



Dominion's End Vol 3: **Ice-bound Splendor and Majesty**

Original novel in Chinese by: [御我 \(Yu Wo\)](#)

Translated by [Prince Revolution](#)

DISCLAIMER!

Please take note of the following:

- The following translation of *Dominion's End* Volume 3 is by **Prince Revolution!** and is a “by fans for fans” translation.
- This translation is completely FREE of charge, so if you have paid for this you have been ripped off!
- **Prince Revolution!** does not ask for donations, payment or anything else of the sort. We do not benefit monetarily from our novel translations AT ALL.
- We only ask that you do not steal credit or attempt to profit monetary from our translation. Please also inform us if you come across individuals or groups stealing credit or profiting monetarily from our translations.

Copyrights

- Copyrights to the *Dominion's End* novels are held by Yu Wo, the author of the novels.
- Copyrights to the *Dominion's End* novel artwork are held by Wu Ling (午零).

One Last Thing

- **Prince Revolution!** has received permission from Yu Wo to translate the novels into English. However this is NOT an official translation of the novels!
- As such, please cease distribution of this PDF (make sure you get your copy from PR! and not another site, if so, report the site to PR!) once an official ENGLISH version of the novels has been published.

HAPPY READING!

Credits

About Prince Rev!

Prince Revolution! (or PR! for short) was started in late April in 2009 by Erialis for the purpose of translating and sharing the ½ Prince and The Legend of Sun Knight novels (and now many others) with other fans (who unfortunately couldn't read Chinese). PR!'s crew has since exploded to include several translators who double as Chinese to English editors and several Proofreaders. They also have sister sites translating the novels into Dutch, Spanish, Indonesian, French, Portuguese and Vietnamese.

Proofreaders

Arcedemius (Prologue, Chapter 1, 2, 3, 4.1, 4.2, 8.1, 10.1, Epilogue)
elisa (Chapter 1, 20.2, Extra)
EviNabiki (Chapter 2, 3, 4.2, 5, 7.1, 7.2, 8.2)
Trespasserby (Chapter 6, 8.1, 10.1)

Art

Wu Ling (午零)

Chinese/English Editors

lucathia (Prologue, Chapter 1, 2, 3, 4.1, 4.2, 5, 6, 7.1, 7.2, 8.1, 8.2, 9.1, 9.2, 10.1, 10.2, Extra, Epilogue)

Translators

Elkin (Prologue, Chapter 1, 2, 3, 4.1, 4.2, 5, 6, 8.1, 8.2, Epilogue)
Ever (Chapter 8.2)
michimochi (Chapter 7.1, 7.2, 9.1, 9.2, 10.1, 10.2, Extra)
Raylight (Chapter 8.1)

Dominion's End Vol 3: Ice-bound Splendor and Majesty

Original novel in Chinese by: 御我 (Yu Wo)

- [Prologue: Three Days](#)
- [Chapter 1: The Guard Tower](#)
- [Chapter 2: The Sudden Attack](#)
- [Chapter 3: Morc](#)
- [Chapter 4: The Laboratory, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 4: The Laboratory, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 5: Those Numbers](#)
- [Chapter 6: The Control Room](#)
- [Chapter 7: Thirteen, Part 1](#)
- [Chapter 7: Thirteen, Part 2](#)
- [Chapter 8: The Three-Forked Road, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 8: The Three-Forked Road, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 9: Truth, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 9: Truth, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 10: Returning Home, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 10: Returning Home, Part Two](#)
- [Extra: Frozen Heart](#)
- [Epilogue: Afterword](#)

Prologue: Three Days

Dàgē and the others are right there!

"Calm down. You can go in after three days." Jiang Xiaotian patted my shoulder, the picture of absolute serenity.

I ground my teeth, gazing at the tall walls that were topped with barbed wire. *This is no obstacle to me. I just have to get across, and Dàgē and the others will be there, waiting for me!*

"I want to go in. I miss Junjun, I miss Dàgē, I miss Uncle and Auntie, and even the rest of the troop!"

Jiang Xiaotian shook his head, replying, "If the me from here were inside, then you could go ahead and force your way in. You'd be able to break out together in that case. But the mercenaries inside probably aren't them."

Why not? I glared at Jiang Xiaotian. *It has to be them!*

"Not a lot of the JDT have come over. I don't think I would blatantly declare myself as a 'mercenary troop.' I'd probably split them into two teams, each team pretending to be civilians who banded together."

I froze. *That makes so much sense. How stupid would you have to be to declare yourself to be a mercenary troop in front of an army? You're just asking to be subordinated! My dàgē would never do something so stupid.*

After finally regaining my senses, I pondered for a moment, then said, "There won't be two teams. Not all of them would come over. The JDT is carrying around too many supplies, so if they brought them all here, the supplies would definitely get taken away.

So they probably only sent a few people, and the others would be somewhere close by, to protect the supplies but also be ready to jump in at any time."

Jiang Xiaotian gave a nod and continued, "In terms of personnel, I'd definitely be sent over. Yunqian would be on watch on the perimeter of the camp, using her sniper scope. For the remaining people, we can eliminate Uncle, Auntie, and Junjun from the list. Cain is a foreigner and Lily is a mix, so they're too eye catching. So it's probably Zheng Xing and Xiao Sha who are accompanying me. Xiao Sha and I could pass off as brothers, while Zheng Xing would probably be an uncle or something."

"Auntie might come." I gave the glaring Jiang Xiaotian an innocent look and said, "The last time Dàgē went to salvage supplies in the city, he took Auntie along with him. She has the ability to sense living things in her surroundings, so it should be pretty handy for finding people. And you'll be less suspicious if you have a middle-aged housewife in the group!"

Dàgē, Zheng Xing, and Xiao Sha is a combination that'll definitely get suspected!

Jiang Xiaotian frowned and nodded, not raising any objections. "So don't be in such a rush to get in. We can look for Yunqian in the

surrounding area. She'll probably be hiding in a high vantage point close by."

When I heard that, my eyes lit up and I immediately set off to find Yunqian. But the moment I turned around, I saw a group of people with clearly hostile intentions. If their eyes weren't fixed on me, they were pinned to my backpack. Thankfully, they were mostly focused on my backpack, so there were at most a few glances at my face.

But of course! This is just four months into the apocalypse, so there's no way there'll be so many morally bankrupt and desperate people running around, wanting to rape someone in broad daylight. And we're talking about raping a guy, okay? That's too extreme.

"Yo, looks like you got quite a lot of stuff in that backpack, huh!"

I quietly examined them. There were five people, all men. Right now, women didn't have the power to rob others and had no choice but to be the victim. Of course, this was talking about women other than those like Lily, Yunqian, and Feng-jiě.

There were another dozen-odd people standing a few steps away, who looked like they still had some morals intact, so they hadn't come up front to rob me directly. But if these five people made the first move, the others probably wouldn't mind dashing in to snatch up whatever fell out of my backpack, like cans and such.

"Kiddo, why duncha you help out a pal?" one of them couldn't resist but blurt out first, his eyes greedily staring at my backpack.

I better switch to using a luggage case in the future. At least you can't tell if a box has anything inside, but my backpack is crammed to the max, so it's super obvious from just one look that it's full of supplies. That is, unless I'm some idiot who likes carrying around bricks.

Someone else urged them on, "Shut your trap. Just take it and go; otherwise, none of us are getting anything if those soldiers come around!"

When everyone heard that, they shut their mouths and closed in on me. Someone even raised his fist, probably planning to knock me down, take my bag, and go.

I frowned at them. It wasn't a problem for me to beat up these people, but I didn't want to draw the attention of the military because things would get very complicated afterwards. The best way to avoid any complications was to run away.

I'd better take care to avoid people's attention in the future; otherwise, robberies like today would keep happening. Besides, who could blame them? Jiang Shuyu looked like a frail, pretty boy who was easy to rob.

"What's going on!"

I turned to see the two soldiers, Chen Yanqing and Guo Hong. The former was holding onto a baguette, drawing the bystanders' gazes and making them drool. If he hadn't been in a military uniform and wielding a gun, he was even more likely to get robbed than me!

Sensing something off about the situation, they rushed over with looks of anger. Chen Yanqing glared at me, scolding, "Didn't I tell you to wait by the registration counter? What are you doing out here?"

I looked down, pretending to be apologetic, in time to see Jiang Xiaotian yawning. But the moment he sensed my gaze, he put on a nonchalant look. However, his sheet white face betrayed him.

By the time Chen Yanqing had finished telling me off, the five had gone their own ways with bitter looks. Judging from their expressions, if not for the fact that Chen Yanqing had a gun, they probably wouldn't have been so willing to back down. It seemed like food supplies were starting to run low. Only hunger would make people fearless in the face of death.

With over half the human population wiped out in one go, food wasn't too difficult to come by during the first year into the apocalypse. Far more people died at the claws of aberrants rather than due to starvation. But probably because there were too many people gathered here, they'd run out of food in the neighborhood. As for Luo'an City that was right next door, only the military dared to venture in there. With limited personnel, of course food was in short supply.

People had to starve a bit more before they would dare to pick up weapons and fight it out with the aberrants.

I lifted my head. Chen Yanqing was still glaring at me in anger. How unusual, he clearly hadn't seemed the caring type before, but he looked like he was pretty concerned today... *Please don't tell me you fell in love at first sight and are treating it as true love. You'll be diced*

up by my Dàgēs for dog feed, and the two of them will do it at the same time!

"What'd you run out here for?" Guo Hong said with a look of deep disapproval, "Times have changed, and you're still carrying around your... son with you. Don't you know you should be avoiding danger? Why'd you run out here?"

"To look for people." I gazed at the military zone, not needing to disguise the anxiety I felt.

"Why'd you come to the more distant camps when you're looking for people? This isn't the main entrance..." Guo Hong grumbled in confusion.

Chen Yanqing asked sharply, "Don't tell me you were thinking of climbing the wall?"

I froze. They *had* guessed correctly. I was, in fact, looking for a more remote area to see if I could get over the wall.

The two soldiers stared at me in disbelief.

I forcefully changed the subject, asking, "Is that bread for me? But what I need isn't food but a place to stay. My little Xiaotian's falling asleep. We haven't slept much the past few days because we've been rushing around..."

I subtly pinched Xiaotian, and he immediately gave a huge yawn, leaning against my thigh with half-closed eyes, looking as if he were

about to doze off any moment. It was so realistic that I felt like he wasn't acting at all but that he really was feeling that exhausted.

"Your son doesn't look well. Is he sick?" Guo Hong asked as he ruffled Jiang Xiaotian's hair, causing the child's face to look even worse.

"He's not sick, just tired." I hastily explained, then added sadly, "It's all my fault. I've been so focused on finding people that I've tired Xiaotian out."

"Is he really your son?" Chen Yanqing asked softly.

This was embarrassing as hell but Jiang Xiaotian gripped my thigh unrelentingly, so I had no choice but to nod.

After a moment's hesitation, Chen Yanqing asked, "Are you looking for your wife?"

"..." I braced myself and admitted, "Yes! If you know a woman called Ceng Yunqian, please let me know. She's quite a bit older than me, almost in her thirties. She boxes so she's very fit, with toned arm muscles, and she has very short hair..."

After describing every one of Yunqian's characteristics in detail, I went on and gave them information about Dàgē, my Èrgē, Xiao Sha, and Auntie, in hopes that they might be able to help look for them in the military zone.

Guo Hong and Chen Yanqing's eyes were bulging so widely that I felt really bad. That was to be expected. Xiaotian looked to be all of three,

and I was only eighteen, so just how young was I when I was procreating? And I vaguely remembered that under a certain age, it was considered to be sexual assault under the law, no matter whether it was consensual or not...

As Chen Yanqing continued staring at me in disbelief, Guo Hong patted my shoulder, remarking, "Let's go. We'll help arrange for you to share a tent with a family with a child. That'll be safer for you."

I bent down to scoop up Jiang Xiaotian, and he reflexively hugged me and sprawled on my shoulder. He looked like he was still pretending to be a sleepy child, but in fact, I could feel the weight of his head pressing against my shoulder, and his entire body was slack, a completely different sensation to all the previous times when he had hugged me back with energy.

I better let Xiaotian get some rest soon! I really wanted to yell at myself for dragging Jiang Xiaotian on a wild goose chase around the campsite, so intent on finding Dàgē and the others that I hadn't realized there was something wrong with mini Dàgē who was right next to me.

Following the two soldiers, I traveled through more than half of the campsite. Just now, I'd been too focused on finding a place to get into the military zone, so I had completely ignored the condition of the campsite. Well, now I had a good view.

The campsite really was quite large. As expected of the refugee camp built by the military, there were tightly packed tents everywhere. But there were even more people who were just sleeping in open air, an

obvious sign that there weren't enough tents to go around. With autumn setting in, the night breezes were quite chilly, so they had covered themselves in a medley of warm things, ranging from coats, blankets, and sleeping bags to even thick skirts.

Perhaps I should thank these two soldiers for being able to snag a tent to share... No, the thanks should go to Jiang Shuyu's face!

The two of them brought me to a tent that was quite close to the main gate of the military zone. It seemed like people measured distance by how far places were from the main gate, which was fair enough. Everyone wanted to get into the military zone, so the closer they were to the main gate, the better.

After a moment's thought, I realized it was possible that Dàgē and the others might come out to find me. Living close to the main gate meant you could see all the comings and goings through the gate, so it was also possible that we'd run into each other entirely by accident.

Guo Hong lifted the tent flap, saying, "You'll be staying here in this tent. Don't go running around again for the next three days."

I obediently nodded as I replied, "I understand." But this didn't mean that I was going to listen to him.

Chen Yanqing declared loudly, "I'll be visiting you over the next few days..." He paused, then dragged me away from the tent and asked quietly, "I still don't know your name?"

I replied without any hesitation, "Jiang Shuyu, the 'jiang' from bianjiang, boundary. My surname is quite unique. It'll be great if you could help check if my family are inside."

The two soldiers nodded. Guo Hong said honestly, "It's not likely we'll be able to find out. There are too many people inside."

I was well aware of that. Although Dàgē was very eye-catching, in places like this, he'd try his best to blend in and wouldn't attract people's attention.

"It's fine." I said in an understanding tone of voice, "In any case, I can go in after three days and search for myself."

The two soldiers nodded.

"Be careful, okay?" Chen Yanqing said, unable to relax, "If anyone does anything to you, just run and wait by the main gate. Those people won't dare to kick up a fuss there. I'll also be visiting you every day. I've got your back."

I really didn't know what to say to that. This guy was actually serious, dispelling any thoughts I might have had of using him. *I can't abuse other people's sincerity!*

Guo Hong gave Chen Yanqing the evil eye and quickly explained, "He doesn't mean you any harm, seriously."

Seriously, he only means love.

I said a little awkwardly, "I know."

Chen Yanqing snapped angrily, "I'm not gonna do anything, I just don't want to see him getting into trouble. I know I talk, but since when have you ever seen me try and pull something, huh?"

"Never." Guo Hong rubbed his nose before mumbling, "But maybe you will this time?"

I saw Chen Yanqing's face start twitching, a sign that he was about to beat up his colleague, so I hastily changed the topic, saying, "I'll take my child in so he can sleep."

The two glanced at Jiang Xiaotian and Guo Hong urged me, "Go in. Children are the most precious."

I breathed a sigh of relief, pushed aside the tent flap, and ducked under it. There were three people in there, two adults and a child...

"Dà-gēge!"

I blinked. The child crawled over and looked up at me, her little face wreathed in smiles. It was the girl who had given me the pair of flip flops!

"Hello, we meet again," I replied with a smile. As expected, the other two turned out to be the couple from the bus.

The man kept stealing glances at the bread in my hand and my backpack, greed showing on his face, but the mother and daughter

next to him looked to be good people. It was like seeing a beautiful flower planted on a piece of cow shit that had even sprouted a little flower bud. It made me speechless.

He asked eagerly, "Can you really get in after three days?"

I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. *Isn't he giving away the fact that he was eavesdropping by asking the question?* I replied with a question of my own in confusion, "Can't we get in three days after registration?"

"Don't be an idiot!" the man immediately refuted. "There are too many people, so they choose who gets to go in. I've heard that women and children are easier to be selected, and for men, unless they join the army, there's no chance of getting selected at all. And joining the army basically means you're going to be cannon fodder!"

But Chen Yanqing said that I could go in after three days. Did he say this to make me stay put for a few days, or does he have some pull so he has a way of getting me in for sure?

Neither option sounded good. The first meant that I wouldn't get in, while the second made me feel like I was taking advantage of his feelings. *I really didn't do anything. I didn't even throw a flirtatious look at him! I blame Jiang Shuyu's looks for this!*

"Why are you telling him this?" the woman said irritably, "Can't you see that boy's almost fast asleep? Let them come in and get some rest."

To his credit, the man didn't object, but he did grumble, "It's already so cramped and now we have two more people."

"Other tents are even more cramped!" The woman snapped back, "I saw six adults crammed in the tent next to us. I have no idea how they're all going to fit in. If we didn't have these two children with us, we'd definitely get more people staying with us."

When he heard that, the man stopped complaining.

The woman gave Jiang Xiaotian and me a smile, and she remarked, "What an adorable pair of children. What are your names?"

"He's called Xiaotian. You can call me Xiao Yu."

She nodded and introduced herself as well. "My family name is Chen, so just call me Auntie Chen. This is my daughter. We like to call her Beibei."

I immediately greeted her politely as "Auntie Chen," never mind that she only looked to be in her early thirties and was probably younger than Guan Weijun had been when she died. It felt pretty odd to call someone "Auntie" like this. But since I'd decided that I was Jiang Shuyu, this meant I was an eighteen year old young man. I'd be calling a lot of people "Auntie" and "Uncle" in the future, so I'd better get used to it!

The man twitched his lips and said, "Why make us sound so old? Just call me Zhang-gē."

Your wife is Auntie Chen, so don't you feel ashamed if I called you Zhang-gē?

I called out, taking care to enunciate every syllable extra clearly, "Nice to meet you, Great Uncle Zhang!"

Auntie Chen muffled a laugh while Zhang-dàshū's face twisted up in rage. I even saw him clench his fists, but only for a moment, before he relaxed his hands again. If I guessed right, he probably didn't dare to upset someone who had been personally escorted here by two soldiers. But he was lucky that he didn't have the guts; otherwise... hohoho!

With this little interlude, Beibei, who'd originally wanted to jump over, no longer dared to anymore. She huddled in her mother's arms, staring at Jiang Xiaotian and me with round eyes.

Seeing that, I couldn't be bothered to talk to them anymore. In any case, we'd be going our own ways in three days' time, so we shouldn't get too attached. Otherwise, my saint complex would kick in and I'd be trapped between a rock and hard place.

I laid out some clothes on the floor and let Xiaotian sleep on them. His face was still incredibly pale, and he was so deeply asleep that we hadn't woken him up at all. This was really worrying, but there was nothing I could do about it. Right now, the highest tier crystals out there were just tier one crystals, but even those amounted to peanuts for someone as high tiered as the Ice Emperor. They were of little use to him.

I tore off a third of the baguette and passed it to Auntie Chen. She looked a little startled but still accepted it with thanks, and then she immediately split it with her husband and daughter.

But Uncle Zhang glared unhappily at the remaining loaf, complaining, "There's just one of you eating such a big piece of bread. Aren't you worried you'll choke to death?"

I frowned. If not for the fact that this bread had been a gift, I wouldn't share it with anyone. After all, if Dàgē and the others weren't here, I'd continue on my chase after them. More food meant less time needed to fill my belly. But I couldn't be bothered to argue with this piece of shit. *There's only one thing I have to say on this matter: you can go to hell for all I care after the three days are up.*

After eating and drinking my fill, I lay down. The tent wasn't very big, so I had to curl up to avoid crowding the others.

I hugged Jiang Xiaotian to my chest, and when I sensed the chilliness of his little body, I became more worried. But the only thing I could do was secure him in my arms and try to warm him up with my body heat. But probably because I'd slept for the whole day, I couldn't fall asleep and all sorts of stuff kept going through my mind.

Going forward, I can't just focus on catching up with Dàgē. I also have to keep an eye on Xiaotian's condition. I can't afford to let him help me strengthen my powers—it's obviously bad for his health!

I wonder if Dàgē's healing powers will work on Xiaotian?

If it doesn't work, will Xiaotian slowly grow up? Or will he remain a three year-old until powerful enough crystals make their appearance...?

As I drifted between sleep and wakefulness, I suddenly felt someone grab onto me. Angrily, I turned over. If Zhang-dàshū was making a move on me, I'd immediately make his wife a widow!

But instead, I saw a little girl hugging my waist from behind, staring at me with her large, soulful eyes.

I relaxed. I really was too nervous. The world hadn't gone off the rails to the point where a husband would make a move on a boy when he had his wife and daughter next to him. Most people now were still normal.

"What's wrong? You can't sleep?" I asked softly, rubbing Beibei's head.

Beibei said in a small voice, "Dà-gēge, I heard lots of strange sounds."

"What kinds of sounds?" I was a little curious. *Perhaps it's another peculiar ability.*

Beibei said with a little difficulty, "Lots of sounds."

I sank into deep thought. *Perhaps she's the same as Suying and has the power to read people's minds? So she's now hearing the thoughts of people around her?*

"There's a person. He sounds very scary." Beibei whimpered, "Mommy says it's not real, b-but Beibei really can hear him. Below!"

Below? I blinked.

Beibei's embrace became even tighter, and she asked anxiously, "Dà-gēge, is it those scary monsters we saw that are crying out?"

I quietly reassured her, "You don't need to be scared. Lots of people here will protect you."

"Gēge, protect Beibei!"

Beibei refused to let me go. I looked between Xiaotian and Beibei, then I cast a hopeful look at the girl's mother, but no luck, she was sound asleep and hadn't realized that her daughter had slipped out from her arms to snuggle in someone else's.

I had no choice but to hug Xiaotian with my right arm and Beibei with my left. As I lay there in the odd situation of holding two children to sleep, a bad feeling about this blossomed in my heart.

Some people say that the saint complex is incurable.

Chapter 1: The Guard Tower

"Xiao Yu."

I looked up to see that Chen Yanqing had dropped by again.

"Is the boy doing okay?" he asked with concern.

I shook my head, gazing at the slumbering Xiaotian, an unspeakable sadness in my heart.

Ever since the child fell asleep that day, he hadn't once woken up and he even burned with a fever. If not for the fact that he didn't look like he was on the verge of death, I'd have run away with the child.

Although people still hadn't figured out the specific conditions for a human to turn into an aberrant, it wasn't hard to reason that the dead turn into aberrants.

Even Auntie Chen, who had originally been quite pleasant, started having her doubts, and she huddled at the other end of the tent with Beibei in her arms. If not for the fact that Chen Yanqing came by three times a day, I'd probably have been chased out of the tent... *No, more like been chased straight out of the camp?*

These few days, I clutched tightly to Xiaotian and didn't leave the tent except to go to the washroom.

But even so, rumors had spread, probably thanks to the piece of shit Zhang-dàshū. He detested me and would glare at me every day. If

Chen Yanqing hadn't warned him, it was likely... I'd have beaten him to a pulp long ago!

This was the fourth day, but I still hadn't managed to get into the military zone. With Xiaotian ill to this extent, there was no way we'd be let in.

"You..." Chen Yanqing looked at me with an aching heart, but his hands were tied.

I said calmly, "I'm leaving."

Chen Yanqing's eyes bulged as he stared at me.

It wasn't like I had a choice. If this continued, sooner or later, the people nearby would gang up to chase out Xiaotian and me, and this would probably happen within the next two days. Recently, that man had been sneaking out for most of the day, secretively doing something or other. But judging from the look in his eyes every time he looked at me, I was positive this guy was up to no good.

Although I wasn't scared of him, right now Xiaotian wasn't well. I didn't want any complications to arise, so I was better off finding some place close by to wait. It also meant it'd be easier to take care of Xiaotian. With the way things were, even if I wanted to wipe down Xiaotian's body with some warm water, I wouldn't even be able to heat up any. It was a pain.

"What're you on about?" Chen Yanqing yelled angrily, "Where d'you think you can go with a kid? Lots of kids have fallen sick recently, but

they recovered after a few days, so it's not a big deal. And it's the fourth day already, so he should be recovering soon. If you really are worried, I'll go talk to my bosses and stay the night here."

The children are falling sick, probably because their abilities are awakening? Children didn't have much stamina, so they often fell sick during the ability awakening process.

It'd be great if Xiaotian really was awakening to his powers, but I knew the truth was otherwise. I didn't know how many days Xiaotian would be ill for, and if possible, I still wanted to go hunt for some crystals. Even if it was useless, it'd be good to use the crystals as candy for Xiaotian. Right now, I was almost driven crazy by this feeling of helplessness!

"Really? Okay, then I'll wait. You don't have to stay overnight," I lied blithely. In any case, I had to make sure this guy wouldn't stay and get in the way of my escape.

Unexpectedly, Chen Yanqing narrowed his eyes with a look of suspicion, then turned to leave. "I'll go speak with my bosses."

Sigh, okay. So now I'll have to pack up and run for it before he comes back.

"Pick up your boy and come with me."

Shit, are you trying to kill me here? I shouted angrily, "What makes you think you can dictate my life? We don't even know each other!"

I'd originally wanted to add things like "you're disgusting" or "like I can't tell you're up to no good" to provoke him, but I couldn't bring myself to do so. Perhaps this guy really did like me, but he'd never made a move on me. If I really was a man, perhaps I could still dislike him, but the soul inside was a woman's, so I was more used to being chased by men than chasing after women myself!

Chen Yanqing turned his head and started scolding me, "What kind of times do you think we're living in? This is for your son, so stop kicking up a fuss!"

I'm far clearer on what kind of times we're living in than you are. Although I knew he had good intentions, these good intentions were a pain in the butt. I couldn't accept them but couldn't reject them either. I didn't know what to do.

"Keep your nose out of my business!" I said coldly. "Who knows what you're up to? You've been searching for my family for so many days with no results, so you're probably not even looking for them in the first place. The dangers out there are nothing compared to you!"

Chen Yanqing's face flushed red.

"Ah Qing's not only helping you look for them, he's also asked a lot of his bros to help out. But there isn't a single person with a surname of Jiang!"

I didn't expect Guo Hong to come over as well, and that honest-looking face of his was dark with fury.

I didn't say a thing as I gave them both a cold look. But on the inside, my conscience was writhing. I'd been hurt in my previous life, and in this life, I was hurting others. *Is this some kind of karma? But I'm not liking this the slightest! Please can we just make everyone happy?*

Besides, he had said that they hadn't been able to find anyone. So *Dàgē and the others really aren't in the military zone?*

Chen Yanqing proclaimed, "Anyway, you're not going anywhere!"

"Why do you even bother with him?" Guo Hong was extremely frustrated.

I stood there with a cold expression and a pain twisting in my heart. *That's right, why do you still bother with such an ungrateful bastard like me? Please, just give up and let me fend for myself, okay?*

"Shuyu..."

I blinked then quickly dove back into the tent for a look. Jiang Xiaotian was already sitting up, and he breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of me, his tightly knit brows smoothing over. Then, when he caught sight of Chen Yanqing and Guo Hong poking their heads in for a look, he immediately put on a stupid look and even said, "Gēge, I'm hungry."

...Hey now, Jiang Xiaotian, did you short-circuit your brain with the fever or something? It's Daddy! Don't call me inconsistent things. I don't even know how to explain it away now!

Chen Yanqing and Guo Hong goggled at me, and I had no choice but to say, "Since Xiaotian's awake, I won't leave for now."

Chen Yanqing clearly still didn't believe me.

"Or you can just sleep here!" I said irritably, "But you'll have to sleep sitting up."

Here, Jiang Xiaotian suddenly raged, "Who are you saying you're sleeping with? I've told you that you're not allowed to have puppy love, but you actually dare to not listen to your Dà-?"

I hastily covered his mouth, calmly explaining to the two... no, even Auntie Chen had been startled—three people, "He's probably still a bit muddled by the sickness. I don't know where he learned this kind of stuff. Boy, it's so hard to raise kids nowadays, hahaha."

Fortunately, Jiang Xiaotian seemed to snap out of it and peacefully rested in my arms, like he didn't have any energy... *Damn, he probably isn't pretending at all!*

The two soldiers stared suspiciously at this father-son or sibling pair.

"He's probably dreaming." Auntie Chen reassured them, "Children are always doing silly things. Beibei also learns a lot of dialogue from cartoons, so it's not unusual."

Guo Hong clutched at his head, mumbling to himself in confusion, "So is he a dad or a gēge? Probably a gēge, right? Xiao Yu's still too young."

Suddenly, Chen Yanqing's expression changed and he looked at me, then back at Xiaotian. His face drained of color, to the point where he was pale enough to compete with the sickly Jiang Xiaotian.

What the hell are you thinking of now? Please, don't tell me!

Chen Yanqing said helplessly, "I-I'll get you some rice porridge for your son to eat. We found some rice in the army. Wait here for me and don't go anywhere."

I hesitated for a moment before nodding. It would be good to feed Xiaotian a little porridge. At least, before we left, I'd secretly let him know about the crystals as repayment for what he did for us.

The two soldiers finally left, Guo Hong's face remaining as dark as it had been at the beginning, while Chen Yanqing kept throwing a few worried looks over his shoulder. Amazingly, he didn't seem to mind how much of an ungrateful bastard I was pretending to be.

Even if you really like Jiang Shuyu's face, you're still a soldier with the benefits that comes with your job, while I'm just an eighteen-year-old kid. And this is the apocalypse! But not only do you not bother with threats or bait or violence, you even keep compromising for my sake. You must be born to be a masochist!

But you should count yourself lucky for being born this way; otherwise, you'd have turned into a corpsicle a long time ago.

From the distance came Guo Hong's unhappy voice.

"Ah Qing, what on earth are you doing? Even if you like him, you don't need to kiss his cold ass to that extent!"

"You shouldn't blame him. If it was with his mother... wouldn't that make him both a dad and a gēge?"

"What?!" Guo Hong exclaimed.

...I turned around, wiping their conversation from my memory, and focused on Jiang Xiaotian's condition.

"It's great that Xiaotian's awake," Auntie Chen said honestly.

Since Xiaotian had woken up, she didn't cling onto to Beibei as tight, and her complexion looked much better than before. When she looked at us, there was even a trace of guilt hidden in her expression. I could hardly blame her. *In times like these, who wouldn't be afraid?*

I relaxed my expression and nodded, then ask softly, "Xiaotian, do you want to go to the toilet?"

Jiang Xiaotian looked up at me, then nodded obediently and said, "Yes."

"Auntie Chen, I need to pop out for a bit." I walked out of the tent, making sure to take my backpack with me. Just because we had reached an understanding didn't mean that I could let my guard down.

I stepped out of the tent with Xiaotian in my embrace. I even wandered around the vicinity, originally intending to let the people

around us see that my son had recovered from his sickness to ward off trouble. As it turned out, I ran straight into trouble instead.

A few men barred my way. This time, no one was paying any attention to my face, and all eyes were fixed on my backpack, a look that I was all-too-familiar with plastered on their faces.

Hunger.

When I saw them, I immediately stepped forward sharply and lashed out with a kick, targeting the tallest and burliest looking guy. I kicked hard at his stomach—he hadn't expected me to dive straight into action without saying a word—and he was sent flying in the air.

I gazed around me with an icy expression, implicitly asking "So who's next?" Only after I saw their shocked expressions and their reluctance to step forward did I straighten my clothes and stride away.

"Well done," Xiaotian murmured a word of praise. "Stunning everyone with one decisive attack can put a stop to any brewing conflict."

I pretended I hadn't heard him and walked to the side of a road close by. Although there were still a few people a short distance away from us, it didn't matter. I was just looking for somewhere to give my child a good scolding.

I tossed the child onto the ground, placed my hands on my hips, and snarled, "Jiang Xiaotian, don't you dare do that again!"

Jiang Xiaotian raised his head, blinked his widened eyes, and called out my name, dumbfounded, "Shuyu, what...?"

"Oh, so *now* you're not randomly calling me daddy and gēge?"

I had already accepted the fact that I had become a dad at the tender age of eighteen. You just had to go and mix up the two and call me both things. Now people think I've done stuff with my mom. How could you do this to your mom and mine?! How could you insult two moms at once?!

"I already told you that what's most important is that the whole family gets together, so why do you still have to be so reckless?" I said angrily, "I'd reach tier two sooner or later anyway, so is it that you don't trust me? To the point where you'd make yourself like this to raise my tier?! It's not worth it!"

Xiaotian looked at me with a complex expression on his face, almost as if he couldn't recognize his own dìdi.

"Actually, it's really not your fault. The aftereffects of traveling through space time are more severe than I'd imagined. Even if I hadn't helped you raise your tier, as long as I used my abilities, I'd run into this problem."

Iciness gripped my heart at the words and I hastily shouted, "Then, you're forbidden from using any abilities!"

Xiaotian didn't respond.

I wanted to pull my hair in frustration. *What am I supposed to do, pick up Jiang Xiaotian and smack his bottom? And even if he promised me now, it's likely that he'd be just as reckless later on.*

"Dàgē, don't be so reckless. You're the only one I have with me right now. If something happened to you, what would I do, all by myself?"

Jiang Xiaotian patted me, saying, "Don't worry. Follow the trail of clues, and we'll be able to find them very soon."

I hesitated for a moment but decided to say it anyway. "They might think I'm dead and give up on leaving clues."

This was a terrifying thought. Thinking back to what had happened, it wouldn't be surprising if everyone thought that I was dead! Even if Dàgē and Junjun couldn't bring themselves to accept my death, given enough time, they would have no choice but to accept reality. And when they did, they would probably stop leaving me clues.

The world was a big place, and we no longer had an easy way of communicating. If I didn't have Dàgē's clues anymore, how many months or years would it take for us to be reunited? Would I really have to wander the apocalyptic world alone until then?

I had to go through so much to get my new family, and I was already determined to become Jiang Shuyu, so why did I have to lose them again?

"Don't worry. As long as I haven't seen your bodies with my own two eyes, I'll never give up on you and Shujun." Jiang Xiaotian said firmly,

"That was what I had done in the past. Even if I was on a completely different continent, I would still come back to find you!"

And then what? I didn't dare to ask the question. Dàgē had sacrificed everything to travel through space and time, and had shrunk to a miniature who couldn't even use his abilities. Just how terrible a fate must the Jiang family have had in that previous world to make him act with such reckless abandon?

"So it's true that the older you get, the more things you'll be afraid of." A hint of nostalgia tinged Jiang Xiaotian's face, and he sighed, "In the past, there wasn't a single thing you were afraid of. You'd even laugh if the sky came crashing down on us. Shujun had always said you were a heartless person."

Nonsense. Jiang Xiaotian, you've lost your wits again. Junjun's an absolute protector of her èrgē, so how could she possibly tell me off for being heartless? She'll say her èrgē is the strongest and most reliable person in the world!

"Junjun would *never* say that."

Jiang Xiaotian barked a "ha" and said, "And you're still the same as before. You can say all you want about your mèimei, but you won't let anyone say a single bad thing about her."

What on earth did I say about Junjun? Isn't Jiang Shuyu a sis-con who can't be saved? I frowned, hoping that I could dream more. The best would be if I could dream back all my memories.

"Anyway, Jiang Xiaotian, you're not allowed to be so reckless anymore. I've already reached tier two, so there's not much that can trouble me now. So just sit back and let your dìdi handle everything!"

Jiang Xiaotian spoke in a patient tone of voice, "So does tier two make you invincible? In the past, you were indeed fearless, and the only person who could put some sense in you was me. And now you're scared of everything except your dàgē?"

"How can I not be scared of Dàgē? You're the one and only mighty, supreme Ice Emperor. I'm so terrified I'm shaking!"

I'm terrified you'll accidentally kill yourself!

The child shot me a look and asked me innocently, "So who are you referring to when you're calling for 'Jiang Xiaotian'?"

"Ah, actually, that's my future son. I just called his name by accident."

The Ice Emperor rolled his eyes at me at that, and I even heard him mutter to himself, "A child isn't a bad idea. If he has one now, they'll grow up to be nine or ten years old in ten years' time, and they'll be ready to fight. But falling in love at a young age would affect his training. Hm..."

He even had the audacity to look very troubled at the two options. *Jiang Xiaotian, just what do you take your dìdi and your dìdi's kid for?!*

"Why don't you have one yourself?" I snapped irritably.

Jiang Xiaotian blinked at me innocently, then spread his hands helplessly as he looked down at his small figure.

"...Dàgē, don't tell me you've forgotten that the you in this world is already twenty-seven?"

A look of comprehension dawned on Jiang Xiaotian's face.

He really forgot. I held my head in my hands. Ever since this Dàgē's biological age had dropped to a three year old's, it seemed like his intelligence was tending toward that age as well. *This... Never mind. Anyway, I had originally already steeled myself for one more dìdi.*

"Dàgē, do you need the toilet? If not, then we should go back, or that Chen Yanqing is gonna tell me off again."

Jiang Xiaotian instantly transformed from a three year old into a thirty year old. His eyes narrowed and he said in a dangerous tone of voice, "He dares to scold you?"

Ah, that Chen Yanqing must be really unlucky to have met me. He works his ass off only to be rewarded with my sneers and scolding, and now he had even garnered the hatred of the Ice Emperor. Who did he piss off to deserve such a tragic fate?

"Actually, he's just worried about me. You were passed out with a fever, so when I told him I wanted to take you away from here, he scolded me."

Jiang Xiaotian frowned, saying, "So the reason you haven't entered the military zone is because of me as well? Then we had better quickly go in. The more we delay, the harder it'll be to find them."

I nodded, but deep down inside, I had accepted the fact that we'd probably be unable to find them.

Dàgē and the others were looking for me, and I was looking for them. The fact that I hadn't caught wind of anything even with the help of Chen Yanqing, who could freely enter the military zone, meant that they were probably already gone. The reason I was still entering the military zone now was to find more clues. But of course, I still wished that we could find Dàgē and the others directly.

Back in camp, I saw three people standing outside the tent in the distance. Chen Yanqing and Guo Hong were faces I knew all too well, but the third belonged to a much older person dressed in uniform with a stern expression. After a moment's thought, I finally recalled that this was the colonel who was in charge of the two during our first meeting.

Of the three, one looked furious, one had a sour look, and one was stern. Who did I piss off now? Other guys had flocks of pretty ladies going after them with their good looks, so why did it feel like I was attracting a crowd of parents and older siblings instead?

"I was just taking my child to go to the toilet," I immediately explained, lifting the child into view.

When he heard that, Chen Yanqing's expression became less severe and he said, "Pack up your things and follow me in."

But this only provoked Guo Hong to rage at him, "You sure are getting more and more ballsy. You dare speak first before the Colonel?"

Chen Yanqing's face stiffened for a moment, then he gave the colonel a begging look.

The colonel looked me and Xiaotian over for a few moments, then glanced at Chen Yanqing and asked again to confirm, "You are *sure* you want to give your family quota to these two people?"

I stared as Chen Yanqing nodded his head firmly.

All right, besides telling him about the secrets about the crystals, I'd better give him a few crystals as well. But this was all dependent on him not making any moves on me. If he dares, hmph, forget about crystals, he'd just turn into a giant ice crystal himself!

"I don't have any family anyhow," Chen Yanqing chuckled, and said casually, "And I took a shine to these brothers."

I shot him a look. Thankfully, he didn't say anything too obvious, like good looking or liking, otherwise Jiang Xiaotian would have definitely gone on a rampage.

Guo Hong still looked like he was sucking on a bitter lemon, but the colonel didn't seem to mind. He examined Jiang Xiaotian, then said

with a nod, "This child is fine. Pack up your things, and we'll head in together."

There wasn't anything to pack since everything I owned was in my backpack. Even my potted plant, Jiang Xiaorong, had been planted in the big compartment of my bag. With everyone starving, I was really scared that the moment I looked away, Jiang Xiaorong would be turned into a serving of vegetables, so I had no choice but to carry it around.

Having said that, my backpack was originally packed to the brim, so there was no way I could shove in something as big as a pot. So my only option was to stuff some earth into the big compartment, just enough for Jiang Xiaorong to root itself there, and it even had to pitifully curl up into a knot of branches. If you didn't look too closely, it almost looked like a decorative Christmas wreath. The poor thing.

This was also one of the reasons why I wanted to leave ASAP. Hearing the rustling noises coming from the backpack every night and constantly worrying about whether the movement in the backpack would attract people's attention was extraordinarily stressful.

I entered the tent and greeted the mother and daughter inside.

"Auntie Chen, I'm leaving."

Auntie Chen had probably overheard the conversation just now. She nodded, speaking with a little regret, "It's good that you can go in. You should go now."

"Gēge!" Beibei rushed up to me and hugged me. Tears glistened in her eyes as she pleaded, "Don't go."

I tweaked Beibei's cheeks and chuckled, "Gēge is going to give you some candy. Come on, open your mouth."

Seeing that, Auntie Chen didn't mind at all and she even shot me a grateful smile. I smiled back at her, shook out a few crystals from the silver canister at my hip, and stuffed them all into the little girl's mouth. I said softly, "If you swallow them, you won't have to be scared of the sounds from underground anymore."

Beibei blinked and her little face turned red as she worked hard to swallow the crystals. I quickly took out a bottle of those trashy drinks that were high in sugar and calories and had absolutely no nutrition whatsoever. "Here, drink something."

The little girl took a few sips, then turned to pass the drink to her mommy. She really was an adorably cute and obedient child. When you added in the fact that she seemed to be developing special abilities already, it was so tempting to kidnap her!

Struggling to suppress the urge to kidnap the little girl, I said to Auntie Chen, "I'm headed off."

Auntie Chen said with a small smile, "Thank you. I'm sorry, I haven't been able to help you these past few days, but you keep giving us things."

"Don't be silly, I really like Beibei." I stroked Beibei's head and told her, "Beibei, you must protect mommy, okay?"

Beibei nodded forcefully.

I gazed long and hard at Beibei and murmured softly, "I'm Jiang Shuyu, the jiang from *jiangyu*, territory."

At this age, the little girl probably didn't know the word—in fact, she probably couldn't read yet, so she'd probably forget it in the blink of an eye. However, this was only the case for children before the apocalypse. If Beibei hearing sounds was really a special ability manifesting, then her intellect was beginning to develop. Maybe she could remember, or maybe she couldn't—after all, this was just the start of the apocalypse. But in any case, it was a possible connection between us.

"I'm called Beibei. Mommy says it's the bei from *baobei*, *precious*."

I smiled, gave her one last stroke of her hair, then turned on my heel and left.

Exiting the tent, I scooped up Jiang Xiaotian and followed the three soldiers to the main gates. Expressions of jealousy and rage followed us every step of the way.

"Why can he go in?" someone finally couldn't resist yelling, "They said I could go in after three days, but it's already day five!"

Guo Hong shouted back, "They're relatives."

But this had the opposite effect than intended and the people started getting agitated, yelling and howling in fury.

"What makes the military so great?"

"If you guys had the balls, you'd wipe out all the monsters in the city!"

"What a bunch of cowards, they only know how to hide here and eat all our food!"

Chen Yanqing and Guo Hong both flushed red, in embarrassment or in fury—or perhaps a mix of both.

The colonel frowned deeply upon seeing the situation deteriorate. The people were starting to surround us, and a fair number of them were even holding onto things, many of which were long metal objects, such as metal bats.

Bang! The colonel immediately raised his gun and fired a shot at the sky.

Only then did the surrounding people freeze, looks of fear warring with their reluctance to back down.

This was familiar, all too familiar to me. In my previous life, Guan Weijun had frequently experienced these situations, but the difference was that she was one of the angry and discontent.

Xia Zhengu had been even more livid, and his face would scrunch up. He would curse these people with special rights and keep muttering about how someday, he'd be stronger than the rest. And when that day came, he would make these people who looked down on him meet terrible ends.

"Stay close." Chen Yanqing worriedly moved to shield me.

I kept my head down, hugging Jiang Xiaotian tightly and not daring to look at anyone.

We had hardly taken a few more steps when there came the sound of rapid footsteps from the front. I immediately looked up to see soldiers, who first saluted the colonel, then started breaking up the crowd of people.

Then, the main gates to the military zone swung open. I was finally able to get in. In the instant I looked inside, I had the illusion that I saw Dàgē, but on closer inspection, it was just another crowd of lost-looking people, who at most looked to be a little better off than those outside.

"We almost had a riot!" the colonel raged, "All of you are not to exit the military zone for the next few days. If you have so much time on your hands, go into the city and scavenge food, or else the people outside are going to say the military are freeloaders!"

The two of them were so humiliated by his scolding that they couldn't look him in the eye.

Chen Yanqing said weakly, "All this food is stuff our brothers-in-arms had to risk their lives getting in the city. Why don't those people follow us in and get some themselves? And they say it's their food..."

I kept my silence. They didn't have guns, they had guns but no training, they were terrified by the aberrants, they were cowards, they had given up—there were too many reasons that could explain why people normally didn't dare to enter the city, but at the same time, you could also say that none of these were excuses.

In the apocalypse, if you don't stand up to live, you can lie down to die!

The colonel snapped, "Cut the bullshit. Get the kids to a safe place then come back and find me. It seems like the two of you are bored shitless, so I'd better give you some missions, or you'll just stir up more trouble."

"Yessir!"

While they were being yelled at, I was inspecting my surroundings. The military zone was quite sizable, and if it hadn't been turned into a refugee camp, it would be hard to fill up the space otherwise.

The place was quite clearly split into a few zones. The common people still lived in tents, the majority of which were on the open ground in the south-eastern area—which looked like it had originally been some kind of training ground. There were many others who had crammed themselves in whatever space was available. This camping zone looked like it was packed to the brim with people, and the only spaces left

were paths for people to walk on. No wonder no more people could come in from the outside.

There were buildings all around us. Some were residential buildings, while others were large warehouses, probably places to store military goods. They were large enough to even accommodate tanks, but the probability of having tanks in a military barracks near a city wasn't high, so it was best I didn't get my hopes up.

The camping zone wasn't small in the slightest, but it really was crammed full of people. Although there were many buildings, there were tents set up everywhere. So the entire place looked pretty messy and cramped.

Where would Dàgē and the others leave the clue? It couldn't be too obvious, or it would make people suspicious, and they might even destroy it. But it wouldn't be hidden too deeply, or there was no way the amnesiac dìdì could find his gēge's clues just relying on the brotherly bond between them.

"Go look at the iron tower," Jiang Xiaotian whispered. "One of the ways I'd leave clues might be to carve it on the tower."

I blinked and looked at the large iron tower at the center of the camping zone. I vaguely remembered Chen Yanqing calling this the guard tower. Although it wasn't as big as some of the famous national landmarks, it wasn't small either. My guess was that it was probably ten stories tall, so it would be no easy task to find a line of writing on this tower.

What was more, there were soldiers with guns on guard at the base of the tower. It looked like it was a high security area, so it was probably home to some highly-ranked officials. The lower levels of the tower were all sealed up and looked like a house, so it should be livable.

"Go climb to the top of the tower to take a look when it's late at night," Jiang Xiaotian said like it was the most natural thing in the world. "The top of the tower is a very obvious target, yet it's also hard for people to discover the clue. And Shuyu, you have the ability to climb up there as well. If it was me, I'd definitely carve the clue up there."

Hearing that, I breathed a sigh of relief. *Thank goodness I have Jiang Xiaotian. Otherwise, who knows how much time I'd have to spend to find the clue?*

"Xiao Yu? Xiao Yu?!"

Suddenly, someone touched my shoulder and I reflexively grabbed his hand and spun him around, ending up with one hand holding onto that person's right hand, and the other pressing down on his shoulder in a lock. Just as I was about to dislocate his arm for safety's sake, Jiang Xiaotian, who had been clinging to my neck the entire time, reminded me in a tone of amusement, "It's the two soldiers!"

I took a closer look and discovered that I was holding onto Guo Hong. I hastily released him and apologized awkwardly, "Sorry, I spaced out."

To one side, Chen Yanqing was staring at me with wide eyes, with an expression like he had just seen a ghost.

Shit, I was so out of it that I forgot that I was a gentle, pretty boy. But oh well, I'm in here already. Think you can kick me out? I'll kill you with two fingers if you try!

"Where'd you learn that?" Chen Yanqing asked in astonishment, "You were even able to knock down Guo Hong? He's quite strong."

Guo Hong was staring at me, startled, as he flexed his shoulder gingerly.

I continued playing the role of a cool, pretty boy as I kept my expression flat, and said coldly, "My dàgē is a fighting instructor, so he's taught me a few moves."

Jiang Xiaotian chuckled, but thankfully, no one would care if a three year old kid started chortling to himself.

Suddenly, a huge shadow appeared behind Chen Yanqing and even propped himself against his shoulder. His face split into a huge grin as he said, "No wonder you can survive out there on your own. You've got skills there, boy!"

Chen Yanqing snapped irritably, "Ah Nuo, stop leaning against me. You weigh a ton and you still want people to carry you?"

Ah Nuo sniggered as he replied, "I'm helping you work out. Otherwise, you won't even be able to win against a kid, y'know?"

Chen Yanqing growled, "How can I lose against Xiao Yu!"

Um, you really will.

"Why not?" Ah Nuo asked in disbelief, "It's hard to say who'll win when you and Guo Hong get into a scuffle, but this lad can even take down Guo Hong."

Guo Hong coughed and explained, "I wasn't paying attention just now. Didn't expect him to have a few moves in him, okay?" He gazed at me and asked, not wanting to admit his loss, "You wanna spar a little? I'll go easy—I won't hurt you."

The surrounding soldiers started clamoring in.

But I don't know how to go easy on you. I've killed too many aberrants, so it's already become a reflex to bash heads to bits. How am I supposed to search for clues if I accidentally bust your head?

I said firmly, "I only know a few defensive moves. I don't know how to spar. If you make any moves on me, I'll scream for help!"

"Might be a bit more useful if you screamed molester." Ah Nuo gazed at my face as he rubbed his chin and exclaimed in amazement, "That face of yours is... really dangerous."

What a perfect description. I couldn't agree more. It's too dangerous, especially if we let the Jiang Xiaotian next to me drop the temperature lower!

Guo Hong said uncomfortably, "Okay, okay, we won't fight. Just don't scream or anything."

Here, a few soldiers crowded around us, chuckling among themselves and babbling, "So you're the Xiao Yu that Ah Qing keeps talking about!"

"Geez, just look at that face. No wonder Ah Qing's lost his wits. He's been tramping around these few days looking for some Jiang surname. We've found a bunch of *rivers* and *gingers*, but no sign of any *territories*. That surname of yours sure is special."

Do you really want to die? I was feeling very cold. The Jiang Xiaotian in my arms was like a block of ice, so I could only hold onto him tightly to prevent the mighty Ice Emperor from lunging at them to bite them because he couldn't use his abilities. That would be simply too humiliating.

"Shut up!" Chen Yanqing explained as he broke out in cold sweat, "I really don't mean anything. I just want to help."

All the soldiers gave him a look.

"Stop scaring Xiao Yu," Chen Yanqing said awkwardly. "I'm really not planning that kind of stuff. He's just a kid. You guys are such a load of bull."

"The one who's normally the most full of shit is you, so who are you to talk!"

A slightly chubby soldier squeezed in next to me and chuckled, "Xiao Yu, call me Fatty-gē. You don't hafta be scared, Ah Qing doesn't mean

anything. He's a total looks kind of guy, and only ever helps out when someone's a looker."

"I'm Kun-gē," a dark-skinned soldier also pushed forward to report his nickname.

The others immediately tore him down, laughing, "The hell d'ya mean by "Kun-gē," Blackie is Blackie. Come on, "gē"? What a joke!"

Stop telling me your names. I don't want to get to know you. If I find my clue tonight, I'm definitely getting out of here ASAP. I don't care if you're blackie or whitey.

Chen Yanqing pulled me over angrily and snapped, "Let's go. Ignore these guys. I'll take you to the tent."

I shook off his hand, and Chen Yanqing flushed red as he said, "I really don't... Never mind. I'll take you to the tent. After that, be a good boy and wait there. Don't go running around again." Halfway through his explanation, the soldiers started hooting and jeering. These terrible friends of his made him give up on explaining himself.

Sigh, I know you mean well. But the thing is, Jiang Xiaotian looks like he's about to rip your right hand off to make red knuckle stew. So for the sake of both your hands, just keep your hands off me, okay?

He led the way, threading through all kinds of obstacles, tents, lost citizens, and their belongings, and we arrived in a patch of empty land. This was much more spacious than the other areas.

I lifted the tent flap—there was no one inside. I couldn't help but throw a suspicious look at Chen Yanqing. *Surely he doesn't have enough authority to let someone take up a tent to themselves?*

"Another batch of people will be coming in tomorrow. This was prepared for them." Chen Yanqing explained, "I'll see if I can arrange for that family who shared a tent with you before to join you again. You guys seem to get along quite well."

I nodded. Although the guy in that family was a pain in the ass, he had no balls. If he could get in here and eat his fill, he probably wouldn't kick up a fuss.

"Stay here. It's much safer in here. If people create any trouble, they'd get chased out. So, no one should come looking for trouble with you. You still have food on you, right?"

"Yes." These past few days, Chen Yanqing had been giving me food and drink, so I hadn't consumed very many of my own supplies.

He nodded, but said in a worried tone of voice, "I better get you two something to eat. If the food you're carrying with you isn't gonna go bad, then it's best to save it for now."

I continued nodding. When we had been scavenging, we focused on finding food that wasn't easily perishable. My backpack was filled with cans and crackers, all of which were things that could be kept for some time.

"What the hell's with that guy?" The moment the soldier left, Jiang Xiaotian exploded, raging, "And didn't I tell you, *no* puppy love?"

He's the one with a crush on me, not vice versa. So why are you blaming me?

"I don't have a crush on him. It's just that if I don't use him, it'd be tough getting in here," I said blandly. Although I could sneak in, it would make much life easier if I could straight up walk through the door rather than having to sneak around.

When he heard that, Jiang Xiaotian froze. Emotions warred across the three year old's face, making me feel bad.

"Dàgē, I feel like these barracks are too lax." I changed topics, taking the chance to voice the discomfort I was feeling, and said, "Although the people outside are starting to starve, it hasn't reached the stage where they lose all control. The soldiers in here can still laugh as well, so it seems like there haven't been too many casualties either. But this doesn't make sense. With so many people here and a whole four months into the apocalypse, some aberrants must have been able to make their way in here. Life shouldn't be this easy for them."

Jiang Xiaotian had a think before replying, "Really? I suppose my situation was a little unique so I can't really compare. Back then, I had a whole mercenary troop with me, about to start a large-scale mission. We had a lot of firepower and plentiful supplies, so average aberrants weren't our match."

I knew it, there's no point in comparing lives.

I mumbled in dismay, "And now that I've called this world's you back home, this you has nothing, and you even have to keep searching everywhere for your dìdi."

Jiang Xiaotian barked a laugh and said, "Believe me, he's much luckier than I am."

I gazed at Jiang Xiaotian and asked for the first time, "So you're the last of the Jiang family left over there?"

Jiang Xiaotian froze, then gave a silent nod.

I enveloped Jiang Xiaotian in a hug and even pushed my chin down hard on his little head. Then I stuffed him a pack of crackers.

As for him, he didn't seem to mind the weight of his dìdi, and didn't care about his image. He just let me hug him and sat in my arms, silently munching on his crackers.

"Dàgē."

"Hm?"

"Say, once we find Dàgē and the others, if I lied to everyone, saying that you're Dàgē's illegitimate son that I happened to pick up on the way, do you think they'll believe me?"

"...Probably."

"Even you?"

"Yeah."

"Dàgē, you're terrible!"

"Men don't need to care about that stuff."

"Then what about me?"

Jiang Xiaotian narrowed his eyes as he snapped, "No puppy love!"

That's totally unreasonable! I laughed so hard that I fell over, still hugging to him all the while. Whereas Jiang Xiaotian, despite knowing that he was unreasonable, maintained a stony expression without any sign of changing his mind, and continued eating his crackers even though he was now lying on his side.

Gosh, my dàgē can't possibly be this cute. Hahaha~

Chapter 2: The Sudden Attack

After that, Chen Yanqing stopped coming by. But I didn't mind this at all. I had already gotten inside, so I had no further use for that guy. *Who cares about him? Hehe, abandoning people after using them, I've finally corrupted my Mother Teresa complex!*

While I sat at the entrance of the tent, I gazed up at the guard tower, appearing as lost as the nearby crowds. But in reality, I was scrutinizing the defense around the base of the tower. The guards stationed there seemed a bit like overkill. Although at first glance it looked like they only had one or two squadrons extra compared to other places, I had spotted hidden alcoves in quite a number of places.

I asked with worry, "Dàgē, there's such heavy security around that tower. Are you really sure you'd have been able to leave a clue there?"

Jiang Xiaotian frowned, thought for a little, then replied, "Xiao Sha can. He is very good at subterfuge, so he should be able to avoid notice. But for your safety's sake, he really should have picked somewhere else. Hm, it's hard to say."

"Then that's fine." I said with a nod, "Dàgē knows my capabilities. He'll definitely leave a message there."

Jiang Xiaotian frowned as he nodded and remarked, "But the security here is too strong. Something feels off."

I felt the same way. Luo'an City was a secondary city. In my previous life, Guan Weijun had also been to a refugee camp that had been at a

similar scale to this. Back then, things were much worse. Bodies piled up in just a fight for resources, and after many rounds of snatching and stealing, the aberrants would round it off by gathering into a herd and put a final end to the humans' internal massacres.

"Maybe there's someone important here," I hypothesized.

Jiang Xiaotian pondered for a while, then suddenly climbed around to my back and pulled something out of my backpack. Then, he stuffed it under my clothes down my chest.

I looked down, to see a little sapling curled up against my chest and shivering almost imperceptibly, its leaves on the verge of being shaken off. It looked pretty pitiful...

"It's not much use at the moment, but it can help take a few bullets."

After his cruel declaration, Jiang Xiaotian grabbed onto Jiang Xiaorong's branch and said coldly, "Stay there obediently. If you dare to escape, I'll make you wish you had never lived!"

Jiang Xiaotian keeps giving me the feeling that he likes making life hard for Xiaorong, but why? It's just a tree.

"Dàgē, didn't you say that the plants right now don't understand human speech?"

He nodded as he replied, "They don't, but they have very powerful instincts and can sense threats. If I scare him and you take care of him, he'll grow loyal to you."

Good cop, bad cop? Man, we have to use psychological tactics even on a tree nowadays.

I lightly patted Jiang Xiaorong. He looked pitiful, quivering to that extent. It was great that I was the good cop, so I quickly comforted it to ease the discomfort in my heart from seeing it being so pitiful.

I don't know if it was a result of my comforting or Dàgē's threats, but Jiang Xiaorong sprawled flat against my chest, and his thin branches reached around my chest to the back, almost like he was hugging me and would never let go.

"Is Xiaorong really ok without any soil?" I was a bit worried.

"He doesn't need much soil." Jiang Xiaotian advised, "Create a layer of ice against your chest. Then, you can put some soil there."

"...Isn't that like wearing a bra?"

Although Jiang Shuyu was very good looking, he was obviously a guy. If his chest suddenly stuck out, then the handsome boy would turn into a she-male!

"So what, can't it be chest armor? It has to be a bra?" Jiang Xiaotian rolled his eyes at me and said impatiently, "Even if you've lost your memories, you should still know what armor looks like, right? If someone asks, just say you're wearing a bulletproof vest under your clothes."

Got it! I created a thin layer of ice over my chest. I was originally a bit worried as to whether Jiang Xiaorong would get frozen, but he didn't resist the slightest and in fact stopped shaking... *Shit, Jiang Xiaorong stopped moving completely!*

"Dàgē ...?"

"He's hibernating. Relax."

I blinked and went "oh."

Jiang Xiaotian shook his head with a sigh. "Why does it feel like your personality isn't the Shuyu I remember, but rather more like Shujun? Amnesia really has had a big impact on you."

Sigh. That's probably because of Guan Weijun. She's also female, and things like the Mother Teresa complex and the urge to protect small animals are common illnesses for girls.

But Jiang Xiaotian's words made me a bit anxious, and I couldn't help but blurt out, "Really? But Dàgē and the others said I haven't changed much!?"

Jiang Xiaotian pondered for a moment before replying. "It could be a problem with my memories. It's been ten years since I've seen you, and after the coming of the apocalypse, lots of people changed as well. Or maybe they're just reassuring you."

Dàgē, that's not helpful at all! I grew frustrated. *Don't tell me I really can't possibly be Jiang Shuyu?*

"Don't worry. People's characters change with age, or in response to dramatic events. It's just that your reason for change is a little unique." Jiang Xiaotian patted my shoulder and said lightly, "Like me, I too have changed over those ten years."

I gazed at Jiang Xiaotian, thinking it over. That was true. He did seem a bit different. Dàgē displayed his cockiness for all to see, so people would immediately mark him as someone not to be messed with the moment they laid eyes on him. But Jiang Xiaotian's arrogance was hidden, and he would only show it if and when he wanted to. Aside from that, he also seemed much more serious than Dàgē. Even as a three year-old, this gravitas hadn't been reduced in the slightest.

But no matter what, Dàgē would always be Dàgē. Whereas I might not be Jiang Shuyu... Ah! Nope, I'm thinking random things again. I've already said that I'll be Jiang Shuyu no matter what, so that's that!

"Shuyu." Jiang Xiaotian tapped me.

I lifted my head and saw him staring at the gates, so I naturally followed his gaze. The gates to the military zone were opening, and a few vehicles were entering. On either side of the gates were soldiers with guns at the ready, to stop people from forcing their way in.

"Those cars look really odd." I was a bit suspicious. Aside from the two Humvees that were respectively guarding the front and back of the line, the vehicles in the middle were all boxy-looking vehicles that were mostly white. It looked like a bunch of ambulances. *Don't tell me*

they're using these to transport resources? Why not just drive a truck instead?!

"It's *them*?" The three year-old child scowled, and said doubtfully, "The MORC already controlled the military this early on?"

I blinked. The MORC was something I'd heard of, but they were just like the Twelve Elites. Things that you'd pick up here and there, stories and stuff of legends that were passed around.

The MORC was an organization that suddenly sprung up in the middle stages of the apocalypse, and just like their name suggested, it was a research-orientated organization. Its full name was the "Molecular Organic Research Center," but it shouldn't be underestimated just because it was a research center. I'd heard that that organization's firepower was truly astonishing, and what distinguished them from the rest was that they had invented all kinds of powerful and strange items. While the majority of them were weapons, some were also everyday items that were invented to cope with the apocalypse.

A lot of the things they'd invented were extremely handy, and everyone had to buy these from them. If this kind of organization didn't have enough fighting power, it'd have been taken over by others long ago, but this research organization not only avoided the fate of being taken over, they had become one of the few large-scale organizations out there.

But that was the extent of my knowledge. In those times, it wasn't strange for there to be all kinds of organizations, and you could say

that the world was made up of organizations, both large and small, and the MORC was only one of them.

"Shuyu, remember that logo." Jiang Xiaotian pointed at the logo on the white vehicle—it was made up of three red trapezoids surrounding a yellow triangle, a simple but eye-catching logo. In the middle stages of the apocalypse, one needed to exchange a *lot* of crystals for an item with this logo on it.

"If you get the chance, shut down the MORC."

"..."

I gaped at Jiang Xiaotian. Why did he suddenly instruct his dìdi to destroy an organization? And an organization with quite a good reputation to boot. They never proactively picked fights, and as long as you left them alone, then the MORC wouldn't pose a threat to you. They also invented a lot of powerful weapons and useful tools, and these were vital to humanity's survival!

"If they're not as spotless as they seem, do you want me to try to sneak into the Guard Tower for a look?"

Jiang Xiaotian held his silence for a long while before replying, "No, get the clue from the tower, then go."

I stared at Jiang Xiaotian. It was clear that he actually very much wanted to go in to check things out, but he didn't want his dìdi to get into danger. But I couldn't bring myself to say that we should take a

look after all—the only thing on my mind was to get the clue ASAP and go back to my family.

Best to leave stuff like saving the world to others. I'm better off curing my Mother Teresa complex.

As we continued waiting for the early hours of morning, Chen Yanqing ran over hurriedly, stuffed two cans into my hands and said simply, "Sorry, I've got an urgent mission, so I don't have time to watch over you. Take care." With that, he turned and left.

"Wait!" I shouted at him.

Chen Yanqing stopped haltingly, and said, "Xiao Yu, I really gotta go."

I walked up to him, grabbed his lower jaw, and tossed in two crystals that I had palmed into my hands earlier, shoved his mouth shut, then threw a quick jab at his abdomen, making him swallow reflexively.

Chen Yanqing gaped at me, coughing hard a few times, but nothing came out. Hysterically, he shrilled, "W-what the hell did you make me eat?"

"Candy," I lied without batting an eye.

Chen Yanqing shot me a hard look that clearly said, "Who do you think you're fooling?"

I'd originally wanted to tell him about the crystals to return the many favors he had done for me, but I now had concerns about the MORC

involvement, so it was safer to keep mum after all. Besides, Jiang Xiaotian wanted to overturn the MORC, and I really didn't want to risk strengthening the enemy force when repaying my debts, so I could only give him a few crystals to give his body a little boost. *As for the rest, I'll leave it to you, owner of the body.*

Chen Yanqing stammered in shock, "Xiao Yu, these moves of yours, what..."

I pointed behind him and reminded him, "I think your mates are calling you over."

He looked over his shoulder to see a few soldiers glaring at him, forcing him to go. But before he left, he added, "Don't go anywhere. I'll come find you when I get the chance."

Jiang Xiaotian gazed at Chen Yanqing's back, his eyes screaming bloody murder, and warned me, *"No puppy love."*

"Dàgē, why don't you try something else? I'm bored of hearing that line."

He pondered, then said, "Have a kid ASAP."

...Dàgē, don't you find those two sentences just a little bit contradictory? I stared at Jiang Xiaotian helplessly. This Dàgē from ten years later really is a handful. I miss this world's Dàgē so much!

Jiang Xiaotian seemed to have noticed the contradiction too, and he added with a stony expression, "For the next two years, you're not

allowed puppy love and you should focus on becoming stronger. Once you've reached a certain level, only then can you start having kids."

I face palmed. "Sure, sure, sure, train, find a wife, and have a kid. I have to hit all the milestones in life in two years. Sure thing!"

"Good." Jiang Xiaotian even had the audacity to nod.

I rolled my eyes at him, and decided that once I was home, I'd throw Jiang Xiaotian to Junjun. *No way Dàgē will ask his mèimei to have children ASAP!*

I looked up at the sky. The moon was hanging high in the sky, and even though it wasn't quite a full moon yet, it was almost there, filling the night with its radiance and making it completely unsuitable for a stealth mission to scale the tower. This was a bit frustrating.

I passed the flatbread on me to Jiang Xiaotian. Although it was past its expiration date, it didn't smell spoilt. The box said "No preservatives added," but that had to be for show only. We couldn't go wrong with eating it anyway. And besides, among all the ways of dying, it was extremely unlikely that you would die of an illness in this apocalyptic world.

Jiang Xiaotian munched on the flatbread and remarked, "Today's not a good day for climbing."

I know that already. Don't say the cruel truth out loud. Even Ms. Moon is happily shining brightly in the sky, a mockery of the Jiang family's bad luck.

"I can create a commotion for you..."

I interrupted him, growling, "Finish your flatbread. You're not creating anything!"

Jiang Xiaotian turned to look at me, and went "Mm." I relaxed. Thankfully, he seemed willing to listen to what I had said.

We still had some time after finishing the flatbread, so I decided to lie down and rest for a bit, to make sure I would be sharp and alert for the tower climb late at night. "Dàgē, I'm going to bed. Come join me?"

"No, I slept too long, so I'm not sleepy."

Just as I was about to reply, "oh, then wake me up later," I suddenly felt something off. There was no guessing if this Dàgē would secretly run off and get up to no good, like sneaking into the Guard Tower to check out what the MORC was up to, or other dangerous acts like that!

I grabbed the child, entered the tent, and lay on the floor. "If you don't want to sleep, then be my pillow."

"...I want to study the map."

"You'll have plenty of time once we set off tomorrow morning. Right, I'm sleeping now. Good night."

Not giving Jiang Xiaotian any chance to dissent, I hugged the child and drifted off to sleep. Fortunately, he didn't put up a fight and just quietly let me use him as a hugging pillow.

But really, it felt quite comfy to be hugging a kid. So maybe Jiang Xiaotian really was onto something when he said to have kids earlier. And in my previous life, I would have had to give birth to one, whereas in this life, I would just have to put in the seed and then I'd have a kid to hug. It was such an easy peasy way to happiness that I would be doing myself a disservice if I didn't have a kid...

“Èrgē, Èrgē!”

I rubbed my eyes and looked down to see Junjun's expression of terror. Startled out of my drowsiness, I quickly got up and asked, “What's wrong? Did you have a nightmare again?”

A few days ago, Junjun had had a nightmare which scared her so badly that she refused to sleep by herself, and every night she would stand by my bed, hugging her pillow and looking so pitiful that there was no way I could turn her away.

Junjun stammered, “Èrgē, t-there's a sound. Some footsteps from downstairs!”

I perked up my ears and listened for a moment. There were indeed footsteps, but there was no one else in the house. Even Lin-bó had gone back to his son's place for a few days.

I made a shushing gesture at Junjun, and the little girl immediately covered her mouth.

I got off the bed, pulled out a baseball bat from under my bed, and said softly, "Junjun, hide in the wardrobe and don't come out."

With that, I quietly opened the door and scanned my surroundings as I walked down the stairs.

There was a silhouette moving around in the kitchen. It looked quite tall and bulky, which was bad news for me. If I couldn't knock down my opponent with the first blow, then I'd probably end up being the person on the floor.

Suddenly, I heard a small sound from behind me. I immediately spun around, baseball bat held at the ready. Shujun was standing behind me, her little face as white as a sheet in the dark, and she was gripping a letter opener that Dàgē had given to me as a birthday present—a butterfly "knife" that was being used to open "letters."

Okay, fine, I admit that this is the right time to use the knife. I plucked it from Junjun's hand and slipped it into my pocket, glancing meaningfully toward her room to get her to go back there. But the pale-faced girl stubbornly refused to leave.

I frowned. If we continued our disagreement, it would only alert the intruder, so I had no choice but to push back my mèimei's punishment until later.

Holding up the baseball bat, I walked to the kitchen door, pressed myself against the wall, and waited. *I'm going to break his leg with the first strike. There's no way I can possibly let Shujun get hurt!*

The silhouette walked out, and I swung the bat with all my might. To my surprise, my opponent's reflexes were extremely fast, and he managed to dodge the swing. I immediately dashed forward and brought the bat down...

"Stop, stop! It's me, Shuyu, don't hit me!"

I froze, and in that moment, he dashed over to the light switch. The lights turned on, revealing none other than Dàgē.

The three siblings stared at each other. Dàgē chuckled drily. "Shuyu, you really put a lot of power behind that swing. Dàgē will teach you a few moves some other day. With you at home, I'll feel even more at ease."

So you'll have less of a reason to come back, is that right? I arched my eyebrows, and was about to start scolding him, when Junjun unexpectedly went "waaaaa" and started crying. Dàgē and I immediately put everything to one side and focused on comforting our mèimei.

Finally, Junjun cried herself to exhaustion and fell asleep on my lap, so I had no choice but to sit on the sofa, acting as my mèimei's pillow.

"Dàgē, why'd you come back all of a sudden?" I asked softly, terrified of waking up my mèimei.

Dàgē gently patted Junjun's back as he responded, "I got Lin-bó's call. He said his son is getting married, and he needs to take a few days off. I was worried about having just the two of you in the house, so I came back to check things out."

I rolled my eyes at him, saying, "I'm in middle school already, so what's there to worry about me staying at home? And I spend most of my time at school anyway, and because Junjun has been going to art classes after school, I wait nearby to pick her up to go to dinner. It's usually almost eight by the time we get home, and then it's homework, shower, and bed. There's not much difference whether or not Lin-bó is around."

On hearing that, Dàgē frowned and said, "Eight? So late? How do you two get home without Lin-bó driving you home?"

"We've got a regular taxi guy to do that. In the past, when we got out of classes earlier, Lin-bó would be busy cooking dinner, so he couldn't come pick us up, and he'd always get that taxi guy to take us home."

Dàgē's frown deepened, and he said unhappily, "I'll hire a driver for you guys as well. Lin-bó is getting old, and he won't be of much help if anything happens."

I pondered for a moment, then said, "Nah, there's no way of knowing how reliable someone is if we find them at short notice. They might even pose a greater danger to us. And anyway, you know me, Dàgē. I don't like having outsiders at home."

Even having Lin-bó is too much. I frowned. When I'm eighteen, I'll let Lin-bó retire. In any case, household duties like cooking and cleaning can be handled between Shujun and myself.

Dàgē gazed at me, clearly hesitating about something, but ended up asking anyway, "Shuyu, do you blame me? For running around all the time, leaving you two at home, or, or even the fact that I'm so focused on being a mercenary..."

I looked back at Dàgē, puzzled, and asked, "Blame you for what? It's good that you're a mercenary. Just don't line up too many missions that you can't come back home at all. A few days ago, when Junjun saw the news talking about a worker at a technology plant worked to literal death, she asked me worriedly, 'Will Dàgē work himself to death too?', and even started having nightmares."

Dàgē looked me over very carefully, and I let him, even though I hadn't a clue what he was thinking.

He exhaled a long breath and said, "Shuyu, you put me at ease to a point where it's a little worrying."

I replied with absolute seriousness, "Dàgē, even though you aren't great at academics, you should at least learn your Chinese properly. I don't even know what language you're speaking right now."

Dàgē burst into laughter and ruffled my hair roughly.

My expression darkened as I said, "Well, since you'll be here for the next few days, you should take Junjun to the kids' amusement park,

buy some clothes and shoes at the kids' section of department stores—oh! Yeah, she told me last time that her friend went to a Snow White themed restaurant, which sounds pretty nice, so we should go as well.”

“...Doesn't Junjun have school?”

“We can take a few days off.”

Dàgē said painfully, “Do you think someone like me can even fit in at a Snow White themed restaurant without looking like an idiot?”

“That's the point, to make you look like an idiot,” I said serenely as I smoothed down my puffed up hair.

“...Shuyu, who'd you learn to be so vengeful from?”

“Learned it by myself.”

Seeing Dàgē grimacing like he had a bad tooth, I suddenly remembered something important and said, “That's right, Dàgē, since you're here, remember to do your annual dental check.”

His grimace of pain worsened.

Feels awesome to see your look of pain, hehehe. Who asked you to ruffle my hair!

“Shuyu! Shuyu!”

I chuckled as I replied, "There's no use crying to me. You have to get your teeth checked—"

A sudden *bang* rang out. My heart skipped a beat, and my eyes flew open, and I saw in front of me a child, although it was not Junjun.

Jiang Xiaotian raged, "How can you sleep so well? I kept calling you, but you refused to wake up. Don't tell me all that training's gone to waste?!"

I blinked, confused about the situation. *This child looks really familiar...*

Bang!

A heavy blow landed on my forehead, knocking me so hard that tears almost spurted out of my eyes. *This child's quite strong, as expected of the Ice Emperor... Ice Emperor!*

I sprang up, snapping out of my stupor. The surrounding sounds rushed in like a wave—screams and the sounds of stampeding feet. The canvas of the tent flickered with a multitude of shadows of fleeing people. *How could I have been sound asleep?!*

I looked at Jiang Xiaotian in shock.

He nodded as he said, "Something's happened. Go climb the tower now for the clue."

He was right—that was the most critical thing right now. I snatched up the backpack, while Jiang Xiaotian climbed onto my back without me

saying anything. Then, I touched my chest. *Good, Xiaorong is here as well. Time to go!*

Yanking aside the tent flap, I could see that the previous calmness outside had dissolved into gunshots, blazing fires, screams, civilians fleeing everywhere, and soldiers firing shots in all directions. The military zone had turned into a war zone.

I asked in disbelief, "Dàgē, how long have I been sleeping?"

"Three hours."

Only three hours for this place to fall from heaven to hell. That's faster than an express train. What on earth happened?

Jiang Xiaotian poked out his head next to my neck and asked with concern, "But it's only been ten-odd minutes since this happened. I couldn't wake you up. Shuyu, are you ok?"

"I'm fine. I was just dreaming about my old memories." I narrowed my eyes. Some of the running and leaping figures didn't look right. They were faster than normal, and some parts of their bodies also looked off. It just simply wasn't very noticeable among the crowds at the moment, due to the chaos and the darkness.

Jiang Xiaotian asked quickly, "So you remember everything now, Shuyu?"

"No, I only dreamed of some small things. It's not the first time it's happened, and every time it does, I've always been in deep sleep."

This was actually very dangerous for me, so I was torn between wanting and hating for this to happen. I wanted to remember my memories through my dreams, but at the same time, if I slept too soundly and something happened, I'd never wake up again.

"Hm, well, it doesn't matter. You can dream whatever you want, however you want, once you find the other me."

That's right, finding Dàgē and the others is the key! I spoke to Dàgē while surveying the different routes. The Guard Tower didn't look approachable. All the soldiers were clustered there, but what was strange was that they were not protecting the Guard Tower. Their gun muzzles were pointed *toward* the tower, and they were firing like crazy, as if they were trying to stop things inside from getting out.

I was starting to get suspicious. I'd originally thought that this was an aberrant invasion, but it didn't seem right. This didn't look like something invading from the outside, but like things from the inside wanting to escape.

"What did you dream of?" Jiang Xiaotian tapped my shoulder and pointed into the distance.

There were four sides to the Guard Tower. Currently, the soldiers were clustered around the main side, but Jiang Xiaotian was pointing to its back. There weren't many people there, and although I might be spotted by people on the ground as I was climbing, who would give a damn at a time like this?

I crafted ice blades below my feet and silently glided toward the side that had relatively less light.

"Once, Lin-bó's son got married and he went home, leaving just Junjun and me behind. You were so worried that you came back to check on us and got back home in the middle of the night. Junjun and I thought you were a thief, and I almost got you with a baseball bat."

Jiang Xiaotian asked in confusion, "I don't remember this. And even if Lin-bó isn't home, don't we have a maid as well?"

What maid? I zipped past a few fleeing soldiers. They looked terrified and couldn't even hold their guns steady. The moment they saw me, they looked shocked but ignored me, scrambling and stumbling to get away.

Hmph! This lot doesn't have the balls to be soldiers. They don't hold a candle to the bunch at the entrance to the tower.

I quietly circled to the back of the tower and flattened the ice blades below my feet, keeping them in a half melted state. The ice's stickiness was of great help when doing things like scaling a wall or climbing towers.

Halfway up, there was a sudden explosion. The tower's violent shuddering forced me to a halt, and I glued myself to the face of the tower. Once the tremors died down, I looked down.

The soldiers were firing like mad, and with the gates to the tower blasted open, many people were now pouring out, only to be mowed down by the bullets... *Wait, those aren't people!*

They didn't immediately collapse after getting shot, and only collapsed to the ground after being aerated into a beehive. *Humans haven't evolved to this stage yet. Are those aberrants?*

"They're experiments," Jiang Xiaotian said in an icy tone. "Look, most of them look human, and a lot of their transformations make no sense. Some of them even have rotting parts. They're not aberrants."

That's right. Aberrants were still living organisms, and while they might die if they grew and evolved in the wrong direction, they wouldn't rot as long as they were alive. They weren't the living dead from zombie movies.

Judging from the situation, the soldiers with their strong firepower still had the upper hand. Although some slipped through the cracks, most of them were injured and just wanted to escape and were unlikely to stay behind for mass scale slaughter. So they didn't pose much of a threat to the refugee camp.

With that worry out of the way, I resumed climbing the tower, when from behind came hesitant words from Jiang Xiaotian, "Shuyu, after the battle below settles down a little, see if you can sneak into the laboratory."

I blinked, resisting the urge to look back and roll my eyes at Jiang Xiaotian, and asked as I continued upwards, "Why? What's there to see?"

"It's just been four months into the apocalypse. No matter how powerful the MORC is, there's no way they can create so many specimens that are powerful enough to escape their control within such a short period of time. In order to pull off something like this, you'd need to already have had some basic research done..."

I jolted and said, "So they might be related to the apocalypse?"

Jiang Xiaotian frowned, hypothesizing, "They're probably not involved in creating the apocalypse. The black fog engulfs the whole world once a year, and this kind of power is too strong for it to be from the hands of a human. But I think they probably knew something before the apocalypse."

So that's why he wants me to check it out. The MORC didn't look like an easy opponent, judging from the way they were able to control the military zone. If we didn't take the chance to investigate during this one rare slip up of theirs, we probably wouldn't be so lucky again in the future.

Why are all these unraveling of mysteries and saving of the world things happening to a teen like me, who only just wants to go home?!

Jiang Xiaotian said hesitantly, "If you really don't want to..."

I cut in, "I'll get hold of the clue to home first, then we'll see if there's a chance of infiltrating the place."

In my previous life, Dàgē was able to become the Ice Emperor. In this life, even if he had changed occupations to be a healer, he couldn't be underestimated. It was only a matter of time before the JDT would step onto the world stage. Which meant that I really did need to scout out the MORC beforehand.

So there's no choice but to fight in the present for the sake of the future. Suddenly, I had a weird feeling, like I was working hard to save up to buy a house.

I finally made it to the top of the tower. A quick scan of the surroundings was enough for me to spot words carved into a globe at the base of the top of the tower. The globe, which was as tall as a person, was completely covered in words that were laid out like a letter. And the first word was enough to let me know that I had found the right spot.

Shuyu...

Chapter 3: MORC

Shuyu, I don't know where you are. We've searched everywhere, but we couldn't find anything to go on...

Of course, it'd be weird if people chasing a person who had been snatched away by a bird had something to go on. The snatched person might have been splattered into goo in a fall or eaten clean by the aberrant—so you'd have to travel from the lands of the living to the dead to find that person!

I hope that the fact that the guard tower has become a refugee site wouldn't create too many variables.

There's something fishy going on here. Every time people are let into the military zone, some number will disappear. But whoever is doing this is being very subtle. Given the state of the world and the harsh reality that no one looks out for others anymore, if not for the fact that we were thoroughly investigating the place to look for you, we probably wouldn't have noticed the disappearances either.

If you are here, you must be careful. Leave ASAP and find us. We will now head eastwards toward an old nostalgic town next to "Lan City." There's a famous clock tower there, and unless we find some hard evidence on the way or if something goes wrong, it will be the base for our search for you for some time. We will change our scouting pattern to expand radially outward from that spot.

Shuyu, come back as fast as you can. Recently, Shujun refuses to stop practicing her special abilities and has fainted a few times. She keeps blaming herself for not being strong enough, for allowing you to get snatched away because you had to protect her, she... In any case, come back soon.

From your gē,

Shutian

“Junjun! My silly mèimei, what if you hurt your health!”

I was so worried that I wanted to tear down a wall to vent my frustration, but unfortunately for me, there wasn't a single wall around me, so I could only grab the tip of the tower and shake it furiously. I really wanted to rip the tower apart.

“Lan City”? Jiang Xiaotian frowned.

Lan City sounded very familiar—it was one of Meisia's three largest cities, but I didn't remember anything about the old nostalgic town. In any case, I'd find out where it was soon enough once I checked the map.

I scanned the words carved on the ball a few more times before reluctantly climbing down the tower. When I looked down to survey the situation, my expression sank.

The situation was worsening. As more and more aberrants slipped through the blockade—evidence that the military's firepower was

slowly losing its effect—the experiments would sneak an occasional attack from behind them, making it impossible for the soldiers to focus on just one side. They had to be constantly vigilant about their surroundings, because the moment they slipped up, they'd be jumped on by the experiments and end up resting in pieces.

A chill gripped my heart as I watched. *Are Chen Yanqing and Guo Hong down there? And that group of soldiers who joked around with me—Ah Nuo, Fatty, Blackie, the Lieutenant...* But given the situation, I wasn't quite sure I dared to go help them.

Although a lot of the aberrants looked like they had evolved erratically, they were remarkably powerful and hard to take down—they were probably even on par with tier one aberrants. And not to mention their astounding numbers, with yet more pouring from the door. There was no way of knowing how many of them there were.

I murmured in astonishment, "Those things are a bit too OP. I wonder if they have crystals?"

Then I can use them to feed Xiaotian. I was suddenly struck by the impulse to snatch a few of them.

"Don't even think about fighting those things." Jiang Xiaotian glared at me as he warned me, "Even if they have crystals, you don't know what the MORC have done to them. Do you even dare to eat those crystals?"

...We had adulterated food before the apocalypse, and now after the apocalypse, we don't dare to eat adulterated crystals. Okay, fair enough. The former would make you die a slow death, but it was hard

to say what the latter would do to you. Worst case scenario, you'd drop dead after popping it into your mouth. It really isn't something worth risking my life over.

Jiang Xiaotian said with a frown, "Shuyu, it's best that you leave. Don't go inside to investigate. There are too many experiments down there, and there's no way you can handle so many."

I was thinking the same thing. With a nod, I started my climb down the tower.

Suddenly, a huge explosion went off, making me cling tightly to the steel tower. I glanced down to see the soldiers starting to use the heavy duty firepower—even grenades and RPGs made their appearances. *Seriously, why didn't they do this earlier instead of waiting until now to show their true colors? They lost a bunch of people for nothing...*

But the soldier standing next to the firer shoved down the RPG, roaring, "The hell are you doing? We've still got our men and a bunch of researchers down there. If you collapse the door, they won't be able to make it out!"

"I'm saving your ass!" The soldier holding onto the RPG growled, "Don't tell me you fucking believe they're still alive?!"

A soldier scowled and bellowed, "I don't fucking care whose ass you're saving. Stop the blasting! Lieutenant, Ah Nuo, Ah Qing, and Old Guo... They're all still inside!"

It was actually Blackie. I quickly climbed lower to better catch what they were saying.

"We can't let them get out no matter what. They're all civvies outside!"

Someone else cut in. "We can't blast them down. The brass say there's some Professor Wu we *have* to rescue."

"Fuck that professor. They're the crazies messing around inside and making these works of art. And you still wanna save them?"

At that moment, a series of explosions sounded out from within the lab. All the soldiers' faces darkened at that.

Jiang Xiaotian tapped me, reminding me, "Shuyu, if you don't leave now, it'll be harder to get away once their defenses completely collapse."

"Dàgē," I said quietly, "tell me, if I ran away every time I encountered danger and think I couldn't win, will I really be able to become the Ice Emperor in the end?"

Jiang Xiaotian jolted and fell silent.

I grimaced as I spoke, "I really want to run away. Just seeing what's going on down there scares me. I just want to go home, to escape all the dangers. All I need is to stay with my family, for everyone to be alive."

In my previous life, Guan Weijun had done exactly that. You could say that I survived ten years of the apocalypse precisely because I did that, but in the end, I still died. The only difference was that it made no difference whether I lived or died then—in any case, I was already a dead person walking, because there was no future to speak of.

But this life is different, dying in this life is completely different! If I was stronger and didn't get beaten to a pulp by the flock of birds, would Shujun blame herself and train her abilities to the point of fainting?

It wasn't the end of the world that I got snatched away this time. At least I was able to protect Shujun. But next time, if I fall, will the people behind me really make it?

Truth be told, I'm terrified. Terrified that I'll end up ripped to shreds like those soldiers, guts spilling everywhere. That'll hurt like hell—and this isn't me speaking hypothetically. I'd died exactly in that manner in my previous life! And what's more, what terrifies me much more than the pain is never seeing Dàgē and Shujun again!

But I'm even more scared that, some day, I won't be able to protect my family. If the person who got shredded wasn't me, but Shujun... my heart aches just imagining that scene.

I sucked in a deep breath. I swore that I won't run and I won't hide, that I'll become the Ice Emperor. Don't forget your oath.

"I can't run away."

Jiang Xiaotian's expression was complicated. If I had to describe it, it'd be like that of a mother bird watching her fledging leave the nest. That expression of mixed dismay and pride... on a three year old's face, it was distressing this fledging. *Please, Dàgē, can you act like a proper three year old?*

"In the past, you didn't fear anything. But now, you're scared of everything. That said, I'd rather trust my back to this you."

I immediately puffed up my chest, my heart feeling like it was about to burst with happiness. Being entrusted with the Ice Emperor's back was the most incredible honor!

"I mean in spirit. In practice, you've still got some ways to go in terms of ability."

Can't you just skip the clarifications?!

"But no matter how brave you are, even you, Shuyu, can't take down so many experiments. This is a fact."

I tilted my head as I watched the soldiers down below, firing non-stop but still getting jumped on periodically. They looked like they were on the verge of defeat. And I asked, "What if I got those soldiers to cooperate?"

Jiang Xiaotian said in a ponderous voice, "They have heavy firepower, but they've lost their nerve. If no one steadies their nerves, they'll scatter. What you want isn't to seek their cooperation, but to deliver

them a huge shock! And make them obey your commands within the shortest period of time.”

I was bamboozled by his words. An eighteen year-old pretty boy needing to astound a bunch of veteran soldiers sounded like mission impossible.

“What’s next will depend on what you do, whether it’s fortifying the defense perimeter, or pushing forward toward the tower. The latter will be much more difficult—these soldiers have lost their nerve and probably won’t be willing to go inside. But whatever it is you want to do, if you don’t do it now, you can forget about getting off this tower.”

He was right. There were originally only a few soldiers slipping away here and there in the confusion, but as the battle became more and more intense, a fair number of soldiers were now retreating as they fired their guns. Those specimens only needed to make one big push, and the whole line would collapse.

Just as I was thinking that, I watched a specimen that stood over three meters tall dash over. Although it still looked humanoid, its skin and flesh were as gray as stone. If he had been crouched by the side of a road, he would look exactly like a big rock.

The soldiers gaped with bulging eyes, but stuff like this could hardly faze me. After all, at the start of the apocalypse, when I was crippled and without any special abilities, Muscle Man had appeared in our house. While this thing in front of me was indeed stronger than Muscle Man, I wasn’t a cripple anymore.

The specimen suddenly chose this moment to let out a huge roar. Everyone finally snapped out of their shock and started firing like crazy. Unfortunately, his skin was crazily hard, to the point where ordinary bullets didn't seem to do much to him within a short space of time.

What was worse, the other specimens weren't just dallying around as spectators; they even had the sense to follow behind this big rock and surge forward in a wave. This meant that the soldiers could no longer just fire at the rock—they had to divert their attention to attack other specimens. This in turn reduced the pressure on the rock, and he immediately rushed up in front of the soldiers, and with a wave of his hand, grabbed onto a soldier in each hand and held them up in front of himself as a shield.

"Hold fire!" The soldiers were horrified and had no choice but to shoot the other specimens, letting the big rock rush straight out of the blockade of gunfire.

How can he be so smart? It isn't possible for aberrants to be so powerful at this stage. Given the size of this guy's head, it's obvious that he isn't an aberrant that solely focuses on developing his intellect. Something seems very off with these specimens. Jiang Xiaotian's right, I do need to check it out. I won't get such a good opportunity as this in the future.

Just as I was hesitating about what to do, whether it was to let Big Rock rush out and never see him again, or to make a move and attack him to shock the soldiers, Big Rock made my decision for me.

He broke through the blockade yet displayed no intent of leaving. If anything, he started stirring up trouble among the military. When soldiers retreated while firing, Big Rock would rush forward. The closer soldiers would freak and start running, while the soldiers further away wouldn't dare to shoot for fear of friendly fire.

I put Jiang Xiaotian and the backpack onto the tower and drew my spear from the bottom compartment of the backpack, and then I was jumping down. I glided over some distance, catching up to Big Rock, then two blades of icy wind shot out from below and froze his feet., sending him crashing to the ground and causing the ground to tremble a little.

The ice blade slid up his back but was unable to even so much as scratch him. But I had anticipated this. At this moment, he roared and swung a hand behind him. I leapt to one side in the nick of time. Without even bothering to stand up, he lunged over at me in the next breath, probably with the intent to crush me to death in his embrace.

I dodged his arms with a glide backwards, and he once again sprawled on the floor, but only to his knees this time—he didn't fall flat against the ground. But this was enough to send him into a rage. He let out a furious roar, and he looked up with a glare, only to widen his eyes—the double muzzle of my gun was pointing right at his eyes.

Bang bang bang—

After being fired at like crazy, he was still able to let out a howl of pain. He first pressed his hands against his face, then started running around crazily, wanting to try his luck and see if he could hit me.

As for me, I was gliding in front of him and examining his face. His sockets had turned into a paste of blood and white goo. His eyeballs should be smushed. In theory, bullets entering his eyes should have been able to penetrate his brain, but he must have closed his eyes in time. This guy's eyelids were also incredibly tough.

At this moment, a few other specimens leapt at me. I spun around and held the gun to one specimen's forehead. One shot blew out half his brain.

Jin Feng's guns really had quite the firepower.

Just as I was about to deal with the other two, they were ventilated into beehives. I glanced to one side to see Blackie holding up a light assault rifle, its muzzle still smoking, a look of disbelief on his face as he stared back at me.

In that moment, heavy footfalls sounded. I looked to see Big Rock get up and start sprinting—he looked like he wanted to get away.

I glided after him, casually icing the spear to my waist. Then, I crafted two long and narrow ice blades and threw out a patch of ice in front of Big Rock. He shattered the ice with one stomp, tilting off balance, but he didn't fall over. But this momentary pause was enough. I stepped on his calf, then leapt to his back, leap frogged over his head, and landed in front of him.

My ice blades were left deep in his eye sockets.

After swaying for a bit, Big Rock collapsed onto the ground, motionless. I walked up, and when there was no response after kicking him twice, lifted his big head and twisted the two ice blades. Only then did I relax and drop his head back to the ground. In this day and age, everyone's vitality was very strong, and there was no way I could relax unless I had turned my opponents' brains into complete mush.

I frowned as I gazed at Big Rock. There was something off about him. He was hard, sure, but he was also very slow. As long as you knew what his weakness was, it wasn't hard to deal with him. Even if he posed a greater threat than a tier one aberrant, his true strength wasn't up to par. It was almost like he had evolved just to act as a shield for gunfire, and he had sacrificed everything else for this one purpose, creating the end result of being very strong but also very easy to defeat.

It was very easy to go wrong with this kind of extreme evolution model. Jiang Xiaorong was a perfect and pitiful example of this, completely wasting the evolution crystals that he had swallowed, changing from a tree that had touched the heavens into a bonsai plant.

So did this Big Rock also pick the wrong evolutionary model, or did the MORC do something?

Whatever, I'll find out once I go in.

I turned around to see that the soldiers' battle was also coming to an end. Although corpses of the specimens littered the ground, a fair number of them must have gotten away; otherwise, there was no way the soldiers could end the fight so quickly. But it wasn't a big deal if

they got away. The world was full of man-eating aberrants, so the addition of these specimens wasn't going to make much of a difference. There were too many to begin with, anyway.

I picked up the light assault rifle from a dead soldier in an offhand manner and walked up to the soldiers, scaring them to the point where they all pointed their guns at me.

"Blackie!" I yelled, and all the soldiers turned to glare at Blackie.

"Ah Qing and the others are trapped inside?"

Blackie nodded, dazed.

"Wanna save 'em?" I asked in a taunting manner. Although I wanted to shock these soldiers, I was too young, I had a ridiculously pretty face, and I had appeared out of nowhere. So even if I was very strong, it was probably hard for them to agree to follow me, so I could only use the idea of saving their brothers-in-arms to rally them to my cause.

If the person who leapt down from the tower was the Ice Emperor, he probably won't have it so hard. He'd just have to wave an arm and call out, and everyone will follow him there and then! Damn it, I- I... can only wait until I grow up. What else can I do?

Blackie's eyes lit up, and together with his dark complexion, it gave the impression of two search lights being switched on at night.

"Damn right we do!"

I nodded and said, "Anyone who wants to go in with me should re-equip themselves, and follow me in to save your brothers-in-arms in thirty seconds. We can't wait any longer than that."

Without waiting for their response, I turned to climb back up the tower to find Jiang Xiaotian. Just as I was about to put him and the backpack on my back, he shook his head and said, "I can carry the bag. You need to fight, and you mustn't get dragged down by this."

"Can you carry it?" I stared at Jiang Xiaotian dubiously. The bag was almost as tall as he was.

"Yes." Jiang Xiaotian gave me an odd look and asked, "Surely you aren't thinking I'm really a kid, are you?"

I rubbed my nose as I replied, "You're the one who said you can't use your abilities."

Jiang Xiaotian chuckled. "I can't, but I can still freeze and shatter a few hearts."

Sigh. Fine. This is the gap in our abilities. To the Ice Emperor, freezing a few people to death doesn't count as using his special abilities. It's probably the same as sneezing a few times for him.

Carrying the child, I leapt down the tower. The soldiers really were all at the ready. There were about thirty of them—they weren't that many in quantity, but they made up for it in quality. Probably because of their military training and the fact that they were living fairly decently

even after the apocalypse, they hadn't fallen to the level of becoming evil warlords yet.

Although a lot of specimens had gotten out, there were probably still quite a few left down there. As insurance, it was better to bring along some helpers. Some of them might even know their way inside, which would be of a great help to me.

Blackie walked up to me, sucked in a deep breath, and said, "We'll go in first. The others need to check how the civilians outside are doing."

I nodded and replied, "Then let's go."

Then, I stared at them, and they stared back at me. Neither of us moved.

"Lead the way!" I gave them a strange look. "Don't tell me you want me and my three year old son to lead the charge?"

"..."

The soldiers flushed red and quickly looked away, and in the end, the highest ranked person, a second lieutenant, took charge and ordered the group to stand in a few rows to enter the tower. The ones at the very front were the scouts, the ones in the middle formed the bulk of the group, while the ones standing at the back were responsible for guarding the rear.

Seeing how organized and well-trained they were, I felt much better about the whole thing. From the looks of things, as long as they could

maintain their state of mind, these soldiers had a fair bit of combat power. Their poor performance just now was purely down to the chaos right from the start and Big Rock's charge without any fear of bullets that had thrown them into disarray.

Everyone gazed at the entrance to the Guard Tower that was in ruins, grim looks on all their faces, but they still stepped forward without any hesitation.

Blackie had been assigned to stand next to me, probably because he was the only person in the group who knew me. He glanced at Jiang Xiaotian and frowned. Some soldiers had suggested that I leave the kid behind, but I had refused.

"Xiao Yu, do you want me to find a pair of boots for you?" Blackie couldn't resist making this offer as he gazed down at me feet, "The inside has been blasted to pieces, so if you go in barefoot, you're gonna be in big trouble the moment you step on something sharp."

I widened the layer of ice that was under my feet and showed him. The soldiers around me gawked at the ice, and Blackie stammered, "Xiao Yu, h-how did you make that?"

"It's nothing unusual. Most people have special abilities."

Someone mumbled, "But no one can use it like that."

Blackie couldn't help but blurt out another question, "Can you teach us to be as strong as you?"

"Let's focus on rescuing the guys first." *Then I'll be gone like the wind.*

Everyone's faces lit up with hopes when they heard that, making me break out in cold sweat. *T-this... fine, if they do well, I'll consider telling them about the evolution crystals.*

Anyway, the MORC should have discovered the existence of these crystals long ago. Given that they have locked up so many aberrants for experimentation, I find it hard to believe that they haven't dissected a few already.

Even though they know about it, they have chosen to keep it to themselves. If humanity had found out about the use of these crystals earlier on, will humans be in a better situation in the future?

Before long, we arrived in front of the elevator. This was probably a cargo lift—it was so large that it wasn't a problem fitting thirty people inside.

I said calmly, "It's not too smart to take the elevators in times like this."

Blackie said softly, "We don't know other paths, and we've only ever watched people go in. We've never gone down ourselves. The research guys only ever let us guard the outside and maintain order in the refugee camp."

"Then why are Ah Qing and the others down there?"

"We received an SOS from the lab, so the Lieutenant took some guys down there. Then those monsters started swarming out of there."

So it's a secret underground lab? I mournfully hoped that it wasn't too big of a laboratory; otherwise, those specimens that had gotten out would just be the tip of the iceberg.

The scouting soldiers pressed the elevator button, and everyone immediately shifted into guard formation. The elevator doors opened, revealing a few white-robed doctors lying on the floor, none of the corpses intact.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

The second lieutenant gestured everyone in, but he barred my way with an arm and asked with a hint of tension, "Why did you come inside? You want the research...?"

"Come on, look at the world we're in now. Why don't you just say it straight, that I want to go in to steal the goods? I just owe Chen Yanqing a debt," I replied calmly, "and I never let my debts go unpaid." *But I will lie.*

The second lieutenant hesitated, glancing at Jiang Xiaotian, before lowering his arm and getting out of my way.

Come to think of it, no one would take a three-year old with them to steal research information. Jiang Xiaotian really is a good cover!

Using the white-robed doctor's identification and eyeball, the elevator started operating smoothly.

I glanced at the display on the elevator. In actual fact, all the buttons were fake. All you needed was the identification card and eyeball, and the elevator would start moving by itself.

To one side, Blackie chuckled, "Ah Qing's really lucky. We originally kept joking that he liked bringing trouble onto himself, but we never thought he'd help someone powerful like you. But seriously, Xiao Yu, who the hell are you? Those moves of yours ain't normal. I doubt anyone in our troop can win against you in a fist fight."

"My family is a long line of martial arts practitioners," I continued my web of lies, ignoring Jiang Xiaotian's laughter. Keeping my cool, I continued adding to it, "I mean, I should be asking what on earth you guys are doing here? Why are you keeping those ab... monsters here? Those things were mostly focused on getting away, but I'm sure there are still a lot of deaths among the civilians out there."

"Hell if we know!" Blackie paused, glancing at the second lieutenant. When he saw that he too had a look of apprehension on his face but made no move to stop him, he continued, "We only know that there's a research lab down here, and those people were researching these monsters, to find out their weaknesses and why they turned into monsters. But we really had no clue that there were so many of them down here. We thought they only had a few to research on."

Someone else raised their voice in anger, "If we'd have known, you think we'd still be guarding this shit hole? We'd have tossed in a few grenades to blast those fuckers to death!"

I asked suspiciously, "You're official military, right? If you're not a privately hired army, why do you need to protect a laboratory?"

Blackie replied perfectly naturally, "Of course we're the proper army. And since our superiors assigned us here, this research lab is probably connected to the government. At the very least, the government probably owns some part of this lab."

I went "whoa" and cast a quick look downwards at Jiang Xiaotian. *Even the government's involved now, Dàgē! Do you really want your dīdi to make enemies with this research center?*

Jiang Xiaotian shot me a look and said utterly fearlessly, "The Flame King is part of the government's military, and I've never been scared of him."

Everyone looked down to stare at Jiang Xiaotian. As for me, I was sweating bucket-loads. The Ice Emperor was indeed mighty. He didn't care the slightest that these people would hear what he said...

"What's the Flame King?" Blackie asked in confusion.

I replied seriously, "The Mighty King of Flames, or 'Flame King' for short, was a very popular cartoon long ago. My Xiaotian loves it!" Jiang Xiaotian froze, but fortunately, he didn't open his mouth to rip me a new one.

The surrounding soldiers looked like they couldn't decide whether they wanted to laugh or cry, but when the elevator jolted to a stop, everyone's expressions reverted to a solemn grimness. Under the second lieutenant's orders, we grouped into a defensive formation and all muzzles were pointed at the elevator door.

I lifted up both guns and squeezed past Jiang Xiaotian to stand in front of him.

Then, the elevator doors opened.

Chapter 4: The Laboratory, Part 1

As the door opened, the soft metallic sounds of guns being gripped tightly surrounded me. It was dim outside the elevator, and the lights above flashed erratically. The damage here was not as bad as in the room above us. The explosion we had heard just now was probably some distance from here, but that was a good thing; otherwise, the elevator might have stopped working.

The scouts split into two parties as they scanned the surroundings. When they were certain that it was safe, they signaled "clear" to the back, and only then did the group follow them.

I was at the center of the group. Judging from the surroundings, this was a huge hall. This was a bad sign. If just the hall was this size, then this whole place must be enormous. Not only did this mean that we would have to expend more effort in our search, there were probably more experiments than we'd originally thought.

After checking out the hall without any incident, the soldiers started allocating tasks. Some were put on guard duty, and someone was sent to find the main switch. Blackie was even sent to take a look at the computers to try and repair them and see if they had any useful information.

"So? Can you pull up a map of this place?" the second lieutenant asked anxiously.

"Give me a minute. It takes time."

Blackie didn't even bother turning his head and focused his attention on the monitor. The monitor was huge, like a large TV screen.

I was standing to one side, a bit curious. I didn't expect Blackie to be in charge of this.

The second lieutenant growled in frustration, "Goddammit, why the hell is it so quiet here? How the hell are we supposed to find them?"

"Quiet!" I hissed, and the second lieutenant immediately glowered at me, "Silence means only one of two things, and one of them is that everyone here is dead."

Everyone's expressions sank.

"The alternative is that something is forcing them to be quiet." I glared at everyone coldly. "Does anyone want to draw out that something? Is there anyone here stronger than Ah Qing and his crew?"

The second lieutenant's face turned white and he shook his head as he said, "No, and they took the top troops with them."

So you're telling me that you're the leftovers? I suddenly felt the future prospects dim.

One of the soldiers said uneasily, "If the Lieutenant and the others can't deal with it, w-what're we supposed to do?"

Shit, I mustn't scare them away. I said coolly, "A lot of the experiments have gotten away, so the situation probably isn't as bad

as it seems. Maybe they've got too many injured people with them. But no matter what, just keep quiet!"

The second lieutenant nodded. I had no way of telling if he really did buy what I was saying, or if he was still disgruntled at being told off by me, but it didn't matter either way. As long as he was listening to me, all was good.

Throughout this exchange, Jiang Xiaotian was sipping on his long life milk. Just the thought that he was the revered Ice Emperor and one of the twelve world elites made my face twitch. *Dàgē, please stop training my acting skills. Do you know how hard it is to maintain the facade of an arrogant and cool pro...? Actually, maybe he doesn't really know.* My Dàgē was born with an intimidating aura but, based on my observations to date, he had his fair share of acting like an idiot despite his competencies. This might also explain how he formed an idiotic team of competent soldiers.

I suddenly felt as if my mental image of the "Ice Emperor" had been dashed to pieces. No wonder people said that distance creates beauty. When you could hug the Ice Emperor to sleep, my only impression left of him was how adorable he was.

"I've got the map!" Blackie suddenly shouted.

"..." I face palmed.

A few soldiers immediately rushed up to cover Blackie's mouth. Not understanding what was going on, he struggled a few times but

couldn't get free, and he looked around uncomprehendingly at everyone around him.

I walked up to gaze at the large screen, the bad feeling in my heart turning into reality. This place was truly humongous, and there was no way this could have been built after the apocalypse. This was probably a secret research lab even prior to the apocalypse.

Jiang Xiaotian tugged at my pants. I picked him up to give him a better view. He pointed at a part of the monitor, and I nodded to indicate my understanding.

"I'm going to take a look at the corridor where the lab is."

The second lieutenant immediately retorted, "The monsters probably came from there. There's no way the Lieutenant and the others would stay there."

"Regardless of whether anyone is there, at least we can figure out what's going on with those things. I've killed a fair number of monsters out there and none of them were as smart as these." I turned to look at the soldiers and asked in confusion, "Since you've been inside the city to look for food, haven't you noticed that the monsters here are completely different?"

No one answered.

The second lieutenant said uneasily, "The research center gave us a vehicle. We don't know what's in there, but as long as we drive that vehicle into the city, very few monsters would come close. And the few

that do are small fry. We finish them off using silenced guns, load up the supplies, and come back. We've never actually seen much of the monsters before."

No wonder. With something like that, it explained why the refugee camp held so many people but no aberrants ever attacked. But for the MORC to actually have something as amazing as this? I'd never heard of this before. I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian. He was frowning but kept silent. I couldn't tell if he hadn't heard of it before either, or if he simply didn't want to talk in front of these people.

I intentionally mumbled out loud, "It's only been four months into the apocalypse. There's no way this place could have been built in that time. So what were they researching originally? The lab is buried so deep underground, and the layout doesn't look like it's for weapons research."

The soldiers' expressions changed, and now suspicion colored their faces.

Someone muttered, "Don't tell me... the black fog is because of the MORC?"

Bro, you have amazing deductive abilities. It must be thanks to Ah Qing! I gave him a "like" in my heart but kept quiet and left things to their imagination. It was best to turn the MORC into the ultimate final boss, so in the future I might not even need to be the one to take down this research center.

"I'm going to check that place out. Come or don't come, I don't really care."

I memorized the route. Along the way, you had to pass through a large part of the research center. If I encountered Chen Yanqing and the others, then I'd save whoever I could. If not... there probably wasn't anyone left alive. After all, the exit was this way. If they were forced to flee in the opposite direction, then they must have been in an awful spot.

The second lieutenant said irritably, "You really don't have the slightest bit of discipline. The most important thing in a group mission is to obey orders. You can't just go wherever you want!"

"I never was one of your people, so why do I have to obey?" I asked coldly, "I made it out of a city all by myself and have survived up to now with a child in tow. Hmph, compared to the likes of you, I'd rather trust myself!"

With that, I turned and left. I couldn't be bothered to debate this any further with them. I was better off finding out the MORC's secret and then legging it out of here!

A research center of this size being reduced to this state by its experiments? It was probably close to impossible for the experiments that had gotten out to pull off something like this, so there had to be something even more dangerous inside. But I had no way of knowing if it had gotten away or if it had stayed behind. But in any case, I shouldn't stay too long.

I wielded a gun in one hand and crafted an ice dagger in the other, then looked back at Jiang Xiaotian. He had been following quietly behind me all this time. The soldiers were so far behind him in quality that you could fit eight whole cities between them!

Time to set off...

"Wait!"

I took in a deep breath to calm myself. These were the leftovers, so I mustn't have overly high expectations. I turned around and said expressionlessly, "You have ten seconds to talk. I'm starting the countdown now. Ten, nine..."

The second lieutenant's face stiffened.

"Six... five..."

Blackie immediately shouted, "We're going with you!"

I shrugged, and wagged my gun toward the front and said, "Then, lead the way."

Blackie grated between ground teeth, "Do you have to be so fucking harsh and use us to clear the path for you?"

I didn't answer his question and asked instead, "Do you know how old I am?"

Blackie stared at my face and hazarded, "Twenty three? Four?"

I almost gave an angry snort of laughter. *You sure are good at lying to yourself to think that a face like Jiang Shuyu's is over twenty!*

"Eighteen."

Silence. Not a single person raised any more objections to leading the way and the soldiers shuffled themselves into formation. Just as the second lieutenant shouted, "Move out!" gunfire rang out in the distance.

Dammit, plans always lag behind changes! I shouted, "Go toward the sounds of gunfire, quick!"

The whole group started running, and I quickly reminded them, "Watch your surroundings. It's too dark in here. Don't go exploring by yourself. You have to move in groups of four. If there aren't enough people, the others should make up for the short fall! Everyone, remember the two people on either side of you and don't lose anybody."

Our advancement immediately slowed down, but this couldn't be avoided. The lights here were damaged much worse than in the hall, throwing our surroundings into even deeper shadows. The area that could be lit up by a torch was simply too small, and the moment someone slipped up, well, forget not being able to save people, the whole group might even pay the price for that mistake. After all, the people who were trapped here were the top troops, while we were the leftovers!

Along the way, I glanced back to check on Jiang Xiaotian. I only relaxed when I saw that he was able to keep pace, but his expression was strange. It was almost like he couldn't recognize me, and this made me a little anxious.

"Jiang Shuyu" certainly had no way of ordering around troops from the get go, but Guan Weijun was different. At the start of the apocalypse, I had probably acted as a leader more often than Xia Zhengu. That brainless dolt always got hurt partway through missions and was rarely able to pull off a successful retreat.

As his girlfriend, carrying her heavily wounded boyfriend on her back, there wasn't anything I could contribute except to issue orders. And as time went on, some of my comrades became used to the commanders changing partway through missions, and some even started agreeing with my plans at the start and objecting to Xia Zhengu's suicidal plans.

Come to think of it, it was probably because me saving his butt and my leadership experience at the beginning of the apocalypse that stayed Xia Zhengu's hand from actually killing me. Doing so would risk alienating our comrades... and scaring the wits out of the women he had as well.

I had so many people standing on my side, from our old comrades to the women he had had. If I hadn't given up on myself because of my boyfriend cheating left, right, and center; if I hadn't given up on training because my special ability was useless enhanced vision and worked to raise my actual combat prowess; if I had put up a fight, I might have been the one to kill off Xia Zhengu. What a pity!

I'll never do anything that I'll regret in this life! I'll bust my ass to get money to buy a house... Oh wait, I mean, train myself, protect my family, and have kids!

There was a sudden tug at my pants. I turned to look at Jiang Xiaotian. He said just one word: "Listen."

I froze and pricked up my ears. There was a very soft sound, and it was growing louder and louder. The others seemed to have noticed it as well.

"Is that a cat?" some of the soldiers looked bewildered, but not one of them looked scared.

"It's the sound of a baby crying," I said calmly, "It's probably bait. Just ignore it. Keep going forward."

One soldier growled, "They were experimenting on *babies*?"

That was a female soldier, but she looked even buffer and darker than Yunqian. I hadn't even noticed her gender until just now.

I hurried them, "Keep going!"

The female soldier had a sour look on her face, visibly reluctant to leave. The second lieutenant too frowned and said, "We have a duty to protect civilians."

Right, that sure is a good duty. Then, why is it that soon enough the military will become a terrifying cancer among humans? Were you

guys driven to insanity by the apocalypse, or is there something going on behind the scenes, something that ordinary people like Guan Weijun had no way of knowing?

But that would come later. The soldiers in front of me were pretty gung ho, and they even knew to protect ordinary citizens. They were a true rarity. I sucked in a deep breath and said, "Let's first meet up with Ah Qing. Every extra body we have is more power to us, and they're the ones who know what we're facing. We need them, whether it's to retreat or to rescue people."

Hearing that, everyone calmed down. Amidst the sound of a baby's crying, we forged on. With every step we took, people's expressions darkened. This was because the sound of the baby's crying wasn't growing fainter with distance, but becoming increasingly clearer, like it was crying right next to your ear. The crystal clear and pervasive sound was giving everyone the chills.

Although I didn't know what was going on, I was positive that no one would ever mention needing to rescue any babies again.

I stopped and looked around. Amidst the bone-chilling cries of the baby, there was a soft yell. I knew what I had heard, but because it was too dark and I didn't know the soldiers very well, I couldn't tell who was doing the yelling. So I could only call out, "Look around you, is anyone missing?"

Everyone immediately checked, and then the soldier at the very back gasped, "The guy on my right's gone! H-he was just there a moment ago!"

I snatched a torch from a soldier next to me and shone the light around. There weren't any open doors on either side of the room, so I reflexively flicked the light at the ceiling. Without any warning, a huge shadow appeared before my eyes.

Not caring to figure out what that was, the soldiers opened fire while roaring angrily.

"Shuyu, blood!" Jiang Xiaotian screamed.

I threw my hands in the air, crafting a huge piece of transparent ice, and shouted at the same time, "Get to a wall!"

Blood showered down. Most of it struck the ice and started making corrosive sounds. I hastily followed my own orders and flattened myself against the wall, then flung aside the layer of ice. The blood, mixed in with the ice melt, showered onto the ground, and continued to make the sounds of acid eating into the ground.

Thank god we had Jiang Xiaotian's warning; otherwise, this shower of blood from above would have cut our numbers by a third.

In that instant, something black dropped to the ground with a plonk. If not for the fact that everyone's torches lit up the silhouette of a soldier, everyone would probably have started firing like crazy once more.

I shone the light at the ceiling once more. That black shadow was gone. The attack just now wasn't enough to finish it off, but it might be a good thing that it got away. Things with blood that could damage

people were very tricky, and if we didn't do a proper job when attacking it, we might hurt ourselves as well. We were better off not fighting it.

I crouched down and flipped the soldier to face up. Half his face was missing, and his head down to his shoulder had been corroded to the point where his bones and some reddish-white stuff underneath were showing. Worse, the corrosion was continuing to eat into him. He gurgled and his body twitched.

Seeing his injuries, I drew an ice blade out of the air and stabbed it into his brain.

When I stood up, I looked up just in time to meet the incredulous gaze the second lieutenant had leveled at me.

"You killed one of our men! Just because he was injured? We could have taken him to the medics. All we needed to do was just take a lift!" The second lieutenant rushed up to grab my collar. I gripped his hand, and the chilly rush of energy forced him to let go. Still, he glowered hard at me.

"Fuck the medics!" I hollered, "You think he can still live?! Look at him, I'm telling you to take a good look at his face and neck! And those bullet wounds on his body! Who was the one who fucking killed him, huh?!"

The second lieutenant jolted and fell silent when he looked down.

The soldier's face was corroded right to his skull, and half his neck was gone, revealing his trachea. Quite a few bullet holes dotted his body, the result of the soldiers firing at the ceiling just now. No matter what, he wouldn't last more than a few minutes, so he was better off being put to rest than experiencing another few agonizing minutes where he wanted to die.

I looked around and growled, "If anyone wants to be an idiot again, I'm ditching your asses *hard*. Otherwise, I don't know who's going to be the one to kill me!"

When they saw what had happened to their comrade, the soldiers were all shocked, and looks of shame flashed across their faces. It was only when I saw that that I breathed a sigh of relief. Honestly, given that they haven't had much experience fighting aberrants, there was no way they would know much about how messed up things could be. But I had no choice but to whip them into shape, or else I really might end up dying at their hands. After all, I hadn't trained to the point where I was impervious to guns and knives!

Gunfire sounded off in the distance again, a few shots followed by silence. I frowned. Something was off. A few bullets simply weren't enough when you were going against an aberrant or an experiment, and would instead only serve to draw more of them to you.

"Xiao Yu, we better hurry!" Blackie said anxiously, "The Lieutenant and the others could be in danger!"

Chapter 4: The Laboratory, Part 2

However, I just stayed right where I was and said, "That sounds like a trap. When you guys saw that monster just now, you fired off so many rounds and still weren't able to take it down. So what are those few shots gonna achieve? I can't think of any reason for doing that other than to bait us over there."

When he heard that, the second lieutenant's face darkened and he asked, "Then what now?"

How should I know?! Guan Weijun had at most snuck into a marketplace or a warehouse. She'd never broken into somewhere as high security as this place. This was a freaking secret laboratory full of aberrant experiments. If this had happened in my previous life, I'd have rather put a bullet in my own head than to come to a place like this. There were a million ways to die here.

I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian. The Ice Emperor was definitely the person with the most experience in breaking into places like this.

Jiang Xiaotian chuckled. "I wanted to see how far you could get. Are you throwing in the towel so quickly?"

"I'm still new at this." I didn't mind asking him. There was nothing shameful about asking the Ice Emperor for help. In my previous life, forget about hugging the Ice Emperor's leg to beg for help, I had never seen hide nor hair of him except from afar, so since I had the opportunity to hug the entire person, I had to make the most of it.

"Judging from the situation, the computer system isn't completely down. Send most of the troop ahead to scout, while we sneak into the

control center. From there, we should have access to most of the security feeds in the lab.”

Then, Jiang Xiaotian pointed at Blackie and said, “Take this guy along with you. He should be an information technology specialist, so you can let him handle any repairs.”

Everyone stared at Jiang Xiaotian like they had seen a ghost. I couldn't be bothered to help cover up for him anymore, so I just said, “So that's that. My Xiaotian knows best. You guys keep going ahead, but don't move too quickly, or else I won't be able to inform you guys in time if we discover something.”

I beckoned at Blackie and said, “Come on, Blackie.”

Stunned, the second lieutenant exclaimed, “Wait a sec, how can you just go? If there's danger ahead...”

“If there's danger ahead, you seriously need me to protect you guys?” I glared and snapped, “What the fuck, guys?! Thirty soldiers aren't as good as a kid, a university student, and one soldier? Calm down and don't fucking panic. None of the existing aberrants can just brush off shots from thirty guns. The only thing you need to know to deal with them is this—blast their brains apart from far away. That's all you need to do!”

Finished with my tirade, I ignored them, turned my back on them, and left. Even if Blackie didn't come with me, it didn't matter. I'd save who I could, and if I couldn't, abandoning them wouldn't make me feel a shred of guilt!

"A-aberrant?" came the mumble from the second lieutenant, and only then did I realize I had accidentally let slip the term. Whatever, even if they found out, it wasn't a big deal. Soon enough, this word would become commonplace.

Blackie ended up coming along. He asked, "Xiao Yu, can you really take me to the control center all by yourself? The first thing the Lieutenant would have done is to order some IT specialists to head over there first. Of course, he'd send a couple of good men as well, to prevent the IT specialists from being killed off."

Here, he threw Jiang Xiaotian a look of alarm and suspicion.

I said irritably, "Well, your second lieutenant wanted me to protect thirty soldiers. So what do you think?"

Blackie looked back to his far away comrades and said with embarrassment, "Yeah, we're really not up to scratch. Everyone's scared shitless by the attack just now, and without someone to command us, we don't know what to do. If the Lieutenant or Ah Nuo were here, or even, or even Ah Qing would do, we wouldn't be like this. Believe me! That second lieutenant's just a boot, fresh out of military school, so his head's crammed full of textbooks, and he's hopeless in actual combat."

I gave him a look, then shook my head and sighed, "You guys can even follow Ah Qing? You really have no standards."

"..." Blackie bit the bullet and tried to explain, "Don't get fooled by Ah Qing's character. He's really strong when he's serious. Have you ever seen semi-automatic firing with machine guns? He can bust a head with every bullet he fires. He doesn't fuck around!"

Now you make me want to take him with me again... Maybe that Ah Qing is really quite the good souvenir? I can definitely try when it's time for me to leave.

"The control room is this way. I was keeping an eye out for it." Blackie pointed at one of the corridors, and then added awkwardly, "I should've suggested to go there right at the start. I just didn't get around to saying it 'cause I'm used to listening to the Lieutenant's orders."

I glanced Blackie over. This one isn't half bad either. What to do? I want to take everyone with me. Is it really okay for me to be so happily picking from the Lieutenant's men?

Jiang Xiaotian spoke up. "Shuyu, we need to find another escape route in the control room. From the looks of things, those experiments probably intentionally kept the elevator running, to draw people down here to their deaths."

I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian. Those gun shots did feel like they were fired to draw attention, but I still found it hard to believe. *Are these things humans or aberrants? Humans haven't evolved to be that strong, while aberrants aren't that smart yet.*

He continued, "The experiments that got out shouldn't have the ability to decimate this lab. There has to be a leader, and he's probably quite powerful. Seeing as how the top troops have been trapped here, that guy is probably still around and didn't escape with the other experiments."

"So I have no chance of victory?" I was a bit despondent. *Don't tell me that ascending to tier two this quickly still isn't enough?*

Jiang Xiaotian looked up at me and said, "I don't know if you can win, but it's only five months or so into the apocalypse. He can't be strong enough to overturn this research center by himself, so there must be some other experiments under him obeying his commands. As for you, you only have disobedient soldiers with zero combat experience against aberrants. So what do you think?"

"Hold it there!" Blackie said quickly, "We're listening to you already. I mean, aren't I coming along with you?"

Jiang Xiaotian glanced at him and asked, "If I told you to take a gun and lead the charge against a group of aberrants, would you?"

Blackie stared at the three year old, his dark face growing darker by the moment. You couldn't really blame him, though. If an average person was told to obey a three year old, it was hardly unusual to be very hesitant to do so. Of course, if this was toward the later stages of the apocalypse, then the commander could take the form of anything.

Jiang Xiaotian ignored Blackie and said directly to me, "Go to the control room, find the Lieutenant or the Ah Nuo he's talking about. If

you can get them to listen to you, then they can contribute in a fight. If we can't locate them, then we're looking for an escape route and leaving immediately. Blackie can go find his own crew to let them know that they should leave, too."

"So it isn't enough to find Ah Qing?" I was pretty sure I had a way of making Ah Qing listen to me, but as for the Lieutenant and Ah Nuo, I really wasn't that close with them. It wouldn't be easy getting them to entrust the lives of a whole troop to a teenage boy they barely knew.

"A guy who's rated as 'even Ah Qing would do' probably has the same leadership abilities as you do, so he's no use even if we do locate him."

I secretly shed a tear of sympathy. *Poor Ah Qing, being rated as useless so quickly.*

I suddenly stepped on something soft. *This sensation...* I shone the light down and lifted my foot, revealing a hand in military green clothing. Although it was soaked in blood, I could still make out that it was a military uniform.

I heard a short sharp breath being sucked in to one side. Blackie was staring at the hand in alarm, but then he relaxed and said, "No, that's not one of ours."

I asked in confusion, "Not one of yours?" *Is the shock so much that you can't think of him as one of your own?*

Blackie nodded and gestured toward the upper part of the severed hand, remarking, "Look. Even though they look alike, the sleeve and

buttons are different. This isn't an official soldier, so it's probably the private army."

"Like mercenaries?" Jiang Xiaotian asked in a thoughtful tone of voice, "Even if you are only responsible for guarding the outside, you still need people on the inside. This is even more the case if we take into account the missing people mentioned in the letter. You can't possibly keep asking researchers to be the ones to abduct people, so if this wasn't done by the military, then it has to be done by the private army owned by the MORC."

"Letter?" Blackie stared at Jiang Xiaotian blankly.

He was right. The letter left behind by Dàgē did mention the mysterious disappearances among the people entering the refugee zone. *Did they turn into the experiments?* Just seeing the news about Junjun was a huge shock, and the only thing on my mind at the time was my worry about my Xiǎomèi. So the fact that other people had gone missing had completely gone over my head.

"Shuyu, we should hurry. Prepare yourself for combat." Jiang Xiaotian frowned and said, "It might not be safe in the control center."

I nodded and armed myself with the same combination of a handgun in one hand and an ice dagger in the other. But what I really wanted was my ice stave, even if it didn't have a spear head. Perhaps Xiaotian's worries were correct. I didn't even have a convenient weapon at hand, so perhaps I was being a bit unrealistic in thinking that I could go toe-to-toe with a large group of experiments.

The three of us picked up our pace. We didn't see any irregularities along the way, and finally our footsteps brought us to a large, transparent corridor with glass walls on either side. Of course, most of the corridor was missing the sheets of glass, and the only things left of them were the shattered shards littering the floor.

This was the lab. I'd wanted to come here from the very beginning but gave up on it after hearing the gunshots. But as it turned out, we needed to pass through this place on the way to the control center anyway.

Even though we needed to leave ASAP, we unconsciously slowed our steps. The sight before us was just too shocking. Although we'd seen countless scenes of human experiments in movies, it was a completely different experience when you were actually stepping into a place like this.

The most unbearable thing wasn't the sight, but the smell. The intense smell of disinfectant made me want to rip off my nose, but it still wasn't enough to mask the metallic tang of blood. The smells of fresh and rotting blood had mixed together, and the putrid mix of all these stench was just absolutely indescribable.

Next was the sound. As we stepped on the glass and jumble of liquids, the crunching reverberated through the silent laboratory. It felt like we were going to draw the attention of something at any moment, and as much as we wanted to stop, we had no choice but to forge on.

Last but not least was the sight. This place was brighter than the corridor just now. It was originally probably as bright as day, but with

half the lights smashed and some of the remainder flashing on and off, the flickering between light and dark was enough to drive one crazy with the fear that the next time the lights came back on, something would appear where there was nothing before.

Corpses were everywhere. Most of them could only count as pieces of corpses, scattered everywhere across the table, the floor, and even draped on various pieces of equipment. We had everything from severed limbs, to skeletons, to organs. Large quantities of blood had been sprayed against the wall as well, turning the originally pristine, snow white surface into a bloody mess of graffiti.

Blackie couldn't help but clap a hand to his mouth at the surrounding scene. He didn't dare to say a word. Then again, if he breathed in the air in here while opening his mouth to say something, the soldier just might dash off to find a corner to vomit into.

But Guan Weijun had lived for over a decade in the apocalypse. No amount of corpses in any shape or form could scare me. Except for those in the glass cylinders.

All the surrounding individual test labs had lots of transparent glass cylinders. Each cylinder held a corpse, or at least what I thought was a corpse. Although they had lots of tubes connected to them, given that they hadn't come crawling out already, they were probably dead.

The corpses came in all shapes and sizes. Some had transparent skin and muscle, with veins and organs clearly visible underneath. Another corpse had completely turned into a mass of tentacles from head to toe, enough to outnumber the number of tentacles that any jellyfish or

squid had any right to have. But the most disgusting corpse was one of a girl. She was completely naked, with beautiful facial features and a fine body. Unfortunately, she had a few too many faces, with as many as thirty faces covering her body.

Blackie trembled as he said softly, "W-what the fuck did they do?"

Sigh, they made the spectacle that you are seeing in front of you.

I lowered my head and asked, "Dàgē, are these aberrants?"

Although they looked disgusting, and they didn't look like they had evolved properly, you could link just about every one of them to a similar aberrant. For example, the transparent guy would eventually become completely transparent, and could even change shapes, and would specialize in engulfing its prey to dissolve and digest.

Furthermore, it wasn't a picky eater and wouldn't turn its nose up at eating even car tires.

An originally terrifying species, but perhaps because their brains became transparent, whatever wits they had also vanished. And when you tagged on the fact that they ate anything they came across, they simply wouldn't starve and didn't have to try hard to scavenge for food. So whether it was a human or an aberrant that got engulfed by one, you only had to struggle very hard to break free.

Later on, some bored folks even started treating it like a pet. In any case, it ate whatever you fed it, making it easy to raise, and some people even started calling it "glasster."

Jiang Xiaotian said flatly, "Dead humans become aberrants, so does it really matter whether they're humans or aberrants?"

True. If you want an aberrant, all you have to do is kill a human.

"What do they want to achieve?" I didn't understand. *Aren't there enough weird and strange aberrants already? What's the point of creating even more weird and strange things?*

Jiang Xiaotian said frigidly, "What *I* want to know is whether they made these before or after the 21st of June."

A chill ran down my spine. This was very critical. A lab wasn't something you could just build off the cuff. *If they weren't originally doing experiments like this, where would they even find facilities like this, once the apocalypse arrived? Were those glass cylinders originally used for storing specimens? What about those tubes? Were they for making glow sticks?*

"What are you talking about?" Blackie asked pitifully, "I don't get what you're saying at all. D-do we still need to go to the control center?"

Just as I was about to reply, "Of course," Jiang Xiaotian suddenly sprinted off, charging into one of the test labs. He then glared at one of the glass cylinders. Or to be more precise, he glared at the monitor above the cylinder. The cylinder had been broken and whatever had been in it was long gone.

"Dàgē, what's wrong?"

I ignored the startled Blackie and walked in to join him. This test lab was larger than the others, and the equipment looked more sophisticated and complicated. It was probably the main test lab.

I was about to resume my questioning as I walked up to Jiang Xiaotian's side, but instead, my heart leapt to my throat. That little face of his was twisted into a demonic mask of fury!

"It's him!" he raged through grated teeth, "Thirteen!"

I froze, instantly understanding who Jiang Xiaotian was talking about. Even if my memory for names was terrible, this name was one that struck fear in the heart of every Asian. The only Asian elite aberrant, he had a name that was not a name—Thirteen.

Thirteen had committed countless massacres in Asia, and he only ever targeted humans, completely disregarding plants and animals. It was to the point where it was almost like he killed humans on sight. Even if his subordinates were so full that they couldn't fit in another mouthful, they still faithfully slaughtered humans. No one knew why Thirteen hated humans so much... *All right, I think I might have found the answer today.*

If I had been caught and stuck in a glass cylinder to be an experiment, I probably would kill humans on sight once I got out as well.

Jiang Xiaotian gazed at the monitor that was currently displaying information about the experiment in the glass cylinder. The top left serial number was 013. *So Thirteen was his experiment number?*

On the monitor was a long humanoid form, looking no different from an ordinary human being. He looked like a man of around thirty years old, but he had a tail that was as thick and scaly as a dinosaur's. It probably packed a punch and could be used as a weapon.

Jiang Xiaotian gripped my arm and said, "Shuyu, let's go! We have to find him!"

My face drained as white as a corpse on hearing that. *Hey, hey, hey, Dàgē, that's the guy that made humanity skip the number thirteen when counting. He's even scarier than the four of death or the 666 of Satan, and you're asking me to find him?*

"Why?" *You can at least give an explanation of why you're sending someone off to his death, right?*

"He killed my men!" Jiang Xiaotian roared, "Xiao Sha ran into him when he was taking the troop out with him, and all of them died! More than twenty good men eaten clean. We didn't even have enough parts to piece together one whole corpse."

My mind blanked. *Xiao Sha died?* "The Xiao Sha here is still well and alive, Dàgē."

"My Xiao Sha's dead!"

So he does know that this is a different world? I kept quiet. *If Xiao Sha is already dead to Jiang Xiaotian, then what about Jiang Shuyu? No, rather, what about the entire Jiang family?*

Jiang Xiaotian was so outraged that he didn't notice his verbal slip. He stared at me, his eyes blazing with anger, and said, "Shuyu, all the twenty-odd crew of mine were eaten. Only Xiao Sha was left whole. He turned into an aberrant, and was shut in a cage by Thirteen as a pet. He wasn't even a subordinate, but a *pet*!"

No wonder Jiang Xiaotian went crazy when he saw Thirteen. Dàgē cared a great deal about his godly troop, and he was already being very rational by not charging into the aberrant camp to fight Thirteen to the death, having seen Xiao Sha reduced to a pet.

"Okay, kill Thirteen." I gave a simple nod of the head. I was already planning to duke it out, if not for Jiang Xiaotian stopping me earlier. And since he absolutely wanted me to fight now, then I'd fight!

Furthermore, far too many Asians had died at the hands of Thirteen in the apocalyptic world. If not for Thirteen and the aberrants he led, another hundred thousand people would still be living in Asia. And this number was a conservative estimate!

In the other world, Thirteen had established the aberrant camp, and was so powerful that even though the Ice Emperor hated his guts, he had no way of getting revenge for Xiao Sha. The current Thirteen here wasn't an elite. Now that we had the opportunity, we had to kill him!

Chapter 5: Those Numbers

"A-are you two crazy or something? What the hell are you talking about?"

Blackie was so shaken that he could barely stammer out his words, and he stared at Jiang Xiaotian like he was staring at an aberrant.

Pissed off by his expression, I said in icy tones, "The world's gone crazy anyway, so two more crazies don't make much difference. Off you go. You should count yourselves lucky—not only will I actually do something to help you guys, I'll even take on the boss of the experiments. You guys only have to take care of his subordinates. Lucky you!"

Blackie's face didn't look like he felt lucky at all. *Come to think about it, he's right. Maybe this entire troop is part of the Jiang family as well, with such misfortune that they have to confront the future elite of the aberrants?*

As I continued down the corridor, I compressed a few layers of ice onto a dagger. Although the ice layers were very thin, the dagger given by Jin Feng was way better than those we'd picked up randomly at a weapons store. It seemed decently durable, and in any case, a dagger wasn't a blunt instrument and I wasn't stronger than an aberrant. Ultimately, my fighting style was to focus on attacking weaknesses.

Jiang Xiaotian quickly scanned the monitors above all the glass cylinders.

"Let's see which subordinates came from here as well... Ah, 'Asura,' Thirteen's most trusted war general. So he started following him from here. Hmph! This time, I'll make Thirteen have a taste of what it's like, having one of your own men made into a pet!"

Dàgē, I have exactly zero interest in taking an aberrant in as a pet. You're on your own if you get him!

Fortunately, we reached the end of the long corridor of the laboratory, and Jiang Xiaotian didn't say any other names.

"So only Asura?" Jiang Xiaotian sunk into deep thought, then suddenly blurted, "Shit, the crying baby sounds we heard at the start are probably from the 'Maternibaby.' The aberrants really have seized control of the entire research center and are luring people in for the kill."

"What are these three aberrants' unique characteristics?" I asked calmly and was rewarded with an appreciative look from Jiang Xiaotian. In that instant, my self-confidence exploded and my chest swelled to the point of becoming an A-cup.

"Asura is simply a war general. He wields dual swords and he can grow swords from all parts of his body."

That's pretty much a porcupine, not at all a simple war general, okay?!

"Thirteen is also a fighter. It's said that he doesn't have any weapons, and just uses his claws and tail. He even has hellfire and psychic

abilities, but I don't know the details, since I've never actually faced off with him before."

As expected of an elite—his abilities varied across the different types to this extent. Are you sure he's not cheating?!

"As for the Maternibaby..." Jiang Xiaotian frowned as he said, "I've never heard anything about what her abilities were. I only know that she once went nuts and didn't differentiate between friend and foe, and demolished an entire city... Shuyu."

"Hm?" I was paying close attention to his words, and at the unexpected calling of my name, I almost couldn't quite catch up with the change in topic.

Jiang Xiaotian blandly said, "Go grab that person from behind that table."

He pointed at one of the large tables in the laboratory. There were a large number of carcasses laid out on it and bones were scattered all over it as well. That table had probably transformed into a dining table at some point.

Well, since Jiang Xiaotian said there was someone behind the table, there had to be someone! Just as I was able to go over to grab them, he had already shot to his feet by himself. He was covered in blood and flesh all over, but his movements were quick and weren't ones that could be made by the heavily injured. It was probably someone else's blood he used to disguise himself to survive.

He raised his hands high in surrender and said, "H-how do you know about 013 and 042? And Maternibaby is probably 005? That's made of two aberrants—after a woman who was seven months pregnant died, both the mother and child turned into aberrants. They're similar to conjoined twins and are very unique."

Damn, you sure remember your numbers!

Probably because my expression betrayed my thoughts, the man explained without any prompting, "005 and 042 are very special and are the focus of our research, so everyone here knows about them."

"But 013 isn't?" It felt off. After all, Thirteen was the one who was the most feared.

The man explained patiently, "He's nothing special. At least before he started this whole incident, he was extremely calm, and the only evolution he underwent was body strengthening, that is, growing scales on some parts and a tail. There are lots of specimens like him in this lab. And as for whatever hellfire or psychic abilities, he doesn't have any of those."

Here, he paused then chuckled wryly, "Well, at least, he didn't demonstrate any of those abilities."

The three of us stared at him, and he said embarrassedly, "I'm Wu Yaojin. A-are you the reinforcements here to rescue me?"

"So you must be Professor Wu?" Blackie frowned as he looked him up and down, the look of disgust as clear as day on his face. "Orders from

above say that we absolutely must rescue a Professor Wu, but you look too young to be a professor. Are you really him?"

If you're asking it like that, of course he'll say he's Professor Wu!

"That's my gē, but he was probably one of the first people killed by 013. He had always felt that something was off about this specimen, but no one listened. So he moved this experiment to his own lab. You guys must have passed by it on the way—it's the one with the most complete range of equipment."

Wu Yaojin asked dejectedly, "T-the lab's not far from here, but I don't dare to go close. Did you guys see my gē?"

Fine, I'm vilifying good hearted people by assuming they'll do the same things as me. I held my head in my hands, wondering whether I was just assuming the worst about them, or whether these scientists had done so much research that they no longer had any common sense?

I'd originally thought that this research center's scientists were all cruel and cold blooded, but now they seemed a bit stupid instead! I couldn't tell if he was so shocked that he hadn't recovered his wits, or if he really did lack them to begin with.

"We only saw a pile of body parts," Blackie said coolly. Evidently, he didn't have a shred of sympathy for the professor of this lab.

Wu Yaojin's face went ashen, and just as I was able to grow a seed of sympathy for him, he sighed, "Gē had so much important research that was coming to fruition. I can't believe it's all gone, just like that."

These scientists probably have zero sense of familial love...

"Sorry, did I say something odd again?" Wu Yaojin saw that our expressions looked off, and explained, "I have Asperger's syndrome, so I don't see a lot of things the same way as normal people do. Please understand."

My face twitched. *Shit, a what syndrome again? I don't understand...*

Jiang Xiaotian asked impatiently, "What exactly happened here?" Wu Yaojin shook his head as he replied, "I have no idea. There was a sudden howl, the alarms went off, and the lights suddenly went out. They only came back on after a few minutes, and by then, the whole place was going crazy. I crouched behind the table once I saw that things didn't look right, and I didn't dare to make a peep. My assistant was torn into pieces and thrown over to where I was, so I covered myself with his blood and flesh and lay on the floor. I even took a scalpel in my hand—if any experiment dares to eat me, I'd immediately stab it into its heart."

He gave a wry laugh and said, "That's all I know. I don't know what actually happened, so I had to overhear you guys to find out that it's the work of 005, 013, and 042. Honestly though, you guys might have gotten it wrong. 013 isn't that scary—if you've seen him before, you'd understand. 013 is really quiet and completely different from other experiments."

"Probably did that to lower your guard." Jiang Xiaotian didn't agree, and challenged him, "Aberrants are like kids. Unless they're plant-types, there's not a single one that's quiet. Thirteen's silence is the real sign that something's wrong."

Body strengthening, and fire and psychic abilities. He already possessed such high intellect at the early stages of the apocalypse, and in the middle stages, he wiped out an entire continent and established himself in the aberrant metropolis. In the later stages of the apocalypse, he became an aberrant elite. Doesn't this sound like Thirteen is the main character of the story?! Are small potatoes like us really challenging the main character to a death match?!

"Aberrant?" Wu Yaojin asked in confusion.

Although it wasn't me who made the slip, Jiang Xiaotian had no desire to respond to his question. So I had no choice but to explain, "It's the name of those monsters."

Wu Yaojin nodded and said sorrowfully, "Can you accompany me to my gē's lab? I have his password, so as long as the computer's still working, we can get hold of the full set of data of 005, 013, and 042. The three of them are really very unique. It'll be a real shame to lose that data."

Jiang Xiaotian narrowed his eyes dangerously. I couldn't tell if he wanted to go back to take a look, or if he wanted to slice and dice the bastard who created something as dangerous as Thirteen and feed him to aberrants.

In the end, he just grated one word: "Go."

Originally, I'd wanted to say that further delays would put the lives of the soldiers in danger, but on second thought, if we didn't deal with those numbered aberrants, everyone's lives would still be in jeopardy. So we were better off figuring out their abilities, which would greatly help with the upcoming battle.

We headed back to that large research laboratory. Wu Yaojin looked around but didn't see any signs of his brother—or perhaps he couldn't tell which pile was his brother. His face was pale and twisted in pain, so it did seem like there were some familial feelings left, and he hadn't turned completely unfeeling due to that whatever syndrome thing.

"Get that information out now!" Jiang Xiaotian snapped irritably, his temper as black as Blackie's. Both the adult and the kid glared at Wu Yaojin, and it was a miracle that they hadn't started threatening him with guns.

Wu Yaojin stared at Jiang Xiaotian and asked curiously, "So the potential you uncovered was intelligence?"

Potential he uncovered? I stilled. Could he mean ability?

Jiang Xiaotian said with narrowed eyes, "Yeah, and you?"

Wu Yaojin smiled as he waved a hand. Although he didn't touch anything, all the litter on the table was swept off. Then, he dropped his hands and said, "That's all I can do. My record is moving only one

kilogram, and I can only do that if I concentrate my entire mind on it. And after moving it, I feel more tired than if I had run five kilometers. This power of mine is nothing compared to those experiments.”

I hesitated and ended up not asking if he knew about the crystals. The fact that he had appeared here of all places was still a bit strange, and he was reacting far too calmly. *I need to keep my eye on him for a bit longer.*

Wu Yaojin started operating the computer and really was able to generate the files on the three aberrants, and the information was now displayed in all its glory before our eyes.

005, the “Maternibaby” that Jiang Xiaotian had been talking about, looked horrific. Even after living for ten years into the apocalypse, I still got the chills looking at her.

Her expression was one of sorrow and tears—the corners of her eyes and mouth turned exaggeratedly downwards, the snapshot of the moment a mother lost her child. Except that it was frozen into permanence on her face.

Her stomach was frighteningly large, to the point where her limbs looked spindly in comparison. If I had to describe it, it was like seeing a meatball with four toothpicks sticking out of it. What was most terrifying, however, was the jagged, saw-like line that ran between the meatball. It looked like it could open up. To the side, there was even a picture of a scan, showing that inside the stomach was a cluster of baby hands and legs. But because the meatball had never opened up, no one knew how they moved.

042, Asura looked like a tall, slender man, but a quick glimpse at the height data said otherwise. Yup, he was 2.9 meters tall. He wasn't skinny at all; his entire body was covered with a layer of muscle, except his height made him look like a stretched paper man. But this was all a "lie"!

013, Thirteen, compared to the previous two, seemed perfectly normal. He looked like a man of around thirty, and he looked very gentle and elegant. However, his face was sheet white and there was exhaustion etched deep between his brows—he was the perfect picture of an office worker who had worked way too many hours of overtime, except for the fact that his finger tips ended in claws, he had a tail, and he had some scales on his body. No wonder Wu Yaojin said he was very ordinary and wasn't the focus of their research.

So this is the guy who'll butcher all of Asia... Oh wait, in this life, it's Meisia. This overworked office guy will one day decimate the whole of Meisia and become the man-slaughtering aberrant elite?

Even if you can't judge someone by their looks, surely you don't have to take it to this extreme?

This data is frankly useless. Frowning, I said, "Pull out info on their abilities, particularly their fighting capabilities."

But Wu Yaojin's response was, "We only have this type of information for Asura. His combat skills are just like this child said. He can grow spikes all over his body, which are the 'swords' you were talking about. Maternibaby is as immature as a baby and doesn't understand speech,

not to mention she throws fits every so often. So there's no way to get her to obey something as complex as 'fight.'

"As for Thirteen, he wasn't even meant to be in our research center. He was only transferred here because another city had fallen, and the research center there was abandoned."

"How did you transfer him?" I found this all unbelievable. It must take considerable effort transferring between research centers, and there was no way you could sneak around the same way as if you were traveling by yourself. *Just how many people did they have to mobilize to enable this transfer?*

Suddenly, I remembered that the soldiers had mentioned that they only had to drive the vehicles provided by the research center and aberrants would keep away. I asked quickly, "How do you keep the aberrants from approaching?"

"With Maternibaby. Most experiments refuse to be anywhere close to her, and even the smell she leaves behind has this effect for a short period of time. Before sending the army into the city, we would make Maternibaby sit on the vehicle for a day, then let the army drive the vehicle away."

"When did this research start?" Jiang Xiaotian asked in icy tones.

Wu Yaojin responded with surprise, "Of course after June the twenty first. Where on earth would we even get these experiments beforehand?"

I hmped coldly, "So what, are you going to tell me those glass cylinders were used for making pickles?"

"We were originally conducting human experiments, but that..." Wu Yaojin stopped abruptly, before resuming somewhat bashfully, "That was illegal human cloning experiments, but those had been unsuccessful. After the black fog, we lost quite a few research centers. Our superiors spent a few months rescuing what they could and patching things together, and we were only able to resume research recently. Our research focus has also switched from human cloning to experimenting on the mutations. A lot of these experiments were originally employees of our research centers."

I immediately retorted, "Bullshit. A lot of people coming into the military zone vanish— isn't that the work of you guys? Who else could it be?"

Wu Yaojin frowned as he said, "Really? I never heard about this."

"Of course you know." Jiang Xiaotian said coldly, "Or has the thought never occurred to you brilliant researchers about how the research center feeds so many experiments?"

My mind went blank. I finally realized that the reason they were catching people from outside wasn't for research, but to be used as food!

Aberrants were able to evolve by eating any flesh of the non-mutated. In order to trigger their evolution, the research center absolutely needed to feed them this food. But compared to the increasingly

dangerous plants and animals out there, the large crowd of “humans” outside presented themselves as the most convenient food source.

This time, Wu Yaojin neither affirmed nor refuted his words.

Blackie rushed forward to grab Wu Yaojin’s collar and raged, “So many have died already, and you bastards are still feeding people to monsters? Are you fucking mental?!”

Wu Yaojin sighed and said, “If we don’t do this, how can we obtain a better understanding about these experiments? Don’t you want to know why people will turn into these monsters? Or whether we can reawaken the minds of the people who were transformed into monsters by the black fog? If we know this, won’t we have solved this apocalypse?”

Blackie froze. I was equally surprised. *Can we really reawaken the human consciousness of those man-eating aberrants?*

“We’ve already made progress. A lot of them are slowly developing intelligence, and some even have memories of the past. If we continue experimenting, they might even regain their senses!”

Blackie opened and shut his mouth over and over, but didn’t make any sounds as he vacillated. I completely understood his feelings—perhaps from an emotional standpoint, feeding humans to aberrants was very cruel, but from a rational point of view, we knew all too well that there was no humane way of finding out how to end this apocalypse.

"They're not who they used to be!" Jiang Xiaotian suddenly burst in with an angry growl, "Absolutely not! The memories you are talking about are just impressions left in the brain. Yes, some aberrants will be able to recall those memories, but they're no longer the humans they used to be! Humans only turn into aberrants after they die, so since they died, how can they possibly be the same person?!"

Wu Yaojin retorted uncomprehendingly, "If they have the memories, why aren't they the same person? An ego is formed by experiences." *This guy really must have that ass-whatever syndrome. How else do you have the balls to continue speaking like that when someone's holding onto your collar?*

There was something wrong with this guy, but the same could be said about Jiang Xiaotian. He was too agitated—it was painful seeing that little face twisted by rage and the two little fists gripped until the knuckles turned white. It was like if Wu Yaojin continued insisting that aberrants could turn back into humans, he would turn *him* into an aberrant with his own two hands, to see if he could then turn back human again.

"The potential you have expressed doesn't seem like it's intelligence." Wu Yaojin stared at Jiang Xiaotian with an expression of interest of all things. And as usual, he continued to pay attention to the wrong thing.

I hugged Jiang Xiaotian. His body was as stiff as a rock.

"Hey, let's cut the chatter already. Do you have the data or not?" I spoke in a cajoling manner, "Blackie, let go of this guy. We need to get

going. Otherwise, we're gonna be helping you pack your buddies into body bags."

Blackie immediately released him.

Wu Yaojin breathed a sigh of relief, quickly worked the computer, pulled out a flash drive, then declared, "Done."

"Let's go." I lifted Jiang Xiaotian to my chest and walked out of the research laboratory. This time, I walked much faster, disregarding whether the two were able to catch up to me. Yup, I wanted to put some distance between us.

I said quietly, "Dàgē, don't believe him. There's no fucking way aberrants can recover their minds!"

The little body in my embrace finally relaxed a little, but he mumbled unhappily, "But some aberrants do remember fragmented memories from when they were human."

"So what? They're just using human brains and human bodies, like a thief invading someone else's house. Just because they can describe what's in the house doesn't mean the house is theirs!"

Here, I came to a stop.

Yes, even if I dreamed back all my memories, am I really Jiang Shuyu?

No, I can't afford to get confused! But...

"Shuyu?" Jiang Xiaotian lifted his small face to look at me, and asked, "What's wrong?"

I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian and strained a smile. "Nothing. You know me. I lost my memories and lived ten years in the apocalypse as another person, so I get a bit confused every so often."

Jiang Xiaotian stared at me silently, making me bemused, then scared. I remembered that he often mentioned that I didn't act like Shuyu...

In the end, he patted my shoulder and said, "Don't dwell on it. What's most important now is to deal with Thirteen, once and for all. Put me down, or you might not be able to react in time if something sudden happens."

I quickly went "okay" and put him down.

The two behind us caught up, panting and wheezing. Blackie even said irritably, "You wanna ditch us?"

I replied in annoyance, "If I wanted to ditch you guys, you wouldn't be standing here and talking to me now."

Blackie looked a bit stung by my words.

Everyone remained in a bad mood for the rest of the journey and lapsed into a heavy silence as we progressed forward. The closer we got to the control center, the more corpses littered the floor.

Aside from soldiers from the research center's private army, Blackie recognized some of his own. Although they had all been gnawed on, he was able to identify them just from the clothing and equipment. His eyes turned red, and he had long disregarded the fact that Jiang Xiaotian and I were crazy or something, since he was almost halfway there himself.

Blackie gave a soft "ah," then murmured in a choked voice, "Fatty, why you too..."

I looked over. A corpse was lying against the wall—it was that rotund and smiley guy who had told me to call him Fatty-gē—except he was already devoured to the bone and was no longer fat anymore. But for some reason, half his face was left, making it easy to identify who he was.

Blackie started crying at the sight of his brother-in-arm's remains. He didn't start wailing, but released a few very suppressed sobs, which at the same time made the scene all the more heart-breaking. I didn't know what to do. *Should I say a few words of comfort?*

At this moment, the child's voice of Jiang Xiaotian rang out. "Hurry up. You still have many more brothers waiting for your rescue. The Lieutenant, Ah Nuo, Old Guo, and Ah Qing—they're still waiting for us. We don't have time to cry now."

Blackie wiped his face and his tears were no more, but his eyes became even redder. "You're right. Let's go."

Rather than consoling him, why not give him an even more important goal? I gazed at Jiang Xiaotian with admiration. As expected of the boss of a mercenary troop. There was much for me to learn, but I wasn't too worried about it. With two Dàgēs, wasn't there plenty to learn from?

Blackie's memory proved to be quite impressive. Just a few glances at the map just now were enough for him to confidently guide us to the control center. He never once hesitated about the route. He was a talent for sure, but unfortunately he seemed quite content to follow the Lieutenant. It might be hard to take him with me... *Okay, how on earth did I turn into a pervert uncle who wants to kidnap people on sight?*

Shaking my head, I split my concentration between walking, keeping an eye on the surroundings, and continuing to compress ice onto the dagger. After rising to tier two, I didn't feel much in the way of change, but it was certainly easier to compress the ice crystals now. My body felt lighter and stronger too.

As I recalled, after Guan Weijun rose to tier two, she wasn't particularly happy or excited. At the time, tiers and the like hadn't been established, so she only felt that her vision and her physical capabilities had improved a bit, and was grateful that she could now spot aberrants from far away and make a speedy escape.

Thinking back to my cowardice in my previous life, where I only got stronger so I could run away faster—this was all just five months ago. I think I've changed a lot now?

Come to think of it, I really have changed a lot. In a short span of time, I've turned from the hunted to the hunter. Is it really okay to undergo such a dramatic change? Is it my death that completely transformed my thinking, or am I being influenced by the echoes left by Jiang Shuyu?

As I dreamed back more and more memories, I was becoming increasingly confused about who I was. Although I hoped more than anything that I was Jiang Shuyu, returning to the early stages of the apocalypse with my memories of my previous life replaying one after another, only now did I realize that Guan Weijun, who had always prioritized fleeing, who I had thought to be weak, had actually done a lot of things. There had been many people behind her—even that boyfriend and that crowd of mistresses had stood behind me. *That was definitely a sort of accomplishment!*

"Your ice dagger is going to turn into an ice stick soon if you don't start to compress it into diamond ice?"

I snapped out of my reverie and discovered that Jiang Xiaotian was frowning at my hand. I looked down—*okay, he was being polite when he said it's an ice stick. It's practically a lump of ice frozen to my hand... Wait a sec, did Xiaotian just say "diamond ice?"*

So the name of compressed ice really is diamond ice! Fine, Xia Zhenggu does get things spot on every once in a while, or maybe I just don't get guy speak? I'd thought that only women love diamonds, but it seems men are just the same!

As I compressed the ice crystals, flicking aside excess layers of ice, I listened to Jiang Xiaotian start lecturing the class on "how to make a weapon."

"You aren't compressing it enough. You need to do it at least another three times. If you are able to, five times more is even better."

I almost wanted to burst into tears on hearing that. *Seems like I really have to keep working on making a weapon until ten years into the apocalypse. Dàgē, how long did you have to work on your ice long sword for? Actually, I'm pretty sure the one time I saw you using that weapon, you had only just finished making it, right?!*

"In the future, you need to make a divine weapon out of pure diamond ice. You can't freeze a regular weapon. It'll just make the weapon brittle."

Don't I know it? Even a bird was able to bust it. I said a little dejectedly, "I know. I wanted to make a spear and a dagger, and I'd originally made some basic ice weapons using a stick and a dagger as a base. I'd originally thought they'd last me a year or two so I'd have time to slowly craft my weapon, but both of them were destroyed when I was fighting against the carrion-bloom birds."

"A spear and a dagger?" Jiang Xiaotian nodded as he said, "Good choice. You are fast and nimble. Those weapons suit you."

"So these..." Blackie hesitated before asking tentatively, "'Abilities of yours? Do you use that word like that?"

"Yup. What's your special ability?" I felt it was probably good to ask him. *Even though he hasn't undergone training or eaten any crystals, so his ability is probably useless, there's always a chance that it's a unique power?*

Blackie hesitated again before replying, "If I concentrate, I can see through some things. Um, I don't really 'see through' them. It's more like I somehow get a sense of what's going on inside stuff. It's pretty handy for finding my way and fixing machinery. So I can tell where the problem is without opening up the machine. Thing is, I can't use it all the time. At most, I can last ten seconds or so."

Take him with us!

I became extremely excited. No wonder he was able to fix the computer so quickly when we were in the hall just now, and he was able to find his way around so quickly. If he had trained this ability, he could probably cover the whole of the research facility. And if we paired him up with Auntie's ability to sense living things—*damn, things like having to storm fortified facilities are things of the past. All we have to do is walk right in and walk straight out again. We wouldn't get attacked by any enemies!*

Jiang Xiaotian also looked Blackie up and down a fair bit, giving him the creeps.

"I got it." Wu Yaojin suddenly spoke up, "This child knows what's going to happen in the future, right? So this is a kind of a special ability as well? So there are powers like these as well. They really are much more useful than mine."

Oops, did we get a bit too over-excited? We'd been blabbering non-stop in front of these two. I'd originally thought to hide the crystals from them to avoid exposing too much information, but now they even knew what weapons I used.

I glanced at Jiang Xiaotian. He didn't seem to care the slightest. As expected of the Ice Emperor, he couldn't care less about small fry like them. Just as I thought that, Jiang Xiaotian flicked a gaze up at Wu Yaojin, his expression cool and his eyes even colder—he didn't have any intention of replying to him.

Oh, is he planning to kill one and take the other? This is a perfect plan! I'm blown away!

Wu Yaojin, on the other hand, wasn't fazed by Jiang Xiaotian's coldness. He examined the child closely, almost as if he was an excellent specimen.

The way he looked at him ticked me off. We were probably better off killing folks who didn't think of people as people. What was more, these scientists had created the aberrant elite, Thirteen, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths. Even if we revived them and killed them a thousand times over, it wouldn't be enough to repay their crimes to humanity.

I rubbed Jiang Xiaotian's head, as a reminder to keep the fact that he wanted to murder the guy a secret! Dàgē, you're too used to showing off your might. If the Ice Emperor wanted to kill someone, that person would probably commit suicide first. And even if he didn't commit

suicide, there would be a whole crowd of people falling over themselves to help kill him, which meant the Ice Emperor pretty much never needed to take matters into his own hands. So it was only natural for him to never hide his intentions.

“Ugh...”

Suddenly, we heard a voice coming from the corner. I immediately raised my gun and dagger, whereas Blackie dashed over and pulled up a person from the pile of minced meat and blood—he actually looked whole.

“Ah Qing!” Blackie yelled, “Wake up, Ah Qing!”

I took a closer look. That blood-drenched guy really was Chen Yanqing. I quickly put away my weapons and moved in to check his injuries, only to be astounded. His injuries weren't too bad. Of course, it was hard to avoid bruises and scratches all over, and he might even have a fracture or two. Still, he was way more fortunate than the poor piles of flesh to the side. *So enviable!*

He had been sprawled against the wall, covered in bits of flesh and blood. He had probably been hit and had passed out after smacking into the wall, where he was then camouflaged by the following shower of blood and flesh by his comrades. He had pretty much survived the same way as Wu Yaojin had, except that one had actively chosen this survival method, while the other had had it bestowed upon him by the will of the heavens.

Chen Yanqing lifted his head, and just as I was able to ask where he was hurting, a savage look suddenly entered his eyes, and he let out a blood curdling roar, like a dying beast mustering the last of its strength to rage in anger—

“AHHHHHHH—”

He lifted his gun and pointed the pitch-black muzzle at my forehead.

Chapter 6: The Control Room

Bang bang bang!

I pushed the muzzle away with a hand. My devoted servant really did fire on me—if I had been just the slightest bit slower, the bullets would have lodged themselves in my brain, not even giving me the chance to turn into an aberrant!

Almost dying in the most random manner pissed me off to no end. I threw a punch at him, then started slapping his face non-stop!

Blackie originally moved to stop me, but when he saw that I was just slapping him, he fell into an awkward silence.

After a dozen consecutive slaps, I finally stopped when I'd slapped the wits out of him. I raged, “Wake up, Chen Yanqing! You bastard! How the hell are you gonna make it up to me if you damage this precious face of mine?!”

In that moment, everyone turned their eyes onto the “precious face.” Chen Yanqing was also staring at the “precious face” in a daze. Suddenly, he snapped out of it and shouted, “Xiao Yu? Why are you here? Did you get caught?”

I immediately grabbed his head in one hand, hauled him up, and even started radiating icy energies. I growled, “‘Caught,’ my ass! Is this cold enough to wake you up?!”

Then, I threw Chen Yanqing onto the floor. He spat out one mouthful of ice, then another, wiped his face, and said, “I feel like I’m still dreaming.”

That was what he was saying, but he looked fully awake.

“What about the others? Quick, tell me everything that’s happened since you guys came in here, or your comrades are all gonna die!”

Chen Yanqing glanced at Blackie, but he didn’t ask any questions and just told us outright, “We split into two groups for the rescue. Ah Nuo was the leader taking us to the control center, while the Lieutenant and Guo Hong went the other way. But we kept meeting monsters along the way and a lot of us got injured or died. We wanted to turn back, but they cut off our retreat route, so we had no choice but to press forward. By the time we got here, we were down to half our men. Before I passed out, Ah Nuo was still alive, but I don’t know what happened after that.”

He had explained it quite clearly. No wonder Blackie said “even Ah Qing will do”—he was able to stay calm despite being covered in his

comrades' blood and flesh, and being afflicted with red eyes, shaking hands, and even frozen ends of his hair. I'd underestimated him.

"From the sounds of it, Thirteen has probably taken over the control center." Jiang Xiaotian frowned as he said, "We didn't encounter any aberrants along the way, so they probably want us to walk straight into their jaws."

"They're that intelligent?" This was surprising. *How could aberrants in this era be so smart? What the hell did the MORC do?!* I asked quickly, "Ah Qing, did you encounter any aberrants who could speak?"

Ah Qing shook his head. "Nope, they didn't look too different from the monsters outside. They jump at us the moment they see us like we're food, unless we use heavy firepower to force them back. But there must be some monster at the top commanding them. When they launched a coordinated attack, Ah Nuo sensed that there was something wrong and wanted to retreat and regroup with the Lieutenant. But by then, it was too late. All our routes of retreat had been blocked off. There's no way this would have happened without a leader."

I had an idea of what was going on. The experiments had probably evolved a bit faster than regular aberrants and had not recovered their minds. *What kind of human mind would gobble up other humans as food?!*

But Thirteen was an exception—leadership didn't just require intelligence but also experience. So perhaps he really did possess a human's mind, but the research center hadn't treated him as anything

special. He was probably a unique case rather than the MORC having found a way to let the aberrants regain their minds.

Blackie asked uneasily, "Ah Qing, should we go find Ah Nuo or go back for the Lieutenant?"

Chen Yanqing asked, "How long has it been since we came in as reinforcements?"

Blackie glanced at his watch and immediately reported, "Forty minutes."

"Just forty minutes..." A look of pain flashed across Chen Yanqing's face, but he shook his head and calmed himself down before speaking anxiously, "We arrived here at approximately the twenty-five minute mark. At the time, Ah Nuo was leading the team at full speed to break through. I was watching the back, and I was sent flying and knocked out before I even noticed the attack. Not much time has passed since, so we still have a chance of catching up to the team!"

Hearing that, I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian. He had just been clamoring to go to the control center to kill Thirteen, so if Ah Qing was proposing to go after Ah Nuo's team, Jiang Xiaotian might object.

Jiang Xiaotian spoke coolly, "If Thirteen was in the control center and he could command the aberrants, do you think we have a choice in where to go?"

Everyone's expressions drained.

I shook my head, saying, "Maybe we do, since Thirteen might not care where we're heading. There are just a handful of us here, so we're too few compared to the other teams. If you had the choice to dig into prime rib, would you even care about a little bit of spaghetti mince?"

This wasn't yet the time when the elites could take on ten thousand enemies by themselves. Right now, fights were still determined by numbers and firepower, so Thirteen's human mind probably wouldn't consider us to be strong. Sigh, though I probably really wasn't as strong as the platoon led by the Lieutenant, so he wasn't exactly wrong.

Jiang Xiaotian pondered for a moment then nodded and said, "You're probably right. At the early stages of the apocalypse, if I spotted a large group of aberrants, I probably would ignore the few that were scattered around. Numbers are more important than individual ability right now."

Dàgē, please don't compare humans and aberrants!

"You...?" Chen Yanqing stared at Jiang Xiaotian and me in bewilderment.

"Lead the way." I said calmly, "Let's catch up to Ah Nuo's team."

He seemed to find the situation highly suspect, but he still swallowed back his suspicions and gestured in a direction with his gun, saying, "This way." Then, he quickly walked to the front and ordered without turning his head, "Blackie, you take the rear guard. You must pay close attention."

"I'll take the back," I immediately cut in. If Blackie were at the very back, not only would he fail to give us any warning, we might lose him without noticing.

At that, Chen Yanqing stopped abruptly and turned to look at me.

Blackie hastily explained, "Xiao Yu's very strong. He's got good marksmanship, good moves, and a weird ice ability. He was the one who saved us out there."

Chen Yanqing hesitated before nodding and continuing to lead the way. His EQ really was quite extraordinary—elite troops really were a completely different animal from the leftover soldiers.

We quick marched some distance—Chen Yanqing was going very fast, probably due to his concern for the safety of his brothers. The exception was when we encountered the occasional turn in the path or a half ruined room, which forced him to stop to do a quick check for any dangers before continuing. That Wu Yaojin probably wouldn't be able to catch up with us at this pace.

On the way, we spotted quite a number of corpses that were missing parts again. Although Ah Nuo's team looked to be in an exceedingly bad situation, making the two soldiers' complexions grow worse and worse, we thankfully didn't see Ah Nuo at all. If not, these two would probably fall into pieces and not be able to push on anymore.

Blackie's expression suddenly changed, and he shouted, "Ah Qing, if we go any further, then we'll pass through the control center. Why would you guys pick this route?"

"We didn't have a choice!" Chen Yanqing raged, "They were chasing us from behind, so we had to press on even if it was a trap!"

I glanced at Jiang Xiaotian. No wonder he hadn't objected to following Ah Nuo—he had probably known this from the start.

Turning the corner, we would be about to arrive at the control center. Chen Yanqing came to an abrupt halt, his expression a mixture of anger and anxiety. Then, after taking in a deep breath, he looked at Blackie and asked, "Are you ready?"

Instead, Blackie looked at me. It was only when I nodded at him that he responded, "Yes."

Chen Yanqing looked at Jiang Xiaotian. His face twitched and he gave in, saying, "Then prepare yourselves for all possibilities."

He lifted his gun and turned sharply, but in the next moment, he recoiled and fell back a huge distance, smacking face first into the ground.

I rushed forward, pushing aside the shocked Blackie, to see on Chen Yanqing's face a large... spider? On first glance, it looked like a spider, but on closer inspection, I noticed that the round body was glistening and full of fluids. It looked more like a marine creature, large enough to cover his face, and two long, slender tentacles were firmly locked

around the back of his head. No matter how much Chen Yangqing clawed at it, he couldn't get it off.

I quickly knelt down, wanting to help, but the moment I touched Chen Yangqing, he started, sat up, and scrambled backwards desperately.

"Don't move, it's me."

He seemed like he was still able to hear, and he no longer moved back. Although he was twitching like crazy, he tried his best to keep still.

I grabbed at the thing with my hand, but I couldn't get a grip on the slick, slimy surface. Its many legs made it look like a spider, but its skin was like a marine creature's. Fire was probably a pretty good choice against it, but the slightest slip up and Chen Yangqing would never be able to show his face to the public again.

"Hang on, it might be a bit cold."

I cautiously froze that monstrous thing and knocked off those long tentacles first. Just as I was about to take a closer look at the gap between the thing and Chen Yangqing's face to avoid ripping off his skin along with it, he couldn't wait any longer. He tore the thing off, spat out something long and soft, took a deep breath, and then started throwing up.

"It really is a spider." I inspected the thing. It was probably a spider-based aberrant, except its skin seemed closer to a marine animal's like a sea cucumber. If an average person got tangled up with this thing on their faces, they were probably a goner.

Judging from Chen Yanqing's expression, I could tell he was being suffocated just now. The time frame for saving someone like that was just a few minutes, but this thing was wrapped very tightly around his head and the tentacles were pretty tough as well. So if you had to get it off within a few minutes, you had to already be lying down on a surgery table, or happen to have a tier two ice user next to you. *Damn, Chen Yanqing, you're a helluva lucky guy!*

"S-save them, quick..." Chen Yanqing was coughing so hard that his face had turned red, but he still forced himself to gesture at the bend in the corridor.

I balked and quickly turned the corner. Before my eyes was a scene of whiteness—the entire corridor was covered in wet and slippery spider webs. Many soldiers were trapped by the white threads, strung up in mid-air and immobilized. Every single one of them had a mollusk spider on their face.

Give up on those who aren't moving anymore, those whose limbs are still twitching take second priority, and target those who struggle the most first. I reached out to grab a spider, froze it, then yanked the whole thing off. I quickly pulled them off one after the other, and I ended up plucking off the ones even from the guys who weren't moving at all, in hopes that they could still be revived ...

"Blackie, Ah Qing, help..."

After plucking the eighth one, I looked back to see the blue and purple faces of the soldiers. The ones who had been twitching had probably

moved as a result of the spiders on their faces rather than their own volition. But I remembered there was one that had been struggling hard...

Looking over them, I didn't see a single living person, and I doubted my memory for a moment.

Blackie and Chen Yanqing's faces had turned sheet white as they gazed at their comrades who had met an unnatural end to life hanging in mid-air. This was obviously too much for them and they stood there in a daze, staring at their comrades who had died tragically.

I scanned over the bodies but didn't see Ah Nuo. Obviously not everyone was here, which was a good thing. As long as there were people to save, Chen Yanqing and Blackie would be able to get a grip on themselves.

Before I could speak, Chen Yanqing suddenly rushed up and said anxiously, "Xiao Yu, help me take him down. He just moved—I saw!"
Oh? The one who struggled the most? I looked over and blanched.

"Ah Qing, run!"

The body behind him exploded, and sticky, smooth tentacles stretched out, about to wrap Chen Yangqing from head to toe. I hastily threw out two ice knives, using the freezing energy to stop that thing's movements for a moment, then gliding right to Chen Yanqing and dragging him to the ground.

Having saved him, I swung upwards with all my strength and cut off one tentacle of the spider. This was rather surprising—I'd originally thought I'd be able to cut through three with that force, but I ended up only cutting one. There was a slight sense of recoil as well, and if I hadn't frozen that bit of its flesh, I might even have failed to cut anything at all. Come to think of it, this thing wasn't just hard, it was tough—much tougher than the spider that had covered people's faces.

In terms of height, this thing's body didn't reach a person's waist, but it was as long as a person was tall. The entire thing looked enormous, and I had no idea how on earth it had fit into a person's body just now. No wonder the body had twitched so violently.

"Shuyu, deal with it ASAP!" Jiang Xiaotian hollered, "There's more incoming!"

My heart chilled and I immediately stabbed a knife at the spider's head. At the same time, this fellow's tentacle stabbed at my face, the slimy, soft tentacle moving so quickly that it whipped up a gust—it was clearly not as harmless as it looked. Unfortunately for it, I grabbed onto the tentacle and foiled its attack. If it were someone else, they probably wouldn't have been able to stop it because it was too slippery, but freezing would turn even the slipperiest of things into a popsicle... *Wait, isn't the diameter and length just perfect?*

After stabbing the knife into the spider's brains, I leaped back, drawing on the tentacle in my hand until it was taut. Then, I turned my ice ability to the max, freezing it from the tentacle tip right to the body. Then, I moved forward and chopped it, creating one fine ice staff. One end was even sharp, so I could just about use it as an ice spear!

Although I didn't have time to strengthen it with diamond ice, the spider's tentacle was originally hard and tough, and my ice powers helped to hold it in a staff shape, so it was passable as a weapon.

The moment the ice spear was created, Jiang Xiaotian's words came true. A huge bunch of spiders rained down from above, both large and small. I just barely caught sight of them before I heard the crack of gunfire. Chen Yanqing was shooting, firstly sweeping a hail of bullets across the ceiling, then once Blackie snapped out of it and followed suit, he switched to targeted shooting, bullet by bullet. Amazingly, every bullet hit a spider's head—at most, only two bullets were needed to burst apart a small spider.

The big spiders, however, were much trickier to handle. Their tough head carapace served them well, making it hard for the bullets to penetrate. Most bullets were deflected, but toughness was easier for me to deal with than hardness. Right now, my ice spear and ice knives weren't hard enough, so I couldn't go toe-to-toe with them on hardness. But if these bouncing spiders were frozen, they wouldn't be able to bounce now, would they?

Just as I was able to start a massacre from the one closest to me, Jiang Xiaotian's clear voice of a child said, "Shuyu, freeze them all and let those two clean them up with their guns."

Will it really work? Freezing a wide area wasn't a problem, but these weren't pieces of sashimi, rather really robust aberrants. Freezing them right to the core wasn't easy. After a moment's hesitation, I

remembered that I had leveled up to tier two and I immediately wanted to try it out.

One large spider leaped right before my eyes. I swung my staff at it, using plenty of force, and smashed it to one side. But it immediately got back up, not showing any signs of heavy damage—it was evident that these types of attack were useless against it.

I batted the big spider far away, retreated behind Chen Yanqing and Blackie, and said, "Keep shooting. I need a few seconds."

Chen Yanqing replied, "We can't hold them back for long. We don't have enough ammo."

Most of the time he was point shooting, but when there were too many spiders swarming over at once, he would switch back to strafe fire. He was going through his ammo a bit slower than Blackie, but still at a very quick rate.

I passed the two guns from Jin Feng to Jiang Xiaotian to prevent him from being forced to use his abilities and getting himself sick again.

As the sound of gunfire thundered around me, I gathered up my ice abilities. The air around me crackled. Occasionally, ice would crystallize out of nowhere and hang in the air, floating and trembling.

At my feet, thin layers of ice started forming on the ground. There wasn't enough moisture here...

I froze suddenly. *Moisture? That's right, if there's no water, how can I create ice? If I can crystallize the water in the air, doesn't this mean I can control water?*

"Shuyu, concentrate!" Jiang Xiaotian shouted, firing at the same time. The sight of a small child wielding a large gun made one want to frown and pluck the gun from his hands.

Not allowing my mind to wander, I tucked this thought at the back of my mind and focused on the extreme. This was much easier than I had expected, and if I hadn't spaced out, I would have gathered enough already. If I were more practiced, I wouldn't need to specially accumulate the power, but just use it directly.

"I-it's cold..." Blackie was shaking so badly that he couldn't speak properly.

"Xiao Yu, are you done?" Chen Yanqing's legs were quaking as he said, "My hands are so cold that I won't be able to shoot soon."

I took in a deep breath then said, "Out of my way!"

The two of them immediately backed away on either side of me, breathing sighs of relief. But before they had finished exhaling, a blast of icy air shot out from between them. Their breaths turned into puffs of whiteness, and they looked like they were somewhere in the middle of deep winter.

Then again, this wasn't wrong. The entire corridor was freezing over. From the floor, it extended up the walls. The spiders didn't care about

it at first, but as the icy air coiled around their tentacles, they started realizing that something was off. But by then, a few of them were already stuck fast to the ground and couldn't move, and for those that were able to jump into the air in time, the cold didn't let them go and followed after.

At the end of this, the entire corridor had turned into an ice tunnel, frozen solid with many spiders. They almost looked like ice sculptures. I didn't think I'd be able to pull it off so easily—or perhaps I really was stronger than I'd thought I was?

The two soldiers gaped at the scene in front of them and turned back to look at me, a hint of fear in their eyes.

I said irritably, "Why are you still looking at me? If you don't hurry up, we'll be in deep shit once they defrost. I can't pull this off again!"

This wasn't exactly true—I could probably do it at least one more time, but right now I needed to get rid of their fear of me first.

As expected, the moment I said that, their terror of me subsided significantly. Blackie in particular started staring at me with worshipful eyes, making me struggle to suppress the glee in my heart. I had to remember that Thirteen in this time period was already able to overturn a whole research center, so I had nothing to be proud of!

"Deal with the large ones first. Hit their heads—don't waste your bullets doing strafing shots, use point shooting!"

Blackie put on a mournful face as he said, "I'm not Ah Qing."

"I'll handle it." Chen Yanqing started point shooting without the slightest bit of hesitation, and every bullet of his hit its mark. His marksmanship really was quite something, so even if his special ability was terrible, I wouldn't miss out on taking him with me.

I took back the guns from Jiang Xiaotian's hands. Seeing how quickly Chen Yanqing was dealing with the spiders and how none of the spiders showed any sign of regaining their mobility any time soon, I didn't fire alongside him. The two guns from Jin Feng packed a punch and I didn't want to waste them. There was also a limited number of bullets in my backpack—anyone would guess that these bullets had a trick or two added to them, so if we switched to normal bullets, the guns wouldn't be that powerful. In the worst case scenario, the guns wouldn't work once we changed bullets.

"They're all dead." Chen Yanqing turned to look at me. For some reason, he had a grim expression stretched across his face as he said, "Can we go?"

Just as I was about to ask why he was making that face, I heard Blackie yell,

"I-it's fucking *freezing*!" He hugged himself with both arms and chattered, "Let's go to the control center, go find Ah Nuo, go find the Lieutenant, just go somewhere. Let's go. I-it's too fucking cold here."

So Chen Yanqing's face wasn't grim, but just frozen.

"Let's go now." I nodded with some embarrassment. This was one of the weaknesses of ice abilities—before everyone evolved to be tough enough, these low temperatures affected even my allies standing next to me. If it were just freezing a small area, it wasn't a big deal, but when I seal off a large area with ice like this, Chen Yanqing and Blackie would probably get so cold that their trigger fingers would fall off.

"Let's go to the control center. It should be close by." Jiang Xiaotian looked over his shoulder and said, "This guy should know. Go ask him."

It was only then that I realized Wu Yaojin was behind us. He was staring at me with his eyes wide open and on the verge of sparkling. If he had the choice, I had no doubt that he would stick me in a glass cylinder and thoroughly research me.

Seeing his expression pissed me off, and just as I was about to throw out a question in an icy tone and scare him while I was at it, his eyes widened even further, and he let out a scream.

Gun shots and a loud roar rang out almost simultaneously. I looked back to see that the world had changed completely. A single silhouette stood, proud and alone—it looked normal, and it was only after taking a closer look that you'd notice that thick tail that trailed onto the floor, sweeping from one side to another every so often.

It was standing on a person, and because that person was being pressed full-bodied against the icy floor, he was starting to freeze over. Even if he hadn't been crushed to death under that foot, just lying on this arctic coldness was enough to half-kill him. But the man didn't

show the slightest sign of a struggle, so in all likelihood, he was already...

I swayed, not quite able to react to the scene before me—then the memories of the apocalypse chose this moment to come rushing at me. Yes, this was how it was during the apocalypse. Human life was completely worthless—a person who was talking and walking next to me one second would easily turn into a bloody corpse in the next, and their deaths would take all sorts of terrifying forms.

So even if we were on the same team and relied on each other for survival, we didn't have much interest in each other and didn't even bother chatting much. Who knew whether they'd still be around after a night's rest? Not talking to them at all would at least spare me that little bit of pain.

As the body count mounted, I had become completely numb. Aside from the people close to me, the lives and deaths of other people didn't trigger much feeling in me anymore. Even if the people dearest to me died, I'd often have to flee in a panic without even having the time to shed tears.

By the time the fleeing was over, I didn't have the slightest bit of energy left in me to mourn. After all, I was already lucky to be alive. Yes, this was the apocalypse, where even grief was a luxury most couldn't afford.

"Blackie!"

Chen Yanqing gave a heartbroken wail and sprayed bullets from his gun like they were free. But the opponent was ready for this and yanked down the frozen spider corpses stuck to the ceiling to block the bullets. In the next moment, a large number of aberrants dashed out from both sides of the opponent—it was obvious that they were bullet-proof just by looking at their exteriors.

To one side was the door to the control room. It had been completely covered by the spider webs, so we had completely failed to notice it, and that was probably intentional on the enemy's part.

Jiang Xiaotian yanked at Chen Yanqing as he retreated behind me. Although he looked like a three-year old kid, his strength was a different matter. Chen Yanqing was dragged effortlessly away by him as he went a little nuts. Being dragged like this, he fell onto his butt at my feet, causing the muzzle to arc upwards, all the while spitting out bullets.

Chen Yanqing struggled to get back up but I held him down by pressing down on his shoulder. He lifted his eyes to glare at me, his gaze as crazed as a beast's. I stared back at him steadily, not shying away from the eye contact. Then, I gripped his shoulder hard before giving him a pat.

Chen Yanqing's face collapsed, his head dropped, and he choked softly.

"Thirteen," Jiang Xiaotian grated through ground teeth.

Hearing this name, I couldn't help but give a sigh of admiration. This was a monumental moment in history where the human elite was

going up against an aberrant elite. That said, one had reverted to childhood and looked like a three year-old, while the other had only just started evolving and currently looked like an overworked office worker. Honestly, neither of them felt awe-inspiring or intimidating—even the big spiders looked scarier than them.

The guy in front of us looked even more dubious than he had looked in the filed photo. *Seriously, this is the aberrant elite that decimated an entire continent? Are you fucking kidding me?*

"So it really was Thirteen?" Wu Yaojin murmured, somewhat in disbelief. Right now, I completely understood where he was coming from. Thirteen's appearance was simply too deceiving.

"You are..." Thirteen didn't move to attack and looked at the ice around us in confusion, then at me. He asked uncomprehendingly, "Them? Us?"

He possessed an extremely high intellect, to the point of being able to speak—albeit he was not completely normal. It was obvious that my ice abilities had befuddled him about whether I was friend or foe, but on this point, even humans would have their doubts. After all, we had a talking aberrant right in front of us, so it wouldn't be strange if people thought I was an aberrant as well. Right now, humans didn't know much about special abilities.

Pretending to be one of these aberrants then attacking when they were unsuspecting was certainly a good way of going about things. Unfortunately, I had Chen Yanqing and Wu Yaojin next to me. I

couldn't care less about the latter, but I was determined to keep the former!

Looking away for a moment lost me Blackie, so how could I possibly bear to lose Ah Qing as well? Right now, I wasn't the Guan Weijun who was used to death. Jiang Shuyu wouldn't ever want to get used to losing people close to him!

"Get off Blackie's body!" I raged, "Or else I'm going to send you meet your spider friends!"

Chen Yanqing stood up. The craziness had passed, replaced by the searing fires of wrath.

Thirteen's expression darkened and he said coolly, "You're 'them.'"

The moment he said that, two aberrants that looked like bears in armor opened their jaws, but instead let out sounds that did not sound the slightest bit bear-like. They sounded like a leaking balloon, except much louder, hurting my ears.

"Watch out, those two have very tough skins." Wu Yaojin whispered from behind, "Even their eyelids are tough. They have nictitating membranes, which means their inner eyelid is translucent and they can keep them shut even in combat. Although they're not as hard as the outer eyelid, they can block a bullet or two, no problem."

The hell, is it possible to make something even more dangerous than them? Although these two looked like bears, on closer inspection, they had a human form. Their legs were too long and they spent more time

standing on their feet than on all fours. They were probably aberrants transformed from humans rather than aberrants transformed from animals. *If they're weaponized down to their eyelids, how on earth am I supposed to defeat them?!*

Within this small window of opportunity, I'd only had the time to secretly compress two layers of diamond ice onto the spear. Trying to brute force my way through their defenses was impossible. If we dragged out the conversation, I might be able to layer on more diamond ice, but I simply couldn't take it when I saw him stepping on Blackie!

You goddamn motherfucker, how dare you continue to stand on him?! I'm gonna cut off all two... all three! of your legs and tail.

Suddenly, I felt energy pulse next to me. I was so terrified that I whipped my head around, worried that I'd lost Ah Qing without noticing. But I saw Chen Yanqing's face—it was obvious that he had become so cold that he'd turned blue. I pushed at him and said, "Go to the back. Don't get so cold that you can't shoot."

Chen Yanqing looked extremely unwilling, but when he heard "can't shoot," he obediently retreated to Wu Yaojin's side. That little rascal had backed away at least a dozen steps long ago.

Having dealt with Chen Yanqing, I then shot a hard look at Jiang Xiaotian and told him sternly in a soft voice, "Don't use your abilities!"

Layers of ice drifted around Jiang Xiaotian's body as he emitted at least the same amount of energy as I was. This was what made Chen Yanqing so cold that he turned blue.

"I'll kill him!"

No wonder Jiang Xiaotian never even considered whether his younger brother could deal with Thirteen or whether it would be dangerous. He'd been planning to do it himself all along, to avenge Xiao Sha from the other world. It was clear that the Ice Emperor didn't care about his own body's condition.

I took in a deep breath.

Chapter 7: Thirteen, Part 1

Jiang Xiaotian frowned and turned to look at me. With that expression on that little face, he was definitely going to say "no".

"Give your little brother a chance to practice." I spoke first, "If I fail, then you could pitch in. Wouldn't that be fine?"

Jiang Xiaotian hesitated for a moment at my proposal before nodding.

Thirteen was watching us this entire time. Although the two armored bears were poised to fight, they didn't seem like they were about to attack. *I think that Thirteen is interested in us and isn't in a hurry to make his move.*

This wasn't a good sign. Thirteen might have the leisure of observing his enemy precisely because it was a child's play to deal with us. Ah Nuo and the Lieutenant's men probably weren't in a good place- or at least they didn't pose any threat to Thirteen. *I only hope that they haven't been wiped out.*

If the elite troops who had gone in first were annihilated, then the reinforcements would probably follow them in death. Even if there were still soldiers outside, they were neither elite nor bold enough to enter as reinforcements. *So what's there to expect from them? This shelter's probably a goner. In the worst case scenario, it could even become the hunting ground for Thirteen's aberrant underlings.*

I raised my ice spear, only having time to add one layer of diamond ice. The outer eyelid might be impenetrable, but the inner eyelid was

not. However, the opponent definitely knew this too. It'd be difficult to accurately strike at this weakness. Directly freezing the two armored bears wasn't going to be as easy as sealing spiders with ice either. The two bears didn't seem fazed by the fact that they were currently standing on ice...

Wait a second, did Thirteen step on Blackie because he can't handle the icy coldness from the floor?

This was a real possibility. Although Thirteen couldn't possibly be weaker than the armored bears- in the world of aberrants, strength was respected, while intellect was as worthless as dirt. This was even truer in the beginning stages of the apocalypse. As such, intelligent aberrants that stayed alive were few and far between, and only the mightiest of aberrants could lay their hands on them— Yes, even in the later stages, intelligent types were unable to rule and could only depend on fighters. One could only conquer through brute force.

However, not all aberrants could resist the cold.

What if I ignored the armored bears and directly attacked Thirteen? In any case, the opponent probably wouldn't sit back and watch the armored bears get killed. If I had to face all three opponents anyway, wouldn't it be better if I picked the target at the start and got rid of this bastard who was susceptible to the cold? Then, dealing with the armored bears wouldn't be a big deal anymore.

As I was evaluating Thirteen and mulling over his possible weakness, waves of a woman's mournful shrieks rang out. While the shrieks didn't sound close, they were actually able to penetrate through the

walls of this research center, transmitting all the way here. They were closely followed by the sound of a baby's thin, sharp cry. The two mixed together, making my hair stand on end. *Could this be the crying baby that we heard in the beginning? Is it Maternibaby?*

I listened—it didn't sound normal, like it was a bit desperate. Maybe the other troops were in a better situation than I thought. Hopefully they'd finish off Maternibaby just like this. In the later stages of the apocalypse, killing one of Thirteen's generals would make someone world famous!

Thirteen's face suddenly changed, his brows heavily scrunching together so much that even his brow ridge popped out. His expression had turned as merciless as a devil's. *What happened to being an office worker about to burst his liver doing overtime?* His whole aura changed- it shot fear into a person's heart with just one look and no one would dare to look down on him.

Despite the changes, he actually didn't pay any attention to me. He instead turned and walked in the other direction, and even the armored bears turned to follow.

That's fucking rude, yo!

I didn't even have time to get angry before Jiang Xiaotian erupted in fury next to me. His little body shot forward, and he roared, "FREEZE!"

Thirteen turned back, his glaring eyes as big as plates. My mind suddenly went blank, and I could do nothing but stare into those pure black spheres as deep as caves. Then, a sudden bolt of pain shot

through my head that took the strength from my knees. I could do nothing but curl up, hugging my head to endure it.

“Èrgē!”

Junjun? I turned to look at her. My tiny little sister is so cute—Wrong! I’m dreaming now, right? Did I just pass out again? Shit, what’s happening out there? I need to hurry and wake up!

“Èrgē’s head is burning!” Junjun’s little hand covered my forehead, and she anxiously asked, “Are you too hot?”

“Do I have a fever? Stay away from me, or else you’ll get infected,” “I” opened my mouth to say. My voice came out super hoarse. *I seem pretty sick.*

“No!” Junjun stubbornly said, “I want to stay by Èrgē’s side.”

“Junjun, behave. Èrgē is sick. What would we do if you got sick too?”

Junjun still didn’t leave, instead pulling the mug on the bedside cabinet, and said, “Èrgē, do you want some water?”

I sighed and asked, “What time is it right now?”

“Ten o’clock.”

“How come you haven’t gone to school?” I frowned. Although my feverish head pounded like a drum, I could still recall that today wasn’t the weekend.

"Not going!" Junjun pouted, "Usually, Èrgē wakes me up. Today, I woke up on my own, and you still weren't up. Lin-bó said that you're sick. He wanted to take me to school and get the doctor on the way back. He said that he worries about leaving you at home by yourself, but he also didn't dare have me take a taxi to school alone. I just said I won't go to school so I could take care of Èrgē. I had Lin-bó call the school."

There really weren't enough people at home. To have Lin-bó always busily running in and out was not going to work either. *We should hire a maid paid by the hour, as long as she commutes instead of staying in our house.*

Then again, I didn't want to add another person to our household. I pondered over it for a while. But my head started pounding again and I decided not to think about it for now and leave it for when I got better, since there wasn't any rush.

Taking the water that Junjun handed over, I drank a few sips that soothed my throat and filled me with pride. *My little sister is so cute and considerate, how can I not love her?!*

"Where's Lin-bó?"

"He went to get the doctor."

I gave a wry smile. *You could've just taken me to the doctor's once I was awake. Why go through so much trouble?*

Previously, when Mom and Dad were still around, we were a large household. All in all, our retinue of servants, gardeners, and chefs and so on tallied up to almost ten people. Actually, there was even a family physician, who came with just one call. Lin-bó always recounted the glorious days, but right now we were just a small, barely rich household.

Dàgē was pretty proficient at making money, but had equally big expenditures. A mercenary group was not that easy to support, plus the scale of their territory was growing larger and larger. *We must economize! In the future, we got to nag Lin-bó more.*

"You haven't told Dàgē, right?" *It's only a fever. I really don't want him executing a mission while worrying.* If Dàgē slipped up during a mission, that could cost lives! *In his head, Dìdì and Mèimei must be healthy and never get sick!*

"No." Junjun pouted and grumbled, "Since there's no use telling him anyway."

I looked at Shujun. *Is that a complaint?*

"Dàgē's responsibility of supporting the family is very hard."

Junjun drooped her little head and said, "I know. Sorry..."

"It's ok. I also think that since Dàgē never comes home, it wouldn't be strange if he forgets where his home is one day."

Junjun immediately nodded heavily. *If Dàgē were to ever see that little look of resentment, he would surely immediately apologize and repent his misdeeds while blaming himself. But he still wouldn't change, so there's no need for him to see this.*

I reached out to pet her head. In my prone position, this turned out a bit awkward to do. Before I knew it, the little girl had grown this tall already. *I really hope that she continues growing up like this into a successful adult. She'll definitely be gifted in both looks and wisdom, a super wonderful woman!*

One day, a lucky fucker will marry my angelic xiǎomèi. Then, they will give birth to some lovable kids. Thinking of a bunch of mini-Junjuns circling around and call me Uncle made my heart melt. *Everything would be perfect like this. But things never go as planned... What the hell am I thinking!*

How is it possible that things won't go as planned! Nuh-uh, it's not a jinx if a kid says these things! My Junjun will definitely become a blessed and happy little princess. It's my sick brain that's making me think nonsense.

"Èrgē, I'm going to steam some buns and heat the milk for you. Lin-bó said to at least eat something." Shujun advised me with the composure of an adult, "Èrgē, if you need anything, just use the internal line and call me. I'll come immediately."

I couldn't help but laugh and said, "Okay. Be careful when you're using the stove."

Junjun nodded in reply before bouncing away.

Only when the door closed did I finally breathe a sigh of relief. My head ached like someone was tumbling around in there, and my eyes were so heavy that I could hardly open them. *I'll nap a bit while waiting for the food. That should be fine...*

"Weijun-jiě, do you know that Xia Zhengu brought another woman back again?"

I was still half-asleep, but as soon as I heard that sentence I jolted awake, turning around to look. It was a woman, looking to be around twenty-something years old? I couldn't tell. She looked delicate and pretty, and was very familiar, but I obviously didn't recognize her.

But "I" chuckled while replying, "Tell me if he ever comes back without a woman instead. That'll be a lot rarer."

What's this? Why am I saying this? And my voice is... a woman's? What's going on?

"This is different!" The woman bit her lips and angrily said, "He brought back a mother and daughter. That girl doesn't even look like she's fifteen yet. She'd still be in middle school before all this!"

Okay, this really is too over the top. And from what I know about Xia Zhengu, this situation might be even more absurd.

"Is the mother pretty?"

The woman blinked, then nodded. "If the child is that old, she should be thirty something already. But nowadays, people don't look as old, so she only looks twenty something, and she's quite busty. She's his type."

My face sank. *Does Xia Zhengu plan to do both the mother and daughter? Screw this, he better not do what I'm thinking of and want a threesome with the mother and daughter. Fucking bastard!*

"I'll go find him right now. See if I can bring the girl over."

The woman nodded her head heavily and started following me.

"Xiao Qi, don't come with me."

I was worried that the conflict would affect her. Recently, Xia Zhengu had become even more heartless. Earlier, I had already scavenged several kinds of edibles, so there was no lack of food at the moment, but this also meant that I was not that useful anymore.

Although I had experience in finding edible plants and farming, Xia Zhengu wasn't going to care about that, since there were plenty of women who helped him farm. He simply didn't appreciate how much food can be grown on an acre. Either way, it wouldn't leave him hungry.

If only Xia Zhengu thought things through, just even by a little bit, our commune would thrive so much more!

That woman, Xiao Qi, still stubbornly followed closely behind me. I could only sigh. *Nowadays, a mistress holds more love and loyalty than a boyfriend.*

When I found Xia Zhengu, he wasn't willing to surrender the girl, as expected. I tried to settle for the next best thing and said, "Then, give me the mother. I need more hands for farming."

He impatiently said, "I brought back quite a few people this time. Take your pick, but the mother and daughter are *mine*."

Unwilling to surrender both, huh. My guess was right. Fucking sonnova bitch wants to be the husband of a mother and her daughter. You scumbag!

"Xia Zhengu, fucking the mother isn't enough? You can't even keep your hands off someone's middle school daughter? You motherfucker, are you still even human?"

"Keep my hands off? *They* cozied up to me. If I don't accept them, they won't be able to survive, y'know? Come on, don't you even have a bit of sympathy? You only know how to be jealous!"

Jealous? I was so angry that I couldn't help but laugh. *What woman would still feel jealous when her man has collected dozens, no, hundreds of mistresses? I will pay my respects to her.*

"If you hadn't shown your interest, no mother would be in a hurry to give her daughter away! Give me the daughter and clearly explain to the mom that I'm taking her to plant crops! That there'll be food and

drink. Then see if that mom would still let her daughter go to your room! Or do you really think you're so irresistible, Xia Zhengu, that you thought just one look would make women want to crawl into your bed?!"

Xia Zhengu's face hardened. He coldly retorted, "Guan Weijun, you're becoming more and more vulgar. Go and hide in the greenhouse and don't let others catch sight of you. You're a disgrace!"

"Fuck your family sideways and backwards. Is that crude enough?" I snapped, "My words are much more civilized compared to what you're doing! You specialize in doing things that no decent human would do, and you still dare to call me vulgar?"

"You!" Xia Zhengu was outraged. His face distorted even further, and any trace of the "gentleman" on his high horse telling me off for vulgarity was gone.

I stepped back but still wasn't quick enough. Xia Zhengu had already grabbed my neck. The difference in our strengths was still way too great, and even escaping wasn't a choice. *Dammit. If only I hadn't given up back then. If only I could have become a bit stronger...*

My neck pulsed with intense pain. *Can't breathe, but I can't beg for mercy. Xia Zhengu, if this bastard manages to make me beg even once, then he definitely won't take me seriously in the future. Even if he beats me to death, I won't give in!*

"Let go of Weijun-jiě!"

Xiao Qi desperately pulled at Xia Zhenggu, but how could she, the medic, have the power to shake a man? In the end, she went crashing into the wall with one push, and was barely able to crawl back up after. She wasn't going to repeat the same, futile motions. Instead, she started to scream and wail, desperately shrieking, "Weijun-jiě will get killed, help!" Her voice was so sharp that even I, the person being strangled to death, could not stand it!

When my consciousness started to blur, people started to rush in. After seeing who they were, I relaxed. It was good that they were not members from Xia Zhenggu's later collection of bastards.

This was an older generation of comrades. While they were fewer than before, each and every one of them was pretty powerful, and they didn't completely side with Xia Zhenggu. *Good, they're here. I have a chance to survive. All I need to do is tell them about Xia Zhenggu's craziness. Maybe they'll be willing to take the girl away... Although, Xiao Qi, people already came. Please stop crying. My head hurts...*

"Èrgē, Èrgē! Sob, sob..."

Once I opened my eyes, I saw a little girl drowning in tears. I almost blurted out, "Who are you?" Fortunately, these words got stuck at the tip of my tongue and what was blurted became "Shujun" instead. *What's wrong with me? Why can't I recognize even my own little sister?!*

"Èrgē! Does it hurt too much?" Junjun wept, "Just a moment ago, you looked very uncomfortable. I keep trying wake you, but you wouldn't wake up. I was so scared..."

I strained a smile and was going to say "Don't be scared, I'm fine" when a sudden, sharp pain lanced through my head. It hurt so much that I couldn't help but squeeze my eyes shut and bite my lips, and braced myself against the pain until it passed. *I can't make any sounds. It'll scare Junjun!*

When I finally squashed the pain down, I relaxed and opened my eyes. I was just about to console Mèimei, but what was before me was not her little weeping face but another even younger little face. *What's going on?*

I was at a loss.

A dream within a dream. A waking upon waking. Was I truly awake?

"Shuyu, Shuyu. Are you okay?" The little kid panicked, "Shuyu, say something!"

I looked at him and finally snapped out of it. I opened my mouth and spoke. My voice was so hoarse that even I was surprised.

Chapter 7: Thirteen, Part 2

"My head hurts real bad. His psychic ability is really strong. The Thirteen in this time period might not specialize in physical combat, Dàgē."

I probably wasn't too far off the mark, seeing how he couldn't stand the cold yet was able to instruct other aberrants.

Jiang Xiaotian, however, didn't care about Thirteen and only frowned. "Are you okay?"

How can I be okay? Waves of pain kept piercing my head, but compared to just now when I couldn't even talk due to the pain, this wasn't a big deal.

Rather than the headache, my main concern was that dream just now, which was more confusing. As I gained more and more past memories, I almost had the answer in my hand, but I didn't dare to think too much about it. *I'd love it if I'm... but on the other hand, that's also...*

I didn't dare continue that line of thought. I forced myself not to turn my head away, not to avoid meeting Jiang Xiaotian's gaze.

Chen Yanqing anxiously said, "Xiao Yu, your eyes are bloodshot and your face is still kinda pale."

No wonder Jiang Xiaotian was so worried and seemed to have given up on chasing Thirteen. I shook my head and said, "I'm fine. Let's go. Something's up with Maternibaby, probably the work of your fellow

soldiers. They're going to be in trouble, what with Thirteen hurrying on over."

Chen Yanqing became even more worried at my words and hurriedly urged, "Then let's go."

I picked up my ice spear and stood up. When I walked over to that ice corridor, Blackie was still laying face down on the ground, his body practically frozen.

I silently crouched down, pointing the spearhead against Blackie's head. Then, I raised my head and looked toward Chen Yanqing. He stiffened then said, "Let me do it."

I nodded in agreement. Unexpectedly, Chen Yanqing did not hesitate and fired a shot, then managed to say, "Let's go."

Other than his slightly trembling hands, there wasn't any other sign indicating his discomfort.

"Don't worry about him." Jiang Xiaotian's voice carried a hint of admiration, "As long as he's got comrades waiting for him, he will be alright. This guy isn't half bad."

I nodded in agreement. *See? That's why you can't blame me for always wanting to take him with me. When there's a capable guy, everyone wants to snatch him up. It's just a shame that Blackie...ugh!*

"But you are *not* allowed to fall in love before you're ready, no matter how good the partner!"

...Dàgē, even if it's ten years into the apocalypse, when women are like buff men while men are like monsters, when people don't bother to maintain appearances, when basically a person's gender doesn't matter anymore, you still can't keep thinking day in and day out that your dìdì will be swindled away just because you saw some human! I haven't even decided what gender I like, so I definitely won't fall in love!

Wu Yaojin hastily said, "Don't settle with a guy. With your strength, having kids will be a huge contribution to the world. Genetics still play a huge factor!"

"Yeah, having children is good." Jiang Xiaotian approved wholeheartedly, then, in the next breath, he snarled, "But the children of my family are *not* to be used as contributions to the world. You better believe that I'd immediately make you die a heroic death!"

"..." Ahead of me, Ah Qing seemed to be walking a bit rigidly.

One had lived ten years into the apocalypse and seen countless tragedies. One had an asparagus syndrome. Even with so many people dead, these two were still talking about whether it was love or puppy love, and whether to pick a guy or girl. My head ached even more. *Please, leave Ah Qing with a better impression. I still want steal this person back to the Jiang territory!*

At this moment, numerous gunshots sounded off in the distance. They were muffled by the walls but could still be clearly heard. *They must be close by.* Chen Yanqing immediately ran toward the sound, and I

quickly followed after. I looked back—the kid was keeping up pretty well. *Wu Yaojin... if you can't keep up, that's even better. Saves me the trouble of deciding whether or not to off you to vent my anger.*

When we arrived at the origin of the gunshots, it was so quiet that it was like no one was around. *They're not all dead, are they?* I hastily looked around and was deeply shaken by the scene.

The soldiers had been forced to retreat into the corner and had formed a circle around a round creature. A closer look made no difference to the sight of a spherical lump of meat. Only after another look did I finally notice her head and legs.

Maternibaby was larger than I'd imagined her to be, especially her huge belly. Two men probably couldn't even wrap their arms around her. Her belly yawned wide open, the inside of her abdomen stuffed with baby arms and legs bathed in blood. Some limbs were so long that they drooped down to the ground. She looked as if she had been hurt to the point that she couldn't move and had no choice but to allow herself to be surrounded by the soldiers.

There were less than twenty soldiers remaining. The second lieutenant who had come to their aid was also among them, and he looked much more respectable than earlier. He and the others stood at the very front, holding heavy firearms, their eyes bloodshot, their bodies both red and pale. They looked like gods of death, but ones whose times were up, struggling in their final hour.

But most shocking were the wounded soldiers sitting next to Maternibaby. They were not holding any assault weapons but instead

held grenades and similar objects. Their hands were ready to pull the pins at anytime, their expressions incomparably hardened. I had no doubt that they were more than willing to perform a suicide mission.

Across from the soldiers was a pack of aberrants—not too many, probably about the same number as the remaining troop. If I wasn't mistaken, the aberrant at the very front was Asura. He looked to be about the same as the picture in the data, but only seeing him in person could you truly appreciate how he towered over you. Only currently, he'd been beaten black and blue, and a whole leg was distorted to the point of being unrecognizable.

But the soldiers had also paid a huge price. The entire floor between the two sides was covered in broken body parts, and while there were aberrant corpses, the majority of casualties were the soldiers.

Since they were going down anyway, the soldiers were resolved to go down together. Grenades were held up, and although they probably wouldn't be enough to kill Thirteen or Asura, they would at least take Maternibaby down with them. Otherwise, Thirteen's expression wouldn't have been as dark as it was now. He was even holding back the attack—every one of the ten-odd aberrants looked strong, and it would probably be a walk in a park for them to finish off the remaining soldiers.

"Ah Nuo!" Chen Yanqing shouted, "What happened to the Lieutenant and Guo Hong?"

Ah Nuo glared and yelled back angrily, "Why'd you come? Leave!"

Chen Yanqing flinched. Then, he looked over at me with pleading eyes.

I too wished that I was strong enough to defeat Thirteen, who'd brought ten-odd aberrants. However, things never went the way you wanted them to. I'd be lucky to even defeat Thirteen, never mind the other aberrants.

Jiang Xiaotian remarked, "I really underestimated them. I didn't expect them to be able to cripple Asura and Maternibaby. With this, you really can defeat Thirteen now. Have the soldiers hold back the other aberrants. You just need to focus on defeating Thirteen."

If I did that, you'd be able to count on a hand the soldiers who'll be left once this is done. They already looked wiped out and had barely any strength left. You could practically see the grim reaper standing over them.

Thirteen seemed to be concerned about Maternibaby's safety. If I used Maternibaby as a hostage to force him to leave, then it was possible to protect the safety of these soldiers.

I had to say I truly admired their tenacity to struggle and fight so long. Even when faced with death, they remained selfless. *So there actually were soldiers who weren't corrupted at the beginning of the apocalypse. But most probably lost their lives and simply didn't survive to see the later days.*

Good people don't live long; bastards live forever. This law of life is fucking terrible. I just want to save a few more good people. Come on!

"Dàgē, I don't want to sacrifice them."

The moment I said that, Chen Yanqing stared at me.

"I know what you're thinking. You can't stand letting me participate or sacrificing these people in front of you. There are too many things you can't stand." Jiang Xiaotian said coldly, "You should know that once Thirteen escapes, in the days ahead, even more people will die at his hands. Your current actions will not save people. You're exchanging the lives of dozens for tens of thousands!"

I know. I do understand! Thirteen's body count is far above tens of thousands of lives. Forget the soldiers—even if you included the civilians in the refugee camp, even if we can sacrifice the lives of these people to kill Thirteen, that'll be a great victory... My ass!

Human lives can't be measured like this! Seriously, my Junjun is worth more than tens of millions of lives! I'm beyond biased, but so what? I don't know those tens of thousands who'll die, but these soldiers before me, who are struggling with all they've got, they are admirable!

I wheedled quietly, "Still, Dàgē, I want them to live. Give me a hand."

Jiang Xiaotian actually broke out into a grin at that and said, "Shuyu, I've always felt that you are too mature, to the point that you don't feel like someone who has just stepped into the apocalyptic world, let alone like an eighteen-year-old. But now, now you finally feel like one."

It's because I'm a thirty-five year-old woman who has fully lived out ten years of the apocalypse. I'd probably even experienced roughly the same length of the apocalypse as Jiang Xiaotian. It was just that I had grown discouraged. Leading those mistresses who had likewise been resigned to their fate, we had only focused on hiding away in our own world, working on the fields. The fight had gone out of us.

"Go. Do what you want." He said indifferently, "Even if you let Thirteen go now, we can chase him down later."

So I just gotta kill Thirteen no matter what. I took a deep breath. *Fine, otherwise I'm going to feel guilty every time I hear news of Thirteen's brutality.*

"Thirteen, let them go." I yelled.

Thirteen turned his head and looked at us. His countenance became even fiercer, hinting that he wouldn't hesitate to have this end in mutual destruction.

My expression sank. I tried to look menacing and thundered, "Take your underlings and leave right now. But if you insist on fighting to the bitter end, I'll do the same!"

Thirteen narrowed his eyes at me. In the next second, his line of sight shifted to Jiang Xiaotian, and a hint of fear crept into his eyes. *Good call! He could actually tell that Xiaotian is the true threat here. No wonder you are the future king of aberrants!*

"Even her?" Thirteen looked toward Maternibaby. Although he gave little away, it was obvious just from watching him rush over the moment he had heard Maternibaby's cries and the way his hands were tied that this aberrant was genuinely important to him.

Not to mention, Jiang Xiaotian had already mentioned that ten years into the apocalypse, Asura and Maternibaby were Thirteen's generals. Perhaps Thirteen could abandon all of the aberrants from this research center, as long as Asura and Maternibaby remained.

"No!" Ah Nuo roared, "The moment this aberrant is free, they'll definitely join forces and annihilate us all!"

Jiang Xiaotian ignored him completely and looked directly at Thirteen. He said, "Only if you promise to leave immediately without touching these soldiers. Then, you can take Maternibaby and leave."

One soldier after another turned to look toward the child, disbelief on their faces.

I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian. Ah Nuo's doubts weren't without reason. Once he had nothing to worry about, who knew if Thirteen would be willing to obediently leave or not.

Jiang Xiaotian said flatly, "Thirteen was well-known for keeping his promises. Once, for the sake of keeping his promise, he gave up on a battle he had been about to win. He abandoned the lives of tens of thousands of aberrants and had nothing to show for it."

Even people don't have such strength of character. I can't even hold my head high now!

"Maternibaby? Better than 005." Thirteen nodded, not even looking conflicted. He just replied straightforwardly, "Okay. Give Maternibaby to me. We will then leave without hurting these people."

Hearing this, the soldiers were stunned, their expressions incredulous.

Chen Yanqing shouted, "Ah Nuo, listen to Xiao Yu. He and this kiddo aren't ordinary folks."

Ah Nuo did not respond. His face was stiff, not at all carefree like when we had first met.

"Ah Nuo, you gotta trust me, man!" Chen Yanqing anxiously explained, "Enough of our brothers have died. Leave the others out of this. There are still many people out there who still need us. This research center is already destroyed. The monsters out there might charge in. We can't just die here!"

Ah Nuo shouted, "Of course I want to live! But if we let this monster go, we can't even think about surviving. You think a monster will keep its word? Are you fucking joking with me!"

I coldly said, "If he breaks his promise, I will put my life on the line to protect you."

"...You?" Ah Nuo laughed hysterically.

Not waiting for him to spit out any more rude remarks, I raised my ice spear and slammed the ground hard. A large expanse of ice spread across the floor. Immediately afterwards, I froze ice blades to my feet. After giving it some thought, it still wasn't impressive enough. I might as well freeze the soles to my knees and directly create a pair of ice boots. Of course, I didn't forget to attach sharp blades. That should appear even more intimidating.

"Yeah, me!"

Everyone stared at me. I raised my ice spear and pointed at Asura. Using a commanding tone, I said, "Asura, you come and support Maternibaby."

Asura looked over and bared his teeth. He didn't seem to understand the human language.

"Asura?" Thirteen murmured and nodded. "Not bad."

Don't tell me they don't have names yet? Come to think of it, Wu Yaojin called them 005, 013, and 042. I mean, while they were confined in the tubes, they probably didn't have any interest in giving themselves names. They just escaped, so why would they have names?

I actually helped name these three aberrants without meaning to. This...won't change things too much, will it?

Ever since awakening, I seemed to have caused a bunch of changes, even though currently the biggest change should be calling Dàgē back

from Glacia. But with someone as important as the Ice Emperor, the scope of his influence must be huge. *In the future, I'll have to think things through more carefully. I can't solely rely on Guan Weijun's memory to make decisions.*

Thirteen shot Asura a glance, and the other aberrant seemed to understand immediately. He really was a psychic type. He cautiously walked toward the soldiers. At this moment, Thirteen spoke again. "Go and support Maternibaby."

Asura glanced back at Thirteen, as if questioning why he had spoken out loud. However, he still acted accordingly.

But once Asura advanced a few steps, all the soldiers pointed their guns at him. Unable to get any closer, he bared his teeth at them to scare them. Then, he turned to glare at Thirteen. His expression was a real sight. He wasn't really angry. In fact, it was like he was complaining, *"See, they're not gonna let me take Maternibaby away."*

Thirteen looked at me.

I could only glare at my side's soldiers for their disappointing behavior, and stalked toward them. As I passed the group of aberrants on the way, looks of concern flashed over the soldiers' faces, reassuring me that the rescue attempt was not in vain.

Some aberrants acted like they wanted to pounce on me. I coldly glared at them—a truly "cold" glare. Freezing air mercilessly swept over, forcing a few aberrants to retreat several steps, their arrogant swagger gone without a trace. Aberrants would forever fear the strong.

Just like that, I walked over and faced Ah Nuo. I pushed down the muzzle of his gun and said, "Everyone move to the side."

The soldiers, however, turned and looked at Ah Nuo as one. My previous guess really was correct—it was too hard for me to convince the masses. Even if I displayed a mastery of ice, making them fear and respect me, that didn't necessarily mean they were willing to obey my words.

Ah Nuo looked at me and growled, "If those monsters break their promise, you're standing at the front and guarding us, even if it kills you. You think you can do that?"

"If they break their promise..." I smirked, "I'll make them die in front of you. That I could definitely do."

Ah Nuo was taken aback and cracked up. He turned and waved everyone to the side.

"You hear that? Make way for our Xiao Yu. Later, if he slaughters those monsters all by himself, we really won't have even a smidgen of pride left!"

The soldiers also began to chuckle even though their expressions were still pained. Some went back and carried the wounded soldiers, withdrawing to the side and immediately rushing to bandage the wounds. This was really necessary. Once those wounded soldiers relaxed, their faces drained of color. They really seemed to be at death's door.

Asura picked up Maternibaby, making for a unique scene. It was like sticking four toothpicks into a pork ball, and then sticking it on top of chopsticks and pouring a bunch of ketchup over it. They walked past me and even gave me a wide berth. Clearly, they didn't like the chilly air around me.

Once Asura retreated to Thirteen's side, they truly didn't hesitate to turn and leave. At this moment, Jiang Xiaotian and Chen Yanqing were still standing at the entrance. Xiaotian had deliberately refrained from coming over, while Chen Yanqing probably hadn't realized what had happened until it was too late to move. And that Wu Yaojin had actually disappeared. *Hmph, do I even have to say it? He definitely saw that the situation wasn't in his favor and immediately fled.*

I looked at Jiang Xiaotian, a bit worried that he would not allow the other side to leave. He only mentioned that Thirteen kept his promises, but he never mentioned whether *he* kept his promises. *But, Dàgē should still be someone who keeps his promises?*

If an aberrant kept its promise but a human broke his, that would be extremely ironic. I really didn't want to see this happen. It'd make me feel that humans are inferior to aberrants. *Besides, Jiang Xiaotian is absolutely not allowed to use his ability!*

Luckily, that didn't happen. Jiang Xiaotian glanced at me indifferently, seemingly aware of what I was thinking. He pulled at Chen Yanqing and the two of them backed up next to the wall together.

Ah Nuo didn't dare to believe it and murmured, "They're really keeping their word?"

"Wait."

At this moment, Thirteen suddenly turned back and spoke, scaring the rest to the point of raising their guns again. He only looked at me and asked, "You know us? There's Maternibaby and Asura. What am I called?"

"I don't know you. You're just called Thirteen." I said truthfully. *Guan Weijun wasn't that unlucky that she got to know you, but between you and Jiang Xiaotian, there's an inconceivable grudge. He really wants to chop you up, then have your aberrants captured and turned into pets.*

Anyway, Asura could just about be kept outdoors as a giant sculpture to admire, but Maternibaby simply looked too horrendous. Even if Jiang Xiaotian had no care for the dignity of the Ice Emperor and rolled about on the ground, throwing a tantrum, I definitely wouldn't agree to it! *What if it scares my Junjun?!*

"Thirteen?"

Thirteen seemed dissatisfied with his own name. If I knew that earlier, I would have named him "Tru Villin" or something. All he had to do was say his name and he'd lose half of his intimidating aura. Too bad I had missed the opportunity. *Is it too late to say something now?*

Even though he wasn't satisfied, Thirteen appeared to accept this name. He looked at me and asked, "Your name?"

Announcing my name before the future aberrant king? That sounds so dangerous—yet so satisfying!

"I am Jiang Shuyu."

I almost wanted to add a plagiarized statement, "I am the man who will become the Ice Emperor." Luckily, I still retained some semblance of humility and didn't say that out loud.

"Jiang Shuyu." Thirteen repeated my name. Then, true to his word, he turned and departed, leading the group of aberrants away.

Only when those oddly formed aberrants disappeared from view did the soldiers break the silence—there was murmuring, shouting, crying, and laughing... As if they couldn't believe they really had survived.

The soldiers wept and laughed. They looked so happy that they even hugged the smelly men next to them, looking like they wanted to kiss them.

"We really didn't die!"

Chapter 8: The Three-Forked Road, Part One

Weary and wounded, we made our way back up to the refugee camp in single file. Along the way, we even encountered Wu Yaojin. The moment we ran into him, every soldier rushed at him, thirsting for blood and vengeance. As for me, I didn't feel it necessary to stop them.

Everyone had dark expressions on their faces after we did a count just now. The number of survivors after all the deaths and injuries had been whittled down to just under a third. The greatest shock was the deaths of the Lieutenant and Guo Hong. Their lives were lost in the aberrant ambush led by Asura and not even their corpses were spared. *Given the circumstances, could you really blame the soldiers for wanting to rip apart the researchers?*

"If you kill me, you're going to run into trouble two days down the line," Wu Yaojin analyzed the situation extremely calmly despite the fact that his life was in danger. "In the past, we relied on Maternibaby to keep the aberrants from the refugee camp. But now that it's not around anymore..."

He had actually adopted the term "aberrant." With that, this new vocabulary might become commonplace even faster.

Ah Nuo's face immediately darkened and he asked gravely, "So those monsters are gonna come?"

Wu Yaojin nodded.

The soldiers' expressions became grimmer, with what seemed to be a

tinge of resignation mixed in.

I quickly asked, "So since you're saying 'killing you will bring trouble,' you're saying that you have some way to fix this, right?"

"Yup." Wu Yaojin gazed evenly at everyone but didn't tell us the solution. It was obvious that he was going to use it as a bargaining chip to protect his own life. He was keeping his lips tightly sealed.

I looked down at Jiang Xiaotian, wondering if he had any ideas. But he didn't seem to care and instead said, "Let's head up. Thirteen is probably heading east, since his main camp was established there. Then again, there's no guarantee that he went over to that city directly, or there might be some delay in between."

Eastwards...? I blanched. Dàgē's route was also eastwards, and I vaguely remembered the aberrants' main camp being in a large metropolis. *Don't tell me it's Lan City?!*

Seeing my abrupt change in expression, Jiang Xiaotian shot me a look of bewilderment, but before I even needed to explain myself, he quickly figured it out himself, and his expression also changed to one of alarm. He blurted out, "Shujun's in danger!"

Technically speaking, it didn't pose an immediate danger to them. Dàgē and the others were planning to set up camp in the old town near Lan City rather than in Lan City itself. Furthermore, the world was a big place, so what was the probability of running into—*Wait a second, with the Jiang family's rotten luck, it's hard to say! I mean, I bumped into Thirteen myself!*

We'd better go soon. I started worrying.

At this moment, Chen Yanqing suddenly took a few steps toward me, with a look of unease on his face. It was almost like a man who was deeply terrified of being abandoned by his wife... *No wait, I mean, just like, just like—I really don't know a better way to describe it!*

But I could understand his unease. In my previous life, there were many who wanted to stay with the strong. Even a small-fry like Xia Zhengu had quite a few followers. Everyone had simply run out of options, and survival in the face of aberrants, hunger, and drastic climate changes had become incredibly difficult. Walking in the shadow of someone strong gave that little bit of security in life, and people were willing to sell themselves and even their children to get that security.

From the way Jiang Xiaotian and I acted, it was like we were masters who knew everything, so who would want to give up the chance to tag along with such people? Although Chen Yanqing was already very clingy to begin with...

But Wu Yaojin dodged behind me and gripped my shoulder tightly before saying, "Promise that you won't kill me, and then I'll fix this situation for you."

The soldiers' thirst for blood became even stronger, and even I didn't have any inclination of saving him. *What kind of idiot thinks that hiding behind me will help?*

I tore his hand off me and sidestepped to let him face the fury of the soldiers.

Wu Yaojin sighed and remarked, "Killing me will be nothing but a loss to you. Although it seems like the current world favors those with physical power, you will still need to rely on truth seekers like me to figure out problems. Surely you don't want to be forever living in fear of aberrants?"

The soldiers were dead silent. I could sympathize with them. Although some people became obsessed with power and the apocalyptic world was probably more exciting than the days of the past, the vast majority of people just wanted to return to the old times, when even the weak could survive, rather than this kind of exciting life where slipping up even a little bit could mean death.

But why did the world suddenly become like this? Was the red meteor shower a coincidence or one of the causes? What on earth was the black fog that would visit every year without fail? What on earth happened in the tenth year of the apocalypse, the very year I died?

I recalled there was a big commotion and there were great booms and explosions that filled the world... What was with that? My memory of that time was a bit foggy—I only remembered everyone fleeing for their lives, and the thing that was hot on their heels seemed intent on annihilating everyone.

I had chosen a direction and led a few people I was close to along the paths with no enemies, but in the end, the bastard Xia Zhengu caught

up with us. Not only did he draw the danger to us, he even attacked us just to slow down the enemy. He shoved at me and sent me flying back a fair bit, and when I looked up, there was a swarm... of insect-like aberrants... *Ugh!*

"Shuyu, what's wrong?"

Gripping my head, I looked up to see Xiaotian gazing at me with worry.

"Just a headache, probably thanks to whatever Thirteen did to me."

I probably needed to question Jiang Xiaotian about the apocalyptic world ten years in the future once we were free from these soldiers. He probably knew about the commotion, unless his time travel happened earlier than Guan Weijun's death. *But that probably isn't the case?* At least I hadn't heard of any of the elite dying back then.

While the soldiers were still being indecisive, Ah Nuo spoke, "We won't touch you. But you better do what you need to do fast. We don't know what the situation is like up there. If the refugee camp's gone, you'll be useless, and you sure won't have any say in how you die then!"

I nodded. He was right. Without the refugee camp, all Ah Nuo and the others needed to do was just leave this place, and there wouldn't be any more worrying about whether the aberrants would invade. Then again, if he really had a way to keep the aberrants away, everyone would want to get their hands on it! I wanted it too. It would be such a waste to destroy it!

"It's the blood extracted from Maternibaby. With it, lasting several

weeks wouldn't be an issue. As for what comes after that, we'll have to wait and see how to deal with it. Hopefully the research center will send help within this time frame."

Ah Nuo impatiently butted in, "Then hurry up and get it!"

Wu Yaojin shook his head and declared, "I already took some beforehand. We can go."

"..." All the soldiers and I felt an impulse to viciously beat him to death.

When we returned to the military zone once more, the scene was a chaotic mess. The few surviving soldiers were completely unable to control the situation. I heard from them that when Thirteen had come out, the aberrants had easily captured a few people, probably as rations to eat on the way. Even the desperate gunfire from the military was not enough to stop them because the two armored bears had managed to block all of the bullets, terrifying the soldiers to the point they thought they were goners. However, the aberrants had left without a second thought, all while clutching large quantities of "food."

"You're saying that the group of aberrants just left toward the south? You're certain of this?"

I questioned the soldier in front of me in detail, afraid he had made a mistake. *I mean, wouldn't Thirteen head east to go man his main camp? What would he want to go south for?*

The soldier nodded his head vigorously and pointed in that direction as he said, "If you don't believe me, go take a look. The footprints and

mucus are still there. Nobody has even dared to touch them.”

Jiang Xiaotian actually did run over to take a look. I was planning to join him, until the other soldiers started reporting to Ah Nuo, and I decided I would rather listen in. Moreover, Chen Yanqing—No, not just him, several others besides him were also looking at me with worship. If I were to run over now, I might be bringing an entire group with me, mobilizing way too many troops. *It's best if Jiang Xiaotian goes there on his own.*

Speaking of which, is this a flag to start my own harem? I don't want to become the second Xia Zhengu, thanks. All of you should just scram!

The soldier reported, “Many people have escaped, but I believe they should still be around the premises. After all, they don't have anywhere to go to. Once the military zone settles down, they should come back.”

They might as well not come back!

First of all, it increased food consumption. Second, since there'd been a large decrease in the number of soldiers, if they had to spare a few people to go scavenge for resources in the city, the rest of them probably couldn't control the masses of civilians. At that point, it wouldn't be odd if people started fighting over food and firearms, and even started murdering others.

Don't ever underestimate civilians. When your hunger reaches the limit, your humanity would also be eaten away to nothing.

Ah Nuo obviously knew that too. His brows were knitted tightly. He

was deep in thought. However, in the next second when he looked up and saw me, his brows relaxed, as though I could fix it all.

... Is this the start of taking an army under my wing?

"Shuyu!"

I raised my head and looked over. The cute little Jiang Xiaotian dashed over, gleefully informing me, "Shuyu, let's hurry! Thirteen doesn't have any more strength to control those aberrants. That's why he left so simply. Seeing the way the footprints are scattered around, he must have let those aberrants go free. At most, he will only have Asura and Maternibaby with him, but both are heavily injured, especially Maternibaby. They'll only hold him back. Also, Maternibaby left a scent trail and tons of body fluid, so tracking them won't be an issue."

This is really a one in a thousand chance, even better than when we were in the research center! If we could do away with Thirteen here, wouldn't the plight of humans improve for the better?

"Okay." I nodded and spoke, "Let's go."

Chen Yanqing's expression immediately changed as he shouted, "Wait—"

I snapped back my head and asserted, "I have to go after him! The leader of the aberrants just now is really something. If we leave him alive, it's going to spell a catastrophe for mankind!"

Before Chen Yanqing could say anything, Ah Nuo interjected, "Since just now, I have been hearing this kid and you talk about something I don't get. But it looks like you two do know something. If that's so, we can't neglect a bigger problem for the sake of fixing smaller ones. Ah Qing, don't try to stop them anymore. Bigger problems are at hand, so we should let them go."

Chen Yanqing turned red in the face, as he stammered, "I-I just wanted to say, that professor from the research center is gone." Ah Nuo's face changed and he instantly glanced around, but there was no trace of Wu Yaojin to be found. He raged, "Damn it!"

"Didn't we already agree not to kill him? Why did he still make a run for it?" I was deeply shocked at this. All of us knew that it was not a good time to be running away right now. With this many aberrants outside, running around on your own was like asking to be food for the aberrants. That's why the thought that Wu Yaojin might run away had never even crossed my mind.

"Everyone, go look for him!" ordered Ah Nuo. Afterwards, he paced around furiously, as he roared, "That guy must have nothing on him that can stop the aberrants coming. He was just fooling us!"

"He probably does have something, or his escape would just mean he's marching to his death." Jiang Xiaotian thought for a moment and said, "Most likely he is unable to use it on the entire camp, or he would have chosen to stay. Moreover, the MORC might have an emergency shelter, since they were working on such dangerous experiments. After all, accidents do occur easily. They can overlook the research center getting destroyed, but even losing one researcher would hurt them,

especially if they were one of the few leading the experiment. They can't afford to lose them, so the MORC must have left them an escape route."

Ah Nuo seemed to have suddenly recalled something and said, "There were orders from the higher-ups before, that if anything were to happen, we must protect Professor Wu as well as follow his instructions."

I nodded and added on, "Wu Yaojin said that Professor Wu was his brother. So it wouldn't be odd at all if he also knew where the 'escape route' is. Chances are that he headed over by himself."

Chen Yanqing spoke in confusion, "Then, why didn't he tell us? We could have escorted him over. It's still miles safer than running over on his own."

Jiang Xiaotian indifferently stated, "First, he would be worried that you all still hold a grudge against him, and would attempt to kill him once we've reached a safe and secure place. The second reason is just my speculation, but that 'escape route' probably can't hold too many people. Putting aside the issue whether you all can fit in, it definitely would not be able to contain all of those civilians outside. Probably, he didn't want to wait around while you all struggled to decide matters, so he simply made a run for it."

"That freaking bastard!" Ah Nuo roared. "We should have just killed him!"

No use crying over spilled milk! Hurry and think of what to do, because

there's a few thousand people gathered here practically screaming to become a food haven for the aberrants! Sooner or later we'll be wiped clean....

Jiang Xiaotian grabbed my hand and said, "Let's quickly head out and catch up to Thirteen. After we deal with him, then you can go home. I'm a little worried that Thirteen will know how to hide his trail. At the very least, he wouldn't let Maternibaby drip blood the entire way to form a blood trail. By then, it will be difficult to locate them."

Hearing that, I took a deep breath, and did my best to suppress the urge to go home. In my heart, I chanted repeatedly, "As long as I finish this, I will be able to see Dàgē and Xiǎomèi." *Yes, there is no need to hurry. I'm just giving chase and busting in three heads. It'll take no time at all.*

What Jiang Xiaotian said was right. The longer I delayed now, the more time I would have to spend later looking for Thirteen. Probably double, or even several dozen times, the amount of time? I should have given chase immediately. Who knows, I might have already busted Thirteen's brains out by now. *What a mistake!*

Thinking of that, I instantly turned to leave.

"Xiao Yu!" Chen Yanqing shouted anxiously.

Turning back, all of the military soldiers were looking at me, as though in disbelief that I could just up and go like that.

I gave a sigh. *It's not easy to be a master...*

"Since there's no way to prevent the aberrants from attacking, it's best if you all evacuate the civilians and then run away. It's definitely not a good thing to have so many people gathered in one place."

Ah Nuo growled in disbelief, "Evacuate to where? All of them will die!"

That was true. Ah Nuo and the others at least had some military strength. However, the civilians outside had nothing to protect themselves with, and the large city beside them wasn't somewhere that they could enter. Having no resources was pretty much equivalent to death. Moreover, even if they headed toward the smaller cities, there would be few who could survive the trip.

"Are you going to just watch as several thousand die in front of you?"

Several thousand? I felt so angry to the point it was laughable. *The number of people that I have watched die in front of me in my life is a hell of a lot more than this!*

"The aberrant that I'm about to give chase to is called Thirteen. Years later, he will become a very strong aberrant. The human deaths that he's directly or indirectly involved in will be well above ten thousand, and that's just a minimum estimate!"

All who were present at the scene had their eyes wide open in shock. They were probably shocked by the sheer numbers. However, it seemed like doubt filled their minds.

Ah Nuo hesitated for a short moment, before he questioned, "How would you know about something that happens years later?"

"Didn't you mention just now that I know some stuff that you all don't?"
Impatiently, I continued, "Our Xiaotian can foresee many things."

Chapter 8: The Three Forked Road, Part 2

Yeah, I can just push it all onto Jiang Xiaotian. In any case, there was something off about him, so it would be wrong if he didn't have some awe-inspiring ability.

All the soldiers looked at the little kid, while the kid himself was glowering, with torrents of icy air pouring off his body. If we didn't pursue Thirteen right this moment, the little kid would probably chase after him himself.

"You can help us first, then we'll help you kill that aberrant later." Ah Nuo seemed pretty desperate. It was clear that if he had the choice, he definitely wouldn't beg an eighteen-year-old and a three-year-old kid for help.

I was certain I could just turn and leave, despite the soldiers' unwillingness to let us go. I highly doubted that they would pull anything on us, but I didn't want to treat them that way. They were acting for the good of the refugees; otherwise, they could just pack up their firearms and food and simply leave, instead of fretting over the problem of whether the refugees would die or not.

I said slowly and clearly, "Actually, my family's in the east. My dàgē leads a troop of mercenaries and we've got firepower and supplies. My mèimei is tormenting herself like she's gone mad, because she thinks I'm dead. So honestly? I really want to go eastwards. I *really* fucking do."

Jiang Xiaotian lifted his little head to gaze at me, clearly biting back

the words he wanted to say. But I completely ignored him. It was obvious that he'd just tell me to go home, and he'd run off to face Thirteen himself. He didn't care the slightest about what would happen to him afterwards, and even if it spelled his death, he would just think of it as the opportunity of joining his siblings from the other world.

My heart clenched. Everything fell in place. *Don't tell me the reason why Jiang Xiaotian never brought up the possibility of parallel worlds is because...*

I looked up sharply to see the soldiers in gloom, making it impossible for me to just immediately turn and go. *Dammit, I probably can't ever get over this Mother Teresa complex!*

I sucked in a deep breath and continued my explanation, "I'm just eighteen. I'm not as strong as you think me to be. And I'm definitely not an expert fighter or anything. I only know some stuff thanks to Xiaotian. And right now, I know that Thirteen bastard will kill many people in the future. If I let him go now and later hear that he has caused a massacre, I won't be able to live with myself!"

All the soldiers listened in silence. They were really well trained. If people like this were willing to come with me, I'd take as many of them as I could. But if they were the types of soldiers who could just abandon helpless refugees, I wouldn't want them to come after all. *Such a dilemma!*

"Do you understand me? I'm not running away, and I'm not so cold-blooded as to be uncaring about the lives of thousands of people. But I *absolutely* must kill Thirteen, the future aberrant elite who would

fucking trample over the corpses of *countless* humans!”

Right after I finished yelling, Ah Nuo suddenly gave a crisp salute, scaring the wits out of me. I didn't know how to react.

Ah Nuo said solemnly, “Please kill that monster. I, Ah Nuo, thank you on behalf of all who are present here.”

All the soldiers followed him and saluted when they heard that.

If I hadn't been here, these people would've probably all died? When I had found them, they were about to commit double suicide with Maternibaby, but the future Thirteen still had Maternibaby by his side... Oh yeah, in my previous life, the lieutenant probably hadn't brought anyone with him into the lab, and without them, Ah Nuo and the others probably couldn't have even gotten to the point where they could take down Maternibaby with them.

I really hope they will live on for much longer! I couldn't help but blurt, “The monsters you keep talking about, I call them ‘aberrants.’ If you want to kill them, you must destroy their heads—but you probably know that already.”

They exchanged looks and nodded.

“After killing the aberrants, dig into their chest cavity. There will be a hard shell inside. Break that open and you'll see this.”

I took the silver flask from my waist and tipped out a few evolution crystals. All the soldiers' eyes fixated on the crystals as they swallowed reflexively.

“Eat this and it will improve your body, and also increase the strength of your abilities.

"It doesn't matter what kind of special ability you have—don't waste it. Although these abilities seem fairly useless right now, they definitely won't let you down if you train them up!"

The soldiers' eyes sparkled and they quickly clamored to ask, "Can we become as strong as you?"

"For sure," I replied without hesitation. "You have good base qualities, so it's not hard to achieve my tier."

I had only reached tier two, and toward the middle of the apocalypse, a tier two was no big deal—I mean, even dogs were tier two! The dogman aberrants then were all around tiers two or three, and often appeared in packs, so people avoided them on sight.

I felt better when I saw looks of hope surface on the soldiers' faces. As long as you had hope, you would have the drive to live. I really was worried that these soldiers who had embraced death wouldn't be able to think things through and would stay here stubbornly to the very end, then end up being wiped clean by hungry aberrants.

"Disperse the refugees, and if you feel that's not doing enough for them, give them most of the stuff as well. You are all very strong, and you definitely will have no problem scavenging for supplies. Aberrants out there aren't so strong—well, at least the vast majority of them will be way weaker than the ones you encountered in the lab. You've already duked it out with lions, so don't tell me you can't beat down some dogs?"

The soldiers cracked up.

I chuckled myself too. It was good that they were able to laugh. Then, I sobered and said seriously, "When necessary, make sure to protect yourselves. I know abandoning civilians isn't what soldiers should be doing, but in these apocalyptic days, humanity is in dire need of strong people."

Especially strong people with good hearts. As for those bastards who are rotten both inside and out, please, go dig a hole and bury yourselves for the benefit of humanity.

"Have you remembered this properly?" I asked anxiously. I really hoped I was able to keep more capable and good-hearted people alive.

Everyone nodded.

"Stick out your hands."

Ah Nuo stared at me in confusion, but Chen Yanqing had already stretched out his hand. I tipped the silver flask and emptied all the crystals into the palm of his hand. There actually weren't that many left, and there might not even be enough for every soldier to get one each.

"I suggest that you split this between two or three people. Pick those whose abilities are most useful, or those who are best at fighting, because the effect of a single crystal is too small. I suggest that you don't share it so everyone gets one, or the effects might not be enough."

Ah Nuo's brow furrowed at my words.

Jiang Xiaotian pointed at Ah Nuo and Chen Yanqing and declared, "The two of you should just split it in half and eat them. A leaderless platoon is not much better than headless chickens. The others can only survive if you two are alive."

The two balked and revealed looks of hesitation. They even glanced a few times at their fellow comrades. But Jiang Xiaotian shouted, "Eat it! If you don't eat it within five seconds, we're taking them all back. Five, four..."

Chen Yanqing stiffened, quickly poured half to Ah Nuo and swallowed the remainder. By the time Ah Nuo got the crystals, Jiang Xiaotian had counted down to "one" and had dashed forward to grab his hand, but Ah Nuo immediately threw the crystals into his mouth.

I gave Jiang Xiaotian an impressed look. This was a fantastic way of dealing with the situation. After we had left, Ah Nuo could have distributed the crystals evenly across all the people. Or worse, even if he had split them between Ah Qing and himself, the others might resent that. But this was absolutely the best way of distributing the crystals.

Since Jiang Xiaotian forced them to swallow the crystals by saying, "the two of you swallow them or no one gets any," this extreme method meant that, even if the other soldiers didn't like it, they couldn't blame it on Ah Nuo and Ah Qing.

"Shuyu, let's go," Jiang Xiaotian said briskly, "the later we set out, the harder it'll be to catch them."

I nodded and followed after the little guy, but after a few steps, I gritted my teeth and dashed back, giving Chen Yanqing a big hug. I gave him a few pats on the back as I tried to recall in my previous life how men hugged each other goodbye... *Hey, you guys to the side. Don't make weird faces. This is friendship between men!*

I glared at the others angrily as they stared at the sky, at the ground, and at imaginary ants, pretending that they saw nothing. *You fucking idiots! How can still you act like morons even though it's the apocalypse?*

Ignoring that bunch, I whispered beside Chen Yanqing's ear, "I'll be staying at Old Town next to Lan City. Don't tell anyone else besides Ah Nuo. Only you two can take people there, understand?"

Chen Yanqing had frozen. He stuttered, "Okay, um, your, your kid..."

I turned around hurriedly. Oh *shit*, Jiang Xiaotian looked so angry that he could spout fire. *Please, you're the Ice Emperor, not the Flame King!*

I hurriedly scooped Jiang Xiaotian up and dashed away to keep Chen Yanqing from dying by the Ice Emperor's hands before he got killed by an aberrant. Even though that would count as a kind of accomplishment, staying alive was still more important.

I dashed out of the camp, with Jiang Xiaotian's one line of "no puppy love" still ringing in my ears, and the scenery that greeted me the

moment I stepped outside triggered memories of the past.

The refugee camp was in shambles and everyone was hiding under things, wanting to flee but too afraid to do so. An eerie silence hung over the camp. Anyone who dared to make any loud sounds would be beaten to death with no remorse. Rather than having someone draw the attention of aberrants by wailing and causing many casualties, people would rather send them to hell so they could cry all they wanted.

"Xiao Yu!"

Just as I thought that, someone actually cried out. She ran up to me, stumbling as she did and received a lot of angry glares from the others. I immediately covered her mouth and gave the people around us a warning look.

I said quietly, "Auntie Chen, don't cry. I need to leave now. If you keep wailing like this, the others will bully you."

Though tears were still rolling from Auntie Chen's eyes, she didn't look like she'd wail anymore, so I let go of her mouth and heard her sob, "Who cares about being bullied? Beibei's gone anyway, so I might as well be dead!"

Shocked, I asked, "How's that possible?"

As soon as I asked the question, my face immediately darkened with anger. *Was she also taken to be aberrant food? But no, Beibei's so little. There's so many people in the refugee camp. Why would they*

take Beibei instead? She's not even enough for a meal.

"I thought that he was human! A bunch of monsters suddenly rushed out, and my husband had gone off somewhere. I had no idea where he was. I couldn't run fast while holding Beibei. A whole bunch of people were caught and monsters were running just next to us!"

Is Auntie Chen talking about the first batch of aberrants that broke free, or was it Thirteen's crowd?

"The man just stood there looking at Beibei. I thought he wanted to help, so I handed Beibei to him, pleading for him to flee, but those monsters surrounded us. I thought we were goners, but that man actually spoke with the monsters. That was when I saw he had a tail." Auntie Chen spoke until she choked up with sobs. She said remorsefully, "I wanted to beg him to return Beibei to me, but I couldn't say a single word. W-Why couldn't I say anything then?!"

She was scared shitless. I could understand.

"He took Beibei?"

Auntie Chen nodded while crying.

Thirteen actually took Beibei with him? This is really a bit strange. Can it be that with his slim stature, his appetite is also small, so snatching a girl is enough?

I frowned and informed Auntie Chen, "I'm going to track him down right now. Auntie Chen, take care of yourself. Do *not* go around crying."

Joy came back to her face. She wiped her eyes, looked at Jiang Xiaotian, and asked with good intentions, "How about I help you look after him?"

I shook my head and said, "I'm leaving now. Auntie Chen, be careful. Go with the soldiers if you can, even if your husband doesn't. Understand?"

But Auntie Chen immediately said, "I'll wait for you to return with Beibei."

I frowned and said, "I'll meet up with the troops. Just follow them."

Only then did Auntie Chen nod.

I carried Jiang Xiaotian and left quickly. I didn't know if it was my ice spear or something else, but no one dared to stop me. I left the refugee camp just like that.

Jiang Xiaotian sprawled on my back and berated me unhappily, "Shuyu, you're as wishy washy as a woman. You have to change that. Be more decisive. Who knows how long it'll take to track him down now after wasting time like this? If we give him time to recover his ability to control the aberrants, killing him won't be easy."

Don't I know it? If not for the apocalypse, Guan Weijun would probably have been destined to be a mother before a wife, and the partner would probably still have been Xia Zhenggu. I might even have played the game of wife versus mistress, haha.

"Dàgē, why the hell did Thirteen grab Beibei?"

"Who cares? That girl is likely 'done for.'"

My face fell. Thinking of cute Beibei, a wave of pain stabbed my heart.

"If you want to save her, focus. The faster we catch up, the likelier it is we can save her."

True. I immediately got a hold of myself, following the tracks left by Thirteen. However, the tracks were very scattered. The horde of aberrants that had run off in all directions had left behind a sea of footprints, and it was difficult to determine which direction Thirteen had gone.

Fortunately, as Jiang Xiaotian had said, Maternibaby had a distinct smell. On top of that, she had left a trail of blood, and it even had the smell of milk.

After following the trail for a while, I actually made a huge discovery.

"Isn't this my motorcycle?!" I was super moved. *I didn't think I'd be able to see this baby here. I was so sad when I took the bus and had to leave this behind!*

Jiang Xiaotian gave it a glance and said, "If you can steal other people's vehicles, of course other people can also steal yours. Besides, you left it on the street, so it's not strange that someone would've grabbed it and rode it over. But it's probably out of fuel. Get some fuel from some car. Need me to teach you?"

Are you kidding me?! A commoner like me, who does everything

myself, is definitely better at this than the Ice Emperor who had countless underlings!

“Hm, this motorcycle uses 95 unleaded petrol. Don’t get it wrong.”

*Dàgē, who cares about 95, 98, 99, or 100 during the apocalypse!
When you need fuel, even sewer oil will do!*

I cried on the inside as I watched Jiang Xiaotian seriously looking for a car with 95 unleaded petrol. The Ice Emperor wouldn’t even relent on his choice of fuel. No doubt he had no lack of resources in his previous life. *It’s hell comparing with him!*

Chapter 9: Truth, Part 1

With the motorcycle, tracking them down was a lot easier. Even though Jiang Xiaotian felt I was wishy washy, Thirteen didn't seem to be a decisive guy either. His footprints revealed that his speed going forward was not that quick. This could also be because he was being dragged down by Asura and Maternibaby, who were both wounded.

I searched for hours. The beginning went pretty smoothly, but the later tracks were faint. Maternibaby had also stopped bleeding, becoming harder to track. It was going to be night soon. I had no choice but to slow down my motorcycle, in order to avoid skipping over any key clues. Luckily, because of this, I discovered a glow in the woods.

I hesitated before stopping the motorcycle. *The aberrants of today shouldn't be able to start a fire. Although they aren't afraid of fire, they wouldn't need to start a fire. Most of the time, a human would still be the one starting a fire, especially since it's getting colder and colder. Even if it's dangerous, they still have to have some fire, or else they are so cold that they can't even sleep.*

"It shouldn't be them, right?" I turned to look at Jiang Xiaotian, who was sitting behind me.

"Hard to say. Thirteen seems to possess quite a few human characteristics still. It's quite strange. So even if he is able to start a fire, it wouldn't be that shocking."

Hearing this, I decided to take a look after all. I parked the motorcycle

on the side, grabbed Jiang Xiaotian, and entered the woods.

Jiang Xiaotian glanced at the motorcycle and said, "Your regard for your motorcycle only came this far, despite how much you loved it."

Don't tell me that I should send it off reluctantly? I rolled my eyes at Jiang Xiaotian.

As I walked in the woods, I was extra careful, though I questioned if this kind of action was useful or not. Psychic-type aberrants were always hell, especially the king of aberrants having a psychic ability. This was practically evil. *Who knows if he has whatever kind of eye or not. Aren't all mangas drawn like this? Big brother's watchful eyes, glazed over eyes, and Sharingans, etc.*

I'm obviously thinking too much. I haven't spotted any abnormalities so far. From far away, in the gaps between the tree trunks, I could see Pork Ball and Bamboo Sticks—I meant to say, Maternibaby and Asura.

Turning a bit, I saw an office worker about to burst his liver. *Ah, it's Thirteen.*

I couldn't resist wiping off cold sweat. *How can these aberrants, who will be as horrifying as hell in the future, look so funny right now?*

There were some people lying on the ground. I hid in the shadows, carefully observing those people. There were only six of them, entangled by the baby arms and legs extending from Maternibaby's belly. With them on the ground like that, I couldn't tell if they were sleeping or just passed out. I couldn't help but feel there was

something wrong. *Wait, they're all men!*

Is the meat of men more delicious? I never heard of aberrants preferring to eat men, but the main point is: where's Beibei? It can't be that she has already...

At this moment, Maternibaby suddenly dragged one of them to her side. She raised the other's leg and was about to chomp down on it.

Suddenly, there was a soft cry. This clear and tender sound absolutely couldn't possibly be Maternibaby's normal voice; or else, I would regurgitate all that chicken soup that I had been eating in the apocalypse.

"Go eat over there," said Thirteen flatly.

Maternibaby looked at Thirteen. Her face paled even more. *Don't know if I'm hallucinating. She looks like an aggrieved mistress. It's just that this mistress is dragging six large men into the forest to the side.* Then, Asura stood up and followed her.

It was exactly a family of three: Mom's table manners were horrible, so she was kicked out by Dad. The son rushed to console the mom... *Hold it! My imagination is too wild. Asura probably just wants a leg all to himself!*

"Don't be afraid."

Alone, Thirteen suddenly spoke. I looked over doubtfully. Only then did I discover a tiny silhouette.

Beibei!

My eyes opened wide. She was actually sitting in Thirteen's arms. Since Thirteen was wearing a white lab coat from the lab's doctors, and it was also night with shadows from the campfire, I had completely missed her presence.

Beibei completely shrank within Thirteen's embrace. She occasionally stole glances with a panicked face in the direction Asura and Maternibaby had left in.

I pushed down the impulse of wanting to save the little girl right away. The first target should not be Thirteen, but Asura and Maternibaby. Although both aberrants were injured, aberrants were tough beings. If they went all out, they could cause great damage. *I can't risk it.*

On top of that, I could rescue six others.

Can't delay any longer, or else someone is going to miss a leg. I don't want to be Mother Teresa, but I can't just stand by and do nothing if I can save someone just by taking action earlier. I immediately sneaked up to the two aberrants. They had crouched down, and each was pulling on a leg, about to tear that person apart.

I clenched the ice spear. *After a period of rest, I've pretty much recovered my power. Although I can't say I'm at 100%, I'm at least at 90%. Let's take care of Asura first, this battle oriented aberrant!*

Just before Asura went ahead to bite at that person's femoral artery, I glided over, charging out from the shadows. I stabbed right into the side of his body. *This is usually the least protected area.*

Sure enough, despite the fact that the ice spear was not tough enough, it could still puncture it, and I did just that. If the other one had not butt in, piercing right through Asura would not have been impossible.

The body of the ice spear was entangled with many hands: teeny hands and skinny, long arms, a stretched version of small, baby hands, which looked soft and weak, but in reality they were quite powerful, plus they were numerous. Even I could not pierce through them. Immediately, I slashed out horizontally and wounded him as much as I could.

Asura let out a cry of pain. A slit spread down a third of his chest. Blood spurted freely. He glared hatefully at me but couldn't get up.

Maternibaby let out piercing cry. The babies' hands, feet, and head, which were entangled in the belly, all shot out. The arms flailed in the air. If you got caught by those, you'd be torn into pieces at the very least. As for the feet, they all extended to the ground and supported Maternibaby. She advanced forward just like caterpillar, yet she was quite fast.

So this was how Maternibaby moved about. I had doubted that those two toothpicks could support that meatball figure. No matter how I saw it, I didn't feel she could move easily. In the apocalyptic world, how could she survive ten years into the apocalypse if she couldn't even walk properly?

Apparently, the gal had plenty of legs. There was no need to worry at all.

I slashed away the tiny herd of arms pouncing at me. Those long, skinny arms were weird though, as if they simply did not have any bones. They felt more like tentacles.

It's gonna be annoying now. My ice spear is not suitable for chopping, and my dagger is too short. If I get too close, these densely packed hands are going to be hard to defend against.

I successively retreated a few steps, dodging the attacking herd of hands. I circled around, whimsically wanting to see if the opponent's hands would get tangled, and she'd finish herself off, tying herself into a dead knot! But I was obviously too foolish. *How stupid would someone have to be to get their hands tangled up? Who has seen people knot their own hands and feet together?*

Pain suddenly shot through my head. I swung my head to look over.

Thirteen had arrived.

A sudden blast of pain through my head almost scared the heck out of me. *If he uses psychic powers, how am I supposed to defend against that?*

"Shuyu, go and deal with Thirteen. Calm down. Even if he has psychic powers, as long as you're on guard, he can't easily get the better of you!"

Yeah. Don't panic. If psychic types really were this powerful, then the future top-tier elites should all have been psychic types.

I just never had a chance to face rare, psychic type aberrants in battle in my previous life. The unfamiliarity would inevitably cause panic.

But if I'm fighting Thirteen, what about Maternibaby?

Thirteen didn't give me any time to think. He shouted "Asura, leave." Asura's long arms snatched a person, and he left hastily, half running, half crawling. He even dripped an entire floor of blood and yowled several times in pain.

I felt bad about the person getting dragged away, but this was no time for my saint complex to kick in. Out of the three aberrants, I had only taken care of one. I myself was sandwiched by two of them. I didn't have the spare energy to save anyone. *The biggest problem now is, can I defeat Thirteen and Maternibaby at the same time?*

"Shuyu, go block Thirteen."

At this moment, I finally understood what Jiang Xiaotian meant. *He wants to deal with Maternibaby himself!*

"No!" *You can't use your powers. When you helped me level up, you burned yourself out like that. If you take part in this battle, what will happen now? Over my dead body!*

Jiang Xiaotian said in a stern voice, "Don't be arrogant. If you can defeat Thirteen, that's already a win, but don't gamble for more. If you lose, I still have to take over and would end up facing two aberrants!"

I froze. *Damn it! I'm still not strong enough. If I could take care of two*

aberrants myself, Dàgē wouldn't need to do anything!

Blitzkrieg strategy! Gotta finish Thirteen before Jiang Xiaotian has any time to make a move!

I raised my ice spear and formed ice boots. The ice spear wasn't useful against Maternibaby, but now that my opponent was Thirteen, there should be no problem. Since the opponent had a human form and didn't have specially reinforced skin, I only needed to pay extra heed to that thick, sturdy tail. It looked a lot stronger than those legs of his. My bones would break if I got caught by that.

Thirteen roared. His face transformed again, his brow bones lifting higher. His entire person went from a liver bursting office worker to a spitfire evil boss.

I froze the whole ground to ice, but not too thick a layer to avoid using too much energy, just enough for easier gliding. In the meantime, I hoped it would also affect Thirteen's movement, since the ice was cold and slippery. An aberrant that was not resistant to the cold really would be affected.

Thirteen bared his teeth, looking pissed. He stretched his hands up, and crackling noises from popping bones sounded. The transformation started from the joints. Sphere after sphere popped out, like small balls; from the arms to the fingers, all had exploded in length, extending his arms by a fold.

This transformation was not limited to his two arms. His two legs were transforming in the same way. Seeing as the opponent would soon to have four big claws, I plunged straight ahead, stabbing forward with

my spear.

Waiting for you to finish transforming, do you take me for a fool? Of course I'll stab you while you don't have any hands!

Too bad, it was not as if he really didn't have any hands. Although those two humongous claws hadn't finished morphing, that did not hinder his attack. He struck with a claw, almost sending my ice spear flying. *He even has more power than I do. This really pisses me off. He's a psychic-type, yet he has this much strength. This is as illogical as mages swinging their staffs to knock out warriors!*

No wonder Thirteen was a top-tier elite. He was so powerful that he could count as an otherworldly creature.

Luckily, I'm more or less also an "otherworldly creature." I wielded the ice spear with vigor: piercing, stabbing, striking, swinging, and, occasionally, feinting. I also mixed in some kicking. Ice blades were attached to the bottom of my feet. Although they weren't strong, Thirteen did not seem that durable either. At least, they could nick him with no problem.

Attack after attack left him dazed, unable to distinguish between actual attacks and feints. At times, when I was actually attacking, he would be unable to block the attack. The tip of the spear touched his body before he frantically attacked the body of the spear, and only then did he prevent it from piercing through him.

Sometimes, they were feints, yet he thought they were real attacks. I would immediately retreat after tapping him, letting his strength

propel him forward. Plus, the floor was an ice rink, almost causing him to fall flat on his face.

The injuries on Thirteen's body increased by many folds after just a few exchanges between us. He hastily retreated, wanting to pull away. This guy was completely unable to block moves that were feints or ambushes; moreover, he didn't have a strong enough exterior that he could disregard them.

I'm in luck. The Thirteen of this time really wasn't a battle oriented aberrant. At most, his strength is just a bit higher. No wonder he had kept two armored bears by his side at the lab. He needed them to block the bullets for him!

At this moment, a sudden stinging pain hit my head. He couldn't win physically, so he was attacking with his psychic powers now.

I immediately glided across, not giving him any more chances to strike. I then executed another string of attacks, only these were far sharper. *Those a moment ago were just a test. Now that I pretty much got a sense of the other's capability, I don't need to continue probing. Finishing this lightning fast is what I really need. I still have to take over the fight with Maternibaby!*

Thirteen had no other choice but to take on these strikes. Although piercing pain seized my head in waves, it was not as if I couldn't tolerate them. Not giving Thirteen any opportunities to be distracted, he seemed unable to hurt me to the point of fainting like before, or it could be that I was prepared for it. Therefore, I wasn't as affected by this as I was before.

As this moment, thanks to a feint, Thirteen all of a sudden lost his balance and fell. I hastily rushed forward to put him out of his misery. But in the end, I was too impatient. He abruptly slapped his hand on the ground and kicked upwards with his head down to knock the spear astray. Then, he seized the opportunity to kick downwards from the upper-left side of my head. If that huge clawed foot hit me, my face would probably crack into fours.

I retreated a step but was a little too late, my thigh getting caught by that clawed foot. A shock of acute pain seized me. Luckily, that kick had not hit me full on. My bones should still be fine; it was just that the sharp claw had left several deep gashes across my thigh. Blood immediately stained my pants.

After all this fighting, the opponent has a pile of minor injuries, which don't look pleasant. On the other hand, I've only gotten hit a few times, with the most serious wound on my thigh, yet it hurts a fucking ton.

When I go home, I'm going to do strength training! I don't hope to knock-out enemies with a single move, but three moves should do the job. Not all battles would let me slowly wear down the opponent.

To the side, a piercing cry suddenly sounded—a woman's shriek plus a toddler's wail. It gave me goose bumps. If the pre-apocalyptic world had been able to produce this kind of sound in horror movies, then there wouldn't have been any need of visuals. Let the audience sit in the dark and listen to this soundtrack— that would scare the heck out of them.

Thirteen's expression changed, and he suddenly ran to the side. I saw this golden opportunity and immediately chased after him, wanting to

stab him in the back.

Only then did I see where the dreadful noise was coming from. Maternibaby was about to be frozen into an ice sculpture. The herd of baby hands that reached out from the stomach was already frozen in ice. Only half of the mother's body remained unfrozen, but it wouldn't be long now.

Thirteen really wanted to aid Maternibaby, but a small silhouette waved his hand and an ice spear emerged in front of Maternibaby's feeble face. If this was thrust forward, her whole head would be gone.

"Don't kill her!" Thirteen hollered, "You want to kill me. Let her go."

Hearing this, Jiang Xiaotian creased his brows. I wasn't sure if he was thinking of whether or not to keep Thirteen's aberrants as pets, as he actually stopped making the ice sculpture—*Anyhow, can't you raise Asura instead? Does it have to be Maternibaby? Do you think that it's fine just because it's going to be Halloween?*

Jiang Xiaotian glanced at me and said, "Kill him, then. I didn't expect Thirteen's current fighting ability to be so poor. He is not going to be much of a help to you. Although you should practice how to defend against psychic attacks, you have lost your memories and often dream. Your mental state is not stable to begin with. This isn't a good time to train your capability to resist psychic attacks."

I nodded, raised my ice spear, and walked over.

Thirteen raised both claws, refusing to submit. He threatened, "Let her

go.”

Jiang Xiaotian raised his eyebrows. In each tiny hand, he released a ball of cold air. Thirteen's knees instantly froze into two round balls, and he was forced to kneel down, as he desperately tried to knock away the ice on his knees. His face was so pained that it had lost all color, though I could understand that. The ice power from the Ice Emperor was so cold that even someone with the ice ability like me was gonna freeze to death, not to mention an aberrant that dreaded the cold.

“You think you can still talk about conditions with me?” Jiang Xiaotian sneered. *I think something's not right here. If Thirteen could be this easily dealt with, then Jiang Xiaotian would have already made his move at the lab. Don't tell me there's a serious repercussion to his power, so he didn't fight earlier?*

My complexion changed at the thought. I shouted, “Jiang Xiaotian. You are not allowed to continue. I will kill Thirteen right now. You be good now. You hear me!”

Jiang Xiaotian pursed his lips but, nevertheless, nodded his head. Thirteen couldn't help but ask, “I don't understand. Why do you have to kill me?”

Why? Because the current you can actually ask me "why"! Which aberrants as of now can speak?

Even if the Thirteen before us didn't seem as ruthless and domineering as the one from rumors, once he encountered any people, even if he

didn't eat them, he'd still kill them. I didn't know if some event in the future caused him to turn out like that, but I also couldn't guarantee that I could prevent that event from happening. Even more, I didn't have the confidence to persuade Thirteen not to kill people outside of mealtime. I could only choose the simplest solution—send him to the next world!

"You're too unique. For the sake of less people dying in the future," I coldly said, "I can only trouble you to die now."

Thirteen said no more, suddenly turning his head and looking under the tree. I then noticed Beibei was actually sitting there. She had been shocked frozen, to the point that even her eyes were glazed and unmoving.

Before the aberrant had come over, he had not forgotten to leave Beibei in a safe place. As for me, this human, I had forgotten all about her. Guilt stabbed me. *This is absurd.* I couldn't help explaining, "I will bring her to her mother's side."

"Keep her by your side," Thirteen said seriously. It seemed more like a request.

I was silent. It was not that I didn't want to bring Beibei with me, but his actions baffled me. *He's like a human, too much like a human!* I couldn't help but recall Wu Yaojin's words. *Aberrants can recover their minds... No, it's impossible no matter how you think about it. Thirteen should be a special case.*

"Protect Beibei!" Thirteen pleaded once again.

"Why? Unless you know Beibei?"

Thirteen shook his head and said, perplexed, "When I was asleep, I saw two people: a tiny one, very much like Beibei, and the other is bigger. She is, she..."

Unable to figure it out, his eyes unexpectedly reddened. I only felt panic at the sight. In the past, killing aberrants simply didn't cause me any mental stress. Killing aberrants that eat people, who would feel any moral dilemmas! *But if there are also human-like existences like Thirteen among them, then before I go for the kill, is it necessary to investigate their background beforehand and determine whether they're human or not?*

No, I shouldn't listen any further. My saint complex is already untreatable. If I throw in this moral dilemma over their humanity, I'll be dead before I know it!

"Okay, I'll protect Beibei."

Thirteen unexpectedly relaxed a bit. He slowly closed his eyes, waiting for death as a manner of relief.

The sight almost made me stay my hand, but only nearly. Thinking of the soldiers who had died at the lab, and then of those future tens of thousands of human beings...

The ice spear pierced straight toward his chest.

Bang, bang, bang!

I swayed, lowering my head to stare at my chest. Blood blossomed, seeping through my clothes, bit by bit, an ugly sight. That wasn't even the end of the gunshots.

Chapter 9: Truth, Part 2

Another burst of gunshots followed closely after, making me stumble. Finally, unable to hold myself up any longer, I toppled to the ground. My chest hurt so much that I was unable to breathe, and my leg throbbed in pain.

Thirteen lay to the side, like he had gotten shot as well. Just a moment ago, we were enemies. Now, we were fellow sufferers. He looked at me, shocked.

Dying next to a king of aberrants seemed pretty worth it. *It's just that I really wanted to return to Dàgē and Junjun's side. There is little Dàgē here, but... but they really aren't the same...*

"Shuyu!" Jiang Xiaotian's voice sounded terribly, awfully pained...

"Jiang Shuyu!"

I snapped out of my reverie and raised my head. In front of me stood a girl, a very pretty one—*Of course, she can't at all compare to my family's Junjun.*

What's her name again... Ah right, Miao Xiangling.

"Do you need something?"

"Um..." Miao Xiangling blushed, then took a deep breath and continued, "You previously mentioned that you would consider going out with me after the exams. Did you mean it?"

I couldn't help but chuckle. Usually, girls would take that as a rejection, but I really had meant it. Preparing for exams while dating would have been so tiring. *Why go through so much trouble?*

"I meant it. Are you free this weekend? Wanna eat lunch and watch a movie together? Let's meet at the lobby of Movie City. How does that sound?"

I promptly invited her first. *Otherwise, always letting the girls invite me out is so not okay. Since we're giving it a try first, it's not like we need to immediately start dating.*

"Perfect!" Miao Xiangling said as if a weight off her chest had been lifted, but she still said in worry, "Then, I'll see you there!"
I nodded. "See you there."

With the words still echoing in my ears, I realized I probably couldn't keep that promise.

There had never been a problem walking this way to Movie City, where I had often brought Junjun. But, this time was different. As I was walking along, a blast of pain suddenly hit my head. The pain passed, and my consciousness soon faded with it.

Before sinking into complete darkness, scenes flashed before my eyes one after another. It was a split second, but it felt super long, as if I had experienced a lifetime.

Beginning from a babbling age, to starting junior high, then high school, and finally studying at college.

Getting a job and a boyfriend, working hard to be able to get a mortgage and buy a house—all of that completely dissolved into sea foam within the Black Fog.

The apocalypse suddenly descended. There were scary monsters everywhere, yet they were nothing in the face of the bitterness of a mother's passing and a boyfriend's betrayal. In the end, my heart was torn into pieces, like ashes in the wind...

I am...

Guan Weijun.

"Shuyu!"

I opened my eyes. Flakes of snow and ice crystals appeared in front of me. There was nothing more beautiful than this that could be imagined. For a moment, I didn't know where I was. *Has everything finally ended? Is this heaven?*

"Shuyu?" A dashing, domineering face appeared in front of my eyes. It couldn't be any more familiar. His expression transformed from grief to ecstasy, and he rushed closer. He wanted to examine me everywhere, yet he didn't dare to touch me anywhere.

"Dàgē?"

Wait a sec, his hair is longer than his shoulders, and it's totally white. This is the Ice Emperor. Right then, my heart brimmed with guilt. The

Ice Emperor's worries and concern should never be wasted on me. It was simply wrong from the start. *Ice Emperor, you got this all wrong. You, you're not my dàgē!*

The Ice Emperor caressed my cheek with concern and asked, "Shuyu, are you okay?"

I shook my head minutely.

I couldn't say it. For the sake of his younger siblings, the Ice Emperor had leapt through time and space. *How could I tell him this cruel reality? I can't ever do it! Plus, at least there's still Shujun. She's his true little sis!*

"Do you feel like vomiting?" The Ice Emperor reached out, like he wanted to support me but didn't dare to, and accompanied with that imposing look... Fine, actually, it currently wasn't all that imposing. Any man who wore ragged, skinny shorts would have his imposing demeanor damaged, no matter how imposing he was.

"No." I thought it was weird, too. I had obviously gotten shot in the chest. Even if I didn't die, it shouldn't be like this; I was just in pain. I reached out my hands to touch my chest, yet I couldn't feel it. Instead, I felt a hard layer of armor. It was just that compared with the complete outline of a chest it had before, it was now in pieces.

"It's Jiang Xiaorong. He helped me block the bullets." I smiled helplessly. Who knew. The "bulletproof vest" thing had just been an excuse, yet it had actually served as a bulletproof vest. If it weren't for this little tree, I would probably be dead. *But, is Jiang Xiaorong still*

alive?

Since I now knew my injuries were not that serious, I struggled to sit up. But the moment I did so, I was stupefied. I was actually in a snowy field. Whiteness spread as far as the eye could see. *W-What's up with this? How did I jump straight from an autumn day to a snowy one?*

Suddenly remembering something, my expression distorted. I twisted my head and glared at the Ice Emperor, yelling with a burst of anger, "What the hell did you do? I told you not to use your ability. You still acted recklessly. No wonder your hair is all white! It wasn't like this the last time I saw you..."

I immediately fell silent. I had spoken so agitatedly that the injury on my chest tore. I was in so much pain that I couldn't even say a single word. Although Jiang Xiaorong had shielded me, he wasn't sturdy enough. Therefore, I had still suffered a heavy blow. When I hurt so much that I began curling in pain, I suddenly felt a wiggle of a twig from my chest.

Jiang Xiaorong, good boy! Live well, and I guarantee you plenty of crystals to eat from now on!

At this moment, a gust of icy cold wind rushed over. Instantly, my chest felt a lot better, but it wasn't healed. The coldness had numbed the pain. *It's so not worth it!*

I glared at the disobedient Ice Emperor and grit my teeth against the pain. "Don't randomly use your ability, you..."

Yet, the Ice Emperor covered my mouth and shook his head as he said, "Don't talk. Just listen to what I have to say, Shuyu. I don't have any more time."

No more time? I was stunned. My eyes just so happened to fall on his pale white hair. Soon after came a cracking sound from the area above my lips. It was his finger...

Voice hoarse, I said, "Dàgē, you haven't seen Shujun yet. It's been ten years. Don't you miss her?"

I could only hope the incentive of his mèimei was enough to make the Ice Emperor want to live no matter what. *He is this powerful. There must be a way! Even if he lost all his ability, it doesn't matter. We would all protect him!*

The Ice Emperor laughed out loud and said, "After traveling with you, it's taken a load off of my mind knowing you are here. Home over here will rely on you to protect it. The Jiang Shutian in this world definitely can't be stronger than you. No, even if it were me at this time, I might not be stronger than you."

I snapped, "Me wanting to become stronger was not to take a load off of your mind, but for our family to continue to survive together. You don't understand at all!"

"Your family will definitely live on together."

What does that mean? It's true that there are two Dàgēs now, and the

Ice Emperor, indeed, isn't my dàgē, b-but...

"My family is no longer alive."

Hearing this, I could feel anger bubbling up, and I roared, "Am I not..."

Yet, the Ice Emperor interrupted me and inquired instead, "Shuyu, this isn't the same world, right? I haven't returned to the past at all.

Rather, I arrived in a different space and time."

Even though it was an inquiry, his tone was filled with certainty.

Listening to this, my face darkened. As I had thought, he had long figured it out and had even kept quiet about it. *Don't tell me was he searching for a chance to sacrifice himself? You bastard...*

There was another cracking sound. I shot a look toward the source of the sound, horrified to the point that my face paled.

A crack had appeared on the Ice Emperor's hand, from the tip of his pinky all the way to his arm. It was like a piece of ice cracking, and some shards were even dropping. I didn't dare to look at the chipped areas.

"Shuyu, I really don't have any more time. Just quietly listen to me."

No more time. Just how long do you have left? Is it enough to start running toward Old Town?

"It was the MORC who shot you just now. Wu Yaojin led a group of people over, and some even had powers. That fucking bastard was simply a wolf in sheep's clothing."

Wu Yaojin! Ah Nuo was right! I should have killed him from the start!

"To be able to find us within this short amount of time, he must have implanted a tracking device on you."

When was this? I scrunched my brows and remembered that he had once hid behind me and patted my shoulders. *That son of a bitch dared to use me!*

"Remember, Shuyu. You need to destroy the MORC. Behind the scenes, they are even more corrupt than I thought. Those ability users were pretty much on your level. It's simply unbelievable. If those people were trained until the later stages of the apocalypse, there would be a bunch of elites in the hands of the MORC. Some of them might even rival the top twelve elites. It's just that they are too deeply hidden away, so the world is completely unaware of their existence. We don't even know what they are up to either. It's a pity that Wu Yaojin escaped. He is very suspicious. If you ever meet him again, you have to watch out."

I don't care about the MORC right now! Killing them will have to be put off until later anyway. They don't fucking matter right now!

"Dàgē, is there really no other way?" I was flustered to the point of begging. "Think harder. You can transform into a kid again. You could definitely live on, right? We can protect you. Definitely! Think about Shujun. You haven't seen her for so long. Don't tell me you don't want to see her?"

"Shujun... I really do want to see her. Too bad, there won't be a chance anymore." The Ice Emperor revealed a nostalgic expression, yet there wasn't the least bit of hesitation in it. *His mind hasn't been changed at all. Why? If he wants to see her, then just continue to live on!*

"Dàgē, no matter what, staying alive is the most important. Don't you think so?" Toward the end, I had to clench my teeth in order to prevent my voice from cracking.

The Ice Emperor smiled and shook his head. "Shuyu, do you know what the last scene I saw was before I came here?"
I couldn't even think of it, but he didn't really want an answer from me.

"It was Lily. She was kneeling on the ground, crying and begging me not to believe that aberrant's words, not to abandon her, not to abandon the rest of humanity. They needed me more than ever, but I still chose to turn my back and leave, abandoning everything."

I opened my mouth, yet I couldn't say a word of consolation. To someone from that world, to the Lily of that world, the Ice Emperor had indeed forsaken them. In the later period, elites were akin to gods. Their existence was of grave importance, the key to changing the tide of the battlefield. Even the loss of one was a huge loss.

"If I really did return to the past, then I would have been able to change the future. Shuyu and Shujun wouldn't have died. Those of the mercenary troop would not have died. I could have even helped the human population. There would have been fewer hardships!

"Yet, in the end, this isn't my world. Not only was I unable to rescue Shuyu and Shujun, I even abandoned Lily and deserted all of humanity. I deserve to die the most. Shuyu, tell me how should I live on?"

I bluntly said, "You don't have the responsibility to save the world in the first place. Lily will understand. She knew how much you wanted to rescue your family. She wouldn't blame you!"

"Hehe, Shuyu. No wonder you always said how important it is for family to stick together." The Ice Emperor chuckled. "Your next step is to find your dàgē and Shujun while I will also reunite with my brother and sister."

My heart sank. I hastily cried out, "Dàgē, I'm also your dìdi!" The Ice Emperor scanned my face. His face was filled with a doting smile, yet he didn't reply. Seeing this, my heart was even more anguished, and I was also a bit scared. *He can't have realized it, right?*

I was Guan Weijun. I was, ever since my mother's womb. It was just that I hadn't remembered my previous life. After getting hit by the tile, I had forgotten the memories of this life, yet I started remembering the memories from my previous life. *Now that I think about it, I don't even know what I was so worried about!*

In the end, the truth was just as Dàgē and Shujun had resolutely said. Indeed, after I was hit on the head by the tile, I remembered my past life. I was their Jiang Shuyu, who had lived with them for eighteen years. That was the absolute truth!

But to the Ice Emperor in front of my eyes, I was not his dìdi;

therefore, he would constantly feel that I was not like the Shuyu in his memory because I really wasn't!

But it doesn't matter—there's still Shujun! I will persistently work hard to sway him. At least, he did not spit out that it was hopeless, so there must still be a way to save him. It was just that the Ice Emperor was unwilling to live any longer. Now that I thought about it, if we hadn't encountered this situation, he had probably planned to accompany me back to my family's side, take a look at Shujun, then walk toward his death in the same manner.

"Dàgē, please. If Shujun knew about your situation, she would definitely be devastated. You wouldn't want to make her cry, right?!"

Hearing this, the Ice Emperor sighed instead. "Make her cry? There's still a mèimei that I could make cry. That's just wonderful."

I widened my eyes. That crack, it had already reached his neck and was crawling toward his face.

"Shuyu, finally, I want to give you a gift..."

I immediately said, "Okay, I want Dàgē to keep living!"

The Ice Emperor smiled, but that smile was split in half by the crack.

In that moment, I felt that my heart had split as well.

"Dà, Dàgē..."

My eyes widened, watching the person in front of my eyes crystallize into ice from the bottom of his feet. My chest started to burn until I couldn't even breathe.

"Shuyu, help me protect the family. If you have any energy left, look after humanity. Protect this world. What I couldn't manage, I know you can definitely do it better than I could. I can see that crystal clear. You will be stronger than I ever was!"

The Ice Emperor seized my shoulders. At this moment, the crystallization had reached his top half. The icy, cold air emitted from his two hands was so frigid that I couldn't feel my arms, though this pain actually made me feel a bit better. At least, I was distracted from the torment that was about to break my heart.

Jiang Xiaotian, you bastard. If you had already decided to die as atonement, why on earth did you joke with me, mentor me, criticize my mistakes, and even be a role model for me to follow all this time? Do you know that I had already envisioned us four siblings living together in a beautiful, happy future? Don't you know that I will be sad?

"Don't cry. Men only drip blood, not tears."

Fuck that, I'm a woman!

"Dàgē, please..."

I cried so hard that I couldn't even speak. The ice had already crawled up his neck. Dàgē was about to turn into a cracked ice sculpture, and you still forbid me to cry?

The Ice Emperor solemnly spoke. "No. Shuyu, it's me who wants to beg you. Please don't let the Jiang family of this world experience any

loss. Please do what I couldn't. Take me with you. Let me see a different future."

Take... You?

I didn't even have time to form a question; the person in front of me had already completely crystallized into an ice sculpture. I didn't dare to move. My arms were firmly held by the Ice Emperor. If I moved, I could cause him to shatter.

I clearly hadn't moved, yet that large crack spread in all directions. Things happened within seconds. The ice sculpture completely broke into pieces, scattering across the ground. I reached out, yet was only able to catch a few ice crystals. At that moment, I could only stare at the ice crystals in my palms, stunned.

Suddenly, the ice crystals that covered the ground floated upwards. My sight was filled with crystals. It was a breathtaking sight, but it was created with Dàgē's life. *I don't even want to look at it!*

All of a sudden, all those floating ice crystals gathered together, condensing a bit. Then, they transformed again. They looked as if they were going to burst into pieces, and even vanish into thin air. I hastily reached out, wanting to grab those ice crystals. Even one would be alright.

My fingers closed in, yet I grabbed something sturdy.

What's this? I blinked.

The ice crystals started to condense along the area where I held onto

the shape of a baton. Then, it extended both ways. In the end, it was about the height of a person—a tall spear. The shaft of the spear to the point of the head was all a translucent, glowing, silver blue, like ice but not. The end of the shaft was sharpened to a point, while the spear head was the shape of a knife. It was a type that could not only slash but also stab. The entirety of the ice spear was beautiful yet deadly.

At this moment, a smear of silver blue extended upward from my right hand, which I was gripping the spear with, starting at the pinky. Simple and neat lines meandered up to my upper arm. If it weren't for the glow, it would have looked like a tattoo. However, the luminescence slowly dimmed. Now, the designs on my arm really became tattoos, silvery blue tattoos.

I stared blankly at the tiny clump of crystals that was still in front of my eyes. While I was still at a loss, it actually transformed into a dagger, a clear, silvery blue one. Abruptly, the whole dagger transformed into light and shot toward my left hand. Silvery blue lines once again bloomed on my skin. The only difference was that the lines on this side were very short, looping once around my wrist like a bracelet.

An ice spear and an ice dagger. They were the two weapons that I was best at wielding. *Ice Emperor, could you be any more thoughtful than this?*

I came to a sudden realization. The Ice Emperor could have definitely hung on, but he had chosen to use the last of his strength to transform into weapons for me.

Maybe, this is exactly what he originally had in mind? Accompany me home, take a look at Shujun, then use the last of his strength to transform into weapons as atonement.

But who knew the MORC would suddenly ambush me. He had probably thought I was dead—after all, I had received several shots to the chest. Therefore, he had exploded in power, resulting in this icy landscape. Finally unable to continue on, he could only move up his plans of transforming into weapons.

Unable to ever set eyes on Shujun, how much must he have regretted that?

“MORC, I will destroy you if it’s the last thing I do!”

Chapter 10: Returning Home, Part 1

Standing amidst a world of ice and snow, I suddenly felt that this world might no longer have anyone left in it. I panicked, but then I heard a crunching noise. I whipped my head around, searching for the origin of the sound, and found it with a single glance. There was someone else on the snowy field. Such a huge tail was so eye-catching, he simply couldn't hide.

Thirteen had his back to me, as if planning to escape. *Even though I'm heavily injured, there's no way he isn't more severely wounded than me, plus he's afraid of the cold!*

I gave a cold laugh. Ignoring how injured I was, I raised my ice spear and dagger, formed ice blades below my feet, and glided over stubbornly. Thirteen noticed me as well and doggedly continued to run, but how could he run faster than me?

In just a blink of an eye, I caught up to him and went to kick him. Although he dodged it, his feet slipped out from under him, and he fell to the ground. His fall was a serious one. His whole body had slammed into the ground. For some reason, he hadn't used his hands to catch himself. He looked quite miserable, with his face held just off the ground.

Sneering, I wielded the ice spear. Right when I went to thrust the spear into his back, to finish this fellow off once and for all, his bizarre posture caught my attention. Looking closely, it was as if he was hugging some sort of object.

Is he trying to trick me? I hesitated for a moment. The anxiety I felt was probably unwarranted. Thirteen's actions up until now showed how much smarter he was than other aberrants, but it wasn't to the point of scheming.

I even had the feeling that this guy looked down on scheming.
"Turn around," I demanded.

Thirteen did exactly as commanded. To be this obedient, he must really be injured pretty badly. He didn't even have any energy left in him to resist. Once he turned around, a tiny body held within his arms appeared—it was actually Beibei.

I was stunned. I stretched out my hand, wanting to take the little girl, but Beibei actually tightened her hold around Thirteen's neck. She seemed very attached to him. On the other hand, she used an expression filled with horror to look at me.

The little girl trembled. I originally thought it was because she was afraid, but Thirteen pulled his white robe over her, struggling to cover her. Then, I finally understood. Our surroundings were a field of ice and snow. If it wasn't for Thirteen holding her, Beibei would probably have frozen to death by now.

The Ice Emperor and I had almost killed Beibei, while Thirteen was actually protecting Beibei the entire time. *What kind of bizarre situation is this? Why do I feel like I'm actually the villain? This is so ridiculous that I want to laugh.*

"You want to kill me?" Thirteen cautiously peered at the ice spear, terrified of it.

What a good question. I really should kill him and snatch away the little girl. Then, I should head east right away and find Dàgē and Xiǎomèi. After that, I should continuously strengthen the Jiang territory, become a top-tier elite with the most powerful troop backing me up, and kill every single MORC member. I would be unchallenged in this apocalyptic world... How come this sounds so much like Xia Zhengu's ambition?

"Jiang Shuyu?"

I looked at Thirteen. He had actually remembered my name well.

"Thirteen, do you hate humans?"

Thirteen looked at me. At first, he seemed as if he wanted to say yes, but then Beibei suddenly raised her head and looked up at him. He then stayed silent and just tightened his hold on the little girl. That action was as if he were reassuring her. *If you ignore Thirteen's aberrations, they look just like a father and daughter.*

"Do you hate the MORC?" As I finished saying this, I saw Thirteen's puzzlement and then immediately shouted, "Do you hate those people who stuffed you in that glass cylinder?"

Thirteen's face immediately twisted into hatred. *Very good, his hatred for the MORC is deeply rooted, but he just didn't know the MORC's name. That's not a problem. I just told him, so he will remember.*

"Swear! Swear to me that if you see any of the MORC, you will kill each and every one of them! I will then let you go!"

Thirteen shook his head and said, "You can ask me something else. I already planned to kill them."

"I don't have anything else to ask you." Don't tell me I should ask him not to eat humans? Try asking someone to never eat food! Even if they swear it, could those words even be trusted?

Thirteen said in a serious manner, "I swear. If I come across any of the MORC, I will kill them all."

I closed my eyes and, with great effort, suppressed what my rational side was trying to tell me. "Go! Before I change my mind, scram!"

Thirteen did not hesitate. Holding Beibei tightly, he turned and limped away.

I stood in place. If the little girl called out, or even gave me one look, I would grab her back. However, not once did I receive any SOS signals from the little girl.

Once they were no longer in sight, only then did I squat down, hold my head, and allow reason to return.

Tens of thousands of lives, Xiao Sha of the other world... The Ice Emperor really wanted to avenge Xiao Sha... Yet I just let Thirteen go! How could I? I even let him take Beibei away. What about Auntie Chen?

But Thirteen's behavior is just off. He doesn't hate humans at all right

now. I can tell. Besides, with his strength, plus the fact that he also has Asura and Maternibaby with him, humans aren't a threat at all. He simply doesn't have any reason to hate human beings. Who would hate a plate of veggies for no reason?

Plus, with Wu Yaojin bringing the MORC over, I could broadly deduce that if it weren't for the Ice Emperor's and my involvement, Thirteen would probably have been caught by the MORC. And this time, he would have definitely become the MORC's main research experiment. Following that, he would have escaped again.

At that time, Thirteen would definitely hate humans to the very bottom of his soul. On top of that, there was no hope that he would bother to distinguish between the MORC and other humans. He would indiscriminately slaughter everyone.

But now the situation had changed, and Thirteen had not been caught. He even had with him a human, Beibei, and he treasured the little girl. Like this, he shouldn't hate humans as much. *Even better is that he still hates the MORC, and he's even vowed to kill them on sight!*

There can't be a better result than this, right? What if I'm wrong? Then, I just released an aberrant that will kill tens of thousands of human beings in the future!

And it doesn't matter if my reasoning is correct or not, Thirteen will end up killing Xiao Sha... No, that's the Thirteen of the other world. The Xiao Sha here is still alive and well. This damned parallel world is really messing my brain up!

Chest full of pain, head full of conflict between logic and madness, I didn't even know what the right thing to do was. *How come knowing the future still makes it hard to judge right and wrong?*

How come even with knowing the future and reaching tier two ahead of time, I'm still suffering endless losses? This time, it was the Ice Emperor, but who'll be next? Will it be Dàgē? Will it be Shujun?

"No—"

Two broken figures flashed across my mind. Grief inundated me. I couldn't help but hold my head as shrieks split the air without stopping.

It continued, until suddenly there was a gentle touch on my face. "Dàgē?" I hastily twisted my head to look over but instead saw a green leaf, which was particularly eye-catching against the snowy backdrop.

A small sapling was perched on my shoulder, familiar yet foreign. The shape of the small sapling with two leaves was, without a doubt, Jiang Xiaorong, but the originally brown branches had become a half-transparent, silvery white, just like ice.

Is this the Ice Emperor's way of thanking Jiang Xiaorong for rescuing me? No, in the end, he must have done this to give me support.

Jiang Xiaorong shifted his two skinny branches. He seemed smaller than he was before. *Helping me block the bullets must still have injured him severely.*

The little sapling, just like how a person would, "sat" on my shoulder, and used the two skinny branches to lightly rub my face.

Suddenly, I understood. "Let me go and find you some soil for your pot."

When I finished speaking, Jiang Xiaorong stopped rubbing. *It can't be that he really understood my words?*

I laughed, but the laughter was choked. I hastily wiped my face, then stood up to start digging. At this moment, I felt something was wrong, like I was missing something... *Where's the ice spear and the dagger?*

The Ice Emperor gave me those! I looked around anxiously, but then I saw the silvery blue ice pattern on my arms flashing brightly. Realization washed over me, like I had been given a clue.

The spear and dagger had been put away.

I was dazed for a good while. Then, I started digging and put Jiang Xiaorong in the pot. Next, I would head eastwards and not detour anywhere else. If I hadn't taken any detours in the first place, maybe... *Maybe what? Wasn't the one pulling me on the detours Jiang Xiaotian himself?*

He already had death in mind. Even if Xiaotian had followed me to Lan City, it would've been just to take a look at Shujun, right? This ice spear and dagger couldn't possibly have been devised so rapidly—he had to have planned this a long time ago!

I carried Jiang Xiaorong and started heading east. Who knew if it was the Ice Emperor who left his mark, but not a single aberrant dared to

appear. First, I collected my motorcycle, and then I drove east the whole way. I drove until the motorcycle couldn't move anymore. Then, I left it behind and started walking on foot.

When I came back to my senses, I was not that conscious of where I was. I just gazed straight ahead. The building looked like a clock tower. *I recall Dàgē's letter mentioned something about a clock tower...*

"Xiao Yu!"

Who's calling me? I stared blankly at the person rushing toward me and blurted out, "Xiao Sha? How are you still alive?"

Didn't Xiao Sha get killed by Thirteen?

He was taken aback, but ran up to me, his joy turning into puzzlement as he asked, "What? Of course I'm alive. Are you hurt?"

I shook my head but Xiao Sha grabbed me and carried me in his arms anyway. I wanted to struggle but found that I didn't have a single bit of energy left. *Oh well.* I let him carry me the entire way, and he even yelled as he ran, "Boss! Shuyu is back! He came back by himself! Everyone, come and look!"

Getting carried like this, I felt lethargic all of a sudden. A bit drowsy, I found that I couldn't even remember how many days I had walked for. *When was the last time I actually slept...*

"Shuyu?"

I was instantly sober and looked over to see a familiar face... *Ice Emperor? Jiang Xiaotian?*

The other person looked at me with utter joy at regaining what had been lost.

Ice Emperor, so you are alive and well! I struggled to stand, wanting to pounce on him, but my feet turned to jelly, and I fell, but luckily someone caught me in time, so I didn't crash to the ground.

Lifting my head, I gazed at him and saw tears in his eyes. To hell with "men only drip blood, not tears." You're about to cry—
He hugged me jubilantly. His voice was like he was half chuckling, half crying as he said, "Shuyu! You came back. I knew you would be all right. Shujun thought the same. Shujun even claimed, 'Èrgē is the strongest. Even if we all died, he'd be all right,' and she was right! How wonderful, she was right!"

I opened my mouth—I had a mountain of questions that I wanted to ask—but I ended up only calling out, "Dàgē..."

This person isn't the Ice Emperor, he's Dàgē. The Ice Emperor is already dead!

To hell with bringing him to witness a different future, as if he isn't dead and has merely taken the form of a spear. That's all BS! Find me if that ice spear ever opens its mouth and calls me Dìdi! You're dead beyond dead!

"Dàgē, you big idiot!"

Just because the Ice Emperor is the parallel world version of you, he is still you—the idiot who isn't willing to live on!

Dàgē acknowledged it all, and guiltily said, "Yeah, Dàgē is a big idiot, who even searched in the wrong direction, causing you to suffer."

That's right, you got the direction completely wrong. If you can live on, then you should live on. Using your death to absolve you of your guilt—that's what morons do!

"Èrgē!" A girl's voice was so high pitched that it could even shatter glass. There wasn't any trace of a pretty girl's demeanor—it was simply a voice on the level of a harpy.

Shujun rushed forward. First, she embraced her èrgē, using enough force that I felt that she wanted to choke her own brother to death. Then, she raised her head, and with reddened eyes, earnestly said, "Èrgē, you came back."

Hearing these words, I jolted awake. I looked around. Dàgē and Xiǎomèi were both embracing me, unwilling to let go. Uncle and Auntie were running over. Even the other mercenaries were crowding around us. They all had happy and grateful looks... *This is home. I'm home!*

"Yeah, I'm back." As I finished saying this, tears blurred my sight. I tried wiping them away, but I couldn't wipe them dry. And seeing Mèimei burst into tears, crying so fiercely, my own tears followed relentlessly. *Let it flow.*

Nestled in Dàgē and Mèimei's embrace, my heart filled with sorrow. I couldn't stop myself and cried with wracking sobs, until I was out of breath, until my sight began to spin and fade into darkness. *Even if I really fainted, I'm not afraid—I'm already home.*

Chapter 10: Returning Home, Part 2

When I regained consciousness, it was because I was starving. My stomach growled a whole symphony. I struggled to sit up. The entire room spun. I touched my chest; it didn't hurt. *My injuries should be healed. This dizziness is completely caused by hunger.*

Sitting up, my feet brushed against a sapling. Jiang Xiaorong had been placed beside the bed. He didn't react at all. *I bet he's sleeping? Is there such a thing as plants needing sleep? I really don't know. However, Xiaorong can walk, shiver, and eat aberrants. Sleeping wouldn't be abnormal at all.*

Slowly, I got out of bed, wanting to call Shujun over to make something for her almost-starved-to-death èrgē. Just when I gripped the doorknob, I heard voices outside and stopped immediately.

"How's your èrgē doing? Has, has he been..."

This was Dàgē's voice, hurried and miserable. He didn't even finish. *Have I been what?*

"I checked while I helped wipe Èrgē down." Shujun said quietly, "There was no visible trace. But if it's been too long, it can also be undetectable."

Wait a minute, when you helped wipe me down, you did what to me? Why do I have a very bad feeling about this?!

"Is that so?" Dàgē said in a calm voice. It was only a few short words,

but they carried deep grief and remorse. This manner of speaking was too much like the Ice Emperor. My chest suddenly felt tight. Not wanting to continue listening to them speaking in such a way anymore, I pulled open the door. The two of them even jumped in surprise. This kind of remorseful and unsettling appearance made me both angry and amused.

"Shujun, when you wiped me down, what did you do? And why are you the one who helped wipe me down?"

I looked at Dàgē, shooting merciless stares filled with dissatisfaction. *You let a girl wipe down a man? Siblings or not, one is eighteen and the other is fifteen. Do you think this is proper?*

Dàgē awkwardly said, "Shujun insisted on it. She said she can't relax if I do it, saying that she was afraid my actions would be too rough and hurt you."

I'm already tier two. How rough can you be to injure me when wiping me down? Do you think you're the Ice Emperor...? Ugh, I can't make that kind of comparison. My chest hurts.

I peered at Junjun, carrying a disapproving look.

Junjun, on the other hand, had red eyes and was even crying. Before the apocalypse, she didn't cry this much. After the apocalypse, people clearly became stronger, yet how did she become such a crybaby?

She cried, "Èrgē, you don't remember how terrible you looked when you came back. The clothes on your body were all tattered and ragged.

Your upper body was only left with a bit of tattered cloth.”

Sigh, damaging clothes is unavoidable on the battlefield. It’s not like those clothes were made of aberrant skin. They’re easily damaged. Plus, Thirteen and I had fought, then I got shot several times by the MORC. To have these clothes still hanging on after that, these materials must actually have been pretty good.

“And you were barefoot. You weren’t even wearing any shoes!”

In order to practice my ice ability, to be ready to fight at anytime, the Ice Emperor forbade me from wearing any shoes, so what could I do?

“And you were carrying a potted plant on your back. Your whole image looked completely wrong!”

That’s Jiang Xiaorong.

Junjun’s tears poured forth again. I followed her line of sight and found out that she was looking at my arms.

“Your arms are even branded with tattoos... Èrgē, you, were you caught by someone?”

I couldn’t help but become depressed. Looking at the ice pattern just reminded me of the Ice Emperor’s shattered disappearance. My eyelids felt hot. My chest tightened. I couldn’t even grate out one word. *I’m so scared that it would come out as sobs, rather than words.*

“Èrgē!”

Junjun cried on my chest. I put my arms around her, even more afraid to speak, afraid that I may follow her lead and cry. Men dripped blood, not tears. I already shed too many tears. Junjun's becoming a puddle of tears could be attributed to how it's said that women are made of water. *The me in this life is a guy made of mud, a crybaby!*

Dàgē raged furiously, "Who dared to do this to, to you...who dared to injure you? And even forcibly tattoo your body. I will absolutely not let them get away with this!"

Sigh, the one who injured me was the MORC, and the one who tattooed me was the Ice Emperor... Wait, this isn't even tattoo, hey!

I was about to explain clearly. *Who knew that raising my head up and looking at Dàgē's face would remind me of the Ice Emperor, and my tears are on the verge of escaping once more?* I hastily lowered my head, not daring to look at him again.

Dàgē mournfully said, "It's Dàgē who didn't protect you. Everything is all my fault..."

"That's not the case!" I interrupted him. *I can't continue like this. Dàgē and Xiǎomèi are feeling guilty already, I can't continue this crying but not crying. They will feel even more remorseful.*

I hastily blinked, blinking back all my tears, then decisively said, "Junjun, make me something to eat. Your èrgē is almost dying of starvation."

Hearing this, Junjun nodded her head at once, saying, "Okay. I'll go make your favorite dishes."

"Make something watery." I hesitated for a moment, then confessed, "I think I haven't eaten for several days. I'm a bit muddled with time."

Junjun pouted, "Okay, I'll go make you some porridge."

Seeing Junjun immediately turn and leave, I wanted to follow her down the stairs.

Dàgē said in a strained manner, "Where are you going?"

"I'm gonna get some water to drink."

Dàgē immediately said, "I'll go get it for you instead!"

I looked at him strangely and said, "My wounds are pretty much healed. Dàgē, you're the one who healed me, weren't you? Isn't it perfectly clear? I can go myself."

Dàgē "oh"-ed, scratched his nose, and said not a word, even though he still closely followed me. *I'm too lazy to care about him. If either Dàgē or Xiǎomèi went missing and didn't come back for a long time, I'm pretty sure that I would also nervously follow along closely behind.*

Stepping down the stairs, I found that this building was actually enormous—a rectangular structure spreading horizontally. On the two sides, there were numerous rooms. In the back, there was a spacious courtyard.

This wasn't even a residential building. No, I should say this was a residential house a long time ago, and it was even a house for the rich.

But now, it was a historical site. It had the feel of a vintage villa. The house looked Western, but the back courtyard had a small bridge, a murmuring brook, and a pavilion that were Chinese in style. What made me speechless was that there was a clock tower on one side. A mishmash of Western and Chinese—now that's strange. I was pretty sure that it was a foreigner who had lived here.

I took a bottle of mineral water, drank a little, and meandered. On the way, I met Uncle and Auntie. They seemed as if they had also come to see how I was doing. It was probably Junjun who told them the news that I was awake.

"Xiao Yu!" Auntie rushed over. Her eyes reddened, the same reaction as Junjun. This made my heart feel warm. *To have family is really a nice thing.*

Uncle, on the other hand, kept repeating, "It's good that you are back."

"How come you're not wearing more clothing? Just wearing a t-shirt, when the weather is this cold. What if you get sick?" She glared at Dàgē who was behind me and nagged, "Do you know how to take care of your younger brother? You are his dàgē. Can't you be more considerate?"

"I'll go get a jacket immediately." Dàgē once again revealed a remorseful look.

I chuckled and said, "No need. It's not cold. I have the ice ability. Even if I'm frozen, I wouldn't be cold. I'm not affected by the cold weather."

Of course, I was only tier-two. A very intense chilly gust could still hurt me. For example, the Ice Emperor's chilly ice ability could still easily freeze me into a popsicle, but this trivial weather condition couldn't do anything to me. Unless I was mental and stood outside when it's negative twenty or thirty degrees for many days, there was still a higher probability of me collapsing than getting frostbite.

"Is that so?"

Auntie finally relaxed, then examined me. She kept asking concerned questions along the lines of "does it hurt," "did you get injured," "are you hungry?" Uncle, who was next to her, didn't say anything, but he listened very closely.

I repeatedly replied "I'm all right" and didn't feel annoyed. I only felt warm and cozy, itching for Auntie to ask me everything again.

Not long after, Junjun rushed over to say, "Èrgē, food's ready. Come and eat."

Once I heard of food, I almost salivated. I followed her to the dining table at once.

There was a huge bowl of porridge placed on the table. It didn't seem like it was merely plain porridge. There were a ton of ingredients, but they were all chopped into pieces so small I couldn't really tell what they were.

Junjun hastily said, "Èrgē, you can just eat porridge. You shouldn't be eating anything else. In the porridge, there are a ton of tiny fish pieces.

It's not plain porridge. If you don't like it, at least have some. I'm brewing soup right now."

Plain porridge or fish porridge, as long as it can fill the stomach all are good porridge. Just don't add chicken soup and Chinese medicine and it's all good!

Already unbearably hungry, I picked up the soup spoon and began to dig in. It was a bit hot, so I chilled it with a bit of cool air. I ate spoonful by spoonful, not daring to eat too quickly to avoid a stomachache.

Watching me eat, Junjun relaxed and murmured, "Fortunately, Èrgē didn't become anorexic."

Now, I'm stumped. Why would I get anorexic out of nowhere? Are all the other ways of dying in the apocalypse not enough?

"Are the others not eating?" I wondered. *Going by the clock on the wall, it's almost noon. It should be around lunchtime.*

Junjun nodded her head. "I'm almost done. I'll go serve the dishes. Dàgē, help me call everyone to lunch."

Dàgē hesitated for a moment and even glanced at me. I was unable to make heads or tails of it, and returned a bewildered look back at him. *What do you want? You're being so odd. Dàgē, did you also get hit on the head by a tile?*

"Okay, I'll go."

Then, while I ate my porridge, I watched as the mercenaries walked in. One by one, I counted until not a single familiar face was missing. Then, I released a breath but also discovered that there wasn't a single person more. *Dàgē actually didn't take in any new people!*

You know, when I was wandering around by myself out there, I had my eye on several people that I wanted to bring back... Wait, how come I don't see any of those college students?

Forget it, I'll ask after I'm done eating. After all, those guys aren't important.

"Xiao Yu." Lily smiled. "You lost so much weight. Eat some more." I nodded my head.

After that, Dàgē said in a deep voice, "Everyone, dig in."
It's so quiet at the table. How is this like the silly mercenaries from before? It's nothing less than a group of ladies and gents. When did our group start to become particular about being silent while eating?

I bewilderedly watched this silent group. Everyone had their heads ducked and were digging into their food. *No one dares to say anything. What's going on?*

"After I was caught by the bird, did anything happen in the group?" I asked uneasily.

Dàgē calmly said, "Nothing. We were searching for you."

"Oh, I was also searching for you guys. Although I wanted to come

back earlier, I encountered many things..." I stopped saying anything, not sure how to continue so I could completely skip over mentioning anything about the Ice Emperor.

Cain, who was sitting to the side, suddenly said, "Those things don't matter at all. You can just think of it like being bitten by a dog."

Huh? Right now, which kind of dog can actually bite me, Cerberus? I was completely baffled and looked around at everyone. In my heart lurked a bad feeling. Did everyone misunderstand something?

Cain patted my back and consoled, "You are a guy anyway. We don't need to care about that chastity stuff. Don't mind this kind of thing."

Before I could react, Ceng Yunqian suddenly blew up. She jumped up and punched Cain fiercely. Once she knocked the other down, she even followed that up by rushing forward and kicking him. She roared, "Keep your trap shut! What nonsense are you saying! Can you be even more stupid? Everyone, help me beat him to death!"

All the gang rushed over to trample over Cain, and even Dàgē put on a frosty face and turned a blind eye. He seemed as if he also wanted to join in kicking the person.

Chastity stuff? And matching that with Dàgē and Junjun's conversation outside the room, I finally thoroughly understood and was also stumped. *Did everyone actually think I was raped? Holy crap.* Considering how Shujun described the condition I was in when I came back, it really did sound like the condition of a mentally imbalanced lady who had suffered from violence. My face turned black.

"Shuyu!" Dàgē anxiously said, "Don't mind him. Cain always spouts nonsense! We all know that you're ok."

He looked at Cain. How rare. He used a very dangerous glare to face his own mercenary gang, making Cain panic. Dàgē's face showed that he couldn't wait for everyone to trample Cain even harder, and it was best if they beat him close to death. Let the big boss appease his anger.

I hastened to clarify, "Really, I'm ok!"

They all worked hard to show a "yeah, you're really ok" kind of expression.

"..."

Even jumping into bleach can't clear this up. I can't really talk about the Ice Emperor in front of the troop, but there is something else that I can at least explain clearly.

I rushed back to my room, almost got lost, then came back carrying a pot. I raised the pot high and said, "This is Jiang Xiaorong."

Everyone looked at me with pity in their eyes. Junjun and Auntie stood at the side carrying dishes, sobbing until they couldn't catch their breaths. Dàgē looked as if he was going to go insane.

"..."

I released a bit of cold air, freezing Jiang Xiaorong ruthlessly. He got

so cold that he jumped out of the pot. He landed on the ground then coiled into a ball. He was just as pitiful as he appeared.

Shujun's tears stopped. They stared stupidly at the little sapling that was shivering on the ground. Dàgē narrowed his eyes at Jiang Xiaorong. His face seemed even more dangerous!

Dàgē, how can we make you drop that dangerous attitude? Feel free to say it, Dìdì will carry it all out!

"He's a banyan tree that I picked up on the way. He originally grew really big, then he withered. Only this tiny bit was left, so I brought him back with me. Xiaorong is very obedient and isn't an aberrant. He is a banyan tree that has experienced the black fog."

I picked up Jiang Xiaorong from the ground, then raised one of his branches and waved it.

"Xiaorong, here. Come and say hi to the big brothers and big sisters."

He wiggled a bit. Once he had struggled free, he shrank beneath my clothes, not wanting to come out and meet anyone.

"As for this..." I looked at the ice pattern on my hands, gave a wry smile, and said, "This isn't a tattoo. It can be said to be a type of power."

I concentrated a bit. The silvery blue ice pattern emitted a glow, and I delightfully looked at everyone's stupefied expressions.

"So that means, you for sure didn't get raped, right?" Cain blurted, then quickly covered his own mouth. But he still received everyone's simultaneous glares. He was so scared that I didn't even want to say anything anymore.

Cain better level up his fire ability, or else one day he'll definitely die from that mouth of his.

"Heck no!" I rolled my eyes, purposely using especially crude words to shout, "In this life, only I can fuck others! No one can top me! If anyone wants to try, take off your own pants first!"

People laughed at the crude, vulgar words. They finally believed that nothing had happened to me. They even squinted at Cain's lower half, scaring him to the point of quickly holding onto his pants and fleeing. Afterwards, Cain poked his head back in and looked around, only for his leader to roll his eyes at him. But Dàgē was now obviously in a cheerful mood, and had no intention of giving him a hard time anymore.

I huffed, "What you looking at? Come over and eat."

Only then did Cain come in and sit down to eat.

From then on, the dining table finally became noisy. Ceng Yunqian mocked Cain non-stop, calling him big chested and brainless. Yeah, big *chested* and brainless. His chest muscles were so big that he lost only to Lily.

How noisy. My lips curled. Finally, I can eat with no worries.

“Èrgē, so you want to be a seme, huh?” After knowing it was a misunderstanding, Junjun happily, even ecstatically, said, “Then, how about Xiao Sha? His figure is more suitable!”

Xiao Sha almost spit out the food in his mouth. Under the teasing eyes of the group, he grabbed his bowl and fled.
Cain howled in amusement.

I said in a cool voice, “No, I like muscular men better.”

The number of people grabbing their bowl and fleeing went up by one.

“Is that so?” Junjun pondered for a moment and said, “But Cain looks unfaithful to me. Èrgē, you should find one outside the group in the future.”

I twisted my head to look at Junjun. *How did my gentle and cute Junjun become like this in a mere five months of the apocalypse? As expected, since people change fast after the apocalypse, my cute and gentle little sister has become this unrestrained fujoshi. Sob!*

To the side, Dàgē had on a “You’re the one who led her astray” kind of expression, wanting to be completely left out of this.

Forget it. In any case, Junjun had even inspected me while wiping me down. Now, I understood where she had inspected. *Just thinking about it makes me want to spit a mouthful of clotted blood. How come I feel a faint sadness like my chastity is gone?*

After clearing up the misunderstanding during mealtime, Dàgē and Junjun no longer carried any grief or reddened eyes. Junjun even joyously said that she and Auntie were making cake to celebrate my safe return. *Even during the apocalypse, I can eat handmade cake. No happiness can beat this!*

"Dàgē, take me for a look around. I want to look at the surrounding environment."

I came back, had my share of pain, and could no longer keep drowning in my mourning. *Because I still have this whole family to protect. The most important thing right now is to inspect the surroundings. I can't let whatever bird flock come again and risk losing another member.*

Dàgē nodded his head, and led me around the outside of the house, explaining one detail after another. This Western house actually had stone walls. *It really is a pretty good place to reside in.*

In the end, we sat in the clock tower in the courtyard. I completely understood why Dàgē had chosen this western house. *Just the view from this tower is already worth it.*

"Old Town is pretty nice. Lan City, which is nearby, is even bigger than Zhongguan City. In the daytime, we can go there to search for supplies, then come back at night. The residence is located on top of a hill, in a high topographical location. As long as we add a monitoring station here in the clock tower, we can see pretty far in every direction. This location is even better than our house."

I nodded in agreement and said, "You must have spent a ton of effort

to conquer this kind of mansion.”

Dàgē indifferently said, “It was only some aberrants and some bullets. If there were people living here, then that would have been a problem. But since it’s so close to Lan City, there’s probably no one who would dare to live here. At least up until now, we still haven’t found anyone.”

At the foot of the mountains lay a forest of urban skyscrapers, like a ferocious monster ready to bite people at any time. If the average person could escape from there, then they would indeed try to get as far away as possible. They would definitely not want to stay in this town that was so close.

“From here on, we will stay in Old Town.” Dàgē said calmly, “We will fortify our defense. We should not just rely on the outer walls for defense. To the aberrants, there’s not much a difference between those walls and paper paste.”

I looked at Dàgē. *He and the Ice Emperor really are different. Although the former’s domineering attribute is more obvious than the latter’s, it’s not the kind that would make people feel oppressed. On the other hand, when the Ice Emperor reveals his true power, it’s like you’re on pins and needles, and you’d feel a cold sweat all over.*

One had a little brother, a little sister, an uncle, an aunt, and a mercenary troop, while the other had lost everything. The discrepancy just got bigger and bigger. Although I could make out many similarities between the two, it was kind of like a comparison between brothers rather than the exact same person.

But I still liked Dàgē the most. Even though it was the Ice Emperor who had helped me level up to tier two, taught me how to use my ability, and even used up his remaining power to turn into weapons for me, in the end he wasn't my dàgē and I wasn't his dìdi.

Now that I thought about it, the Ice Emperor knew this point clearly, too. As a result, he had not been willing to live any longer. Throughout his life, he had lost too many, far too many people. In the very end, he had lost his entire world, so how could he continue living freely?

Even if he wasn't Dàgē, the Ice Emperor was still a very important family member. It could be said he was another older brother and it wouldn't have been wrong.

He had said that he wanted to see how I would bring about a different future.

I silently looked at Lan City below. *Will this be Thirteen's base of operations in the future?*

"Dàgē, will a small town be enough to satisfy you?"

Dàgē turned his head to glance over and said not a single word in reply, yet he had a look of anticipation for his younger brother's next sentence.

I narrowed my eyes at the enormous city that devoured people—
Thirteen's aberrant base, huh? Hmph!

"The Jiang territory will conquer Lan City!"

This time, Lan City is the Jiang's base, not Thirteen's!

Dàgē curled his lips into a smile and didn't at all look like the weathered Ice Emperor.

"As you wish."

Extra: Frozen Heart

"Boss, just a bit further and we'll arrive."

Lily turned her head, revealing an ugly, centipede-like scar across her face, a sigh-worthy sight.

Jiang Shutian indifferently said, "You guys station yourselves here. I'll go in by myself."

Upon hearing his words, Lily felt a bit uneasy. For these past years, Jiang Shutian had risked everything just to return to the Jiang family. It was not long ago that they had lost Xiao Sha. The mercenary troop didn't have that many people left—those that were left weren't even senior-ranked members.

It could be said that the whole mercenary troop had almost been annihilated just for the sake of coming back to this place. If they had chosen to remain stationed where they had started, they definitely wouldn't have been like this today.

Under these circumstances, how could Jiang Shutian bear to greet failure? But in reality, they all knew that failure was just around the corner. It was just that he himself, from the very beginning, had been unwilling to face it.

"Let me come with you."

"I have to go by myself." Jiang Shutian coldly said, "No objections allowed!"

Lily shut her mouth, knowing full well that any further attempts would not work. The Jiang family had become a sore point for the boss. No one else was allowed to touch it.

She was only worried that once her boss saw the truth, this sore point would get out of hand all at once. What kind of consequences would that result in?

The troop was nearly out of people. If they lost the boss, Lily really didn't know where she could go. Of course, with her ability, going anywhere would not be a problem, but no place would hold any meaning for her. She had nothing keeping her anchored, only the JDT. If there was nothing left of the troop, she felt that she would not have the courage to continue on.

In this kind of world, your destination didn't matter. What mattered the most was whether or not there was someone to accompany you.

"Boss." Lily, in distress, begged, "I only want you to remember. We've accompanied you all the way here, even using our lives to escort you home! Please remember that I'm still here."

Jiang Shutian looked at her. He moved his lips, but in the end, he spoke not a single promise.

Lily turned her back on him. Tears rolled down her face, yet her tone was cold as she said, "Xiao Sha hasn't been avenged yet. As the leader of this troop, you have the responsibility to avenge him. Even if you die by Thirteen's hand, this vengeance must be dealt!"

A response finally came from behind her. "Yeah."

Lily felt relieved. She wiped her face. At least, she was certain that the boss would come back. As for whether he would purposely seek to die with Thirteen, that was a problem for the future.

When she turned back around, her boss was already far off in the distance. Under the setting sun, a path of ice crystals reflected the crimson color of the sunset. It was a gorgeous sight, yet Lily only felt it to be ominous, the color of blood. No matter how beautiful, it could only be a sign of bad luck.

Jiang Shutian took his time advancing forward. With his current ability, his top speed was something that outsiders could not even imagine. It was rare that he revealed his true strength since there wasn't ever a need to do so.

There was now some sort of "Top Twelve Elites in the World" kind of title due to communications being restored. Otherwise, how could anyone know what was going on with the other continents? Don't even mention having a ranking of those elites.

On the side of the humans, they had Ice Emperor Jiang Shutian, Thunder God Jin Zhan, and Flame King Debert.

Among them, Thunder God Jin Zhan lived nearby. Jiang Shutian knew Jin Zhan. Although he didn't know him well, and he hadn't seen him for so long, he had no intention to visit him. Most importantly, home was not far off. All other affairs and social interactions would have to

be postponed.

Humans had sort of hoped that the Big Three would unite. After all, aberrants were by far the stronger ones, and it so happened that human beings were their number one menu option.

Jiang Shutian, however, knew this unification would never happen. Jin Zhan was, after all, the mafia's young master. He wouldn't obediently listen to others. Debert was, on the other hand, a military and a government official figure. The government over there relied on Debert and his military subordinates, struggling to get by. The fact that Debert was still willing to obediently listen to the orders from his higher-ups was already difficult to believe. On top of that, would the government and the military listen to someone else's orders? Equally unlikely.

The power of Jiang Shutian's troop was the weakest of the three groups. Jiang Shutian hadn't even established a base, but he wasn't afraid of them. Jin Zhan and Debert hadn't even broken through tier seven, while he had reached tier eight a long time ago.

Killing his entire way here really was the best way to train. Jiang Shutian couldn't help but laugh bitterly. He had no choice but to admit that suffering was indeed greatly beneficial toward enhancing strength.

No matter how slowly he walked, he'd have to face it eventually. From a distance, Jiang Shutian recognized the residential area where his own house was located. No matter how thoroughly it had been destroyed, he could still recognize it instantly.

Descending from his ice path, he walked over one foot at a time. Even though he wanted to walk slower, he couldn't help but increase his pace. Stepping into familiar yet unfamiliar streets, one after another, Jiang Shutian discovered that his memories had somewhat faded. He finally found a familiar street sign. He remembered—walk forward two steps, face the left, and he would see his home...

A humongous black aberrant was standing not far away. No matter how Jiang Shutian wanted to lie to himself, he couldn't. That really was his house.

Jiang Shutian slowly made his way over. He could not collapse, not yet. It had been so many years that the odds that Shuyu and Shujun would be waiting where they had originally been was not high. They could have moved elsewhere a long time ago. He had just come to search for clues.

But he had been subconsciously ignoring a fact all this time. Ice Emperor Jiang Shutian. This name had resounded throughout the world long ago. If they were still alive, why wouldn't they come to look for their dàgē?

Jiang Shutian stepped forward to get a good look at this aberrant. As a tier eight, he could approach anything without being discovered.

This aberrant was unexpectedly very human-like. The top half was a human body, except the strands of his long black hair were snake-like—like Medusa's. There were red-veined patterns on his body. In particular, there were two red patterns under the eyes as if stained from tears. The lower half, however, was a huge lump of mud.

The entire aberrant was entrenched on top of the half-dilapidated house. It was staring at the setting sun as if it was fond of that crimson thing.

Jiang Shutian stood there, unmoving for a long time. He did not want to move. He was unwilling to move...

If only it didn't look so similar. If only there was a larger difference, to the point of being unrecognizable. At least, he would be able to keep a sliver of hope. He would still be able to search for the impossible.

But the Heavens wouldn't even give him that bit of pity!

"Shuyu?"

The aberrant jumped and whipped his body around. Once the aberrant saw that it was a puny thing behind him, he relaxed. He thought this thing was too small and weak, and that was why he hadn't noticed it.

"Shuyu. I'm... I'm your dàgē. Do you still remember?"

Jiang Shutian had once heard that some aberrants retained their original human consciousness. He had scoffed at it before, but now—anything would do. He was willing to believe anything at this point.

"Aye-ya-ya. There is still someone who doesn't get it, huh?" The aberrant chuckled. "I'm not your guy. You should clearly know this. Didn't you humans get this figured out already? We latch onto human carcasses. We absorb all the nutrients and grow into aberrants after

that. Humans are just soil and fertilizers in which we could plant our roots in. We can even eat you guys afterwards in order to evolve. Thank you for your great sacrifice.”

The illusion crumbled cruelly. Jiang Shutian felt he was on the verge of going mad. He knew it all too well. Shuyu had long since kicked the bucket, had died in the midst of the black fog—no, maybe even earlier, during the fallen-tile incident. He might have already died then.

This aberrant had seized Shuyu's corpse and had even kept his face. Yet, he was definitely not his dìdi, Jiang Shuyu!

His family was long gone. All of his mercenaries had known this very clearly. Jiang Shutian had been the only one unwilling to believe it, sacrificing everything to come back home.

How he had hoped that Shuyu had not died. Even in a deep coma, he might have survived the moment of judgment. He might have even woken up after that.

Shuyu was that strong and optimistic of a kid. He only needed to wake up, and he would be able to protect Shujun, Uncle, and Auntie. Shuyu would be able to protect them all, until he came back.

But all that was a mere pipe dream.

There was no such thing as a “miracle.”

Dìdi, Mèimei, Uncle, and Auntie had been long dead since the beginning of the apocalypse. He had spent all these years to come

back and search for his family and had even lost members of the mercenary troop again and again: Cain, Zheng Xing, Yunqian, Xiao Sha... Only Lily was left.

And what was all this for?

Jiang Shutian looked up at the sky and sighed deeply. In one blink, icy cold aura burst out.

"You, you..." The aberrant shrieked, "Don't tell me you're the Ice Emperor Jiang Shutian? Impossible! Even if you are the Ice Emperor, you can't be this strong. I've almost reached tier seven. I'm so close."

Jiang Shutian coldly declared, "You will only be 'close' forever."

The Ice Emperor struck. This aberrant really wasn't weak. It was just as he had said—he was close to tier seven. Who would have known that there was an aberrant this powerful near Thunder God Jin Zhan's neighborhood that had gone undetected? Over time, it might even become another Thirteen.

As expected of an aberrant that had formed from Shuyu. It really was stronger than most.

Jiang Shutian felt that his way of thinking was a little twisted. He didn't want to kill this aberrant. He didn't want to stop nursing this sore point he had for so many years this easily. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to go on—not even Xiao Sha's vengeance could make him go on.

How long they had fought, Jiang Shutian simply couldn't tell. Even if

he could continue battling on, the aberrant wasn't able to do so. Countless times, the aberrant had wanted to escape, yet how could he? The muddy lump that was his lower-half had already been frozen into ice by the Ice Emperor, firmly binding him to the spot.

Jiang Shutian walked in front of him. Their figures were as different as night and day. The aberrant was so big it was like a house. Jiang Shutian could only stand on the aberrant's leg and raise his head to look at that familiar yet unfamiliar face.

"Don't kill me!" the aberrant implored. An idea suddenly flashed through his mind, and he quickly shouted, "Gēge. You're my gēge, right? I remember now. Gēge, don't kill me!"

"Call me Dàgē. You and Shujun both like to call me Dàgē."

"Dàgē!" He immediately exclaimed, readily accepting this great advice.

Jiang Shutian smiled faintly as he climbed his stairs of ice to the aberrant's face. He then, caressed that extremely handsome face. His dìdi had always been so beautiful that even Shujun had said that after looking at Èrgē for so long, she really didn't know what kind of handsome guy she'd need as a husband to be pleasing enough to her eye.

Even transformed into an aberrant, he isn't bad looking, sheesh.

In response to this, the aberrant inwardly relaxed. It seemed he could still continue to live on, and maybe he had even gained an ally?

Considering this, he got excited. Although he had gotten beaten to shit

and needed a lengthy time for full recovery, if he could get this ally in exchange, then that was a victory!

"Shuyu, just tell Dàgē one thing."

"Sure!" The aberrant did his best to pretend to be harmless and innocent, yet he wasn't aware just how sly his outward appearance was, making him appear strange and ridiculous.

Jiang Shutian smiled faintly and asked in a light tone, "Did you eat Shujun?"

The aberrant froze. He had eaten humans for so many years, how would he know who he had eaten, much less the names of his food?

Jiang Shutian suddenly slapped himself hard and mumbled, "What am I saying! Shuyu would never hurt Shujun. Although he loves to tease his mèimei, he would never lift a finger against Shujun! Aberrant, you aren't Shuyu at all!"

The aberrant sensed that things had gone south and decided to sacrifice his mud-like lower-half and escape. However, he was already an arrow at the end of its flight—how could he possibly escape the hands of the Ice Emperor?

Blast that beautiful face apart—this aberrant does not have the right to wear Shuyu's face. Blast that chest apart—an aberrant should not have Shuyu's heart. Blast everything here apart— since home no longer exists, this place should turn into a cemetery to accompany the dead.

His heart was as cold as ice.

Jiang Shutian discovered that his power had become stronger. He had already been a tier eight elite who was able to turn his nose up at the world. *Am I tier nine now? Probably no one can be sure, since no one has been able to reach this level.*

But what's the point?

His whole world had been destroyed a long time ago. He himself had only just discovered it.

Just like an ice sculpture frozen in place, he stood there for a long time until Lily came over to find him. He then kneeled and cried for a whole night. He followed her back and formed a base, expanding the JDT. Just the title of "Ice Emperor" was enough for crowds of people to join in one heap after another.

Until that day, when an insect-like guy mentioned the possibility of returning to the past, Jiang Shutian suddenly felt that he had come back to life...

Epilogue: Afterword

The afterword has spoilers, so please don't read the afterword first!

I really want to discuss the plot, so please, everyone, don't read the afterword before reading the book. The story won't be as interesting if you know the spoilers, so please make sure to keep the book interesting. After all, the afterword isn't going to run away if you read it later!



All right, let's start.

The Ice Emperor has come solidly in first place as "the most pitiful person in Dominion's End," winning over even Guan Weijun. This is a real feat as the characters who are usually the most abused in my books are all the ones who are referred to as the main characters, so this is a rare instance where a side character takes the crown.

In this volume, I was most worried that I didn't properly portray the Ice Emperor's desire to die.

At the start, when the apocalypse descended onto the world, the Ice Emperor had the advantage of having firepower and his mercenary troop at hand, so life wasn't very difficult for him. As such, he underestimated the power of the apocalypse. By the time he made up his mind to go home, by the time he'd discovered that things didn't seem right, it was too late. "Going home" squeezed the Ice Emperor's heart like a vice. Having come to this point, whether it was the question of whether his younger siblings were still alive, or the

sacrifice of his comrades for this purpose, all these hounded him to the point where he had no choice but to go home.

In the end, he got home and discovered that his family was long wiped out. His heart shattered into pieces.

Then, after thinking that he had found the right solution, which was to go back to the past, start afresh and change everything, he regained the impetus in life for his heart to start beating again.

And to this end, he even abandoned his last surviving comrade, Lily, and even turned his back on his responsibility as a leader.

When the Ice Emperor traveled through time and space, Thirteen was still alive, and he hadn't gotten his revenge for Xiao Sha.

For even someone as strong as Jiang Shutian, after mentally getting beaten over and over throughout the apocalypse, his spirit had become completely crushed.

He couldn't protect his younger siblings. He had dragged each member of his mercenary troop to their deaths. He couldn't avenge his troop's deaths. He abandoned his last comrade. And he even abandoned his whole world.

Remember, the extra chapter mentioned that the Ice Emperor was one tier stronger than the Thunder God and the Flame King (well, technically not one whole tier as the other two were close to breaking into his tier by just a little bit), and he gained another tier after killing the Shuyu aberrant. So the Ice Emperor could be said to be the

strongest in the world, and the extra story was set less than ten years into the apocalypse!

With the Ice Emperor's might, it was possible that he could lead humanity out of its dire straits, but it wasn't bad enough that he didn't contribute anything to humanity's future, he even dumped humanity to one side without a thought.

The culmination of all this meant that he could no longer live with who he had become. The sense of guilt and blame had reached terrifying levels, to the point where even the Ice Emperor couldn't live with it. If not for the fact that he wanted to send Shuyu home and see Shujun, he probably would have completely broken down after looking at the world map and seeing that something was wrong.

So yeah, that just about sums it up.

But this is not to say that the Ice Emperor was weaker than Shuyu (Weijun). Rather, he was the classic type who was so strong that he became brittle. Rather, it's guys who're like weeds who can sway with the winds and storms and adapt to all sorts of environments who thrive best and take over the entire ecosystem.

So let us mourn the Ice Emperor in silence for three seconds, then, look forward to watching the growth of our weed-like protagonist!

By Yu Wo



Are ~~Are~~ [Character Introductions] ~~these really okay?~~ **like these really ok?**

Ceng Yunqian

28 years old, the kind of sniper where the person and the rifle are equally lethal. Ever since she was little, she discovered that she liked sweet, tender girls, so from the age of three, she had already proposed to take her childhood friend's hand in marriage. She couldn't come out of the closet any younger. Her dream is to marry a gentle wife and have a cute daughter who would ideally be as cute as Shujun. "Boss, my room door's always unlocked. Come have a kid with me. You can have the boys, and I'll keep all the girls."

Lily

30 years old, the older sister type whose bark is louder than her bite. Because she's gentle at heart, she intentionally dresses up like she's the fiery and fiercely independent kind of woman. She will never admit to falling for telephone scams, and will never admit that when she was little, she had met Ceng Yunqian and was proposed to with a foxtail... Ahem! Nope! It really never happened!

Ice Emperor, Jiang Shutian

37 years old, the upgraded version of the mighty Dágē. He's the Jiang Shutian of another world, the famous human elite with ice powers. He is known as the Ice Emperor and is the person that Jiang Shuyu deeply worshiped. But right now, his mental image of this mighty personage is being completely ruined.



Are
[Character
Introductions]

like these really okay?

◆ Ceng Yunqian ◆

28 years old, the kind of sniper where the person and the rifle are equally lethal. Ever since she was little, she discovered that she liked sweet, tender girls, so from the age of three, she had already proposed to take her childhood friend's hand in marriage. She couldn't come out of the closet any younger. Her dream is to marry a gentle wife and have a cute daughter who would ideally be as cute as Shujun. "Boss, my room door's always unlocked. Come have a kid with me. You can have the boys, and I'll keep all the girls."



◆ Lily ◆

30 years old, the older sister type whose bark is louder than her bite. Because she's gentle at heart, she intentionally dresses up like she's the fiery and fiercely independent kind of woman. She will never admit to falling for telephone scams, and will never admit that when she was little, she had met Ceng Yunqian and was proposed to with a foxtail... Ahem! Nope! It really never happened!



❖
**Ice
Emperor
Jiang
Shutian**
❖

37 years old, the upgraded version of the mighty Dage. He's the Jiang Shutian of another world, the famous human elite with ice powers. He is known as the Ice Emperor and is the person that Jiang Shuyu deeply worshiped. But right now, his mental image of this mighty personage is being completely ruined.



終疆

03

冰封獅皇

御我〇著

午零〇圖

◎皇冠文化集團

www.crown.com.tw

