

## Middleman Assassination Squad

Written by

Cao DengXian

Based on the true events of the 2020 Funny Nobel Prize winner in Management.

Email: [caodengxian@126.com](mailto:caodengxian@126.com)

1       **FADE IN**

2       **INT. PRISON - CELL - NIGHT**

LUO QIAO (42), a man who could sniff out a loophole faster than you could say 'tax fraud,' stares at the ceiling. Regret, thick and heavy as prison gruel, churns in his gut.

                    LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
I thought loopholes were business  
savvy. Turns out, they're just  
fancy talk for breaking the law.  
Justice doesn't blink.

3       **TITLE CARD: "MIDDLEMAN ASSASSINATION SQUAD"**

4       **EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY**

The relentless sun scorches the cracked asphalt. A black BMW screeches to a halt beside towering excavators, dust swirling in its wake.

Luo Qiao stands by the machines, his gaze sharp against MANAGER WANG's skeptical glare. The timid ASSISTANT MANAGER MA lingers, unsure.

                    MANAGER WANG  
Two million. Take it or leave it.

                    LUO QIAO  
            (Chuckling)  
That won't even buy my lunch, Wang!

                    MANAGER WANG  
Got Cat 200s elsewhere.

                    LUO QIAO  
On a hill? They'll sputter out. My  
Cat 250s roar like beasts.

Luo Qiao winks at FANG GANG (41), a muscular force of nature lounging in the BMW, coiled and ready to spring into action.

                    LUO QIAO  
Gang, show Assistant Ma the site.  
Let him see the magic.

                    FANG GANG  
On it! Come on, Ma, let's roll.

Assistant Manager Ma hesitates, glancing at Manager Wang.

MANAGER WANG  
Go on already! Quit stalling!

Reluctantly, Ma joins Fang Gang, and they zoom off.

LUO QIAO  
2.15 million, and I'll bill you for  
2.3. Sweet deal, huh?

Manager Wang eyes Luo Qiao with a cunning smile, suspicion brewing.

LUO QIAO  
Trust me, Wang. It's our little  
secret.

MANAGER WANG  
I'll need to see those other  
machines first.

5      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Sunlight pours through the windows, painting the room in warm hues. Luo Qiao crafts a perfect cup of coffee at a gleaming espresso machine.

JIANG FANG (30), his fiery, beautiful wife, focuses on "Black Widow" playing on the TV. Nearby, their baby dreams peacefully in a bassinet.

Luo Qiao hands Jiang Fang a steaming cup, glancing at the screen.

LUO QIAO  
Great flick! Ready for "Journey to  
the West: Conquering the Demons"  
next?

Jiang Fang accepts the coffee, rolling her eyes with a hint of mirth.

JIANG FANG  
Old and ugly, dodging danger at  
every turn.

LUO QIAO  
I want you to see the White Bone  
Demon get her comeuppance.

Jiang Fang chuckles, but her demeanor shifts to concern as she turns to Luo Qiao.

JIANG FANG  
Are you really selling all the  
machinery?

LUO QIAO  
What's got you antsy?

JIANG FANG  
Rumor has it Shi Mao gambles in  
Macau, and the 's riding on those  
deputies.

Luo Qiao nods knowingly.

LUO QIAO  
Shi Mao's just a face. His cousin,  
Shi Qing, runs the show.

JIANG FANG  
Who's Shi Qing?

LUO QIAO  
The big cheese at Nan'an City  
Development.

JIANG FANG  
Watch your step. Don't bet all your  
chips on one hand.

Luo Qiao taps her nose playfully.

LUO QIAO  
Got it, darling. I'll mull it over.

JIANG FANG  
If only you had half your brother's  
caution and talent.

LUO QIAO  
Sweetheart, you can't have it all!

6

**EXT. NAN'AN CITY - DAY**

A river of metal and glass snakes through the streets.

Luo Qiao's black BMW prowls like a sleek panther, weaving  
through traffic, and halts before a high-rise apartment  
complex.

7

**INT. ZHANG XIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

ZHANG XIAO (41) drowns in paperwork, glasses perched on his nose like a scholar burdened by the world.

LUO QIAO

Zhang, I need a favor.

Zhang's eyes snap up, surprise flickering before settling into curiosity.

ZHANG XIAO

How much?

LUO QIAO

Five million. For a year.

Zhang chuckles, a dry sound that echoes the tension in the room.

ZHANG XIAO

Do I look like a money tree? Hit the jackpot somewhere?

LUO QIAO

Switched lanes.

ZHANG XIAO

To what?

LUO QIAO

Real estate. Queen Villa Complex. I want a 20% stake.

Zhang's face darkens slightly, concern threading through his features.

ZHANG XIAO

Careful, Luo. Don't dive into waters you don't know.

LUO QIAO

Highway business is dead. Used to make money as a second-tier contractor, now it's just a money pit.

ZHANG XIAO

Who says it isn't? My materials business is drowning in debt.

LUO QIAO

If cash is tight...

ZHANG XIAO

Not that I don't want to help. I've got three million on hand. Might seem like too little.

LUO QIAO

It's plenty! I'm grateful for anything.

Zhang stands, retrieves a bankbook from a drawer, a plan forming.

ZHANG XIAO

Let's hit the bank.

They exit with camaraderie in their stride, laughter trailing behind.

8

**INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Sunlight bathes the room, spotlighting the luxury bag Luo Qiao tosses onto the sofa.

His son chews a toy, unfazed. Luo Qiao playfully pinches his cheek.

LUO QIAO

Hey champ, where's Mom?

The child mumbles, undisturbed. Jiang Fang enters with a milk bottle, her eyes gleaming as they land on the bag.

LUO QIAO

Honey, what do you think about this?

JIANG FANG

Another bag? You planning to start a collection?

She pulls out the designer bag, her smile betraying her feigned indifference.

LUO QIAO

Like it?

JIANG FANG

Not bad, not bad. Finally showing some taste.

LUO QIAO

Speaking of taste, where's your brother buying his apartment?

JIANG FANG  
Why the interest?

LUO QIAO  
He only has you. Too far is a  
hassle, but no new places near us.  
What a pickle!

JIANG FANG  
Since when do you worry about  
family logistics, Mr. Developer?

LUO QIAO  
Just thinking out loud! We'll keep  
two villas, sell this place, and  
live like a sitcom family!

JIANG FANG  
Each villa's five or six million.  
You'd part with one?

LUO QIAO  
Cost's about two million.

JIANG FANG  
Thought you regretted giving my  
brother two million!

LUO QIAO  
Come on, think I'm that tight? Just  
realized we're two million short on  
the fee...

JIANG FANG  
Money's in the safe. Do what you  
need.

LUO QIAO  
You're the best!

He heads to the safe, hesitates, turns back with a grin  
tugging at his lips. Jiang Fang watches, a sly smile on hers.

9

# **EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY**

Molten gold blazes across the sky, igniting the battered old  
excavator in a fiery glow.

Luo Qiao and Fang Gang light three incense sticks, bowing  
deeply in farewell.

Manager Wang orchestrates the loading of a newer excavator  
onto a flashy red flatbed truck.

LUO QIAO  
Old friend, 27 years and countless memories. Parting with you is like losing a piece of my soul.

FANG GANG  
Bro, remember those first few months? You turned the earnings into my mom's new hip joint.

LUO QIAO  
Ancient history, Gang. Why dig up relics?

10      **INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

A bold banner reads "Natural Real Estate and YAOLUO ENGINEERING Co., Ltd. Equity Transfer Signing Ceremony."

Lean and sharp LAWYER HE YAN (33) stands to the side.

HE YAN  
Today we witness the signing of the Queen's District equity transfer between Natural Real Estate and Yaoluo Engineering. This is a significant step towards a prosperous future for both parties. Representatives, please sign.

Rugged GENERAL MANAGER SHI MAO (50) and Luo Qiao rise, exchange nods of mutual respect, and sign the contract. Applause erupts.

SHI MAO  
Here's to a partnership that thrives!

HE YAN  
Congratulations, gentlemen. The contract is now binding.

11      **INT. RESTAURANT - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT**

Laughter and the clinking of glasses fill the air. Luo Qiao, Fang Gang, lawyer He Yan, Shi Mao, and two deputies bask in their collective tipsiness.

LUO QIAO  
When the road roller roars, gold flows!



He gestures to He Yan, who deadpans:

HE YAN  
When the gavel strikes, gold flows!

Everyone roars with laughter, turning to Fang Gang, who blushes and downs his drink.

SHI MAO  
When the property market booms,  
gold flows!

He attempts to cue his deputy but suddenly clutches his shoulder.

LUO QIAO  
What's wrong, Shi?

SHI MAO  
Ugh, my old enemy, frozen shoulder!  
It's killing me!

LUO QIAO  
Try some tiger bone plaster?

SHI MAO  
Where can you find real tiger bone  
these days?

One of the bespectacled deputies jumps in.

DEPUTY  
When the official seal stamps, gold  
flows!

They raise their glasses again, faces flushed with success and alcohol.

12     **EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

Streetlights flicker with a ghostly glow. Shi Mao, barely upright, clings to his deputies like a drunkard's lifeline.

Luo Qiao and Fang Gang stumble behind, equally intoxicated.

Shi Mao grips Luo Qiao's hand with sloppy affection.

SHI MAO  
Luo... my brother! Next time... we  
drink till dawn!

LUO QIAO  
Easy, Shi. Need me to call a driver?

SHI MAO  
No need! Nan'an... is my domain!

Shi Mao belches, nearly toppling into a trash can. His deputy steadies him.

LUO QIAO  
Not like these stumbling fools, huh? Let's hail a cab!

Fang Gang clutches a utility pole, vomits. Luo Qiao flags a taxi, shaking his head.

LUO QIAO  
Look after yourself! I'm out!

The taxi zooms off, leaving Fang Gang conducting an invisible orchestra, flailing for a phantom cab.

13

**EXT. JADE GARDEN APARTMENTS - ENTRANCE - DAY**

A taxi screeches to a halt, and Luo Qiao spills onto the pavement like a discarded marionette, his suit crumpled and stained.

He stumbles through the entrance with the bewilderment of a lost traveler.

LUO QIAO  
(half-slurred)  
Anyone home? I'm locked out of my own life!

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN, amused by the spectacle, pauses to chuckle.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN  
Which building, buddy? Need a hand?

LUO QIAO  
No clue, man.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN  
Call your wife. She'll reel you in.

Luo Qiao fumbles his phone, handing it over helplessly.

LUO QIAO  
You... you dial... I'm done for.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN  
What's her name?

LUO QIAO  
Uh... Zheng Shishi! A real looker!

The phone flickers, dies in the man's hand. Luo Qiao continues his plea.

LUO QIAO  
Zheng Shishi! Get down here, quick!

A WOMAN WITH PERMED HAIR smirks nearby.

WOMAN WITH PERMED HAIR  
This Zheng Shishi must be quite the spectacle.

An OLDER WOMAN nods knowingly.

OLDER WOMAN  
She's his ex. A decent gal, but couldn't handle him.

From the crowd, Jiang Fang storms over, yanking Luo Qiao by the ear like a mischievous child.

ITH PERMED HAIR  
And this one? Just a gold digger?

OLDER WOMAN  
Obviously! What else? She's young, pretty, and too smart for her own good.

14     **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Sunlight slices through the blinds, casting stripes across the floor.

Jiang Fang sits with arms crossed, as Luo Qiao lounges on the sofa, looking sheepish.

JIANG FANG  
Shouting for Zheng Shishi last night? Missing her? Or just trying to embarrass me?

LUO QIAO  
She's nothing compared to you, my brilliant star...

JIANG FANG  
Then why call her name?

LUO QIAO  
Just wanted you to hurry  
downstairs...

JIANG FANG  
You think I'm naive? The moment you  
asked for that 2 million, I knew  
you were scheming!

LUO QIAO  
I'm genuinely short...

JIANG FANG  
I'm not unreasonable!

Jiang Fang gestures to the safe with a resigned sigh.

JIANG FANG  
Code's 7474774. Take what you need.

LUO QIAO  
Can we bury this conversation?

JIANG FANG  
And the villa money?

LUO QIAO  
One unit is a fair exchange, no?

Jiang Fang chuckles, shaking her head.

JIANG FANG  
You're a silver-tongued fox!

LUO QIAO  
I swear...

JIANG FANG  
Alright, alright, just teasing you.

15     **INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Shi Mao clutches his phone, eyes sparkling with glee like a child unleashed in a candy store.

SHI MAO  
Buy it! Buy it all! 110,000 is a  
bargain. Skin and bones, we'll take  
it!

He hangs up, rubbing his hands together with greedy anticipation, before dialing again.

SHI MAO

Hey, about that tiger... dead or alive?

(sighs with relief)

Alive, excellent! A lively masterpiece!

16

**INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Sunlight slices through the blinds, casting stripes across the floor. On TV, a stern-faced FEMALE ANCHOR delivers the news.

FEMALE ANCHOR

Recently, police cracked a case of illegal hunting and trafficking of Siberian tigers. Suspect Shi Mao and others have been detained.

Jiang Fang paces like a restless cat, cradling her son. Luo Qiao sprawls on the couch, brow knit, scrolling his phone.

JIANG FANG

Shi Mao's in trouble. What about our project?

LUO QIAO

He'll wriggle out with a fine.

JIANG FANG

You think this is shoplifting?

LUO QIAO

With cash, prison's just a hotel.

Jiang Fang rolls her eyes.

LUO QIAO

How much do we have left?

JIANG FANG

Fifty, sixty thousand. Why?

LUO QIAO

Fork over forty grand for Fang Gang.

JIANG FANG

Borrowing again?

LUO QIAO  
His dad had a stroke, needs  
hospital cash.

JIANG FANG  
Is it serious?

LUO QIAO  
Just a limp arm.

JIANG FANG  
Oh, I forgot, my brother took  
thirty thousand for tuition the  
other day, now there's only a  
little over ten thousand left.

LUO QIAO  
It's an emergency!

JIANG FANG  
You care more for him than your  
brother!

LUO QIAO  
Different kind of brotherhood.

JIANG FANG  
Luo Qian outshines you in every  
way.

Luo Qiao grins, stuffing cash into a briefcase, slipping out  
like a sly fox.

17      **INT. YAOLUO ENGINEERING - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Luo Qiao shuffles papers nervously. Fang Gang barges in, face  
grim.

FANG GANG  
Shi Mao... got seven years.

Documents scatter like autumn leaves. Luo Qiao sinks onto the  
sofa, deflated.

LUO QIAO  
We're sunk... What's the plan now?

18      **EXT. QUEEN'S VILLA DEVELOPMENT SITE - DAY**

A sun-bleached wasteland stretches ahead. Luo Qiao and Fang  
Gang squat, defeated.

LUO QIAO  
Who's running their show now?

FANG GANG  
Just an office drone and a foreman.

LUO QIAO  
Think they can read blueprints?

Luo Qiao inhales deeply, smoke curling around his darkening face.

FANG GANG  
Let's snatch Shi Mao's rights.

LUO QIAO  
Easy as stealing candy, right?

FANG GANG  
Money solves everything. Loans or subcontracting.

LUO QIAO  
With your credentials? The office won't bite.

FANG GANG  
What's your plan? Sit and stew?

Luo Qiao ponders, eyes sparking with a sudden idea.

LUO QIAO  
Get Shi Mao's wife. We need a chat.

19     **INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Sunlight slices through blinds, casting zebra shadows on the plush leather sofa.

WANG XIUHONG (45), dressed modestly, perches nervously, out of place in the room's opulence.

Across from her, Luo Qiao, sharp and polished in his suit, lounges with nonchalance, exuding a calm confidence.

LUO QIAO  
Wang, you're the captain of this ship now. Feeling the seasickness yet?

Wang Xiuhong wrings her hands, her anxiety palpable.

WANG XIUHONG

Luo, these contracts might as well  
be in alien tongue. What if I mess  
up?

Luo Qiao waves off her concerns with a dismissive chuckle.

LUO QIAO

Piece of cake. Just bring in a pro  
to steer this thing.

Her eyes widen, a storm of doubt brewing within.

WANG XIUHONG

A manager? They cost a fortune!  
What if they're just here to milk  
us dry?

Luo Qiao leans forward, his gaze reassuring.

LUO QIAO

Chill, Wang. Most folks aren't out  
to fleece you. Think of them as  
guard dogs, not wolves.

Wang Xiuhong's brow furrows deeper with worry.

WANG XIUHONG

What if they overcharge me for a  
table, say it costs two grand when  
it's just one?

Luo Qiao's expression hardens, his voice firm.

LUO QIAO

If this ship sinks, we're both  
going down with it.

Tears well up in Wang Xiuhong's eyes. Luo Qiao hands her a  
tissue with a gentle smile.

LUO QIAO

Here's a wild idea: visit Mr. Shi,  
chew it over, decide on a manager  
or pass the baton.

Her eyes brighten with a glimmer of hope.

WANG XIUHONG

Visit... visit? I can see him?

Luo Qiao nods, his smile encouraging.



LUO QIAO  
Absolutely, family visits are on  
the menu.

20      **INT. PRISON - MEETING ROOM - DAY**

Shi Mao, clad in a prison uniform, appears weary yet resolute as he converses with his wife, Wang Xiuhong.

SHI MAO  
Still radio silence from Shi Qing?

WANG XIUHONG  
Laying low, bribery probe's got him  
cornered.

Shi Mao's frustration is clear, but determination gleams in his eyes.

SHI MAO  
Tell Luo Qiao to snag more shares.  
We'll pocket an 8% management fee.

WANG XIUHONG  
And if he balks?

Shi Mao smirks, a conspiratorial light in his eyes.

SHI MAO  
Who says no to free cash?

21      **INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Luo Qiao reclines in his chair, contemplating Wang Xiuhong with a shrewd gaze.

LUO QIAO  
I'm onboard with Shi's plan, but  
there's a catch.

Her interest piqued, Wang Xiuhong leans in.

WANG XIUHONG  
What catch?

LUO QIAO  
You'll take the helm from Shi Mao,  
manage the Keishin crew.

Wang Xiuhong stiffens, panic creeping into her voice.

WANG XIUHONG

I'm just a housewife! This is Greek to me!

Luo Qiao's tone softens, yet remains firm.

LUO QIAO

If you don't, we're both sunk. I can't solo this gig.

WANG XIUHONG

Let me discuss it with Shi Mao first.

LUO QIAO

I'll have Lawyer He draft a new contract. You two mull it over, then we'll ink it.

22      **INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

A fiery red stamp slams onto the contract, leaving its mark with authority. He Yan stands, his smile broad.

HE YAN

Congrats! The deal's locked in. A pleasure to witness history.

He Yan shakes hands with Luo Qiao and Wang Xiuhong, their faces a blend of relief and determination.

23      **INT. YAOLUO ENGINEERING - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Sunlight slices through blinds, casting sharp lines across the room.

Luo Qiao looms over a cluttered desk, eyes scanning blueprints like a treasure map.

The door bursts open. FANG GANG swaggers in, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

FANG GANG

Boss, my cousin's itching to subcontract some work. What's the verdict?

Luo Qiao stays focused on the blueprints, a sly smile forming.

LUO QIAO  
So, you want to play the big boss  
now?

FANG GANG  
He promised me a cut. Of course, I  
told him no way!

Luo Qiao chuckles, finally locking eyes with Fang Gang.

LUO QIAO  
Tell him it's fine.

Fang Gang nods with vigor, bouncing on his toes.

FANG GANG  
Great! He'll nail it!

Fang Gang exits, practically skipping. Luo Qiao's phone  
buzzes with Wang Xiuhong's name flashing. He answers,  
shifting to mild concern.

LUO QIAO  
Wang, what's the matter?

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)  
We need to talk. Can you swing by  
my office?

LUO QIAO  
Tomorrow DAWN. See you then.

24      **INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Wang Xiuhong, now in a sharp suit, exudes newfound  
confidence. Luo Qiao and Fang Gang, taken aback, stare at her  
transformation.

WANG XIUHONG  
Director Yang from Qingxin Street  
Office wants to reclaim the  
development rights for Queen's  
Villa!

Fang Gang's fist slams the table, sending teacups skittering.

FANG GANG  
In his dreams!

Luo Qiao throws Fang Gang a cautionary glance, then addresses  
Wang Xiuhong.

LUO QIAO  
What's his reasoning?

WANG XIUHONG  
Claims we're unqualified post-Shi Mao. He's jittery about the risk.

LUO QIAO  
What else does he know?

WANG XIUHONG  
Probably heard about Shi Mao's cousin, Shi Qing, getting busted. He's trying to capitalize on our bad streak.

LUO QIAO  
Shi Qing too? What's the charge?

WANG XIUHONG  
Bribery. The higher they rise, the harder they fall!

FANG GANG  
He's just fishing for a bribe!

LUO QIAO  
It's deeper than that. Someone's pulling the strings.

WANG XIUHONG  
So, what's our move?

LUO QIAO  
We dig up the puppet master.

25      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

The car idles under a looming building. Luo Qiao turns to Wang Xiuhong, her face a mix of trepidation and resolve.

LUO QIAO  
Wang, head up there. We need to know who's pulling the strings on this one.

WANG XIUHONG  
Think he'll spill the beans?

Luo Qiao retrieves two cartons of cigarettes from a bag, handing them to Wang Xiuhong with a knowing smile.

LUO QIAO  
 Consider these a friendly nudge.  
 Everyone loves a peace offering.

Wang Xiuhong hesitates, then clutches the cartons and exits the vehicle, striding toward the building.

26

**INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Wang Xiuhong returns, sliding into the passenger seat, recounting her encounter.

WANG XIUHONG  
 Handed him the smokes, and he  
 turned into Mr. Nice Guy. Said your  
 partners are scared stiff of being  
 exposed.

LUO QIAO  
 Yao Jiancheng, huh?

WANG XIUHONG  
 Who else? Riding his dad's  
 coattails, borrowing scaffolds,  
 never returning them. Always got  
 another 'project.'

LUO QIAO  
 His dad used to be the big shot in  
 urban planning, right?

A calculating smile tugs at Luo Qiao's lips, eyes gleaming with strategy.

LUO QIAO  
 (murmuring)  
 Retired early...

WANG XIUHONG  
 Should we confront Yao Jiancheng?

LUO QIAO  
 Nah, he'll come knocking soon  
 enough.

Luo Qiao gazes out the window, the city's chaos a chessboard in his mind, poised to make his next move.

27

**INT. YAOLUO ENGINEERING - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Sunlight filters through blinds, casting stripes across the room.

Luo Qiao sits at his desk, punching numbers into his calculator, the clicks echoing in the tense silence.

The phone rings, Wang Xiuhong's name glaring on the screen. He picks up.

LUO QIAO  
Wang, what's the latest catastrophe?

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)  
Yao Jiancheng wants all the rights for Queen's District. If not, he's bailing on us!

28      **INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Luo Qiao and Wang Xiuhong sit across from each other, the air thick with tension.

LUO QIAO  
The nerve of that guy!

He pauses, weighing his options, and makes a decision.

LUO QIAO  
Offer him 40% of the rights.

WANG XIUHONG  
You sure that's smart?

LUO QIAO  
Just testing the waters. Let's see his reaction.

WANG XIUHONG  
Alright, I'll see what he says.

29      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Luo Qiao grips the steering wheel, tension crackling in the air. His phone buzzes—Wang Xiuhong calling. He answers, voice terse.

LUO QIAO  
Did he bite?

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)  
Nope, spat it out. Wants the whole enchilada.

LUO QIAO  
He's got guts. Offer him 60%.  
But...

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)  
But what?

LUO QIAO  
Remind him not to overstep. Or  
else...

He slams the phone down, anger seething. The BMW leaps forward, a predator unleashed.

30      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Dim light casts long shadows across the room. Luo Qiao slumps on the sofa, weighted by despair. Jiang Fang enters, concern etched on her face.

JIANG FANG  
You've been brooding for days.  
What's gnawing at you?

Luo Qiao bites into an apple with unnecessary force.

LUO QIAO  
Yao Jiancheng wants the entire  
Queen Villa project!

JIANG FANG  
His greed knows no bounds! He'll  
choke on it!

Luo Qiao lets out a hollow laugh, eyes betraying helplessness.

LUO QIAO  
If only I could...

He stops, the dark thought lingering. Jiang Fang takes his hand.

JIANG FANG  
Talk to him again. Explain our  
side. He can't want to destroy us.

Luo Qiao looks at her, anger giving way to weary acceptance.

31      **INT. YAOLUO ENGINEERING - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Luo Qiao paces like a caged animal, yelling into the phone. Fang Gang leans against the wall, a smirk playing at his lips.

                 LUO QIAO  
He still won't budge?! Fine! Not a  
single crumb for him! Let's see if  
Yao Jiancheng can wrestle it away!

He slams the phone down, fist hitting the table with a satisfying thud.

                 FANG GANG  
Told you, with sharks like him,  
you've got to use a harpoon!

                 LUO QIAO  
Subcontract Shi Mao's share  
immediately!

He waves dismissively, shooing away doubts like pesky flies.

                 FANG GANG  
Why not start construction early?  
Catch him off guard!

                 LUO QIAO  
Now that's a plan I can get behind!

32      **EXT. NAN'AN CITY - DAY**

Luo Qiao and Fang Gang exit one office after another, each more disappointed than the last.

33      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

The city blurs through the windows as the BMW speeds along. Luo Qiao and Fang Gang slump in their seats, weary from rejection.

                 LUO QIAO  
Another bust. They all think Queen  
Villa's got a hex on it.

                 FANG GANG  
Maybe it does. Even my cousin's  
bailing.

Luo Qiao's frustration is a simmering pot about to boil over.



LUO QIAO  
We're running out of lifelines,  
Fang.

34      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

The living room resembles a battlefield of paperwork. Luo Qiao collapses onto the sofa under the crushing weight of failure.

JIANG FANG  
So, no one's biting on Queen Villa?

Luo Qiao shakes his head, the gesture heavy with defeat.

LUO QIAO  
Yao Jiancheng's got them all  
spooked.

Jiang Fang's determination blazes like a lighthouse in a storm.

JIANG FANG  
Giving up ain't in your vocabulary,  
right?

Luo Qiao massages his temples, searching for a solution.

LUO QIAO  
We need someone desperate enough to  
be outside Yao's reach.

35      **INT. HUIHUANG REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Luo Qiao sits across from WANG JIAN (51), a shrewd manager with hawk-like eyes.

WANG JIAN  
Ten percent profit? That's peanuts.  
Who's gonna risk it for that?

LUO QIAO  
Alright, twelve then.

WANG JIAN smirks, raising five fingers.

WANG JIAN  
Fifteen. Final offer.

Luo Qiao chuckles, sliding a contract across the desk.

LUO QIAO  
Fifteen is my cut too. But if you  
take forty percent...

WANG JIAN skims the contract, eyes alight with greed.

WANG JIAN  
You know how to play the game, Mr.  
Lu.

LUO QIAO  
Watching subcontractors get  
squeezed dry while the big shots  
reap the rewards? Can't stand it.

WANG JIAN  
Ain't that the truth? It's all  
backroom deals now. I'll get back  
to you in two days.

LUO QIAO  
Looking forward to it.

They exchange smiles, a silent understanding between them.  
Luo Qiao and Fang Gang leave, stepping into the gathering  
darkness.

36

**INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - MEETING ROOM - DAY**

Anticipation buzzes. Managers from Natural and Huihuang Real  
Estate surround the table. He Yan stands ready to witness the  
signing.

HE YAN  
Will Mr. Luo Qiao and Mr. Wang Jian  
please sign the equity transfer  
agreement?

Luo Qiao and Wang Jian exchange nods, pens hovering over the  
contract. Suddenly, Wang Xiuhong bursts in, panic and urgency  
on her face.

WANG XIUHONG  
Mr. Lu, we've got a situation!

LUO QIAO  
What's going on?

She thrusts a document into his hands. His triumph melts into  
alarm.

WANG XIUHONG  
 Jiancheng Real Estate wants to pull  
 the plug on the Empress Villa  
 project. Here's the lawsuit.

Luo Qiao's eyes narrow as he absorbs the document's weight.  
 Fang Gang steps forward, attempting levity.

FANG GANG  
 Mr. Luo, the signing's done. Let's  
 party first, sort this mess later.

WANG JIAN  
 Yeah, let's do that.

Fang Gang ushers everyone out, leaving Wang Xiuhong and Luo  
 Qiao in the charged room.

Luo Qiao glares at the lawsuit, anger simmering. He picks up  
 a cigarette left by Fang Gang.

LUO QIAO  
 Let's find that bastard!

37

**INT. RESTAURANT - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY**

Laughter and clinking glasses fill the air. Executives from  
 Huihuang Real Estate revel in the celebration.

Fang Gang, wine glass in hand, grins from the head of the  
 table.

FANG GANG  
 Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Luo had a  
 bit of a crisis pop up, sends his  
 apologies!

The crowd exchanges amused glances, raising their glasses.

FANG GANG  
 But Mr. Luo insists we celebrate!  
 On behalf of Natural Real Estate,  
 cheers to all!

WANG JIAN  
 We'll see plenty more of Mr. Luo  
 soon enough. Cheers!

Music swells, and the room erupts into lively chatter and  
 toasting.

38      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Sunlight streams through the curtains. Luo Qiao sits, gripping Yao Jiancheng's lawsuit.

Jiang Fang offers him tea, her voice a soothing balm.

JIANG FANG

Don't stress. Talk to Yao Jiancheng. If he insists on reclaiming all the rights, just make sure we have a safe exit strategy.

LUO QIAO

Think he can guarantee that?

JIANG FANG

We don't need his guarantee. Just make sure he doesn't steamroll us.

Luo Qiao sighs, nodding in resignation.

LUO QIAO

Alright, Wang Xiuhong and I will tackle this tomorrow.

Jiang Fang squeezes his hand, offering silent support.

39      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Fang Gang weaves through city streets. Luo Qiao sits beside him, anxiety visible. In the back, Wang Xiuhong and Wang Jian share a worried glance.

40      **EXT. YAO JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - DAY**

The BMW halts at the gate. A security guard approaches, eyes curious.

SECURITY GUARD

Who are you here to see?

Luo Qiao lowers the window.

LUO QIAO

Manager Wang from Natural Real Estate here to talk business with Manager Yao.

SECURITY GUARD

Got an appointment?

LUO QIAO

No.

SECURITY GUARD

Hang tight. I'll check.

The guard ducks into the booth. Moments later, the gate swings open. Luo Qiao parks in front of the imposing building.

41      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Inside the BMW, tension clings like a stubborn fog.

Luo Qiao stares at the dashboard, fingers drumming a nervous beat. He glances at Wang Xiuhong and Luo Jian.

LUO QIAO

Keep your faces out of sight. You two head in and ask Yao Jiancheng about dropping the lawsuit. If he digs his heels in, Wang Jian, tell him you're all-in on this project.

LOU JIAN

He'll get the message!

Wang Xiuhong and Luo Jian hop out. Luo Qiao lights a cigarette, hands trembling like leaves in a storm.

FANG GANG

Bro, that punk's begging for a knuckle sandwich!

Luo Qiao exhales, filling the car with a fog that rivals London's.

42      **EXT. YAO JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - DAY**

Wang Xiuhong and Luo Jian trail after Yao Jiancheng (53), his arrogance like a designer suit, as he strides out with impatience.

43      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Luo Qiao rolls down the window, craning to catch the heated exchange outside.

44      **EXT. YAO JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - DAY**

Wang Xiuhong charges after Yao Jiancheng, her voice like a siren's wail.

                  WANG XIUHONG  
Mr. Yao, are you backing down or  
not? Last chance!

                  YAO JIANCHENG  
Back down? Ha! See you in court!

Yao slips into his Mercedes, a Cheshire grin plastered on his face, and speeds off, leaving Wang Xiuhong and Luo Jian fuming.

45      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

A dangerous glint flickers in Luo Qiao's eyes. Fang Gang reaches for the door, but Luo Qiao clamps a hand on his arm.

                  FANG GANG  
This is too much bullying!

                  LUO QIAO  
Hold your horses!

Wang Xiuhong and Wang Jian return, their faces flushed with indignation.

                  WANG XIUHONG  
Infuriating!

                  LUO QIAO  
No use getting your knickers in a  
twist. Was that Yao in the Merc?

                  WANG XIUHONG  
Who else?

                  WANG JIAN  
I asked him, he said it's our  
internal mess. Nothing to do with  
him.

                  LUO QIAO  
Damn, twisting words like a lawyer!

Luo Qiao reclines his seat, closing his eyes, resignation washing over him like a tide.

46

**INT. YAOLUO ENGINEERING - OFFICES - DAY**

Fang Gang slouches at a cluttered desk, photographs of a battered Yao Jiancheng scattered before him.

Luo Qiao strides in, eyes narrowing at the photos, a storm brewing in his gaze.

LUO QIAO  
What the hell, Fang? You think this  
is a game?

FANG GANG  
He had it coming!

LUO QIAO  
I told you, no vendettas!

FANG GANG  
Just looking out for us.

LUO QIAO  
You might have blown it all!

FANG GANG  
I thought...

LUO QIAO  
Think next time! We can't afford  
screw-ups.

Luo Qiao's voice softens, caution threading through his words.

LUO QIAO  
Just... keep it cool. No more  
stunts.

47

**INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - MEETING ROOM - DAY**

Wang Xiuhong stands in a sharp Armani suit, exuding authority among skeptical developers. Tension hangs like a storm cloud.

DEVELOPER REPRESENTATIVE A, with a nose like a hawk's beak, leans forward, impatience carved into his features.

DEVELOPER REPRESENTATIVE A  
Mrs. Wang, can you really steer  
this ship?

WANG XIUHONG  
Gentlemen, I've learned on the fly.  
It's time for fresh leadership.

DEVELOPER REPRESENTATIVE B smirks, masking skepticism.

DEVELOPER REPRESENTATIVE B  
How noble! Duty or opportunism?

Wang Xiuhong's eyes flash with resolve.

WANG XIUHONG  
My husband made mistakes, but his  
dedication was real. I'm here to  
fix, not exploit.

Uneasy glances and whispers snake through the room. Wang Xiuhong stands like an unyielding fortress.

48      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Dark stillness envelops the room, the soft rhythm of Jiang Fang and their baby's slumber.

Luo Qiao tosses, brow knotted with unease, then bolts upright, a single word escaping his lips, venomous and sharp.

LUO QIAO  
Kill!

Jiang Fang stirs, eyes fluttering open, amused.

JIANG FANG  
Crazy...

She rolls over, surrendering to sleep. Luo Qiao watches her, guilt and desperation storming his eyes.

Quietly, he slips away to the living room, burdened by his thoughts.

49      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

A solitary lamp casts long shadows.

Luo Qiao stands by the window, face a mask of simmering rage, fists clenched, words seething under his breath.

LUO QIAO  
Yao Jiancheng, you'll regret this.

Jiang Fang's voice, soft but firm, cuts through the tension.

JIANG FANG (V.O.)  
Who are you talking to?



Startled, Luo Qiao turns to find Jiang Fang in the doorway, eyes piercing.

JIANG FANG

What are you scheming, Luo Qiao?

LUO QIAO

Nothing. Just thinking out loud.

JIANG FANG

Don't lie to me. You're up to something dangerous.

LUO QIAO

You're imagining things.

JIANG FANG

Don't underestimate me. This isn't going to end well.

Luo Qiao turns back to the window, jaw clenched, silence thick and heavy like the air before a storm.

50     **EXT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - DAWN**

The BMW lurks at the gate, a predator in wait. Employees stream in as Luo Qiao's eyes gleam with intent.

51     **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Yao Jiancheng's white Mercedes glides into the lot. Luo Qiao, like a hunter spotting prey, snaps incriminating photos with his phone.

52     **EXT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - DAY**

As the sun dips, Yao Jiancheng departs. The BMW slips into traffic, a cheetah on the prowl, vanishing into the urban jungle.

53     **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Dim shadows dance on the walls. Jiang Fang, phone pressed to her ear, whispers with desperation.

JIANG FANG

...He's obsessed, Luo Qian. Blind to the risks, the damage he's causing...

LUO QIAN, calm and reasonable, responds gently across the line.

LUO QIAN (V.O.)  
He's always been driven, Jiang Fang. But he loves you and Tongtong fiercely.

Jiang Fang's laugh is brittle, on the verge of shattering.

JIANG FANG  
Love? What's it worth if it blinds him to reason? If it destroys everything we've built?

A pause, heavy with fears. Luo Qian's voice threads with urgency.

LUO QIAN (V.O.)  
What did he say, Jiang Fang?

JIANG FANG  
He... he mentioned silencing Yao Jiancheng, making him disappear...

LUO QIAN (V.O.)  
You need to steer him back to sanity. This isn't just business; it's dangerous.

Jiang Fang's eyes glisten with unshed tears, reflecting a wedding photo.

JIANG FANG  
I've tried, Luo Qian. He won't listen. He thinks money can fix everything. But what's money worth if we lose ourselves? If we lose each other?

Silence swallows the room. Luo Qian's voice returns as a quiet plea.

LUO QIAN (V.O.)  
Don't give up on him, Jiang Fang.

The connection closes, leaving Jiang Fang alone with her fears. She sets the photo down, grief marking the glass.

54      **INT. BLACK BMW - CONTINUOUS**

Luo Qiao hides behind a surgical mask, eyes locked on the entrance with hawk-like intensity. A jogger emerges. Luo Qiao grins.

                         LUO QIAO  
                          (To himself)  
                          There you are, Yao Jiancheng.

He starts the engine, trailing the jogger into the shadows.

55      **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Yao Jiancheng jogs. Luo Qiao lumbers behind, wheezing. Yao pauses at a railing. Luo Qiao grips a wrench but hesitates, sweat beading.

*FLASHFORWARD:*

- Sirens wail; red and blue lights strobe.
- The handcuffs gleam icy.

*End of Flashforward.*

                         YAO JIANCHENG  
                          Need help with that railing?

Luo Qiao freezes, caught.

                         LUO QIAO  
                          I... uh...

                         YAO JIANCHENG  
                          Heard about an old lady who leaned  
                          on a railing yesterday and ended up  
                          swimming with it.

                         LUO QIAO  
                          Yes, yes... You need to be  
                          cautious!

Luo Qiao taps the railing, feigning nonchalance.

56      **EXT. QUEEN'S VILLA DEVELOPMENT SITE - DAY**

Long shadows stretch across the site as Luo Qiao sits among shattered beer bottles, glaring at a photo of Yao Jiancheng.

LUO QIAO  
 (muttering, sarcastic)  
 Be careful, huh? Sure, like you  
 need that advice.

A bitter laugh escapes him.

LUO QIAO  
 You think you can just waltz in and  
 take everything I've built, Yao?  
 This is my life, you clown!

He kicks a bottle, eyes burning with defiance.

LUO QIAO  
 I won't let you win! I've got a  
 family! You leave me no damn  
 choice!

A rusted van arrives. Fang Gang approaches, casual in his  
 stride.

FANG GANG  
 Drowning your sorrows, boss?

LUO QIAO  
 Here to rub it in?

FANG GANG  
 Nah, just checking—my cousin's  
 itching to know when we start.

LUO QIAO  
 We're not. It's under new  
 management.

Fang Gang's eyes turn steely.

FANG GANG  
 Anyone messes with you messes with  
 him.

LUO QIAO  
 What was he, before?

FANG GANG  
 A butcher.

Luo Qiao shivers, uneasiness creeping in.

LUO QIAO  
 No, no, too risky. What if it  
 leaks?

FANG GANG  
Just pay for the "PR," and he'll  
handle it.

Luo Qiao shakes his head, anxiety gnawing at him.

57      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - STUDY - NIGHT**

Dim light casts long shadows. Luo Qiao hunches over his desk, Yao Jiancheng's photo glaring under the lamp's harsh glow.

Jiang Fang stands in the doorway, silhouetted by the dim light, her presence tense and unyielding.

JIANG FANG  
Plotting something reckless, aren't  
you?

Luo Qiao jumps, spins around, his smile strained.

LUO QIAO  
What are you talking about? Just  
some late-night brainstorming.

She steps closer, her gaze sharp.

JIANG FANG  
Don't play me for a fool. I know  
that look. It's the "Yao's gonna  
pay" look.

His laugh falls flat.

LUO QIAO  
He's just a small bump. We'll  
manage.

JIANG FANG  
This isn't a joke, Luo Qiao. This  
revenge obsession will destroy us.

He stands, trying to assert himself, but she holds her ground.

LUO QIAO  
He took everything! What should I  
do, send a thank-you card?

She grips his arm firmly.

JIANG FANG  
 There are other ways. Legal ways.  
 Don't throw away everything for  
 this madness.

He meets her gaze, doubt flickering, then turns away, resolve  
 hardening.

LUO QIAO  
 I know what I'm doing.

She steps back, distance growing between them.

JIANG FANG  
 I hope so, for all our sakes.

She leaves, door closing softly, leaving him alone in  
 silence. Yao Jiancheng's photo remains, a silent, accusing  
 specter.

58      **INT. YAOLUO ENGINEERING - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Luo Qiao paces, eyes sharp with tension. A blue plaid  
 snakeskin bag sits ominously on the coffee table.

Fang Gang enters, sensing the storm brewing.

LUO QIAO  
 Open it.

LUO QIAO

Fang Gang unzips the bag, revealing crisp stacks of red  
 bills. His phone buzzes, "Fang Yuan" flashing. He silences it  
 with a sigh.

LUO QIAO  
 Before any "public relations," let  
 me know.

59      **INT. SILVER VAN - DAY**

Fang Gang drives, smug grin plastered on his face, a  
 snakeskin bag beside him. His phone flashes "Fang Yuan"  
 again.

FANG GANG  
 Yuan, what's the emergency?

Fang Yuan's frantic voice crackles through the van.

FANG YUAN (V.O.)  
 Uncle's in the ICU! When are you  
 coming to the hospital?!

60      **INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - DAY**

Fang Gang rushes in, snakeskin bag in hand, panic etched on his face. He finds FANG YUAN (39), muscular and stern, outside the ICU.

FANG GANG  
 How's Dad?

FANG YUAN  
 Stable, but where was your phone?

FANG GANG  
 Busted. Just got it fixed.

FANG YUAN  
 Sixty grand, gone in a blink!

FANG GANG  
 I'll handle it. Go rest. We'll chat  
 tomorrow.

Fang Yuan eyes the bag suspiciously, then walks away. Fang Gang paces, restless. A young nurse approaches, her demeanor icy.

NURSE  
 Family of bed 5?

FANG GANG  
 Yes, yes, I am.

NURSE  
 Settle the bill soon, or the  
 hospital won't take responsibility!

She clicks away, leaving Fang Gang staring at the bag, scratching his head. He starts to call Luo Qiao, hesitates, then hangs up.

61      **INT. SILVER VAN - DAY**

Sun blazes off the van's windows as it speeds along.

Inside, Fang Gang and Fang Yuan clutch a blue plaid snakeskin bag, ominous with hidden intentions.

FANG GANG

If this project tanks, we're screwed.

FANG YUAN

Thirty guys count on us to put food on their tables. How do we face them if we fail?

FANG GANG

That snake Yao Jiancheng's looking to swallow the whole thing. Nail him, and that million's yours.

FANG YUAN

Anyone steps in my way, they'll regret it.

62

**INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Sunlight bathes the room. Luo Qiao grinds coffee beans, his mind adrift. Jiang Fang watches with a knowing smile.

JIANG FANG

What schemes are brewing now?

LUO QIAO

Ah, my wise wife... caught me again.

They exchange weary smiles, a semblance of normalcy. A loud knock spills coffee grounds everywhere.

Jiang Fang laughs and opens the door to a disheveled Zhang Xiao, clutching a sleeping bag.

ZHANG XIAO

Sister-in-law, I'm your new doorman! The missus wants a divorce!

Jiang Fang stifles a laugh, ushering him inside. Zhang Xiao plops down, unfurling his bag.

LUO QIAO

What's up, Zhang Xiao? I said I'd pay you back soon!



ZHANG XIAO

Luo, you have no clue. My wife yaps every day, says your project's a sinking ship, and lending you money's like throwing buns at a stray dog... she's scared stiff!

Luo Qiao's phone rings again. "Fang Gang" flashes. He hesitates, then answers.

LUO QIAO

Handle it! And quit bugging me!

He hangs up, visibly relieved, then kneels beside Zhang Xiao.

LUO QIAO

Stay here. I've got to head out.

Zhang Xiao watches, confused, as Luo Qiao exits, leaving unspoken anxieties hanging in the air.

63     **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Luo Qiao's BMW halts at the mall entrance. He steps out, each stride toward the bus station heavy with worry.

64     **EXT. FANG YUAN'S COURTYARD - DAY**

Fang Yuan sharpens his butcher's knife, sweat glistening on his muscled arms.

The blade gleams under the sun, matching his steely resolve.

65     **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Jiang Fang cradles their baby, eyes glued to the TV. Zhang Xiao sprawls on the floor, immersed in video games.

A video call from Luo Qiao interrupts.

LUO QIAO

Guess where I am?

The camera swings to the majestic South China Sea Guanyin statue.

ZHANG XIAO

Luo Qiao, you rascal! I'm stuck here, and you're off sightseeing. What kind of man are you?

66     **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAWN**

Fang Yuan pretends to exercise, eyes darting to each passerby, hiding something sinister in a rolled-up newspaper.

67     **EXT. SCENIC AREA - SANYA - DAY**

Sunlight streams through palm leaves. Luo Qiao kneels before the Guanyin statue, hands clasped in prayer.

                    LUO QIAO  
Bodhisattva, bless this endeavor!  
The project's fate is in your  
hands!

68     **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Fang Yuan spots Yao Jiancheng, grips the knife hilt within the newspaper, and creeps forward.

Yao Jiancheng, oblivious, stretches his leg.

Suddenly, Fang Yuan's phone rings loudly in his pocket.

                    YAO JIANCHENG  
Phones nowadays—more reliable than  
alarm clocks.

                    FANG YUAN  
Ain't that the truth!

He answers the phone, irritation in his voice.

                    FANG YUAN  
What is it, Yang Tianxiang? Money  
again? I told you, I'm tapped out!

69     **EXT. SCENIC AREA - SANYA - DAY**

Luo Qiao kneels at the Guanyin statue, desperation morphing into veiled threats.

                    LUO QIAO  
Bodhisattva, I've begged you  
countless times! Show your power  
just this once! Make him retreat,  
or... don't blame me for what  
happens next!

70

**EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Fang Yuan lounges on a stone step, toothpick dangling, exuding unwarranted confidence.

Yang Tianxiang (36), wiry and desperate, approaches under a cloud of gloom.

YANG TIANXIANG

Bro Fang! My wife's packing up to leave!

FANG YUAN

What's her beef now? Your mother-in-law stirring the pot again?

YANG TIANXIANG

We're still short 80,000 on the bride price. She says no cash, no wedding bells!

FANG YUAN

With your looks, she's doing you a favor.

YANG TIANXIANG

Come on, Boss Fang! If you don't help, she'll elope with the next guy!

Fang Yuan's eyes twinkle with a mischievous idea. He spits out the toothpick, leaning in conspiratorially.

FANG YUAN

You want quick cash? 250,000. You in?

YANG TIANXIANG

What's the job?

FANG YUAN

Make a developer lose interest in his land... permanently.

YANG TIANXIANG

Count me in! Where's my cut?

FANG YUAN

150,000 up front, 100,000 when it's done.

Yang Tianxiang hesitates, then nods eagerly. Their eyes lock, a shared understanding glistening with cunning.

71

**INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Sunlight floods the room. Jiang Fang, half amused, half exasperated, tries to coax milk into the playful baby.

A QQ video call interrupts. Luo Qiao appears by the sea, "End of the Earth" monument behind him.

LUO QIAO

Honey, remember the vows we made right here? To the ends of the earth together, forever...

JIANG FANG

How dare you bring that up! Leaving me with the debt collector while you wander to the world's end. Is this your idea of "never parting"?

LUO QIAO

Come on, love! I had no choice. You know how relentless Zhang Xiao can be.

JIANG FANG

You think running away solves anything? What if he does something crazy?

LUO QIAO

Relax, Zhang Xiao's all bark and no bite. He'll leave once he's fed up. When I return, I'll bring you a gift to make it up!

JIANG FANG

Gifts, shmifts! Just come back and sort this mess!

LUO QIAO

Yes ma'am! Mission accepted!

72

**EXT. LABOR MARKET - DAY**

Sunlight spills over the bustling labor market. Workers gather like ants, faces a mix of hope and desperation.

FAN SI (31), a wiry figure with eyes sharp as daggers, prowls through the crowd, hunting for opportunity.

A rusted van screeches to a halt. A FOREMAN, built like a bulldozer, leaps out, barking orders.

FOREMAN  
Bricklayers! Need three! Quick  
hands, come!

The crowd surges, jostling Fan Si, who claws to the front.

FAN SI  
Wait! I'm fast, and my price is as  
flexible as a yoga instructor!

The Foreman sneers at Fan Si's scrawny frame.

FOREMAN  
With that scrawny frame? What can  
you do, scare the bricks into  
place?

Fan Si's silent stare unnerves him.

FOREMAN  
Next time.

The van roars away, leaving Fan Si and disappointed workers  
behind.

As the sun climbs, Fan Si retreats to a shadowy corner,  
chewing stale buns with resignation.

73     **INT. SMALL STORE - DAY**

Yang Tianxiang inspects a fruit knife with precision, shaking  
his head.

YANG TIANXIANG  
Got anything sharper? For...  
slicing fish.

A raspy voice responds from the shelves.

FEMALE SHOPKEEPER  
Wang Mazi's cleaver is top-notch.

Yang Tianxiang grimaces.

YANG TIANXIANG  
Too clumsy, like trying to write a  
love letter with a broom.

74

**EXT. SOUTH AN CITY - DAY**

Yang Tianxiang spots Fan Si getting pushed aside at the labor market. Grinning, he sneaks up and embraces Fan Si from behind.

Fan Si, startled, squats defensively but eases upon recognizing him.

FAN SI

You job hunting too?

YANG TIANXIANG

Yeah. Thought they wouldn't let you out till next year?

FAN SI

Good behavior. Early release.

YANG TIANXIANG

What kind of work you looking for?

FAN SI

Anything that pays. Money's tighter than a drum.

YANG TIANXIANG

Got a job offer. Interested?

FAN SI

Sure. What's the gig?

YANG TIANXIANG

Someone's paying to resolve a "development rights" issue.

Fan Si's face hardens.

FAN SI

No way, I swore no more crime to Warden Wang.

Yang Tianxiang leans in, whispering conspiratorially.

YANG TIANXIANG

They're offering 150,000.

Fan Si hesitates, then retorts.

FAN SI

Why don't you do it yourself?

Yang Tianxiang sighs.

YANG TIANXIANG  
Promised my girl I'd walk the  
straight and narrow.

A van brakes nearby. A FAT MAN shouts from the crowd.

FAT MAN  
Need two laborers, tall ones first!

Fan Si and Yang Tianxiang exchange a look, moving to a  
quieter spot.

FAN SI  
How's he paying?

YANG TIANXIANG  
50,000 upfront, 100,000 after.

FAN SI  
Can you guarantee he'll pay?

Yang Tianxiang pats his pocket.

YANG TIANXIANG  
Money's in my hands. You know where  
I live. I'm not running.

He flashes a wad of cash and a photo. Fan Si checks both,  
tucking the cash into his shirt, resolve glinting in his  
eyes.

75

**EXT. INTERNATIONAL DUTY FREE CITY - DAY**

Under the blazing sun, Luo Qiao, dressed garishly, paces  
outside Duty Free City, forcing a smile at his phone camera.

On the screen, Wang Xiuhong watches, amused.

WANG XIUHONG  
You men sure know how to relax!

LUO QIAO  
You wouldn't believe it, Wang  
Xiuhong, but I'm here for damage  
control! Every project, I pray at  
the South Sea Guanyin statue. Never  
failed me. Forgot this time, and  
bam, Yao Jiancheng appears! I'm  
sweating bullets!

WANG XIUHONG

My grandma had a trick for that.  
Make a voodoo doll, write their  
name on it, stick it with needles.  
Guaranteed bad luck!

LUO QIAO

I know that one! But I'm all  
thumbs, can't make a doll to save  
my life!

WANG XIUHONG

No problem! I have a picture of Yao  
Jiancheng. I'll send it to you.  
Print it out, stick it at the foot  
of the Guanyin statue, and put a  
rock on it. He won't be able to  
budge!

LUO QIAO

(Grinning)

Brilliant! Let's do it!

76

**EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

The park basks in a soft golden glow. Fan Si moves with  
purpose, practicing martial arts with a dagger, eyes fixed  
with intent.

FAN SI (V.O.)

Where's Yao Jiancheng? Did he  
change his DAWN routine?

Joggers fill the park as the sun rises.

Fan Si studies a photo, frustration mounting as his target  
remains elusive.

77

**EXT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - DAY**

Fan Si crouches behind an SUV, eyes locked on the entrance.

A white Mercedes glides in, and Yao Jiancheng assists an  
elderly lady inside.

FAN SI

All this for a hundred grand?

He edges toward the entrance but is halted by a SECURITY  
GUARD.



SECURITY GUARD  
Who are you here to see?

FAN SI  
President Yao. Urgent business.

SECURITY GUARD  
Appointment?

FAN SI  
I have a secret, a matter of life  
and death!

The guard skeptically unfolds a crumpled note, his expression quickly turning serious.

78     **INT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

The cityscape sprawls beyond the windows.

Yao Jiancheng, brow furrowed, stares at a crumpled note:  
"Someone's got a hit on you. Call if you want to live.  
13858110110." The shaky handwriting matches his nerves.

79     **INT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

In a sleek room that screams wealth, Yao Jiancheng and two beefy executives sit, worry etched on their faces.

ZHANG SANMING  
Think it's a joke? Some punk  
pulling our leg?

CAI CAIJIN  
Could be a shake-down. Someone  
looking to make a quick buck.

Yao Jiancheng taps the table, unease gnawing at him. He dials the note's number. Fan Si's voice, cold as ice, answers.

FAN SI (V.O.)  
Yeah?

YAO JIANCHENG  
Who am I talking to here?

FAN SI (V.O.)  
Name's Fan Si. Meet me at  
"Encounter" Cafe at 3 PM if you  
like breathing.

80

**INT. ENCOUNTER CAFE - DAY**

Soft jazz fills the air. Yao Jiancheng and his team sit by the window, their untouched coffees reflecting their anxiety.

ZHANG SANMING

You really think someone'll show?  
This is nuts.

YAO JIANCHENG

Better paranoid than dead. We need  
to know if someone really wants me  
six feet under.

Fan Si enters, exuding confidence, and approaches their table.

FAN SI

Mr. Yao Jiancheng, I presume?

YAO JIANCHENG

That's me. And you're...?

FAN SI

Fan Si. Seems someone's slapped a  
price tag on your head.

Zhang Sanming scoffs.

ZHANG SANMING

You, an assassin? Give me a break!

Fan Si shows a phone with Yao Jiancheng's photo and address.  
The executives turn pale.

YAO JIANCHENG

Why haven't you done the job?

FAN SI

Coin's too thin. Not risking my  
neck for peanuts.

YAO JIANCHENG

So why are you here?

FAN SI

Let's stage your death. I snap some  
pics, we scam the lot, and they  
leave you alone.

Yao Jiancheng exchanges looks with his team, then nods.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Fine, but I better not end up six  
feet under for real.

FAN SI  
No sweat.

Fan Si flashes his ID, easing their skepticism.

FAN SI  
See? All above board.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Swing by my office tomorrow for the  
shoot.

Fan Si leaves, leaving disbelief in his wake.

81     **INT. HOTEL ROOM - SANYA - DAY**

The sunset paints the sea in fiery hues. Luo Qiao sits on the  
bed, lost in thought as the TV murmurs news.

A police siren jolts him back. He rushes to the window,  
pulling the curtains apart.

LUO QIAO  
They're here for me? No way, not  
already!

Police cars speed past, leaving him relieved.

LUO QIAO  
Thank heavens... they're not after  
me.

He slumps back onto the bed, the TV's drone feeling distant.

82     **INT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

The office is chaotic, furniture overturned. Fan Si  
orchestrates the scene, directing Yao Jiancheng and his team.

FAN SI  
President Yao, don the white shirt.  
Now lie there! More agony!

Yao Jiancheng lies on the floor, shirt stained with fake  
blood, grimacing dramatically. Fan Si snaps photos.

FAN SI  
Perfect! These'll fool anyone!

Yao Jiancheng stands, dusting himself off, his team exchanging uneasy glances.

YAO JIANCHENG  
What's our next move?

FAN SI  
Spread the word you're "dead," then  
lay low for a spell.

Fan Si exits, leaving them in stunned silence.

83     **EXT. YA'AN VILLA NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY**

Yao Jiancheng flings his luggage into a limo, which speeds away.

84     **INT. HOTEL ROOM - SANYA - DAY**

As the sun sets, Luo Qiao lies on the bed, phone buzzing. He answers groggily, seeing Fang Gang's excited face on the screen.

FANG GANG  
Luo, mission accomplished!

Fang Gang shows photos of Yao Jiancheng's "tragic end." Luo Qiao jolts awake, relieved.

LUO QIAO  
Excellent! Finally, I can sleep  
soundly.

85     **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Fan Si reclines on a bench, counting a stack of bills, grinning triumphantly.

86     **EXT. NANHAI GUANYIN STATUE BRIDGE - DAY**

A soft sea breeze blows under the blazing sun. Luo Qiao walks the bridge, face filled with apprehension, wrestling with a decision.

He spots a boat below with a man resembling Yao Jiancheng laughing with a woman.

LUO QIAO  
Yao Jiancheng?

The boat vanishes. Luo Qiao rushes to the other side but sees nothing.

LUO QIAO  
No... impossible...

He collapses, trembling, cold sweat pouring as if he's seen a ghost.

87     **EXT. NANHAI GUANYIN STATUE - DAY**

Sun blazes down, wrapping the towering Guanyin statue in a serene silhouette.

Luo Qiao kneels, eyes wide with terror and regret.

LUO QIAO  
Bodhisattva, I was wrong! I  
shouldn't have considered murder!  
Protect me, please!

His plea echoes along the empty seaside, soaked in despair.

88     **INT. LUXURY HOTEL ROOM - BEIJING - DAY**

Yao Jiancheng perches on the bed, his lavish suite a gilded cage. Memories haunt him, unease twisting like a knife.

*BEGIN FLASHBACKS:*

89     **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Luo Qiao grips a wrench but hesitates, sweat beading...

90     **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Fang Yuan spots Yao Jiancheng, grips the knife hilt within the newspaper, and creeps forward...

91     **INT. ENCOUNTER CAFE - DAY**

Fan Si enters, exuding confidence, and approaches their table.

FAN SI  
Seems someone's slapped a price tag  
on your head.

*END FLASHBACK.*

92      **INT. LUXURY HOTEL ROOM - BEIJING - DAY**

Yao Jiancheng, pale and sweating, urgently dials Vice President Zhang Sanming.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Sanming, pull out all stops. Find  
out who's behind this—now!

ZHANG SANMING (V.O.)  
Got it! We're on it.

Determination hardens Yao Jiancheng's features as he braces for the storm.

93      **INT. HOTEL ROOM - SANYA - DAY**

Luo Qiao sprawls on the bed, swiping his phone with mounting frustration. He dials Wang Xiuhong.

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)  
(sobbing) )  
Luo Qiao, is this karma?

LUO QIAO  
What's going on, Xiuhong?

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)  
Yao Jiancheng... he's dead!

LUO QIAO  
(pretending to be calm) Xiuhong,  
it's not on us. He dug his own  
grave.

Her sobs intensify, a storm through the line.

94      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Luo Qiao bursts in, tossing his luggage aside like it's haunted.

LUO QIAO  
Finally escaped that mess. Sanya's  
magic, huh?

Jiang Fang appears, arms crossed, eyes like daggers.

JIANG FANG  
You think it's that simple?

LUO QIAO  
You didn't pay him to disappear,  
did you?

JIANG FANG  
Actually, I did.

Luo Qiao blinks, then forces a grin, offering a velvet box.

LUO QIAO  
Come on, love, don't be mad. Check  
this out—like it?

Jiang Fang opens the box, her eyes flicker with surprise.

JIANG FANG  
Wow, this is... impressive. You've  
outdone yourself.

Her smile fades, concern returning.

JIANG FANG  
Yao Jiancheng is dead. Someone...  
took care of him.

LUO QIAO  
(feigning surprise) What?! Wrong  
crowd, I guess.

JIANG FANG  
That's what I thought, but it's  
unsettling.

He pulls her close, his touch soothing.

LUO QIAO  
Don't let it haunt you. You've done  
enough. Rest, okay?

95

**INT. LUXURY HOTEL ROOM - BEIJING - DAY**

Yao Jiancheng paces like a trapped animal, eyes flicking  
between the door and the window.

YAO JIANCHENG  
When does this nightmare end?!

He slams his laptop shut, frustrated, and picks up his phone.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Cai Caijin, I'm coming back.

CAI CAIJIN (V.O.)  
You sure? It's risky.

YAO JIANCHENG  
No choice. Get me top bodyguards.  
Spare no expense.

CAI CAIJIN (V.O.)  
Understood, Mr. Yao.

Yao Jiancheng hangs up, eyes challenging the horizon.

YAO JIANCHENG  
This ends now. Whatever it takes.

Resolve carves his features into stone.

96     **INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

Luo Qiao commands the room from the podium, energy crackling.

LUO QIAO  
Brothers! Queen's Villa project  
kicks off in 17 days!

Applause erupts, excitement mingling with anxiety.

LUO QIAO  
We're tight on time, but we'll nail  
it!

He faces WANG JIAN and Wang Xiuhong, trust firm in his eyes.

LUO QIAO  
Let's show them our mettle!

The room buzzes, charged for the challenge ahead.

97     **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAWN**

Yao Jiancheng jogs, bodyguards orbit him. A man in a duck-billed hat fidgets on a bench.

YAO JIANCHENG  
That guy looks fishy. Check him  
out.

Two bodyguards approach.

BODYGUARD A  
Sir, hands out of your  
pockets—slowly.



The man reveals walnuts. Yao Jiancheng exhales, tension easing.

98      **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - STUDY - DAY**

Luo Qiao stands before a miniature Guanyin statue, anxiety etched on his face.

                 LUO QIAO  
Guanyin, please... make Yao  
Jiancheng vanish. I can't keep  
doing this!

99      **INT. WHITE BENZ - DAY**

Yao Jiancheng sits in the back, his gaze flicking nervously to the rearview mirror.

                 YAO JIANCHENG  
We've been tailed for three blocks.  
Got the plate?

                 BODYGUARD  
Yes, Boss Yao.

100     **INT. YAO JIANCHENG'S VILLA - NIGHT**

The villa, a fortress of light, has wolf dogs prowling. Yao Jiancheng watches his bodyguard secure the doors, unease palpable.

                 YAO JIANCHENG  
Stay sharp tonight. No surprises!

In the study, he slumps into his chair, unrest pressing down.

101     **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Luo Qiao thrashes in bed, sleep evading him. His wife and child rest peacefully beside him.

*BEGIN FLASHBACKS:*

102     **EXT. NANHAI GUANYIN STATUE BRIDGE - DAY**

He spots a boat below with a man resembling Yao Jiancheng laughing with a woman.

LUO QIAO  
Yao Jiancheng?

*END FLASHBACK.*

LUO QIAO  
What are you plotting, Yao?

He rises restlessly, heading to the study.

103     **INT. STUDY - CONTINUOUS**

Luo Qiao clasps his hands before the Guanyin statue, desperation in his voice.

LUO QIAO  
Guanyin Bodhisattva, please... just  
make him disappear!

104     **INT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Yao Jiancheng rubs his eyes, dwarfed by mountains of files. The clock declares it past eleven.

He weakly waves a bodyguard over.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Bring in Zhang.

ZHANG SANMING rushes in, anxiety etched on his face.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Any leads?

ZHANG SANMING  
Yang Tianxiang, Fan Si's old  
cellmate. He's a bricklayer now.  
Motives unclear.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Yang Tianxiang? What's his beef  
with me?

Yao ponders, perplexed.

YAO JIANCHENG  
What landed them in prison?

ZHANG SANMING  
Yang for burglary, Fan Si for  
shaking down folks.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Fan Si? With his slight build?

ZHANG SANMING  
Lost his parents young, joined  
gangs at sixteen.

Yao's face hardens, thoughts churning.

105     **EXT. YAO JIANCHENG'S VILLA - NIGHT**

The villa looms under the moon, a fortress of glowing windows.

Yao Jiancheng's car glides silently up the driveway. Two bodyguards, hawk-eyed, scan the night. Satisfied, they nod.

Yao steps out, his face a map of tension.

106     **INT. YAO JIANCHENG'S VILLA - CONTINUOUS**

Inside, the living room hums with a soft glow. His mother sits, worry etched deep.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Mom, why are you still up?

MOTHER  
Can't sleep when you're out there,  
son.

Her hand, warm with concern, clasps his. Yao sighs, burdened by the world.

YAO JIANCHENG  
This ends tomorrow. I'm going to  
the police.

Relief softens her face. Yao, resolve steely, braces for the storm.

107     **EXT. NANHU POLICE STATION - DAY**

The sun rises, indifferent to human chaos.

Yao Jiancheng, flanked by Zhang Sanming and bodyguards, strides into the station. Tension coils around him like a snake.

108     **INT. NANHU POLICE STATION - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY**

OFFICER SUN (48), seasoned and sharp-eyed, sits across from Yao Jiancheng. A young policeman stands by, ready to assist.

OFFICER SUN  
Tell us what happened.

Yao Jiancheng leans forward, voice steady but tinged with anxiety.

YAO JIANCHENG  
A hitman said someone offered  
100,000 yuan for my life. He took  
fake photos to scam money, but I'm  
on edge every day.

Zhang Sanming interjects, suspicion lacing his words.

ZHANG SANMING  
We think there's more to this.  
Hidden factors.

Officer Sun and the young policeman exchange glances, gravity settling in.

OFFICER SUN  
We'll investigate. Uncover the  
truth.

The young policeman nods, offering reassurance.

YOUNG POLICEMAN  
We'll do our best to keep you safe.

Yao Jiancheng and Zhang Sanming exhale, a weight lifting slightly.

109     **EXT. QUEEN'S VILLA DEVELOPMENT SITE - DAY**

A wasteland vibrates with energy. Fang Gang directs workers, lines crisscrossing the earth.

Luo Qiao, atop his BMW, surveys like a monarch.

Zhang Sanming storms over, frustration boiling.

ZHANG SANMING  
Who gave you permission to start  
construction? Has Jiancheng Real  
Estate agreed?

Luo Qiao, unruffled, dismisses him with a wave.

LUO QIAO  
 We have the rights. Your agreement?  
 Not needed.

Fang Gang rallies the workers, who march forward, ushering Zhang Sanming away.

Luo Qiao's smile widens, a conqueror in his domain.

110     **INT. NANHU POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY**

A single light pierces the dim room, spotlighting Fan Si, who squirms under Officer Sun's cold gaze.

OFFICER SUN  
 Why did you do it?

Fan Si's lips quiver, eyes darting like a trapped animal.

FAN SI  
 I... I was just at the labor  
 market... looking for work...

Officer Sun and the young policeman share a knowing look, the boy's tale as thin as smoke.

111     **INT. GIFT SHOP - DAY**

Luo Qiao, humming a tune, peruses the shelves with an air of confidence. The young salesgirl beams at him.

SALESGIRL  
 What can I get for you, boss?

Luo Qiao's eyes twinkle with mischief.

LUO QIAO  
 Two cases of thousand-shot  
 firecrackers! And fifty "good  
 fortune" red envelopes!

The salesgirl packs the items efficiently.

Luo Qiao slips a hundred yuan bill into a red envelope, grinning slyly.

112     **EXT. GIFT SHOP - DAY**

The sun blazes overhead, casting sharp shadows. Luo Qiao stands by his car, juggling shopping bags.

His phone rings, slicing through the air.

LUO QIAO  
This is for you. Thanks for the  
hustle!

SALESGIRL  
Thank you, boss!

Luo Qiao answers the call, his jovial expression crumbling into dread.

FANG GANG (V.O.)  
Boss! The cops! They nabbed  
someone!

Luo Qiao's knees buckle, the salesgirl catching him just in time.

SALESGIRL  
Are you okay, boss? Should I call  
an ambulance?

LUO QIAO  
No... no need... I'm good...

He dismisses her concern, sinking into his car like a puppet with cut strings.

113     **INT. BLACK BMW - CONTINUOUS**

Luo Qiao slumps, sweat sliding down his face. His phone abandoned on the seat.

SALESGIRL  
You sure you're okay?

LUO QIAO  
Th...thanks...

He offers a weak smile, more grimace than reassurance.

The salesgirl shuts the door, leaving him adrift, eyes vacant.

114     **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY**

The table is lavishly set, but Luo Qiao and Jiang Fang eat in silence, each bite tasteless.

LUO QIAO  
Jiang Fang, we need to talk.

Jiang Fang sets down her chopsticks, her eyes narrowing.

JIANG FANG

About what?

Luo Qiao gathers his courage.

LUO QIAO

Why... why did you marry me?

Jiang Fang arches a brow, a smirk ghosting her lips.

JIANG FANG

Are you asking if it was for money?

A pause settles; Luo Qiao nods slightly.

LUO QIAO

It's been gnawing at me, especially after...

He recalls handing cash to her brother, bitterness simmering.

JIANG FANG

Leave my brother out of this!

LUO QIAO

I just want to know... would you still be here if I was broke?

Jiang Fang chuckles coldly, returning to her phone.

JIANG FANG

Who turns away from money these days?

Luo Qiao's face drains of color, disappointment etched in every line. He rises slowly, shuffling to the door.

LUO QIAO

I need to sort some things. Might take a while.

JIANG FANG

Where are you going?

Luo Qiao doesn't answer, casting a sorrowful glance back before leaving. Jiang Fang stands, regret flickering in her eyes.

115      **INT. YAOLU ENGINEERING - CEO'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Flames reflect on Luo Qiao's weary face as he feeds the last document to the fire. Holding a letter marked "To Jiang Fang," his voice shakes.

LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
 Jiang Fang, the invoices for two bulldozers are in here. Selling them should keep you and our child afloat for a while. After the project, Luo Qian will give you another 4 million yuan. We may not be as rich as those corrupt officials, but you won't go hungry...

He caresses the envelope, voice breaking.

LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
 You joked about wishing I had half of Luo Qian's talent... The 's his now. I hope... I hope you two...

Unable to continue, Luo Qiao shuts his eyes, anguish etched into his face.

He leaves the letter on the desk, exiting as the flames cast a long shadow.

116      **INT. BLACK BMW - NIGHT**

Luo Qiao drives away from the office, glancing nervously in the rearview mirror.

He pulls into a secluded spot, retrieves his phone, and plays a sea-recorded video. He dials the police on a second phone.

LUO QIAO  
 Hello, police? I... I'm Luo Qiao. I want to turn myself in.

Officer Sun's steady voice cuts through:

OFFICER SUN (V.O.)  
 Luo Qiao? You sure about this?

LUO QIAO  
 Yes. But... I have one condition.

OFFICER SUN  
 Let's hear it.



LUO QIAO

Don't let my wife, Jiang Fang, find out. I'm worried... worried about the kid's future... If you agree, I'll come in. If not, I'll... I'll take a boat and disappear.

OFFICER SUN

Disappear? Not without a boat! Relax, we can agree to that. In fact, I'm right by the sea. Let's chat in person.

Luo Qiao freezes, then rolls down the window. Officer Sun stands outside, grinning like a cat with a canary, gesturing for him to step out.

117     **INT. NANHU POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY**

Luo Qiao slouches in his chair like a deflated balloon, the gray walls mirroring his despair.

Officer Sun watches him, balancing amusement and pity.

OFFICER SUN

Luo Qiao, why did you and Fang Gang hire someone to "off" Yao Jiancheng?

Luo Qiao sighs, the weight of his missteps pressing down like a guilty conscience.

LUO QIAO

(remorsefully)

I thought money could fix everything. Fang Gang handled the details... I never imagined... they'd actually kill Yao Jiancheng...

His voice dwindles; he avoids Officer Sun's gaze.

OFFICER SUN

The photos? All a ruse. Yao Jiancheng is alive and kicking!

Luo Qiao's head snaps up, disbelief across his face.

LUO QIAO

What? He's alive? Then... the photos?

Officer Sun leans back, enjoying the moment.

OFFICER SUN

A staged act by Yao Jiancheng and  
Fan Si to scam you out of cash.

Luo Qiao's face shifts to realization, a sardonic laugh  
escapes.

LUO QIAO

I hate subcontracting. Yet, same  
thing happened to me. Ironical, isn't  
it?

118     **INT. YAOLU ENGINEERING - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Jiang Fang stands before Luo Qiao's desk, clutching a letter  
labeled "To Jiang Fang." Tears blur the ink as determination  
solidifies her resolve.

JIANG FANG (V.O.)

(Determined)

Cracking jokes about flaws turns  
them into knots in the heart. Luo  
Qiao wouldn't go this far... He's  
hiding something! I have to find  
him. We'll face this mess together!

She wipes her tears and rushes out with determination.

119     **INT. DETENTION ROOM - DAY**

Officer Sun escorts Zhang Xiao inside. Luo Qiao jumps up,  
surprised.

LUO QIAO

Zhang Xiao! How'd you track me down  
here?

Zhang Xiao, breathless, grins sheepishly.

ZHANG XIAO

Aigoo, Mr. Luo! Jiang Fang's  
tearing her hair out looking for  
you! I said he even swindled your  
brother's house purchase money to  
pay off his debts, can he commit  
suicide? There must be a problem  
with the project. That's why I  
called the police. Who knows...

Luo Qiao blinks, processing the whirlwind of events.

LUO QIAO  
When did I cheat him of his money?

ZHANG XIAO  
Didn't Jiang Fang pay me back?

LUO QIAO  
When was this?

ZHANG XIAO  
While you were hiding out in Sanya.

Realization hits Luo Qiao. He collapses back, deflated.

LUO QIAO  
So she did pay you back... and I  
didn't trust her.

Jiang Fang bursts in, joy turning to fiery anger.

JIANG FANG  
Luo Qiao! You think it's that  
simple? Have you thought about what  
would've happened to us if Yao  
Jiancheng were really dead?!

Luo Qiao remains silent, complexity on his face.

LUO QIAO  
Everything's got two sides. You  
only know what's right or wrong by  
going through it...

Zhang Xiao quietly exits, leaving the couple alone.

JIANG FANG  
Don't worry. No matter what  
happens, I'm with you. We'll face  
it together.

Jiang Fang embraces Luo Qiao, tears flowing as they hold each  
other.

120     **INT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Sunlight filters through blinds onto Yao Jiancheng, who  
fidgets in his chair, consumed by greed and fear.

Officer Sun, calm and persistent, slides a photo across the  
desk.

OFFICER SUN  
Recognize him, President Yao?

Yao Jiancheng examines the photo of Luo Qiao, unease washing over him.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Never seen him before. Doesn't  
exactly scream "mastermind," does  
he?

Officer Sun leans in.

OFFICER SUN  
Who's your partner on the Empress  
Villa project?

YAO JIANCHENG  
NATURAL Real Estate.

OFFICER SUN  
And Shi Mao owns it, right?

Yao Jiancheng hesitates.

YAO JIANCHENG  
What's your angle here, Officer?

Officer Sun smirks.

OFFICER SUN  
Luo Qiao holds 40% of NATURAL. He's  
all in.

Realization hits Yao Jiancheng, his face grimacing.

YAO JIANCHENG  
So, it's my greed that brought me  
to this mess.

Officer Sun's gaze is relentless, breaking down Yao's  
defenses.

121     **INT. HE YAN'S LAW FIRM - OFFICE - DAY**

Sunlight slashes through blinds, painting the cluttered  
office with harsh stripes.

He Yan, sharp-suited, ponders at his desk. Jiang Fang, eyes  
stormy with worry, sits across, pleading.

JIANG FANG  
He, I need your help. Luo Qiao's  
been set up.

HE YAN

I'm in the loop. But I've ditched criminal law, remember?

JIANG FANG

Please, he was just trying to spook Yao Jiancheng, not do him any harm.

HE YAN

Even spooking can land you in hot water, you know.

JIANG FANG

Sure, but murder? Please, you know Luo Qiao wouldn't. Yao was driving him up the wall.

HE YAN

It's a real pickle. I need to dig through the files.

JIANG FANG

So, you'll give it a shot?

HE YAN

No promises, but I'll give it my best shot.

JIANG FANG

Thanks, He.

He Yan watches her leave, his face a study in contemplation.

Shadows flicker over his face as he picks up the file, the absurdity of Luo Qiao's predicament weighing on him.

122     **INT. QINGXIN DISTRICT COURT - DAY**

Tension crackles in the courtroom. Jiang Fang sits among the audience, worry etched on her face.

The judge's gavel thunders, silencing the restless crowd.

CHIEF JUDGE (54), an imposing figure with a weathered face, commands attention.

CHIEF JUDGE

Court is now in session! The defendants, including Luo Qiao, stand accused of intentional homicide.

Jiang Fang grips her seat's edge, eyes fixed on Luo Qiao.

CHIEF JUDGE  
Luo Qiao, do you know Yao  
Jiancheng?

Luo Qiao stands, defiant.

LUO QIAO  
No!

Yao Jiancheng smirks, a hint of mockery in his eyes.

CHIEF JUDGE  
Yao Jiancheng, do you know Luo  
Qiao?

Yao shrugs, eyes twinkling with feigned innocence.

YAO JIANCHENG  
No idea. Maybe seen him in passing.

Laughter ripples through the audience. Jiang Fang's glare  
could melt steel.

CHIEF JUDGE  
Order! Luo Qiao, why spend two  
million on a "PR" campaign for  
someone unknown to you?

Luo Qiao's frustration boils over.

LUO QIAO  
He tried to take my project! My  
life's work!

Yao Jiancheng interrupts, voice laced with mock outrage.

YAO JIANCHENG  
I bid fairly! Slander!

Chaos erupts. The judge fights for control.

CHIEF JUDGE  
Silence! Prosecution, your  
statement.

ZHENG CEN (38), the prosecutor, rises with the gravity of a  
hanging judge.

ZHENG CEN  
Luo Qiao, driven by financial  
dispute, conspired to kill Yao  
Jiancheng.

(MORE)

## ZHENG CEN (CONT'D)

He used intermediaries—Fang Gang,  
Fang Yuan, and Yang Tianxiang—to  
engage Fan Si. Fan Si then colluded  
with Yao to fake a crime scene.  
Intentional homicide, Your Honor.  
We seek severe punishment.

All eyes turn to the defense lawyer, He Yan, poised for  
counterattack.

## HE YAN

Your Honor, the evidence is riddled  
with gaps. The photos, the  
phone—provided by the plaintiff—are  
unreliable.

He Yan's words stir the courtroom, whispers of doubt flutter  
through the crowd.

## HE YAN

Fan Si's actions prove no intent to  
kill, merely a ruse to deceive.

As the debate crescendos, the Chief Judge calls for calm,  
deliberation imminent.

## CHIEF JUDGE

I will now announce the verdict!  
Having reviewed the evidence, the  
court finds it insufficient to  
convict the five defendants of  
intentional homicide.

Relief floods Luo Qiao and his co-defendants, disbelief  
etched on their faces.

Jiang Fang covers her mouth, tears of joy brimming.

123

**INT. NATURAL REAL ESTATE - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY**

Sunlight bathes the room in a warm glow. Wang Xiuhong stands,  
eyes bright with excitement, facing Luo Qiao, who reclines in  
his chair, finally relaxed.

## WANG XIUHONG

You're out! And guess what? Yao  
Jiancheng called. He dropped the  
lawsuit and apologized!

Luo Qiao raises an eyebrow, cautious.

## LUO QIAO

Really? What spooked him so bad?

Wang Xiuhong leans in, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper.

WANG XIUHONG

Rumor is he's so scared, he's got  
bodyguards swarming him like bees.

Luo Qiao nods, a cautious smile on his face.

LUO QIAO

He must be brewing something. We  
can't slack off now. Start the  
construction right away. No time to  
waste!

Wang Xiuhong gives him a thumbs-up, determination etched on her face.

124

**EXT. QUEEN'S VILLA DEVELOPMENT SITE - DAY**

The sun, a relentless inferno, gilds the sprawling grassland. Excavators hum like a victorious chorus.

Luo Qiao and Jiang Fang perch on a grassy mound, sun-soaked, tension dissolving from Luo Qiao's face.

LUO QIAO

(Sighing with relief)  
With Yao backing off, it's like a  
mountain off my shoulders.

Jiang Fang turns to him, a teasing glint in her eyes.

JIANG FANG

(Playfully)  
Weren't you the brave one before?

Luo Qiao chuckles, shaking his head.

LUO QIAO

When you're cornered, you gotta  
play the part. But man, it was  
terrifying.

Her smile fades, curiosity taking hold.

JIANG FANG

(Concerned)  
What about Fang Gang? Did he ever  
come back?

Luo Qiao sighs, gaze drifting to the horizon.



LUO QIAO  
Vanished after the trial. Just  
poof, gone.

JIANG FANG  
And the money?

Luo Qiao shrugs, self-mocking smile.

LUO QIAO  
Vaporized. But hey, his dad needed  
it for treatment.

Jiang Fang squeezes his hand, offering silent support. In the distance, excavators press on, forging a new path for the future.

125     **EXT. YAO JIANCHENG'S VILLA - DAY**

Sunlight gilds the opulent villa, casting a dreamy glow.

Yao Jiancheng paints at a long table, bodyguards poised like sentinels at the door.

YAO JIANCHENG  
(Reciting with a smirk)  
Toiling all day to fill the belly,  
once full the mind turns to  
clothing; With both food and  
clothes ample, one yearns for a  
beautiful wife...

His voice halts, eyes darkening with schemes.

YAO JIANCHENG  
(Muttering to himself)  
Luo Qiao, stay away from the  
Queen's Villa. It's forbidden  
fruit.

The bodyguards exchange puzzled glances.

Yao Jiancheng resumes painting, bold strokes spelling  
"strategic planning" on rice paper.

126     **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

Dim light casts shadows on the walls. Luo Qiao and Jiang Fang sit in silence, chopsticks clinking against bowls.

Luo Qiao fidgets, words caught in his throat.

JIANG FANG  
(Teasing)  
You're twitching like a guilty  
debtor. Spill it.

Luo Qiao hesitates, then leans forward.

LUO QIAO  
(Hushed)  
Honey, where are the bulldozer  
invoices?

Jiang Fang raises an eyebrow, suspicion creeping in.

JIANG FANG  
Thinking of selling again?

Luo Qiao nods, sheepish.

LUO QIAO  
I need to keep something under  
wraps.

Before Jiang Fang can respond, Luo Qiao's phone vibrates,  
"Fang Gang" flashing ominously. They exchange tense looks.

JIANG FANG  
Answer it.

Luo Qiao picks up the call.

LUO QIAO  
Hey, Gang?

Fang Gang's voice crackles with urgency.

FANG GANG (V.O.)  
The prosecutor is appealing. We  
need to get our stories straight.

Luo Qiao's breath catches, mind racing.

LUO QIAO  
What do we say?

FANG GANG (V.O.)  
Just say the PR money was to spook  
Yao, not to kill him. That Fan Si  
dude? Say he tried to con us.

Luo Qiao nods, mind drifting to memories of the past.

125 *BEGIN FLASHBACKS:*

127 **EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY**

Dust swirls as angry farmers, armed with hoes and shovels, surround Luo Qiao and Fang Gang's vehicles, faces ablaze with fury.

OLD FARMER

Look what your trucks did to our crops!

LUO QIAO

(Frantically)

Sir, I told you, we're just workers. Talk to the project manager.

BALD FARMER

It was him! Promised no trucks at night, then worked all night!

HOTHEADED FARMER

Let's teach him a lesson!

Farmers advance, tools raised. Luo Qiao weaves through them, pleading.

LUO QIAO

Brothers, let's talk! No need for violence!

Fang Gang intercepts a shovel, kicking the hotheaded farmer into a ditch.

The farmer rises, charging at Luo Qiao, but Fang Gang shoves him aside, taking a blow on his shoulder.

Fueled by adrenaline, Fang Gang disperses the farmers.

*END FLASHBACK.*

128 **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - RESTAURANT - NIGHT**

Back in reality, Luo Qiao extends an olive branch.

LUO QIAO

Come back to work, Gang.

FANG GANG (V.O.)

No.

The call ends. Luo Qiao and Jiang Fang sit in silent despair.

129

**INT. NANAN INTERMEDIATE PEOPLE'S COURT - DAY**

The courtroom hums with solemnity. The CHIEF JUDGE (43) , a man weathered by countless cases, presides.

Jiang Fang sits in the gallery, worry etched on her face.

CHIEF JUDGE

(Bangs gavel)

Luo Qiao, what was your intent  
giving Fang Gang 2 million yuan?!

LUO QIAO

(Nervously)

Just to scare Yao Jiancheng, make  
him back off from the Empress Villa  
rights. Told Fang Gang to threaten  
him, rough him up if needed, but no  
killing!

CHIEF JUDGE

Bring Fang Gang up!

TWO BAILIFFS escort Fang Gang into the courtroom.

CHIEF JUDGE

What did Luo Qiao say when he gave  
you the 2 million?

FANG GANG

He said... I could threaten Yao  
Jiancheng, rough him up, but no  
killing.

The Chief Judge signals for Fang Yuan, Yang Tianxiang, and Fan Si, who echo Fang Gang's testimony.

CHIEF JUDGE

Then why the photos of Yao  
Jiancheng 'being blown up'?

FAN SI

I thought it would shock him more,  
scare him effectively!

Chuckles ripple through the gallery, even the Chief Judge suppresses a smile.

CHIEF JUDGE  
Court is now in recess for  
deliberation.

The courtroom falls silent, the ticking clock echoing like a heartbeat.

130     **INT. NANAN INTERMEDIATE PEOPLE'S COURT - DAY**

The courtroom is tense. The Judge, weary but stoic, reads the verdict:

JUDGE  
Upon review, the evidence is  
insufficient to find the defendants  
guilty of intentional homicide...

Luo Qiao and the others exhale collectively, relief washing over them. Jiang Fang covers her mouth, tears of joy streaming.

CHIEF JUDGE  
(bangs gavel)  
In accordance with the Criminal Law  
of the People's Republic of China,  
the verdict is as follows: uphold  
the original judgment, the five  
defendants are acquitted!

The gavel's echo is a symphony to their ears. Luo Qiao and his co-defendants embrace like shipwreck survivors finding land.

Jiang Fang's smile beams through her tears, eyes bright with hope.

131     **EXT. QUEEN'S VILLA DEVELOPMENT SITE - DAY**

Machines roar, dust clouds the sky. Luo Qiao and Wang Jian, helmets askew, navigate the chaos with childlike delight.

LUO QIAO  
Chief Luo, you're my hero! That  
cement and rebar deal was a  
lifesaver!

WANG JIAN  
(grinning)  
Chief Luo, you bet your life on  
this project. How could I not pull  
out all the stops?

132     **INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Sunlight streams, casting warm hues. Luo Qiao strides in, optimism radiating.

He freezes as Jiang Fang's stern gaze shrinks his bravado.

          LUO QIAO  
Honey, what's eating you? Who's  
ruffled your feathers this time?

          JIANG FANG  
Sit down!

Luo Qiao sinks into the chair, suppressing each breath.

          JIANG FANG  
Did you cut corners on the highway  
project?

          LUO QIAO  
How could I?! Don't you trust me?

          JIANG FANG  
So it was built to national  
standards?

          LUO QIAO  
National standards? That's a  
surefire way to go broke! I just  
followed the budget the higher-ups  
gave...

          JIANG FANG  
Ran into Fang Gang at the market.  
He said there was a landslide on  
the highway, and someone got  
arrested!

          LUO QIAO  
The cave-in's a cement issue,  
nothing to do with us! Our  
section's rock solid!

Jiang Fang's tension eases slightly.

          LUO QIAO  
What's Fang Gang up to these days?

          JIANG FANG  
He and Fang Yuan opened a  
slaughterhouse, supplying meat to  
butcher shops.

LUO QIAO  
Business good?

JIANG FANG  
I hear it's not bad.

133     **EXT. LABOR MARKET - DAY**

A silver van screeches to a halt, Yang Tianxiang and Fan Si leap out, their voices slicing through the crowd like knives.

YANG TIANXIANG  
Carpenters! Bricklayers!

FAN SI  
Experienced preferred! Wages negotiable!

Applicants swarm, eyes wide with hope.

134     **EXT. QUEENS VILLA COMPLEX - DAY**

Three years on, the barren wasteland flourishes as a high-end villa complex.

Luo Qiao and Jiang Fang stand before a villa, shadows stretching in the setting sun.

LUO QIAO  
This one for your brother, or the one by the road?

JIANG FANG  
This one.

LUO QIAO  
Why do you like being next to the curb?

JIANG FANG  
Easier to find when drunk.

LUO QIAO  
Tease!

Laughter shared, peace momentarily restored. A call interrupts, draining Luo Qiao's smile.

LUO QIAO  
Hello, court? Okay, I'm coming.

JIANG FANG  
What's wrong now?

LUO QIAO  
The prosecutor's office is  
appealing again, wants to retry the  
Yao Jiancheng case...

The sun's glow lingers, yet uncertainty casts its shadow. The future remains an enigma.

135     **INT. INTERMEDIATE PEOPLE'S COURT - DAY**

Tension electrifies the courtroom, every seat taken, anticipation etched on faces.

Jiang Fang sits in the front row, twisting a handkerchief like a lifeline.

Luo Qiao and four others stand in the dock, their expressions a kaleidoscope of dread.

CHIEF JUDGE  
(bangs gavel)  
Court is now in session! We will  
announce the verdict for the  
defendants Luo Qiao and others  
accused of attempted murder.

Zheng Cen stands, eyes gleaming with zeal.

ZHENG CEN  
Your Honor, the previous judgments  
are deeply flawed. We protest!

He Yan, the defense lawyer, leans back with the calm of a poker player holding a full house.

HE YAN  
Your Honor, the defense argues the  
evidence is thin, riddled with  
doubt. Critical evidence was  
mishandled, and some testimonies  
are suspect.

Zheng Cen leans forward, zealous.

ZHENG CEN  
Post-trial, we found collusion  
among the defendants! Luo Qiao's  
trip to Sanya was a calculated  
alibi!



He Yan waves a dismissive hand, a feline smile playing on his lips.

HE YAN

The defendants were involved, but  
had no intent to kill. Intentional  
homicide doesn't apply.

The Chief Judge, face carved from granite, bangs the gavel again.

CHIEF JUDGE

The defense and prosecution have  
concluded their arguments. The  
panel will now deliberate.

136     **INT. COLLEGIAL PANEL DELIBERATION ROOM - DAY**

Judges clash like gladiators, their debates fierce. Case files teeter on the table. A mountain of cigarette butts fills the ashtray.

JUDGE A

This case has been retried thrice.  
What's the right verdict?

JUDGE B, a skeptic with a detailed eye, taps his pen.

JUDGE B

There are gaps in the evidence. Luo  
Qiao claims he only intended  
'public relations,' not murder.

JUDGE C, a cynic with a wry smile, snorts.

JUDGE C

'Public relations?' Two million for  
that? Who's he kidding?

The CHIEF JUDGE raises a hand, quelling the noise.

CHIEF JUDGE

Enough bickering! The crux is, Luo  
Qiao's money trickled down through  
subcontracting. By the end, just  
150,000 reached the hitman. Is that  
intentional homicide?

137     **INT. INTERMEDIATE PEOPLE'S COURT - CONTINUOUS**

Judges reclaim their seats, expressions taut with the weight of judgment.

JUDGE A  
(bangs gavel)  
Deliberation concluded! The chief  
judge will now read the judgment.

The Chief judge unfurls the judgment, a dramatic gesture akin to a general declaring a preposterous battle.

CHIEF JUDGE  
(reads judgment)  
This court finds the actions of the  
original trial defendants Luo Qiao,  
Fang Gang, Fang Yuan, Yang  
Tianxiang, and Fan Si...

Luo Qiao clutches the dock's railings, palms sweaty, heart hammering like a band of timpani players on their first day.

CHIEF JUDGE  
...In accordance with the Criminal  
Law of the People's Republic of  
China, the judgment is as follows:

Time freezes. Only the chief judge's voice pierces the silence.

CHIEF JUDGE  
One, revoke Criminal Judgment No.  
249 of the Qingxin District  
People's Court of Nan'an City; Two,  
sentence the defendant Luo Qiao to  
five years imprisonment and  
deprivation of political rights for  
one year; Three, sentence the  
defendant Fang Gang to three years  
and six months imprisonment; Four,  
sentence the defendant Fang Yuan to  
three years and three months  
imprisonment; Five, sentence the  
defendant Yang Tianxiang to three  
years imprisonment; Six, sentence  
the defendant Fan Si to two years  
and seven months imprisonment...

Luo Qiao slumps into his chair, ashen. Regret coils around his heart like a serpent. His carefully crafted plan shatters, leaving only cuffs.

In the gallery, Jiang Fang's face reveals resigned sorrow.

Cameras click like locusts, capturing the gravity of the moment.

JUDGE  
 (bangs gavel)  
 Silence! Court adjourned!

Bailiffs guide Luo Qiao and the others from the courtroom, shadows trailing like faded echoes of a somber melody.

138     **INT. PRISON - WORKSHOP - DAY**

Dim light barely pierces the grimy windows. Inmates hunch over workbenches, assembling electronics amid chemical stink.

Luo Qiao, in a drab uniform, moves with detached sluggishness, eyes glazed.

A THIN, STERN PRISONER (43), paces like a drill sergeant, barking orders with a voice like shattered glass.

THIN PRISONER  
 Left hand, circuit board! Right  
 hand, resistor! Faster!

Inmates scramble, movements jittery. Luo Qiao, lost in thought, fumbles with his soldering iron, anger simmering beneath the surface.

LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
 Every clang of metal here fuels the  
 embers of my hatred. Yao Jiancheng,  
 Fang Gang—one day, they'll pay.

The thin prisoner inspects Luo Qiao's work with disdain, shaking the circuit board until a resistor clatters to the floor.

THIN PRISONER  
 You trying to mess with me?! Want a  
 fine?

Luo Qiao's eyes snap into focus, a cold smile creeping across his lips.

He grabs the thin prisoner by the collar, slamming him onto the table.

LUO QIAO  
 Say that again?!

Chaos erupts. Inmates swarm, pinning Luo Qiao to the ground.

A BURLY PRISONER (46) barrels through, voice a thunderclap that silences the room.

BURLY PRISONER  
Enough! Break it up!

The mob disperses, leaving Luo Qiao gasping on the floor, rage simmering beneath the surface.

139     **INT. PRISON - VISITING ROOM - DAY**

A sterile room, divided by a single table. Luo Qiao sits across from Jiang Fang. Time has etched lines into their faces.

Luo Qiao clutches her hands, regret heavy in his eyes.

JIANG FANG  
Your eyes... they're full of hate.  
Where's the man I married?

Luo Qiao forces a tight smile, voice thick with unspoken sorrow.

JIANG FANG  
I wanted to bring Tongtong, but Shi Mao and Wang Xiuhong said he's too young for this place.

LUO QIAO  
Shi Mao's out?

JIANG FANG  
Yes, early release for good behavior. First thing he did was beat Yao Jiancheng to a pulp.

LUO QIAO  
Some people never change.

Jiang Fang hands him a child's drawing and a law book.

JIANG FANG  
Tongtong drew this for you.

Luo Qiao unfolds a comical family portrait: a lanky stick figure beside his plump wife and child.

LUO QIAO  
He drew me so thin.

JIANG FANG  
He can't remember your face. Says photos aren't his dad.

LUO QIAO  
I've let you both down... I promise  
to change, to come home soon.

A POLICE OFFICER enters, signaling the end of the visit.

POLICE OFFICER  
Time's up!

Luo Qiao stands abruptly, gripping the bars as Jiang Fang  
turns to leave.

LUO QIAO  
How's our son?

JIANG FANG  
He's fine. We're all waiting for  
you.

Jiang Fang walks away, Luo Qiao watches, eyes a mix of  
longing and hope, caught between past mistakes and  
redemption.

140     **INT. PRISON - CAFETERIA - DAY**

Fluorescent lights expose rows of stark metal tables. Luo  
Qiao sits across from the Burly Prisoner, a law book between  
them.

LUO QIAO  
Why does everyone act like you're  
the big boss here?

The Burly Prisoner chuckles dryly, a sound as rough as  
sandpaper.

BURLY PRISONER  
I've got a charm from the King of  
Hell.

LUO QIAO  
What kind of charm?

BURLY PRISONER  
(stoically)  
I'm on death row.

LUO QIAO  
No way! And you're just chillin'?

BURLY PRISONER  
The traffic police office was  
supposed to cost 100 million.  
(MORE)

BURLY PRISONER (CONT'D)  
 First guy chopped it to 70, passed  
 it to the next who dropped it to  
 50, then it got to me. Quality went  
 down the drain, and I took the  
 fall. I snapped and took them out.

LUO QIAO  
 Why not appeal?

BURLY PRISONER  
 Lost faith in the law, man.

LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
 His words hit home, stirring  
 thoughts of my family's ruin. Do I  
 hate them or thank them?

*FLASHFORWARDS:*

- Fang Gang at a sewing machine, sweat on his brow.
- Fang Yuan with a heavy bucket of pig slop.
- Yang Tianxiang shapes bricks, covered in mud.
- Fan Si scatters birdseed, pigeons fluttering.

*FLASHFORWARDS ENDED.*

LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
 My decisions dragged them all down.  
 Time to rethink my life. The law's  
 not just a cheat code—it's a shield  
 for justice. True strength is  
 respecting both law and morality.

141 **INT. PRISON - OFFICE - DAY**

Harsh fluorescent lights cast a cold glow over a chessboard.  
 Luo Qiao, tense, plays against a kindly old guard.

KINDLY GUARD  
 Ever heard of Mandela? Spent 27  
 years inside, but embraced the  
 guards when he got out.

LUO QIAO  
 Never did. What's his story?

KINDLY GUARD

He said, "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

Luo Qiao, pensive, considers the weight of these words.

142     **INT. PRISON - LIBRARY - DAY**

Luo Qiao pores over Mandela's autobiography, eyes intent.

LUO QIAO (V.O.)

Hatred's a self-made prison. Time to reflect on my mess-ups.

143     **INT. PRISON - WORKSHOP - NIGHT**

Under dim light, Fang Gang slumps over a garment, sorrow heavy in his voice.

FANG GANG (V.O.)

(sorrowful)

Luo Qiao, I let you down.

He pulls out a crumpled letter.

LUO QIAO (LETTER, V.O.)

Greed blinded me, Gang. Thought money could buy it all, even justice. It cost us everything. Hope you can forgive me.

FANG GANG (V.O.)

You never forced me. I loved being the muscle, but I was just a pawn.

Fang Gang, sobbing, throws the letter.

FANG GANG (V.O.)

(whisper)

I'm the one needing forgiveness.

144     **INT. PRISON - DAY**

Sunlight filters through barred windows. Luo Qiao sits at a metal table, a chess piece in his grasp.

LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
Life's like chess, I thought. Be  
clever, be ruthless-win.

*BEGIN FLASHBACKS:*

145 INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sunlight slices through the blinds, casting stripes across the floor. On TV, a stern-faced FEMALE ANCHOR delivers the news...

JIANG FANG  
You think this is shoplifting?

LUO QIAO  
With cash, prison's just a hotel.

146 INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Wang Xiuhong and Luo Jian trail after Yao Jiancheng, his arrogance like a designer suit, as he strides out with impatience.

147 INT. YAOLUO ENGINEERING - CEO'S OFFICE - DAY

Luo Qiao paces, eyes sharp with tension. A blue plaid snakeskin bag sits ominously on the coffee table.

Fang Gang enters, sensing the storm brewing.

LUO QIAO  
Open it.

*END FLASHBACK.*

He grips the chess piece tighter.

LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
Didn't see fate's trap. Every move  
dragged me closer to the edge. Lost  
it all-freedom, dignity, friends.  
Just a pawn tossed aside.

148 INT. PRISON - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Luo Qiao holds the chess piece, hope flickering in his eyes.



LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
Fearing the law might make me  
better. Belief in the law needs an  
independent judiciary. Without  
corruption, fewer problems. Then  
Jiang Fang and my kid won't live in  
fear. Maybe this game of chess has  
just begun.

Luo Qiao rises, strides to the window. Sunlight bathes his  
face, illuminating newfound resolve.

**FADE OUT.**