

The Beauty 99

Chapter 99 The Secret of the Research Lab (Part 2)

The door opened, and Ling Chen followed closely behind Qin Lan in his wheelchair, striding into the room.

Immediately, a metallic skeleton placed in the center of the room appeared in Ling Chen's sight. The surface of the metal skeleton was a silver-gray color, and the material it was made from was unknown. In the center was a core circuit board, which still had its protective cover uninstalled, leaving the chips and wires exposed.

From the center of the circuit board, metallic rods extended on both the left and the right, each about two fingers in width. At the middle and end of each metal rod, there was a round fixing device.

Apart from the sides, there were also two metal supports beneath the circuit board, each about one meter long, and in the middle of the supports were two movable devices that could rotate back and forth.

At this moment, Ling Chen finally realized what Nanrong Wanqing's research was about.

Internationally, this type of metal skeleton goes by one general term, called Mechanical Exoskeleton, and can also be referred to as exoskeleton armor.

Such exoskeleton armor can be worn on the body, providing protection and additional power to enhance physical functions, such as allowing individuals with leg disabilities to walk freely.

Seeing Nanrong Wanqing sitting in her wheelchair, how could Ling Chen not understand the purpose behind her research? It was nothing more than her desire to regain the ability to walk.

Facing Ling Chen's gaze, Nanrong Wanqing said, "Now you know what this research lab is working on."

Ling Chen nodded, "Chairman, if I may ask, the existence of exoskeleton armor is no secret in the world and has been reported in the news. Why would those people be interested in your research?"

Qin Lan took over the conversation and counter-questioned, "Mr. Ling, how much do you know about exoskeleton armor?"

"Not much, I've never been involved in this field."

"There are many researchers around the world who study exoskeleton armor, including the military powers. The exoskeleton armor can not only allow disabled individuals to regain mobility but can also enhance various physical capabilities. To give a simple example, a person's limit might be running ten kilometers, but with exoskeleton armor, they could run twenty or thirty kilometers without feeling fatigued. Not only that, exoskeleton armor can significantly increase a person's abilities, such as jumping power and strength. Our country began the secret research of exoskeleton armor ten years ago, hoping to use it to enhance soldiers' combat abilities and survival skills."

Qin Lan paused slightly at this point and then continued, "While exoskeleton armor is powerful, it also has many limitations. The exoskeleton armor is mainly powered by electricity; the greater the usage intensity, the more electricity it consumes. In fact, many countries internationally have already developed working models of exoskeleton armor but have not been able to utilize them in the military domain. One reason is the unresolved issue of electricity consumption. The electric energy storage device cannot be too large, otherwise, it would increase the armor's weight and cause inconvenience in movement. To my knowledge, the current exoskeleton armors internationally can only operate for one to two hours on their internal power supply when disconnected from an external power source. This is not enough time for soldiers in field combat."

"Moreover, existing exoskeleton armors are too complicated and cumbersome, making them very troublesome to use and having very poor stealth as anyone can easily spot them. Because of these two reasons, exoskeleton armor has been unable to be applied in the military domain for a long time."

After listening to Qin Lan's explanation, Ling Chen had a general understanding of exoskeleton armor.

"Miss Qin, could it be that you have already overcome these two major obstacles?"

Qin Lan nodded, her eyes exuding an undeniable pride, "After years of research, we have successfully solved the material issues of the Exoskeleton armor. What you see now is the first completed product developed by us, made from a composite metal. It is a special metal created based on an alloy, not only convenient to carry but also extremely hard. It doesn't feel too burdensome to wear, even without electrical power. We have conducted several tests, wearing this set of Exoskeleton armor under our clothes and walking on the streets without anyone noticing. Its concealment is very good."

"As for its power system, our scientific researchers have found a solution and are currently testing it. Once successful, this Exoskeleton armor can operate autonomously for ten hours. Just these two points alone make this set of Exoskeleton armor sufficiently viable for military use."

"Qin Lan, show him the test data of this armor."

Upon Nanrong Wanqing's command, Qin Lan took out a document from her portfolio and handed it to Ling Chen.

Ling Chen casually flipped to the first page and his gaze froze, his face showing incredible astonishment. The power of the Exoskeleton armor was vividly demonstrated in these data.

Speed increased threefold, jumping power fourfold, strength enhanced fivefold. Ignoring everything else, just these three pieces of data alone were enough to reflect its might.

As a former member of the Ghost Squad, Ling Chen knew all too well what this meant. If this Exoskeleton armor became widespread in the military, it would be enough to change the status of special forces soldiers worldwide. The so-called king of soldiers, the elite special forces, would be nothing but dross in front of this Exoskeleton armor, not worth mentioning.

Unconsciously, Ling Chen felt his palms starting to sweat. At this moment, he finally understood why those people would go to such lengths to obtain this Exoskeleton armor.

Closing the document, he looked up at Qin Lan and said, "Miss Qin, may I have a word with you in private?"

Qin Lan glanced at Nanrong Wanqing, and seeing her nod, she immediately left the room, leaving just the two of them.

"Chairwoman, do you realize what this Exoskeleton armor signifies?" When Ling Chen asked this, there was a rare seriousness in his eyes.

"I know. The development of these events was beyond my expectations. Initially, I just wanted to research a lightweight Mechanical Exoskeleton so that I could regain the ability to walk, but the research achievements over these years have far exceeded my imagination. It wasn't until I saw these test data that I realized what a terrifying thing I had created. A year ago, to avoid letting outsiders know about these studies, I strengthened the security of the research lab and signed confidentiality agreements with all the scientific staff. Until I decide how to deal with this Exoskeleton armor, no one is allowed to leak any information."

"Still, someone got wind of it. Could there be a mole in the research lab?"

"I don't know." Nanrong Wanqing shook her head gently, "If it weren't for that person at Yulong Mansion mentioning the research lab, I would still be unaware that its secrets had been leaked."

"How many people in the research lab know about the existence of this set of Exoskeleton armor?"

"That's a question for Qin Lan. The research lab has always been under her charge. You can ask her anything you want to know."

Qin Lan's first reaction was disbelief, her tone firm as she said, "The confidentiality work in the lab is very stringent, it's impossible for there to be a leak. Chairman, I..."

Nanrong Wanqing raised her hand to stop her mid-sentence, "Ling Chen is right, it indeed happened—someone already knows about the existence of the exoskeleton armor. Just a few days ago, someone even tried to force out the location of our lab; fortunately, Ling Chen was present and prevented that person from succeeding. Our visit this time is also to get to the bottom of this issue."

"Miss Qin, how do these researchers usually contact the outside world?" Ling Chen asked.

"During work, they are not allowed to carry mobile phones. If they need to contact their families, they do so through the security room; they have no opportunity to contact outsiders. Moreover, the thirteen researchers are responsible for different projects and work separately. We strictly forbid them from discussing their work with each other, which prevents anyone from knowing all the manufacturing processes and technologies. Even though the exoskeleton armor is manufactured by them, if these thirteen individuals are separated, none of them could produce it on their own. In this research lab, only I am privy to the complete manufacturing process."

Ling Chen nodded, finding the method not uncommon as many labs use this approach to safeguard their research.

"Miss Qin, do they really stay here all 365 days a year?"

"No, they each have four days off per month, with the thirteen individuals rotating, except for holidays all other times are spent in the underground lab."

"Doesn't anyone protest against this restriction on freedom?"

Nanrong Wanqing said indifferently, "If you were offered an annual salary of ten million, would you accept these restrictions?"

"An annual salary of ten million?" Ling Chen muttered to himself. Truly generous of the Nanrong Family. With such a salary offer, the non-profit lab's expenses would amount to at least three hundred million a year, a figure perhaps only the Hongyu Group could afford to burn through.

"Given that only fourteen people, excluding Miss Qin, know about the exoskeleton armor, it's very likely that the leak originated from one of the researchers."

Qin Lan frowned slightly, "I don't understand why they would do this; the chairman provides a generous compensation package, and leaking information would be akin to ruining their own future."

"Maybe someone else offered a higher price. In any case, nothing is absolute in this world. Miss Qin, please prepare a list for me; I want the detailed information of the researchers. Also, keep an eye out during this period to see who seems the most suspicious."

"Okay, if it really is one of them leaking information, I will cooperate with your investigation."

After organizing the list and other materials, Ling Chen and Nanrong Wanqing left the lab and drove towards the headquarters of Hongyu Group.

On the way back, Ling Chen glanced at Nanrong Wanqing's legs and couldn't help but ask, "Chairman, can't current medical technology heal your legs?"

Nanrong Wanqing, looking out the car window at the rapidly receding trees, her hands gently caressing her numb legs, a hint of bitterness flickered in her beautiful eyes.

"If there were such a technology, why would I bother researching that thing?"

"There are so many capable doctors in the world, someone among them might be able to treat your legs, like..."

"Who are you suggesting? Zhu Xiaozhu? You don't need to speak for her in front of me. I know her medical skills are very good, but I won't seek her help."

"Why?" Ling Chen was genuinely puzzled. When he last mentioned Nanrong Wanqing in front of Zhu Xiaozhu, her expression was also somewhat peculiar. Could it be that these two women had some past conflict?

"No reason, I just don't want to mention her anymore," Nanrong Wanqing said, sounding somewhat cold.

Ling Chen shook his head helplessly. These two women were like two beautiful flowers each flourishing in their place, widely renowned yet blooming in different seasons, never interacting with each other.

Since Nanrong Wanqing didn't want to discuss it further, he didn't press her. Next time he saw Zhu Xiaozhu, perhaps he'd ask her.

"Chairman, what are your thoughts concerning the exoskeleton armor?"

"What do you mean?"

"Such a device is like a timed bomb in your hands, constantly posing a danger. My advice is to dispose of it. The more people know, the greater the risk to you."

Nanrong Wanqing pondered for a moment before speaking, "Are you suggesting I turn it over to the state?"

"Not quite turn it over, but rather, collaborate. The military has many defense contractors, all strategic partners, and you could also move in that direction. This way, not only can you ensure your safety, but it could also bring substantial profits to the company."

"I never considered using it for military purposes, nor do I want it to become a weapon of murder. Given its significance, you should foresee the enormous changes it could bring to the world once it is released; I don't want to be the spark that transforms the global military landscape."

"Everything has two sides; you can't just see the bad; you must also recognize the good. Think about how many people there are in the world who have experienced what you have; if they had this, they could live like normal people."

Nanrong Wanqing massaged her temples, a trace of fatigue evident in her eyes.

"Let me think about it further."

Returning to the company, Ling Chen escorted Nanrong Wanqing back to her office and then, carrying the information gathered from Qin Lan, he prepared to leave.

Stopping at the door, he suddenly turned back to ask, "Chairma