, you don't seem local."

"I used to study abroad and just recently returned home."

"Wow, can't tell; turns out you're a foreign graduate."

Ji Beizhao smiled shyly, "Many in Hongyu Group are high-caliber talents returned from studying abroad; I'm nothing special."

Ling Chen silently nodded; the young man was quite humble, and his personality seemed fine. Staying in such a big company, it wouldn't be a bad idea to make more friends. Usually hanging around with the big guys from the security department was dull, so making friends from other departments could be a good thing.

After chatting for more than half an hour, Ling Chen saw a delicate-looking girl carrying a tray sit down at the table next to them.

"Lan," he waved in greeting.

This girl's name was Wang Lan, secretary to Nanrong Wanqing.

"Mr. Ling," Wang Lan greeted him with a smile.

"Lan, has the chairman had lunch yet?"

Wang Lan shook her head, "The chairman is still busy; I just asked her, she said she doesn't have time to eat now and asked me to keep her meal."

Ling Chen checked the time; it was almost 1:30 pm. That woman really didn't know how to take care of herself, no matter how busy, she should eat first.

He stood up immediately, "You guys keep talking, I'll go bring some food to the chairman."

Tang Yuan teased, "The old virgin is catching on, finally caring about a female colleague?"

"Get lost."

"Old virgin?" Hearing this peculiar nickname, Wei Jun chuckled looking at Ling Chen, "Ling, no wonder you wouldn't come out with me for some fun at night, turns out it's because..."

Ling Chen's face rarely blushed, he glared and said, "Don't listen to his nonsense, I'm off!"

Originally, Ling Chen wanted to get Nanrong Wanqing a meal from the cafeteria, but it was so late that the food had already gone cold. Thinking of Nanrong Wanqing's delicate physique, Ling Chen simply ran out of the company and bought a clay pot rice from a restaurant across the street, which he brought to the chairman's office.

He knocked on the door and heard Nanrong Wanqing's voice from inside, Ling Chen gently pushed the door open and strode in.

At that moment, Nanrong Wanqing was still buried in work at her desk, not even lifting her head.

"Lan, the document I was asking you for just now, give it to me."

While speaking, she was seriously signing a document with a pen, and raised her other hand slightly towards the outer edge of the desk.

Ling Chen helplessly shook his head; this woman actually mistook him for the secretary, Wang Lan.

He stepped forward and placed the freshly-bought clay pot rice directly onto her hand. Feeling the unexpected weight in her hand, Nanrong Wanqing immediately lifted her head. Seeing Ling Chen in front of her, she expressed her surprise, "Why is it you?"

Ling Chen chided, "Look at the time, no matter how busy you are, you should eat first. Eating well gives you the strength to work. Here, this clay pot rice was just bought, hurry up and eat it while it's warm."

Hearing the care in his words, Nanrong Wanqing's heart warmed, and a small smile unconsciously spread across her lips.

Opening the lunchbox and smelling the delicious aroma, her beautiful eyes suddenly lit up with a peculiar sparkle, curiously looking at Ling Chen, "How did you know I like fish-flavored shredded pork?"

"I just picked randomly, glad you like it," Ling Chen said, smiling.

Of course, he would not tell Nanrong Wanqing that he had specifically made a call to Nanrong Hao, who as a brother, knew his sister best.

However, to Nanrong Wanqing, it felt like a special twist of fate. Could it be true telepathy? Thinking this, her pretty face blushed slightly as she quickly bowed her head and started eating the fish-flavored shredded pork in the lunchbox, hiding her embarrassment.

After a few bites, she noticed Ling Chen was still standing there and couldn't help asking, "Aren't you going back to your office?"

"I'll wait until you finish eating. Once you're done, I'll leave." Saying this, Ling Chen found a chair to sit on, crossing his legs and casually pulling out a toothpick to chew on.

Seeing his relaxed demeanor, Nanrong Wanqing reprimanded him, "Mind your image, this is the chairman's office, what if someone saw?"

"What's there to be afraid of." Ling Chen said nonchalantly, "The chairman herself doesn't mind, who dares to care. Come on, stop worrying about me and eat your meal."

This jerk... who said I didn't mind.

Nanrong Wanqing muttered to herself but did not argue further, burying her head in her fragrant meal.

With her usual appetite, she would be full after half of it. But today, somehow under Ling Chen's 'supervision', she managed to clean up the pot entirely, and even felt somewhat reluctant to stop.

"I'm done," she presented the empty lunchbox in front of Ling Chen, "Don't bring me this to eat anymore."

"Why, wasn't it tasty?"

"I'm afraid of getting fat."

She usually controlled her portion to maintain her figure.

Ling Chen nonchalantly said, "It's fine, a bit chubbier is good, feels more substantial."

"How do you know I'm not... substantial..." Nanrong Wanqing blurted out, but as soon as the words left her mouth, she immediately stopped herself, her face turning crimson, unable to utter another word.

Last time he held her naked body, he probably knew perfectly well where she was more or less endowed.

Seeing Nanrong Wanqing's enticingly bashful appearance, Ling Chen could guess what she was thinking, feeling a bit embarrassed. Not knowing how to continue the conversation, he quickly cleared his throat, "Well... if there's nothing else, I'll get going first, you continue with your work." Saying that, he quickly walked out of the office.

Chapter 170 Candlelight Dinner

Watching Ling Chen walk to the door, Nanrong Wanqing suddenly thought of something and hurriedly called after him.

"Is there something else?" Ling Chen turned around.

"Do you have time tonight?"

"Tonight? I have a dinner appointment with friends. What's up?"

"Can't it be another day?"

Ling Chen hesitated for a moment, shook his head with a face of apology, "The person I'm meeting today is quite important, so... Did you need me for something tonight? If it's urgent, I can..."

"It's nothing." Nanrong Wanqing took over the conversation, "Just asking casually. Since you're busy, let's forget about it."

"Oh, then I'll be off now."

As she watched Ling Chen leave the office, the blush in Nanrong Wanqing's beautiful eyes gradually faded. However, thinking about Ling Chen being unavailable tonight couldn't help but make her feel somewhat disappointed.

In the evening.

After work, Ling Chen took Nanrong Wanqing back to Nanrong Family's home. Glancing at the time, it was already close to six-thirty, leaving only an hour to get ready.

After a quick shower, he changed into a set of relatively fresh clothes and then drove alone to the destination, Xiyuan Restaurant.

Shortly after his departure, a white Maserati slowly entered Wealthy Manor and stopped at the Nanrong Family's front door.

The car door opened, and a pair of slender beautiful legs stretched out first; followed by the youthful and pretty Su Lin, who dashed into the villa like a breeze.

"Wanqing."

Upon entering, she excitedly called out.

"I'm here." As she finished speaking, Nanrong Wanqing appeared at the top of the stairs in her wheelchair.

Seeing her outfit, Su Lin couldn't help but exclaim "Aiya" and pouted, "Why haven't you changed clothes yet? It's almost time." Saying this, she hurried up the stairs, helped push the wheelchair into Nanrong Wanqing's room and urged, "Hurry up and change, we leave in half an hour."

Nanrong Wanqing looked helplessly at her but complied obediently.

Today was her big day; she couldn't spoil her mood.

In less than half an hour, Nanrong Wanqing came out of her room first. She usually wore plain whites, but today she had put on a beige long dress. Her jet-black hair fell like a waterfall, setting off her stunning beauty. Since the climate had entered autumn and the evening breeze was cool, she added a light-colored shawl on top. With her beauty and grace, she conveyed an additional air of nobility.

Soon after, Su Lin also came out of the bedroom.

She was dressed very formally today, in a pink dress, with her shoulders slightly exposed and the hem adorned with shiny silver foil. Under the lighting, it sparkled brilliantly. Her smooth hair slipped down her shoulders, and her delicate face was lightly made-up. A pure white diamond necklace graced her tender neck, complimenting her fair skin.

Already beautiful by nature, she became even more dazzling after a little dressing up, matching Nanrong Wanqing in splendor.

"How do I look, Wanqing?"

Su Lin twirled, with her dress fluttering like a blossoming violet, displaying her beautiful smile.

Nanrong Wanqing nodded gently, her eyes showing a trace of admiration.

"Sister, cousin, the car is all ready. Shall we head out?"

At this point, Nanrong Hao walked in from outside. Compared to his two sisters, he was dressed more casually, as always.

"Let's go. If we don't leave now, I'm afraid we'll be late."

Nanrong Hao looked around and asked curiously, "Sister, where's Chen? Isn't he ready yet?"

"You didn't mention it; I almost forgot." Su Lin, already at the door, turned back and said, "How come I don't see Ling Chen? Wanqing, didn't you tell him?"

"He's got something on tonight, he's already left."

"Left?" Su Lin was slightly disappointed, "Since he's got something to do, let's leave it at that."

Dusk, 7:20 PM.

Ling Chen arrived at Xiyuan Restaurant ahead of time, quietly waiting in the hall for Zhu Xiaozhu's arrival. Thinking about seeing Zhu Xiaozhu soon, he immediately felt nervous, with sweat continuously breaking out on his palms.

On a normal day, he wouldn't be so nervous, but today's meeting was unusual for him, hence the inevitable nerves.

Xiyuan Restaurant is a newly-opened high-end establishment; the interior decor is very opulent, with the spacious hall furnished with over twenty tables and chairs. When the restaurant is full, the staff will use screens to partition the area around, creating a private little space to avoid disturbance from others, providing attentive service.

After waiting for a few minutes, a graceful figure slowly stepped into the entrance of Xiyuan Restaurant. Ling Chen raised his head, and his gaze was instantly captivated.

Zhu Xiaozhu was wearing a simple dress with flat shoes, carrying an exquisitely small shoulder bag – the usual attire. However, the one difference for tonight, especially, was that Zhu Xiaozhu had deliberately adorned herself with a snow-white pearl necklace and teardrop-shaped earrings.

Though merely two unostentatious pieces of jewelry, they added a touch of enchanting charm to Zhu Xiaozhu's fresh and elegant demeanor, like a radiant moon fringed by dazzling stars – extraordinarily charming.

"Xiaozhu."

Ling Chen quickly stood up and waved to Zhu Xiaozhu in greeting.

Seeing him, a faint blush crept onto Zhu Xiaozhu's pretty face as she walked straight over.

"Please, take a seat." Ling Chen gallantly pulled out a chair for her.

Once Zhu Xiaozhu was seated, Ling Chen snapped his fingers, summoning the waiter. He then passed the menu to Zhu Xiaozhu, "Take a look at what you'd like to eat."

The restaurant offered a fusion of Chinese and Western cuisine, catering to all tastes. Zhu Xiaozhu, being from Beijing, still preferred the flavors of the north.

After placing the order, two waiters promptly set up screens, crafting an isolated world for two.

Facing each other, upon looking into Zhu Xiaozhu's bright, limpid eyes, a gentle ripple spread across Ling Chen's heart. Sensing the unusual look in his eyes, Zhu Xiaozhu couldn't help but lower her head, the glow of blush spreading across her tender, pale cheeks, causing Ling Chen's heart to skip a beat.

Just then, a waiter entered, replacing the vase on the table with two candlesticks in the center, and poured them a glass of red wine.

Moreover, even the lights overhead gradually dimmed, allowing the romantic glow of candlelight to pervade the small screened-off space.

"This is..."

Ling Chen looked at the waiter, puzzled.

With a smile, the latter said, "Sir, this was your request. Please enjoy your dinner at your leisure."

My request? Ling Chen was taken aback; when had he made such a request?

Could it be... Little Hua?

Yes, it must be that girl.

Ling Chen was torn between laughter and tears; that girl didn't even give him a heads-up, so he could be mentally prepared.

Looking at the candlelit dinner in front of him, Zhu Xiaozhu's pretty face reddened even more, her expressive eyes filled with shyness.

What woman doesn't like romance? Even someone as refined and unworldly as her harbors the same expectations as any ordinary woman in her heart.