

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

Luo, real estate ain't just numbers. It's guanxi. Who you know, who owes you.

LUO QIAO

Guanxi, sure, but I learned from pops—saving face while haggling. It's a tightrope act.

ZHANG XIAO

No more highways for you?

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, Waiting for the chance to show his fluency in Mandarin.

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.

INT. BLACK BMW - DAY

Luo Qiao lowers the window, craning to catch the commotion outside. The car hums with tension.

EXT. YAO JIANCHENG REAL ESTATE - DAY

Wang Xiuhong, an unstoppable force, chases after Yao Jiancheng, her voice piercing the air like a siren.

WANG XIUHONG

Mr. Yao, you backing down or what?
Last chance!

Yao Jiancheng, smug as a Cheshire cat, waves dismissively.

YAO JIANCHENG

Back down? Ha! See you in court!

He slides into his Mercedes with a grin that screams mischief, leaving Wang Xiuhong and Wang Jian seething.

INT. BLACK BMW - DAY

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

FANG GANG

That sissy needs a lesson!

LUO QIAO

Hold your horses!

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

WANG XIUHONG

Infuriating!

Luo Qiao smirks, trying to lighten the mood.

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 chuckles, shaking his head.

LUO QIAO

Damn, twisting words slicker than 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.
 (MORE)

LUO QIAO (CONT'D)
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.

INT. YAO JIANCHENG'S VILLA - NIGHT

Dim light bathes the living room, casting soft shadows. Yao
Jiancheng's MOTHER, her face etched with years of worry, sits
quietly.

YAO JIANCHENG

Mom, you should be resting.

Her hand reaches out, warm and steady, clasping his.

MOTHER

How can I rest when you're out
there in danger?

Yao sighs, a world of burden on his shoulders.

YAO JIANCHENG

I've made you worry more than I
should have.

MOTHER

You're no spring chicken. Still single. What's your plan?

YAO JIANCHENG

Freedom's a sweet perk of bachelorhood, Mom.

She shakes her head, concern deepening.

MOTHER

Who'll look after you when I'm gone?

Yao's resolve hardens, eyes reflecting determination.

YAO JIANCHENG

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

Relief washes over her face, softening her expression. Yao steels himself, ready for the challenges ahead.

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; 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.