

# Middleman Assassination Squad

Written by

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

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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"**

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

4       **EXT. NAN'AN, CHINA - DAY**

SUPER: 2014

5       **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's sharp gaze met MANAGER WANG's (45) skeptical glare. ASSISTANT MANAGER MA (39) hovered nervously nearby.

                    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.

# 6 INT. LUO QIAO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

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!

7      **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.

8

**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.

9

**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.

10      **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?

11      **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.

12      **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.

13      **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.

14

**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.

15

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

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.

16      **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!

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

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.

18      **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?

19

**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.

20

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

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.

21      **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  
Who says no to free cash?

22      **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.

23      **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.

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

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.

25      **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.

26      **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.

27      **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?

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.

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

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!

29      **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.

30      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Luo Qiao, white-knuckled, grips the steering wheel. Phone buzzes. Wang Xiuhong. He answers, voice tight.

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...

Luo Qiao slams the phone down, face a thundercloud. BMW roars, a metal shark in the city's concrete ocean.

31      **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...

The unspoken threat hangs in the air. Jiang Fang takes his hand, a small anchor in the storm.

                    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.

32      **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!

33     **EXT. NAN'AN CITY - DAY**

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

34     **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.

35     **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.

36      **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? Might as well  
offer me a coupon for a free  
coffee. Who risks their neck for  
that?

LUO QIAO  
Twelve percent, Wang. Sweeten the  
pot, like adding a cherry to your  
sundae.

Wang Jian raises five fingers, eyes gleaming like a cat eyeing a canary.

WANG JIAN  
Fifteen. Final offer, no haggling.

Luo Qiao chuckles, slides a contract across the desk, a silent duel of wits.

LUO QIAO  
Fifteen's my slice too, but snag  
forty percent, and we have a deal.

Wang Jian devours the contract, his greed blazing like a furnace.

WANG JIAN

You play a mean game, Mr. Lu. A real maestro in the art of the deal.

LUO QIAO

Can't stand subcontractors getting squeezed like lemons while the big cats feast. Gotta spread the wealth, right?

WANG JIAN

Ain't that the truth? Backroom deals run the world. I'll get back to you in two days. Forty-eight hours. Tick-tock.

LUO QIAO

Looking forward to it. Tremendously.

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

37

**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!

38      **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.

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

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.

40     **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.

41     **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.

42        **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 Wang Jian.

LUO QIAO

You two go in, mention dropping the lawsuit. If Yao Jiancheng digs in his heels, Wang Jian, make sure he knows you're all-in on this project.

LOU JIAN

He'll get the message!

Wang Xiuhong and Wang 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.

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

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

44        **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

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

45        **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 Wang Jian fuming.

46

**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!

47

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

Fang Gang sifts through photos of a battered Yao Jiancheng, each image a silent confession. Luo Qiao barges in, fury in his eyes.

LUO QIAO

Did you do this?

Fang Gang's gaze hardens, defiance flickering.

FANG GANG

He had it coming!

LUO QIAO  
I told you to keep it cool!

FANG GANG  
What's a little lesson?

LUO QIAO  
You might've blown everything!

Fang Gang shrugs, indifference cloaked as concern. Luo Qiao sighs, frustration giving way to resignation.

48      **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.

49      **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.

50

**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.

51       **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.

52       **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.

53       **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.

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

Dim light stretches shadows across the room. Jiang Fang grips her phone, her voice a tightrope of worry.

                  JIANG FANG

Lu Qian, he's lost it... Can't see the risks...

                  LU QIAN (V.O.)

He's impulsive, but his heart's in the right place.

She hesitates, voice cracking with fear.

                  JIANG FANG

He wants to silence Yao Jiancheng... permanently.

                  LU QIAN (V.O.)

Bring him to his senses. This isn't business—it's madness.

Jiang Fang stares at a wedding photo, tears glistening like unshed pearls.

55       **EXT. YA'AN VILLA COMMUNITY - DAWN**

Night shift workers trudge home. A black BMW idles at the entrance, its presence an anomaly in the dawn.

56       **INT. BLACK BMW - DAWN**

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.

57       **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Luo Qiao, disguised in a baseball cap and sunglasses, nervously trails Yao Jiancheng.

He clutches a wrench, his hand slick with sweat. Doubt gnaws at him.

                  LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
          This is insane. What am I doing?  
          This isn't me.

Yao Jiancheng stops to stretch, oblivious to Luo Qiao lurking behind a tree. Luo Qiao raises the wrench, his heart pounding. He takes a step forward, then hesitates.

                  LUO QIAO (V.O.)  
          I can't do this. This is wrong.

He lowers the wrench, his body trembling with relief and fear. A jogger passes, startling him. He stumbles, dropping the wrench with a clang.

Yao Jiancheng turns, a questioning look on his face.

                  YAO JIANCHENG  
          Everything alright?

Luo Qiao stammers, desperately trying to regain his composure.

                  LUO QIAO  
          (Feigning nonchalance)  
          Just... admiring the scenery.  
          Beautiful park.

58       **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)  
 Yes, yes... You need to be  
 cautious!

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 Fang  
 Yuan wants to know when we're  
 starting.

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.

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

The study's darkness weighs heavy. Luo Qiao bends over his desk, the lamp casting Yao Jiancheng's photo in a harsh spotlight.

Jiang Fang stands in the doorway, a silhouette of determination.

JIANG FANG  
Planning something reckless, aren't  
you?

Luo Qiao turns, a facade of calm.

LUO QIAO  
What are you talking about? Just  
thinking.

JIANG FANG  
Don't lie. You're plotting against  
Yao Jiancheng.

LUO QIAO  
He's a minor nuisance. I'll handle  
it.

JIANG FANG  
This isn't a game. This obsession  
will destroy you. And us.

He looms over her, but she stands firm.

LUO QIAO  
He took everything! What should I  
do, send thank you cards?

Jiang Fang grips his arm, a lifeline.

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

Their eyes lock, doubt flickers before his resolve hardens.

LUO QIAO  
I know what I'm doing.

She steps back, the gap between them a chasm.

JIANG FANG

I hope so, for all our sakes.

She leaves him alone, Yao Jiancheng's photo an accusation in the dark.

60      **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.

61      **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?!

62      **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.

63

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

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.

64     **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.

65     **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.

66      **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?

67      **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.

68      **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!

69      **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAWN**

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

70      **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!

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

Jiang Fang cradles their baby as her phone rings. Luo Qiao's image appears, standing before the "End of the Earth" monument.

LUO QIAO

Remember our vows? To the ends of  
the earth...

Jiang Fang rolls her eyes, frustration spilling over.

JIANG FANG

How dare you bring that up! Leaving  
me with debt collectors while you  
wander. Is this "never parting"?

LUO QIAO

Come on, love! Zhang Xiao's  
relentless. I had no choice.

JIANG FANG

You think running solves anything?  
What if he goes crazy?

LUO QIAO

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

JIANG FANG

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

LUO QIAO

Yes ma'am! Mission accepted!

JIANG FANG

What's your plan for Yao Jiancheng?

LUO QIAO  
Don't worry, I'm going legal.  
Gathering evidence. He'll get  
what's coming, just wait.

72      **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!

73      **INT. HOTEL ROOM - SANYA - NIGHT**

Luo Qiao twists in bed, sheets tangled like his thoughts.  
Sweat glistens, a sheen of guilt.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

74      **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Luo Qiao sprints, police in hot pursuit.

POLICE OFFICER  
Stop! Don't let the killer escape!

Luo Qiao weaves but gets caught, shackled by fate.

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

Jiang Fang's glare pierces as Luo Qiao is led away, shame casting long shadows.

JIANG FANG  
You've wrecked everything! Our  
business, our family, yourself!

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

Luo Qiao kneels, a police officer's gun aimed at his head,  
judgment heavy in the air.

POLICE OFFICER  
In the name of the people, I  
sentence you to death by firing  
squad!

LUO QIAO  
Wait! I have last words!

POLICE OFFICER  
Make it quick!

LUO QIAO  
My assets... give them to my wife  
and brother...

POLICE OFFICER  
Save it, they've already hooked up.

LUO QIAO  
Don't you think they make a good  
match?

POLICE OFFICER  
Shut up!

A gunshot echoes, Luo Qiao falls...

END MONTAGE

77      **INT. HOTEL ROOM - SANYA - NIGHT**

Luo Qiao jolts awake, cold sweat clinging like regret.

LUO QIAO  
(to himself)  
Jiang Fang was right...

78      **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.

79

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

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 collapses onto the bed, the TV's droning now a distant hum of mockery.

LUO QIAO  
I shouldn't have done such a  
boneheaded thing!

Luo Qiao grabs his phone, dialing Fang Gang, but an automated voice taunts him:

PHONE  
Sorry, the number you have dialed  
is powered off.

Frustration mounts as he calls his office. Silence mocks him. He stomps, grabs his coat, and bolts out.

80

# **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.

81     **EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY**

A taxi speeds down the highway, Luo Qiao's eyes dart between the horizon and his phone.

82     **INT. TAXI - DAY**

Luo Qiao dials Wang Xiuhong, urgency crackling in his voice.

LUO QIAO

Sister Xiuhong, I need a favor...

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)

Mr. Lu? What is it?

LUO QIAO

Call Yao Jiancheng, tell him someone's after him. Tell him not to go jogging for the next few days.

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)

Oh my, what's this about? Why help that bastard Yao Jiancheng?

LUO QIAO

I hate him too, but we're in the same boat. If the development rights get pulled, we're all sunk.

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)

You're always thinking ahead. I'll take care of it.

Luo Qiao hangs up, releasing a sigh, tension still etched on his face.

Outside, the sun blazes brightly, a stark contrast to the storm brewing within him.

83      **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.

84      **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  
Looking for work, Yang?

Yang's eyes glint with mischief.

                  YANG TIANXIANG  
Nah, just waiting for the right  
opportunity.

                  FAN SI  
What kind of job? Need an extra  
hand?

                  YANG TIANXIANG  
Already promised it to someone  
else.

                  FAN SI  
I'm starving here, Yang. Cut me in!

Yang leans closer, voice dropping conspiratorially.

YANG TIANXIANG

Got a real estate mogul willing to  
pay big to "resolve" some  
development rights issues. You in?

Fan Si's face darkens with caution.

FAN SI

No way. Swore to the warden I'd  
stay clean.

YANG TIANXIANG

We're talking 100 grand, Fan.

FAN SI

Why not handle it yourself?

Yang glances around, lowering his voice.

YANG TIANXIANG

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

A rusty van screeches to a halt nearby. A portly man jumps  
out, barking orders.

PORTLY MAN

Need two laborers! Tall guys first!

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

YANG TIANXIANG

Thought you were inside till next  
year.

FAN SI

Good behavior got me out early.  
What's the payment plan?

Yang thumps his chest with confidence.

YANG TIANXIANG

Fifty grand upfront, fifty when  
it's done. Trust me, I've got the  
cash right here.

He flashes a wad of cash and a photo. Fan Si examines them,  
resolve glinting in his eyes.

FAN SI

Deal.

85       **INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - DAY**

Luo Qiao sprints down the hallway, bursting into the ICU.

86       **INT. HOSPITAL - INTENSIVE CARE UNIT - DAY**

Luo Qiao, out of breath, finds Fang Gang, who looks relieved.

                  FANG GANG  
          Didn't mean to worry you, Bro.

Luo Qiao swallows hard, taking in the sight of the unconscious patient.

                  LUO QIAO  
          How's the old man?

                  FANG GANG  
          Still hasn't woken up...

                  LUO QIAO  
          Let's talk outside.

87       **EXT. HOSPITAL ROOF - DAY**

Luo Qiao's face storms as he confronts Fang Gang.

                  LUO QIAO  
          When did Fang Yuan start the "PR"  
          work?

                  FANG GANG  
          Two days ago. Almost wrapped up.

Luo Qiao's expression shifts abruptly.

                  LUO QIAO  
          Tell him to back off, now!

                  FANG GANG  
          What's wrong?

                  LUO QIAO  
          It's too risky! We could lose  
          everything.

                  FANG GANG  
          Just paying for PR, what's the  
          risk?

LUO QIAO

You think a judge will see it that way?

FANG GANG

No guts, no glory, right?

LUO QIAO

This isn't about guts—

FANG GANG

I know you're soft inside...

LUO QIAO

It's not about being soft!

FANG GANG

Remember the first time you gave Manager Zhang a hundred grand? You were a wreck for days. Now a million doesn't faze you.

LUO QIAO

Ever wonder why I'm risking what should be mine?

Fang Gang pauses, then sighs, resigned.

FANG GANG

The money's with Fang Yuan. You talk to him.

88

**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.

89

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

Luo Qiao and Fang Yuan stand under a gnarled tree, tension crackling like static.

FANG YUAN  
You think this is just a game?

LUO QIAO  
I acted rashly. Forgive me,  
brother.

FANG YUAN  
Money's gone. What's your plan?

Fang Yuan sinks onto a worn stool, avoiding eye contact. Luo Qiao circles to face him.

LUO QIAO  
Let's not talk money now.

FANG YUAN  
We will eventually, won't we?

Luo Qiao pauses, resolve hardening.

LUO QIAO  
No. We won't.

Fang Yuan sighs, walks inside, dials his phone, returns moments later.

FANG YUAN  
Can't reach him.

LUO QIAO  
No phone?

FANG YUAN  
Fresh out of prison. Nothing.

LUO QIAO  
We need to stop him! Got a photo?

Fang Yuan nods, shows Luo Qiao a picture on his phone.

FANG YUAN  
This is him. Fan Si.

90     **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.

91     **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

Fang Yuan scans the park, eyes darting for Fan Si, tension palpable.

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

Luo Qiao, masked, scouts for Fan Si outside the building, anxiety etched in every movement.

93     **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.

94     **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  
Boss, could this be a prank?

Cai Caijin, the stocky finance manager, shakes his head.

CAI CAIJIN  
Someone might be shaking us down.

ZHANG SANMING  
Right, can't take this lightly.

YAO JIANCHENG  
It's real. Natural Real Estate  
thinks so too.

ZHANG SANMING  
Why would they?

CAI CAIJIN  
Think they staged it?

YAO JIANCHENG  
One step at a time.

Yao Jiancheng taps the table, hesitates, then dials the  
number on the note. A cold voice answers:

FAN SI (V.O.)  
Yeah?

YAO JIANCHENG  
Who am I speaking to?

FAN SI (V.O.)  
Fan Si. Meet at "Encounter" Cafe, 3  
PM.

The call ends. Yao Jiancheng grips the phone, deep in  
thought.

95      **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.

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

The black BMW stands guard at the entrance, an unyielding sentinel.

97       **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Luo Qiao watches the flow of people, spots Fan Si approaching, and rushes out.

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

Luo Qiao intercepts Fan Si.

                  LUO QIAO  
          You're Fan Si, right?

Fan Si startles, eyes wary.

                  FAN SI  
          Who are you?

                  LUO QIAO  
          The employer. Stop all actions!

Fan Si sidesteps, Luo Qiao blocks him.

                  FAN SI  
          Who sent you?

                  LUO QIAO  
          Fang Yuan.

                  FAN SI  
          Don't know him.

                  LUO QIAO  
          Did you take a 2 million yuan job?

Fan Si chuckles coldly, glaring.

                  FAN SI  
          Get lost!

He tries to pass, Luo Qiao grabs him.

                  LUO QIAO  
          Wait, let me call Fang Yuan.

Fan Si grins wickedly.

FAN SI  
You trying to steal my job?

LUO QIAO  
I'm the employer! Why steal?

FAN SI  
Stop lying!

Fan Si attacks, knocking Luo Qiao out, drags him to the BMW, and leaves him unconscious in the passenger seat.

99      **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.

100      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Fluorescent lights flicker overhead as Luo Qiao jolts awake, sweat glistening on his forehead.

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

Luo Qiao charges toward the security room, adrenaline surging. A HULKING GUARD intercepts, suspicion etched on his frown.

GUARD  
What's the hurry?

LUO QIAO  
Did a short guy in black come  
through?

GUARD  
Yeah, why?

LUO QIAO  
He's an assassin! We need to act  
now!

The guard eyes him warily, but urgency wins.

GUARD  
How do I know you're not the  
assassin?

LUO QIAO  
I overheard him! No time to  
argue—move!

The guard hesitates, grabs a club, and nods. They sprint  
together.

102     **INT. JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - CORRIDORS - DAY**

A tense silence blankets the hallway as Luo Qiao and the  
guard reach the CEO's office. Employees linger, eyes wide  
with fear.

Inside, Yao Jiancheng lies motionless, blood pooling, face  
frozen in a grimace.

Luo Qiao stands, aghast, then silently retreats.

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

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

104     **EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY**

The sun, a relentless inferno, blazes through the windshield  
of a speeding black BMW racing towards Sanya.

105      **INT. BLACK BMW - DAY**

Luo Qiao pulls up to the Duty Free Mall, picks up his phone, urgency in his voice.

LUO QIAO

Fang Yuan, remember: you haven't seen me.

FANG YUAN (V.O.)

Got it.

Luo Qiao straightens his clothes, steps out of the car, and takes a deep breath.

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

Luo Qiao, decked out like a neon billboard, paces outside Duty Free City, straining a smile for 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!

107     **EXT. BLUE SKY PARK - DAY**

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

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

Luo Qiao answers a video call groggily. Fang Gang's eager face fills the screen.

FANG GANG  
Boss, Fan Si took care of Yao  
Jiancheng!

He waves his phone, displaying photos of Yao's "corpse."

LUO QIAO  
Can't believe this is real...

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

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.

110     **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.

111     **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.

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.

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

Luo Qiao frantically scrolls through news on his phone, anxiety twisting his features. He dials Wang Xiuhong with shaky fingers.

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)  
 Mr. Luo, will the Bodhisattva  
 punish me?

LUO QIAO  
 What's wrong, Sister Xiuhong?

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

LUO QIAO  
 My god! Do they know who did it?

Wang Xiuhong's sobs echo through the speaker.

WANG XIUHONG (V.O.)  
 No idea.

LUO QIAO  
 Don't worry, Sister Xiuhong. This  
 isn't on us.

113     **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.

114     **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?

115     **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.

116     **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.

117     **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.

118     **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.

119     **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:*

120      **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.

121      **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!

122      **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.

123     **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.

124     **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.

125     **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!

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

Luo Qiao thrashes, sweat-soaked and restless. Jiang Fang stirs beside him, alarmed.

JIANG FANG  
Bad dream?

LUO QIAO  
Yeah.

JIANG FANG  
About what?

LUO QIAO  
Being chased by my teacher.

He rises, pacing toward the living room. Jiang Fang follows, concern shadowing her steps.

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

Luo Qiao wipes sweat from his brow, tension coiling in his muscles.

JIANG FANG  
I heard you say "I didn't kill  
him"?

LUO QIAO  
Oh, the teacher asked who killed  
the frog on the desk.

Jiang Fang's gaze pierces him, voice firm.

JIANG FANG  
Luo Qiao, don't ruin our family.  
Don't ruin yourself.

Luo Qiao meets her eyes, resolve wavering.

LUO QIAO  
Don't worry, I know what I'm doing.

He glances out the window, the city's lights stretching like a grid of possibilities, each one more dangerous than the last.

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

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

129     **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.

OFFICER SUN  
He didn't actually try to off you?

YAO JIANCHENG  
No, but it's driving me nuts.

OFFICER SUN  
Why take his word?

YAO JIANCHENG  
A partner tipped me off.

OFFICER SUN  
How'd she know?

YAO JIANCHENG  
Heard something in a diner.

Officer Sun leans back, skeptical.

OFFICER SUN  
Think she's involved?

YAO JIANCHENG  
No way, she's just a country woman.

OFFICER SUN  
Then why go along with the charade?

YAO JIANCHENG  
Wanted them off my back.

OFFICER SUN  
Upset anyone lately?

YAO JIANCHENG  
Kept to myself.

OFFICER SUN  
Think, Mr. Yao.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Well, during my divorce, my ex said  
she'd split me in half...

OFFICER SUN  
How so?

YAO JIANCHENG  
Something about lightning or an  
axe.

OFFICER SUN  
Why'd she say that?

YAO JIANCHENG  
Wanted more money.

Officer Sun nods, exchanging a glance with the young  
policeman.

OFFICER SUN  
We'll get to the bottom of this.

YOUNG POLICEMAN  
We'll ensure your safety, Mr. Yao.

Yao Jiancheng nods, relief softening his features.

130 **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.

131     **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.

132     **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.

133     **EXT. GIFT SHOP - DAY**

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.

134     **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.

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

A table brims with dishes, soft light casting a warm halo. Luo Qiao and Jiang Fang eat in silence, tension simmering.

LUO QIAO  
Jiang Fang, can we talk?

Jiang Fang eyes him, wary.

JIANG FANG  
About what?

Luo Qiao gathers his thoughts.

LUO QIAO  
Why did you marry me?

A smirk tugs at Jiang Fang's lips.

JIANG FANG  
Wondering if it was for your money?

Luo Qiao nods, uncertainty clouding his eyes.

LUO QIAO  
It's been on my mind, especially  
after your brother...

He stops, recalling the loan for her brother's house.

JIANG FANG  
Leave my brother out of this!

LUO QIAO  
If I had nothing, would you still  
be here?

Jiang Fang's gaze hardens.

JIANG FANG  
No! Is that what you wanted to  
hear?

Luo Qiao's face pales, disappointment deepening. He rises,  
heading for the door.

LUO QIAO  
I've got things to sort out. Might  
be gone a while.

JIANG FANG  
Where are you going?

Luo Qiao offers no answer, casting a long, lingering look  
before leaving. Jiang Fang stands, fear flickering in her  
eyes.

136      **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.

137      **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.

138     **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?

139     **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.

140     **INT. DETENTION ROOM - DAY**

Luo Qiao slumps on the cold iron bed, spirit as broken as the dim light. The door groans open. Zhang Xiao and Officer Sun step in, casting long shadows.

LUO QIAO  
Zhang Xiao? How'd you track me down  
here?

Zhang Xiao, breathless and frazzled, gestures wildly.

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, confusion clouding his features.

LUO QIAO

When did I cheat him of his money?

Zhang Xiao leans closer, sincerity in his eyes.

ZHANG XIAO

When Jiang Fang paid me back. While  
you were hiding out in Sanya.

Realization hits Luo Qiao like a tidal wave. He collapses  
back, deflated.

LUO QIAO

She did pay you back... and I  
didn't trust her.

Jiang Fang storms in, fury igniting her voice.

JIANG FANG

Luo Qiao! Think it's that simple?  
Have you thought about what  
would've happened if Yao Jiancheng  
were really dead?!

Silence hangs heavy as Luo Qiao absorbs her words, complexity  
etched into his face.

LUO QIAO

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

Zhang Xiao and Officer Sun retreat quietly, leaving the  
couple to their storm.

JIANG FANG

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

Jiang Fang wraps her arms around Luo Qiao, tears mingling  
with unspoken promises.

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

Officer Sun stands over a cluttered desk, questioning Yao  
Jiancheng. Case files flutter under the ceiling fan.

OFFICER SUN

What's your relationship with  
Natural Real Estate?

Yao Jiancheng, defensive, shifts uncomfortably.

YAO JIANCHENG  
We're partners on the Queen's Villa  
project.

Officer Sun, unimpressed, leans in.

OFFICER SUN  
Then why try to take their  
development rights?

Yao Jiancheng's gaze darts away.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Their executives got arrested.  
Quality control's at risk. Didn't  
want to risk my neck.

Officer Sun flips a file open with a casual flick.

OFFICER SUN  
Did you know Natural is a joint-  
stock company?

Yao Jiancheng blinks, caught off guard.

YAO JIANCHENG  
No, I didn't.

Officer Sun smiles, slides a photo across the table.

OFFICER SUN  
Luo Qiao holds 40%.

Yao Jiancheng picks up the photo, realization dawning.

YAO JIANCHENG  
So... he's the mastermind behind  
this?!

Officer Sun nods, eyes twinkling with irony.

OFFICER SUN  
He's bet everything on this  
project.

Yao Jiancheng stares at the photo of Luo Qiao—honest,  
unassuming—understanding unfurling slowly.

YAO JIANCHENG  
Now it all makes sense...

142 INT. HE YAN'S LAW FIRM - OFFICE - DAY

He Yan frowns over a mountain of documents. Jiang Fang sits across, anxiety twisting her features.

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

He Yan raises an eyebrow, considering.

HE YAN  
Mrs. Jiang, I've ditched criminal law, remember?

Jiang Fang leans forward, desperation in her voice.

JIANG FANG  
This is different! He was just trying to spook Yao Jiancheng, not harm him.

He Yan sighs, tapping his pen rhythmically.

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

Jiang Fang's voice rises, urgency palpable.

JIANG FANG  
I know, but Yao was trying to swallow the whole project! Luo Qiao was pushed into a corner!

He Yan studies her, then nods slowly.

HE YAN  
It's a complex case. I need to dig through the files.

Jiang Fang exhales, relief mingled with hope.

JIANG FANG  
So, you'll give it a shot?

He Yan leans back, a thoughtful smile touching his lips.

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

Jiang Fang stands, gratitude in her eyes.

JIANG FANG

Thanks, He.

As she leaves, He Yan watches, contemplation etched into his face. He picks up the file, shadows flickering over his determined expression.

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

A charged atmosphere grips the courtroom. Yao Jiancheng, exuding confidence in a tailored suit, wears a smug grin.

Jiang Fang fidgets in the gallery, anxiety etched into her features.

Luo Qiao and four other defendants shuffle in, their expressions a mix of defiance and dread.

The CHIEF JUDGE (54), stern and commanding, silences the room with a sharp gavel crack.

CHIEF JUDGE

The court will now hear the case  
against Luo Qiao and others,  
charged with attempted murder.

His gaze, sharp as a hawk's, lands on Luo Qiao.

CHIEF JUDGE

Luo Qiao, do you know Yao  
Jiancheng?

LUO QIAO

Never met him.

The Chief Judge turns to Yao Jiancheng.

CHIEF JUDGE

Yao Jiancheng, do you recognize Luo  
Qiao?

YAO JIANCHENG

Not at all.

CHIEF JUDGE

Then why invest two million in "PR"  
related to him?

LUO QIAO

He's hijacking our development  
rights—my life's work!

Yao Jiancheng smirks, sarcasm lacing his voice.

YAO JIANCHENG

I was safeguarding the project  
after some arrests. Didn't know of  
his stake.

He dismisses Luo Qiao with a glance.

YAO JIANCHENG

Don't dress up murder-for-hire as  
"PR."

Luo Qiao's voice rises, indignant.

LUO QIAO

"PR" was Fang Gang's term. We were  
partners, Yao! You cut us out--thief  
is still a thief!

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. 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.

144     **EXT. COURTHOUSE STEPS - DAY**

Luo Qiao exits the courthouse, the sun a relentless inferno overhead. REPORTERS swarm, cameras flashing like lightning.

LUO QIAO

No comment. Please, give us space.

He pushes through the crowd, Jiang Fang by his side, their steps syncopated by relief and resolve.

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

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.

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

Excavators hum like a victorious chorus.

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

LUO QIAO  
 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.

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

Yao Jiancheng sits alone, the city lights twinkling outside his panoramic window.

He picks up a framed photo of a younger, happier him standing with his father on a construction site.

YAO JIANCHENG (V.O.)  
(To the photo)  
They think it's easy. They think  
it's all about greed. You taught  
me better than that.

He lifted his teacup and set it down again.

YAO JIANCHENG (V.O.)  
This city... it chews you up and  
spits you out if you're not  
careful. Luo Qiao... he's playing a  
dangerous game. He doesn't  
understand the stakes.

He sets the photo down, a shadow crossing his face.

YAO JIANCHENG (V.O.)  
I have to protect what we built.  
Even if it means playing dirty.

148     **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  
What's on your mind? You look like  
you're about to ask for a loan.

LUO QIAO  
Uh... where'd you stash those  
bulldozer invoices?

JIANG FANG  
Thinking of selling again?

LUO QIAO  
Just need a safety net.

A sharp knock interrupts them. Luo Qiao returns with a court summons.

JIANG FANG  
Property fees?

LUO QIAO  
Court's reopening our case.

They exchange horrified looks. Luo Qiao dials Fang Gang.

LUO QIAO  
Fang Gang, got the summons?

FANG GANG (V.O.)  
Yeah. We toast?

LUO QIAO  
Stay cool. Stick to our story. PR  
money was just to scare, not kill.  
Fan Si was after a con.

FANG GANG (V.O.)  
Right... hope it works.

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

125 *BEGIN FLASHBACKS:*

149 **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.*

150     **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.

151     **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.

152

**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.

153     **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?

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

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.

155     **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.

156     **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...

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

The courtroom buzzes with anticipation. Jiang Fang fidgets in the front row. Luo Qiao and others stand in the dock, faces tense.

CHIEF JUDGE

Court is in session! We'll announce the verdict for Luo Qiao et al., charged with attempted murder.

ZHENG CEN

Your Honor, previous trials misjudged. We protest!

HE YAN

Your Honor, evidence is weak, full of holes. Key evidence mishandled, some testimonies 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

My clients were involved, but no intent to kill. Attempted murder doesn't apply.

CHIEF JUDGE

Arguments concluded. Panel will deliberate.

158     **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  
100,000 reached the hitman. Is that  
intentional homicide?

159     **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;  
(MORE)

CHIEF JUDGE (CONT'D)

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.

160     **INT. PRISON - WORKSHOP - DAY**

Luo Qiao struggles with the monotonous task of assembling electronics, his mind elsewhere. The THIN PRISONER (43) sneers, pointing to a faulty circuit board.

THIN PRISONER

Still dreaming of loopholes, Luo?  
Some circuits can't be bypassed.

Luo Qiao glares, but the words sting. He throws the board down, frustration boiling over.

LUO QIAO

Shut up! You think you know  
anything about me?

THIN PRISONER

I know a con man when I see one.  
Just like you, I thought I could  
game the system.

The BURLY PRISONER (46), observing from nearby, approaches. He places a heavy hand on Luo Qiao's shoulder.

BURLY PRISONER  
Leave him be. He's learning.

He gestures to a nearby table where a chessboard sits, pieces neatly arranged.

BURLY PRISONER  
Care for a game? Helps pass the time. And teaches a thing or two about consequences.

Luo Qiao hesitates, then joins him. They play in silence, the only sound the clack of plastic pieces.

LUO QIAO  
You seem... different. Not like the others.

BURLY PRISONER  
We all make choices. Some land us here. I built a faulty foundation, and the whole structure collapsed. Took others down with me.

He captures Luo Qiao's knight.

BURLY PRISONER  
Every move has a consequence. You can't just bulldoze your way through life. Sometimes, the law is the only stable ground.

Luo Qiao stares at the board, seeing not just the game, but his own life. The deals, the betrayals, the shortcuts - all leading to this.

LUO QIAO  
I thought I was playing chess. Turns out, I was just a pawn.

BURLY PRISONER  
We all are, in the end. The question is, what kind of game are you playing? And are you willing to play by the rules?

The Burly Prisoner looks at Luo Qiao intently, his gaze piercing. Luo Qiao looks down at the chessboard, a flicker of understanding dawning in his eyes.

## 161 INT. PRISON - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Luo Qiao sits across from Jiang Fang. Time has etched lines into their faces.

Luo Qiao reaches for her hand, pulling back, eyes full of regret.

JIANG FANG  
You've changed.

LUO QIAO  
Who wouldn't here?

JIANG FANG  
Wanted to bring Tongtong. Shi Mao  
said kids shouldn't come here.

LUO QIAO  
Shi Mao's out?

JIANG FANG  
Early release. First thing he did  
was beat up Yao Jiancheng. Almost  
landed back here.

LUO QIAO  
Some never change. How's Tongtong's  
school?

JIANG FANG  
Started last year. Doing well.

Jiang Fang bursts into tears.

LUO QIAO  
What's wrong?

JIANG FANG  
Tongtong asked, "Is Dad a  
murderer?"

Luo Qiao looks stricken.

LUO QIAO  
Does he... hate me?

JIANG FANG  
He's too young for hate, Luo Qiao.  
He just misses you.

LUO QIAO  
I chased fame and fortune... forgot  
what really mattered. Forgot you,  
Tongtong, our life.

JIANG FANG  
In life, who doesn't grow while  
wiping away tears?

A guard signals time's up. Jiang Fang hands Luo Qiao a law book.

JIANG FANG  
Study this. Don't be like before.

Luo Qiao grips the bars.

LUO QIAO  
Tell Tongtong... I'm trying to be  
better. A better man, a better  
father.

JIANG FANG  
I will. We're all waiting for you  
at home!

Luo Qiao watches her leave, eyes full of longing and regret.

162     **INT. PRISON - WORKSHOP - NIGHT**

Luo Qiao sits alone, meticulously carving a small wooden figure of Guanyin. The Thin Prisoner approaches, sneering.

THIN PRISONER  
Praying to idols won't get you out  
of here, Luo.

Luo Qiao ignores him, continuing to carve.

THIN PRISONER  
Only thing that matters in here is  
power. And you ain't got none.

The Burly Prisoner appears, placing a hand on the Thin Prisoner's shoulder.

BURLY PRISONER  
Leave him be. He's finding his own  
kind of power.

The Thin Prisoner slinks away. The Burly Prisoner nods at the carving.

## BURLY PRISONER

She's a symbol of compassion,  
right? Mercy. Things we could all  
use a little more of in here.

Luo Qiao looks up, surprised.

## BURLY PRISONER

I've had a lot of time to read in  
here. To think. About the choices  
I made. The harm I caused.

He pauses, his voice softening.

## BURLY PRISONER

Compassion isn't weakness, Luo  
Qiao. It's strength. It's what  
gets you through this.

He walks away, leaving Luo Qiao to contemplate his words, the  
small Guanyin figure a silent promise in his hands.

## 163 INT. PRISON - LIBRARY - DAY

Luo Qiao sits at a table, surrounded by law books. He's not  
just reading them now; he's studying them, highlighting  
passages, taking notes.

## LUO QIAO (V.O.)

The Burly Prisoner was right. The  
law isn't just a set of rules to be  
manipulated. It's a framework for  
a just society. A way to protect  
the vulnerable. A way to right  
wrongs.

He closes a book, a newfound understanding dawning in his  
eyes.

## LUO QIAO (V.O.)

I used to think justice was a game.  
Now I realize it's a  
responsibility.

*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.

164     **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.

165     **INT. PRISON - WORKSHOP - DAY - FIVE YEARS LATER**

Luo Qiao, older, teaches other inmates how to assemble electronics. He's patient, encouraging, a mentor.

LUO QIAO  
See? It's not about speed. It's  
about precision. About doing  
things right.

He smiles, a genuine smile that reaches his eyes. The Thin Prisoner, also older, watches him with respect.

166      **EXT. PRISON GATES - DAY**

The gates swing open, and Luo Qiao steps out into the sunlight, a free man.

Jiang Fang and Tongtong rush towards him, their faces beaming. Tongtong is taller now, but his eyes still shine with the same innocent adoration.

Luo Qiao embraces them, holding them close, savoring the feeling of freedom and the warmth of their love.

TONGTONG  
Dad! You're home!

Luo Qiao looks at his son, then at Jiang Fang, a promise etched in his eyes.

LUO QIAO  
I'm home. And I'm here to stay.

They walk away, hand in hand, a family reunited, ready to rebuild their lives, together.

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**FADE OUT.**