



Dominion's End Volume 4: **The Battle for Lan City**
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 4 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 monetarily 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, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1)
elisa (Chapter 2.1, 8)
EvlNabiki (Chapter 5.2, 6, 7.1, 9.1, 9.2, 10, Extra, Epilogue)
Minthe (Chapter 5.1, 7.2, 8)
Lala Su (Chapte 1.2)
Trespasserby (Chapter 1.2, 7.2, 9.2, 10)

Art

Wu Ling (午零)

Chinese/English Editors

Elkin (Chapter 4.1, 4.2)
Miaka Mei (Chapter 4.1)
lucathia (Prologue, Chapter 1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 6, 7.1, 7.2, 8, 9.1, 9.2, 10, Extra, Epilogue)
Taffygirl13 (Chapter 3.1, 4.1, 4.2)

Translators

Chizuru (Chapter4.1, 4.2)
Miaka Mei (Chapter 3.1, 3.2, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 6, 8, 10, Extra, Epilogue)
Michimochi (Prologue, Chapter 2.1, 2.2, 7.1, 7.2, 9.1, 9.2)
Kiki (Chapter 1)

Dominion's End Vol 4: The Battle for Lan City

Original novel in Chinese by: 御我 (Yu Wo)

- [Prologue: Disintegrate and Reconstruct](#)
- [Chapter 1: The King, Jiang Shutian, is Born, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 1: The King, Jiang Shutian, is Born, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 2: A Call Without A Response, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 2: A Call Without A Response, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 3: Foray into Lan City, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 3: Foray into Lan City, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 4: Shangguan Family, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 4: Shangguan Family, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 5: An Unexpected Encounter, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 5: An Unexpected Encounter, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 6: Brute Strength is Life](#)
- [Chapter 7: Tier Two Duel, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 7: Tier Two Duel, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 8: Misplaced](#)
- [Chapter 9: In This Life, We Are Both Doing Swell, Part One](#)
- [Chapter 9: In This Life, We Are Both Doing Swell, Part Two](#)
- [Chapter 10: The Ice Spears](#)
- [Extra: Ominous Number](#)
- [Epilogue: Afterword](#)

Prologue: Disintegrate and Reconstruct

"Chen Qianru died."

I was stumped for a moment. *It's not that big of a deal, but then again, how did she even get endangered?* Chen Qianru couldn't fight, and she hadn't even discovered her power. Logically speaking, she should have been in the safest place, where she was unlikely to meet any kind of danger.

Though now that I thought about it, wasn't I the one who had stayed home back then, and yet still got kidnapped by the bird? In the apocalypse anything could happen. An abnormal mouse might have bitten her life away.

Junjun explained what happened to those college students in further detail.

"I told Su Ying to hide in her room and avoid coming out, so as to prevent Dàgē killing her as well. The same with Ding Jun. Everyone told him to try staying out of Dàgē's sight."

What? Don't tell me that this means that Chen Qianru died under Dàgē's hands?

What the hell happened here? I really don't understand. Although Dàgē is not the type that would be lenient toward a pretty girl, he is definitely not the type that would kill for no reason, let alone a woman who didn't even have the strength to truss up a chicken. He still tolerated woman just a bit more than men.

"Why would Dàgē want to obliterate those college students?" I couldn't understand even after pondering over this for the nth time. Asking would be much faster.

Yet Junjun asked in response, "Èrgē, do you still remember the day that big red bird appeared, that there was a gunshot that attracted them to us?"

I nodded. At the time, I had Yunqian arm everyone while I had hidden myself in the attic to monitor the situation. Originally, the flock of carrion-bloom birds would have flown straight over us, but a gunshot from downstairs had attracted them down, which led to all that trouble afterwards.

"Back then, Yunqian-jiě handed out guns to everyone but was unwilling to give one to Chen Qianru. When none of us were looking, she stole one and even carelessly fired a shot."

So that's how the gunshot that made those carrion-bloom birds stop in their tracks happened!

I was speechless. *Chen Qianru, could you have had even more of a death wish? If you don't know how to use a gun, don't take one. Did you truly think reality was like that of a movie where you could just take a gun and immediately become a sharpshooter?*

"Èrgē, when you got taken by that bird, Dàgē almost went mad. He had already driven so far, yet he wasn't able to catch up. The bird was

already out of sight. He had no choice but to turn the car back. After hearing from Yunqian-jiě about this, he killed Chen Qianru on the spot.”

At this point, Junjun couldn't help but take a deep breath. She had probably found that scene quite horrifying.

“You didn't try to persuade Dàgē to be more lenient?” I rubbed my nose. Even though I was the victim, since I was able to return alive, the reproach and anger I felt was not that deep.

“No way!” Junjun rebutted, “I was mad as well! Èrgē, you were injured all over and even got kidnapped by the bird. She caused all of this! She didn't even know how to use a gun but still stole one. You suffered the consequences. Don't tell me I even had to persuade Dàgē not to kill her? I just wanted to zap her to death! Èrgē, think about it. If her actions caused me to be the one taken away, would you have tried to persuade Dàgē to spare her?”

If the one who had been taken by the bird was Shujun...God, world destruction was possible! I immediately admitted, “Yeah, you're right. I was wrong. Sorry.”

Junjun nodded to accept my apology and continued on.

“All of us were distressed. Dàgē took Xiao Sha, and the two of them went in the direction that the birds flew to continue the chase. Dàgē had the rest of us pack our supplies to follow them. Since everything happened so suddenly, everyone was so busy and distressed. No one's happy at seeing Su Ying and Ding Jun around, so I told them to try

and avoid showing their faces in front of everyone, and that I would bring them food.”

Speaking of this, her composure broke down. She murmured, “Actually, I didn’t want to talk to them either. I was thinking that if we hadn’t brought them back, then Èrgē wouldn’t have gotten endangered. On the other hand, I thought they were pitiful as well. I mean, they weren’t the ones who caused all this.”

Junjun was troubled.

I patted her head and said, “You did the right thing. Whoever caused it, they should pay. There’s no need to take it out on the innocent.”

If the one who had been taken away was Junjun, I most likely would have taken it out on the whole world. However, when educating this kind and lovable little sister, of course I couldn’t say that. Although I hoped to nurture Junjun into a woman strong enough to be able to protect herself, I didn’t plan to raise her into a witch who tosses all morals away!

Junjun suddenly remembered something and said, “Oh yeah, Èrgē. When you have time, you should go take a look at Dàgē’s power. The way he killed Chen Qianru was very weird...”

She stopped and gestured with her hands in the air for a long time. In the end, she dejectedly said, “It’s hard to describe. I don’t know how to say it. She just disappeared completely.”

She disappeared completely? I was baffled for a bit, but more than that, my curiosity rose. I immediately said, "I'll go look for him right now."

On the way to find him, I met Ding Jun. He sat on a stone stool under a tree in the courtyard, with a screw nut hovering ten centimeters above each hand. This did not match what Shujun had said about him and Su Ying staying out of sight, yet this was not that strange, either. He was getting blamed when it wasn't his fault. Young people always liked to rebel, such as deliberately sitting in a bustling place like the courtyard to show off one's ability. This was not that unusual.

Ding Jun looked at me, his expression begrudging. Although he worked hard to keep up a poker face, he couldn't avoid it slipping. His effort in concealing his expression was not enough to win him any hands.

"Come to the dining table for dinner today." I told him, "You've done well. There won't be any more problems from here on out."

Ding Jun was taciturn for a while before nodding his head.

This guy really was a man of few words, though Xiao Sha was like this in the beginning as well. As we became more familiar, I didn't feel Xiao Sha was indifferent. On the contrary, I felt he shied away easily. Cain would always tease him into anger. Xiao Sha probably used indifference to disguise his true self.

Don't know if it's the same with Ding Jun. Hopefully when he warms up to us, he won't be this standoffish or, if anything, I'll just toss him to Cain to look after.

After pondering for a bit, I didn't go find Dàgē yet. Rather, I walked up to the hallway on the right-hand side of the second floor. The rooms there had been assigned to the women for residency. Men were quartered on the other side. The only exception was that the whole Jiang family resided on right side of the third floor. Our rooms were three adjacent rooms. Junjun was placed in between Dàgē and me, for the sake of protection.

Dàgē said he had the right to half the floor as the mercenaries' boss. As for the rest of the floor, he planned to modify it into a conference room, a place for core members to hold meetings.

Mr. Privilege had not caused dissatisfaction among the members, only smothered giggles. It was a rare chance for everyone to be able to ridicule this normally imposing captain, so they could not let this opportunity escape. Their amusement almost led to tears in their eyes. It was a pity that Dàgē's composure and thick skin were both boss level. He was able to resolutely maintain the dignity of the mercenary troop's boss, as if he wasn't an older brother who was adamant on keeping his little brother and sister by his side.

Coming up to the second floor, I tentatively knocked on a few doors before finding the right one.

Su Ying timidly opened the door. Once she saw me, she was so alarmed that she nearly slammed the door reflexively.

"Come to the dining table to eat dinner tonight." I maintained a smile, not wanting to scare her too badly. In the past, she was very scared of

me. Now that she got frightened this much by Dàgē, she probably wanted to flee. It was just that going outside by herself was courting death, so she didn't dare to leave.

Once Su Ying heard this, she finally lifted her head to look at me. As she saw that I was serious, she cracked and broke into sobs, a pitiful sight.

"Fortunately, you came back alive, or else..." She didn't dare to finish that sentence.

I patted her on her shoulder and calmly said, "Don't worry anymore. The thing with Chen Qianru has nothing to do with you guys. No one will blame you two anymore. It's all right."

To this, she cried even more miserably. Her face was drenched in tears to the point that she could give Maternibaby's sad-looking face a run for its money. It seemed like the plight this time had really scared her to the bottom of her soul.

I didn't bother talking to her any longer. I patted her back and let her finish crying. Once she finished crying, she should be okay.

She cried for a good amount of time before stopping. Then, feeling embarrassed, she wiped her face and said, "Then... then I'll go to the kitchen right now and help Shujun with the cooking."

I nodded my head, quite satisfied. This girl was able to get a hold of the situation very nicely. Out of the three people that we had brought back, I liked Su Ying the most. That time at the basement, she was

also the one who had warned me about the danger. On top of that, she had a rare psychic ability. I should just assuage her fears and let her stay at ease among the mercenary group. In the future, she could become a true member.

"Then, I'll go to the kitchen right now."

I smiled as I nodded my head. She closed the door, carefully went around me, and broke into a run at once.

She ran as if there were aberrants chasing after her!

Su Ying, how bad can your eyes be? Are there any aberrants as handsome as I am? Disgruntled, I stopped smiling and scrunched my brows. Why are first impressions so hard to overwrite? Is even this face not enough to change her impression?

Then, Su Ying suddenly turned her head. She was so spooked that her legs almost gave away into kneeling. She bent her waist into a 90-degree angle and shouted, "Sorry. I forgot to say 'Excuse me, I'll be taking my leave.'"

"..."

Excuse my ass! Am I an emperor or something?! To be this scared of me... Su Ying, are your eyes just for show?

Could this be a retreat to advance? There were quite a number of women who would purposely give me a cold shoulder. Since childhood, I had encountered all sorts that tried to attract my attention. It was all

this face's fault, looking so sinful. This truly was a society ruled by appearances...

An "Ai-yah!" could be heard from the stairs, then the "thump-thump-thump" sound of falling, and finally a shout of, "I'm fine!"

... Most likely not.

I couldn't help but laugh out loud. *This Su Ying might really suit this Jiang territory. She's basically an invincible airhead, so it doesn't make sense for her not to join this troop of invincible soldiers!*

"What are you laughing about?"

Hearing that familiar voice, I turned around as I gleefully called out, "Dàgē, how come you're here?"

"Was about to head down." Dàgē stood at the staircase. As he finished speaking, he saw how I was waiting merrily for him to continue. He then awkwardly continued, "I wanted to see where you were."

I nodded. *Totally understandable. If Shujun had been taken away by a bird and went missing for so long before coming back, I would just directly live at her right hand side for months.*

"Perfect. I was looking for you as well."

"Oh? What do you need?" Dàgē smiled, looking pretty happy. As long as he saw that I was normal, not clinging onto some pot, he would be happy. This was really a bit troublesome, but I didn't have a solution. I

could only let Xiaorong hide in my room or underneath my clothes and let him not to meet Dàgē as much.

Junjun, on the other hand, wasn't as bothered about Xiaorong. However, she really couldn't stand seeing me bare-footed. Even though I clearly explained to her that it was for the sake of practicing my ice powers, her eyes would redden every time she saw me bare-footed. I could only obediently put on my shoes properly.

It was a pity that I couldn't find any men's flip-flops. Those things were easy to put on and take off. Junjun had a couple of flip-flops, but her feet were so small. I couldn't even fit into any of them. I searched and searched. I finally found a bag of blue and white slippers—but I hadn't bought any? The supermarket had probably snuck a few unmarketable items in while I was paying for my shopping spree. *Tch, okay, props to you!*

However, the moment I put them on, Junjun looked over with disdain in her eyes. She said these types of shoes and my face were never meant for each other. It had made her eyes sting, and I was not allowed to wear them ever again.

Sigh. How could I forget to buy some flip-flops! Even though I never really wore them in the past, so of course I wouldn't go out of my way to buy them. Tsk, for future reference, no matter what it is, bringing everything along would be the right thing to do, since who knows what might be useful someday.

"Shuyu, snap it out." Dàgē fondly tried to get my attention.

"Oh." I snapped out of it and asked, "Junjun said the way you killed Chen Qianru was strange. I wanted to see what's up with that?"

Dàgē nodded his head. He started walking down the stairs and tossed out a line, "To the courtyard."

I followed right behind him. *Of course, it's to the courtyard. Dàgē's so strong! He was even the Ice Emperor in another world! What if the house gets torn down?*

Although this house was one where the West meets the East, the style itself strange, not to my taste, at least it was our current place to rest our feet, and conquering Lan City was still far down the line. We would probably be living in this house for quite a while. Even if we really did plan to move to Lan City, this place was a perfect landmark. You could see the whole city from here. We definitely would have people stationed here; therefore, we needed to cherish this house.

In the courtyard, Ding Jun was still there. Once he saw Dàgē, his eyes lit up. He stood up instantly. In the next second, his eyes met mine. His face turned dejected immediately. Then, he used an indifferent expression to cover it up.

If it weren't for Ding Jun's expression appearing more like reverence than adoration, I might have thought he fell in love with my Dàgē and was treating me as if I was an unwanted third-wheeler...*Bruh, this way of thinking is too horrifying. Just forget it! It's not like everyone is the same as I am, having this excessive bro-con and sis-con of a brain.* Ding Jun wore an anxious expression and said, "Hello Boss."

Dàgē didn't react much when he saw Ding Jun. There was only his solemn leader's demeanor present. He said indifferently, "I'm going to use this place. Go find a different spot."

After laying down the order, he turned his head, smiling as he said, "Shuyu, wait for a bit. I'll go find something to demonstrate on for you."

Your face changed, Dàgē! I rubbed my nose. *Seems like Dàgē this time feels guilty to the extreme.* In the past, every time he came home after a long period of time, he would always behave like this. Giving his brother and sister a big smile, solemnity and dignity already packed away. Even Yunqian and Zheng-shū found this sight unbearable to watch and would always gaze outside the window at how magnificent the sun was.

To be honest, even Auntie and Uncle were like this. If they excavated for too long or if they accidentally injured themselves, then they would definitely come back with those radiant smiles as if sunflowers were blooming. Just by looking at their expressions, I would know what had happened and had no need to investigate if they had gotten injured.

"Sure, go ahead."

Dàgē looked left and right, then frowned as if he wasn't able to find anything suitable. He then walked further ahead toward the grove. He was probably thinking of breaking some branches off. *Ugh, hope these trees are not as strong as Xiaorong.*

Ding Jun stood where he was, as if he didn't want to leave. That made me frown. Although I didn't mind him staying, Dàgē had already given his order, yet he wasn't following it. That would not do.

"Did you not hear what the boss said?" I said coldly, "Well, what are you waiting for?"

Ding Jun's face stiffened, though he didn't show any anger, even though the mere act of stiffening hinted at his displeasure. He nodded, saying, "Sorry, I'll go now."

Watching him walk out of the courtyard, I felt annoyed. We only took in three people, yet the result was Chen Qianru who got killed for causing me harm, Ding Jun who had enmity against me, which left us with just Su Ying, who was rather normal but was scared of me. *Are we just meant to be at odds with each other?*

I hoped that the next batch we took in wouldn't be this problematic. But given my experience in my past life, no matter which group, big or small, there would always be never-ending disputes. And Dàgē's Jiang territory would definitely grow bigger and stronger than the past life's group. By then, we would have all sorts of people among us.

Chen Qianru and Ding Jun were both inconsequential. Chen Qianru was just a dumb girl who had made a deadly mistake, which took her life as a matter of course.

Ding Jun, in comparison, had self-control, but he was still full of openings. It was because Dàgē had never taken a notice of him that he hadn't discovered Ding Jun's enmity toward me.

If he had found out, with the current Dàgē's level of feeling sorry for me, a death flag awaited Ding Jun. I shouldn't interact with him much in the future. I wouldn't want my Dàgē to go on killing some dumb flies. *It's beneath him!*

"Shuyu, snap out of it."

Dàgē dragged along a piece of tree trunk, his face filled with disapproval, condemning me for always letting my mind wander. His resignation was very clear.

It's just that I was thinking too much, being easily entranced when I'm so focused. It's a habit from childhood, which is really hard to change. "Being lost in my thoughts at home should be fine, right? As long as you're here, Dàgē, would I meet any accidents?"

Dàgē paled and angrily rebuked, "What nonsense are you talking about! Don't even mention any accidents in the future! You and Shujun are both going to be all right!"

After stepping on a landmine, I immediately adopted an apologetic stance and obediently said, "Of course, we will both be all right. Dàgē don't mind my nonsense. They're just the ramblings of a kid." *Although I'm eighteen on the outside yet thirty-five on the inside, when I say the wrong thing, of course I'm going to pretend to be a three-year old!*

Dàgē's expression gentled, and he then rubbed his brother's head. He couldn't help it and nagged, "When I'm here, you can let your

attention wander at ease, but you can't do that anywhere else. You need to remember this. Don't make this into a habit and be distracted just anywhere and everywhere. Right now, this world is not a place you can afford to do that..."

I lowered my head as I listened to Dàgē's nagging. I also thought I was too relaxed recently. If I had this attitude in the last life, no matter how I died, it wouldn't have been strange.

After nagging for a long while, Dàgē finally stopped. He sighed. "Although I really want to carefully protect you guys, so that you don't have to worry about these things..."

I lifted my head and interrupted, "Dàgē, even while growing up, since when have I ever needed anyone's protection?"

"You're not wrong, but it's just..." Dàgē froze after those words and stared at me. He asked, "Growing up?"

I beamed and declared, "Dàgē, I remembered everything."

Dàgē's eyes practically lit up.

I didn't keep him in suspense any longer and immediately explained, "I have been Guan Weijun's reincarnation since birth. It's just that after getting hit by the tile, I remembered everything about my past life but forgot Jiang Shuyu's eighteen years of life."

Dàgē smiled and nodded. "I was right about that. Now you don't have to worry about it anymore."

I shot him a glance and said, "Yeah, now the person who needs to worry is you."

Dàgē's smile stiffened. I smirked.

Jiang Shuyu was never afraid of Dàgē, and I was Jiang Shuyu. I really didn't know what I was afraid of in the past. Dàgē was formidable and domineering all right, but that was only to outsiders. To Shujun and me, this was not so. Because Dàgē was never home for long, he had always felt guilty toward us. That was why he always pampered his little brother and sister as much as he could.

On top of that, I had kept some of Guan Weijun's awareness and was never really a true kid. Since childhood, Mom had always said that I had so much wisdom that I might as well have been a demon. There was never a need for Dàgē to worry about us, which made his pampering even more outrageous. After all, he wasn't afraid of us being spoiled arrogant and let me have my say. On top of that, I was the one who raised Junjun, so of course whatever her Èrgē said, she followed.

If it weren't for Dàgē and Xiǎomèi being so obedient and letting me become the person with the most say in the family, I wouldn't have been able to spend a million bucks on gathering up supplies in a day so easily that day before the apocalypse. Even Lin-bó would probably have stopped me, as he would have had to at least ask Auntie and Uncle's permission first. However, he was so used to having the second son giving out orders that he had even forgotten to report that to Auntie and Uncle.

Educating Dàgē, Xiǎomèi, Auntie, and Uncle since childhood had definitely been the right thing to do.

Remembering Lin-bó, a flash of grief seized my heart. Lin-bó had been home much more than Dàgē, Auntie, and Uncle. It would be a lie to say that I felt no closeness with him. Who would have thought that once the apocalypse came upon us, he would be gone just like that? Recalling how my loss of memory had guarded me against him, I was at once filled with guilt.

Lin-bó's son was called Lin Mingjie. I even called him Jie-gē. He was not a stranger either. Although he was not as close as Lin-bó was, he was still closer to us than most. If he was still alive, he should definitely be welcomed into our mercenary group.

"Shuyu, are you all right? What are you thinking about? You're frowning again. Is it confusing?" Dàgē asked with concern, "Are there any problems with having two different sets of memories?"

I thought for a bit before shaking my head. I didn't think there were any problems. I felt like Guan Weijun who had lived halfway, then went cross-dressing as a guy to become Jiang Shuyu. It was just that the disguise was utterly thorough, as I had become an infant and started all over again, but in the end, it had been me the entire time.

At most, it is just that the me who recovered my memories will be more like a guy... Probably, maybe?

"Are you sure?" Dàgē's voice was curious and he asked, "So, do you like men or women more?"

...That's a good question.

I opened my mouth, yet I couldn't give an answer. When I was purely Jiang Shuyu, I had definitely liked women, or else I wouldn't have agreed to meet with Miao Xiangling, resulting in my getting hit by a tile, but now...

I looked at Dàgē's chest and abs. Although the weather had become a lot colder, he didn't have that much on. For the top half, he was just wearing a black T-shirt that was on the tight end, which sat really well with his figure and showed off his bulk. The outline of his muscles was very clear. *Wide shoulders, thick chest, narrow waist, long legs—ah, the temperature feels like summer.*

As for women, all of a sudden, Jin Feng's massive chest flashed across my mind. Her thin waist had not an ounce of excess fat, yet she was definitely not paper thin. If you peeled away her clothes, I bet you'd see v-line abs! And her hair that was pulled back into a high ponytail swept left and right across her compact and strong shoulders—*Wait a minute, this is no longer a question about orientation. I've simply become a huge pervert!*

And a pervert that makes no distinction between men and women. Fuck. This is way too horrifying! I was so scared that I hurriedly dragged my perverted thoughts back from their wild prancing. *From today onwards, I promise that I will be an upright gentleman!*

"I don't know." I stiffened my face and turned away from Dàgē's muscles—*I'm not looking, I'm not!*—I said in a rough voice, "The most important thing right now is to practice and become more powerful so we can live peacefully in this apocalypse. That's why, I'm definitely not going to get in a relationship with a girl within the next two years... And *definitely* not with a guy either!"

Dàgē gave a laugh, smiling as he said, "Don't worry. Dàgē will protect you guys. Getting into a relationship is no big deal."

This Dàgē wants me to get into a relationship. That Dàgē doesn't want me to get into a relationship too early. Are you guys even the same person?

I paused for a moment. I hadn't said anything about the Ice Emperor yet. I really didn't know how much I should say. Letting Dàgē know that there existed another him from a parallel world who had dragged the whole JDT—dying one after another, until only Lily was left— in order to return home. In the end, he abandoned her as well and even abandoned all of humanity. *Can I even talk about this?*

Even though the Dàgē before me hadn't done any of that, if I hadn't recovered Guan Weijun's memories, hadn't called Dàgē back before the apocalypse, then he might have been another Ice Emperor. After all, they were the same person. If they lived through the same situation, then I was afraid he would have made the same choice.

Letting Dàgē know that he could have done something like that doesn't feel right. He probably can't avoid feeling guilt toward the JDT then. That would definitely affect his judgment.

"Shuyu?" Dàgē looked at me in incomprehension. He then anxiously asked, "What are you thinking about? Why do you look so serious?"

This bad habit of wearing my feelings on my face hasn't changed even after two lifetimes, so it's probably hopeless. I felt a bit saddened that I would never become a movie star. I changed the topic and prodded, "I'm all right. I accidentally thought of Lin-bó. Sigh. Forget it. The dead have already departed. Dàgē, let me take a look at your power."

Shujun had only said the way Dàgē had killed Chen Qianru was weird. To use "weird" to describe the way of killing someone, it could be none other than an ability.

Dàgē smiled a bit. He picked up the tree trunk that he had tossed aside and flung it into the air. Then, with a wave of his hand, the whole trunk disintegrated into particles. My eyes popped. I looked down, yet there wasn't a single speck on the ground... *What the hell!* "I'm not done."

Dàgē lazily lifted both hands. Some dust-like matter gradually whirled together, forming some unknown entity at first. Then, as it got bigger, I could see that it was a piece of bark, then a twig, then a branch...

Finally, the piece of trunk appeared once more.

What... the... hell...

Chapter 1: The King, Jiang Shutian, is Born, Part One

"Disintegration is a lot simpler than reconstruction. I can make a tree trunk disappear with a wave of my hand, but reconstructing it on the other hand takes a long time and is a lot more difficult. Reconstructing this tree trunk is pretty much my daily limit, and I can only do it because the tree's composition is fairly simple. The more complicated something is, the harder it is to reconstruct."

At that point, Dàgē sighed with some dissatisfaction, "I still need to train more."

You might as well train to destroy the world with a wave of your hand, then!

As expected of someone who would have originally become the Ice Emperor. Your natural talent is enough to make us little mortals want to just bash our heads against a brick of ice and kill ourselves! I hovered between life and death, almost dying several times just to get to tier two. Faced with Dàgē's power, I really want to kneel down and shout, "Long live the Emperor. Long live His Majesty!"

"But it's not that there are no limits to disintegration. I tested it on an aberrant and found that dead things are easier to disintegrate than living things. The disparity is still pretty big, and I'm not sure of why."

I thought a bit and said, "It's most likely because the energy inside the aberrant is blocking your disintegration. I once heard a theory about how all special abilities are just a way of using energy, just that every individual uses it differently to create different powers. That's why it

doesn't matter what kind of ability it is—a tier one being will never be able to beat a tier five being.”

The difference of one tier is already very difficult to contend against, but there was still a chance among the lower tiers. After all, the beginning two tiers were able to be killed by guns, and it was nothing more than a matter of firepower. By tier three, bullets were no longer all that dangerous—artillery shells were much more useful... Unless the opponent had conveniently exhausted their power completely, then they could possibly be killed using a Barrett.

Tier ones crawled everywhere, tier twos weren't much better than dogs, tier threes were considered human, and tier fours were fledgling elites. Most were the leaders of small groups or the elite subordinates of a large organization's boss.

A tier five would already be as powerful as a large stronghold's boss, a tier six would be equivalent to a region's overlord, and reaching tier seven was enough to enter the world's strongest. Reportedly, it was said that the Ice Emperor had already taken a step into the eighth tier.

But I thought that the truth wasn't so. Since Xia Zhengu was always concealing his strength whenever there were others watching him, the elites probably had also hid their actual strength, lowering their true power by a tier for the public. It was a very probable situation.

Perhaps there were even more elites that had entered the higher tiers but were hidden and hadn't revealed themselves. It wouldn't be odd even if tier nines or tier tens had existed.

Thinking of the present, I had already reached tier two just six months into the apocalypse. Even with my past life's memories and the Ice Emperor's help when I most needed it, I only had a bit more resources than other people. In the whole world, there were plenty of people like Thunder God Jin Zhan who had money, power, and subordinates. *Could there really be no one stronger than me?* That was something I didn't dare claim.

Given the current progression, having only twelve elites seemed too few. The Ice Emperor had also said that the MORC definitely had many strong people among them, so numerous that they could even rival the existence of the twelve elites...

"Shuyu." I heard Dàgē's helpless voice call out.

I raised my head and asked, concerned, "Dàgē, how are the others doing with their special ability training?"

Dàgē thought for a moment before speaking. "Not bad, but they aren't used to using their special abilities in a fight, and it doesn't really raise their strength much. Even though they usually train on using purely their special abilities in a fight, when it comes to the real thing, they forget all about them and just instinctively use their guns and martial arts to fight. It's nothing like how you blend in your ice ability when you fight."

Hearing that, my face turned somber. "We have too many bullets! Dàgē, we can't continue like this."

"Then, what do you think we should do?"

I fell silent for a bit before announcing, "Advance into Lan City without guns."

Dàgē asked calmly, "Can we bring hand weapons?"

"You can." I myself still carried a spear and dagger, after all.

"Then, let's do it." Dàgē was actually quite brisk, not hesitating in the slightest when he replied.

Instead, it was me who was worried and asked, "What happens if there are casualties?"

"I can ask them in advance. Whoever doesn't want to go doesn't have to go." Dàgē's voice was tranquil. "The practices of a mercenary group have always been that if your strength can't keep up, you'd be dropped to the second squad, and the inferior ones would just continue to fall."

I was startled for a moment before recalling that the rules of a mercenary group really were like that. Dàgē's mercenary group could be regarded as a medium sized organization and was separated into five squads. Zheng-shū was only in the fourth squad. After all, age was one factor, but he was also considered to be the mercenaries' doctor, so his fighting ability wasn't everything. Even the first and second squads liked to have him join them on their missions.

Lily was part of the second squad. Xiao Sha's talent was quite good, but he was green with little experience, and was therefore placed in

the third squad. But I recall that Dàgē had once said that he wanted to promote him to the second squad.

In the first squad, there was Ceng Yunqian. Although Ceng Yunqian's talent was about the same as Lily's, her sniping ability was truly excellent. Cain was also in the first squad. All aspects of his strength were well above average. He could be considered a well-rounded expert.

I thought for a bit and smiled as I said, "If their strength can keep up, then we can designate them as squad leaders in the future. The 'groups' that come later will all be large assemblies that will number in the thousands. Dàgē, you absolutely cannot manage them as if they were a mere mercenary group. At the very least, you must lead like it's a small city."

"Is that so? Then, it really will be a bit troublesome."

Dàgē frowned, seeming as if his head hurt somewhat. It was understandable. He could deal with a medium sized mercenary group thanks to me forcing him early on to go to a combat and staff college. Otherwise, when faced with missions that only some larger groups could undertake, he definitely wouldn't have been able to complete them so smoothly. However, I don't remember ever forcing him to study how to become a mayor.

"We can have Uncle and Auntie help you govern. They're both leaders of archaeology teams, so they shouldn't be any worse than you with any economic or political work. They'd probably be even better than you with logistics."

After all, archaeology teams frequently stayed at one place for several months and could even stay up to a year at a time. If the logistics and goods management wasn't up to par, they would only be able to pack up and return home to bathe and sleep.

Dàgē's frown finally loosened, and he even deliberately released a sigh.

I spoke seriously, "Dàgē, you must become even more imposing than now, so when other people join the team later, they'll think of you as a deep and unfathomable man. So long as you're here, no one would dare to create the slightest trouble!"

Hearing that, Dàgē first laughed before immediately restraining his smile and forcing his face to turn solemn. He swept his eyes toward me and spoke with an apathetic voice, "Could it be that you still believe I'm not already imposing enough?"

Already imposing, but still not enough. Just now, who was it that had a huge grin on his face because of his dìdì?

I darkened the expression on my face and released an icy chill. The temperature in the room immediately dropped as some faint ice crystals began to solidify, hovering in the air. Dàgē immediately became guarded, his whole body turning taut as his pupils shrank.

Revealing enough, I slowly withdrew my ability. Dàgē also relaxed as he nodded. "Your acting was pretty good. It'd be better for you to act as the deep and immeasurable one."

I forced a smile and pointed at my face. "Dàgē, I just turned eighteen and furthermore, I have this kind of face. Really, I would have to constantly release energy, or else others will definitely treat me like a powerless, delicate pretty boy."

Dàgē paid no attention as he replied, "You'll look aged after two years."

After two years, I'll only be twenty! What do you mean, aged! Telling a woman "You look old" is a surefire way to make her hate you, and it won't be forgiven for an entire lifetime!

Seeing the expression on my face, Dàgē laughed and changed his words. "You'll eventually grow up. That's fine, right?"

His words made me suddenly remember something that I had yet to explain. I opened my mouth. "Dàgē, if you eat crystals in excess, your body will be preserved in peak state. That's why people in the apocalypse don't seem very old. Usually, the stronger one is, the younger they look."

Dàgē was surprised. "There's even such an effect? Then, could it be that it's impossible to die from old age?"

I shook my head. "I'm not sure. I only lived for around ten years and although I didn't eat too many crystals, I could still feel myself becoming a bit older."

Although there weren't many changes, a woman is very sensitive to these things!

Consider the Ice Emperor again, all right? He was obviously older than Dàgē by ten years, but rather than saying his face aged, it'd be far more appropriate to say that his whole person had undergone a great change. His facial features had no change.

Dàgē frowned and said, "Don't tell me that you'll look like you're eighteen forever? Junjun is only fifteen. What should we do?"

That would just be too terrifying! Wouldn't that mean all the children who ate crystals wouldn't grow up?! I immediately explained, "My body still shouldn't have reached its peak state yet, so I will at least grow until I've reached the best possible state. I believe it should be around twenty-five years old."

At least, Xia Zhengu had looked around twenty-five, with absolutely no change at all. I hoped I had not guessed wrong. If I always retained my appearance of an eighteen year old, I'd have to wait for my next life to gain any authority.

Dàgē didn't understand. "Twenty-five is a pretty good age, but don't tell me that people that were already over twenty-five years old would start aging in reverse?"

I nodded. Some of the older people really could become younger. I remembered that there was an old comrade that was already thirty-seven or thirty-eight when the apocalypse had started. But after ten years in the apocalypse, not only did he not age, he had even turned younger. Although he didn't exactly turn back into a twenty-five year old, he seemed as if he was only a bit past thirty and absolutely couldn't be past thirty-five. If he had eaten even more crystals, maybe

he might've actually been able to revert back to a twenty-five-year-old's appearance.

Even if the crystals could allow people to return back to their strongest period, the apocalypse still had many people who looked old. This was because the circumstances were simply too harsh, and many people were often struggling between life and death. Both thin and shriveled with skin as dry as tree bark, it made those people look as if they were incredibly old.

Dàgē suddenly laughed and said, "Just wait for Uncle to eat a lot of crystals and look young again. At that time, 'Dàgē' might have to be his title instead."

That's actually true! The Jiang family's traits are all so distinct, so in the future, maybe we really would look like four siblings... but that isn't important!

I nagged, "Dàgē, your smile is way too happy. Your imposing demeanor is completely gone! You must remember to keep a dignified air at all times. As long as there are people around, you absolutely cannot reveal such a cajoling, flattering smile. It'd also be better if you always released a little bit of energy. In any case, you can consider it training your special ability. Also, pay more attention to your clothes. When we enter the city, we have to find some good clothes to alter them. I can do a bit of needlework, so in the future, I can help you make an outfit fit for a leader. As the proverb says, fine clothes make the man..."

Fortunately I had lived ten years in the apocalypse in my previous life. It was out of the question to not pick up needlework. What kind of things didn't need to be altered by my own hands? All in all, I had acquired countless survival skills—Guan Weijun, the level ninety-nine daily life assistant!

Dàgē helplessly touched his face and said, "I never even knew I had such a flattering smile."

"When we enter the city, I'll go find a Polaroid camera and take a picture for you to see."

"...Leave it, I'll just trust what you said." Dàgē frowned and said, "I can't ever smile in the future? This is actually pretty troublesome."

"Of course you can smile, but you must smile with the manner of an elite!" I looked at the surroundings but saw that the open courtyard wasn't a good place for instruction and could only say, "Let's practice again once we go to the third floor. We have to practice until you have a noble and icily arrogant aura. It'll be very convenient once we enter the city to recruit people."

"Training special abilities isn't enough, I even have to train my acting skills, huh?" Dàgē laughed but didn't oppose it. "Entering the city shouldn't be done hastily. First, we should fortify this place so we can feel at ease when we enter the city."

That's right. Otherwise, it would be terrible if we were attacked. Our base is right next to a metropolis. We can't be careless. But when I thought about how we would be separating into two groups, I

immediately felt a headache. Right now, there were too few of us in the Jiang Dominion, so few that we couldn't even be divided into two groups and still preserve enough firepower in both groups.

"Zheng Xing's earth ability is pretty useful. I plan to have the perimeter wall heightened and thickened before placing a layer of wire netting over it."

I immediately said, "I want to set up an electricity grid."

Dàgē thought for a bit and replied, "Then, we need to find even more electricity generators. This small town does have electricity generators, and the number isn't negligible, but we need them in several places, so it still might not be enough. Later in Lan City, let's look for more."

I pondered before forcing up the courage to make a suggestion, "Dàgē, if I want to take turns bringing one person with me to Lan City, would you agree?"

The more I spoke, the more my heart trembled. *Dàgē's face has completely changed!*

Dàgē was silent for a long time, his expression so unpleasant that I couldn't bear to say any more. "Never mind, I was just making a suggestion..."

"Okay." Dàgē flatly agreed but still couldn't help but add on, "However, you must promise me that nothing will go wrong."

I opened my mouth. However, I couldn't bear to lie to my own dàgē and could only honestly say, "Dàgē, you have to know that nothing can be guaranteed in this kind of world. I don't want to lie to you."

Hearing that, Dàgē stiffened before mocking himself, "Ah, right. You even managed to be taken when you had clearly been home, so maybe going into a big city won't even be as dangerous."

That's... purely because of the Jiang family's terrible luck. Generally speaking, encountering a situation at home was far rarer than encountering one in a big city. Who would have imagined that I could walk halfway around Zhongguan City with nothing happening, but while staying at home I'd be snatched up by a bird? Apart from bad luck, what else can you call it?!

"Besides, as it was, you were able to find us and return all by yourself." Dàgē sighed, "Dàgē hadn't thought that his resolve wouldn't be enough. I'm being such a sissy, not at all like a man."

I couldn't help but mollify him. "Dàgē, I'm someone who has lived two lifetimes, which adds up to around fifty total years. In my past life, I even lived ten years in the apocalypse, while you're only twenty-seven right now!"

Hearing that, Dàgē laughed. "Then, do you want to switch our roles, and I'll call you Dàgē?"

"No way! Even if you dared to call me that, I wouldn't dare to answer to it."

Dàgē laughed in a deep voice, appearing to be very happy, his grin so large that it seemed as if his face would split. That I had safely returned and even recovered my memories made him seem happier than he had ever been even before the apocalypse. *But, this is no good!*

"You aren't allowed to smile this much outside. Where did the imposing dignity we just talked about earlier go?"

Dàgē immediately restrained his rising lips, leaving his face expressionless. He shot a glance indifferently, a domineering air filling the room. It could make a person's legs turn into jelly, leaving them only able to kneel in worship!

Fortunately I had already been exposed to it for eighteen years, so my legs were very solid as I simply nodded, saying, "That's right, keep it just like this."

The helplessness in Dàgē's voice was rather obvious as he said, "Always keeping this kind of manner up is also pretty tiring."

"Well in any case, Dàgē, you'll be the future king. You won't have to see people too often, and you don't need to always be so solemn in private."

If you were to always just see the Ice Emperor taking a walk by the roadside, his status would definitely become cheapened. It's only natural for a god to be deeply hidden. In short, no outsiders can be allowed to witness my dàgē's invincible airheaded side!

Dàgē seemed even more helpless as he replied, "What king? We're not in the Middle Ages."

I spoke seriously, "No, it'll precisely become that kind of era in the future, and Dàgē, you'll definitely become the king."

Dàgē raised his eyebrows. "First it was a base, and now this talk about kings. Shuyu, do you wish for me to become a sovereign?"

It's not about what I wish, but rather that you were originally a ruler, and I only want to prepare thoroughly so the road later will be smooth.

I hesitated for a bit before finally deciding to lay the matter out clearly. "Dàgē, do you still remember what I said about the twelve elites? I recalled some more details and want to tell you."

Chapter 1: The King, Jiang Shutian, is Born, Part Two

Dàgē didn't seem to really care as he asked, "Can I tell other people?"

"Yeah, you can." I also thought it was the right thing to do. Telling everybody at once was better than saying it here and repeatedly saying it later. "I'll go and gather everyone."

Having a small amount of people had its advantages. I didn't have to search for long to gather them all. It was just a pity that the third floor's conference room wasn't completed yet. We could only gather in the dining room on the first floor, making it feel like it was meal time. At times, people even reached their hands out to take peanuts and melon seeds from the table to chew on. *Where's the serious atmosphere? Getting the conference room built is definitely top priority!*

"Why hold a meeting today?" Everybody asked curiously, as they simultaneously cracked the melon seeds between their teeth. Seeing this, I truly wanted to just take all the melon seeds along with the tray and just stuff their mouths with it.

Dàgē waved his hand toward me and everyone looked at me as if it were only natural. A group of highly experienced mercenaries automatically staring at an eighteen-year-old youth, just waiting for him to open his mouth... it was a very incongruous scene.

Their expressions pleased me. Although losing my memory led me to making a lot of wrong choices, it was fortunate that I was still able to make things right. They looked like they still had faith in me.

"I remembered who the three elites of mankind were." Although it was Jin Xiaoyue who reminded me, just thinking about how to explain how Jin Xiaoyue would know gave me a huge headache, so I'd better just skip over that.

Their eyes were all shining, clearly showing their interest. As expected of people living the mercenary life—powerful elites were a very attractive topic for them. Nobody was like the past life me who just scraped by and couldn't even remember the names of the most powerful elites.

"First is the Flame King Debert." I looked at everyone and asked, "Have you guys heard of this Debert? He's a foreigner, and he seems to be in the military."

Cain immediately widened his eyes, shouting loudly, "Does that still need to be said?! It's definitely Eagland's Soldier King, Debert!"

What a joke of a parallel world! What's the meaning of only having the names changed?! I held my head with my hand, feeling my head hurting, but when I gave it some more thought, I realized it didn't matter. Anyways, no matter what country was involved, now there was only one nation known as "Mankind."

I asked in detail, "Debert is his family name?"

Lily nodded and said, "Foreigners always address others by their family name and only address others by first name if they're close with each other."

I pondered over it. Although it was his surname and not his actual name, foreigners have very unusual last names, while they shared a bunch of the same first names. Besides, it sounded very logical for the Soldier King Debert to become the Flame King Debert, so it should be that person.

"As expected of the Soldier King."

Everybody exclaimed in admiration as if they all already knew Debert, even believing that the Soldier King becoming the Flame King wasn't anything too surprising. It seemed like this Mr. Debert really was crazy powerful, so becoming a ruler and building his own domain wasn't a strange thing for him to do.

"Since the Flame King Debert is in the faraway Eagland, we don't need to care about him for now. In any case, we can't even get in touch with him."

Although everyone nodded, they couldn't help but whisper to each other all kinds of exaggerated tales about the Soldier King's exploits. They sounded no different from myths. The only thing missing was a punch to blow away the Earth.

I couldn't help but give them a big eye roll. If this Mister Soldier Flame King was really that strong, would mankind have actually been almost driven to extinction?

"All right, let's stop worshiping the Flame King and return to the even more important matter—the strongest elites in Meisia. Are you guys listening or not?"

Everyone immediately and simultaneously stared at me, eyes shining and ears pricked. I didn't leave them in suspense. In any case, there was something far more shocking later on, so there was no need to astonish them now.

"Thunder God Jin Zhan."

Everybody was startled, too shocked to respond.

Finally, Yunqian spoke strangely, "The Jin Zhan you're talking about shouldn't be the one that I'm thinking of, right?"

I nodded. "It's him."

Cain was dumbstruck as he said, "Truly 'a wolf in sheep's clothing,' huh!"

I shot back angrily, "That's not how you use that idiom! Right now, the correct idiom you should be saying is 'you can't judge a book by its cover.'"

"But the idiom 'you can't judge a book by its cover' isn't very fitting either." Lily laughed. "Jin Zhan's looks are really impressive. After all, he isn't very old and is actually the same age as Boss. If he didn't have any imposing bearing, he wouldn't be able to preside over others."

Oh, so it's like that? That's not surprising. Jin Feng looked really mighty, so her dàgē shouldn't be any worse.

"Jin Zhan, huh?" Dàgē muttered. "We've had some dealings, but they're all the way in Zhongguan City, which is a bit far. Besides, I don't think that you have any interest in piggybacking off of him?"

"Of course not! Now, I'm going to announce the final elite, the Ice Emperor..."

I looked at everyone. None of them seemed to care very much and were even still talking about the Soldier King and Jin Zhan. My heart suddenly swelled with evil delight as I purposely stretched out the words.

"Jiang Shutian."

Everybody was startled before each and every one of them widened their eyes, turning their heads to look at their commanding officer. Their eyes were several times bigger than normal, filled with disbelief.

"But I don't have an ice ability," Dàgē spoke calmly.

I admitted awkwardly, "In my dream, I saw that you probably stayed in Glacia, but since I called you back to Meisia, your power was influenced by that."

Dàgē nodded. Probably because he saw the guilt on my face, he said, "Fortunately, you have the ice ability now, so we're not losing out."

Although I knew Dàgē was comforting me, his words were like a sharp sword stabbing directly into my heart. It felt as if I had stolen Dàgē's ability. It'd be better if he didn't console me.

Fortunately, Dàgē's ability didn't seem to just be healing. Or maybe the truth behind the "healing" ability had never been anything simple. I didn't understand it myself, but I just felt like we should use a broader mindset to view something like "powers" in the future.

Or maybe it's like what I heard in my past life, that all abilities were just different routes leading to the same destination, and they were all simply different ways of using energy. *Could this theory possibly actually hold some truth to it?*

"Shuyu."

I returned to myself as I looked at Dàgē. The fact that my thoughts had wandered off again didn't need to be mentioned. In any case, everybody was already used to it by now.

"So the reason you wanted to establish a territory isn't about you wanting me to become king, but because you know that I will be a king?" Dàgē said seriously, "But Shuyu, you have to consider. I don't have the ice ability anymore, so there's no way I can become the Ice Emperor, and I might not even become one of the twelve elites."

Then how about you don't disintegrate a tree trunk and reconstruct it again for me to see! Claiming to be weak while possessing such murderous power, even Shujun won't be deceived by you!

"What does everyone else think?" I looked at the others calmly and asked, "Do you guys think that just because your boss got a different ability, he would become just another face in the crowd?"

Everybody shook their heads simultaneously with great force. I glanced at Dàgē who simply raised an eyebrow, no longer able to retort.

"All right, so how about you just properly prepare for becoming a king by first establishing this base before slowly advancing on Lan City?"

I looked at everyone. The small number of people was truly distressing, not even enough to fill the seats at a long table. We really needed to bring in more people, or else how would we advance on Lan City? We practically had no people! We couldn't even form a small platoon, not to mention an army. Even if we all had the power of the Ice Emperor and conquered Lan City, were we supposed to each watch over fifty streets and a thousand skyscrapers?

"However, I don't want to waste any time. I want to take turns taking people with me to Lan City for training."

Everyone was startled before reflexively looking at Dàgē. The latter nodded, and they all looked at me excitedly, seeming very eager.

"I only have one request, and that's to not bring any firearms. You may only bring knives at most." I said calmly, "Furthermore, there's one more condition that I'll explain clearly before we go. When we enter the city, you're responsible for your own life and death. I won't take any responsibility."

Everyone's brows rose. No one seemed to have the least bit of fear. It seemed as if none of them ever had any plans of giving up. This kind of attitude had both pros and cons.

The good thing was that everyone in the Jiang domain was worthy to be called mercenaries and weren't like common folk, who would be scared out of their wits. It was only natural that they were more useful and resilient than normal civilians. The bad thing was that ever since the apocalypse, our party had too easy of a time. What happened to putting our lives on the line to escape, having food and water shortages, or sleeping in the open without shelter? Our group had gone through none of that. Truthfully speaking, I might be the only one in our group who understood the true terror of the apocalypse.

However, this wasn't all that serious. After I took them to Lan City to face danger, it was guaranteed that they would understand everything. It'd be a lot more useful than verbally intimidating them.

I saw that nobody had any thoughts of giving up, and I also didn't try to scare them anymore. In any case, the first order of business was bringing them in with me.

"For this first trip, I can only bring one person. Therefore, we'll be drawing lots to decide the order."

I took out the bamboo sticks I had prepared ahead of time and placed them inside a pen holder before looking at everyone. Everybody including Uncle and Auntie were here. The only ones missing were Ding Jun and Su Ying.

Junjun suddenly asked, "Can I also draw for it?"

I nodded my head. "Yeah."

Junjun's eyes shone. I was completely satisfied about my little sister's fighting spirit, but Dàgē's expression darkened, making Junjun a little frightened and worried. She hesitated for a little while, but still stubbornly refused to say that she wouldn't go.

"Let's start." I changed the topic. Dàgē had already given his permission after all. He just couldn't help worrying, which was why his expression was so ugly.

Each of them took a stick. Cain even compared his number with Xiao Sha. Whichever of them left later would have to go to the kitchen to wash dishes tonight. However, apart from them, no one else showed great excitement or disappointment when they saw their number. In any case, it was just an order. They'd all eventually have the chance to go.

At this moment, Shujun suddenly gasped, attracting everyone's attention. She raised her head, shyly glancing at Dàgē.

"Junjun?" I asked, not understanding, "What happened?" *Could she have pulled a terrible fortune? Wait, but that's not right. There's obviously only one, two, three on the sticks.*

Junjun showed us her stick. Astonishingly, the number on the stick was one. This was even scarier than drawing a super duper bad fortune. Dàgē's expression immediately changed, turning so ugly that

it made everybody fall absolutely silent, nobody daring to let out a single breath.

I was somewhat at a loss on what to do. If dìdi and mèimei paired up to go to Lan City as the leadoff hitters, it would be a wonder if Dàgē could remain calm, but if he didn't let Shujun go...

A hand snatched Junjun's stick and shoved over another one. Junjun blinked, unable to react right away. When she looked down, she saw that the "one" stick that was in her hand had been replaced with the last stick.

"There's no rule that you can't change lots, right?" Xiao Sha casually tossed that number one stick up and down.

Seeing this, Dàgē's face finally eased a little, but his brows were still creased. Even if we delayed the order, it would inevitably one day be Junjun's turn. However, it would still be better than dìdi and mèimei going into the city together right off the bat.

"Wait a minute!" Cain got up and hooted, "This doesn't count—"

Dàgē glanced sharply at Cain who immediately withered as he muttered, saying, "I, I'm saying I didn't lose to Xiao Sha. I don't want to wash dishes..."

"You will wash the dishes!" Dàgē ordered, not allowing him to disagree.

Cain looked at the number two on his stick, looking like he wanted to cry but couldn't.

Chapter 2: A Call Without A Response, Part One

The trip for Lan City was now scheduled for three days from now. It would have been better if we set off earlier, but I had just returned. I wanted to stay with my big brother and little sister for a bit longer. Plus, it wasn't as if I had figured out what was going on with the "tattoos" on both of my arms. I had to figure it out before going into the city, or else there wouldn't even be any weapons for me to use.

My head started hurting when I thought about that time I had just returned home. Dàgē had mistakenly thought that I had these tattoos forced on me. *I should stick with calling these "ice patterns" for now. After all, I've never seen anyone with silvery blue tattoos before. The color really is beautiful, but if anyone used such a color in a tattoo, that person would probably be poisoned by metal toxicity or something similar.*

In order to thoroughly investigate this ice pattern in the full-length mirror in the room, I had cut off the sleeves of my shirt, turning it sleeveless. But with the weather getting colder, I would stick out like a sore thumb if I wore this into the city. I would need to add a jacket as a disguise, but I wasn't sure if covering the ice pattern would affect the summoning of the spear and the dagger. I had to get this sorted out.

The ice pattern on my right sprawled along almost my entire arm, from the tip of my pinky all the way to my upper arm. Luckily, the lines of the pattern weren't too clustered. There were just a few, and the icy blue color was very faint. It was nothing too outrageous; or else this delicate face of mine coupled with many complex tattoos would most definitely give an immeasurably odd impression.

The ice pattern on my left, on the other hand, was quite a bit smaller. The lines were thinner, wrapping once around the wrist. If this had been a real tattoo, I think I would be able to accept such a design. It was quite nice to look at.

My guess was that the right one represented the long spear and the left one represented the dagger. Since the gap between the size of the two weapons was quite large, naturally the gap between the size of the two ice patterns would be just as big.

In order to prove this point, I immediately shouted, "Come out, Ice Spear!"

Even after waiting several seconds, nothing appeared. I looked at my right arm speechlessly. *Did I get it wrong? Is the spear on the left instead? But I recall it should be on my right...*

I eyed my left arm skeptically, then called out again. Not a single response. *What's going on?*

If the spear is no good, then what about the dagger?

I hastily called out to summon the ice dagger. The silvery blue ice pattern on my left wrist glowed faintly. Suddenly, there was a chilling feeling in my hands as if I was touching a piece of ice. A sliver of ice had condensed in my hand, its shape somewhat like a dagger. *Success!*

As the moment of bliss went by, I immediately gripped the misshapen ice dagger, yet it shattered just as I closed my fingers around it. Its fragments scattered all over the floor, melting instantly, leaving not a single trace behind. Even the glow of the ice pattern had disappeared without a trace.

My mind blanked. I thought I had crushed the dagger into smithereens just by holding it. Several moments passed before I finally snapped out of it. If I could crush a dagger transformed from the Ice Emperor just like this, was there even a need for me to have a dagger in the first place?

I gathered energy once again, but this time I didn't shout "ice dagger." After all, it had suddenly occurred to me how stupid it was to call out for a weapon. This was not some magic spell that needed an incantation. *Why did I even think I needed to call out earlier?*

If you shout "Come out, my XX00 weapon" before battling with aberrants, isn't this hinting to the opponent to just hurry and finish you off before that?

As I had thought, even without shouting out loud, the ice pattern glowed and gradually condensed into the form of a dagger.

This time, I waited for a moment. Once its shape was a bit sturdier, I made my move and gently wrapped my fingers around it. It didn't shatter this time. The ice dagger was hard, but still as thin as a cicada's wing. I almost couldn't feel its presence. It was like that shard of ice that had protected my heart back then. *Wait a minute, this still*

isn't right. The last time I saw the ice dagger, it was a sturdy dagger, not just a piece of ice.

What exactly went wrong? Am I not qualified enough to wield a completely intact dagger? Is that the reason the ice spear isn't even willing to appear?

What should I do now? There's only three days left until we enter Lan City. This amount of time isn't enough to create a weapon I can use. Don't tell me I have to battle with a piece of ice? Still, the sharpness and sturdiness were both present in this one. My shard of ice that had protected my heart had been thin, yet it had been stronger than the spear I had created. Even if the Ice Emperor's dagger was just a piece of ice, it would definitely be more powerful than the protective shard that I had created.

But there would always be that "what if" in times like these, like what if I shatter it this time, and then I can never put it back together again? This was a weapon that the Ice Emperor left behind! This was all that was left of his existence...

Let's just try again. I can't use it when it's like this!

"Shuyu."

A knock sounded, followed by Dàgē's voice from outside. I hastily withdrew the piece of ice before opening the door.

Dàgē said unhappily, "What are you doing locking yourself up in your room all day long? Come with me to look at the plans of the base. I also want to discuss Uncle's power with you."

My eyes immediately shone. "We know what Uncle's power is now?"
Dàgē smiled as he nodded.

Awesome! All the abilities of the Jiang family are now known. I wonder what kind of power it is? Even with me as the ultra cheat, it still took until now to discover Uncle's ability. It must be a very unique ability? I shot a glance at Dàgē, yet he just smiled, not saying a single word. I couldn't believe he was still keeping up the suspense.

"Let's go find Uncle then." I was too lazy to care about this big brother of mine who was becoming more and more childish lately. I turned and walked right out of the room.

Dàgē shook his head and said, "I'm starting to miss the time when you were still amnesic."

"What. Miss the time I was still scared of you?" I unhappily glared back at Dàgē.

"What nonsense are you talking about? I miss the time when I still had some influence over you. At the very least, you would be apprehensive before you ran off."

"Even if I were apprehensive, I'd still run off anyway. Even if I wasn't kidnapped by a bird, I was thinking about leaving home for tens days to half a month for Zhongguan City."

Even if my mind only contained Guan Weijun's memories and not Jiang Shuyu's, my mind would still be focused on wanting to enter the city for training. My heart had feared Dàgē, yet my actions hadn't been the least bit more obedient. *Jiang Shuyu at least announces his leave before actually leaving! Guan Weijun will leave without saying anything.* Though I claimed to fear him, my conduct was quite audacious.

Dàgē stared speechlessly at me with his eyebrows scrunched deeply enough to kill a fly, but I was not going to give up because of that. Entering the city to train was a must. Jiang Shuyu had been raising his little sister and taking care of the household since young. He was never the kind that needed protection. *Coupled with Guan Weijun's past life's regrets and this life's grief, this time I will become so strong, so powerful, and so tyrannical that everyone will obey me!*

Uh... okay, that last one is up for negotiation. I suddenly realized that my thinking was seriously skewed. *If this continues, I will end up turning into a tyrant. Oh no, I have to obediently dial that back and pretend to be a weak pretty boy. Dàgē is more suited to be the tyrant.*

However, presently, Dàgē's eyebrows were deeply locked. Even if he were a tyrant, he would be a sullen tyrant. I could only try consoling him again, "Dàgē, I'm only going to scout the outer area of Lan City. You don't have to worry too much. I've already lived ten years in the apocalypse. I know exactly how to continue to live on."

Dàgē stared at me, then earnestly asked, "Promise me. Survival comes first, okay?"

I nodded. *That goes without saying. Everything is over once you're dead... Well, assuming that reincarnation isn't an option. But with a miraculous reincarnation happening once already, with my previous life being Guan Weijun, and this life being Jiang Shuyu, then what's next?*

Even if I can reincarnate into the Flame King or the Thunder God, I'm not going to switch to either! I will cling on to the Jiang family forever, even to my dying breath!

After receiving the desired response, Dàgē finally stopped being a sullen tyrant. He patted my shoulder and said, "Let's go and take a look the base's plan. Your experience is broad. If there are any changes that need to be made, just put them forward."

I nodded and followed Dàgē to the dining room. All of a sudden, I felt like it was time to eat. I couldn't help but say, "Dàgē, we should get the conference room done soon. With both meals and meetings held here, the serious atmosphere for a meeting isn't present."

Dàgē raised an eyebrow. "Which is more important, the conference room or the defensive fortification of the surroundings?"

"... Defensive fortification."

All right, we can just merrily eat our meals as we hold our meetings for now. There aren't any outsiders right now anyway. We don't need to worry about our image.

In the dining room, Zheng Xing, Uncle, Ceng Yunqian, and Lily were already waiting. The architectural plan was laid out on the long table.

"Shuyu, come over and take a look." Uncle waved at me in high spirits.

Although Uncle was not an architect, he was an archaeologist, who specialized in excavating buildings. Therefore, he had some familiarity with buildings. As for Zheng Xing, he had the earth ability. When he just started, he could only loosen soil for planting. *I wonder how much he has improved? So what do Yunqian and Lily specialize in again?*

After pondering for a while, I recalled that Yunqian specialized in locks, traps, and the like. Whenever Dàgē recruited personnel, he would tell me about what they specialized in. However, after he recruited too many, it was too much effort to remember them all, so now I only had vague impressions.

Ceng Yunqian specialized in sniping, locks, and traps. Xiao Sha was amazing at stealth. Zheng Xing was a military doctor. Cain was good at fighting. Lily was... After thinking for a while, I still couldn't remember what Lily specialized in.

Lily seemed to notice my pondering. She smiled as she said, "I've been in charge of the logistics for a while. Although I'm not the main manager, you guys don't seem to have any other choices, so the boss made me in charge of supplies."

I remarked, "Even if we had other choices, we would still choose you!"

Lily smiled charmingly. "You sure know how to phrase it."

This was the truth. The people who followed Dàgē might not be the strongest, but they were the type who would never go right if Dàgē ordered them to go left. In the apocalypse, there were no better comrades than them. *We're not going to swap them out for anyone!*

I looked down at the blueprint. It was so huge that it covered a good half of the table. This layout practically detailed half of Old Town, with the mansion as the focal point. This mansion already had stone walls surrounding it. The blueprint detailed thicker and taller walls, completely transforming them into the walls of a castle. People could even stand on them. Electric wires would be added to the outside of the walls like I had requested. There were also a myriad of large spikes in addition to densely packed glass thorns.

In summary, if we ever wanted to kill someone, we just had to slam them into the wall, and the person would end up with a lot of holes.

The clock tower that had originally been there would be kept, but it would receive all sorts of upgrades, converting it completely into a watch tower, and it would be the type that couldn't be destroyed or taken down.

Even more excessively, there would be a moat outside the walls!

Of course, the moat itself wouldn't do much against aberrants. However, I had ice powers, and Ceng Yunqian had water powers. To us, this canal would be a huge help.

Next was the outer residential area inside the walls. The traps all over the ground and the barbed-wired wall were really nothing—no, there *was* something. I could actually see several bunkers, big and small, along the way. I quickly took a closer look and found out that the plan was divided into top and bottom layers. The bottom layer was actually an underground passage! This blueprint didn't just have bunkers—it was practically bonkers!

"So, how is it? Is it okay?" Zheng Xing and Uncle looked at me anxiously.

"Of course, it's okay! But, can we really manage to do this?"

No matter how you looked at it, this was a massive construction project. This was basically on the scale of a base belonging to the late-stage apocalypse, and those were all built gradually after everyone's powers had grown stronger. *Right now, unless we have construction groups and heavy machinery from before the apocalypse, we wouldn't be able build all of this, right?*

Dàgē explained, "We need time and personnel. We can take it a step at a time. We need to mainly rely on Zheng Xing and Uncle; others' abilities will also be of some help, like Cain's fire and Yunqian's water."

"Uncle?" I twisted my head to look at Uncle, curious about what kind of ability could help with building this base.

Feeling a bit embarrassed, Uncle chuckled as he said, "Shutian had me recall my excavations and what I remembered about the layouts of the castles I've seen. After reflecting upon it, I discovered something

wasn't right. I could actually remember all the details very clearly. Even those contemporary military structures that I've only glimpsed, I could draw completely. So I figure, my ability should be 'memory,' right?"

Memory? Hard to say. If this was the previous life, then he'd definitely be the first to get left behind. However, this ability along with Uncle's being an archeologist, plus his and Auntie's love for reading and how well read they were—even The Encyclopedia of Moss and The Suicide Handbook were possibly the type to appear on their shelves—would definitely be a huge help for the base's long term development.

In my previous life, I didn't have any agricultural knowledge, so I could only rely on rudimentary books that I found. Even books about gardening were precious in my studies. I don't know how many missteps we took before we were finally able to plant edible and stable staples successfully. Even more importantly, it had to result in something that wouldn't eat us in return.

Throughout this process, Xia Zhengu was extremely impatient, always believing that looting was faster than farming. If it wasn't for the older members painstakingly arguing that our food supply was emptying out, that the canned food and cookies had long passed their expiration dates, and that looting wasn't a long term solution, he wouldn't have even let me build a greenhouse.

After returning to my senses, Uncle looked at me nervously. I hastily replied, "Uncle, continue to think about every field of knowledge. Other than architecture, think about agriculture and cultivation too. When

you have time, write it down. We should also think of a way to plant some stuff next.”

Uncle's spirits immediately lifted, and he repeatedly claimed it was no problem, his expression quite happy. On the surface, it had seemed that Uncle hadn't cared much about not having an ability, but he nonetheless had hoped to figure it out and to be of some use.

This reminded me. For the upcoming scouting, instead of searching for food, I should bring more books and seeds back instead. In the beginning of the apocalypse, food was not hard to find. Instead, it was those kinds of things that would be gone forever once they were gone.

“Oh right, also add a library room...” Pausing mid-sentence, I looked down at the blueprint of our base and instead said, “add a library floor.”

Uncle's eyes glistened, and he exclaimed, “Yeah, let's add one! Shutian, Shuyu, with the whole world becoming like this, tons of knowledge will definitely vanish. Since we have the power and the ability, just think of this as our responsibility to preserve the knowledge and culture of humanity to then pass on to future generations!”

Passing on to future generations, is it? That phrase sounded really grand, but I was just thinking about how unexpectedly useful knowing all this stuff had been. Back when I was planting and farming, I couldn't even remember just how many times I regretted that I hadn't taken lots of books from those bookstores I had passed by. Later on, many places got destroyed, and things like books were great materials for fires in the winter, so extremely few of them had remained.

I thought it over and said, "Then, let's just find a room to store the books for now. Lan City is a huge metropolis. There's got to be federal library. Later, we can take over that place. A bit of fixing up, and we'll be able to use it."

Hearing this, Uncle beamed. "Right, right. The books of a library would be more thorough and complete than a bookstore's."

Seeing how happy Uncle was, I could only shut my mouth and not clue him in. Once winter arrived, who knew how many books would be left in the library? So, we should still head to the bookstores first to grab some books. After all, later on, the library might end up being just an empty building with no books in it.

Dàgē suddenly said sternly, "Shuyu, I will not permit you to go to that federal library!"

Startled, I helplessly said, "Dàgē, do you really think I'm that reckless? Ever since I was kid, the ones who loved running straight toward danger were always you, Uncle, and Auntie, right? Junjun and I were always the good kids obediently staying at home. "

Uncle lifted his head to look toward the sky, only to discover there was only the ceiling above his head. He then dipped his head to pretend to study the blueprint again.

Zheng Xing laughed out loud. Lily let her boss keep a bit more dignity by covering her mouth to giggle.

"...but you've been reckless recently." Dàgē was embarrassed yet unwilling to give up on that fact.

I thought for a moment and said, "It's probably because I wasn't the least bit daring in my last life that I regretted it to my dying breath."

After saying that, everyone stared straight at me. Dàgē had known all the details, but the others hadn't gotten the full picture. *Previously, Guan Weijun was afraid of letting people know about this situation, but now I am a hundred percent Jiang Shuyu. So what if people know about the reincarnation business? Hmph, if anyone dares to provoke me, the whole Jiang family will come and crush you!*

"Dàgē, more than worrying about me, you should be worrying about yourself. Of all the members in the Jiang Dominion, the one who has the most potential to survive until the end is definitely me!"

This line might have been over the top, but I really couldn't stand looking at Dàgē's current worrywart self. Before I got kidnapped by the bird, at least he would still let me face tens of aberrants all by myself. Yet now, he was like an overly protective mother bear who couldn't bear letting her cub get a single scratch. *What about our agreement on being domineering, Dàgē!*

Hearing this, Dàgē was instead relieved and nodded. "Remember to have Shujun with you. Then, I will have no worries."

I confidently said, "Well, of course! If I haven't fallen, then Junjun won't get a single scratch!"

Actually. I don't have the right to criticize other people. I'm also a protective mother bear. If the one who got kidnapped by the bird was Junjun—I can't even imagine it! Just thinking about it makes me crazy. Okay. I kinda understand Dàgē's recent neurotic behavior. Guess I should let it slide.

"What falling!" Dàgē furiously shouted, "Before I fall, nothing's going to happen to you guys!"

Is this a domino effect where everyone's going to fall one after another?

"Dàgē, actually you guys need to be more careful since you guys are going to stay here. With so many people working on the construction, plus our objectives and actions being so grand, no matter if it's aberrants or survivors, they might all seek us out. So promise me, you'll protect Junjun."

Actually, these words were unnecessary. How could Dàgē not protect Junjun? Only by stepping over his dead body could one hurt Junjun. Yet, I had to divert his focus here, so that he wouldn't constantly worry about my safety and overlook the base's. When I returned, I didn't want to discover that something had happened at home.

Dàgē agreed briskly, "I'll protect Junjun. You better protect yourself."

"Deal!"

Chapter 2: A Call Without A Response, Part Two

Although I really wanted to find out how everyone's ability had progressed, I only had three days. It wasn't enough. Plus, I was going to take them into the city one by one, so I didn't need to rush it. As a result, I hid in my room almost the entire time to continue figuring out the spear and dagger.

After trying for three whole days, the ice dagger in my hand had taken its complete shape. Although it still didn't look as impressive as before, it at least looked more like a knife and not just a piece of ice. Its thickness was about two millimeters... I think? Forget it. I shouldn't lie to myself. One point five millimeters was decent enough.

The hilt of the dagger was too narrow to grip comfortably. I could only add to its width by using my ice ability. Afterwards, I anxiously tested it on all sorts of things.

The blade was very sharp. Practically, nothing in the room or outside of it could win against it. It only got harder to cut when the energy of an ability was involved. However, once I covered the dagger with my own ability, the problem was easily solved, like bamboo splitting on a knife's edge. But by then, this would be a competition between whose ability was superior, so although the sharpness of the dagger had some influence, it was not the crucial point in the fight.

In the process, the dagger didn't break or shatter. I even hardened my heart and tried to cut a stone with the dagger. There was some resistance, but the dagger was still able to slice through it. It was just that the deeper it went, the harder it was to move. In the end, it was stuck. I had to spend a huge amount of energy to free it. I was so

scared in the process that I almost wanted to get a chainsaw and saw apart the stone to avoid damaging the ice dagger.

But then again, using a chainsaw to rescue a dagger would be too ridiculous. On top of that, Dàgē would ask me about what was going on. If I had to start explaining this, then I could kiss going to Lan City goodbye. If Dàgē knew I wasn't able to form the spear yet still wanted to enter the city nevertheless, he would definitely lock me up until the day all aberrants have been annihilated. So, I could only steel my heart and forcefully pull it out.

The ice dagger remained undamaged with not even a single scratch on it. I finally let out a breath. It seemed like I would be able to use the dagger, but there was still no response from the ice spear. *Sigh, what else can I do? Although I've already made a spear to take its place, after having seen the Ice Emperor Spear, the weapons I've created practically tarnish the image of a spear!*

I looked at the spear placed to the side. Because I'd reached tier two, creating this replacement was nothing. This time, I didn't use the handle of a broomstick either but an iron railing as the base, and it was the decorative, vintage type. The entire appearance of the spear had leveled up more than once, but of course, it was still ninety-nine levels away from the Ice Emperor Spear. One mere level was nothing.

Even though I had only spent three days of effort on it, this ice spear had seventy to eighty percent of the strength of my original spear. It should be enough for the beginnings of the apocalypse... *Eh, I forgot to consider the Jiang family's luck. But I'm definitely going to enter Lan City no matter what today!*

I put away the dagger and grabbed the spear. Next, I pulled Jiang Xiaorong, who had been planted in the corner, and stuffed him inside my shirt. Then, I grabbed the hiking backpack and the silver hip flask that Jin Feng had prepared for me. *All ready. Okay, let's set off!*

I pulled the door open.

"Are we leaving now?" Xiao Sha raised his head. His eyes were bright, and he held a broom in his hand.

We are, but did you have to be so anxious as to stand in my doorway? He was fully equipped, yet he was holding a broom and sweeping the floor. He didn't even have a dustpan ready. *Where do you think you're sweeping the dust to? You gonna swallow it?*

"Are you ready? You didn't bring a gun, right?" I was a bit worried about this group of mercenaries. I had heard from Dàgē that when they were searching for me, they hadn't come across any big obstacles either. They hadn't stumbled upon any aberrants that were too powerful for them. I really worried that they didn't have enough awareness of the danger of the apocalypse. They didn't understand it enough.

This led me to reconsider if the entire Jiang family was unlucky, or if it was just me... *It hurts too much to consider.* I decided to let go of that thought. Rather than suffering misery alone, sharing the misery was much better. Since the whole family was facing life and death together, then the bad luck should be shared as well!

Xiao Sha directly flashed open his jacket like an exhibitionist. Fastened tightly around his tight T-shirt and skinny jeans were tons of leather stuff: belts, braces, suspenders, all kinds of straps, and they were all lined with daggers, knives, shurikens, and even a bunch of metal stuff I wasn't familiar with, but they all looked to be deadly.

He definitely understood it well. I really shouldn't have worried about these mercenaries. Their whole beings are humanoid weapons. Guns were just one of their weapons. Going with or without made no difference.

"Isn't that heavy?" I was a bit speechless and reminded him, "Don't let it affect your speed. The majority of the time, we'll want to avoid aberrants instead of confronting them."

Xiao Sha shook his head and said, "It's not that heavy. The guns that we had to bring for missions in the past were much heavier, plus after eating the crystals, my strength has increased immensely. This bit of weight is nothing."

That was true. Guns were much bulkier than concealed weapons, after all. The weight of one or two guns was no lighter than a full collection of knives. Besides, the Jiang Dominion was a mercenary troop. Their physique and experience are definitely way above an ordinary person's. They wouldn't make a critical judgment error like this.

"Let's go. We'll report to Dàgē first." I took a deep breath. Dàgē's expression was definitely not gonna be pretty. For these two days, he was even clingier than Shujun. He was barely like that Dàgē who

never came home. It seemed like the incident where I got kidnapped by the bird had really scared the hell out of him.

Xiao Sha hesitated as he said, "Boss is in the living room. He's been sitting there since he finished breakfast this morning..."

"... Let's go."

I forced myself to lead Xiao Sha to the living room. Yet, Dàgē wasn't the only one there. Junjun was also there. There were all sorts of food on the table too: beef jerky, cookies, drinks, chocolate, etc. The table was completely piled with food.

Although I had asked Shujun to prepare some food and drinks, in case we weren't able to find any food in the beginning, what's with this mountain of food? Am I going to enter the city to open a food stall or something?

"Dàgē, Junjun..."

"You're about to leave? It's not even noon yet." Before I even finished saying anything, Dàgē frowned and cut me off. "Eat dinner before you leave."

Wait. Shouldn't it be lunch instead? What's up with dinner?

"Dàgē, night is not a good time to confront aberrants. Once I enter the city, I have to find a safe place to camp before the sun sets. I want to avoid traveling after dark, so I can't enter the city too late."

Although aberrants weren't necessarily stronger at night, humans are diurnal beings. All in all, our vision and alertness at night can't beat that of an aberrant's. Unless one was strong enough to overcome all sorts of weaknesses, it was better to avoid moving around during the dark.

Dàgē wore an unwilling expression and agreed, "You're right."

Junjun pouted as she asked, "Can't you leave after lunch? I'm almost done cooking."

Originally, I wanted to reply with "no need," but Junjun had a face full of anticipation, plus Dàgē's face had darkened. I could only say, "Okay. I'll just pack some of this food first. Go bring the dishes out. We'll eat whatever there is. You don't need to prepare more."

Junjun immediately nodded. Her skipping was so excited that I felt that I was going to end up so full that I could only take a leisurely stroll into the city. Well, it's all right to stroll. If it could let Dàgē and Xiǎomèi feel relief, then wasting a day was worth it.

I started scooping up the pile of food on the table. The preparation may be a bit much, but what was chosen had gone through careful consideration. They were all high calorie items and conveniently small to carry, plus they were not the type to expire quickly. I packed some into the bag, not about to bring too much. After all, we were about to enter a city. Food in the first year of the apocalypse wasn't hard to find. It was just a question of whether or not we had the capability to go searching.

If a tier two was unable to find any food, then starving to death was deserved.

During lunch, the table was basically an encyclopedia of dietary supplements: the Complete Herbal Soup of Ten Ingredients, Herbal porridge, Angelica Duck, and Ginger-basil Egg. I think I even smelled the Soup of Four Ingredients. If these were eaten before the apocalypse, then it would definitely lead to an immediate overdose to the point of a nosebleed. Most importantly, what's with this Soup of Four? Am I going to experience menstrual pain in this life still?

"Èrgē, you need enough supplements before entering the city!" Junjun timidly said, "That Soup of Four is mine. Auntie made the Angelica Duck. Uncle cooked the Ginger-basil Egg."

And what about this Complete Herbal Soup of Ten and Herbal Porridge?

Junjun's head dropped. By her two sides were the doting Uncle and Auntie. *W-What else can I do? Let's just sit down and start eating then.* After all, I'd never heard of anyone dying in the apocalypse from taking in too many supplements.

This table was full of love. I could only take a bite of each dish. As I had predicted, I was so full that I had to hug my belly out the door. Even Xiao Sha, who was next to me, was not left out. His originally slim waistline was now a jutting one. His icy expression had turned even more freezing, like he was constipated.

Caressing a belly full of love, the two of us were finally able to take off. The whole Jiang Dominion lined up at the main entrance to see us off, either wearing a worried expression or a strained smile. Fortunately, there was the invincible airheaded soldier Cain, who waved with all his might with no understanding of the atmosphere.

"How did this turn out to be like we're going on some life threatening dragon-slaying quest or something..."

I wiped off a handful of sweat. I just wanted to enter the city to fight some battles and level up. I didn't really intend to challenge some demon king!

Xiao Sha said with a grim face, "Ate too much. I want to puke."

The start of this big dragon-slaying adventure doesn't seem to be that rosy, huh?

I stared at everyone, who was all concerned. Feeling the need to just hurry and escape, I got into the car and twisted my head to ask Xiao Sha, "I'll drive?"

Although I haven't been acting like an eighteen-year-old, my appearance is still that of a weak, beautiful boy. So I shouldn't be going at it alone until I'm at least twenty!

Xiao Sha had no opinion about it. He grimly folded his two arms and looked to be anxious and unhappy. However, I believed he was in a bad mood because his stomach was in a bad mood.

This car was just a domestic one and wasn't modified much. After all, once we get there, I would have to leave it by the roadside. If it was modified too well, the survivors would just hijack it sooner. When it's time to head back, we should just find a better one to drive. It would be more practical that way.

I started the engine, thought for a bit, then rolled down the window. Toward the troubled audience, I flashed an ultra-brilliant smile.

They were taken aback but soon smiled as well. They finally let go of all of their worries and unwillingness, relaxing their shoulders.

"Bring back some films for me," Cain brashly said. "The best romantic action ones, ya got that?"

I get what you mean but I'm gonna pretend that I don't!

"Bring a dumbbell back, the heavier the better." Yunqian caressed her own biceps with an unsatisfied frown.

Do you feel that building an entire base with less than ten people isn't enough of a work out?

"I want lipstick, the crimson kind." This was Lily.

That's a doable one. I decided to also bring some lip balm and other skin care products for Junjun and Auntie.

"Books!" Uncle and Auntie shouted in unison.

I nodded and then looked at Dàgē. *You got anything you want?*

He thought about it and said, "Bring a girlfriend or boyfriend back."

I immediately floored the gas pedal, speeding away with a screech.

Chapter 3: Foray into Lan City, Part One

We abandoned the car at the outskirts of the city. It was actually still a ten minute drive to Lan City from here, but along the way, we'd noticed a lot of suspicious activity, so it seemed like a bad idea to continue traveling by car. Although a car was fast, the target it created was too large and would easily attract the attention of aberrants. The enemies would be hidden while we were out in the open. It was too disadvantageous for us.

I glanced at Xiao Sha and asked, "Can you produce wind blades with sufficient destructive power yet?"

Before I got kidnapped by the bird, I had previously taught everyone in the JDT. At that time, their results were hardly anywhere near satisfactory. Although their ability had rapidly improved, they weren't able to use much of it during actual combat. Contrarily, they were more efficient at using it for housework. This was both funny and extremely embarrassing.

Xiao Sha shot me a glance and made a casual flinging motion. I could faintly sense a sudden gust of wind. A squeaking noise sounded nearby.

I walked right over and lowered my gaze to see a mouse-like thing on the ground. It was just that its tail had sharp thorns growing all over it, and the head was hairless and seemed to have a hard, outer layer. Its four claws were black and shiny, and there was even a horn protruding from its forehead. This thing was called a horned mouse. They weren't very strong but were very difficult to guard against. They'd often

charge out of the dark, tear off a piece of your flesh with its horn, and then scamper away.

This mouse was split into two halves across the middle. Its limbs were still twitching, but there was no trace of the lethal weapon which had injured it. The wound was so clean that it seemed as if it had been caused by a single slice from a sword. *So clean and precise. It seems that Xiao Sha has really made a lot of improvement.*

"Not bad. Your ability has improved a lot."

Xiao Sha replied with a faint smirk, "We encountered a few aberrants along the way, so everyone got better."

I asked a bit confusedly, "Dàgē said you guys hadn't come across any powerful aberrants."

After a brief silence, he finally answered, "Back then, anything that blocked Boss's path, no matter if it was strong or weak, he'd only say a single word, 'kill.' If we didn't get rid of whatever was blocking the way in five minutes, he would lose his patience and start firing bullets like they were free of charge. If guns were ineffective, he and Shujun would step in. The number of times that Shujun passed out was too many to count, while Boss ended up fainting two times. So we had to do everything we could, in hopes of finishing off the opponent within five minutes."

I felt my eyes stinging with tears, but I resisted with great difficulty. This was the apocalypse, so there was no safe and sure way of getting stronger. *I'm not even sure how many times I've collapsed.* However,

this was the only method to strengthen oneself. Only by forcing oneself to their limits, even to the edge of life and death, would one be able to attain new heights.

"Looks like I was right to take turns in bringing people out." I lightly remarked, "Training at home is basically useless, so getting straight into combat is the right thing to do. You should prepare yourself. If you can't keep up with my pace, I'll have you stay and wait for me on the outskirts of Lan City to avoid dragging me down."

Xiao Sha grew stern and quickly nodded. Then, he hesitantly asked, "But didn't you tell Boss that you'd only be strolling outside the city?"

I rolled my eyes at him. *If I hadn't said that, would Dàgē have let me go? We might as well just lock the door and set Junjun on me, okay!*

Xiao Sha seemed to tacitly understand. Nodding his head, he no longer spoke.

As we headed toward Lan City, I didn't stay out of sight deliberately, but I also wasn't stupidly walking in the middle of the road. I simply walked casually along the side of the road. But even that was brazen enough. From time to time, we could hear some activity coming from the buildings to either side, and several times, those sounds resembled voices. They were clearly humans and not aberrants.

As expected of a first world mega-city. Although the mortality rate was high, the amount of people who survived wasn't small either. After walking for about half an hour, I could accurately pinpoint three locations with human activity.

I suddenly thought of something and hastily asked, "Xiao Sha, you guys must have encountered some people while traveling toward Old Town, right?"

Xiao Sha nodded. "Quite a few."

As expected, the JDT members' appearances hinted at their strength. There would definitely have been a lot of people who wanted to join our troop in the hopes of gaining protection.

"Then, why weren't any new people taken in? Did you guys only run into scum?" *Is our luck really that bad? I guess I'm not the only one with bad luck within the Jiang family.*

"When we came across somebody, we didn't check whether they were bad or good, because Boss would only say a single sentence: 'Step aside or die.'"

We're left with no option but ghosts. I was speechless.

Should we take in some new people to join the Jiang Dominion on the way? In any case, it was quite delusional for the members of Jiang Dominion to build a base of operations with our current numbers. Plus, we didn't have a need for it at all. We're building such a huge territory, yet we were lacking in personnel, so much that even guarding it was a problem. *Dàgē should also be considering taking people in.*

Looking at those three spots, I hesitated for a moment but still ended up giving up. Xiao Sha and I both looked to be two youngsters around

twenty years of age. Our figures didn't look strong or robust, and we were even heading toward Lan City. And yet, those people didn't make a sound to stop us, so the chance that they weren't good people was high.

However, the probability of an error of judgment was there as well. After all, Xiao Sha and I were acting oddly. In this kind of situation, everyone was escaping out of the city, while we were doing the opposite by heading inside. It was suspicious no matter how you looked at it. It was also possible that the other party didn't dare to call out to us.

The harder I thought about it, the more my head hurt. *I should just stop thinking.* It was only day one, and I still wanted to explore the ins and outs of Lan City. Honestly, it was too bothersome to take some strangers along the way, and the other party was unlikely to be willing to enter Lan City, nor wait for me at their original spot.

Xiao Sha suddenly stumbled and grabbed the corner of my shirt to prevent his fall. I was a bit stupefied. *Stumbling isn't anything unusual, but how could Xiao Sha act so clumsily?* He spoke with a low voice, "Someone's following us."

I knitted my brows. I wasn't able to detect anyone.

Xiao Sha quietly said, "The enemy is very skilled at tailing. I'm completely unable to see his figure. If it wasn't because of my wind ability letting me occasionally sense faint breathing behind us, I might have been unable to detect him."

I pretended to help him up and quietly asked, "Mercenary?"

"Not necessarily. It could be a soldier, policeman, or even a detective."

I pondered for a while, then purposely asked with worry, "Chen Sha, are you all right? Did you sprain your leg?"

Xiao Sha's mouth twitched briefly, and he spoke with a frown, "My ankle hurts a bit."

Putting on a distressed look, I said, "You should have been more careful! Come take a break over here."

Xiao Sha awkwardly said, "Sorry."

I supported him as we limped toward the side of the road and sat down. Then, I took out water and crackers and passed them over to him.

Xiao Sha took them without batting an eyelid. Ignoring his slightly bulging waistline, he worked hard on gobbling up the water and crackers. The guy who'd just said he was so full that he felt like vomiting ate and drank one mouthful after another. His expression was filled with craving and satisfaction, looking exactly like a guy who'd gone hungry his whole lifetime. He was quite the accomplished actor.

While staring at the food in his hand, I intentionally gulped, acted like I was holding myself back from eating, and only drank a few sips of water.

"It's been getting so cold lately. I think there's something strange going on. It's only almost November, and it hasn't been this cold around this time of year in the past." I anxiously said, "I'm afraid that this winter might be colder than before. If we don't look for more food, life might get harder later."

Hearing this, Xiao Sha stopped eating. He lowered his head and looked at the crackers. A look of hunger was on his face, but he still passed the crackers over to let me put them away.

He said, "There's probably food inside Lan City. I know the location of a supermarket's warehouse. I've previously worked part-time there. That warehouse isn't eye-catching on the outside, so it might not have been discovered."

I nodded my head and sighed. "I hope so. The stuff outside is pretty much all gone, while the places that haven't been looted all seemed rather fishy. It'd be really bad if there were monsters inside."

"Yeah. We shouldn't take risks just for the sake of a few bites. Do you still remember that Chen Qianru? She died in such a miserable way."

"I know, right? Her whole person was... *sigh!*" *Why had that girl been so stupid?* I couldn't help but regret it for real. I said self-deprecatingly, "But aren't we exposing ourselves to danger by entering the city?"

"The warehouse is located just on the outskirts of the city." Xiao Sha said with a frown, "We'll move around the outskirts and avoid going too far in."

"Well, that's our only option."

After sitting at the side of the road for a little while, there was still no movement. *Is the opposite party being too cautious, or do they truly not have any ill intentions?*

Xiao Sha shot me a questioning glance. I calmly asked, "Does your leg feel a little better? If it's fine, then we should move on."

He shifted his leg, stood up, and said, "No problem. It's probably just a little sprained."

"I'm so glad you're okay!" I also stood up, then threw myself into his embrace, and softly said, "Let's role play as a gay couple. It's easier to speak closely."

Xiao Sha agreed. He hugged me without even a hint of awkwardness. Professionals were naturally skilled at adapting to the situation. Thinking back to my past life, at my side, I only had office workers who would rush out and attract monsters randomly, shrieking children, and weeping elderly women. There were so many foolish teammates that I wanted to ditch but couldn't even finish washing my hands of them. *Now that I have such a godly teammate, this is pretty much a cheat!*

"Is that person still there?" I asked softly.

Lowering his head, Xiao Sha moved closer to the side of my ear. An indifferent look was on his face, but his eyes were filled with

gentleness. *Truly a spitting image of a devoted, cool guy.* This acting skill was so excellent that I couldn't help sighing as I compared myself to him. He whispered, "Still there. The instant I sense them, I can determine their general location, but there's a chance that I'm wrong. Should we kill him?"

My godly partner is just too godly. Wanting to take someone down just from catching sight of them is quite the dilemma, too! "Try to avoid lowering the population of humans on Earth even more. If he doesn't make a move, we can ignore him for now. If he really does follow us for too long, then it won't be too late to take action later."

"If the enemy has a gun and strikes when we're off-guard, we could possibly die."

"Wasting precious ammunition to shoot dead two passersby is quite the meaningless thing to do." I coldly uttered, "Besides, it's hard to say whether a single gunshot is enough to kill me. But if he dared to strike at us, as long as he isn't able to kill me in a single hit, then he'd be the one to die!"

Xiao Sha briefly contemplated this and said with a nod, "He'd probably not kill you since you're good-looking. He'd likely kill me to take you away."

Fuck! This is actually possible. But I thought about it. Xiao Sha's waistline was only thicker than mine by an inch. He was slender and had long legs, while his facial features weren't very coarse.

"Probably not. Isn't it more useful to keep you?"

"Usef..." Xiao Sha's face distorted for a moment. Then, he skillfully resumed his indifference and "passionate boyfriend" look. He faintly said, "It's time to go. We need to find a lodging place before night falls."

"Okay." I straightened from his embrace and obediently nodded.

We spoke a lot just now to draw the person out, but he still refused to come out. He probably wasn't going to show his face for now. *Who knows how long that person would continue following us?* I suddenly had a wicked idea. *Let's head straight into the city and see if he still dares to follow us.*

We hit the road for a while. An enormous road sign with "Welcome to Lan City" was hung lopsidedly, giving the impression that it could fall off at any moment. Even a part of the lower right of the signboard had scratch marks on its surface.

I stared at the sign with my head tilted and felt slightly unhappy. Lan City was going to be my family's territory in the future! The sign was crooked and had even been scratched. *How unsightly! We have to get this sign changed in the future!*

Plus, we also have to rename it, since Lan City sounded too girly. It was totally discordant with my family's ferocious, invincible troop! *Mm, what should we name it—I'm such a fool. It has to be "Jiang Dominion!" This is my family's territory.* Even the pun is marvelous. *A hundred times more imposing than OO city or XX metropolis!*

"Shuyu." Xiao Sha called out to me, warily looking at the underbrush beside the road sign.

I mumbled "Mm." I had noticed ages ago. With such poor hiding skills, there wasn't any need for Xiao Sha to step in, since even my knees could sense where they were hiding. Compared to that guy secretly stalking us, these guys' camouflage skills basically earned them a big fat zero.

Xiao Sha glanced at me, while I was also looking at him shyly, perfectly acting out the powerless, clueless, and useless beautiful youngster. Xiao Sha's face briefly twisted. *Tsk, your acting skills are pretty good but still lacking in consistency.*

The leader was pretending to be weak, so Xiao Sha could only volunteer himself and yelled, "Who's there!"

The people over there seemed to have given up on hiding. While Xiao Sha was shouting, they had already stood up from the bushes. They were all tall and bulky men, each carrying a knife or staff in their hands. The one leading them was wearing a puffer coat and was even holding a gun. They looked like they were getting by pretty well.

They were staring straight at my backpack, with hunger on their faces. Only the man with the puffer coat was showing suspicion on his face. He asked doubtfully, "You guys actually want to go into the city? You crazy?"

At this moment, the rest of them showed realization on their faces. After taking a look at the city behind them, a look of fear clouded their faces.

Someone muttered, "No wonder something seemed off. The direction is all wrong. We always rob others while facing Lan City. But strangely this time, we can't see the city because it turns out that our backs are to it."

I see. So this bunch of people specialized in robbing civilians who were fleeing from the city. They're quite smart people. Most of the people escaping from the city would be carrying a lot of supplies. Although those citizens may be armed and would be alert to danger, compared to starving, freezing to death, or getting killed by aberrants in the city, those people would likely be less of a threat to them. If the ones doing the looting weren't killing everyone off and taking away everything, then those civilians who had just escaped from the city might just wish not to fight them over it.

The man in the puffer coat frowned and pondered for a while. Then, he said, "Whether you want to enter or leave, you need to pay the toll. You're free to go wherever you want. The toll that I'm referring to ain't paper money. You guys get that, right?"

Xiao Sha's face darkened with a deep frown. Since his outward appearance wasn't imposing enough, he actually didn't appear all that fierce. He just looked like someone with a bad temper, cold-hearted and hard to approach.

"Chen Sha, just give it to them." I timidly hid behind Xiao Sha, thinking that we should treasure all life. We're all one human race. Giving away some food didn't really matter, so let's just give them a chance. As long as they leave after taking the stuff, I can treat this as a contribution to humankind's survival. *In any case, it's not like I'm lacking in food and drink.*

"Fine." With great reluctance, Xiao Sha took out chocolates and some canned beverages from the backpack. I also took out several crackers, letting him throw them all to the opposite party.

Those people probably hadn't expected us to cooperate so readily. They were somewhat confused when receiving the food, but soon after, quickly began a tug-of-war. They only stopped when the man in the puffer coat shouted at them.

The man in the puffer coat gazed at me. I shrank back and hid behind Xiao Sha, praying that they'd leave quickly. *Please don't get seduced by this face of mine!* Since ancient times, a pretty, red face was often the flood of disaster. A blue face was all the more of a severe flood, and even resulted in freezing. *You better run away if you wanna live!*

However, he only shot me a glance and shifted his focus to Xiao Sha.

"And take off the jacket you're wearing."

Xiao Sha's face turned even uglier, and even I couldn't help sighing. It's not that we were reluctant about a single jacket, but Xiao Sha would turn into a lethal human weapon once he took off the jacket. *With a whole body covered in knives, can we still part amiably?*

"Take it off already!"

Xiao Sha turned his head and glanced over. I shrugged. "Take it off if you want. It's not so often that someone else tells you to do that instead of me. You gonna do it?"

"... I feel that lately, your words have been particularly infuriating."

After recovering my memory, I became completely unrestrained. *To put it in a nutshell, I've got the Jiang family. I ain't afraid of nobody!*

"Still chatting!?" The man in the puffer coat roared furiously.

Xiao Sha glanced indifferently at him. As the man wished, with one pull, off came his jacket, and just as expected, everyone's eyes widened while the man in the puffer coat stared blankly. Soon after, his facial expression quickly changed, and he swiftly lifted his gun up. But he obviously couldn't beat Xiao Sha's speed. At this moment, Xiao Sha was already flinging his arm, throwing out a knife, which pierced into the back of the man's hand with peerless accuracy. While the man in the puffer coat shrieked in agony, Xiao Sha leaped ahead and easily picked up the gun. When he stood back up, the muzzle of the gun was already aimed straight at the enemy's head.

The man in the puffer coat immediately snapped his mouth shut. Although the blood on his hand was spurting out like tap water, a sight that made you wince just from looking at it, that mouth of his was rather tight lipped.

But, what happened to not using guns? I glared at Xiao Sha with discontent. Seemingly having realized it, he turned and quickly tossed the gun over. I briefly inspected it after grabbing it. This was a modified gun, and its craftsmanship was just so-so. *Trying to kill me with this? You might as well just aim straight at my head and fire three shots... Er, people must never be overconfident. Let's go with two shots.*

Xiao Sha pulled out his daggers and faced the other ten people with them, looking every bit like he was going to "beat up all ten" by himself. On the other hand, the entire bunch stared blankly at him. Then, they looked at the gun in my hand, and an expression of joy came across their face, as if the gun in my hand was just a stick for tending fires. *Tsk tsk. My appearance is just too deceptive—I wonder if I should make full use of this...*

Dàgē would arrogantly proclaim himself as king, and even Junjun could act bossy and domineering to avoid being taken lightly and bullied. As for me, I would just lay low like a wolf in sheep's clothing. *Just like how the MORC did it, so no one knows the true depth of their waters!*

So that when the time came to take action, I would suddenly transform from a weak and beautiful youth into an unrivaled little Superman—just this little bit was enough to mislead the enemy into thinking that the other members of Jiang Dominion might also be hiding their true powers. The more I thought about it, the more I felt that it was a pretty good idea...

I abruptly turned and looked behind us, but there was only the main street and the city. There was no movement whatsoever, though I could somewhat make out human shapes in the windows. They were paying close attention to us. *Are they the family members of these robbers, or just unrelated people?*

But right now, none of that was my main focus. Even if the enemy behind us started a fight, they still wouldn't be able to divert my attention.

Far away, there was something there, and it was approaching closer.

My heart thumped with alarm. This wasn't a panic that arose without rhyme or reason. As your tier rose, so did your sensitivity to danger. A tier two would just feel a hunch, but even with just that, I was still able to detect danger. *Just how terrifying is this thing, to be able to make me, a tier two, feel a sense of dread?*

"Xiao Sha!" I decided not to risk it. I turned and shouted, "Get inside the next house, quick! Something's coming!"

Chapter 3: Foray into Lan City, Part Two

Xiao Sha sent his opponent's kitchen knife flying with a strike from his dagger. At the same time, he delivered a single kick, knocking the other person a few steps back. The opponent clutched his stomach as he keeled over, groaning in pain. Xiao Sha turned to look at me, then ran straight back without a word or question. He glanced around before saying, "That one."

I looked over. There was a row of townhouses, and all of them looked exactly the same. The external wall was made of stone and appeared fairly high-grade. The door was even sturdier, just like the gates of a city. Good choice!

After nodding with approval, the two of us quickly started to run toward the building, with Xiao Sha easily taking the lead. As expected of a user of the wind ability. He turned to look back and suddenly paused in his steps, seemingly wanting to run back to the rear.

I rolled my eyes at him. "Keep running! Think of a method to get inside first."

Xiao Sha continued to charge toward the house again, jumping up and down to look for an entrance. I gained a moment of reprieve and so turned to look back. Three or four of the looters were collapsed on the ground, while the man in the puffer coat was still standing, his left hand tightly clutching his right. Needless to say, this method of applying pressure to staunch the bleeding was rather effective, as his hand was no longer spurting blood.

He was observing our movements with suspicion clouding his face. But this doubt didn't last for long. Faint tremors ran through the ground, causing the both of us to simultaneously look in the same direction. Billowing smoke and dust emerged from the horizon, immediately followed by a distinct sound—the sound of footsteps. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the sound of hoofbeats?

The clip-clop sounds did not seem as strong and powerful as a horse's. They were more likely to be from creatures of a smaller size. But this also indicated how large in number they must be, to be able to cause such strong vibrations.

"Shuyu! Hurry up and get inside!"

When I looked back, Xiao Sha had already opened the door. Such astonishingly high efficiency. My dear friend, were you by any chance a thief before joining the JDT?

I remembered Dàgē saying that Xiao Sha had been picked up. However, he wasn't an orphan, so I wasn't sure what exactly "picked up" meant in this case. Back then, Dàgē hadn't returned home for so long, and in the midst of a cold war, both Dìdì and Mèimei had refused to respond to his words. Afterwards, I had forgotten to ask further.

As the sound of powerful hoofbeats approached closer and closer with increasing intensity, I quickly ran inside the building. Hearing the sounds of footsteps from behind, I looked back and saw the man in the puffer coat running over, while also shouting to the others, "Let's go! Hurry up and follow them—hide inside the houses."

Well, he's pretty smart. But what a pity, who said you guys could come in?

The man in the puffer coat shot Xiao Sha a glance. He then went around him cautiously and rushed toward the neighboring home.

Ok, I guess he's very smart. The moment he noticed something was amiss, he pushed all other matters aside to go straight into hiding first. He had even chosen the same kind of building as us, simply jumping next door. Moreover, under tight time constraints, we'd most likely not confront each other again. What a perfect example of killing two birds with one stone.

Upon entering the house, I dragged Xiao Sha up to the third floor, which was right below the rooftop. If things didn't work out, we could try jumping off the building to flee for our lives. After looking around inside, we ended up going straight into the wardrobe. In any case, the wardrobe was plenty large enough, with enough space to even fit two men lying side by side on the floor.

"Shuyu, what exactly are those?" Xiao Sha asked in confusion.

I raised a finger to my lips. "Listen."

The clip-clop sounds were getting clearer and clearer. Although they weren't as overpowering as those of a horse stampede, the lighter pitter-patter was more agitating, an extremely unsettling sound. It can't be a swarm of cockroaches, right?

I frowned. I would be okay with that. For now, they wouldn't attack any prey over a certain size. It was just a pity that a cockroach's footsteps didn't exactly sound like this.

The hoofbeats were almost within reach, as the tremors also reached their peak. This situation continued for about ten seconds, before the sounds gradually began to fade. I stepped out of the closet, feeling fairly certain about what was out there. After all, there was another clue aside from the footsteps: the cries.

I pushed the wardrobe door open and walked over to the window to look outside. I was right!

It was a horned mouse tide. They were very high in number, and looked pretty much like a black tidal wave that was advancing to engulf Lan City.

At this moment, Xiao Sha also walked over to the window, only to be shocked at the sight of the swarm outside. Fortunately, he had used a wind blade to kill off the horned mouse from before. If he had gotten stained by its blood, we might not have been able to escape so easily.

But in the end, a horned mouse was really "as timid as a mouse." Intimidating them would be enough to send them fleeing in eight or nine cases out of ten. Although gathering in such a large group might give them more courage, I had a tier two ice ability. I could simply make some impressive looking but useless sounds and light effects to scare away the mice without much of a problem.

Contrarily, the cockroaches that I had just thought about were much more terrifying. But nothing compared to an ant tide or a bee tide... Actually, best not to think about those any further. In any case, those are matters for the future. At the current stage, accumulating en masse to prevail was the most common practice. Such swarms were not yet likely to attack humans, since these species weren't aggressive originally.

But I hadn't expected that horned mice would gather to form groups so soon. Moreover, they had such overwhelming numbers. No wonder they were heading toward the major city; they had most likely gnawed through everything in the vicinity of the town already.

"Shuyu, are we still entering the city?" Xiao Sha asked worriedly.

"Why, are you scared?" Such a reaction was only natural. Seeing as a group of horned mice this large could simply crush people to death, it was obvious that nobody would want to try to face them head-on.

Xiao Sha's expression turned cold, and he said, "I still can't find the guy on our tail, and now this massive group of horned mice is entering the city. Going to Lan City at this time would not be a good choice."

The person tailing us was indeed quite troublesome, and made me feel a bit on edge. I had the sudden urge to start something to force him out of hiding, but this would be too unwise. Since we didn't have any knowledge of the other person's strength, we were already at a disadvantage.

"I can guarantee you that there are definitely other things inside of Lan City that are more terrifying than the colony of mice just now."

Xiao Sha was stunned for a moment. But he nodded and did not have any further objections.

Just thinking about the aberrants that would emerge in the later stages of the apocalypse was enough for me to imagine how horrifying the situation in a first class city would be. Even though Asia eventually had the Ice Emperor and the Thunder God, first class cities remained in a state of unexplored wilderness.

The Thunder God had started in Zhongguan City. That was a second class city, but that was already enough to keep him busy. Meanwhile, the Ice Emperor had put his life on the line to return home. If they had occupied a first class city from the very beginning, would they have been able to secure a large stronghold for humanity?

But then again, maybe I wasn't being cautious enough. Perhaps the reason they had been able to live long enough to become the twelve top elites was because they hadn't gone to first class cities to court death.

I took a deep breath. Courting death and becoming stronger, why is there such a small difference between them?

"Don't be too afraid of that guy tailing us. He most likely developed a perception and concealment-related ability. We need to be more alert. If we get the chance..." At this time, I looked around at the room behind me. No matter how powerful this person was, he couldn't

possibly hide inside the room. Only then did I whisper, "Immediately kill him on sight!"

Xiao Sha nodded, and his eyes flashed fiercely.

As soon as I exited the house, I sensed somebody's gaze. When I raised my head, I saw that the man in the puffer coat was currently standing on the balcony next door. He was staring at us with an expression mixed with both surprise and suspicion. He's got quite the nerve. Xiao Sha had single-handedly beaten the shit out of ten people, yet this guy still dared to stand within our line of sight. Is this courageousness? Stupidity? Or is he just too fond of Xiao Sha's jacket?

The opposite party was solely focused on Xiao Sha, an evident expression of reverence on his face. There was no place for a guy like me in his eyes. Fine then, I'll just obediently stay as the 'weak and beautiful youth' beside the strong one. And now I'm even moonlighting as the little boyfriend. The longer I live, the younger I get.

"You still wanna go?" Xiao Sha coldly spoke.

The expression of the man in the puffer coat immediately changed, and he strongly shook his head. After some hesitation, he then shouted, "Why are you going into the city? Everyone is leaving from there. No one is going in! Besides, didn't you see those mice?"

Xiao Sha held his tongue and simply threw me a sidelong glance.

I leaned on "my boyfriend" with a frightened expression, and said with trembling lips, "Just tell him to 'fuck off' coolly with the air of a pro,

and then let's hurry to the city before it gets dark. Unless, of course, you feel like sleeping in the open right in front of the aberrants' noses?"

"..." Xiao Sha indifferently glanced at the man in the puffer coat, and dropped the words, "None of your business," before swaggering off with his "little boyfriend."

After walking a good distance, Xiao Sha asked with uncertainty, "Was that what you meant by 'air of a pro?'"

I thought it over. He was still a bit lacking in grandeur, coolness, and arrogance. But taking into consideration the fact that Xiao Sha was, in fact, the cold type of pro, being taciturn and lacking in communication skills might actually be fitting. Besides, having Dàgē alone was enough to fill the role of a domineering and mighty Boss.

"Not bad," I praised.

Xiao Sha released a big sigh of relief. Which part of him looks like a highly skilled pro? He's clearly more like a student who's just submitted his exam paper and is terrified of getting a zero...

I was a bit speechless. The moment I got my memory back, the almighty Dàgē became an invincible airhead, and the cool guy transformed into a young school-boy. It's no wonder that people say memories are the most beautiful pictures, while losing one's memory elevates everyone even more to the cool and proud.

We slowed down as we walked further. Tall buildings were gradually emerging in our surroundings. The road was packed full of vehicles,

and the ground was black and red. It was clear that we had officially entered Lan City's turf. I no longer dared to blatantly go on. Advancing stealthily was the most logical action.

Along the way, I continued to question Xiao Sha. Sometimes he couldn't detect the stalker at all, while at other times, he could sense the enemy's aura again. The most recent time that he felt it was just a few minutes ago.

"He actually has the cheek to follow us into the city?" I frowned. Just what is this guy trying to do? He's just sneaking around without doing anything. Are Xiao Sha and I actually conspicuous enough to the point where someone would be that drawn to us? We each only have one backpack and don't have that many supplies. Unless they fell for our lies at the beginning about that fabricated warehouse store?

No. The terror of Lan City definitely far exceeds the allure of a warehouse or market, especially when we haven't yet entered the phase of food shortages.

Entering a dangerous zone like Lan City while having a person stealthily following us, was really an unwise action...

Just as my killing intent emerged, Xiao Sha suddenly rushed out, fully releasing his murderous aura. I blankly watched as his throwing knives flew out even faster than he shot out. However, the knives pierced into the shadows by the side of the road, which appeared empty.

Although I didn't know what was going on, I had to at least follow my partner's lead now that he had already made a move. I swiftly twisted my arm back to draw the ice spear on my back and hurriedly followed.

Xiao Sha charged forward and swung his daggers toward the shadows.

I knitted my brows. Xiao Sha hadn't used wind blades from start to finish. As expected, when placed in a critical situation, he had instantly forgotten about his ability. Although I wanted to remind him of this, I suddenly remembered that Xiao Sha's opponent was probably the concealed person. In that case, it's better to just let Xiao Sha finish off that kind of dangerous guy as quickly as possible.

But I still couldn't see anything within the shadows...

Clang!

I was stunned. The dagger in Xiao Sha's hand was stopped in midair at a deadlock. Although faint, a silhouette slowly came into view. That's a hand!

The hand, which was as dark as the shadows, was also holding onto a dagger. Only now could I gradually start to see the enemy. He was a murky figure, which made it extremely difficult to detect him in the shadows. Without looking closely, he was undetectable, which was how he had followed us all this way.

The two daggers rebounded off each other, but Xiao Sha clearly had more remaining energy than the enemy did. He had probably been the one to break off first, ending the stalemate before charging in again.

The clashing sounds of daggers continuously reverberated, practically song-like.

Tilting my head, I assessed the enemy. He was quite strong, and even knew how to use the surrounding shadows to conceal himself. There were quite a few times when I was suddenly unable to sense any trace of him, and could only pinpoint his location afterwards. His movements were not bad at all. Matched together with his weird shadow-like body, he was truly the ideal candidate for tailing.

However, our family's Xiao Sha was much stronger. No wonder Dàgē had called Xiao Sha a hidden elite. Even when facing up against this shadow-like person, he could still pretty much follow the opponent's footsteps, and even stay one step ahead by predicting their movements. Several attacks had probably landed on the enemy, but I was uncertain because he was just too dark.

That ability to transform one's whole body into a shadow was just too strange. If the enemy's ability was this strong, and could be maintained for a long time, he would definitely not be at a disadvantage in a fight. Although there were some ability types more suited for battle and some less suited for battle, the power of an ability also reflected the strength of one's body. However, this guy's strength and speed really didn't seem to be greater than Xiao Sha's.

Unless... I frowned and loudly shouted, "Xiao Sha, use your ability!"

There was no sluggishness in Xiao Sha's movements at all as energy waves started to fluctuate around his body. Gusts of wind condensed to form numerous wind blades one after another, hovering in midair.

Wind was colorless and formless, which actually made it quite hard to detect. Had I not ascended to tier two, I probably wouldn't have been able to see it so clearly. Rather than "see," it was more accurate to say that I could "sense" the energy waves.

If Xiao Sha was truly able to integrate wind blades into his fights, he would surely number among the JDT's finest battle experts.

After shooting out the wind blades to block off all escape routes, Xiao Sha lunged forward with his daggers. The opponent stiffened, seemingly at a complete loss. Looks like this strike will undoubtedly be successful...

"Tánggē!"¹ The black figure screamed with a shrill voice.

Xiao Sha froze in shock. His hand twisted a little, causing the wind blades to scatter outwards and turn the roadside cars into honeycombs.

I shouted sternly, "He's bluffing!"

Xiao Sha turned cold. As he raised his daggers with caution, he once again gathered up wind blades. His speed at gathering those is quite impressive.

The black figure hurriedly jumped out of the shadows, but only a humanoid silhouette could be seen. A "clang" was heard as something dropped to the ground, probably the dagger, which was also wreathed in darkness. Such an odd ability.

"Tánggē, I-I'm Chenyang! Shangguan Chenyang!"

Footnotes

1 Tánggē: A term of address used for older male cousins from the paternal side of the family.

Chapter 4: Shangguan Family, Part One

Shangguan?

I looked at Xiao Sha. He still had his guard raised, but from his expression, it seemed that he really did recognize the name "Shangguan Chenyang." Since the word "Shangguan" was mentioned, the other party probably knew Xiao Sha.

Xiao Sha shouted, "Show your face!"

"I can't! I don't know how I became like this. I, I can't get back to how I originally looked. That's why I got driven out. They think I'm a monster!" The shadow's shoulders sagged as he muttered, "I haven't turned into a monster. It's not like I eat people. I just, just..."

He didn't seem to know "just" what he was, though I knew very well. This change was similar to that of the brainwight that we had encountered before. It was a physical evolution, and a significant one at that. He didn't even have a human form any more. Looking pretty much like an aberrant, it would be hard for him to be accepted by humans.

Xiao Sha hesitated a bit. Then, he turned to look at me.

I grabbed Xiao Sha's arm and timidly hid behind him as I asked, "Chensha, is this person really someone you know?"

Xiao Sha nodded. "Yes, the voice sounds like him."

"It's really me!" Shangguan Chenyang hurriedly said, "Tánggē, don't you recognize your younger brother?"

"Your cousin?" I frowned, trying hard to play the role of a little boyfriend. I pushed him in discontent and complained, "Why haven't I heard you mention him before? You never tell me anything!"

Xiao Sha indifferently said, "I have more than twenty younger cousins. I'm not very close with any of them, so there is nothing to talk about."

"..." That's a really big family. Props to you that you can still recognize this voice that belongs to some unfamiliar cousin.

Shangguan Chenyang retorted, "At least you're more familiar with me than the others! We worked at the same company before, and I helped cover up for you when you skipped work several times. Have you completely forgotten me?"

There was a sour look on Xiao Sha's face. He had no desire to reply, whether or not he remembered.

Skipped work? I glanced at Xiao Sha. *This guy was an office worker? Which boss was as broad-minded as the sea, to have actually recruited such a cold and taciturn person?*

"Why are you following me?" Xiao Sha frowned.

"I, I was just wandering around and saw you by chance, so I tailed you."

Xiao Sha coldly snorted. "Sneaking around without showing your face? Are you trying to rob me?"

The shadow was silent for so long that Xiao Sha even started to grow wary. Finally, the shadow replied, "I didn't dare to show myself. Everyone has been afraid of me, and I got driven out from the family."

This time, it was Xiao Sha's turn to fall silent. Who knew if he believed these words or not?

Shangguan Chenyang bitterly laughed and said, "Tánggē, when I'm in this form, I could pretty much rob anyone successfully, so why would I specifically try to rob you? It's not like we've never fought before. When have I ever beaten you?"

Xiao Sha's face eased a little, and he asked, "You got driven out despite having this kind of ability?" He stilled for a moment and seemed to cast a sidelong glance at me. He then said, "At least, Shangguan Chenhao should consider you to be useful."

"The current Shangguan family is no longer the same. Several elders have died or otherwise turned into aberrants. You also know that most of the elders were supporting your big brother. Their deaths, along with the world falling to this kind of state, have allowed the military-oriented Chenhong to grow dominant. Your brother is barely able to keep standing alongside him. And there's Chenyu, who isn't simple either..."

I couldn't understand what I was hearing. *Is this the legendary power struggle among rich and powerful families?*

Xiao Sha coldly snorted in disdain. "The Shangguan family has yet to disperse?"

Shangguan Chenyang wryly chuckled and said, "You really do hate the family, don't you? Thanks to your big brother's quick response, not only have they not dispersed, they've occupied a military base. As soon as he realized the situation, he contacted the base and even dispatched people to bring back the outlying family members. Who knows how he reacted so quickly? But upon arriving at the base, Chenhong immediately used his military background to seize half of the power."

"Is that base in Lan City?" I cut in and asked. However, the shadow ignored me, and I couldn't read the facial expression of the silhouette. He simply looked like a very dark and opaque shadow.

Xiao Sha asked, "Where is the base?"

Shangguan Chenyang finally said, "In the south, not far from Lan City. Are you going to find your big brother? In that case, I won't follow you..."

Okay, even if I can't see his expression, I can tell that this guy doesn't want to answer me at all. Should I be thankful that my appearance really isn't the least bit menacing? Even though I'm clearly carrying an ice spear behind my back?! Although it looks like an iron railing rolled up in plastic wrap, it should at least be more impressive than a broomstick, right? Sigh... I really miss the Ice Emperor's spear!

Xiao Sha coldly said, "I'm not interested in the Shangguan family."

Shangguan Chenyang immediately asked, "Then, can I follow you?"

Follow "you"? He has completely disregarded my existence. In any case, I've at least got a super attractive face!

Xiao Sha frowned. He wanted to look at me yet didn't dare to look.

I immediately turned into a little troublemaker boyfriend. In a dissatisfied manner, I pinched Xiao Sha hard and then dragged him away. I even shouted to the shadow, "If you dare to come closer to eavesdrop, I'll order Xiao Sha to beat you up!"

There was a hint of helplessness on Xiao Sha's cold face. But as soon as we walked far enough from that shadow, his expression instantly changed to an obedient one, ready to listen to orders.

In fact, I was slightly hesitant. Shangguan Chenyang's shadow ability was quite terrifying. Xiao Sha didn't seem intent on keeping him either. But I decided that, no matter what, we had to bring him in first before further discussion.

Based on Shangguan Chenyang's words, it sounded like their military base was not far from Lan City, and they had quite a few people, many of whom were soldiers. The moment they ran out of food, they would definitely go out in search for supplies. At that time, they could possibly run into the Jiang Dominion. Thus, it was necessary to find out the exact situation their base was in. Shangguan Chenyang could be the key.

"Xiao Sha, is your relationship with your big brother bad?"

Xiao Sha's face sank.

I said, slightly awkwardly, "Eh, it's not that I want to hear about your personal matters. But if they're not far from here, we might inadvertently encounter—"

Xiao Sha interrupted, "My father had three wives. He's the eldest son of the first wife. I'm from the third wife's household."

...Big families are really chaotic. It's no wonder there are more than twenty younger cousins. Turns out it's not each person having multiple kids, but that there were many giving birth!

"I originally had three 'older brothers.'" Xiao Sha sneered, "But there were two idiots who wanted to compete for power against Shangguan Chenhao. In the end, one of them died while the other was admitted to an asylum. So, I'm only left with one."

This big brother is really dangerous! My family's big brother is still the best. Even though our family's deposit book, property deed, and land deed are all in my hands, Dàgē wouldn't ever think of killing his dìdi!

I suddenly thought of the time when Xiao Sha had once gotten entranced by a brainwight. Back then, he had said something about his brother, and wasn't it something along the lines of, "Dàgē, stop hitting me, I'll listen to you"?

It didn't sound like an estranged or hostile relationship. *Ohhhhh, my curiosity is quickly breaking through the horizon!*

Xiao Sha pledged, "I left the Shangguan family ages ago, and have no interest in the base to the south. Even if there ends up being conflict between the Jiang Dominion and the Shangguan family, or even Shangguan Chenhao, I would still be Boss's man!"

He glanced at me and corrected himself, "What I mean is, Boss's subordinate."

Eh, it's not like I misunderstood.

"We can't bring that shadow along into Lan City. Tell him to wait here for five days. If he's still there after five days, we'll bring him back. By all means, don't mention anything about Old Town or any other matter regarding Jiang Dominion."

Xiao Sha nodded, and went back to talk with Shangguan Chenyang.

"You're taking this boy into the city?" Shangguan Chenyang said in surprise, "Tánggē, you wouldn't do such a stupid thing, right? It's fine to spoil this kind of plaything normally, but Lan City is not currently a place to be fooling around in."

...Can I take back what I said and not bring him home?

"Shut up!" Xiao Sha sternly said, "You're not allowed to speak about him that way!"

It wasn't until Xiao Sha glanced at me that I finally realized what I had to do. I angrily shouted, "Who are you calling a plaything? Xiao Sha, I'm warning you! If you let him come with us, I'll ignore you from now on!"

After that, I immediately turned my head snootily and left. I only sighed in relief after hearing Shangguan Chenyang snort in disdain. Pretending to be a brainless pretty boy wasn't easy. If I didn't pay attention, I could let my IQ slip in. I hadn't even bothered to retort to that provocation.

Before I'd walked for too long, the sounds of footsteps came from behind. As Xiao Sha caught up with me, he said, "He agreed to wait there."

I made a sound of "mm" and said, "It's late. Let's look for a place to stay first. This place should be within Lan City's boundaries, right?"

"Yes, but only on the outskirts. Lan City is very large. It's divided into more than ten districts. This area is closer to the mountain, so it isn't as prosperous as the other areas."

No wonder I couldn't sense any danger. There was no way a grand metropolis could be so safe. It seemed like it was due to there being fewer people here.

"This district had caused the previous generation of the Shangguan family to suffer a huge financial loss. No one bought out their developed district, and it became a 'dead zone.'" Xiao Sha said curtly, "At that time, Shangguan Chenhao was the one that recovered the

financial situation, and then rose to power as a result and became the head."

I'm more curious about why you aren't willing to call him your big brother even once. You just keep saying, "Shangguan Chenhao." I only shout "Jiang Shutian" when I get really enraged, so Dàgē is most afraid of hearing me call his name.

"If the JDT wants to fight against the Shangguan family, we don't have enough people." Xiao Sha seriously said, "Nowhere near enough."

"Yeah, but we're not in a rush to gather so many people." I said with a faint smile, "A base which houses numerous powerhouses would never be short of manpower."

Xiao Sha hesitated, but still couldn't resist asking, "Just how strong can humans become?"

I thought about it and summarized by saying, "Toppling mountains and overturning seas."

Xiao Sha's eyes stretched wide.

I truthfully said, "Of course, only a small number of people can reach that level. The majority of people are not so powerful."

"I'll never be in the majority!"

I smiled, casually reached out my hand, and said, "Hand them over."

Xiao Sha stilled, looking at me in confusion.

"All of your knives." I thought about it and spared him, saying, "Except for that dagger on your waist."

Xiao Sha stared blankly before asking, "All of them?"

"Why are you hesitating?" I impatiently said.

Thus, Xiao Sha began taking out the knives. He first took off his coat, which fell with a clang on the ground. It was basically like a metal coat. It was followed by the straps below his torso and on his thigh, and a small knife hidden in his boots. Four square pieces of metal with extremely sharp edges came out from the buckle of his belt, a tiny blade similar to a hair clip was pulled out behind his ear, and a fingernail-sized blade was spit out from under his tongue. Finally, his hand reached into the crotch of his pants and pulled out a thick needle.

"...Actually, just keep that thing in your pants."

I had absolutely no desire to take the needle that was being offered to me. After I ordered Xiao Sha to put the needle back in the crotch of his pants, I gathered the rest of the knives and tied them to my body. If I had not eaten quite a few crystals, I might not have had the strength to carry these things. *Xiao Sha, even if you were popping crystals like candy, did you really need to turn yourself into a walking knife drawer?*

"From now on, you have to figure out how to use your abilities in actual combat. You have to train until you can use them like actual throwing knives."

Xiao Sha hummed in agreement. Afterwards, we found a house to stay in. There was only a small group of cockroaches in it, the kind that was covered in scales. However, they didn't actually take the initiative to attack. Upon seeing us, they first vibrated their wings in attempt to intimidate us. Then, they scampered away after I sent over a breath of cold air.

"If you run into insect-type aberrants, scaring them away takes precedence. At the current phase, they wouldn't attack prey of a much larger size. If you really want to kill them, don't get their blood on you; otherwise, the consequences will be very troublesome."

Xiao Sha nodded his head in understanding. We picked the third floor of the house that was neither too high nor too low as our temporary place to stay. The room with a window was set up as a small living room, which happened to be the perfect area for eating. We were starving after walking for so long, so as soon as the food was brought out, we both devoured the food without a word.

Lan City had looked so close. It was just at the foot of Old Town, but it had turned out to be lot further than I'd expected. However, this was also a good thing, as being too close was actually worrying.

Having eaten and drunk to our fill, I glanced outside to see that it was completely dark. From time to time, there were different cries and howling, a lot of which sounded very familiar. In my previous life, I

had spent countless nights drifting in and out of sleep in constant terror of these sounds.

One day had already passed. Taking into account the travel time, we didn't have much time to continue exploring. Before we left, I had promised Dàgē to return home within a week's time. At that time, the look on his face had been extremely unsightly, and he had only been willing to give me three days. After a lot of wheeling and dealing, I had finally gotten a five-day limit.

I asked, "How much longer do we need to walk before reaching a more prosperous area?"

Xiao Sha contemplated for a moment, then said, "An hour at the most. There are not many prosperous places in Lan City. The place where we came from was close to the mountains. In the daytime, there would be quite a few people here. Most of them would have been travelers, as there's a pathway here. However it was late at night when the apocalypse occurred, so there may not have been many people here."

"Are you very familiar with Lan City?"

"I used to live here for a while," Xiao Sha admitted. "The Shangguan residence is here."

Things were a lot easier with someone local around. I thought about it and asked, "Do you know where the nearest shopping mall is?"

Xiao Sha looked at me strangely and said, "I do know, but the shopping mall is big, so it might have already been looted."

"No worries. The things I want are definitely still there."

Chapter 4: Shangguan Family, Part Two

Xiao Sha thought about it and said, "There may be mini department stores nearby, but I'm not sure about it. Based on my memory, the nearest shopping mall is still a slight distance away, and we may have to walk for a day."

As expected from a man—he didn't even know where the closest shopping mall was. If it was a woman, she could probably circle all the various big and small shops nearby on a map, and would even be able to tell me which was best for buying clothes, or which was best for shoes. As for the things that I wanted, she would have screamed out "I'll take you there" with shining eyes!

Sadly, I only had a man with me. Beggars couldn't be choosers, so we probably had to walk around a bit more.

"We still have two days to spare, so let's head in that direction. On the way back, we can grab a vehicle on the outskirts of Lan City to save time."

Xiao Sha reminded me, "It's a small shopping center. Although there wouldn't be as many people there as in large shopping centers, it would be no small number either."

"The apocalypse occurred in the middle of the night, and it was also the same day that the black fog spread. There wouldn't have been crowds in the shopping centers. That area would usually have been noisy too, so there probably weren't many residents living around there either."

The realization struck Xiao Sha, and he nodded.

"Let's hurry to bed and set out early tomorrow." If we hurried, we could possibly make it home within five days. Then Dàgē wouldn't get mad at us. "Do you want to keep watch the first half or the second half of the night?"

"I'm not sleepy, so the first half of the night."

With this response, I lay down comfortably on the bed. Xiao Sha was sitting on a floral-patterned single sofa by the window. It was even pink in color, making him look funny from every angle.

Xiao Sha frowned, and said, "Shuyu, has the temperature inside dropped?"

"It's the energy I'm releasing. It has a warning effect."

When I saw Xiao Sha nod, I finally relaxed and fell asleep. However, I was jolted awake by a fluctuation of energy. Before I even reacted, I realized...

"If you want to learn how to keep your guard up by releasing energy, I can teach you during the daytime as we travel. Don't play around now, or else I'll have to give up on sleeping."

It was silent for a while before an awkward "sorry" could be heard.

Come to think of it, teaching Xiao Sha this skill was the right thing to do. The wind ability could be better than the ice ability for keeping

watch. Although an average person wouldn't notice the slight temperature drop, this mercenary, Xiao Sha, had still detected it. After all, it was too unlikely for the temperature inside the house to be lower than the outside. But if the house had a slight breeze, it would be far less noticeable.

But no matter how easy or not it was to be noticed, I could at least guard against people who were approaching in my sleep. So everyone in the Jiang Dominion should learn this skill. Nevertheless, it was a very difficult skill to master. Back then, I had learned how to sleep while maintaining energy under the torturous training of the Ice Emperor. *Now, what method should I use to torture others?*

"Shuyu, it's gotten a bit cold." There was a slight tremble in Xiao Sha's voice.

"The fault doesn't lie with the temperature being low. This level of temperature is not enough to make you feel very cold."

Eating all those crystals wasn't for nothing. We were entering winter of the first year of the apocalypse. The average person would have already started to wear a coat, but the members of JDT wouldn't even have to put on extra layers yet. Xiao Sha and I were wearing coats just because we didn't want other people to notice anything strange. I also had to hide the ice patterns, as they were too eye-catching.

"It's my power that makes you feel uncomfortable. You can cope with it by releasing your energy."

"But didn't you say you wouldn't be able to sleep?"

I was momentarily speechless. I had only been thinking of training others, but had forgotten that the one that needed the most training was me. On the way here, Xiao Sha had detected that shadow, Shangguan Chenyang, while I hadn't. If the Ice Emperor knew of this matter, he would definitely suppress his reluctance to severely reprimand me, giving me a hard training session while scolding me.

"I was wrong. If I can't sleep because of this small thing, I might as well not sleep."

I simply got up and carefully guided Xiao Sha on how to use energy.

"Not like that. You're using too much energy. You won't be able maintain it until morning. You're not preparing an attack, so there's no need to condense so much energy. Only a little bit is necessary, and it's best if it's even lighter than the breeze. That way, the enemy won't be able to detect any difference. But even I haven't mastered this part yet, which was why you could easily detect the temperature change."

Xiao Sha shook his head and said, "I noticed because I was sitting still, and was close to you. I simply thought that some window hadn't been closed."

I placed the pillow behind my waist and said comfortably, "Be sure to practice until you can sleep while maintaining the output of energy. The farther you can project it, the better. That way, you can instantly detect when someone approaches you."

Xiao Sha nodded and immediately began to work on it, trying hard to reduce the release of energy. Though quite unstable, this was the typical case for beginners. I had only been slightly better in the beginning, since I'd had experience from my past life. On the other hand, Xiao Sha was a complete novice starting from the very beginning.

"You're not sleeping?" Xiao Sha glanced at me curiously.

"I will. But my task is to identify your energy so that it doesn't disturb me. That way, I can continue to sleep."

Xiao Sha's eyes shone, and he said, "I'll also practice this in the second half of the night."

I smiled. Still gonna practice, huh? Being able to hold out for the first half of the night and not faint will already be worth applauding. Damn, I suddenly don't feel like sleeping. I want to wait and see him faint. It's a shame that I haven't found a Polaroid. Otherwise, I would definitely snap a photo and tease him over it in the future.

Wait a minute! The person who'll be going out with me next time should be Cain. I've decided! A Polaroid will now be considered the second most important item in our search of goods. It doesn't matter if I can't take a photo of Xiao Sha. But I must get a photo of Cain fainting!

As for the most important item, *cough*, without a doubt, it's the "King's garment" of my family's Dàgē.

As I let my imagination run wild, I found myself truly unable to fall asleep. If Xiao Sha practiced his ability until he fainted, it'd be bad if there was no one to take watch.

During my training back then, the Ice Emperor would instantly kick me with his little foot when I was about to fall asleep. During that time, was he ever able to sleep?

Taking a deep breath, I then said to Xiao Sha, "I'm not sleeping tonight. I'll watch you practice your ability and sleep tomorrow night. It'll be the same in the future. You'll practice for a day and not practice for the next, until you've learned to steadily use the ability to keep your guard up."

Xiao Sha glanced over. "Won't it affect our operations during the day? I can practice after we go back. Safety is important."

"It's nothing." I shook my head. *We can't play it safe like that.* When I was being trained up by the Ice Emperor, I hadn't slept for who knew how many days. In comparison, being able to practice safely, even going to sleep when tired felt too easy and comfortable without any imminent danger.

The only good way of training was under the pressure of kicking the bucket if you didn't get your power down pat. As the saying went, man's potential always appeared in times of stress!

Hearing my reply, Xiao Sha no longer opposed the idea. He only said, "I will master it as soon as possible."

I rolled my eyes at him. *You haven't practiced yet, so you have no idea. Once you faint from practicing, try saying "I will master it as soon as possible" again.*

However, Xiao Sha's current energy seemed stuck around tier one. It wasn't quite stable. Hopefully, he would be able to raise his tier while we were in the city.

"There's too much energy. It's blowing like a hurricane!"

I threw the pillow over. Xiao Sha didn't even dare to dodge it and got hit straight in the face. He casually put the pillow away while trying his utmost to suppress the escaping energy. *Such a good kid. Which alley was he picked up from, Dàgē? Hurry up and tell me. I wanna pick one up too!*

I stood up, nonchalantly pulled out a sheet of toilet paper, and put it on top of his head. Once my hand let go, it instantly floated up and circled through the room before getting blown to the side of the door. It stuck fast against the door, unable to fall to the ground.

"There are a few stages that you should train. The first stage is getting that toilet paper to hover in the air with a constant and stable orbit."

Xiao Sha frowned, but he didn't say anything.

"The second stage is being able to settle that toilet paper on top of your head. At most, it can only have a slight tremble. The third stage is being able to stop it wherever you want it to. And I'm talking about stopping it in mid-air. You got that?"

"Understood."

"Your difficulty level is higher than mine. Wind is formless, so it's much harder to control than ice." Patting his shoulder, I said, "No rush. These three stages of training aren't so easy to master. If you really could succeed in mastering it all, you would have to at least be tier three already."

"Tier three?" Xiao Sha asked in bafflement. Just then, it came to me that I had never explained to everyone about the tiers in detail. I'd have to find the time to explain it after getting home—

I abruptly turned to the window. Xiao Sha started as well, before quickly jumping up from the sofa. In an instant, I stretched out my hand to start condensing a thick layer of ice. Right as the ice wall took shape, there was a flash of light, and the glass window suddenly shattered completely. The deafening explosion was so huge that the whole house shook violently.

Xiao Sha was about to push me away from the shards of broken glass, his hands already outstretched. However, when he realized that the glass shards were all stuck in the ice wall, he retracted his hands.

The sounds of explosion continued, but they were all small ones, nothing compared to the explosion just now. I walked to the window and looked out. Fires were blazing everywhere. Approximately three or four streets away, raging flames were releasing black smoke into the air. Even from here, it was possible to detect the heat, not to mention the heavy smell of smoke.

"The gas station exploded." Xiao Sha looked over and said in discontent, "Such a waste. What did those aberrants blow up the gas station for?"

I cautioned him, "Listen carefully."

Xiao Sha pricked up his ears. "Human voices?"

I nodded. Although it was far away and obscured by explosions, we could still vaguely hear human voices. In a city filled with aberrants, sounds that could travel this far had to be screams. It didn't sound like a small number of people.

"Let's go and take a look." I looked at Xiao Sha and carefully stated, "But that doesn't necessarily mean we'll save anyone. If necessary, we'll have to just watch with our arms folded to avoid getting ourselves into trouble."

Xiao Sha nodded, looking completely heartless. *It almost sounds like I'm berating him. Anyways, professionals know how to weigh the pros and cons. There is no need to explain such things again; these mercenaries don't need to be reminded.*

Clutching my ice spear, I put on the jacket packed with knives, and we jumped straight down from the balcony. This little bit of height wasn't much of a problem to us. The only difference was that I landed noiselessly, while Xiao Sha still made a sound.

He gazed at me with a mixture of admiration and envy.

"Don't be jealous of me. You have the wind ability, so your mastery in mobility will only surpass mine in the future. Let's go. If we don't hurry, we might not even manage to catch a glimpse of the commotion."

I sped up but didn't form ice blades for gliding. For one, Xiao Sha wouldn't be able to keep up with me. Second, as long as it wasn't necessary to use my full strength, it was best to hide it. Although I hated the MORC's very existence, their style of operations was worth learning.

We had only run two streets over, but we could already feel the rise in temperature. The flames were burning more and more intensely. Without firefighters to put out the fire, this blaze would at minimum burn down the entire street. I felt a sharp pang in my heart, as this would be my future home.

When we were still one street away, I stretched out my hand to stop Xiao Sha from getting any closer. Instead, I pointed at a building nearby and climbed up, even turning midway to check on how Xiao Sha was doing. Although he wasn't able to use his ability for assistance, and his climbing speed wasn't very fast, there was no sign of him stumbling. He continued to heft himself up step by step, his movements extremely smooth and agile.

Having eaten a lot of crystals, our strengths would also increase. Just two fingertips would be enough to lift one's body weight. Even without the help of an ability, climbing up a building was merely child's play.

After climbing to something like the sixth floor, I emerged on the balcony. Xiao Sha hopped up after me, close on my heels. He looked toward the gas station and pointed to a road not too far away, remarking, "They're over there. I see eleven people, with something chasing after them. They're not moving that quickly."

I was, however, looking in another direction. Patting his shoulder, I said, "Look over there."

In the other direction, a large group of people was quietly hurrying across the road. The people weren't fast, and they weren't moving in any kind of formation. Most likely, these were civilians, not some specialized organization. There were at least fifty or sixty of them, but it was hard to see clearly from this distance.

Xiao Sha balked and asked in confusion, "Don't tell me these people intentionally blew up the gas station to draw away the aberrants' attention so the others would have a better chance of getting away? Are they soldiers?"

They could very well be. Right now, none of the civilians were capable of pulling this off, and at most had only improved to the stage of being able to flee without screaming or crying. But these people didn't quite look like soldiers, as they were wearing all sorts of random stuff. *Or maybe they grabbed whatever was at hand because of the cold weather?*

They were fleeing with aberrants chasing at their heels. There were fewer aberrants than I'd expected, only twenty at most. Although the raging blaze would attract the aberrants' attention, they wouldn't

approach the scene of a fire. *Blowing up the gas station is actually a pretty good idea. If it weren't because a first class city had too many aberrants, their chances of escaping unscathed would have been very high.*

The closer they approached us, the farther away they were from the other group, their directions exact opposites. The more attention those people drew, the safer the other group became; however, the price of being the bait was their own lives.

Not three minutes had passed since I'd started observing when someone got knocked down by a pouncing aberrant. He let out a pitiful wail before he got shredded and devoured by the aberrants that caught up.

Even though it was a bit cruel, his death allowed his companions to take a breather. *Just who is the leader of this group?* Even with their companion screaming so horribly, it wasn't enough for any of them to look back, or to wildly take a shot. Perhaps Xiao Sha had guessed right, and they could be soldiers.

"Shuyu, should we hide?" Xiao Sha asked. "They're too close to us and there's more and more aberrants following them now. We might get discovered."

He paused, and then changed his line of questioning, "Or do you want to save them? We might lose, though."

That was true. Even if I could beat the current number of aberrants, there were plenty hidden away that were observing the scene. Fighting

would create a commotion that would also attract even more aberrants, leading to a never-ending battle.

While I was still hesitating, those ten people dashed toward the crossroads and scattered in all directions at the same time. Turning left or right was nothing surprising, but someone even pulled a manhole open and jumped down it, while another one was climbing up a house alone. Those skills weren't bad at all, belonging to someone wearing what looked to be protective goggles, but it seemed rather high-tech, so I wasn't really sure what it was.

"Well done!" Xiao Sha praised, "Indeed, splitting up is the only way to survive."

Indeed. Although it was unavoidable that someone would get caught and killed, it was way better than everyone getting wiped out together. Splitting up to flee could possibly result in someone fortunate enough to survive and live another day.

The only person who had scrambled up a house was throwing stuff down to draw the aberrants' attention, obviously to give the others the opportunity to escape. Seeing this scene, I called out to Xiao Sha.

"Come, time to save someone!"

This fellow is brave, clever, and willing to sacrifice oneself for others—exactly the kind of person I want to recruit into the JDT!

Chapter 5: An Unexpected Encounter, Part One

"We'll split up for the rescue. Gather them here, but only bring the quiet, obedient ones. Abandon them if there's the slightest resistance."

Xiao Sha nodded.

"The key point is not to push yourself too hard. If there's something amiss, prioritize your own safety first. If you really can't get away, then call out my name, and I'll figure something out. *I mean it.*"

I couldn't resist giving out the order thrice. I was worried that Xiao Sha wouldn't want to endanger me, so much so that he wouldn't even be willing to ask for help and would end up sacrificing himself. If the sacrifice was worth it, then so be it. But I really didn't want him to die in vain when I could have saved him, simply because of some pointless misgivings.

Xiao Sha readily agreed, without any sign of struggle or hesitation. He didn't look like he would insist on not calling for help and taking on the burden alone.

Running out of time, I quickly instructed, "You'll save the ones who were running to the left and right, lead them here, and don't go anywhere else. I'll save the others."

Only two people had run straight ahead, and the aberrants chasing after them were far greater in number. However, a portion of the aberrants got distracted because the person climbing the house was unceasingly throwing stuff to lure away the aberrants, so that group of

people hadn't been captured yet. However, they were unlikely to last much longer.

The house-climbing guy seemed to be in the most danger. The aberrants who had chosen to climb up after him had quite the skills, but that guy was surprisingly strong. He could actually climb up one building after another, crawling then jumping up and over. He didn't look particularly robust, and yet he had so much strength. He probably possessed a strengthened body related ability, or had already eaten evolution crystals... *Someone is really gonna die if I keep on letting my thoughts wander!*

Xiao Sha had already jumped down, making a beeline for the two closest people. Seeing this, I followed him in jumping down, deciding to first save the two people who were running straight ahead. Their position was only about five meters away from death. *If we don't go now, then we won't need to go later.*

Forming ice blades on the soles of my feet, I slid along and up the sides of the buildings. Gliding over railings, smoothly grabbing and hopping up window sills, I quickly moved past the group of people down below. I then jumped down into a small, dead-end alley. Both sides of the alley had moderately high windows, and they even had sturdy metal bars across them.

Crafting an ice dagger in my left hand, I kicked off the wall with one foot, jumped up and chopped at the window's metal bars, kicking it away with the other foot, breaking the window in half. At the same time, the sound of chaotic, panicked footsteps were closing in. I put

the dagger away while rushing out of the alley and waved my hand toward the two people.

They were frightened out of their wits, and one of them had almost fallen flat. Seeing this, the aberrant behind them quickly put strength into his feet to pounce forward. I whipped out my arm and flung a knife at him, striking the aberrant's knee, and he collapsed onto the ground. The two people didn't look back for even a moment and hadn't noticed what was happening. The one who hadn't fallen down had continued running forward, and the other one who had fallen was quickly getting back up to flee.

This was quite the excellent character. No matter how cruel it seemed to abandon those who had fallen, with the aberrants behind them almost within reach, a single moment of hesitation could easily lead to the fate of getting eaten. Therefore, stopping was not that much different from wasting another life. You might as well make use of the time from someone else falling down and getting eaten, to speed up and continue fleeing. It could be that taking this chance could save your life.

"Over here!" I urged. "Come this way!"

The two people hurriedly rushed over but seeing that it was a dead-end, their faces darkened.

I quickly pointed at a window and said, "The window on the right! Hurry up!"

While they were busy straining themselves to climb up to the window, I turned around just in time to see an aberrant's head turning to look in the alley. The moment he saw me, an expression wild with joy could be seen on his crooked and twisted, ugly face. He was most likely a human-turned-aberrant, being able to show such an expression.

Gliding with ice blades underfoot, I instantly rushed straight toward him. He even looked at me with his eyes wide open, a dumbfounded expression on his face. A flying knife stabbed into the space between his eyebrows and mashed up his head. At the same time, my hand hadn't forgotten to excavate his chest for his evolution crystal. In no more than three seconds, the crystal was dropped into the silver wine flask.

Shooting out more flying ice knives to impede the other aberrants, I suddenly felt it was quite a pity. Fortunately, they were tierless ones, so leaving them behind wasn't much of a loss, and in any case, what the city lacked the least was aberrants.

Turning around and walking back into the alley, I leaped up to the window. The two people were already gone from sight, but they probably hadn't run far.

"Come out. I'll take you guys somewhere safe. My..." I paused, feeling that it could help lower their wariness, so conveniently changed the "companion" identity to suit. "My boyfriend is really powerful, so let's meet up with him."

The two poked their heads out from the kitchen. Both of them were youngsters. At first, they were staring at me with their eyes wide open

in a strange look. But upon seeing my face, their expressions immediately showed a sense of realization, and they even nodded heavily! *Can you not use such a thorough set of expressions to convey your inner voices? Even I could read your thoughts!*

"Hurry!" *If we don't hurry up, perhaps they might even say "with this face of yours, even I would be okay with it."*

I walked to the side of the main entrance and pulled it open a small crack to look outside. There was no movement out there. This was quite strange, as Lan City was way too peaceful right now. This kind of quiet did nothing to ease one's heart but rather felt like the calm before a storm, which was more dreadful than these small-scale fights. A few little waves wouldn't be of much significance, but a large storm could capsize this boat of mine.

Turning my head back, the two looked reluctant and hesitated to move forward, so I spoke with irritation, "You don't even have any supplies with you. Don't tell me you're afraid that I'd commit sexual assault on you? If you drag this out any longer, it will take even longer for me to save your comrades. They might have already lost their lives while you're wasting time!"

Hearing this, both of their expressions instantly changed. Glancing at each other, they quickly followed my lead as one. Luckily we didn't encounter any aberrants, so I was able to continue with my act.

Returning to the original rendezvous point, a man and a woman were already waiting there, but there was no sign of Xiao Sha's whereabouts. *He probably went to save the ones on the other side.*

Returning to the original rendezvous point, a man and a woman were already waiting there, but there was no sign of Xiao Sha's whereabouts. *He probably went to save the ones on the other side.*

Seeing how they were so excited to the point of almost hugging each other, I didn't explain anything, only saying, "Wait right here." If they wished to leave, then they could feel free to do so. Although the Jiang Dominion was lacking people, we would never cry or beg others to join us.

In order for me to act out a "frail and delicate pretty boy" instead of jumping out from the window, I purposely chose to walk to the staircase before jumping. Pulling myself up to the side of the window, I glanced around at the buildings and saw that the house-climbing person wasn't that far from here and had already distanced himself from his previous location. Right now, the aberrants had long since reached where he had been and were only a balcony's hop away from him.

He was fleeing while grabbing pots from the balconies and hurling them toward the aberrants and even managed to hit quite a few of them. Although they hadn't instantly died from the hit, their skulls had been cracked open, causing a drastic decrease in their movements. *This precise head-shot and strength are pretty good.*

I immediately decided to save him right away. *As for the one in the sewer, I'll rescue him last.* Earlier, none of the aberrants had jumped down to chase after him because they had been lured away by everyone else. Although hiding oneself in a sewer didn't guarantee

one's safety, there was nowhere safe within the large city. We could only hope for good luck.

It was just that for me to save the house-climbing guy, I might not be able to maintain the image of a "frail pretty boy." *But now's not the time to worry so much!* Just from the fact that he'd been smashing things to attract the aberrants' attention, I instantly wanted him!

After pondering for a while, I charged to the side of a building that the person was already on the verge of jumping over to, then climbed all the way up. When I reached the appropriate floor, I kicked the window into pieces to enter, then rushed toward the side of the room with the balcony.

The timing was just right, as he was throwing a flower pot in the other direction right then. He practically crashed into my chest with his back. The force was so great that it knocked me back several steps, directly ramming me against the balcony's railing. *Fortunately, I don't have breasts in this lifetime, or else my cup size might have shrunk by two with this crash!*

He... No, this is actually a she!

I was stupefied as I gazed at her. Although she was wearing goggles, and her figure was covered by a jacket, this appearance was definitely not a man's.

At this moment, she turned around and seemed like she wanted to punch me but stopped halfway. I took this opportunity to pull her into

the building, while turning and shooting out two ice knives, striking down the two pouncing aberrants.

The woman looked at me, but I couldn't see her face clearly because of the goggles—*Wait a second, could these be... night vision goggles?* The more I looked, the more I thought so. Goggles shouldn't be this big, and they also didn't seem light-weight.

Noticing her alert stance, I quickly shouted, "Let's go! We've already rescued your friends except the one in the sewer. Let's go find him, quickly."

The woman was stunned. Then, the position changed into her pulling me while running. She shouted, "Over here!"

She ran to the first floor while dragging me along. Instead of looking for a manhole to jump into, she ran toward a nearby building. Knocking on the door of the security room, she softly said, "Zhang Jing, it's me."

A head appeared behind a desk. He didn't seem very surprised. The moment he saw her, he quickly stood up and came out of the security room, then quietly stood beside her with an expression of happiness after surviving a calamity.

"Where to next?" The woman asked while turning her head.

With just a single sentence of, "Follow me," I led them toward the promised gathering place—the sixth floor of a building. It was just that I couldn't leap onto roofs and vault over walls. I had to properly walk

down the road, in order for me to maintain my image of a "delicate pretty boy."

Returning to the sixth floor, Xiao Sha was already inside. He was sitting on an armchair and had even opened up a drink. But he was looking rather anxious for some reason. The others were standing behind a long sofa, not daring to even take a seat, looking like they were preparing to flee at any moment.

I hurriedly called out, "Chen Sha, I'm back!" and Xiao Sha finally responded.

Xiao Sha instantly stood up. Glancing over with that anxious expression, he tried to cover it up with his cool and detached nature, but his stride was somewhat hurried as he walked over. Standing in front of me, he sized me up from top to bottom. Only when he didn't detect any injury, did he finally return to his indifferent attitude. *Xiao Sha's acting skills are truly top notch! When I reach home, I'll acknowledge him as my master and seek his knowledge. As long as I can master this skill, I'll no longer need to worry about failing to act out the "frail and delicate pretty boy!"*

Taking the initiative, I threw myself at him for a hug, and said, "Don't worry, I'm completely fine." I continued to whisper in his ear, pretending to say words of love, but I was actually giving out orders. "Go find out who's the mastermind behind their operation."

"Okay." After softly agreeing, Xiao Sha pushed me away. "That's enough. Don't make a fuss."

I complied and obediently stood behind Xiao Sha to watch the play.

His sharp pair of eyes swept a glance over everyone as he coldly uttered, "Who ordered you to blow up the gas station?"

I counted a total of nine people present.

"It was me."

The woman that I brought back unexpectedly moved forward. She still had night vision goggles on, causing her facial features to be obscured. But she didn't look very old. *The leader of this group of people is actually a young woman?*

This was rather impressive. Except for women like Jin Feng with extraordinary backgrounds, it wasn't easy for a woman at the current stage to be able to command a group of grown men.

She walked in front of Xiao Sha, taking off her night vision goggles without the slightest hint of hesitation, and revealed the face of a young woman.

Staring at her, my eyes rounded in astonishment and my breath stilled. I was at a loss for words.

She is...

The woman happily smiled as she spoke, "Thank you for saving us. I thought most of us were gonna die, but who knew there would be a knight in shining armor! We're truly grateful to our savior. However,

this great benefactor, could you please finish what you started and help us find the others?"

Upon hearing this, Xiao Sha knitted his brows and said, "You're the one in charge of leading them? What's your name?"

As if worrying that Xiao Sha wouldn't believe her, the woman nodded heavily and said, "My name is—"

"Guan Weijun," I inadvertently blurted out the answer.

This face in front of me couldn't be more familiar. I could recognize it even if it were turned to dust. Having worn it for thirty-five years in my previous life, how was it possible not to know it?

She looked at me, suspicion clouding her face as she asked, "You know me? But that's impossible. If I had seen you before, then I'd never be able to forget you."

Of course, no one could forget this face of mine. If I had seen "Jiang Shuyu" in my past life, I'd never fail to remember such a good-looking boy.

Even though I had already met "Ice Emperor Jiang Shutian," and encountered the Thunder God's biological younger sister Jin Feng, I still totally didn't expect for "Guan Weijun" to actually exist. And the main question going through my mind was, *just who is this woman?*

If she is the actual Guan Weijun, then who am I?

Could it be like a situation similar to the Ice Emperor and Dàgē existing at the same time? *Don't tell me that this woman is actually me?*

"Shuyu?" Xiao Sha frowned and asked, "You know her?"

I shook my head. It wasn't exactly an answer, but more of trying to shake away the confusion filling my head.

Guan Weijun threw me a glance, seemingly not wishing to inquire further. She continued asking Xiao Sha, "Can you follow us—"

No! Who cares who Guan Weijun is... There's an even more important question!

I anxiously asked, "Mom... I mean your mother, is she still alive?"

My heart was pounding. In the past life, Mom was gone very early, but I no longer remembered the precise time. Back then, we couldn't even manage to flee, and each day dragged by like a year. With such a poor perception of time, if it wasn't for the clear difference in seasons, perhaps I wouldn't even have been able to determine the year.

Guan Weijun stared at me in shock and said, "You really do know me? My mom is with the other group."

"Xia Zhengu is leading the other group?" I coldly smiled. "Well, this is quite rare. He was always the one in a hurry to court death. Then again, it was his only strong point. He was actually willing to leave with the others this time?"

Guan Weijun frowned and asked in confusion, "What are you talking about? I don't understand what you're trying to say. You're quite the strange guy. I don't have time to talk to you. Regardless of whether you guys will come or not, we have to meet up with them. They're just old people, young women, and children, and my mom is also among them, so it'd be really bad if they encounter a monster."

I remained silent for a while, but Mom was indeed more important. I couldn't save her in the past life, so was it possible for me to make up for that in this lifetime?

I turned my head, staring at Xiao Sha. I pleaded, "Chen Sha, since they're elderly, weak women, and children, we should also go take a look."

Xiao Sha frowned, seemingly displeased as he said, "You're always soft-hearted." He turned toward the nine people and said, "Hurry up already, before I start regretting this!"

Seeing that Xiao Sha had agreed, the nine were exhilarated. Not wanting to waste any more time, Guan Weijun quickly took the lead. Looking at this situation, she might really turn out to be the leader.

Watching the back of the woman standing at the forefront, my heart was in a great mess.

What the fuck is going on with this situation! Is she really me?

But I can't remember anything about blowing up a gas station, and she doesn't seem to know Xia Zhengu. But how is this possible? Or perhaps she thinks I'm too dubious, so she pretended not to know him?

"Shuyu, are you okay?" Xiao Sha softly asked, "What's the matter?"

It was difficult to talk in a whisper, so I simply told him, "You just need to properly put on an act. I want to observe things first. If there's no problem, then we'll bring them back to Old Town."

"Bring all of them?" Stunned, Xiao Sha said, "There are only nine people here, while the other group has at least fifty people."

I nodded. *If we're taking them, then we'd have to take all of them. All nine people here are at the prime of their life.* At a single glance, you could easily tell that the other group was definitely their family members, and that was why they were willing to blow up the gas station to assist with their escape. If we were to take them in, then we had to take each and every one of them. It would not be possible to only take the nine of them.

Xiao Sha seemed to come to an understanding on his own and asked nothing further.

Contrarily, his trust only caused me to feel depressed. What "observing?" It was nothing but an excuse. *No matter what, bringing back Guan Weijun and Mom is a must. And yet I can't only take the two of them. Two women would definitely not agree to follow an*

unknown group, so I could only bring along everyone else. But what if these guys are really dangerous?

Whether or not the whole operation was truly planned by "Guan Weijun," none of it felt like a good thing. If it was truly her, I didn't remember being able to direct a bunch of people in this kind of operation during the first half year of the apocalypse. *Even Xia Zhenggu didn't have this kind of power to rally up supporters!*

If this operation wasn't planned by the "Guan Weijun" in front of me, then who else was it?

This won't do. I can't just thoughtlessly bring these people home. That would be too risky.

Added together, their number could reach the sixties, which was multiple times more than the number of members of the Jiang Dominion. If they really did have any ill intentions, they could possibly harm the members of the Jiang Dominion. *I'll never let that happen!*

In the past life, I was Guan Weijun. But right now, I am Jiang Shuyu!

After running for a bit, we had already reached the group. Their speed was truly too slow, several supporting the elderly and holding the young. Some of them were even injured. If Guan Weijun hadn't led people to blow up the gas station, to lure or scare away the aberrants, they might not have been able to escape this city.

This also shows how terrifying this woman is. She could actually lead this group of people to escape to the border of the city.

From afar, I could see a familiar silhouette. I couldn't resist walking faster. She seemed to have noticed me too, as her excited expression was plainly visible. Separating herself from the group, she hurriedly ran toward me. A few people noticed her action and looked over. They became excited and immediately followed in rushing over. They were evidently the relatives of those nine people.

As she got closer, I could see her face clearly—it was exactly the same as my memory's. I couldn't stop the tears from falling.

"Xiao Jun, Xiao Jun!"

Mom... Mom! I miss you, I miss you so much!

But Mom slipped past me, tightly hugging someone else. A familiar mother and a familiar daughter, yet the person that was within the mother's embrace wasn't me.

Looking at this scene, I felt somewhat befuddled and actually became unsure of who I really was. *Could it be that I'm really just "Jiang Shuyu," while "Guan Weijun" was nothing but a dream?*

A figure rushed toward me. Feeling irritated, I wanted to knock them down and freeze the person into an ice block, but I stopped my hand just in time when I heard his familiar voice. Letting the person press my face into his chest, I grabbed his collar to wipe away my tears. We were surrounded by people hugging their lovers, relatives, and so on, so we weren't being very conspicuous.

Luckily, Xiao Sha's response was fast. Otherwise, with me alone staring blankly in place and my face stained with tears, it would be really hard to explain.

"Shuyu, what's wrong?" Xiao Sha inquired, his voice worried.

I breathed in deeply, then briskly explained, "The ordinary woman that I appeared as in my dream, was that Guan Weijun. So I got a bit confused. Sorry, this won't happen again."

Xiao Sha was taciturn for a long time. He finally said, "That is considered a normal woman?"

Er, how would I know that this "Guan Weijun" would undergo some kind of deviation? In the past life, I was just an ordinary office worker. At most, I had only led everyone to flee when my boyfriend was heavily injured. I've absolutely never led something like a suicide squad to go blow up a gas station!

"Cough cough!"

Turning my head to glance over, Guan Weijun was pulling Mom's hand, and the two were looking at me and Xiao Sha. Mom's face even carried a trace of embarrassment. Clearly, she was not used to looking at two gay lovers.

"The two of you have such a good relationship!" Guan Weijun praised, "No wonder, since your little boyfriend is so good-looking, paired with you, this great hero. Truly, a talented man and a beautiful man, a match made in heaven!"

Stop sucking up to people using my face...

Xiao Sha coldly spoke, "Quit bullshitting. Just what are you trying to say?"

Blinking her eyes, Guan Weijun gently spoke, "Well, the thing is, this little woman has a teeny-tiny, small request. Mister lord savior, could you please escort these few weak and delicate ladies out of Lan City?"

Footnotes

The April Fools version of this chapter can be found [here](#).

Chapter 5: An Unexpected Encounter, Part Two

All the others were staring at her, their expressions so twisted that I didn't even have the heart to look at them. I reckoned that among these sixty people, young and old, men and women, any of them were more fitting of the title "weak and delicate lady" than her.

Xiao Sha spoke with a hardened look, "More than half of you are men."

"In the presence of a great hero such as you, each and every one of us is merely a woman!"

"..."

Hey hey, those thirty men or so behind you almost burst into tears

Watching this familiar face in front of me laughing so brightly, I felt deeply disturbed. *Had I really looked like this in the past?*

No, no, absolutely not. At the initial stage of the apocalypse, although Xia Zhengu hadn't started getting into casual relationships with other women, sticking to flirting at most, I still couldn't laugh at all. Back then, I only remembered being terrified and panic-stricken regularly. Laughing was practically impossible, since I had to control the urge to cry almost all the time.

Now, Guan Weijun was here, and even Mom was here, but there was no sign of Xia Zhengu. I couldn't figure out what was going on with this Guan Weijun. And the opposite side had a total of sixty people, far exceeding the amount of members of the Jiang Dominion. This was too dangerous, but Mom was among them... I tightened my fists.

"Shuyu, come over here." Xiao Sha dragged me away. I obediently followed him to the side, and this "obedience" swiftly applied to someone else instead.

As if consulting his superior on what he was supposed to do next, Xiao Sha asked, "You're really interested in bringing them back just like that?"

I frowned and shook my head. "I want to look into their background first. Do you think there's something wrong with that Guan Weijun?"

"That woman is rather fishy," Xiao Sha agreed. "She's an ordinary woman at first glance, but her bearing and the thin calluses on her hands show that she has undergone training. But I don't know what kind of training she has done. Her profession probably doesn't rely on her fighting skills though. She doesn't have our kind of vigilance where we're constantly alert for people lurking in the corners. She's just an amateur."

Hearing what was said, I felt that it was far from good. *This Guan Weijun had even received some training! What had I ever trained in during the past life? I'd probably only practiced my typing speed!*

Xiao Sha walked a step closer, as if he were saying words of endearment, and quietly reminded me, "Shuyu, they're watching us. You need to decide quickly."

Knitting my eyebrows, I said, "We'll follow the original plan to go to the shopping mall. They live in Lan City and even have women, so

they'll surely be clearer than you about its location. Let that Guan Weijun take the lead, and the others can help us carry the stuff."

"They have too many people, so they won't be able to move together."

I thought about it and felt the same way. Sixty people painted too big of a target, even if the nearby aberrants were oddly few in number. Coordinating a smooth operation would be difficult with so many people. Otherwise, there was no need for Guan Weijun to go and blow up a gas station.

"Let the elderly, children, and wounded ones hide in a nearby safe place. The others will come with us." Contrarily, I wasn't worried about not being able to find shelter. Since that Guan Weijun was able to lead a group of people into fleeing to this place, finding a safe haven wouldn't difficult for her.

Xiao Sha asked full of confusion, "Is there something you need from a shopping mall?"

"Yes, there's LV, Chanel, BURBERRY, and other things."

"... Seriously?"

"Of course." I pondered for a bit, and said, "Oh right, we still need sewing machines and needlework related stuff. With everything needed available in the shopping center, if we don't go there, then where else are we supposed to go?"

Originally, I was thinking that we wouldn't be able to carry much with just two people and four hands, but now that it turned into sixty people, even clearing out an entire floor was possible!

Despite his whole face and heart a storm of confusion, Xiao Sha still complied. He walked up to the group of people and asked, "Where can we find a shopping mall?"

Guan Weijun curiously asked, "Shopping mall? What for?"

"Supplies," Xiao Sha answered briefly.

"You should look for them somewhere else after leaving the city."
Guan Weijun said with disapproval, "Lan City is just too dangerous. We should escape from here ASAP."

I shook my head and said, "Other kinds of supplies are a different matter, but there isn't much food left outside. It's already been looted."

Guan Weijun was stumped. "There's nothing left?"

"Small quantities can be found, but if you want to fill your belly for a long time, then I'm afraid that it's not possible."

I intentionally looked at the group of people behind her. Worry and anxiety filled my eyes, my concern genuine, as the amount of food that they would consume was truly not small in number. Even though the Jiang territory had a large amount of supplies, we shouldn't be sitting around at home, eating away our resources. It seemed that,

apart from organizing manpower to search for supplies in the city, we ought to start farming as soon as possible.

Even though most of the plants that I was looking for hadn't fully undergone evolution yet, plants at the current stage were still not strong enough, so they could be planted and would be edible as long as we were careful not to let the slightly stronger plants continue to grow, along with harvesting them all before the arrival of the black fog.

Guan Weijun frowned deeply and spoke with slight unwillingness, "Fine then. Let's make a trip to the supermarket."

"Ordinary supermarkets are easily ransacked, while shopping malls have underground floors for the most part. I think that a large majority of people wouldn't dare go down there."

Stunned in realization, Guan Weijun muttered, "That kinda makes sense. Hey guys, do any of you know where the closest shopping mall is?"

She actually turned her head around to inquire from the others. *A woman not even knowing where the nearest shopping mall is, are you sure this is okay? What happened to your annual celebratory shopping frenzy?*

When the other women heard the words "shopping mall," they became unusually excited and bantered back and forth, chatting among themselves.

"Nearby? How about Huanzhou Department Store?"

"Huanzhou is already outdated. We've gotta go to Dizhi. That's the latest shopping mall for upper-class women!" Another woman passionately said, "In the past, I only shopped at the gourmet food street at the lowest floors. I didn't dare to stroll around the upper level's exclusive stores."

"But Dizhi is farther than Huanzhou! Two streets away."

"I remember that Dizhi has a very big supermarket!"

Xiao Sha promptly decided, "Then, Dizhi it is! The elders, children, and injured will stay. The rest will follow."

As he finished speaking, he shot me a glance. I gave a slight nod, but at the same time, caught sight of Guan Weijun curiously looking at us. I hastily shifted my expression, to appear docile and wary of strangers while hiding myself behind Xiao Sha. I was starting to feel frustrated at myself for easily breaking character. Fortunately, my appearance was good enough to pose as a delicate and pretty boy, or else my guise would have long since been exposed.

"Can we leave behind some youngsters?" Guan Weijun calmly requested, "I'm just worried that these elders, weak women, and children might not be able to cope with emergency situations."

Upon hearing this, Xiao Sha glanced over everyone, chose five people among those that had blown up the gas station, and spoke in a commanding manner, "You guys will remain here."

The five were stunned. They actually turned toward Guan Weijun to seek her opinion. They agreed to stay behind only after she nodded... *Among women surviving the apocalypse, was the "me" in my past life the only one who was such a terrible failure?*

After thinking for a while, I was still worried about leaving Mom behind. So I simply took out a pile of short knives, daggers, darts, and such from the jacket, then tossed all of them to the five people. Although I still had the gun that I had picked up, it would be hard to predict what would happen from shooting a gun in the middle of Lan City. Before getting a clear understanding of their capability, it would be best not to hand it over to them for now, so as to not let them overreach.

"You can use these."

Everyone stared at me with their faces saying, "What the hell." I pointed at Xiao Sha with an innocent look. "I'm only helping him carry them. They were so heavy!"

A look of realization dawned upon their faces. "No wonder you were carrying such a long rail but weren't even using it. It wasn't actually yours."

This... I just didn't have the chance to use it. Can't you see that the style of this rail doesn't exactly match the other weapons made of excellent quality?

Guan Weijun picked up those weapons for a closer look, and actually smilingly said, "My god, are you actually filming a movie? This isn't

some plaything that you could randomly find. They're all the real deal. Are you some kind of hit-man or something?"

"Xiao Jun! What nonsense are you saying! He must be a martial art expert!" Panicking, Mom turned to look at Xiao Sha as she explained, "I'm so sorry. My daughter has no filter and is always babbling whatever comes to her mind. Please don't take offense."

Mom's brilliant skill in lying through her teeth hadn't changed. *What kind of great martial art expert would carry a whole bunch of murderous weapons while running about all over the place? What "martial art?"*

Guan Weijun was still brightly smiling as she said, "Our great benefactor wouldn't mind the words of a nobody like me. You're just being paranoid, Mom! "

Xiao Sha only glanced at her indifferently, not inclined to say anything, thoroughly acting out the role of a cool expert.

Seeing that Xiao Sha really didn't show any sign of caring, Mom let out a sigh of relief and wearily spoke to her daughter, "Xiao Jun, at times like these, how are you still so merry like this? You grew up so carefree, but I really have no idea where this personality came from."

She really is thoughtless. I inwardly nodded in agreement. *It's already the end of the world, yet she's still so happy. If she isn't putting on an act, then she's just a silly and naive person!*

Just what kind of person is this Guan Weijun? I was still unable to figure it out. She didn't appear to be a simple fool. She could even command a full operation, yet she wasn't someone with deep and profound thoughts. *Actually, she's probably just an overly-optimistic person.*

However, I still had my doubts. *Can she really be a good leader with such traits?*

Xia Zhengu had also had a passionate and excitable temperament. Among a group of fugitives surrounded by a spiritless atmosphere, he appeared unusually eye-catching. Even though he often had rotten ideas, among a crowd of people who didn't even have the guts to speak their minds, his action of repeatedly saying phrases like "Believe me, I'm definitely right," forcefully and with conviction always easily lured others into following him.

I looked at Guan Weijun, a hint of killing intent rising within me. If this fellow was Xia Zhengu... *No, it can't be. Xia Zhengu didn't have this kind of personality. They're different. I don't even feel the slightest familiarity from her.*

After this, Guan Weijun arranged everything, while Xiao Sha only suggested a few ideas. Sure enough, that woman wasn't any sort of pushover. She took out a map and led everyone to the nearest warehouse.

It was the headquarters of a mini storage. A single aberrant was at its doorway, seemingly guarding it, and looked very weak. Xiao Sha busted its head with the strike of a single dagger, easily earning the

veneration of everyone. Apart from this, not even a single mouse could be found; however, there were numerous locks.

This group of people seemed to be accustomed to this type of thing, as the old and weak ones hid themselves, while the youngsters hid in the outermost area, looking very alert.

Guan Weijun spoke with one of the young men who was staying behind. "Tai Wen, my mom will be in your hands. As we agreed, I'll help everyone out of the city, and you guys will take good care of my mom. If she loses even a single hair, I'll beat you to death."

Mom was standing to the side, looking somewhat apologetic, and advised, "Everybody has been very good. Xiao Jun, you shouldn't be bullying these youngsters all the time."

What "youngsters?" The one called Tai Wen even looks older than Guan Weijun by a few years!

"Don't worry, Weijun." Pushing his eyeglasses, Tai Wen said, "Unless I die, nothing will happen to Auntie. But if I really do die, don't forget to take care of my wife."

Guan Weijun responded very naturally with "of course," then smiled at the woman behind Mom. "In any case, your wife and my mom will be together."

Hearing this, Tai Wen finally nodded in relief.

"Let's go." Guan Weijun spoke to Xiao Sha, "We'll quickly leave after getting the supplies. I can't handle Lan City anymore. If it wasn't for the right opportunity, we wouldn't have been able to leave at all. Although you're quite strong, you still shouldn't look down on this place."

Xiao Sha nodded indifferently and said, "Lead the way."

Guan Weijun didn't say anything further. She led the twenty young people, her commanding aura not losing to Xiao Sha's, not to mention the past life's Xia Zhengu.

My mind was in great turmoil. Seeing my own face on someone who was doing all kinds of things that were unlike me, yet was even a lot stronger than my past self... *Wait a second, if this Guan Weijun is someone who is able to lead and convince others, then she'd most likely think nothing of Xia Zhengu, right?*

If she didn't take a liking to him, then that means they hadn't dated at all, so Xia Zhengu obviously wouldn't be here!

Sure enough, I'm the only one who was blind! What do I do, my mood just got even worse...

"Why do you keep on staring at me?"

Stunned, I lifted my head. Guan Weijun had somehow ended up in the middle of the group and was walking beside me.

She tilted her head and laughingly said, "Although you're very good-looking, and I'm also fond of your looks, I don't like the young ones. Plus, you're also the great hero's little boyfriend. I don't want to be sent to hell so soon, so it's no use even if you like me!"

What the fuck are you talking about? She actually thought I would want to hook up with "myself"? Just from looking at my face, I couldn't even bring myself to drop a kiss, not to mention the many more explicit things after that... The mere thought caused my face to instantly darken. *This situation is too horrifying. It must never be allowed to happen!*

"Weijun-jiě, quit messing around before someone gets angry." A young man worriedly looked at Xiao Sha, who was at the front.

I glanced at him and noticed that he was the one who had run into the sewer. Guan Weijun seemed to have called him "Zhang Jing"? He didn't look very old. He was probably a university student who hadn't entered the workforce yet.

Guan Weijun smilingly said, "It's fine. Shuyu won't mind." She glanced over and curiously asked, "You're Shuyu, right? I heard our benefactor call you that several times. You're truly the most beautiful boy I've ever seen."

Guan Weijun's smile was exceptionally manly. I blankly stared at her, a familiar feeling suddenly flashing through my mind, but I simply couldn't grasp it...

"You sure get easily distracted when you look at me!" She said while frowning, "I'm begging you, please don't cause our great benefactor to get jealous and slaughter me."

Once she said that, even Zhang Jing who was still beside us started to get nervous.

I quickly said, "Chensha wouldn't do that. He trusts me."

Guan Weijun confusedly asked, "I've been hearing you call him 'Chensha,' but it couldn't mean 'dirt,' right?"

"It's the chén from xīngchén, stars."

She "oh"-ed, and said, "I had wondered why the parents would name their kid 'dust and mud.' But even if it just sounds like it, it still doesn't sound nice. This naming skill is just too lacking."

Chénshā (辰沙), chénshā (塵沙)? Compared to Xiao Sha's eldest brother's hào (brilliance), or that shadow guy's yáng (vast), the word shā (sand) was truly inferior.¹ It seemed that, despite being born from a large clan, Xiao Sha's life was so miserable that he'd been picked up by Dàgē from a dark alley. He had probably been despised ever since birth.

"Shuyu!" Xiao Sha suddenly shouted, his hand waving me over.

Noticing that his expression seemed amiss, I frowned and quickly walked to the front. Not needing to hear his next words, I had already lifted my head to look toward a certain spot.

In the distance, there were ten large buildings grouped together to form an arc. All of them had been completely and tightly wrapped by white string-like substances. Those string-like things had numerous black dots moving around them, but the distance was too great, so I couldn't determine their actual form. In the middle of the arc, there was a white cocoon, but it was located too far away and was between the buildings, making it appear very small. However, its actual length and width should at least exceed three meters.

"We noticed this thing a long time ago." Guan Weijun stepped forward and advised us, "Don't get too close. There are too many monsters over there, probably a colony of spiders. We just need to maintain a certain distance. There are actually a lot fewer monsters in this area than in other territories, which was why we managed to break out from here. Just a little bit more, and we could have succeeded."

There was a little bit of dissatisfaction in her tone as she reached the end of her sentence. She didn't sound happy to go to the shopping mall, but I completely ignored her comment, as I was very clear about what was currently happening in front of our eyes. That thing was progressing to the next tier.

This was a colonization which would later give rise to the "ruler" of a colony of aberrants. The possibility for it to be a colony of spiders wasn't low. Although other aberrants such as humans, mice, or dog-like aberrants were the most common in cities, the mutation of other body forms occasionally occurred. I had even heard of crabs occupying the inland cities and towns. Those were most probably seafood from restaurants that hadn't been slaughtered in time.

"Shuyu," Xiao Sha called out.

"Hm?" I absentmindedly answered, my eyes still looking at the big cocoon hanging in the air.

"The quantity is a bit too much." Other people were still around, so Xiao Sha could only speak vaguely, yet his eyes were filled with worry, as if afraid that I'd instantly rush over.

I dropped my eyes. I did feel the sudden, undeniable urge to just rush ahead and ambush that aberrant by myself. It was in the midst of leveling up and had quite the powerful might, with numerous aberrants protecting it. So who would believe that it was just a tier two? It was highly likely to be tier three. *With such a high-leveled aberrant, would I be able to raise my tier if I ate its evolution crystal?*

Dàgē had already reached tier one, but he was still quite a distance away from reaching tier two. But if he had this evolution crystal, he might even leap to tier two...

"Shuyu." Xiao Sha pulled on my arm, worry clouding his face.

I stared at Xiao Sha, my heart thinking of Mom who was still waiting at the mini storage. I could only sigh inwardly and indirectly reply, "I'm not afraid. You don't need to worry."

Hearing this "don't worry," Xiao Sha finally heaved a sigh of relief. Nodding his head, he still didn't let go of my hand. It seemed that I'd had too many precedents of sneakily running off, so no one would

believe me even when I promised to be sensible and not act impulsively.

"You guys are so close." Guan Weijun said with admiration, "So much that the mere sight of it causes me, this single dog,¹ to want to look for a boyfriend. Great benefactor, if you ever change your sexual orientation and start to like women, remember to look for me first!"

Xiao Sha and I looked at her. *Does this mean that she wishes for our break up? Can this woman be any more airheaded than this? Even her companions have a look of "I'm done with this," having resigned themselves to their fate. It seems that she often does this sort of airheaded thing.*

Guan Weijun seemed to realize that she had said the wrong thing and burst into laughter. It wasn't an awkward laugh, but more of a "my words were too funny" kind of laugh. This woman's scatterbrained nature seemed to be a special ability of its own.

"Chensha, where's the shopping mall? We should quickly grab stuff and leave."

I pretended to be afraid as I urged him on. I was worried that if we stayed here any longer, I wouldn't be able to resist rushing in and cutting down that big cocoon. An aberrant that was quickly rising to tier three was just too attractive. My eyes would unconsciously drift away, and my mouth would unintentionally start watering. It was better for us to quickly leave.

Xiao Sha stared at Guan Weijun, and the latter answered, "We're almost there," and quickly led the way. There were no aberrants along the way. I started to feel suspicious, but upon seeing the big cocoon, I finally understood.

She purposely chose to walk near the big cocoon but far enough not to alert those black dot territorial protectors, which was why nothing happened along the way. *No wonder she could lead sixty people out of the city, and all the others placed their faith in her. She possesses quite the high ability.*

But this kind of capability requires time to nurture. If everyone refused to listen to her instructions at the beginning, then her capability would have been useless, since she would have been unable to utilize it to the best of her abilities. For a woman bringing along her mother, how did she make so many people obey her?

I looked at Guan Weijun who was leading at the front. *She better have a good reason to convince me. Otherwise, I'd still take her back, but I wouldn't mind locking her up for a lifetime!*

Alert, Guan Weijun suddenly turned around. Her eyes were unusually sharp, making her appear unlike a woman.

Feigning ignorance, I tilted my head with a smile, stunning everyone present.

Why do I feel like something's off...

Footnotes

1 Chensha: Xiao Sha's name is Chensha (辰沙), with Chen (辰) coming from xingchen (星辰), which means stars. All of the mentioned Shangguan family members so far share the “chen” part of the name. However, combined with sha, Xiao Sha's name sounds the same as chensha (塵沙), which means dirt/dust/sand. Sha (沙) by itself means sand, while the other members of the Shangguan family have more impressive names, such as Chenhao (辰皓), with hao (皓) meaning brilliance, and Chenyang (辰洋), with yang (洋) meaning vast.

2 Single dog: Slang used to describe a person who is neither married nor in a relationship (used self-deprecatingly).

Chapter 6: Brute Strength is Life

The shopping mall entrance seemed empty, but the glass panes of the display windows to both sides were shattered all over the floor, and even the items on display inside the windows had fallen every which way. Obviously, something had broken in.

Upon seeing this, Guan Weijun turned to look at Xiao Sha and asked, "How many monsters can you kill?"

Naturally, Xiao Sha wouldn't expose his hand right at the start. He prudently said, "You speak first."

Guan Weijun took a deep breath and quickly explained, "Three if they're not fast. One or two if they're a bit faster. But some are particularly strong. I'm not very sure about those."

She then pointed at Zhang Jing and said, "He's the opposite of me. He could deal with two of the fast monsters. But for those with thick skin and high strength, he wouldn't even be able to kill off a single one. As for the rest, two people could probably cope with one. Not getting killed right away, and being able to finish off a monster would have to depend on their luck. In normal circumstances, that is. If there's a disparity in strength with the monsters, just a single one of them could make us break into a run. That happens a lot, too."

They're pretty strong. I was slightly taken aback. This Guan Weijun can actually deal with three aberrants? At this phase of the previous life, I was still at the sidelines, using a kitchen knife tied to a broom stick like some small fry!

Xiao Sha nodded and said indifferently, "I can handle six normal monsters, four or five if they're slightly stronger. But it's hard to say for even stronger ones."

The moment those words were spoken, everyone's face changed—as one, they all wore an expression of revering a great expert. They were just short of "calling their wives to come out and get a glimpse of god."¹

Actually, Xiao Sha was still hiding his real strength. My guess was that he should be able to comfortably handle eight. If he wasn't expected to be unharmed, he could probably even handle a dozen or more. Although he hadn't reached tier one, he was pretty close already. The formless and colorless wind ability was truly too suited for combat.

Xiao Sha maintained a cold expression as he faced everyone. "We're heading in. I'll join the fight, but only under one condition. Ten of your people must carry the things I want. And no matter what it is, there can be no objection."

This was a very good move. After all, the things that I wanted weren't actually everyday living necessities. In the event that these people refused to cooperate, we would waste a lot of time if they started making a fuss inside.

Guan Weijun instantly nodded in agreement, without even a hint of hesitation. This was very understandable. Without Xiao Sha, forget searching for supplies, a lot more of them would have died. It wouldn't have been strange either if they had all perished. They should be content that they were all still alive and even had stuff to grab.

"Let's go!"

Xiao Sha commanded in a low voice and took the lead to charge through the shattered display window. Guan Weijun and the others followed closely behind him. I chose the end, so as to avoid carelessly losing any members.

Although I was somewhat on guard against this group of people and Guan Weijun, so far, my impression of them was fairly good. For an average person to have this kind of discipline was truly exceptional. I did feel uneasy about Guan Weijun because of it, but in the end, it was merely a suspicion. A person of talent warranted careful protection. Even if we didn't have her join the JDT, at the very least, the human race would have another bargaining chip.

A faint noise caught my attention. It actually sounded like a fist smashing onto flesh. I was a bit mystified. Xiao Sha wouldn't be using his fists, since his strength wasn't very high.

I hastily climbed over the display window. Inside, they had already started fighting. The pouncing aberrants looked rather familiar. Each and every one of them looked like rotting corpses. At first glance, it looked just like a zombie apocalypse!

However, with a careful look, you'd noticed that they weren't actually rotting. They just had reddened and wrinkled flesh oozing with fluids, crooked limbs, and also a rotting stench. But the eyes were exceptionally clear, evidently not the eyes of a dead being. This kind of aberrant was blatantly named "zombie"—a common aberrant.

By the time they evolved to the next tier, their limbs would no longer be this crooked, and their wrinkled flesh would form a thick and hard layer of outer shell. The fluid all over their body would evolve into mucus, making them slippery and difficult to strike at, and they were quick to scamper away, too. Along with their overwhelming stench, they were considered quite the unwelcome aberrant. Even humans who hunted for evolution crystals wouldn't be very pleased to see this kind of aberrant.

But for humans at the initial phase of the apocalypse, it was evident that this kind of aberrant wasn't a common sight. Their faces turned pale out of fright, and the women and several young men seemed to be on the verge of vomiting.

Xiao Sha had rushed to the forefront, blocking five aberrants by himself. However, the aberrants weren't flocking around him. Six of them were charging toward the others. Even with Xiao Sha shooting out formless wind, he only managed to attract one of them to himself.

He threw a glance at me, and I blinked in response, but who knew what kind of information I had transmitted, as he went back to finish off the six aberrants on his side, no longer caring about the five aberrants rushing over. Actually, I was merely playing innocent, and hadn't agreed to help out. *Seriously, there wasn't even the least bit of mutual understanding between us.*

I grudgingly formed ice knives inside my grasp, dallying as I planned to send them flying when these people were dealing with the aberrants,

letting them think that they had killed it themselves. Alas, they were just blankly standing there, unable to even move.

I had overestimated this group of people. Even that Zhang Jing had turned pale from fright. *What happened to being able to handle two? Xiao Sha underplayed his abilities, but you guys actually overplayed yours?*

As death was just around the corner, I couldn't keep concealing my abilities. Right when I was about to take action, a figure suddenly rushed out.

"Cut the daydreaming!"

Guan Weijun angrily shouted and harshly hauled away a woman who was nearly pounced on. Following that, her right hand smashed into the zombie, sending it flying. After it fell to the ground, it kept rolling around with a miserable shriek. I fell silent after taking a closer look. That thing's eyes had popped out from the punch and were hanging from its face, nearly about to fall.

Turning my head, I saw Guan Weijun extending her hand to grab onto another zombie's head, not expecting that the secretions would be too sticky and cause her hand to slip. The aberrant leaped onto her and opened its mouth, intending to bite down.

Upon seeing this, I formed knives into needles, shooting out all five at once, separately striking at the aberrant's elbow and abdomen. The thin and small ice needles didn't have much ability to injure, only able

to hinder the aberrant's movement, allowing Guan Weijun enough time to react.

Once again, she reached out and grabbed onto the enemy's head. But this time, she directly thrust her fingers into the eye socket, so any secretions were useless. Then, her fist smashed into its face—one punch, two punches, three punches—ultimately smashing the head into pulp. White brain matter mixed with flesh and blood spurted all over the ground.

Now, I finally understood how she had convinced the masses. It was probably—"Unconvinced? Then, come fight me!"

Another zombie pounced over. She turned around and grasped onto its head with one hand, while punching with her other hand, only needing a few punches to burst open the head. Unfortunately, the remaining zombies no longer voluntarily delivered themselves, very carefully attempting to attack from a distance, or simply switching targets.

This seemed to be quite the difficult problem for Guan Weijun, as she could easily burst the enemy's head open, but the problem was that she could no longer grab onto any heads. No wonder she had said she could only handle one or two of the fast aberrants. In truth, she had plenty of unused strength but not the combat ability to back it up. "Capturing" was much harder than "smashing."

To be able to smash open an aberrant's head while unarmed was impossible even for Xiao Sha, okay? This was undoubtedly the power of strength, not the power of far-sight. *Even her ability isn't the same! This "Guan Weijun" really isn't me.*

Then, just who is she?

Xiao Sha was slashing heads at the front, while Guan Weijun was smashing heads at the rear. This horrifying scene finally woke everyone up. Zhang Jing bent both of his legs and forcefully leaped over, like a kangaroo hopping all over the place. The zombies at this stage couldn't move very fast, so they couldn't catch him at all.

Sometimes, Zhang Jing would spring over to the side of a zombie, making a slice before it could react. However, it wasn't very effective. Although current zombies hadn't evolved to form actual outer shells yet, simple cuts weren't enough to finish them off. Compared to Xiao Sha who ended a life with each slice, Zhang Jing was simply treating the zombies with gua sha.² The cuts only produced red marks, but yielded no blood.

Nevertheless, he was at least able to stall for time. When someone else was in danger, he'd pass by and attract the zombie's attention, then arduously attempt to finish off the enemy. But, he was mostly waiting for Guan Weijun to sort out her own target and then come over to bust heads open.

Over twenty people were stalling for time with their monsters, waiting for Guan Weijun to come take their heads. *I can't help but be impressed!*

Seeing that they were fine, I turned toward Xiao Sha. However, I was only in time to see him knock a zombie down with a kick and stab down with a dagger. Then, without even turning his head, he sent out

a blade of wind, striking the last zombie directly in the face, slicing the right half of the head off. As the head wasn't completely destroyed, the zombie didn't instantly die, but instead fell to the ground on his butt, twisted and crooked while struggling to climb back up. But soon after, he was crushed by Xiao Sha's wind blade.

He had been about to stab him with his dagger, and had only changed to striking with his wind blade after I glared at him. *It seems that in order to change these mercenaries' fighting habits, you can't even leave them with a utility knife.*

After settling the six zombies, Xiao Sha charged over and finished off the two leftovers. This time, he obediently used wind blades to deal with the zombies. Two wind blades shot out and cut into each aberrant's face at the same time. His control was pretty good, but shooting out two blades at the same time seemed to have weakened their might. Those two zombies didn't instantly get killed, but simply lost half of their head. They twitched on the ground, waiting for Xiao Sha to cut them down.

Aberrants covered the ground. Even though there were no tier ones, it would still be too wasteful to simply leave the crystals behind. However, I didn't want to dig out the crystals right in front of this group of people. I still wanted to find out whether they knew about the existence of the crystals or not.

"You're so strong!" Guan Weijun's eyes shone, her face filled with worship while she gazed at Xiao Sha.

Xiao Sha reflexively shook his head and said, "Not strong enough at all. The one who's stronger is..." He paused, stiffly resisted not looking at me, and said, "There's a lot."

Everyone was in disbelief but didn't dare to refute Xiao Sha's words. Only Guan Weijun spoke with a foolish smile, "Great benefactor is really too modest, although your appearance doesn't suggest that you're a humble guy!"

Is this a compliment? Look to your side. Your companions are about to burst into tears!

Xiao Sha didn't bother to argue over her words. He merely looked at Guan Weijun's hands. White brain matter, red blood, and a foul stench—it was like the pair of hands of a homicidal devil.

"I don't know what's up with this either. I just ended up with a lot of strength." Guan Weijun swung her arms while frankly explaining, "Zhang Jing is very good at jumping. The others have a lot of small abilities, but they're all useless."

The useless "others" silently shed tears.

What about that Tai Wen's ability? I stared at Guan Weijun. This fella actually had a bit of a brain to her and didn't turn out to be the silly big sis that she appeared to be.

Xiao Sha simply said, "I can use wind to cut objects."

Guan Weijun had most likely guessed it. Nodding her head, she asked while feeling puzzled, "But your power is clearly much stronger than ours. Is there a way to strengthen one's power?"

My face twitched. *Wait a second, you actually haven't eaten any crystals? You have so much strength without eating any crystals? I would rather believe that you're lying!*

Xiao Sha indifferently shot her a glance. He didn't say anything, nor did he go to dig out the crystals.

Guan Weijun rubbed her nose and said, "Let's go to the supermarket and grab some stuff!"

"Xiao Sha, I want to go to the second floor." I tugged at Xiao Sha's sleeve.

Guan Weijun asked in doubt, "Is there anything on the second floor to take? Isn't the supermarket on the basement level?"

You don't even know what's on the second floor? As a woman, even if you couldn't go from the stores of the underground floor, all the way to the top floor of the shopping mall, you should at least know that the first floor sells cosmetics products, the second floor sells premium and quality goods, and the third floor and up sells clothes!

I naturally said, "It's the quality goods departments. There are clothes that I like which I couldn't afford buying in the past, but now that it can be taken for free, obviously taking it is a must."

Everyone looked at me in bafflement. Even the easy-going Guan Weijun seemed taken aback. But for some unknown reason, she looked at me suspiciously after shaking herself out of her shock. *Just what are you suspicious about? Has she seen through my "frail and pretty boy" act?*

"Hurry up! I have a lot of things I want to take. I want jackets, clothes, and pants!"

I hid behind Xiao Sha, and thoroughly acted willful, arrogant, and unreasonable. Evidently, this time, my acting passed inspection. No one's expression looked pleasant, but no one dared to speak up because of their consideration of Xiao Sha.

Xiao Sha coldly said, "You can choose to come with me first, then go to the supermarket downstairs. Or ten people can follow me, while the rest can go to the supermarket by themselves."

Everyone's face darkened.

Guan Weijun looked at Xiao Sha, then looked at me. She immediately and resolutely said, "No matter where our great benefactor wishes to go, we will definitely follow!"

Brash, scatterbrained, willing to rescue companions and protect the old and weak, and even unexpectedly good at adapting to circumstances. If this person wasn't Guan Weijun, but merely an irrelevant person, I would have long ago decided to bring her back to the Jiang Dominion without further deliberation.

We headed up to the second floor. There were no aberrants. It was vacant and desolate, with little damage. Upon thinking about it, it was quite logical, since the first and second floors were too close to each other. You could nearly see the whole first floor from the second floor. Even the most brainless aberrants wouldn't let other groups of aberrants linger on the ground above its head. After all, feeling extreme hunger yet not being able to find any unevolved flesh, the food of an aberrant would naturally be another aberrant. They would eat up the different ones first. With no other option, then eating their own kind was quite feasible.

After briefly looking around the second floor, I soon found my main objective. In the past, I had nearly clenched my teeth and bought a jacket for Xia Zhengu with two months of my salary. *It was a good thing that I hadn't bought it. Otherwise, I would have given myself a big slap in the face to the point that my teeth would've fallen out.*

Rushing into the luxurious store, I waved my hand like a *nouveau riche* and said, "I'll take it all!"

Everyone's face darkened further.

It was an entire row of long, military-styled windbreakers. The price marked on them had a bunch of zeros. At the initial stage of the apocalypse, these windbreakers were free for the taking; however, they were items that no one wanted. The winters in the apocalypse were too cold. So the thicker the coat, the higher its demand. Windbreakers, this kind of autumn apparel, was something that no one cared about.

Only after two years would people start searching for these clothes. Having discovered the function of crystals, people who ate a lot of crystals would gradually become fearless of the cold. At that time, there would be no small amount of people wearing windbreakers. Some were experts, while some were pretending to be experts.

It was just the right time for the members of JDT to wear this. The military-style jacket looked cool and handsome. As long as we modified it a bit and added a matching emblem of the JDT forces, then our invincible troop would have matching uniforms! They might be clowns on the inside, but at least on the outside, they would look imposing enough to scare people to death!

"Are you sure you really want this?" Guan Weijun's face was clouded with doubt again. "Don't you feel cold wearing this? Nowadays, wanting to appear beautiful won't just end with getting a running nose. It could really mean freezing to death!"

I stilled, then unreasonably argued, "It can be worn when it gets warm!"

"Why are you so sure that the weather will turn warm?" She asked with increased doubt. "The winter this year has gotten too cold. Tai Wen kept on blabbering about how something's fishy. He was really worried that the weather will keep on getting colder and won't be warming any time soon. It's probably because of some 'mini ice age.' I don't really understand it much, but it really is strange that it's gotten so cold."

I can't keep up my act if you keep seeing through me! I feigned shock and disbelief, and snapped, "How could it keep getting colder? It will surely get warmer! Don't talk nonsense."

The others vehemently repressed the dissatisfaction in their eyes. But they were all merely youngsters, whose acting skills were subpar, so unhappiness could more or less be seen. Only Guan Weijun was different. She just gazed at me, as if scrutinizing the quality of a commodity. She suddenly smiled, and said, "I humbly accept your blessed words and hope it will come true. It *will* get warmer!"

I really can't understand this woman's way of thinking...

"All right. All right. Let's take the clothes." Seeing that everyone was very slow and unwilling, Guan Weijun rolled her eyes at them and urged, "We already promised that ten people would carry his things. It's up to him to take whatever he wanted. It won't even be ours. Move quickly, or are you asking for a beating? Wanna fly and get stuck to the wall?"

Everybody finally set in motion. Windbreakers, pants, dress shirts, and such were all cleanly swept away. Even the sizes were unchecked. In any case, as long as everything was taken away, it'd surely become useful in the future.

I thought about the female members within the troop. My family's cute Junjun would naturally wear pleated skirts; Auntie will have graceful, long dresses; the sexy and hot Lily must have a miniskirt; as for Ceng Yunqian, er, shorts, I guess.

Eh, they actually have flip-flops! Silvery white, simple yet nice looking—this is the one. Junjun would surely let me wear this. I'm taking this!

Take, take, take... until my shoulder was patted. I turned to look. Xiao Sha was holding a towering mountain of clothes. I looked beyond him. Everyone had a suitcase placed beside them and their hands were also carrying a mountain of clothes. Their number seemed to exceed ten...

"There are twelve now." Xiao Sha calmly said. "I agreed to see them out of the city, in exchange for two more people to carry things. But we can't take anymore, or we won't be able to walk."

Realization dawned upon me. Losing myself from a moment of carelessness, I had gotten overjoyed since I could just take things without needing to pay money and what not. Lastly, I grabbed a pair of long boots, and hugged them in my arms.

Xiao Sha glanced over and cautioned me, "The size is too big."
"It's for Dàgē."

Hearing this, Xiao Sha took a particularly close look at the boots, and nodded. "It suits Boss."

Of course. These kinds of powerful military boots which could kill someone with just a single kick would best suit Dàgē!

Guan Weijun stuck her head in, looking at us with shining eyes—a look of "I wanna listen to gossip, too."

"..."

Xiao Sha turned his head away. "Downstairs to the supermarket."
Guan Weijun "oh"-ed while looking a little disappointed.

While passing through the hallway, I snuck a look at the floor directory. The sewing workshop was on the ninth floor—this was rather troublesome. Bringing so many people up to the ninth floor, just for the sake of a few sewing machines would be too laborious. It wasn't quite worth it.

After thinking it through, I decided to give up for now. We might find several sewing machines after searching around Old Town. After all, it was a town, so it was bound to have had some good wives and loving mothers that were good at tailoring, right? If we really couldn't find any, then when it was Cain's turn to come next time, I'd have him bring some home.

"Let's go to the supermarket." I turned around and smiled. "Restock some chocolates."

Everyone wore an expression of looking at a patient who was suffering from "prince syndrome." Even looking at this face of mine didn't help them keep a pleasant expression on their faces.

Only Guan Weijun looked at me with a grin, without the slightest hint of scorn. "I don't eat chocolates very often. I'll look forward to getting some recommendations from you."

I smiled and agreed with an "all right." *It's really hard to hate this kind of woman.*

Following that, going to the supermarket was contrarily neither alarming nor dangerous. There were just a lot of armored cockroaches. However, current herds of cockroaches weren't anything terrifying. Xiao Sha flipped over a bunch of them with just his wind blade. And with Guan Weijun's fist smashing, the whole floor was filled with cockroach paste.

After that, everyone just happily took things without paying up. Most of them took food which could be preserved for long periods. Even those twelve people carrying the clothes couldn't resist putting some food into their pockets, looking like they were itching to throw away all the clothes on their hands.

Guan Weijun rolled her eyes several times at them, and tilted her head toward Xiao Sha as if asking "You sure you wanna throw them?"

The twelve depressed people were forced to look on helplessly as their companions wantonly plundered. I threw a few chocolates to the top of the piles of clothes that they were carrying and advised them, "You can use the clothes to wrap small food items. Look for high calorie foodstuffs. Chocolate candies are the best. High calorie food could save one's life in this cold weather."

Everyone stared at me with a relieved look, as if I hadn't reached the final phase of "prince syndrome" and had a chance for recovery.

After snatching all the chocolates, I took a few bags of milk candy. Shujun loved them. Although we had already heaped up a bunch of them from back then, it was always good to acquire more. No one would be able to make these kinds of milk candy in the future. After all, minotaurs were not to be trifled with. *You want cow's milk? Puh-lease, trade for it with your life!*

It was just that I hadn't thought that the danger of entering Lan City this time would be so low, far lower than my expectations. Granted that it was due to my advantage in reincarnation, allowing me to be able to cope with most situations, but a first class city should still be a place where danger lurked on every side.

It should be because of that huge cocoon, which must have thoroughly wiped out all the nearby aberrants. Otherwise, that almost-tier-three aberrant wouldn't have felt secure enough to wrap itself into a cocoon, and only depend on its subordinates for protection.

Arriving at the first floor, I asked, "Chen Sha, do we take the crystals now?"

Xiao Sha glanced over, and I blinked at him. He then said, "Yeah. Come help me scoop them out."

I frowned and reluctantly said, "... It's disgusting, but okay."

Guan Weijun seemed curious, but she didn't ask, only staring intently as Xiao Sha walked up to a zombie. He squatted down and stabbed downwards into the center of the heart with a dagger, skillfully excavating the chest. That skill was so practiced that it didn't lose out

to mine. It seemed like the journey that the JDT had undertaken to get here really wasn't like the understatement that Dàgē had claimed.

I stepped forward, holding a throwing knife to dig into the chest, but intentionally acted slightly clumsy.

Everyone stared in stupefaction, but no one took the lead to start talking. At this moment, Guan Weijun moved one step forward, staring with wide-opened eyes as Xiao Sha dug out a crystal from the zombie's chest.

Xiao Sha simply tossed the crystal into her hand and said, "You smashed three dead, so you get three pieces. That Zhang Jing gets one piece. Come and dig it out yourself."

Guan Weijun quickly held the crystal up for inspection, and smilingly said, "Is this what makes you so strong? How do you use it? Is it edible? It smells nice. I feel like eating it."

"Yes." Xiao Sha said while scooping out crystals, "A few pieces of them are of little use. It takes about five or more to make a difference."

I secretly paid attention to Guan Weijun, very interested to know what she'd do. Her three pieces with one from Zhang Jing only came to four pieces. *So how would she distribute them?*

"Great benefactor, could you give us another piece?" Guan Weijun said, smiling, "See here, my hand can carry some more. I'll quickly go upstairs and help you get more stuff. Your little boyfriend seemed very

fond of those military boots. I have a lot of strength, so carrying ten or even twenty pairs wouldn't be a problem."

Xiao Sha looked at me and asked, "Shuyu, you wanna take some more?"

I looked toward the second floor, a thought hitting me. "Ten pairs of boots are enough. I want sewing machines. Xiao Sha, can you jump up to the ninth floor and help me grab some?"

"..." Everyone's face darkened. There was a look of "your prince syndrome has reached the critical stage. It's beyond help" on everyone's face.

This is called the "good wife and loving mother" complex, okay? What prince would wish for sewing machines?

Xiao Sha stood up and lifted his head. The center of the shopping mall was the empty interior between floors. By looking up, you could see to the ceiling of the topmost part.

He ran to the side of an escalator, hopped onto the handrail, and reached the second floor after a step and a leap. Flipping out into the open area in the middle, he grabbed onto the railing of a balcony with one hand, and climbed all the way up.

Although his wind powers hadn't reached tier one yet, and was thus insufficient for Xiao Sha to learn how to fly, he was more agile, so leaping higher was of no problem. That smooth and easy climbing was like the qinggong in martial arts films.

Everyone watched with their mouth agape, looking up at Xiao Sha's figure which was leaping higher and higher...

"Seriously, we should have called Tai Wen over to come and see god."
Guan Weijun exclaimed in admiration.

Footnotes

¹ **“calling their wives to come out and get a glimpse of god”**: This expression of marveling at something extraordinary originated from the Hong Kong comedy film, *A Chinese Odyssey*, which is based on *Journey to the West*. In the film, the time-traveling reincarnation of Monkey gets seen by Pigsy, who tells his wife and the Bull King to come out from the cave and get a glimpse of god.

² **“gua sha”**: A popular treatment done by scraping the skin with a massage tool to allow for better circulation.

Chapter 7: Tier Two Duel, Part One

By the time we returned to the mini storage, it was already very late. There was no need for discussion. Everyone automatically understood that we were going to stay here for the night. The dark was definitely not the best time for the living to be active.

Upon returning, Guan Weijun ascertained everyone's well-being. She then went to the side with Zhang Jing and Tai Wen for a private discussion. The topic was probably the distribution of crystals. Those two seemed to be her right- and left-hand. I didn't know how she was going to distribute them; there were five crystals, so it was best to give them all to one person. One person could hardly feel any effect with partial consumption. But at the end of the day, the distribution itself was always the difficult part. One wrong move, and just a few crystals could shatter the team's harmony.

I scrunched my brows and watched Guan Weijun. She placed the crystals in Tai Wen's hands. I couldn't really tell from my angle, but it seemed to be all of the crystals...

"Please don't be afraid of my Xiao Jun."

Startled, I looked back and saw Mom looking at me with uneasiness. She even anxiously explained, "You probably saw Xiao Jun's strength, right? She's actually a good girl. She's just... just a bit tomboyish and learned a bit of boxing. I don't know how her strength became so powerful..."

I looked back on how Guan Weijun could use her bare fists to smash brains into pulp all over the floor. And this much power was before she

even ate any crystals! But to me, that scene wasn't gruesome. I just found it regrettable. If I had been that strong in my last life, maybe Mom wouldn't have passed away so early on in the beginning stages of the apocalypse.

I couldn't compare to her. No matter who this Guan Weijun was, she was stronger than me.

I didn't know why, but I kept thinking about the fact that she was stronger than me. A feeling that made my heart pound erupted toward the surface without anything holding it back. I just had this violent surge of... *What is it?* I couldn't put my finger on this type of feeling... *Guilt? Shame?*

"Xiao Jun has saved many people along the way. She is a very good kid. She is definitely not a bad person. She would never hurt anyone, only monsters. Don't be afraid of her. A-And don't hurt her."

She was so nervous that she was about to tear up.

All of a sudden, there was a sour feeling in my heart. The Mom before my eyes was still Mom. She hadn't changed, from appearance down to personality. It was just that the child she loved so dearly wasn't me anymore.

I knew that I shouldn't be complaining. I had lost a mom but, hey, I had gained Dàgē, Xiǎomèi, Uncle, Auntie, and even the whole Jiang Dominion. *I pretty much hit it big, right? But how can I use quantity to compare something like this?*

"Y-You believe me, right? Xiao Jun really isn't a bad person." Mom looked anxiously at me. If I said a word of disbelief, she might really burst into tears while pleading.

I smiled and said, "I think she's great. You have to be stronger in order to survive in this kind of world."

After hearing this reply, Mom was finally relieved. She murmured, "Exactly. Being stronger is a good thing..."

She looked at Guan Weijun, her gaze an odd mixture of relief and reluctance. This attitude was all too familiar. I instantly recalled Dàgē's face, despite the difference in gender and appearance. He often used that expression to look at me, too.

Guan Weijun was arguing with Tai Wen at the moment. As I thought, she really did want to give all of the crystals to Tai Wen. Just as Mom said, she was a good person, who was strong and had good leadership skills. Moreover, she hadn't blindly let Xia Zhengu catch her eye.

Mom worriedly watched as Guan Weijun and Tai Wen quarreled. We could vaguely make out what they were saying, like how the crystals could make people stronger, how Tai Wen thought that it should be given to Guan Weijun, and how the latter insisted on having Tai Wen eat them. I didn't know the exact reason, but this probably had something to do with their abilities. Tai Wen's ability might be really useful.

Mom grumbled, "What's this Tai Wen insisting on not eating them for? Don't tell me, he actually wants to make Xiao Jun stronger and have

her protect everyone? She is just a girl..." After listening to them for a while, she changed her mind. "Then again, Tai Wen is right. Xiao Jun always likes to rush out in the front. How would she be okay if she's not stronger?"

Seeing how conflicted and worried she was, I couldn't help but say, "Once you get out of the city, it won't be as dangerous anymore. You could all come back with me. Our people are very powerful and can protect you."

Mom looked at me. She neither confirmed nor turned down going. She just smiled warmly and said, "It's great that there are people protecting you."

With this one sentence, my tears almost gushed out.

"I'll protect you. This time, I won't ever fail again."

Mom didn't seem to hear me clearly. She asked in puzzlement, "What did you say?"

"Nothing."

I held back my tears. Finally, I made up my mind to bring these people back. I didn't believe that this ordinary, sweet-tempered mom filled with motherly love would raise some kind of evil, sinister kid. Even if that soul inside of her was that bastard Xia Zhengu, he would be nurtured into a sweetheart!

At this moment, Guan Weijun huffed, "If you won't eat them, then I'll just throw them away! Whoever wants to eat them will eat them!"

With no other choice, Tai Wen could only obediently take the crystals and swallow them.

Watching this scene, I could only smile bitterly. *Powerful and righteous, how much more can she knock me down?*

I picked up the silver flask and grabbed my mother's hand. She was shocked and looked at me bemusedly. I poured out all of the crystals into her hand. There weren't that many. Five to be exact.

Mom blinked, somewhat overwhelmed. I smiled at her and said, "For you. I don't need these."

She opened her mouth and seemed too embarrassed to take them. But when she turned to look at her daughter, she couldn't bear not taking them. Finally, she said shyly, "Thank you."

I smiled and nodded my head. I watched as Mom rushed over and gave Guan Weijun the crystals. The three people on that side were shocked as they listened to her explanation. Then, they turned to look at me.

Guan Weijun revealed a brilliant smile. "Thanks! I knew you just like to act haughty but you're actually a big softie. You're a good kid."

... Is it too late to take those crystals back?

I turned away, my face expressionless. Xiao Sha sat leaning at the outermost part of the warehouse. It was a good spot for keeping watch. We had no intentions of giving the lookout to a civilian. We might as well just skip organizing who would keep watch. Xiao Sha and I were enough. The others just needed to worry about eating and sleeping.

Xiao Sha tossed me a glance. "Made your decision to bring them back?"

I sat down and asked without answering, "What are your thoughts on them?"

"There may be sixty people, many times the number of the JDT, but they are just ordinary people. We are mercenaries. We've got both guns and abilities. They are not our opponents at all, so if you want to bring them back, it isn't that much of a problem."

Yeah. Bringing them back isn't the problem. How to support them is the big question.

"Can you bring them back by yourself?"

Xiao Sha looked over with a frown on his face.

I explained, "I wanna take a look at the giant cocoon. He's in the midst of advancing to tier three. This should be his territory, so there aren't that many aberrants roaming around here. Before getting into his transitional stage, he would have either driven away or eaten all of the fairly powerful aberrants in the area. We must either take the opportunity to finish him now, or we'll have no choice but to take a

detour around him to enter Lan City in the future. We can't afford to take on a tier three aberrant."

Six months into the apocalypse and he was already becoming a tier three aberrant. Even if this thing didn't survive into the later days of the apocalypse, he would definitely be dominant for a long time. If we let him successfully rise to tier three and dominate this area, he would be the most terrifying hurdle stopping us from conquering Lan City.

Xiao Sha opened his mouth, but I cut him off to say, "Even if I can't win, I can always find ways to escape. But if I have to look after someone, then it's hard to say if I can escape. If you want to come with me, you have to at least reach tier one, but you haven't gotten past that threshold yet."

He bit his lips, his face showing his reluctance. He asked, "How do I train to be as strong as you?"

I thought back to the Ice Emperor's training. I couldn't shake off the frustration I felt, like I was overlooking something, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was.

"Shuyu?"

I had an Ice Emperor who had bullied me and helped me raise my tier, but I couldn't say this out loud. I could only answer helplessly, "I experienced the apocalypse for ten years in my dream. I knew how to use my powers since the beginning. Ever since the apocalypse started, I've almost died several times and also found my way from Zhongguan

City. All these are unreasonable, hellish training. It's natural to be a bit stronger."

Xiao Sha was silent for a bit before he said, "Then, I will venture into the city alone in the future."

I blanked, but Xiao Sha's expression was very calm. There was no changing his mind. In all honesty, I didn't have the right to make this decision for him: to survive comfortably or to struggle between life and death in order to become stronger.

I took a deep breath and said, "You decide on your own later. If I haven't come back before dawn, help me take them back first. I'll catch up. Just remember this. It doesn't matter if anyone dies, including Guan Weijun. Only, Guan Weijun's mother cannot die!"

"All right." Xiao Sha said lightly, "But if I arrive at the base, and you still haven't caught up by then, the boss will definitely enter the city to find you."

I know. Junjun will follow right behind him, too.

"I will definitely catch up. But before I do, don't meet that Shangguan Chenyang. I don't trust that guy. His change was too great. His psychology might have changed too."

Like that brainwight, who went as far as eating people. But then again, this person was related to Xiao Sha after all. Xiao Sha might want to bring him home.

Unexpectedly, Xiao Sha agreed with an “mmhm” and said, “He might have been driven out of the Shangguan family because of some other reason. It wouldn’t just be because his appearance has changed too much. His transformation is unique, which would make the Shangguan family want to confine him rather than allow him to run off.”

He frowned. “The Shangguan family is in the southern part of Lan City. They’re another potential danger to us. When I go back, I’ll tell the boss everything about the Shangguan family so that he’ll be prepared.”

Your relationship with your family sure is horrible. That “wouldn’t-it-be-better-to-just-kill-the-whole-family” type of expression is way too X-rated!

Xiao Sha glanced over and asked, “How am I supposed to explain to Guan Weijun why you’re missing?”

“Say whatever, like ‘I got so scared that I ran back home’ or something.” It was a very unconvincing excuse. Although I wanted to hide my real strength, faced with the problem of a tier three aberrant, something like hiding my real strength wasn’t as important anymore.

I got up and dusted my butt off, getting ready to leave. If I could resolve this before dawn and return, I wouldn’t need to find any excuses.

“I’m leaving.”

Xiao Sha hummed in acknowledgment, then asked unwillingly, “Shuyu, just how strong are you right now?”

I chuckled, then took off my flip-flops, stuffed them into his hands, and materialized ice blades below my feet. I didn't answer. *Taking on ten of you is as simple as eating crystals. This kind of thing that will topple other people's motivation is best kept to myself, or else if everyone in the Jiang Dominion ganged up on me, should I beat them all up? Freeze them? Or beat them up, then freeze them?*

With a burst of force below my feet, I no longer masked my strength. I zoomed out in a flash. Dark streets swiftly passed by. With every push, I glided for at least thirty meters. Next, I twisted my body and skated onto the side of a wall. Relying on the momentum to rise upwards, I began "climbing" the building. Sliding, jumping, sticking close, flipping—with merely a few moves, I had climbed to the top of a twelve-story building.

However, I still felt crappy. If the Ice Emperor were here, he would be even more disappointed. He always said that gliding would be enough to let me travel to every corner of the world. *With the adhesiveness of the ice and the power behind the legs, what place would be out of reach? At most, add a little jump...*

The Ice Emperor had painstakingly taught me a long list of things. *But this little lady... Ah, no, this young lad still can't manage it!* Previously, the best result had been losing all my energy after skating up to the fifth floor, almost falling on the ground with a "bang." Fortunately, my hand grabbed the awning in time. The next day, my thighs were even as sore as hell!

There were a few aberrants at the top of the building. When they saw this fresh lump of meat, they excitedly threw themselves over one-by-one until I smashed the head of the first. They widened their eyes that were akin to beacons, then immediately fled every which way, but unfortunately it was too late. Ice blades shot out explosively...

I had just accepted sixty people, so crystal accumulation needed to be taken seriously. Even if I didn't need these crystals myself, these tierless crystals would still be beneficial for other people.

The silver flask constantly jingled with each crystal placed inside, a symphony to the ears. I really loved this flask that Jin Feng had given me. The size was perfect. It was practically made for storing crystals! After this, I definitely had to use ice to strengthen the flask, or else I'd be devastated if it broke.

Standing on the high-rise, I looked in the direction I wanted to go in and jumped off. The target was the building over. Naturally, it was not a jumpable distance. I couldn't even touch the wall of the building. I made a slab of ice in midair and stepped on it. The slab fell instantly. I relied on that rebounding force and took another hop, but the distance was still not enough. I had to make another piece; yet again, almost there. One more time...

In the end, when I was five stories away from the height I wanted to reach, I slammed into a glass window of the building with my face plastered against the glass. I silently vowed that before I perfected this move, I wasn't going to use it in front of anyone.

Ice Emperor, where's the promised hop, step, and jump to the clear

blue sky? How come I just fall right down? How do I ignore gravity's force?

Time was short. I had no choice but to advance upward through the "normal" way of gliding, jumping, and climbing.

Not long afterwards, I arrived at a street not far from the giant cocoon. I suppressed the freezing air around me and slowly headed over. The black dotted guards on the ground became clearer and clearer, but they were not the spiders I had envisioned. Guan Weijun had thought that they were spiders probably because she had been too far away, and these white silk threads would have given anyone the impression of a spider's webbing.

But in reality, these black dots were... caterpillars.

They came in all sizes, from as big as a human's head to as long as two meters. Fur grew on the side of their rough, fat flesh—or were they thorns? Those thorns came in many colors. Caterpillars of various colors crawled everywhere. Some rolled themselves into a ball, then rolled swiftly on the white silk. So, rolling should be its main way of movement.

In addition, some areas of the silk had eggs spread all over them. It was just that they weren't very big, and they were white too, so they were hard to see from afar.

Looking at this, I could feel my scalp tingling. If this giant cocoon leveled up to tier three and these eggs hatched, this neighborhood would fall in as ghastly a situation as having swarming locusts passing

through it. It was just that this time, the ones swarming the area would be caterpillars.

Ice was disadvantageous against these kinds of aberrants. Fire users would be able to deal with these bugs with ease. But no matter what, I had made up my mind to defeat the aberrant in that giant cocoon. This was no longer a matter of a detour. With so many aberrants roaming about, they would expand outward wildly. They would need so much more "food," and Old Town was the nearest large town nearby!

So instead of waiting for this tier three aberrant to bring his huge army, why not take his life when he's still a tier two!

I fixed the ice spear on my back and from among the curved buildings, I picked the closest building to the giant cocoon and climbed up from the far side of it.

I slid down to a window entangled with white silk. I transformed a piece of ice and threw it on top of the white silk, but these white threads were not sticky like spider webbing. They were more like silkworm threads. Therefore, these silky threads were not sticking on the walls of the building but were secured by breaking the windows and wrapping around the pillars of the building.

Trying to cut them with just an ordinary ice knife did not work. Adding more force into the action only broke a few strands. They were not any thicker than strands of hair, but they were tougher than expected.

I thought for a moment but still didn't materialize the ice dagger to test it. The ice dagger's energy was very high, so it would catch the cocoon's attention.

Now, the question was: *should I go directly up to the cocoon or eliminate his minions first?*

If I couldn't defeat the giant cocoon fast enough, I would be surrounded by the giant cocoon and the caterpillars, but I could possibly deal a heavy blow to the cocoon first.

If I took care of the caterpillars first, I would have to spend a lot of time to deal with such a large number. During this period, wouldn't the giant cocoon detect me? If he discovered this danger, would he come out straight from the cocoon, or would he find some way to speed up his advancement to tier three and then emerge?

There were too many uncertainties. I couldn't decide which of these assumptions was the correct one, so I picked the most favorable option.

After thinking it over, I took off my jacket and dress shirt, leaving only the white tank top. A layer of strange, half-translucent chest armor protected my chest. I patted my chest and whispered, "Xiaorong, can you help me?"

The armor wiggled. Thin, long branches spread out, gently caressing the ice patterns on my arms. Ever since the Ice Emperor transformed into weapons, Xiaorong had become semi-transparent and was able to perform simple communications with me. Well, it was more me talking

to him one-sidedly. He couldn't use any words to reply, but I could feel his changes in emotion.

"Xiaorong, I can't fly, and the Ice Emperor's way of moving around is too hard. I can only rely on you."

Forming ice paths everywhere would consume too much energy. I couldn't afford that right now. It was too difficult to hop to the skies, too. I hadn't mastered it, so it was impossible to use it in actual combat. In contrast, the other side had his white silk. Even if he couldn't fly, he could still move in midair. That would not be in my favor. I had to think of a different solution.

Fortunately, while the other party could shoot silks, my side had branches!

As the branches stretched longer, they began to wrap around my arms and legs. I moved around and discovered that they wouldn't affect my movement. *Xiaorong is so capable! When we get back, I'll definitely get Dàgē to accept you.*

Looking at the giant cocoon, I made my decision. No matter what, this thing was a real threat. I had to deal a critical strike as my first order of business.

Chapter 7: Tier Two Duel, Part Two

After communicating with Xiaorong and confirming that he knew what he needed to do, I jumped straight out of the window and formed my ice dagger in midair. Semi-transparent branches shot out. I was pushed right at the cocoon. Since I hadn't mastered this move yet, my face almost crashed into it. Fortunately, I pulled the ice spear out in time and used the force from the push to pierce right into the top of the cocoon.

I drove the spear head in and felt satisfied but immediately met resistance. I tightened my right hand around the handle, then grabbed the ice dagger on my thigh with my left hand and stabbed it right in the same area as the spear head.

With this stab, the blade sunk directly into the cocoon, but that was as far as it went. If only I could summon the spear, I would have been able to jab directly into the aberrant's skull. But I couldn't, which sucked, and no matter where I stabbed the ice dagger, it wasn't like I could hope that the aberrant had plastered his face against the edge of the cocoon. That kind of posture would be way too uncomfortable.

I pulled the ice dagger out and jumped upward immediately. After landing on a branch, I jumped again, this time even higher. I formed a thick slab of ice above me and flipped around in a circle, my feet pointing up, head pointing down. I kicked the thick ice heavily. Using the rebounding force, I flew downward like a cannon. Halfway down, I twisted my body up again, then landed right on the spear. The whole shaft sank in, piercing into the cocoon. However, it couldn't withstand the force. First, it bent. Then, the entire shaft splintered.

The giant cocoon vibrated violently. *Looks like I got a direct hit. Nice.* I was really getting worried that the aberrant inside might not be all that big, so the spear wouldn't be able to reach the target. Since there was such a huge reaction, I must have successfully pierced it, and it wasn't some insignificant, small wound either.

I immediately grabbed the remaining ten centimeters of the shaft. In one breath, I released a great amount of ice energy, so much that I didn't even have the energy to spare to deal with the caterpillars that were rolling over to me. Fortunately, I had Xiaorong with me. A great number of icy branches shot outwards all at once. One by one, the branches sent the thorny caterpillars flying.

I could even feel Xiaorong's grievance and pain, but there was no way to comfort my friend. I could already feel something obstructing the ice power that I had just forced into the cocoon. I had to focus on increasing the ice energy I was sending into the giant cocoon.

By now, the vibration from the giant cocoon was so violent that I could have been shaken right off, but it wasn't much of a problem to me since I had my ice ability and Xiaorong's branches. Unless I were mortally injured and had no choice but to let go, if I wanted to stay on top of something, no one would be able to move me, not even half a step.

At the same time, I didn't want to be injured heavily just for the sake of staying right where I was. So when I felt the cocoon's inner energy about to erupt, I hastily retreated away from the giant cocoon.

At the same moment, icy branches shot out and entangled with the white silk not far away, pulling me over at the same time. However, the force was too great, and I flew past where I wanted to be. I grabbed both the ice and silk to pull myself back in place. I needed to practice this move more, or I'd eventually end up tragically smacking into a window.

I was positioned on top of the giant cocoon. All below me were those colorful caterpillar balls. They all came rolling toward me wildly. Even those who didn't have claustrophobia would feel claustrophobic from this.

The icy branches shot out continuously at those caterpillars, but they didn't have enough offensive power. The strikes hardly killed any of them. Some of the large caterpillars just flinched for a moment before rushing forward again. I jumped to a different spot, still keeping my eyes locked on the giant cocoon. I had no time to deal with these caterpillars.

"Xiaorong, bear with me. Help me take care of those bugs."

I sent over more of my ice energy to Xiaorong. He was unafraid of my ice energy and could even use it within a certain limit.

I didn't really understand what was going on with us. Xiaorong was a bit like a parasite... *Oh wait, this way of describing him isn't quite right.* After all, he spent most of his time in his pot in the room, not on me. So if I really had to put it into words, he was more like a... summoned beast?

The icy branches grew more and more dense. I let Xiaorong off of me before he extended further to avoid having a bunch of branches wrapped around me, hindering me in my fight.

I'll let Xiaorong deal with those caterpillars. I stared at the giant cocoon. That giant cocoon was twisting madly. Something inside wanted out. It wasn't the right time, so it had a very hard time coming out.

I clenched the ice dagger, staring fixedly without letting my eyes wander. Suddenly, a caterpillar broke away from Xiaorong's barrage. It threw itself at me but was slowly freezing in midair. Although it was not completely iced over, it could hardly move. With the added mass of the ice, the caterpillar's original momentum from its jump was no longer enough, and it dropped downwards before it could reach us. In the end, it barely managed to hook onto a bit of white silk, but it wasn't enough to hold its weight. It slid for a distance before falling the rest of the way.

The white cocoon stretched into an oblong shape. The topmost portion became thinner and thinner. I could vaguely make out the shape of the aberrant. It actually had a human face, but a much bigger one, about three times the size of my face. The eyes were startlingly huge. It didn't seem like it had a nose. Just as the cocoon stretched until it was about to break, I jumped straight down, aiming the ice dagger directly at the right eye of that face.

Riiip—the cocoon broke and a face emerged. The facial shape was round at the top and pointy at the bottom. It still had a nose, just that it was only a tiny protrusion with two skinny lines for nostrils. The

sides of the eyes glittered with different colors of the rainbow, and seemed to be made up of small, fine scales. The eyes opened, revealing pitch black pupils. The mouth cracked open, exposing fine sharp fangs, and let out a piercing cry.

The ice dagger only managed to stab him between the eyebrows. While the aberrant hadn't even opened his eyes yet, I had caught him off guard and the ice dagger had already pierced him. He had nevertheless felt endangered and had instantly twisted his head, causing the dagger to sink in between the eyebrows. It went in about five centimeters deep. If this were just an ordinary aberrant, just this depth and some ice energy would have been enough for his brain to become frozen tofu. However, this aberrant was gigantic, with a protruding forehead. Five centimeters was like a bargain sale for this big guy.

I sent in ice energy without stopping. However, it didn't even take a second for an alarm to go off in my head. I jumped back right that instant. A light, colorful fog came shooting out from his mouth. If I had stayed where I was, it would have directly hit my face.

Taking advantage of my retreat, the aberrant shot out from the top of the giant cocoon. His body was thin and long from the tight fit, but once he left the cocoon and stretched out his gigantic wings, his body appeared incomparably gigantic.

Yet, I was ecstatic. There was a tear in one of his wings, extremely close to the thorax. That would definitely affect his flight mobility, or he might even be unable to fly at all. Although this fellow was currently hovering in the air, he was swaying very badly.

This aberrant must have formed from a human. Even though the figure was gigantic, he was at least three or four meters tall. Those four pieces of butterfly wings were even more humongous. Even the insect-like abdomen was huge. Instead of a thorax, the middle portion was actually a human torso, with all four limbs present. Without the wings, the whole body was slim and long, and the arms and the legs even more so. The soles of the feet were slender and sharp, definitely not suitable for long walks.

From the upper torso, you could tell it was female. The bust was so disproportionately large, plus that elongated abdomen and the whole nest of caterpillars protecting her while she advanced to the next tier meant she was definitely the queen, responsible for production—*Off with her head!*

So long as she was dead, even if I couldn't completely annihilate the rest of the caterpillars and another butterfly queen emerged among them, they would lose this advantage. As the humans and other aberrants advanced their tiers in the later stages, it would not be so easy for them to spread their influence.

The queen fluttered and quivered. She was furious and distressed. The rainbow fog gradually dispersed as she flapped her wings. Even if I didn't know what effect the fog had, I couldn't let her have the upper hand. I held my breath and charged forward.

I stepped onto the white silk and drew out a layer of ice under the soles of my feet as I glided downhill. The white silk transformed into an ice slope. Next, I added ice spikes below my feet to ascend. It was

a similarly easy feat. These white threads were a strength and a weakness at the same time. She probably didn't have enough time to complete her transformation, or the silk should have the effect of obstructing foes. But as of today, I benefitted from this opportunity.

As I jumped, the butterfly tried flapping farther to dodge out of the way, but with one flap, she bared her fangs in pain and instead dropped down a bit. *I can't miss this chance.* I leaped forward. The moment my skin brushed the rainbow-colored fog, it stung intermittently. *Oh, come on! I can't even let it touch my skin?*

I immediately wrapped my skin with a layer of ice. It was a thin layer at first, but I didn't expect the ice to be melted in an instant. By this time, I had already jumped right in front of the opponent. I reached out to grab the other's arm. The pain unexpectedly returned. This time, it was no longer a sting, but a freakin' burn!

The layer of ice was not enough to block the fog. I had no choice but to release ice energy constantly to protect my whole body. However, by now, I had lost the opportunity to seize the aberrant, and the butterfly flew away from me. She perched on the white silk and used those slender feet and hindwings to hook onto the thread, supporting her gigantic body.

Her blood dripped, and even that had a multicolored sheen. As it landed on the white silk, a wisp of smoke rose from the stain. It looks like I couldn't let that blood touch me either. *It might even be more dangerous than that multi-colored fog.*

Glancing at my arm, where I had felt a burning sensation earlier, I saw that the affected skin was red and discolored. At present, my biggest weakness was that my physique was not tough enough. For humans, unless one had a body-strengthening ability or the like, it would be hard for one's physique to surpass an aberrant's.

This was one of the reasons human beings were crushed by aberrants in the apocalypse. In the first phases, abilities were practically worthless, but physical-strengthening abilities had their obvious advantages. Once the aberrants seized the advantage by devouring human flesh and blood, the speed of their evolution far surpassed the humans. How could humans *not* be crushed by them?

In the future, I've got to think of a way to overcome this weakness. But for now, I'll just spend some ice energy to cover my body. Even if I wasted some energy, the aberrant's energy capacity was far greater than mine, so I could only accept this loss. Otherwise, the multi-colored fog would continue to burn my skin, and I wouldn't last long. I didn't have a way to take care of the aberrant instantly either.

Fortunately, I had landed the first two critical hits. Those wounds on the wing and the forehead were not trifles, or else I would only have been able to run with my tail between my legs. *As of now, I still have a chance!*

I tightened my grip on the ice dagger. Actually, the butterfly's blood had gotten on it, but there was no damage to the ice dagger. Even if the ice dagger looked just like a piece of ice, it was a weapon formed out of the Ice Emperor's body!

I enveloped my whole body with cold air. As I carefully observed the aberrant, the butterfly was not in a hurry either. She fluttered her wings. The multi-colored fog became thicker and denser. Luckily, it was far from Xiaorong, or he would have turned from semi-transparent to rainbow-colored.

The butterfly's eyes may have been huge, but after she experienced almost getting blinded as she came out of the cocoon, she was on guard. It wouldn't be easy for me to use the ice dagger to stab her eyes to reach the brain. If I missed, considering how much her forehead protruded, she would attack me before I could even stick it into her brain. She didn't need to hit me in the head either. All she needed was to pierce the softest stomach area and dig out my innards, and I would be dead.

The temples, the lower jaw, or the cerebellum... The butterfly suddenly twisted her head to look to the side. A bunch of caterpillars came crashing at her. She dodged one, but another came flying at her.

The banyan tree was going wild. His branches were shrouded in a layer of ice, so he was no longer afraid of the thorns on the caterpillars. The branches exploded into action, whipping and whacking here, there and everywhere. *Now that's what I call having fun!* Although the mid-sized to large caterpillars would not die from this, they wouldn't be able to get close to him either. The two sides were in a deadlock.

But Xiaorong knew that I didn't care if the caterpillars died or not. As long as they didn't hinder my battle, a deadlock was fine. Now that he saw that I was in a tough spot, he even had the insight to throw the

caterpillars over to disrupt the fight. *This tree is now the baby brother of my family. Anyone who bullies him dies!*

The butterfly was furious because of her own caterpillars. There were hundreds of caterpillars. It was a spectacular show as they came flying over one by one. The thorns of the caterpillars plus the throwing speed meant that the butterfly wasn't unscathed. She screamed and the caterpillars stopped, no longer rushing toward Xiaorong.

Idiot! I rushed forward and shouted, "Xiaorong!" The banyan tree transformed entirely back into branches and wrapped around my body. I borrowed the branches, formed ice blades, used the white silk, and even formed ice slabs in midair. I glided and climbed and was pulled, my movements extremely quick.

I wrapped Xiaorong's body in ice energy once again. Thin and long branches shot out. Just as we were about to catch the butterfly, she blew out a wave of multi-colored fog. Simultaneously, I let out a burst of ice energy. Xiaorong couldn't bear such a strong wave of ice energy, but that was okay. It would still work if it surrounded him without touching him. As long as this could block that rainbow fog from burning him, all was well.

The butterfly leaped and dodged most of the branches. However, a few still hit her body. She repeatedly used her hands to grab the branches and sprayed colored fog with her mouth. Under my command, Xiaorong didn't continue wrestling with her. He retreated when he was grabbed. However, another branch coiled around her without her noticing. The more she wanted to get rid of those branches, the tighter the branches got.

In the end, she flew upwards, ignoring the pain in her wings, wanting to fly upward at all costs. Stupidity was truly a disease. One could not expect much from a butterfly's IQ. Xiaorong took the chance to bind her with even more branches. She had already had one wing damaged before this. Now, with the addition of the branches, she immediately plummeted.

Why is she trying so hard to fly? As the branches tried to pull her down, the butterfly continued to flap, regardless of the piercing pain. She hissed sharply as her blood spurted. Xiaorong was in a bad shape as well, his branches twitching. The corrosiveness of that blood was too powerful. Even my ice energy couldn't block it.

I slid along the branches and jumped on the butterfly. I ordered Xiaorong to retreat at the same time. We weren't too high up. If he dropped straight down, the white silk below us would guarantee his safety.

To ensure I wouldn't be shaken off, I could only use both hands and feet to climb on the butterfly's damaged wing. She tried to scratch me over and over, and she even spewed the multi-colored fog again. This time, the fog was so thick that it had become gooey.

Making use of my agility, I climbed around her, never letting that multi-colored fog hit me. If that fog were to hit me directly, this life would be over.

Even though the fog didn't hit me directly, the thick fog still made me feel pain all over. I used the ice energy to forcefully block it while I

held the dagger in my hand and stabbed at the butterfly. I could feel resistance, as if I had stuck my hand into a sponge. I could feel the burn, as if a thousand needles had been pierced to my bone marrow, but I couldn't let go even with the pain that made me want to cry out. If I let go, she would fly right off and maybe even abandon these caterpillars. *Everything would be ruined!*

This aberrant was truly at the top of tier two. She was able to waste this much energy, filling the sky with colorful fog. It was like a watercolor palette had spilled across the sky, and even this hadn't made her hit her limit. *With such endless energy, I must have her crystal!*

We were locked in a stalemate in midair. Ignoring the burning sensation, I slashed left and right. I could hardly injure her with the fog gathered so densely around her head. Thus, I started stabbing elsewhere. As her resistance evidently weakened, I chose to slice into her other wing, the unharmed one.

Dropping from midair, we crashed onto the white silk, bouncing away from each other. I wanted to find my balance, but a strand of white silk had caught my left foot. I was careless. I had to twist all around before I could find my balance. A surge of pain seized my whole left thigh. I placed my hand over my leg and layered ice over the entire leg. The ice would work as a temporary cast for now.

I looked down. The butterfly's fall was more severe than mine. She was way too big and was also surrounded by colored fog. The white silk couldn't catch her. She fell straight to the lowest parts of the white silk and even squashed many of her own caterpillars on her way down.

Finally, she lay on the ground shrieking. The caterpillars rushed toward her to protect her, not wanting to give up at all.

I staggered for a bit but forced myself to ignore my injured left leg. Facing the swarm of caterpillars, I summoned Xiaorong and once again charged over using various moves. I slew all the way up to the butterfly. Although there were still many caterpillars behind me, that no longer mattered.

I breathed heavily and dropped my head to look at that butterfly. She looked up. The fog had weakened a lot. I could see her inky black eyes staring right at me, and I could even read the despair in them.

"In the next life, ask to be smarter."

The ice dagger pierced downwards—tier two crystal obtained!

Yet, this was not the finale. I twisted back. The crowd of caterpillars did not scatter despite their queen being dead. They transformed their anger into high speed rolling, surging from all sorts of directions.

I gave a cry of "Xiaorong!" I could feel my eyes burning as I faced the never-ending caterpillars. There was no end to killing these caterpillars. My body had long been numbed by pain.

Finally, I stabbed one last time, yet I didn't hit anything. My consciousness came back to me. I was standing among countless caterpillar corpses. Not even one was left alive.

I let go of a deep breath, my body so heavy that it was like I was carrying a mountain. I opened my mouth, wanting to let Xiaorong down, but I spat out a mouthful of blood.

I wiped away the blood and saw my arm covered in a rainbow of colors. The colors were even darkening, almost blackening. No, I had to gather some crystals and gobble them first; otherwise, I would die. These tier zero crystals barely had any effect, but fortunately they were all over the ground. All I needed was to gobble up more...

I squatted to dig up the crystals when suddenly a pair of gigantic feet landed in front of me. I looked up. A lizard-like aberrant opened its mouth, dripping a stream of saliva, as if it was in front of a piece of beef steak.

While the butterfly fought with me, a sneak was actually trying to get one over us both. Unfortunately, it was just a creature who had barely reached tier one. It was totally looking down on me.

I was so angry I laughed.

Cold air exploded from me. Xiaorong's branches shot out in every direction, spreading out like a dragnet over the entire place.

I roared, "A tiger that leaves the mountain can be bullied by a dog, but you shithead of a mouse think you could make a move on me?"

Chapter 8: Misplaced

When I came round, a blood-red and yellow sunset was reflected on the snowy leaves of the icy tree that had filled the sky, strikingly colorful like tears of blood, appearing as beautiful as a rose... *Jiang Xiaorong, why the heck did you grow and fill the sky for no reason?*

I crawled up and even had to push aside the branches all over my body, as I had been completely buried by tree roots. Frowning, I asked, "Xiaorong, are you protecting me?"

The banyan tree excitedly shook his tree trunk, even curling up his roots and tightening around me, as if asking for credit for how well he had protected me.

"Well done." I nodded, then asked with a slight smile, "Now then, tell me, how many caterpillar crystals did you eat while I was asleep?"

The banyan tree suddenly froze, as if he was just a tree that was incapable of moving. That shaking just now must have been caused by the wind.

Rolling my eyes, I said, "Still playing dumb? Don't tell me there's nothing left? Besides, aren't you afraid of exploding from overeating? Now, hand over the rest of the crystals."

Ripping away the tree roots as I stood up, I looked down to check on my injuries—the tank top had vanished without any trace, and all that remained of the pants were several strips of rags hanging around the crotch area. This actually made it easier to see the condition of my injuries at a glance. The situation was slightly better than I'd thought.

All of the wounds had closed, so I was unlikely to have had much blood loss.

Fortunately, I had eaten that tier one crystal before passing out. I really had no choice since my injuries were too serious. I had been a bit worried that I wasn't fainting, but was actually dying, so I had to eat it. Otherwise, I really wanted to save it for Junjun to eat; her strength must surpass her beauty!

I frowned while looking at the surrounding sunset scene, hoping that I had only fainted from early morning to evening. It better not be several evenings later now. If Xiao Sha had returned to the base for quite some time, then I'd be in huge trouble.

A tree branch carefully outstretched to the front, and a leaf spread open. Fine, tiny crystals occupied half of the leaf's surface. I looked down. It was not a small amount, so Xiaorong had only eaten one third at most.

I put away the crystals and said, "In the future, unless you're wounded and in immediate need of crystals, wait until I wake up to make distributions. Rest assured, you won't be losing out. As long as you follow me well, I'll ensure that you'll have no end of crystals to eat."

Xiaorong was so happy that the whole tree rubbed against me; however, he was just too big. Although not as excessive as the previous tree that stretched across the sky, he was still a banyan tree of ordinary size. Don't mention rubbing, just having a few branches shoot over instantly buried me.

Foiled, Xiaorong seemed quite displeased. He started to retract the branches and turn from a big tree into a bonsai. *I haven't got the faintest idea of how he can grow and shrink like this. I really have no words in response to his flexibility of suddenly growing into a huge tree and suddenly shrinking into a small bonsai.*

"Wait! Don't turn small just yet. Help me take some white silk."

I didn't want to walk in the city practically naked. Worse still would be returning to the base in the nude with injuries all over my body. My big brother's fury and little sister's tears were even scarier than the end of the world.

Although the white silk was made of "fine threads," it was relative to the huge cocoon. In fact, each and every piece was wider than my hands. After Xiaorong grabbed a large section, I trimmed and cut holes and strips into it with the ice dagger, wrapping the strips like bandages as my shirt and pants. I really hadn't lost any of my past life's tailoring skills.

After fixing everything, the result was not bad at all—both tough and flexible. If I had worn this material during the fight earlier, it would not have left me running naked.

Look at all that white silk. How can we let it go to waste? Of course, just straight away let Xiaorong go at it!

Finally, I dragged a large bundle of white silk back home in a net woven from tree branches. My speed was a bit slow as the injury to my left thigh was pretty serious. I really couldn't walk very fast.

Back at the mini warehouse, no one was around. I continued to walk. There was no trace of fighting along the way. I was really glad—it seemed that Xiao Sha hadn't encountered any great danger while retreating.

When the familiar bell tower came into view, and I found nothing unusual, I sighed in relief. The bad luck of the Jiang family was terrifying enough. I always felt like something was going to happen at any time. *I don't care if it happens to me. Please don't let it happen to the other Jiang family members.*

As I approached the town, there were many people there—that was, far exceeding the total people in the JDT. They appeared rather calm, some sitting or standing. They should be the group of people with Guan Weijun. It seemed that they had just arrived and were still sorting things out. *Awesome!*

I made a quick detour to avoid the crowd and headed straight for the main building that was higher up.

"Shuyu!"

As I approached the main building, a head protruded from the sentry point above the door. Ceng Yunqian quietly called out, "Hurry up and get inside. Xiao Sha just arrived with a large group of people. Boss's face instantly turned dark when he didn't see you. Even Shujun was shouting about wanting to go to the city to find you."

Hearing that, I threw the huge lump of Xiaorong directly across the gate and then jumped over immediately. I first told Xiaorong to toss the white silk into the backyard and directly return to the room to be a bonsai. Following this, I rushed to find my big brother and little sister.

When I rushed into the hall, Xiao Sha was standing in front of Dàgē and Shujun—head bowed as he received double the bombardment.

"I'm back!" I promptly shouted and quickly stepped in front of them, ignoring the pain in my leg. *Even if it gets broken later, right now, I must walk steadily in front of Dàgē and Xiǎomèi!*

Dàgē looked at me with a very dark face and Xiao Sha was obviously relieved, while Junjun directly pounced on me, almost knocking me down. *I feel like my left thigh broke. I hope I'm just imagining it...*

It hurt so much that I couldn't think for several seconds. When I raised my head, Dàgē and Xiǎomèi were standing in front of me with equally stormy faces.

"You're wounded?" Dàgē coldly said.

"Yeah." I braced myself to answer, "My left thigh hurts pretty badly. Everything else is trivial. Really!"

Familiar rays of light shone again.

Junjun circled around me for inspection, and I quickly cooperated by posing in various ways to show her. She made three rounds before

finally stopping and speaking with relief, "The injuries this time aren't serious."

See! I hurriedly nodded. Of course, I made no mention of the contribution of a certain tier one crystal.

It didn't take long for the light that covered my whole body to shrink to the thigh. It felt like Dàgē was even trying to completely heal the broken bones. Although Dàgē's expression didn't change, I could clearly feel that his energy was depleting. I hastily took out the tier two crystal and said, "Dàgē, eat this crystal before you go on."

If I didn't have Dàgē eat it quickly, I would keep feeling uneasy. *Right now, it's not easy to get tier two crystals. Besides, it's the crystal of an aberrant that was almost tier three.* I was a little excited since Dàgē might directly rise to tier two if he ate it.

Dàgē didn't stop. He simply glanced over and actually said, "Eat it yourself."

I was stunned, and was about to persuade him, but he interrupted me. "In the next few days, you'll keep watch over the town base. In exchange, I'll be going into the city. I will hunt for my own crystals to eat."

I looked at Dàgē in shock. *He actually wants to enter Lan City?*

He spoke in a matter-of-fact way, "If I don't train, how can I become stronger?"

Indeed, that was true. It was not enough to just eat crystals. Actual combat experience was extremely important. Sometimes, I even felt that fighting a battle didn't lose to the effects of eating crystals.

After thinking it through, I no longer tried to stop him, but simply continued to advise, "Dàgē, just treat this as the last crystal that Dìdì hunts for you. In the future, you can hunt for them yourself."

This was a tier two crystal. As long as he ate it, Dàgē could hunt for tier two crystals by himself later on. But I dare not voice this, for fear that Dàgē would not eat it.

Upon hearing this, Dàgē finally took the crystal and said, "This is the last time. When you hunt for crystals in the future, I won't eat even a single one."

Watching him eat the crystal, I finally dared to complain, "Dàgē, do you need to be so stubborn? Anyway, Dàgē, when you become stronger, you'll protect your dìdì, right? It's the same no matter who eats it!"

Dàgē retorted, "So when you get stronger, you won't protect your gēge? What's the difference then with having you eating it?"

I was speechless.

Junjun laughed, and the next second, a huge rush of energy exploded from Dàgē all at once, scaring her so much that her rosy face lost all color.

My leg which was being treated was jolted by this energy, and I almost fell. Fortunately, Junjun held me just in time, while Xiao Sha hurriedly pulled the two of us to a safe distance.

Junjun turned to look at me. After confirming that I was okay, she actually dashed directly toward Dàgē. Even Xiao Sha was too late to hold her back. His face changed, and he rushed to catch up to her.

Knowing that there was nothing wrong, I wasn't worried. I first touched my leg—*it doesn't hurt at all*. Pulling aside the white silk shirt, I saw that not even a single bruise remained on my whole body. Dàgē's outbreak was just too powerful. I hoped he could control it well, so he wouldn't end up healing all of the enemy's wounds with this explosive power...

"Èrgē! What happened to Dàgē?"

Junjun stood near Dàgē, but she didn't dare to move any closer. She was confused about this, not understanding why she didn't dare to step forward.

"Move a bit closer. Nothing is gonna happen."

I calmly walked over. This movement clearly pacified Junjun. She did as she was told. Even Xiao Sha moved over. Both of them walked toward Dàgē step by step. Their faces changed but they could only crease their foreheads in a frown and bitterly endure it. Although it was such a cold day, their foreheads were drenched in sweat.

"How is it? Tier two isn't for show."

I went over but didn't enter Dàgē's range of oppression. Junjun and Xiao Sha were not Dàgē's opponents, as their gap was too big, so getting closer was fine. But if I were to get closer to Dàgē, he'd be somewhat on alert. He was currently on the cusp of leveling up. I didn't wish for any unforeseen events to occur.

But for Junjun and Xiao Sha, it was a good opportunity, especially Junjun. Her chance of fighting an aberrant alone was almost zero. It was a rare opportunity for her to feel the oppressiveness of a difference in tier—although I actually didn't want her to experience this.

"Have a good feel of this oppressiveness. You can come out if you really can't handle it."

With sweat running down like raindrops, the two were unable to respond. Pursing their lips, neither of them moved their feet.

I stood at the sidelines, sensing that the surrounding energy was gradually being tucked away by Dàgē. Originally, his energy level had already almost reached the peak of tier one but was stuck at a bottleneck. Triggered by this tier two crystal, his energy instantly burst out. In fact, the impact of breaking through tier one usually wasn't so big. Dàgē had caused such a big deal likely due to the crystal being too overwhelming. For a moment, he wasn't able to completely absorb it.

I carefully felt the energy around Dàgē to prevent things from going wrong. At this time, Dàgē threw me a glance. Seeing that I smiled

back at him, he didn't return a single word and concentrated on absorbing the energy.

It took several minutes before Dàgē finally finished reeling in the energy. I immediately rushed over to hold Junjun. The moment the oppressiveness let up, she went limp and fell into my arms. Seeing that my little sister really didn't have any strength to stand up, I simply carried her princess style. As for Xiao Sha at the side—*Sorry, since you're not my family's little princess, you'll just have a lie on the floor by yourself.*

Dàgē slowly opened his eyes, looked down at his body, and then looked up and asked, "Shujun, Xiao Sha. You all okay?"

Junjun nodded and said, "Just a little tired."

Xiao Sha propped himself up. He shook his head, sweat dripping down his face—he was too tired to speak.

Dàgē finally felt at ease. He walked over and touched Junjun's forehead. Lifting his eyes, he asked, "Shuyu, what's the matter with this crystal? I felt especially good right now."

I honestly confessed, "Tier two crystal." In any case, his tier had already gone up. Even if he cut his stomach open, Dàgē wouldn't be able to dig out the crystal.

Dàgē glared furiously at me. I shrank back and pitifully sought support, "Junjun, look at Dàgē. He's bullying me. I fed him food, but he's scowling at me."

Junjun said in a sour mood, "Can't blame Dàgē. Lately, I've been wanting to glare at you, too!"

I felt aggrieved. *Where's my gentle and soft Mèimei, whom I personally raised since childhood?* "Sob sob sob... After growing up, Mèimei no longer loves Èrgē."

Junjun exaggeratedly rolled her eyes. Patting her unloved èrgē, she urged, "I want to take a bath."

"I need to bathe too. Let's..." I shut my mouth, having almost said "bathe together," momentarily forgetting that Mèimei was already fifteen, almost sixteen! *I almost turned into a pervert!* "...Let's take you back to your room. Then I'll wash up, too."

Junjun glanced over and snorted, seemingly knowing that her èrgē had secretly changed his previous remark.

I held Junjun in my arms, while Dàgē supported Xiao Sha. Just as we were about to take them back to their rooms, Lily came in.

"Boss, the people Xiao Sha brought back want to see you."

Dàgē looked at me and lifted one eyebrow, handing over the work to me just like that. "Xiao Sha said you wanted to bring these people back. You should handle this yourself. Whether they leave or stay, you decide."

"Dàgē, this won't do." I looked at Xiao Sha with a frustrated face.

"Why didn't you clearly explain the whole story?"

Xiao Sha sullenly said, "You didn't come back, and when I explained that you went off by yourself to fight a huge cocoon and a large group of spiders, Boss's face had instantly darkened. He wanted me to explain in detail about what kind of aberrant it was, the situation surrounding it, and why you wanted to go by yourself. Besides that, he didn't want to hear about anything else at all."

Why were you so honest!? Can't you just say that I went to slay some bugs? See how truthful an answer it would have been? It can't even be considered a lie!

"People that Èrgē wanted to bring home?" Junjun curiously asked, "Are they really strong?"

"Nothing amazing."

Xiao Sha shook his head before he added, "There's a woman. She's quite decent."

Hearing "woman," Junjun's eyes shone. She looked at me with a wide grin and even gave me a wink.

Dàgē even hurriedly asked, "Is that woman beautiful?"

Xiao Sha thought about it and said, "Ordinary. Not as attractive as Shuyu."

Don't make a comparison with me. This face of mine has long since defied all natural order.

Lily interrupted, "She's not breathtaking, but she is rather pleasing to the eye. She's quite the cheerful and lively lady."

Believe me, her "liveliness" far exceeds your imagination.

Dàgē nodded and inquired, "How old is she?"

"Twenty-five." I answered.

Dàgē frowned. "A bit old."

Say I'm old again, and I'll never speak with you again... Wait, that's not right. I'm not Guan Weijun. I'm Jiang Shuyu, an eighteen years old youngster in his prime.

"Was she the one who took the initiative?"

Take what initiative? I was at a loss.

Xiao Sha shook his head and said, "No, Shuyu started it."

Dàgē nodded and casually said, "Then, there's no need to say more. As long as Shuyu likes her."

Hey hey hey, your thought processes have completely derailed! I only took the initiative to save her, okay? What's this about liking her?!

"I'm going to see what kind of woman Shuyu likes."

After saying this, Dàgē immediately walked to the door, and Lily followed him with brightly shining eyes.

Xiao Sha was stunned. He gazed at me in puzzlement. "Who do you like?"

I fiercely glared at him and was about to shout at Dàgē when Junjun suddenly patted me. She anxiously said, "Èrgē, put me down."
I could only carefully set her down, making sure that my family's princess could stand up stably. By the time I lifted my head, Dàgē's figure was already far away.

Shit! Wait a minute, Dàgē, let me explain! I was about to catch up—

"Èrgē, I want to go, too. Help me out. I can't walk properly."

With a grimace, I turned around to support the unusually powerless princess as we slowly moved to the door. Soon after, someone tapped my shoulder again—it was Xiao Sha, taking the opportunity for a lift.

Oh come on! I'm the injured person who needs help, okay? Although my wounds had been healed, the energy I'd used up and my blood loss hadn't been replenished. *Why are you making me into your walking tools one after another?*

By the time our pale-faced trio rushed outside of the gate, Dàgē and Guan Weijun were already standing face-to-face. At first glance, they seemed to be confronting each other. The members of the JDT were all

gathered together and standing behind Dàgē, while Tai Wen and Zhang Jing were standing behind Guan Weijun.

These troop members, who always appeared like invincible airheads, were currently standing in an orderly fashion, their hands at their guns. Although their postures were all different, you could tell they were pros at a glance, tigers and wolves whose strength could not be underestimated.

"Does Guan Weijun really like you?" Xiao Sha seriously said, "I think she likes someone else."

Indeed. Guan Weijun's eyes were glued on Dàgē, and she was even occasionally gulping while sneaking a glance at his chest and abs.

Look at my past self with such a thirsty look, as if she hasn't seen a man for eight hundred years—don't mention my image, even my integrity has been fed to the dogs.

"You're called Guan. Wei. Jun?" Dàgē softly uttered this name.

Guan Weijun gasped and murmured, "Oh my god, my ears are going to get pregnant."

Let's see you try giving birth?

"Èrgē..."

"Yeah?" I looked at Junjun.

Junjun comforted me in sympathy, "People say that first love is always fruitless. Losing to Dàgē is nothing unusual. Èrgē, you're very handsome and also a good guy. You'll certainly find a better girl!"

*...Question: I was relegated to a good guy by my beloved mèimei.
Should I cry my heart out?*

"Wait here," Dàgē commanded.

"Okay, I'll wait for you!" Guan Weijun answered like she was willing to wait forever for him.

Dàgē walked over. From his movement, it seemed like he wanted to drag me to the side to interrogate me. However, I was supporting Shujun and couldn't leave, so I simply shrugged my shoulders. Dàgē paused his footsteps and gave me a glance, indicating that the interrogation was delayed, but would occur.

He turned to Guan Weijun and the other two and said, "Out of consideration for my dìdi Shuyu, you can stay in Old Town—temporarily."

After that, he picked up Junjun in a princess carry, turned around, and left—his manner so handsome that it could be called arrogant, suave, cool, and overbearing.

"Your complexion doesn't look good. Get some rest as soon as you finish talking to them."

I nodded obediently and watched Dàgē carry Junjun away. The latter shouted, "Èrgē, I'll ask Auntie to stew chicken soup for you."

I should just go straight to my room later, lie down, and sleep for three days and three nights. *I refuse to believe that the chicken soup won't spoil after that!*

Guan Weijun came over and said with admiration, "I did feel like the great benefactor was too submissive to you. Even as the boyfriend of a guy, he wouldn't be so obedient, right? Then, it turned out that you have the backing of a super strong gēge. The support of brotherhood truly can't be underestimated!"

...Mom would never raise an evil, sinister kid, but it seems to be no problem for her to raise an idiotic and scatterbrained girl. Can that mouth of yours ask for any more trouble? Tai Wen and Zhang Jing are crying behind you!

"Oh right, Xiao Yu. Your clothes, shoes, and sewing machines are all outside. Wanna bring them in?"

I instantly said, "Of course."

Guan Weijun shrugged and said, "Then, you'll have to find someone to carry them. Your people wouldn't let us into this house."

I nodded. Looking at her, I was reminded of my mother whose condition was unknown. But it wouldn't do to fix my attention on someone else's mother all day long, so I could only take the indirect approach. "So, what are you going to do next?"

Guan Weijun's eyes suddenly turned sharp. She spoke with some difficulty, "Well, it's a bit hard to say, but it seems I'll have to trouble you."

Indeed. Among them, the ones with combat strength aren't very strong, while the ones with no combat capabilities occupy almost two-thirds of them. Asking for the Jiang Dominion to take them in is simply an impossible task. It'd be hard for anyone to start talking about the matter.

"Please, let me be your sister-in-law!" Guan Weijun excitedly shouted. Then seemingly having recalled something, she asked, "Oh, by the way! Is your brother married?"

...Could you be anymore frank than this!? You've frightened my family's invincible troop! Do you have any idea how difficult it is for them to maintain their image? Cain was enduring so much that even his face twisted!

Getting stared at by my past life's face, with her eyes almost sparkling, my face twitched as I replied, "My dàgē isn't married yet."

"Girlfriend?"

"No."

"Boyfriend?"

"No!"

Guan Weijun was flooded with euphoria. She extended her hand, and said, "Then from now on, I'm your brother's pursuer. Didi, kindly give me more advice, please!"

I was a bit sluggish while forced to shake hands. What the hell is going on? "Guan Weijun" wants to be my family's sister-in-law? Thinking about the scene of Dàgē and Guan Weijun together—why do I feel like Dàgē and I are having a taboo, incestuous relationship? Fuck! This is just too creepy!

"W-Weijun." Tai Wen helplessly said, "Right now, our first priority is to have them willingly accept us. It's not to scare them away, right?"

"Of course not. If I scare away my dream lover, who am I going to marry?" Guan Weijun twirled in delight—she was literally spinning around in a circle! Clasp her heart, she said, "I've never seen such an amazing man in my whole life. That intimidating presence of his is just like a savage lion's. If I piss him off, I could instantly die anytime. How thrilling!"

That sounds nothing like the characteristics that a good husband should have...

"I wanna go back and tell Mom that I've finally found a real man! She's getting a son-in-law!"

This ultimate move sure is powerful, roasting all the guys here in a single strike.

Guan Weijun skipped to the door with joy. She only then remembered her two companions. She turned around and called out, "Come on, we have to arrange for everyone to settle down." Then, she happily hummed with small bouncing steps.

Zhang Jing hurriedly followed her. Tai Wen pushed his glasses as he sighed, and apologized to all the members of the JDT, "Weijun is just a little simple-minded. She is actually a good person. She's quite clever when she's not being foolish and is also pretty strong. I'm sorry for the inconvenience. Please consider taking us in."

As an older member, Zheng Xing stepped forward and answered, "That depends on Boss. But you should prepare yourselves. If Boss isn't willing, you have to immediately leave this town."

"It's best that you don't mess around or have any crooked thoughts. Otherwise..." Cain smiled like a ruffian while saying this. His eyes gleamed coldly—the very picture of a man with a big smile and evil intentions.

"Of course not. We're just a group of normal people." Tai Wen looked at us, seemingly a bit unwilling to leave. He continued asking, "Excuse me, is there anything that could make you more willing to let us stay?"

I cut in, "Sort out your abilities and present them. My big brother likes competent people."

Tai Wen shot me a glance, dropped his eyes, and humbly said, "All right, understood. Then, I'll go back and ask everyone."

He finally turned to keep up with Guan Weijun, walking behind her to the left, like a genuine subordinate. If I hadn't known he had a wife, I might have thought that he was fond of Guan Weijun, but it wasn't so.

"Tsk. I like that woman."

Ceng Yunqian was the first to start talking. But the words that she said horrified me. *Make it clear, is it the common like, or that "other kind of like?"*

With no outsiders, Cain immediately dropped his "frivolous expert" image and shouted, "Come on, guys, let's make a bet! Will that woman be able to pursue Boss?"

"It's definitely possible," Lily calmly said. "Boss doesn't take the initiative, but he doesn't refuse anyone who offers themselves as long as they're pleasing to the eye."

Yes, my family's dàgē has little regard for integrity. The discipline since childhood turned out to be useless. Despite having arduously disciplined him since I was young, I still couldn't restrain him.

However, Dàgē had never brought a woman home, or perhaps, he had never thought of those people as his girlfriends.

But there was one woman who had personally made a visit. She was an ultra-sexy, gorgeous beauty with a figure like roaring waves. She came up and instantly hugged me tightly, and kept on saying "Dìdi looks so cute," "I'm your dàgē's girlfriend Yunyun." Then, she stayed in the house and refused to leave. Lin-bó, who wanted to call the

police, was locked outside by her. This situation frightened Junjun so much that she burst into tears.

I had given Dàgē a call, and we never saw the woman ever again. Afterwards, there were no longer any women who came for a visit. I even privately asked Yunqian, did Dàgē cut off all communication with that woman after breaking up? She only replied, "Very scary, don't ask."

But I was really curious, so I secretly investigated. Because Dàgē hadn't guarded himself against me at all, I was able to easily check from his own sources.

The woman turned out to be an assassin, and she did have some mysterious and unclear relationship with Dàgē. Reportedly, she was killed by Dàgē for unknown reasons in the end, and he even took her head to receive her bounty. This little affair had turned out quite famous within the underground. There were all sorts of conjectures: loving and killing each other, the untold story between a hit man and a mercenary, the clash between love and mission. The whole plot of the story was more dramatic than a primetime show.

However, the truth was that she had scared Junjun into tears, while I had given Dàgē the ultimatum to hurry up and get the fucking woman out of here, and to never have her come back again. Thereupon, the killer lady got sent to hell and was guaranteed to never return.

"I'm not talking about a bed warmer. I'm betting on the position of sister-in-law!" Cain's loud voice drew my attention.

"That's a bit hard." Lily thought for a long time, then turned to ask me, "Shuyu, do you have a good impression of this woman?"

"Ah?" I was still out of sorts. I didn't even know why Guan Weijun would fall in love with Dàgē... Then again, women were super attracted to my family's Dàgē. He was basically a hormone manufacturing machine. Her liking Dàgē only proved that her eyes weren't blind.

Lily analyzed in all seriousness, "I think Boss is okay as long he likes how she looks. There's no problem with having her as a bedmate or even a girlfriend, but if she's actually to become your 'sister-in-law,' then Shujun's and your opinions might be ninety-nine percent of the factor. Boss would never take a wife who the two of you dislike."

Everyone glanced over. Cain immediately cried out, "Shuyu can't join the gambling party! You're definitely going to cheat!"

Cheat? I felt a bit helpless. I don't know if I should "cheat" to have Guan Weijun win over Dàgē, so I can smoothly accept and look after Mom as my mother-in-law; or have Guan Weijun stay far away from Dàgē, so that I don't have the illusion that I'm marrying Dàgē.

Stuck between two dilemmas, I abruptly smacked my head hard. I have no right to meddle in Dàgē's marriage! I'm his dìdi, not his parents! Besides, even parents can't control who their son wants to marry these days.

It rains when Heaven deems fit; mother remarries when she wants to; even if Dàgē wishes to marry a violent woman, it's all the will of Heaven. I'm better off washing up before bed.

After I finished taking a bath, Dàgē and Xiǎomèi came to visit me.

"What's with that Guan Weijun?" Dàgē got straight to the point and asked.

I was momentarily silent, then said, "No idea. But she shouldn't be me. The disparity in our personality is too big. In the past, I didn't have that kind of personality, but I don't know who she really is either."

Hearing that, Dàgē hurriedly said, "Maybe she's just a stranger. This matter is too bizarre, so no one can say for sure. You don't need to worry about it."

Junjun also firmly nodded, expressing her agreement.

I fell silent. In the end, the Ice Emperor was still Dàgē. Although a different fate had brought about a slight discrepancy in personality, I could discern that they were the same person. Mom's existence further confirmed this point—she was undoubtedly my mom. Her character was exactly the same.

Then it could only be me and Guan Weijun who were different. *Only me and her...*

Startled, I was finally able to grab hold of a flicker of an idea that had come to me... *In the past lifetime, it was me and him. I was Guan Weijun; in this lifetime, it's me and her. I am Jiang Shuyu...*

"Jiang Shuyu..."

"What?" Dàgē and Junjun looked at me, puzzled.

She's Jiang Shuyu! The Ice Emperor's real dìdi, the Jiang Shuyu who was often scolded by Mèimei as optimistic and thoughtless.

I was trembling all over. The ice covering my arms was so cold that the coldness was seeping right into my heart.

"Shuyu."

"Èrgē!"

Dàgē and Xiǎomèi each grabbed one of my shoulders, with an expression of utmost worry, not knowing that their own brother had been wrong ever since birth.

I opened my mouth but suddenly felt a stabbing pain in my heart, as if warning me not to say anything. But looking at the face of Dàgē and xiǎomèi—they totally didn't care who Guan Weijun was. They were only worried about my condition.

With this kind of brother and sister, I didn't want to hide anything at all from them. With a trembling heart, I confessed, "She, she is Jiang Shuyu! That Guan Weijun is the real Jiang Shuyu!"

Dàgē was stunned, but unlike me who was too close to the situation, he was apparently more clear-headed, and instantly understood.

"The two of you have been swapped."

At this time, Junjun suddenly screamed and let go of my shoulders, while Dàgē didn't let go of his hold. He was even emitting healing light. *But I'm not hurt, so why is he suddenly helping me heal?*

Flustered, I simply focused on the most important matter, and asked, "Junjun, are you all right?"

I grabbed her hand. Her palm was already reddening, but Junjun seemed to be completely unconcerned about her hand. She cried out, "Èrgē, your arms are so cold. Will you be all right? Are you cold?"

Weren't my arms cold due to psychological factors? I quickly lifted my arms and looked. It felt like the ice patterns had turned faint...

I immediately took off my jacket. There were numerous veined patterns on my arms, but at this moment, only faint marks were left. The originally silvery blue ice pattern was so faint that only a smear of watery color remained, so light that it was almost invisible.

The weapons that the Ice Emperor left behind...

I tried to call out the dagger. Ice ability condensed, but no weapon formed even after a long while. I kept at it until I started getting a headache from overusing my ice ability. I had to stop.

"I'm sorry..."

Ice Emperor, I'm sorry for having misplaced your love. I'm sorry for snatching away the weapon that you wanted to give to your didi. I'm sorry for causing your didi to lose such a good Gēge and Mèimei.

"Èrgē!" Junjun desperately hugged me, as if refusing to let go, as if not letting her èrgē go anywhere.

I sucked in a deep breath and held Mèimei's warm and small figure. I might have been guilt-ridden, but I would never regret becoming "Jiang Shuyu."

"Èrgē, you're my èrgē! I won't recognize anyone else!"

"Okay. If you don't want to, then so be it." I patted my sister on the back to comfort her as she kept trembling. She must have been really scared. "Junjun, don't be afraid. Nobody can replace me, your èrgē." The figure in my embrace finally stopped trembling.

She lifted her head, staring straight at me with big and watery eyes. "Really? You won't leave our home? You won't say you're not my èrgē? You won't get seriously injured?"

Um... I braced myself and said, "I absolutely won't leave you again. I'm definitely your èrgē. I'll do my best not to get seriously hurt."

Junjun was slightly dissatisfied with the last sentence but nodded reluctantly.

Stroking Mèimei's black hair, I looked up and asked, "Dàgē, can you take in Guan Weijun and the rest? Although the number of people is a little much—"

Dàgē readily responded, "All right. As long as you stop worrying over insignificant problems, I'm fine with even marrying her!"

"...She's your past life's dìdi." *Dàgē, don't you have any qualms about it? Can't you at least have a bit integrity!*

"In this lifetime, you're my dìdi."

Chapter 9: In This Life, We Are Both Doing Swell, Part One

After sleeping in for two whole days, I couldn't escape my chicken soup fate. Actually, the soup left no aftertaste in my mouth, so it wasn't particularly hard to finish.

Well, it was about time to face the problem regarding Guan Weijun. Ignoring her wasn't the way to go. I didn't know if the solution I had thought of would work though, and I was hesitant about carrying it out, but this was also the only way I could make it up to Guan Weijun.

With feelings of guilt, I looked down at the ice pattern on my left wrist... *Hm? Has the color turned darker?* Although it hadn't returned to its original shade, it wasn't as faint as it had been yesterday, like it was on the verge of fading.

This ever-changing shade is making me so nervous!

Forget it. This wasn't supposed to be mine in the first place. I forced myself to stop thinking about the ice pattern and walked out the door to find Guan Weijun, but Junjun blocked me right outside the door.

"Érge, where are you going? I want to go, too."

I frowned. *If Junjun comes along, things might be a bit...* Suddenly, I was hit with Junjun's ultimate puppy-eye attack. I immediately surrendered. I could face my big brother sternly, but once I was in front of my little sister, my body would turn into putty.

In this life, I'm a siscon through and through. Left with no other choice, I said, "Fine, but you have to promise me that no matter what I do, you won't voice any disagreements."

Junjun pulled her brows together and unhappily said, "Érge, what are you planning to do now?"

Eh, did I give it away again? Am I truly so helpless against the power of my little sister?

"A-anyway, if you don't promise me, I won't bring you along!" I put on my best stern face.

Junjun held up two fingers and said, "First, don't ever think of leaving home. Second, don't ever harm yourself. I don't care what else you do."

Let me think: does this count as harming myself?

"Érge?" Junjun's expression changed from a super cute girl to a fanged dragon lady.

I hastily said, "All right, all right. Érge will promise you anything! Let's go right now. I'm gonna find Guan Weijun and the others with her. Dàge told me to hurry up and decide whether to take them in or to have them leave quickly so they can search for food. Otherwise, chasing them away after all the food is already gone would be too cruel."

Junjun was extremely doubtful, yet she didn't say anything. She followed quietly behind me and murmured, "If you get hurt again, I'm going to make you drink chicken soup all three meals every single day."

Wait a minute. So you actually know that chicken soup is nothing but torture?

I speechlessly led the little sister who had gradually grown devious since the apocalypse... We descended down the stairs to find the living room occupied with a few sewing machines. Shoes covered the floor. Mountains of clothes were piled on the sofas and the tables. Obviously, the mercenaries didn't know what to do with this kind of stuff.

"Junjun, alter the clothes with me later. I want to make some uniforms for everyone."

Junjun asked curiously, "Aren't these the clothes you brought back? These clothes are already pretty, and everyone likes them. Zheng-shū even took a couple of coats to wear. Do we need to alter them?"

"Of course," I earnestly said, "We've got to customize the clothes to the *Jiang Dominion* style in uniform."

After all, we couldn't go out and let the enemy exclaim, "So they're the LV team!" Those high-end brands would steal all the grandeur.

Junjun nodded and grinned as she said, "Sure, then, I want one with a pleated skirt."

I already knew that. I nodded and reminded her, "Remember to wear boy shorts under it."

Junjun blushed and said, "I know. I've been scolded for accidentally exposing my underwear before. "

Who called her out? Who took a peek? I'm going to silence him!

"Dàge was the one who called me out to be more careful. Èrge, please, don't put on such an ugly look."

"..." Fine. If Dàge was the one who peeked, no harm was done. You could say that he had seen it since we were growing up. Not just underwear, but even bare bottoms during bath time. He had seen it all, even though it was when we were little.

I grabbed a jacket from the pile on the table and put it on, getting ready to leave.

Junjun saw it and frowned. "Èrge, are you cold?"

I shook my head. As I walked, I explained, "I'm concealing my strength right now. I can't exactly show that I don't feel cold."

Junjun immediately said, "Then, I'll go get a coat on, too."

I stopped her immediately. "You don't need to conceal your strength. In the apocalypse, the stronger the better it is for girls; otherwise, if there's a lecher and you didn't have any power, you're going to be bullied by him."

It suddenly dawned on her. Yet, shortly after, she felt something was not right and protested, "But Èrge, you're so pretty. If you hide your strength, it won't do you any good either. People are going to bully you, too!"

I shook my head and said, "That won't happen. As long as Dàge is powerful enough, there won't be anyone who dares to touch us. It would just be verbal abuse at most. Plus, I'm not a girl, so just let them talk. But it's different for you. If anyone dares to lift a single finger or whisper a single word, Dàge and I will destroy that imbecile! Junjun, for the sake of the human population, you better not conceal your strength. It's best if you're so strong that everyone idolizes you as their goddess."

Junjun giggled. "All right, I'll definitely become super powerful!"

I was satisfied. *The war goddess of our family is just around the corner.*

I walked through the main gate and said hello to Yunqian and Cain, who were watching the gate. Yunqian was already wearing some shorts she had taken. With how cold and freezing it was, wearing these shorts made her appear particularly powerful. Beside her, although Cain hadn't gotten any new clothes for himself, the short-sleeved t-shirt he was wearing made him appear pretty powerful, too.

I liked what I saw. *Mental note to self, don't make the clothes too thick when we start tailoring them later. The more revealing, the better. Of course, my sister is the exception. The pleated skirt is already too short. Nothing else is allowed!*

"Shuyu," Yunqian called out to us. "Where are you and Junjun heading?"

"We're looking for that group of people out there," I shouted back.
"Will be back in a moment."

Yunqian nodded and said, "Now I can explain to that bro-sis-con boss where his pair of siblings have gone."

Cain howled, "Boss is such a 'love the house, love its fowl' kind of man. Shuyu is so powerful. What does he even need to worry about?"

How did you come up with "love the house, love its fowl"? I didn't understand what he was trying to say, but Cain's words made me frown. Later, I needed to tell everyone about how I was concealing my strength. I couldn't have them expose me so casually, or else my earlier efforts in pretense would all be in vain.

Stepping out of the mansion, we passed through a street and immediately began seeing signs of life. The scene was more comforting now, unlike the ghost town from before. The place they had chosen was quite close to the mansion though. If it wasn't for Yunqian holding a sniper rifle at the sentry point, these people would probably have chosen to squeeze their way into a house right next door to the mansion.

Well, this was also understandable. After all, it was a world filled with monsters. Who wouldn't want to live next to the strong, unless the strong one was scarier than the man-eating aberrants? Actually, that

kind of situation happened quite often. If one wanted to know what type of moral conduct the elite who occupied the area held, just take a look at the expressions of the local residents.

All the people on the streets who saw Junjun and me had similar reactions. First, they were nervous. However, once they had a better look at our faces, they would relax. It was completely different from their nervousness in response to the others in the JDT.

I pondered for a moment, then asked a woman who was drying her laundry, "Excuse me, where's Guan Weijun?"

The woman apparently recognized me. She pointed at a house and said, "Guan Weijun lives over there."

I thanked her and walked over to where she had pointed. I even heard her sigh in admiration, "What a pair of beautiful siblings!" However, her lamentation far outweighed her admiration. In the apocalypse, being too beautiful wasn't a good thing.

I knocked on the door. The person inside immediately opened it, without an ounce of caution. Then again, with such a gap in strength, there was no use in being wary, so she might as well be welcoming instead.

Guan Weijun had opened the door herself. Seeing that familiar face, I felt even more conflicted. This person in front of me was the original Jiang Shuyu. Even though the soul was trapped in the body of "Guan Weijun," whose innate talent far paled in comparison to "Jiang Shuyu," she was still so remarkable. I couldn't even start to imagine what

heights she would have reached if she could have had the body of
"Jiang Shuyu."

As for me, can I really hope to compare with her?

"What's wrong?" Guan Weijun asked, not knowing what was going on.
"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"I want to talk with you privately,"

I looked at Zhang Jing and Tai Wen, who were behind her. There was also a woman. She looked very familiar. She was probably Tai Wen's wife. I wasn't sure where Mom had gone, but she was most likely doing the housework. I didn't have to worry about her, since there was Guan Weijun to protect her.

Junjun harrumphed behind me.

"... My sister and I want to talk with you privately."

Guan Weijun didn't even give it a thought and said "sure." Tai Wen in the back didn't agree and shouted, "Weijun, take me with you at least."

"It's just the little brother and sister. What am I bringing you with me for?" Guan Weijun turned him down and said, "If I were to go and see my husband, then I'd bring you and Zhang Jing with me."

Your husband... I sweated. I wasn't sure if the next thing would go smoothly.

Tai Wen hesitated, then looked at Junjun and me. The two of us looked back at him. As one, brother and sister both played innocent, instantly winning him over. He relaxed, obviously feeling that he had been too wary. *See, being young is such a natural disguise.*

After we dealt with Tai Wen, Guan Weijun asked me, "So, where are we going? Are you fine going up to the attic to have the conversation there? I guarantee Tai Wen and Zhang Jing aren't going to eavesdrop. If they dare, I'll bash them until they're plastered against the wall."

Tai Wen immediately retreated behind his wife. The latter was holding her laughter. She was a petite woman with an egg-shaped face and was very pleasing to the eye.

I said, "Let's go up then."

Following Guan Weijun up the stairs, Junjun whispered, "Èrge, are you going to have Dàge propose to her?"

... Sister, you make it sound like an outdated arranged marriage. I'm just the second brother, not the tyrannical head of the Jiang family!

"Heck no, it's not like that. Dàge will marry whoever he wants to marry."

In front of us, Guan Weijun's footsteps faltered, but then she continued climbing up the stairs. With such a close distance, it would be impossible for her not to have heard us.

She pushed open the door to the attic. I watched Guan Weijun turn her body to face us. My heartbeat suddenly picked up. It was the first time I was doing such a thing in both my lives, and I was unsure if this was going to work.

With both women staring straight at me, I grew even more nervous. I knew I shouldn't have let Junjun come with me.

Fuck it! Let's just do this!

I hollered, "Guan Weijun. C-Can I ask for your hand in marriage? Then, you can stay here. From now on, I'll protect you well!"

Chapter 9: In This Life, We Are Both Doing Swell, Part Two

I couldn't return the body. Even if I could, I couldn't bear to leave Dàgē and Xiǎomèi. So I could only make up for it in a different way. I could marry her, protecting the Ice Emperor's little brother, and naturally take Mom in as my mother-in-law. Then I could call her "Mom." This was the best solution I could come up with.

Guan Weijun was stunned. Junjun as well. Both of their eyes were wide open, as if they had suddenly seen me go crazy. Well, I admit that this sudden marriage proposal was a bit crazy. But hey, yesterday, Guan Weijun had only taken one look and had wanted to marry Dàgē. I, at least, had been looking at her for several days already. *There isn't a need for this level of surprise, right?*

Guan Weijun rolled her eyes exaggeratedly and huffed, "I'm not interested in little boys. Scram, let your big brother come!"

I was in an awkward position. Dàgē did say he could marry her, but that was absolutely not okay. This was my own problem. I couldn't just let Dàgē sacrifice himself and marry a woman he didn't even like!

As for Dàgē ever becoming fond of Guan Weijun, chances were... and this was not me putting myself down or anything, but in my last life, I really wasn't some great beauty. This Guan Weijun in front of me was even worse at prettying herself up than me, and would barely pass for an athletic cutie. Compared to that deceased, gorgeous assassin who had knocked on our door, they were fundamentally two different species.

"What's with that look on your face! I think your big brother *is* a bit interested in me!"

I looked at Guan Weijun skeptically.

Guan Weijun huffed coldly, "Not convinced? Go back and ask your brother. You, on the other hand, are not even the least bit interested in me, yet you dared to open your mouth to propose. If it wasn't for you being my future little brother-in-law, I'd have beaten you up until you're stuck on the wall!"

I helplessly said, "My big brother only saw you once. How can he be interested in you? He might not even remember your hair color."

Glaucous green hair had come into fashion for a time, but that was my natural hair color in my last life. It wasn't dyed, and I wasn't sure which generation had brought in the genes of this kind of hair color. Even Mom didn't know.

"So what if he doesn't remember my hair color?" Guan Weijun confidently said, "My legs definitely left an impression. He peeped at least twice!"

In my last life, I had indeed had a pair of long legs, but they weren't all that special...

I dipped my head and stared at her legs. They were sturdy and slender. Her thighs were tightly closed, and the calves had a nice silhouette. These were definitely legs that had gone through intense training. If I remembered correctly, that deceased glamorous assassin

seemed to have had a pair of strong athletic legs as well. *Don't tell me, Dàgē is into these kinds of legs?*

In my previous life, I had only developed such legs after the apocalypse happened. Madly fleeing for one's life was something everyone knew how to do.

"If he's as uninterested in me as you are, then I wouldn't be targeting him!" Guan Weijun huffed, "Did you think I was that shameless?"

No matter how I look at it, you are that shameless! I held my forehead, and had no choice but to say, "Fine. Go chase after my big brother. If you catch his eyes, be my sister-in-law. If you can't, then I'll marry you."

Guan Weijun put on a disgusted expression, as if to say "who wants to marry you" and replied, "If I were to marry you, why not force Zhang Jing to marry me instead? At the very least, he's taller and more obedient, and can maybe put on some muscles at least. You're not my type at all. You're fine as eye candy, but being my husband is a no go. You look prettier than me and have no masculinity to speak of. You look like you can't even put on any muscles and have no potential in development."

Have you ever heard of not kicking someone while they're down? I ate, drank and trained with my life on the line, yet I couldn't get shredded. I was already sad enough, and yet you went ahead and kicked me where it hurts. Do you even want to be my sister-in-law?

"My èrgē is a really good person!" Junjun protested.

Guan Weijun chuckled. "Of course, he's a good person. I'm the one who's unworthy of him. He deserves better."

Despite having a face like this in this lifetime, who knew that I'd still have the chance to hear such a classic rejection line...

Junjun blinked. She seemed to feel that those words made sense, yet they were also not quite right. She didn't know how to respond.

I looked at Guan Weijun. I didn't even know what to do with her anymore. I originally thought this was the best solution, but the other party didn't want to marry me. However, would Dàgē really take an interest in her? Even if he did, could he stay faithful to her? Monogamy was not popular in the apocalypse. *If Dàgē ever cheats on her...*

"Why do you always look at me as if you're at a loss?" Guan Weijun asked in puzzlement, "Have I ever met you before?"

I took a deep breath and said, "Just consider me crazy, okay? Guan Weijun, have you been well in this life?"

She looked at me, baffled. Yet seeing my serious expression, her expression gradually returned to normal.

"I've always been well. Even with the apocalypse, I'm doing as swell as ever. I don't know what you're thinking about, but with my personality, I'd be fine wherever I go. Life is so short. If it's a choice between being gloomy or happy for a lifetime, then of course, I'd rather live happily for the rest of my life!"

But in the last life, you had Jiang Shuyu's body and identity... but got hit on the head right before the apocalypse and never woke again.

I suddenly realized something. When the Ice Emperor returned home, he hadn't been able to find anyone from his family. All of his family had been gone, yet in this life, I called Dàgē to come back home from the very beginning. Even though he lost the Ice Emperor's power, he obtained a different power. And most importantly, everyone was alive and well.

On the other hand, Guan Weijun's mother was still alive. There was no Xia Zhengu. They could even join our group. No matter what, this life was better than the last.

You're doing well. I'm doing well. With our lives swapped, we're both doing swell.

I smiled, relieved.

"Yeah, let's both live happily for the rest of our lives!"

Guan Weijun grinned and ruffled my hair. She said in approval, "That's the smile I was looking for. You're young and beautiful. Don't look so gloomy. Smile more. It's a feast for the eyes for everyone."

Did you forget that this is the apocalypse?

But I think she's got a good point. What am I supposed to say to that?

Guan Weijun turned her head and told Junjun, "Xiǎomèi, even your èrgē has accepted me."

Wait a minute, I accepted what?

"Can Dàsǎo ask you a question? That big brother of yours, what exactly is his name?"

My word. You don't even know his name, yet you keep calling yourself Dàsǎo, my sister-in-law, and wanting to marry Dàgē. This... your taste of men is not bad. At least, so much better than mine.

"Jiang Shutian," Junjun obediently replied.

Guan Weijun deductively said, "Your èrgē is Shuyu. Then, you must be Shujun, right? I keep hearing them call you Junjun."

Junjun nodded.

Guan Weijun started speaking with great familiarity, "Junjun is such a beautiful girl. Don't worry. In the future, Dàsǎo will help you filter through partners. Rotten guys shouldn't even think about getting close. I'm not all talk. Your dàsǎo's eye for people is superb. In the past, a few besties asked me to take a look at their boyfriends. Either they got rid of rotten men or they got married to good husbands!"

You have besties with that kind of personality? Are you sure they're girls?

After hearing this, Junjun looked at me with sympathy. She clarified without giving up, "My èrgē is a good person. He's not a rotten man. It's the truth!"

Junjun, you don't say. You think I need a reminder of the rejection from just few minutes ago?

"Of course, he is not rotten. He's just a bit delicate, a bit beautiful, and a bit weak. He doesn't meet my requirements of husband material. The girls... or uh, men, who like this flowery type of boy are pretty numerous. Wasn't it that Chensha who was all smitten on him? Haha, let's not say anything about today's proposal, okay? If that icy cold Chensha were to hear about this, it's not like I can beat him."

I immediately clarified, "We were just pretending to be a couple. It's easier to stay closer to talk that way. We're not lovers."

Guan Weijun stared blankly for a moment, then nodded her head.

Junjun curiously asked, "Then, what are the requirements to be Weijun-jiě's husband?"

Already on to the "-jiě" suffix, huh! I knew it. Considering Guan Weijun's personality, it's really hard to hate her. Junjun was already accustomed to Dàgē's lack of principles, too. She really didn't have much objection to Guan Weijun's brash claim of becoming her dàsǎo. I mean she couldn't be any worse than that dead temptress.

Guan Weijun's eyes lit up. She exclaimed, "Of course, he has to have unparalleled strength, a first-class physique, a gaze that can make people freeze, and domineering might. Now that's a real man!"

Junjun nodded her head vigorously. "Then, my dàgē really matches every requirement. He really is super strong."

"I could tell from a glance. Your brother doesn't have an ordinary occupation, right?"

"He's the boss of the mercenary troop."

"*Ho ho*. That kind of super cool job fits him so perfectly! Mèimei, you gotta help me chase your big brother. I'm begging you! In the future, I'll definitely treat you very, very well."

"And treat my èrgē well, too, okay?"

"Of course!"

"Then, I'll help you!"

I was powerless. I was shot down when I proposed for the first time ever, and it was even with a machine gun. Now, even my little sister had betrayed me so quickly, selling Dàgē in the blink of an eye. What happened to the girls of the apocalyptic age? *My manly heart has become so tired. I want to go home and play with Xiaorong.*

"Shuyu!" Guan Weijun suddenly called my name.

I turned to look over and saw both girls looking at me with a face full of surprise.

"Your left sleeve is glowing. Are you all right?"

Bewildered, I immediately raised my hand and pulled up the sleeve to look at my wrist. The ice pattern was glowing faintly. The silvery blue patterns were crystal clear. The color wasn't the least bit faded compared to its original color.

Trying to suppress the excitement in my heart, I summoned the dagger once again. My left hand held the ice dagger in the very next moment. It was even thicker than that ice dagger I had formed right before we entered Lan City, and its shape was more complete now. It glistened faintly with its original splendor.

The ice dagger in my hand emitted a powerful chill, yet it wasn't freezing to the touch anymore. Instead, my arm felt warm. Although I couldn't see the other areas that were covered by my jacket, I could feel that the rest of the ice pattern should have returned to its original silvery blue color, too, no longer faded to the point of nearly vanishing.

"Wow, this blade is so beautiful," Guan Weijun praised.

I was better off doing some explaining. "I can summon a dagger."

Guan Weijun stared at the dagger and smiled. "See, I was telling Tai Wen. To enter Lan City at a time like this, and to even dare to split up and rescue people, you couldn't be some useless guy no matter how you looked at it. Yet, he said that with your appearance, you definitely

must have been dearly protected ever since you were small. It wouldn't have been strange for you to be a good-for-nothing wimp. Chensha is super strong anyway. He would be able to protect you."

"My èrgē—" Junjun stopped mid-sentence, recalling that I was hiding my strength. She blushed and corrected, "took care of our family since he was a kid. He's great at housework and even taught me how to make dolls and bake cakes. He also took me to eat apple pie at a Snow White themed restaurant. He's not a good-for-nothing!"

The gaze Guan Weijun shot at me clearly expressed, "You're really not my type."

My heart is so tired. I should just go home and play with Xiaorong.

I turned to climb down the stairs. Tai Wen and Zhang Jing were sitting in the living room with heavy faces. When they saw me, they immediately stood up and kept their gazes on me. They didn't speak a single word, but since they didn't see Guan Weijun, they didn't have any intention of letting me go either.

Even if I didn't take into account Guan Weijun's identity, she really was talented. A woman able to have such authority really couldn't be underestimated. If Dàgē really ended up liking her, I must help her control Dàgē and his principles. This time, there would be no failure in his education!

I jerked my thumb backward, and soon we could hear footsteps and chattering between the two women. Tai Wen and Zhang Jing loosened up then.

I shouted at the stairs, "Junjun, I'm heading out first. Do you want to go back as well?"

Junjun shouted back, "Èrgē, go back first. I want to talk with Weijun-jǐě about what Dàgē likes."

"...Sure."

I answered helplessly. I received sympathetic expressions from Tai Wen and Zhang Jing. There was a sense of camaraderie between us.

"Has she always been like this?"

Tai Wen pushed up his glasses and said, "Always. My wife has been her bestie since middle school."

Gee, so you're that man who has been verified as a "good husband"? I looked at the sweet, round-faced girl on the sofa. So that's Guan Weijun's bestie? The gap between their personalities was so huge. Saying she's taking care of a pet would have been more accurate—Wait, did I just figure out the truth?

Shit. No wonder Guan Weijun immediately roped in my little sister. This was basically the result of raising a bestie for so many years!

"I'm going first then. You guys..." I took a deep breath, and decided, "can relax and stay. Later, people will come and make arrangements with you. But you have to remember, staying means working. Nothing is free in this world."

Tai Wen immediately followed that up with a question. "What exactly are our main jobs?"

"At this moment, it should just be constructing the base and training. Those who are able to fight will enter Lan City in search for supplies."

After hearing this, the two of them relaxed.

"Then, that won't be a problem," Tai Wen solemnly replied. "Many thanks. I know we're the ones freeloading. Even if there is no way to repay you in the short term, at least we won't drag you down. We definitely won't loaf around in constructing the base."

I nodded. That was actually a good thing. The base's blueprints that Dàgē had pulled out last time were ambitious. If we only relied on the mercenaries to build the Jiang territory, it would be a pipe dream. Plus, this was only a temporary base, not our final destination. It wasn't like we would keep expanding it for five or ten years. It was not worth spending more than a year of construction on it. *We'd be better off hunting for crystals instead!*

Suddenly, the door was kicked open, startling everyone. Zhang Jing even jumped backwards.

I calmly looked at the person rushing over from the door. Ceng Yunqian panted and shouted, "Shuyu! Come quickly."

"Shujun, come downstairs. We're leaving." I called out, not even looking backward. I could hear footsteps rushing down the stairs. I immediately followed after Ceng Yunqian.

Tai Wen called out anxiously, "Wait. What happened?"

"Wait here." Ceng Yunqian barked, "This is an order!"

Tai Wen stiffened. Junjun and Guan Weijun arrived. The latter asked, "Can I come along?"

Ceng Yunqian turned to look at me. Guan Weijun and the three others were taken aback and looked at me as well. They looked a bit bewildered.

"Wait here." I left with this sentence.

It seemed hiding my powers would be too hard to do with people in our inner circle. Afterwards, I'd have to have a talk with Guan Weijun and her left and right hand men. They didn't need to know the depths of my strength, but they should at least know that I didn't need to be protected. That part didn't have to be kept from them.

Ceng Yunqian immediately led the way. As soon as we left the house, I asked, "What happened?"

"There's a large number of people advancing toward this town."

I frowned and asked, "Are they passing through?"

Ceng Yunqian shook her head.

"They're charging straight for us!"

Chapter 10: The Ice Spears

I climbed up the bell tower that had been transformed into a sentry and looked into the distance. There really was a crowd of people coming toward Old Town, and there were at least one or two hundred of them. Plus, their direction was very clear. *It's definitely Old Town!*

But how is this possible? Lan City is right behind Old Town. In our current phase, everyone wants to escape from the city, so why would a large group of people head over here?

Is this a mere coincidence, or are they aiming for us? But how did they find out that there are people here... Startled, I suddenly thought of something. *Could it be that...*

By this time, Yunqian and Shujun had climbed up after me. Once beside me, Yunqian handed over a pair of binoculars and explained, "Cain has already gone to inform Boss. The situation is very bad. The enemy has weapons, and some are dressed in military uniforms. Although we don't know if they are real soldiers or not, those weapons are definitely genuine."

I held the binoculars up and looked through them. It wasn't hard to locate my target within the crowd—a tall and unusually conspicuous guy.

"They're real soldiers."

Ceng Yunqian was stunned, and doubtfully asked, "How do you know that? They do look like it, but it wouldn't be hard for us, the mercs, to dress like soldiers, too. There's basically not much of a difference."

Putting the binoculars down, I was so furious that I could kill someone.

"Because I know the two morons among them!"

I roared, then jumped straight down from the bell tower, running toward the outside of the town. Once I ran to an empty street, I formed ice blades for gliding and reached the outskirts of the town in less than ten minutes. I'd be able to catch sight of the crowd right after the next turn.

Putting away the ice blades, I walked, step by step, toward the crowd of people. The opposite side seemed to have noticed me, but they didn't appear very agitated since I was alone.

While walking over, I couldn't help but think of how to settle things afterward. The more I thought about it, the angrier I got. *All I feel like doing is freezing to death a certain duo among them.*

A guy rushed out from the crowd, excitedly running toward me, and had the gall to shout, "Xiao Yu!"

I tightly clenched my fists, suppressing the strong urge to give him a good beating on the spot. I furiously roared, "You. And that guy at the back—Get over here!"

Another guy from the rear slowly walked over. Unlike the happy one at the front, he was fairly calm and sterner than when we had first met. Still, he wore a smile on his face. He was greatly resisting becoming emotional, as if finally getting rescued after countless days of suffering.

Calm down, calm down. I still need to hide my strength. If I beat these two up in front of hundreds of people, then I can kiss hiding my strength goodbye... The fuck, most of these soldiers might already know about my strength!

I could feel my blood pressure rising. I brought both of them to the side, then turned to face them. One of them had a joyful look on his face, making me want to thrash him with a kick, just like how Guan Weijun said—*stick him to the wall!*

"Chen Yanqing!"

He jumped in fright, then stood straight in reply, "Yes!"

I bellowed, "So just because I let you bring a few people over, you think it's fucking okay to bring a few hundred?"

Flustered, Chen Yanqing stammered, "T-They are just civilians. Most of them are from the previous shelter, and some were rescued along the way."

"Some were even rescued along the way?" *I want to freeze this idiot to death.* "Have you thought of how you're going to support these people?"

Chen Yanqing's face flushed red, and he shook his head, seemingly discouraged.

The other tall guy, Ah Nuo remarked, "We are soldiers. We can't abandon the civilians."

I'm almost going crazy from frustration. I want to take them in exactly because they're the type of good soldier who wouldn't abandon civilians. Yet because of this great conduct of theirs, they've gone and brought over several hundred civilians. What kind of joke is this!?

Guan Weijun is my mom's daughter and the Ice Emperor's little brother. I had to think long and hard before accepting the sixty civilians that they brought along, much less the several hundred people who were a mix of civilians and soldiers—*now that's what I call "chaos."* Why should I take in all of them?

Ah Nuo explained, "We have quite a few soldiers and weapons. We can go to the city to find supplies and support the civilians. All we need is a safe place to stay."

I raged, "Do you really think every soldier is good at heart and believes in self-sacrifice? Someone as smart as you should know why you could order them around and even get them to support four or five civilians! It's so they could reach the 'safety' that you spoke of!"

Ah Nuo was silent for a while, then said, "They're my old comrades-in-arms. They won't mess around."

I coldly said, "The apocalypse is best at screwing people up. Forget about your old comrades. Do you really think that I trust you?"

Ah Nuo lifted his head and looked over, his smile fading away completely. "So you won't take us in?"

"How *do* I take you in?" I said through gritted teeth, "I really can't take in *this* many people. Even if I will, the other troop members won't!"

Chen Yanqing appeared depressed.

Unexpectedly, Ah Nuo didn't get angry. This slightly improved my impression of him. He contemplated momentarily with a deep frown, then said, "Our people are too many. We won't make things difficult for you. Just let us station at the outskirts of the town. Right over here, just one street is good enough."

I tightly clenched my fists, and flatly refused, "Not possible."

This time, Ah Nuo said, clearly getting a little angry, "We came all the way over here, running for our lives. Do you have any idea how many people died along the way? Now that we finally made it and there's a light at the end of the tunnel, you won't even let us settle down at the edge of town?"

I know. I understand all too well. In my previous life, were my days of fleeing any less? It was a dead world without any hope, where death was just a matter of time. I thought of killing myself every day. It

might have been better than being eaten up alive, but I had always been afraid to die...

That sort of nightmare would remain vivid in one's memories even after a long time had passed, so vivid that it would make people tremble.

That's why I'm so obsessed with getting stronger. I will never, ever let anyone in the Jiang Dominion fall into such a predicament!

Seeing that I didn't waver, Ah Nuo furiously said, "This is the country's territory. You can't occupy it!"

I snapped, "Who doesn't occupy territories nowadays?! Cut that crap about the country's territory. The whole world has become the aberrants' nation, and there's only one law—eat or be eaten!"

Ah Nuo's face sank and appeared very unsightly. If he wasn't wary of my strength, he would have long since turned hostile.

Chen Yanqing looked at Ah Nuo, then at me. In a quiet voice, he pleaded, "Shuyu, we really are exhausted. Throughout the whole journey, we needed to protect these civilians while sneaking around. We couldn't travel far each day, so it wasn't easy getting here. Our ammunition and food are also low. At least let us stay a few days before making a decision."

Having heard what was said, the look on Ah Nuo's face changed, and he glared severely at him.

I can't be soft-hearted, can't be soft... I'm a man now, so I have to harden my heart! But, to not even give them a few days... Fuck, I'm probably gonna be a wimp this entire life!

"You have three days to rest and reorganize." Clenching my teeth, I said, "Once the three days are up, get lost!"

In response, Chen Yanqing let out a big sigh of relief, while Ah Nuo's expression lightened. He even shot a glance toward Chen Yanqing, hinting that he did well.

Exchanging flirty looks right in front of me, what do you take me for? You think I can't tell that your expressions mean "let's decide three days later?"

The two turned around and called out to their group. Looking at the huge crowd of people coming into the town, I struggled to keep my composure and tried counting the number of soldiers. *One, two... eight... fifteen...* The more I counted, the more worried I became. *Is it too late to change my mind and tell them to get lost?*

"Shuyu."

Stunned, I turned and saw that Dàgē and the others had come over.

I was suddenly struck with guilt. We had taken in sixty people when I accidentally ran into Guan Weijun, and now there were another several hundreds of people. *I really don't know how to face Dàgē. I'm just like a magnet for trouble, and a fucking big one at that!*

Dàgē was leading all the members of the JDT, with his oppressive aura released in full force. The members of the JDT didn't even number ten, but they were so intimidating that the several hundred people fell completely silent; whereas Chen Yanqing, Wen Jianuo, and the other soldiers had raised their weapons as if confronted by a formidable enemy.

"Put your weapons down! That's my big brother!" I furiously snarled.

When the two lowered their muzzles, the other soldiers then followed their example, gradually lowering their weapons. However, their hands were still clutching onto them, giving me the urge to beat them all up into a pulp. *Daring to point a gun at Dàgē? Careful, or I'll make shaved ice out of you all!*

Dàgē came over to my side, his eyes slowly sweeping across the crowd. The crowd of people at the opposite side had already been so overwhelmed that they didn't dare to let out a single breath, and now seeing Dàgē's "calm yet intimidating" look, the crowd trembled even harder.

He asked me, "Who are these guys?"

I pointed at Wen Jianuo and Chen Yanqing and said, "I was on the way home when I got to know these two. We teamed up at the guard tower." *As for the others, just ignore them!*

Dàgē coolly glanced at Ah Nuo and Chen Yanqing. "Soldiers?"

As if facing a senior officer, both of them respectfully replied, "Yes."

"You're the leader?" Dàgē decisively judged Ah Nuo as the person in charge.

Ah Nuo hesitated for a moment, and said, "Yes."

Dàgē looked at the crowd and asked, "Estimate the number of people."

Ah Nuo paused momentarily, but he quickly got hold of the current situation, and dutifully reported, "Forty-two soldiers, and approximately two hundred civilians."

Upon hearing this amount, my expression darkened. *Forty-two soldiers, more than four times the total number of the JDT.*

Dàgē indifferently said, "Hand your weapons and supplies over, then you may stay. If you don't wish to hand them over, then leave."

Ah Nuo forced himself to stay calm and attempted to negotiate, "This is a bit too demanding. There are too many aberrants. We need weapons to—"

"Or defy me, and—"

Dàgē raised his hand at a nearby building and sent out a blast of energy—the sidewalk bench, the glass window display, the goods inside, and even the entire first floor of the building—everything that his powers touched was completely demolished. Specks of fragments wafted through the air, but were ultimately obliterated completely, until there wasn't even a smidgen of dust left.

"Die!"

The expression on all their faces suddenly changed to one of horror, and they tightly grasped their guns, but none of them dared to point their gun at Dàgē.

"You can stay anywhere beyond this point."

Dàgē pointed at the wrecked house and said, "Anyone who wants to enter must hand over their weapons and supplies. You have three days to consider it. If you won't hand them over, then beat it. After three days, the only people left here will be dead people."

Hearing this, the look on every soldier's face didn't seem to be very pleasant, and many civilians at the back were clutching their bags tightly.

At this time, a guy suddenly walked toward me. He casually handed a gun over to me and even pulled out a knife from his military boots, intending to hand it over.

I rolled my eyes at him. *Who would want that knife from his stinky boots?*

"Keep it to yourself."

Chen Yanqing "Oh"-ed, and happily put the knife away, looking extremely grateful for being able to still keep it. *This guy really has no ambitions in life.*

Ah Nuo looked completely helpless, but he didn't say anything in the end.

Chen Yanqing said with slight awkwardness, "We were gonna stay anyway. It's not a big deal whether or not we have guns."

Ah Nuo sighed. "The Heaven wishes it to rain, my mate wants to remarry, what else am I supposed to do?"

Upon hearing this, Dàgē shot a glance at Chen Yanqing. Luckily, he didn't say anything that would damage his image.

"No, you guys got the wrong idea!" Chen Yanqing anxiously said, "Ah Nuo, you guys should come over, too. What do a few guns even matter? Have you forgotten? At the guard tower, Xiao Yu, he—"

I gave his head a vicious slap. It caught him completely off guard, and he was almost thrown into the ground to eat dirt.

Chen Yanqing touched the back of his head and looked at me with pure confusion.

"You should stay here and help Ah Nuo out."

I couldn't bear it any longer. At the other side, the look on their faces upon seeing Ah Qing's quick betrayal—each and every one of them wasn't surprised, yet they looked exceedingly gloomy.

But the truth was, Chen Yanqing wasn't putting hoes before bros. He had been with me longer, so he was much clearer about my abilities than the others. He didn't resist at all in regards to giving his weapons up because he knew that those guns were obviously nothing compared to staying here and properly training his abilities. Moreover, they were quickly running out of ammunition. These soldiers were just too accustomed to using their guns, so they hadn't changed their way of thinking and weren't as flexible as Ah Qing.

That is to say, since those guys have already misunderstood, and because of me leaving him behind, would he get ganged up and beaten up by everyone?

Chen Yanqing didn't seem worried about it. He excitedly said, "Thanks, Xiao Yu. You're a really good person." Then, he turned around and went back.

Damn it! Lately, I've been getting so many brownie points for being such a great person that I could be a millionaire.

"Shuyu, come with me." Dàgē said in discontent, "You're young and soft-hearted. Others could easily take advantage of you."

"Okay, Dàgē." I obediently followed behind Dàgē, making use of his domineering influence to hide my true strength and pretend to be weak.

So far, it seemed to be quite effective. I got a bit overshadowed by Dàgē's presence the instant he appeared. I had finally found a way to

successfully hide my true strength—*When standing beside Dàgē, all living things are weeds beneath his feet!*

Dàgē then led us away. After walking some distance away, everyone started to chatter among themselves.

Cain gave a sigh of praise. "Shuyu, you're taking in little brothers and sisters as fast as riding a plane. You got yourself hundreds of people in the blink of an eye. Absolutely incredible!"

I think I'm incredible, too. How did I bring back a few hundred people with a single sentence? I feel like crying right now.

"Dàgē, how are we supposed to take all of those people in? This is just too much! You don't have to worry about me. If you want to kick them out, then just do it. I'm okay with just having Chen Yanqing."

If Ah Nuo were willing to stay, then I wanted him, too. He seemed to be a talented guy even more capable than Ah Qing. But it was precisely because of his capabilities that he became the leader of this group, so just getting him to stay might be an impossible task.

"There aren't that many people." Contrarily, Dàgē said, "Xiao Sha has already told me about the Shangguan family. If we want to conquer Lan City, then we would need a lot of manpower to defend this territory and stop others from pillaging it. These hundreds don't amount to much."

I was startled. *That's right.* Compared to the military district in the south, our numbers were so small that they could be overlooked. Dàgē

and I might be able to block a few dozens, but that was only under the condition that we weren't getting raked by bullets from dozens of guns. Plus, the other troop members weren't as strong. Even if we were lucky enough to defeat hundreds of soldiers, the military district might not amount to only that much.

"You could say it's good timing that these people turned up on our doorstep. At the start of the apocalypse, they were thrown from a peaceful life to becoming homeless vagabonds chased by aberrants. Providing shelter to these people living in fear of being devoured will easily foster a sense of belonging. In order to keep the JDT's protection, they'll become very obedient and won't rebel easily."

I contemplated for a while and realized it was true. If I had found a reliable troop and safe haven at the early stage of the apocalypse in my previous life, forget about a gun, I could have even thrown my boyfriend away, no doubt! Anyway, by that time, he had already more or less started to have affairs with other women. His reliability had slipped down as fast as going down a slide.

I said with a bitter smile, "I was lacking foresight and too hasty."

Looking far ahead, taking people in at this time was the right thing to do. I had started to panic when I saw the horde of people, and to make things worse, they had come because of me. After talking with Dàgē, it finally came to me that these soldiers at least gave me the sense that they're good-hearted people. *Later on, finding even forty soldiers with personal integrity would be a harder task than finding a diamond on the street.*

"No, you were just anxious because there are too few of us." Dàgē patted my shoulder. "If it was in the past, I too would never have taken in so many people. But now, the might of our abilities is so overwhelming. If we wanted to obliterate those two hundred people, would it be that hard? Shuyu, you're not actually that weak, right?"

Everyone in the JDT was stunned upon hearing Dàgē's words. They were looking at me in utter disbelief.

I fell silent. I thought about the butterfly and caterpillar colony that I had wiped out. A soldier with a gun might be able to block two caterpillars, but not necessarily turn out victorious. An ordinary person without guns only had the fate of getting trampled by the caterpillars, let alone the more powerful butterfly. Actually, these two hundred people only had forty soldiers, so their combat capabilities were inferior to the butterfly and caterpillars.

I even had Dàgē and the JDT at my back. *This fear seems to be a bit unreasonable.*

"I'm not weak, just a little timid."

My past life's experiences had scared the wits out of me, so much that I didn't even consider myself an elite. I still remembered the strength of those aberrants and elites in the latter half of the apocalypse. I had almost been scared to death. I would always feel that I wasn't strong enough, that I could never catch up to those elites. But I had actually forgotten that it had only been half a year since the apocalypse, where most people hadn't even seen an evolution crystal while I was already

at the peak of tier two, and had even finished off an aberrant who had almost risen to tier three.

Encountering an almost tier three butterfly so early on, I wasn't sure if this was the Jiang family's bad luck, or whether the butterfly was more unlucky. If Ah Nuo and his crowd of two hundred had encountered the butterfly and the caterpillar colony, they'd have quickly taken a detour, while I had obliterated the butterfly and the caterpillar colony with just Xiaorong and the shard-like ice dagger.

Just what was I afraid of?

I'm just... lacking an elite's self-confidence.

Dàgē said unhappily, "When you're all alone, you're extremely gutsy. I'm afraid that you'd rush over no matter what kind of aberrants you met. But if matters were to involve the people around you, you wouldn't even have any guts left! You need to fix that part. It should be the other way around. Don't go messing around all alone and have the troop miss out on training opportunities. They're starting to feel dissatisfied. Xiao Sha said that he didn't feel any danger entering the city with you and has decided to enter alone."

I shot a glance at Xiao Sha, and explained, "I'm just worried that there will be casualties. We can't afford any loss since our numbers are so small."

Dàgē chuckled, and blandly said, "If they're going to keep missing training, then losing them wouldn't hurt us much. After all, they would just be leeching off of us, and my JDT doesn't take in parasites."

Such cruel words! I stared at Dàgē in shock. *These guys are your comrade-in-arms that have faced life and death together with you. You actually said these words right in front of them. Is this really okay?!*

"Shuyu. The scariest thing to my troop members isn't dying. It's becoming someone useless."

Zheng-shū sighed. "Boss is right. I've never been skilled, and I'm also getting old. I can't compare to you youngsters. Thankfully, my ability is somewhat useful. You can leave it to this old man to build the base. Don't think that I can't do it."

That's right. In the apocalypse, dying was such an easy matter. Being useless and struggling on at death's door was actually the scariest torture. *Hadn't I experienced enough of that in the past life?*

After figuring things out, I comforted Zheng-shū, "Don't worry. People will get younger as they eat more evolution crystals. Zheng-shū will soon become Zheng-gē."

"Seriously?" Everyone had a "what the heck?!" look on their face. I nodded. "It's true."

Everyone's expression turned slightly odd.

"So, we may live long and never grow old?"

"I don't know." I truthfully replied, "I only know about things up to ten years. That's still far from living a long life."

Besides, the mortality rate in the apocalypse is too high. Don't mention a long life, not dying early is already very difficult. Even the Ice Emperor, one of the top twelve elites, had not personally experienced immortality because of all kinds of reasons, let alone anyone else.

And ten years later, it seems like something big is gonna happen... At that time, what will happen to the world...

"Shuyu."

"Ah?" I lifted my head, confusedly looking at Dàgē.

"Go back to your room to think. Don't stop in the middle of the road."

"Oh." I silently went back to my room to play with Xiaorong. Still feeling apprehensive, I decided to train with Xiaorong on getting better coordinated. In the case that a problem arose from the two hundred people, I would be able to instantly seize control over them.

Returning to my room, I quickly took off my jacket and shirt to investigate the ice pattern on my bare torso in the mirror. Sure enough, the ice patterns on both of my arms had been completely restored to their silvery blue color, looking pretty much the same as in the past.

Raising my left hand, I called out for the ice dagger, and ice power immediately condensed into the form of a dagger. If I was not

mistaken, it was much thicker than the last time, and the shape was more solid.

I carefully called out to the Ice Emperor's spear. But this time, nothing happened. There was not even the slightest hint of the spear.

These two weapons don't just depend on strength, but also on mood? However, I had no complaints. After all, they were things that shouldn't have been mine in the first place. Right now, I ought to kneel down and give my thanks to the Ice Emperor for the opportunity to use the shard-like ice dagger.

If it wasn't for how sharp this dagger was, and for how the Ice Emperor had somehow transformed Xiaorong into something like my summoned beast, I would never have been able to single-handedly get rid of the butterfly and caterpillar colony.

I beckoned my hand. Xiaorong pulled two roots out from the pot in the corner, then strode over with his short, plump, and leg-like roots. This tree could actually mimic a human walk. He was swaying and wobbling like a toddler just learning to take his first steps.

I picked Xiaorong up. He appeared very beautiful, like an ornament due to his semi-transparency, although he didn't resemble an actual plant.

"Xiaorong. Be good, and your èrgē will let you have your fill of crystals! Can you try this..."



I had shut myself up in my room, playing with Xiaorong. Three days later, Chen Yanqing, Ah Nuo, and the two hundred people that they had brought along had chosen to stay behind, as expected.

Based on the words that had slipped out of Chen Yanqing's mouth while he was earnestly pleading, I had guessed that they would most likely stay behind. They were lacking in food supplies and ammunition. A gun with no bullets was not much different from a piece of metal, so it hadn't really been such a pity to hand it over. They just hadn't been able to wrap their minds around it in such a short time.

By taking the two groups of people in, the Jiang Dominion had taken in three hundred fatties at once. Our supplies would sustain us for a while, but with so many people, I was afraid we'd have a critical shortage of food if we didn't start looking for supplies soon.

In terms of farming, there were many seeds and plants in our supplies. They were safe to eat if planted now, but two years later, the plants might eat us instead. Furthermore, the third year of the apocalypse had been named as "the year of the death" because of the famine and a winter with a new record in low temperatures. You could freeze to death even while you were bundled up in a quilt inside a house.

Back then, everyone was going crazy from starvation and ate anything in sight, to the point that even cannibalism was no longer an uncommon occurrence. In the end, hunger had won over the fear of death, and humans had started to arm themselves against aberrants. During those dire times, we had managed to seize many edible aberrants; plants, animals, and even other unidentified things...

If I could search out those aberrants at an earlier time, and also sow plants or raise livestock in pens, we would have no problem with food supplies when we took more people in.

But searching for a particular aberrant was no easy matter. This wasn't something that I could do all alone. It was also impractical to have everyone look for it, since others could easily notice that something was fishy.

As the Jiang Dominion took in more and more people, there'd surely be a lot of untrustworthy people among them. If the news of us looking for a particular aberrant were to reach the ears of some powerful person, such as the MORC, we would definitely arouse suspicion. And by the time the usefulness of those aberrants was discovered, these prophetic acts would cause the Jiang Dominion to be pushed to the very forefront of scrutiny.

If outsiders were to find out about my reincarnation, would I also get stuffed into a glass cylinder for experiments, like Thirteen was?

Upon thinking of this, I was struck by fear. *If I were to get stuffed into a glass cylinder, I'm afraid that such a protective and doting Dàgē and Mèimei would have already...*

Veins started throbbing in my forehead; *I should stop envisioning these kinds of situations, or I might end up killing somebody.*

I wanted to take advantage of my rebirth to do stuff, yet I had misgivings one after another. *If I had enough strength to triumph over the MORC, would there be a need to be so apprehensive?*

I roared, "Jiang Xiaorong! Come on, let's try one more time!"

The transparent branches were like an overarching web, swooping down upon me.



W-We did it...

"Hahaha—"

The experiment was a success, and I couldn't help bursting into laughter. My body relaxed completely and collapsed onto the bed. *The next time I come across the butterfly again, I won't end up getting beaten black and blue!*

Lying on the bed left me feeling groggy. Exhaustion swept over me in waves, and I closed my eyes and sank into a deep sleep... Who would have thought that the next time my eyes opened again, it would be due to nearly getting suffocated.

Ripping away the tree on my face and tossing it to the ground, I snapped, "Jiang Xiaorong, what are you doing, clinging onto my face? Sticking so tightly too. Are you trying to murder your èrgē!?"

Hungry!

"..." *I must be really hungry.* I was actually hearing voices, as if I heard the tree say "hungry." Not out loud, but directly in my head. *That was really strange.*

Jiang Xiaorong curled up his branches while lying on the ground. That pitiful look of his really did make him appear like he had passed out from hunger. I picked up the silver flask from the desk and poured a crystal out. A lump of tree instantly leaped over, moving so fast it was as if that tree at death's door from earlier was a completely different tree.

After feeding him an entire handful of crystals, I suddenly felt slightly guilty. I hadn't given these crystals to a human, but a tree instead. *However, I don't think there are many humans who are as useful as my family's Xiaorong. In the apocalypse, humans can't even compare to trees. They might even be inferior to ants in the future!*

Xiaorong clung to my body after eating his fill. He obediently wrapped around me in a "tank top" shape, just like a semitransparent vest. After thinking it through, I stretched my hand out and put on a coat, heading out to check on how the arrangements were going for the three hundred plus people.

The door of the meeting room on the third floor wasn't closed. Everyone was coming and going, looking awfully busy. Upon seeing this, I suddenly felt a little embarrassed. Upon coming up with some ideas, I had gone straight to hiding inside my room to play with Xiaorong. Even my meals had been delivered by Junjun. *I had completely disregarded the matter of handling this huge group. What's more, I was the one who had attracted them!*

Everyone lifted their heads and glanced at me, then resumed busying themselves. The desk was piled high with blueprints. Uncle and Zheng

Xing were holding the blueprints, having a heated discussion. Ding Jun was occupied with jotting down the details of their discussion and occasionally drawing designs for them to see. Upon seeing me, his face stiffened up, then he lowered his head to draw designs.

Lily seemed to be the person in charge of organizing the manpower, with Junjun, Su Ying, and Auntie assisting her. From time to time, the three people would rush off their feet with work after receiving orders.

Yunqian, Xiao Sha, and Cain weren't here. They had probably gone to stand guard at the sentry point and main gateway. There were three hundred strangers outside, but the JDT had only dispatched three people to stand guard at the door. This was not because of arrogance, but because we were greatly understaffed.

The whole meeting room was filled with a sense of "busyness." Seated at the head of the table was Dàgē, the only person who wasn't working. He was tapping on the desk surface with his index finger at almost regular intervals, while staring at a box of crystals and thinking about something.

They were the crystals from defeating the caterpillars, although I'd had to brace myself when I handed them over. Back then, Xiao Sha's expression had turned dark upon seeing the large amount of crystals. His glare seemed to accuse me of leaving him out, of sneaking out alone to have a great meal.

Dàgē glanced over, and smilingly said, "So you're finally willing to come out? It's been more than ten days. I was thinking that we would have to at least drag you out for dinner on Christmas."

Eh? More than ten days have already passed? I figured that it's been seven to eight days at most. It seems that I've been training so much that I lost all sense of time. Who knows how many days I fell asleep for at the end, causing Xiaorong to be so hungry that he had to beg for food.

Dàgē asked with raised eyebrows, "So, what made you come out?"

"Oh, yeah, I want to form my own squad. I need some of your men."

"Who do you need? Xiao Sha? Yunqian?"

I shook my head, and said, "The JDT has too few people. All of them should be leading their own team. They can't be squad members. At most..."

I looked around, and easily skipped over Ding Jun; I had zero interest in having a sour-faced guy beside me. *Su Ying! That's right, she has psychic powers. Compared to combat abilities, this ability would be more useful for me to carry out my plans!*

"It will be Su Ying."

She jumped up in fright, and her rosy face turned pale. Her gaze was filled with intense fear, as if she had just been chosen to be the devil's wife.

Am I really that terrifying? You better take a closer look at this face! Tilting my head slightly, I cast a smile in her direction.

After showing a stunned expression, Su Ying became even more panicked. I could even see the thought "it's the devil's charm" from her face.

Dàgē looked at me, then at Su Ying, and said, "Shuyu, if you have to pick so many, then leave Xiao Sha out. That would prevent awkwardness after a break-up."

"..."

Break up, my ass! Who's dating Xiao Sha!? On hearing your claim, Su Ying has gone hiding behind Lily while covering her chest, like I'm some sex fiend who goes after everyone!

I glared furiously at Dàgē. "I have higher moral standards than you, Dàgē! I won't go picking so many!"

Dàgē calmly asked in reply, "Weren't you going to pick Chen Yanqing?"

No, I... All right, I was going to pick him, but I'm picking him to be my squad member!

Dàgē shook his head. "It's up to you. If it is Xiao Sha's choice, then it's not my place to say anything about you guys. Just remember to separate your work from your love life."

W-wait a minute! Dàgē, Xiao Sha hasn't decided on any of this, don't just marry him off like this.

"It's a good thing for you to pick Su Ying, too." Dàgē said approvingly, "There's hope for a nephew or niece."

Should I beat up Dàgē? Or beat up Dàgē? Let's just beat up Dàgē!

Dàgē suddenly changed the topic, and sternly said, "Lily is arranging everyone's living quarters. It's best that you make an early pick of your members, and remember to report back after you're done choosing. That would help facilitate her work. If you're free, help me find Guan Weijun and her right-hand men."

"Why are you looking for her?" My gossipy heart was instantly lit aflame. *Only ten days have passed, but Guan Weijun has already gotten her hands on Dàgē? Based on Dàgē's lack of shame, this might even be possible!*

"We have too few people. It's really not enough. Let's take her in and make her a troop member."

I was stunned. I hadn't expected that Dàgē would trust her so quickly. *Truly deserving to be... his past lifetime's biological dìdi.*

I suddenly felt a bit sick at heart, but soon after, felt like slapping myself. *I snatched away the body, yet I won't even let Dàgē treat the other person slightly better? Is there a need to be so petty?!*

Dàgē stroked his chin and said, "There shouldn't be any issues regarding faithfulness after I take her into my bed in a few days. Maybe I'll feed her some crystals too, to make sure she can put people in their places."

...Dàgē, can't you have a few morals?!

"Dàgē, are you selling your body?" I said through gritted teeth, "It's still acceptable for other women to climb into your bed, but she's not the same. If you don't like the person, then don't go messing around!"

Dàgē looked at me, and asked, somewhat helplessly, "You even like Guan Weijun as well?"

...This is seriously out of sync.

Rather than talking to Dàgē, whose brain was currently not functioning, it was more useful for me to go and sort out my squad. I turned around and left, not forgetting to take Su Ying from behind Lily.

"You're actually angry? Boss is just teasing you."

"Dàgē, y-you're bullying Èrgē again... Heh!" *Junjun, when you're giving me support, could you hold back your laughter?*

"Hahaha—Aiyo, so funny. It's such a pity that Xiao Sha isn't here. I'm definitely gonna tell him!"

Sounds of laughter came from behind, and even Dàgē was chuckling quietly. These guys... *It's already the end of the world. Can't you take it more seriously?*

"Shuyu, have you thought of a name for your squad?" Lily, the only serious person, asked, "If you have, I'll help you note it down."

Pausing in my footsteps, I was about to say that I hadn't, but when I turned around, the name automatically popped into my head.

"My squad will be called 'the Ice Spears.'"

Extra: Ominous Number

"Ah Yan! Run! Take Xiao Ya and run!"

There was a crying woman in front of him with tears streaming down her face and a little child held in her embrace. Upon hearing his words, she was about to turn around and run, but her eyes suddenly widened. Throwing the child to the side, she rushed over and knocked him away. A mournful, shrill scream sounded, until her body suddenly shook violently—a hand pierced out of her body through her heart, and the scream stopped.

Ah Yan...

"Daddy—"

Turning around, he saw his daughter running toward him. But a monster was pouncing on her from behind, and she ran up to him as fast as possible. Barely in time, he moved her under him to protect her, but it was a waste of effort, as his body was also pierced. Pressed to the floor, unable to move, he helplessly watched as the girl was dragged away by another monster and torn into, never to cry again.

His heart was already dead. After that, there was only numbing unconsciousness.



Looks like everybody here is dead...

Huh? It seems like this one is still breathing. Oh, so it wasn't a fatal wound. Take these two back. Perfect, see if there are any differences between the fatally and non-fatally wounded transforming into monsters.

Register the dead one as 012. The one that's still alive is 013.



There was nothing sadder than a withered heart. Upon waking up, 013 passed his days in a muddled-headed daze. In the beginning, there were all kinds of experiments, which were unbearable even for aberrants. His body was cut over and over again, and getting burnt and frozen were common occurrences. But no matter how much it hurt, no pain hurt more than the numbness of his heart. So, he simply bore them. Moreover, his complete lack of response caused him to lose experimental value. He spent most of his time in a deep slumber inside the circular cylinder.

013 looked coldly upon the researchers who were coming and going. They were opening their mouths and making all kinds of complicated sounds. After listening for a long time, he suddenly came to a realization that this was "talking" and gradually understood more of what they were saying. But he kept quiet, instinctively knowing that he shouldn't attract too much attention.

That was until a strange voice transmitted into his mind. He looked at the other party—a very tall guy. 013 felt that this guy was very resentful, and was on the verge of going on a rampage. He could even feel the guy's killing intent toward the person in front of him.

Don't attack. Things will get worse.

The guy suddenly stiffened, lowered his head, and looked everywhere for the source of the voice.

"Why is 042 suddenly not moving?" Puzzled, the researcher in front circled around 042 to examine him.

"Don't get too close to him!" The other one hurriedly pulled him back, all the way to a great distance before finally breathing a sigh of relief. "This guy's strength is very high, and he evolves every day, so you can't take it easy."

Keep going. Don't stop there.

013 remained indifferent, as the tall guy walked further and further away.

Through this experience, 013 exhibited abilities which were neither too great nor too small and no longer went back to slumber inside the cylinder. Rather, he waited for the daily inspection in a small room. He heard more and more voices, and attempted talking to these voices several times. He often succeeded, but each response was different. Some were just furious and irritable, seemingly not understanding what he meant, while some could somewhat respond.

The tall guy from that first time was the best at receiving his thoughts, although he was originally a little confused. But 013 was idle and had nothing to do, so he talked to the tall guy. He told him the best way to survive, so that he wouldn't frequently get cut and sliced up. Gradually,

the tall guy could mostly understand what he meant, and he was very obedient.

013 gradually controlled all of the experimental subjects in this place. Some were obedient, while some could be forced to obey. A few were completely unresponsive, and he used them to do a variety of trials, but all of this was just to pass the time. 013 didn't have any goals.

Until the day that he was taken to a routine examination and saw that thing—an aberrant with a very grotesque body. Thin limbs and a disproportionately large stomach, which totally violated the definition of strength. Even walking should be difficult.

Yet, 013 was mesmerized. Staring at that stomach, he felt that something should come out of there, and that thing... He wanted to see it.

However, he didn't see anything breaking out of the stomach. 013 first watched her get taken to the laboratory. Then, a miserable shriek could be heard, making him feel extremely irritated. Ever since waking up, he had never felt this kind of emotion.

After listening for a while, 013 decided to take her away from here. *Just stop screaming already...*



"There's Asura and Maternibaby. As for you, you're just called Thirteen."

Thirteen opened his eyes and his whole body sprang awake. He looked around and heard a whimper. He looked down. A little girl had fallen to the ground, sobbing and crying.

Thirteen picked her up from the ground and took her back into his arms. The little girl couldn't stand the cold weather, and it wasn't warm enough even with a bonfire. Fortunately, Thirteen's body was very warm. Although he was afraid of the cold, he was much stronger than the little girl.

The girl was still crying.

"Beibei, don't cry." Thirteen clumsily coaxed the girl, "Won't drop you again."

But, Beibei cried even louder. "I want Mommy, Mommy—"

Thirteen frowned and blurted out, "Mommy is dead."

Beibei finally stopped crying, shocked to the point of stupefaction. The girl was still young. She was, in fact still ignorant of the meaning of the word "dead," but she also knew that it was a terrifying pronouncement. And now that it was placed on her most important mommy, the little girl was dumbfounded.

But after that moment of sluggishness, she burst into an even louder wailing.

Thirteen could do nothing but watch the little girl cry. Fortunately, his injuries had mostly healed, since countless things would be drawn over

to them with the way she was crying. Right now, there weren't many aberrants or humans who could so much touch a hair on Thirteen.

A tall figure slowly came out of the shadows, dragging a carcass which seemed like some kind of an animal. He looked at the crying little girl. The look in his eyes was ill-natured, but he did not strike.

"Asura, can Maternibaby still move?"

Asura shook his head, then threw the meat in front of Thirteen.

Thirteen furrowed his eyebrows. Before, he would have hated that "Jiang Shuyu" and would probably have tried every possible means to kill him. But after getting Beibei, he seemed to be a little less concerned about Maternibaby.

Maternibaby and Asura were different. Thirteen had "chosen" Asura as an important companion, but only "put up" with Maternibaby. Although he didn't know why he needed to tolerate her, he had still done so, even if the thing breaking out of Maternibaby's belly didn't match with what he wished for.

But now that he had Beibei, Thirteen knew that he didn't necessarily need Maternibaby. So, there was not much resentment toward Jiang Shuyu, especially after the other party had let him go. Thirteen felt that he didn't really want to kill him.

"Roast it well."

Asura did so with a sour look on his face. He didn't like to be near fire, but Thirteen often ordered him to make a fire and even roast the food before feeding the little girl. Plus, it couldn't be human flesh. It was burdensome work, one after another. But he had to admit that the noisy little girl was at least slightly better than Maternibaby. When the latter went crazy, even comrades weren't spared from getting killed. Her food intake was also too much. It had been troublesome just to get her food.

Upon thinking of this, Asura looked at the little girl. She ate so little, so was actually quite easy to raise. Thus, he would generously accept the other party replacing Maternibaby.

"Eat." Thirteen pushed the cooked meat to the side of the girl's mouth.

Beibei was crying so much that she was almost out of breath. There was no way for her to eat.

"Mommy! Dad, Daddy..."

Thirteen stiffened.

"Find Mommy, I wanna find Mommy..."

Thirteen looked at Beibei. He too felt that something was missing. Maybe the little girl was right. They might really be lacking "mommy." He nodded in agreement.

"All right, find Mommy."

Beibei no longer cried. She looked up at Thirteen. He had a tail, and the little girl knew that humans didn't have tails, but owing to the fact that Thirteen still maintained a mostly human form, she was not too afraid of him. If he were swapped with Asura or Maternibaby, the little girl would definitely cry herself to death.

She bit into the meat he held, ate and drank her fill, then nestled in Thirteen's arms to sleep, feeling very warm.

Walking back along the road, Thirteen held the little girl and observed the shelter from afar. It was already a purgatory on Earth.

Humans who were unwilling to evacuate had taken the army's food and weapons. Thinking that they had gotten lucky, they had intended to continue staying in the military area. They were just like fish raised in a pond, waiting for aberrants to come and "fish" them.

The aberrants of the present were very hungry. It hadn't taken them long before they had come searching to "harvest" this delicious food.

Beibei was shocked silly.

"Mommy is dead," Thirteen said indifferently.

The hellish scene caused Beibei to tightly hug Thirteen, just like a drowning person grabbing hold of a floating piece of wood, as she urged, "So many monsters... come on, Daddy, let's go!"

Thirteen moved as he was told, and said, "I'm Thirteen, not Daddy."

"Daddy, Daddy..." The little girl was so frightened that she could only repeat this word, no longer calling out for her mommy. It was as if she was trying to hypnotize herself—Daddy was this person in front of her.

Thirteen turned silent. He patted Beibei on the back, then looked at his own hand in doubt, unsure of why he had done such a thing.

Following this, the little girl had a fever for several days. The cold weather and frozen ground, along with having received frights again and again, made it so that the illness almost took her life.

Thirteen felt very irritated, even more irritated than when he heard Maternibaby's scream. But he was helpless, so he ordered Asura to catch a few humans—living ones.

The humans, trembling and kneeling at the feet of Asura, suddenly saw Thirteen walk out and did not fear him as they feared Asura.

"Help!"

"Please save us—"

Their cries for help instantly stopped when Thirteen raised the large tail behind him.

Thirteen glanced around and picked the person who appeared the most passable and posed the least threat. He wrapped his tail around her and walked away while she shrieked.

"Be quiet."

The scene immediately turned silent. The monster... was actually speaking?

The others, can I eat them? Asura felt a little hungry. He had eaten just a while ago, but he was always hungry.

Thirteen nonchalantly nodded. "Leave behind the part that I want to eat."

Asura complied. Thirteen liked to eat the thing in the middle of the trunk. He called it the "heart." Unless he was compelled with no other choice, he wouldn't eat the other parts at all. He was extremely picky about food. Fortunately, Thirteen didn't eat much. Generally speaking, one or two a day would be enough, except if he had just finished fighting or was seriously injured.

The people all over the ground began to scream, Asura's claw swept over them, and the world turned quiet again—*Time to eat.*

With the human wrapped up in his tail, Thirteen came to the tree cave where the little girl was staying.

"Wake her up. If she doesn't move anymore, I'll eat you up."

The woman trembled all over, never expecting that such a thing could happen. *Monsters can actually talk? Is this little girl a monster, too?* Her mind filled with fear as she began to take care of the sick girl. But in a situation where nothing was available, she could not do much. On the contrary, she was only thinking of escaping.

Fortunately, it was the end of the world, where people died from all sorts of reasons, but seldom of illness. In the end, the little girl slowly got better.

Once, the woman seized the opportunity when Thirteen left to eat something, leaving her to take care of the little girl. The woman looked down at the little girl, feeling somewhat distressed. At this time, she had already determined that the girl was human. But it was hard to even protect herself, so she couldn't go out of her way for this girl.

Thirteen turned his head in the direction of the tree cave. He was only afraid that Beibei would see him eating humans and be scared to tears again. So he stayed away while eating, but still kept a tight control of the situation there. If that woman were to do anything harmful to Beibei, Thirteen could incapacitate her even at such a distance.

"Asura, eat that one."

Anyway, she was of no use. He had originally wanted to wait for Beibei to wake up, and ask if she was "Mommy," but since the other party didn't want to stay with Beibei, then so be it.

Thirteen went back to the tree cave just in time to see the little girl open her eyes. He felt like his heart was exploding, but it was not painful at all. On the contrary, it was a very comfortable feeling. Thirteen liked it very much.

The little girl was fed water and meat while in a muddled state. She said in a spoiled manner, "Daddy, I want candy."

Thirteen tilted his head. "What's candy?"

"Daddy is so silly!" Beibei grinned, as if she didn't see the big tail behind Thirteen. She told him in detail, "It's something transparent, sweet, and also very tasty!"

Thirteen was a little distressed. He went out to ask if Asura had seen anything similar.

Asura contemplated, then took out a transparent object.

Thirteen frowned and asked, "What's this?" He understood that Asura wouldn't carry something useless on him.

Don't know. Maternibaby dropped it.

Asura hadn't given much thought to it. Back then, he had picked it up and forgotten about it soon after. Only until Thirteen asked about it did he finally remember there was such a thing.

Maternibaby? Thirteen didn't mind much. He brought the "candy" over to Beibei.

"This candy smells really nice!" Beibei was instinctively drawn to it, and instantly ate it. She seemed to be in high spirits.

Seeing that Beibei was happy, Thirteen felt happy as well. He decided to get hold of more "candy" for Beibei. *Since Maternibaby dropped it, then the others might drop it, too?*

Two aberrants and a little child began to wipe out everything, with no distinction between human and aberrant, no matter where they went.



I'm Jiang Shuyu, the jiang from jiāngyù, dominion.

Beibei opened her eyes and rubbed them. Looking up, she saw that Thirteen wasn't sleeping. He was staring blankly at the fire. It was now Asura's turn to sleep. Even though the two rarely encountered enemies, they took turns sleeping, lest something make a surprise attack. Unless the numbers were too many, then they would make a detour completely, as he did not want to clash head on. Thirteen didn't want to endanger Beibei.

Noticing that Beibei had woken up, Thirteen looked down at her.

Beibei played with the tip of his tail, while asking, "Daddy, who is Jiang Shuyu? Beibei always hears this name in her sleep."

After the fever, Beibei couldn't remember a lot of things. She was always asking questions, but Thirteen couldn't answer most of them.

Having not heard the name for a long time, Thirteen pondered for a while and answered, "He's the same as you."

Beibei was surprised and hurriedly asked, "Just like me, he is also Daddy's child? He's my big brother?"

"...Mm." Thirteen didn't understand very well. But for matters that he didn't understand, he would directly give a firm response. Because if

he gave a negative answer, Beibei would keep asking more questions, and most of the time, he couldn't give an answer. She would likely not ask again if he gave a definite answer.

"Then, where did Gēge go?"

Thirteen was a little depressed. This time, the definite answer turned out to be useless.

"I don't know. He's gone."

Beibei was in utter disbelief and cried out, "Daddy! You're too careless! I can't believe you lost Gēge!"

"Mm."

"You have to find Gēge. Do you remember what he looks like?"

"Mm." Thirteen remembered the chilly air around him. It had been even colder than the winter, and it felt very uncomfortable to be near him.

"Then, let's go find Gēge and bring him back."

In response to the little girl's request, Thirteen frowned a rare frown and did not readily agree. Jiang Shuyu was very strong, and he was not very good at dealing with that kind of icy energy. Thirteen was unsure of his chances at winning.

"Daddy?" Beibei was angry. "If you want to be a good daddy, you can't lose track of your children. You have to find him!"

Thirteen was silent for a long time, before he finally answered, "Mm." Beibei was satisfied. Although it was only a word of "Mm," this was just how her family's daddy was like. If he agreed to do something, then he'd really fulfill it. So there was no need to worry about not being able to find her gēge.

I wonder what Gēge looks like? Beibei was so happy that she rolled around in her daddy's arms. She was really lonely. Although she wasn't alone, whether it was Daddy or Asura, she had always felt that she was very different from them, while Daddy said that Gēge was the same as her! *I can't wait!*

Thirteen called Asura over. The other party was even taller than before. But their disparity was not too large, only about a meter. He had also learned to speak a little.

"Asura, find more companions who are capable of following orders. The more the better."

Beibei wanted "Jiang Shuyu." Thirteen predicted that he may not be able to win. *Then, we'll just have to get some help.*

Asura left to carry out the order. Since Thirteen had said "the more the better," then according to his understanding, this meant he had to look without stopping. After all, the more the better!

A certain aberrant army, under successive misunderstandings, was gradually established. The trajectory had twisted but now returned to the path of the previous life. But this time, there was no Maternibaby, and Thirteen was not renowned for his brutality of killing humans on sight. On the contrary, the aberrants under his rule needed to ascertain that it wasn't "Jiang Shuyu" before killing.

Everyone around the world knew that Thirteen of the twelve elites had "Blade Asura", his strongest war general, by his side. While his Achilles' heel was Beibei, the enchantress.

Epilogue: Afterword

[The Jiang Family Is Shameless]

"Dàgē, I feel ashamed to face the Jiang family's ancestors and descendants. I swing both ways. I'm so depraved that I'll sleep with men and women, *sob sob*..."

"Which two? I'll bring them back for you."

"*Sob sob*... I'm a disgrace to the Jiang family. My IQ is actually so low that I tried to discuss integrity with Dàgē, *sob sob*..." "

[Comparing brothers, who's afraid of you?]

"Feng, my surname is Jiāng (疆), while yours is Jìn (靳). Our common point is that it takes too many strokes to write those characters in Chinese, while both of our brothers aren't very good at studying. I wonder, if a teacher punishes my brother and your brother to write their family name, who would write the fastest?"

"Your bro."

"No, it's your brother. My brother would turn in a blank paper and look at the teacher while crossing his legs. Then the teacher would take the initiative and surrender."

"My bro would order his men to dump the teacher in an oil drum, and pour cement into it to submerge into the bay."

"...Okay, you win."



Afterword

A new storyline begins to unfold in this volume. Whether it be the image of Dàgē, or the construction of the base, it's gradually beginning. Our family's Shuyu has also started to form his own squad—the Ice Spears. This volume gives the feel of setting the scene.

I am also slowly beginning to tell the story of everyone in the Jiang Dominion. Although it's a first-person narrative, we can't ignore the charming and lovely supporting characters!

Speaking of the supporting roles, I wonder if you guessed the introduction of Guan Weijun?

Despite appearing late, she is in fact, a very important character. When I first came up with the idea of soul exchange, one of my ponderings was this: if a person could live again, but did so in a different body and grew up in a different environment, would that person grow up to become different or still remain the same?

In the case of Jiang Shuyu, he was a bit different. But the cause of his difference was the regret of his past life, which made him work harder in this lifetime than in the last life. After regaining his memory, he gained even more factors that affected him. *Cough*, the problem of sexual orientation wasn't the only one. There are also a lot of other problems depicted in the book. Let's just have everyone read and discover them by themselves.

Guan Weijun can be considered a control variable. She hasn't changed much. It is almost as if her whole person had been plucked and placed here from the past life. Of course, because she has no memory of the past life, she has a clear sexual identity, *hah*.

And besides Guan Weijun, there was also Dàgē's true face, or should we say... another face? Let's slowly unravel this.

Strong and domineering, attracting everyone's attention the moment he appears, an individual that you absolutely cannot underestimate—this image was just too vague for me. Just like a king, as soon as he comes out, others are naturally compelled to kneel and worship him. But what kind of personality does this king have? It's hard to say.

It's too vague. I want you to see a more vivid and life-like Jiang Shutian, not a paragon, with some immoral conduct that would make women both love and hate him. He doesn't always appear to be imposing; his happy moments are as numerous as his imperious ones. He likes to tease and watch his precocious younger brother bristle from anger, which makes himself feel like an older brother. At first glance, he's an individual who makes arbitrary decisions and acts like a dictator. However, as he knows that his own knowledge is inadequate, he in fact does listen to other people's opinions quite well. He developed this trait largely due to his little brother who had been mature since childhood. If he could comply with the commands of a ten-year-old child, it wasn't much of a problem to listen to the opinions of other adults.

In other words, because the Ice Emperor didn't have the mature little Jiang Shuyu as his dīdi, his personality was actually more autocratic

and solitary than that of this world's. And the change in Junjun was even more obvious. Although the version of her in the past life liked her brothers, she wasn't so much of an èrgē-con like she is in this world. The influence the family members have on each other is also very fascinating.

In fact, it wasn't just Dàgē, every character is the same. I want them to be more vivid and life-like in the eyes of every reader, and not someone who can simply be encapsulated by a single adjective.

I hope that you will like these imperfect characters with many shortcomings, whose integrity are also still in need of discussion.

By Yu Wo.



Are [Character Introductions] like these really okay?



Are-

**[Character
Introductions]**

like these really okay?

◆ Jiang Lingqing ◆

45 years old. The uncle of the three siblings in the Jiang family and an archaeologist. He became the guardian of the three children because of the early death of his older brother. However, because he was a through-and-through scholar, his older brother had always been taking care of him. After his older brother passed away, his nephew ended up taking over. So, he became a guardian under guardianship.

Jiang Lingqing

45 years old. The uncle of the three siblings in the Jiang family and an archaeologist. He became the guardian of the three children because of the early death of his older brother. However, because he was a through-and-through scholar, his older brother had always been taking care of him. After his older brother passed away, his nephew ended up taking over. So, he became a guardian under guardianship.



✦ Chen Yanqing ✦

26 years old.
A professional soldier, a man with a flowery mouth. The whole team knows that he swings both ways, and he has the heart but not the guts to pursue his sexual urges. Regardless of men and women, he hasn't managed to fool around with any. He was publicly known as the last "pure and innocent little soldier of the century" by the whole army.

Chen Yanqing

26 years old. A professional soldier, a man with a flowery mouth. The whole team knows that he swings both ways, and he has the heart but not the guts to pursue his sexual urges. Regardless of men and women, he hasn't managed to fool around with any. He was publicly known as the last "pure and innocent little soldier of the century" by the whole army.



◆ Guan Weijun ◆

25 years old.
An easy-going and tomboyish woman, who has studied self-defense, karate, and many more arts. Without even taking those into account, her violent tendencies were already off the charts. Another hobby was playing online games. Her gaming names were all the same—"doubt me fight me." Her wildest dream in this life is to find a husband who could exchange blows with her every day, but no man dares to date her so far.

Guan Weijun

25 years old. An easy-going and tomboyish woman, who has studied self-defense, karate, and many more arts. Without even taking those into account, her violent tendencies were already off the charts.

Another hobby was playing online games. Her gaming names were all the same—"doubt me fight me." Her wildest dream in this life is to find a husband who could exchange blows with her every day, but no man dares to date her so far.

御我
著
午零 繪

終疆

04

蘭都爭霸





終疆

• 蘭都爭霸

御我◎著 午夢◎繪

◎皇冠文化集團

◎寶品