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ROU BAO BU CHI ROU

— CASE FILE —
COMPENDIUM

Bing An Ben

5

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Chapter 121: You Called Me Little Devil Again

HE YU SAT next to Xie Qingcheng's hospital bed with his head lowered, silently peeling an apple.

Even though Yi Awen hadn't been the mysterious woman with the bag he saw that night, He Yu and Xie Qingcheng had learned a great deal about Qingli County, in addition to witnessing the finale of a family drama.

Yi Awen had been taken away, and the police had found Yi Qiang's severely decomposed body in the salon attic. Currently, Yi Lulu was at the police station receiving psychological counseling and undergoing questioning.

It was now the next day, and at the Qingli County's community health center, He Yu had remained watchful at Xie Qingcheng's side the whole time.

He Yu actually didn't know how to peel an apple—the result of his handiwork was a scraggly mess, with half the flesh ending up in the garbage can along with the skin. Still, he finished peeling and cutting the fruit and handed it to Xie Qingcheng. By now, he no longer bore any resemblance to that terrifying would-be murderer in the mountains.

Although Xie Qingcheng was awake, he didn't have much energy to eat, nor was he willing to have someone else feed him.

“I cut it into small pieces for you,” He Yu tentatively began.

Xie Qingcheng had one hand hooked up to an IV and the other hand covered in bandages. Even if the apple had been cut into pieces, he'd have

had a hard time eating it.

Nevertheless, with a soft cough, he said, "I'll eat it myself."

He Yu was about to reply when the doctor entered the room.

Xie Qingcheng's luck wasn't even E rank—it was an F. When the motorcycle flew into the air and tossed them against the cliff, he injured his head and torso. He still had a mild concussion and was coughing up blood, to say nothing of the gunshot wound to his arm. He was far unluckier than He Yu.

"Your muscles and bones have been damaged," the doctor explained to them after reviewing the compilation of medical case studies. "Even after treatment, this arm will never be as strong as before. And your health, well —"

"I know," Xie Qingcheng said, interrupting the doctor. "You don't need to continue."

The doctor glanced at him with a complicated look in his eyes.

"I used to be a doctor myself," Xie Qingcheng explained.

The doctor was silent for a moment. "Then, please. Look after yourself."

"I will, thank you."

He Yu hadn't thought their conversation would end so abruptly, and there was no way *he* was going to let the doctor go just like that. He'd never had any problem logically delivering words of condemnation, incisive and cold. Now, though, when he heard the doctor tell Xie Qingcheng about his arm, he jumped to his feet, his thoughts a jumble as words spilled out of his mouth.

“What do you *mean*?! What do you mean his arm will never be the same as before? I’ve been shot around there and *I’m* fine now, so why can’t he get better? Is it an issue with the quality of care here or—”

“He Yu.” Xie Qingcheng’s voice dripped with reprobation.

He Yu fell quiet. He gritted his teeth, forcibly restraining his increasingly irritable mood, but the rims of his eyes reddened and his chest heaved.

“The diagnosis will be the same in the city,” the doctor replied evenly. “Even if you were injured in the same general area, the specific location will result in different outcomes. Plus, to be honest, he’s much older than you, so his ability to recover can’t compare to yours. I understand your feelings, but please calm down.”

Rather than answer, He Yu seethed in silence.

“If there’s nothing else, I’ll be taking my leave,” the doctor said. “If you need help with anything, feel free to press the call button at any time.”

Once the doctor left, neither of them spoke. After a long pause, He Yu selected another apple and sat down. He began to peel the fruit, but his movements were irregular and frantic, helpless and despondent. In the end, he flung the apple into the garbage can so hard that it thudded heavily against the bottom and knocked the can onto its side.

Xie Qingcheng looked up at him with a sidelong glance. “What are you trying to prove?”

He Yu stared at Xie Qingcheng, his eyes brimming with both anguish and fury. It was a while before he spoke again. When he did, he ignored Xie Qingcheng’s question. “Well, what are you going to do now?”

“It’s just one arm, and it’s not like it’s going to be entirely useless.” Xie Qingcheng seemed wholly indifferent. “Finding out the truth as quickly as possible is more important. And—*please* pick up my garbage can.”

“Just one arm?” He Yu repeated Xie Qingcheng’s words back to him, his voice taking on an odd tone. He couldn’t care less about the stupid garbage can. The man in the hospital bed didn’t reply. He Yu tried to hold himself back, but he failed in the end. “Xie Qingcheng, you always told me to value myself, but what about you?” he cried out, jumping to his feet. “Can you manage the same for yourself?!”

“Then, what’s your advice?” Although Xie Qingcheng was quite unwell, his severe aura loomed imposingly as he stared up at He Yu.

“*I would never fucking dare!*” He Yu was so incensed that he started swearing.

“You’re a student; don’t use that kind of language in front of me. Besides, your situation isn’t the same as mine.”

“Yeah? And how’s that?”

Xie Qingcheng closed his eyes and didn’t respond immediately. It seemed as if he wanted to give a perfunctory answer and let the topic go.

He Yu wouldn’t let him. “Xie Qingcheng, answer me! How exactly are you and I different?!”

No response.

“We’re both human, aren’t we?”

Silence.

“We’re both psychological Ebola patients, aren’t we?”

More silence.

“Don’t give me any of that ‘I’m mentally ill, my life is worthless’ spiel, because...because when you devalue yourself, you’re also devaluing me!” He Yu became more and more worked up as he spoke. He stared at Xie

Qingcheng with bloodshot eyes for a long time before he went on. “Xie Qingcheng, I’m begging you, please take yourself seriously. Back there in the mountains, you know, if that bullet landed in your heart instead of your arm—you would’ve died just like that, right in front of me. I really...”

I really would’ve lost it. Murder, slaughter, dismemberment, arson—you name it, I could’ve done it.

“I hope you won’t blame yourself for this,” Xie Qingcheng said solemnly. “You came with me, so I needed to protect you.”

He Yu blinked.

“Besides, if someone’s in mortal danger right in front of me, I could never stand by and do nothing.”

“But you were about to trade in your life for mine!”

“Yes, and? I’m your elder, so it would be my duty to save you. Enough about this. After all, I *didn’t* die.”

With every word Xie Qingcheng said to him, He Yu felt a handful of salt pouring onto his heart. He could tell there was something about Xie Qingcheng’s personality that was even more terrifying than his own—it was as though Xie Qingcheng treated his own life as an object that he could trade in or destroy for the sake of a goal, as long as he found the exchange acceptable.

“You’re completely disregarding your own life,” He Yu said hoarsely.

In the end, he just annoyed Xie Qingcheng.

“I am *not*,” Xie Qingcheng said as he stared up at He Yu. “I knew exactly what I was doing. I’m thirteen years older than you, and I’m the first psychological Ebola patient who can control his emotional symptoms and conquer the disease. Who are *you* to tell me I’m disregarding myself? So, my arm’s injured and won’t ever be as strong as before? It is what it is. I told you

long ago that we can't change the things that have already happened, so we need to learn how to accept them."

He spoke very calmly, almost mechanically. "I've just already accepted the facts, that's all. I hope you'll stop making careless assumptions about my feelings, He Yu. You're still too young. Besides, the two of us may have the same illness, but we don't walk the same path. You can't truly understand me."

When he heard that last sentence, He Yu's face turned ashen and he grew quiet. It was a long while before he sorrowfully spoke up again.

"Xie Qingcheng, could you please not say that? You and I...we're both unique. Ever since I learned the truth, I've been trying my best to get closer to you. I want to understand what you feel, how you *think*, but you've kept on insisting that I'm too young, I'm not calm enough. You even—you wanted to use that bullet in your shoulder to pay me back. Xie Qingcheng, how much do you not want me? How much do you want to settle the score between us?"

He started to choke up as he continued. "You, *you* said you didn't want to owe me anything, so you insisted on this step, and now you're telling me I can't understand you? 'We don't walk the same path'? You just want to dismiss all my hard work. Isn't that right?"

Xie Qingcheng hadn't anticipated this aggrieved reaction, and he paused in surprise. "That's not what I meant. Why are you making such a big fuss out of this?"

Unexpectedly, those words provoked He Yu past his limit. Overtaken by his emotions, He Yu found it impossible to accept Xie Qingcheng's words.

"Look, you've paid me back completely, so you can talk to me like this! Even if I'm actually worried about you, you'll just say I'm making a fuss." He Yu glared at Xie Qingcheng.

Xie Qingcheng was already dizzy to begin with because of his mild concussion. As He Yu grew more heated, his headache only worsened. "Why don't you sit down? We can have a proper conversation."

“I *won't* sit down! No matter what I do, you think I'm childish, that we don't walk the same path, and that I can't understand you. What use is sitting down?!”

“Then you can leave.” Xie Qingcheng felt like his head was about to split open.

He Yu's eyes sharpened in anger. “I just *knew* you were gonna chase me out again! You don't owe me anything anymore, so I've gotta leave if you want me to leave. I don't have the right to stay, do I?”

He Yu was so inscrutable, Xie Qingcheng thought, that even the most difficult woman he'd ever met couldn't measure up. “What exactly do you want?”

Infuriated and hurt, He Yu glared at him for a long time before lowering his head and bracing a hand on the hospital bed. After another moment, he looked down with tearful eyes and kissed Xie Qingcheng's bandaged shoulder.

“I don't know...” He Yu's voice had softened, tinged with a throaty hoarseness. “I didn't want you to pay me back.”

Xie Qingcheng remained silent.

“But, but now...you've already paid me back for everything,” He Yu said. “I just don't know what to do. Xie Qingcheng, I don't know what to *do* anymore.”

He Yu kissed Xie Qingcheng's shoulder again, then his neck and his lips, gripping his bed sheets in his hand as tears rolled down his cheeks. Utter misery washed over him.

“Xie Qingcheng, why do you have to treat me this way? Why can't you be a little bit nicer to me? Why are you unwilling to owe me anything at all?” He Yu continued to kiss him, unable to keep himself from reaching out to

pull Xie Qingcheng into a tight embrace. “Why can’t you see me as someone who’s not like everybody else?”

Uneasiness overtook Xie Qingcheng as He Yu hugged and kissed him. He didn’t know what He Yu wanted from him. After all, they’d only ever hooked up because of an unexpected turn of events, and now that that arrangement had ended, they were merely two unlucky sufferers of the same disease. He felt that He Yu’s reliance on him was excessive—his demonstrations of physical intimacy were like a runaway train that couldn’t be stopped.

“Xie Qingcheng, couldn’t you acknowledge me?” He Yu asked it despondently between the presses of his lips. “Could you...give me a hug? Just like how I hug you.”

Nothing.

“Please?”

He Yu kept on waiting, and waiting, but—of course, after all that, he didn’t get a hug from Xie Qingcheng. As he stalled, he buried his youthful face in the crook of the older man’s neck. His eyes slowly closed with disappointment.

It was okay. It was fine. He’d known it would turn out this way, hadn’t he? Xie Qingcheng had already paid back all his debts. Why would he still indulge him? He had no reason to baby him with a hug. Yes, that was fine. He Yu was already used to it. Actually, he’d never had any hope in the first place. As long as Xie Qingcheng didn’t throw him off, that was enough.

For a long time, all that could be heard in the quiet hospital room was the faint beeping of the instruments and the sound of their breathing as He Yu stubbornly clung to Xie Qingcheng.

Xie Qingcheng didn’t understand why He Yu was asking him for a hug right now, but he sensed that his emotional state was very fragile. He didn’t want to upset him any further. So he didn’t push him away.

“Why don’t you let go of me now?” Xie Qingcheng eventually asked.

“I don’t wanna.”

Xie Qingcheng paused. “It’s too hot. Let go of me.”

“No. Let me hug you for a little longer.”

He Yu really didn’t let go. Apparently he was willing to persist in giving a one-sided hug for quite a while. He even hugged him more tightly than before, as if this could make up for the effort that the other man wasn’t putting into the embrace.

“Xie Qingcheng, you don’t owe me anymore,” he muttered. “But don’t I owe you? What am I supposed to do? Tell me, what should I do?”

Xie Qingcheng could feel He Yu’s vigorous heartbeat pressed against his chest. That fervent, almost obstinate, beseeching rhythm pushed him into a sense of vague disorientation. That disarrayed feeling caused him even greater unease, so he tried to push He Yu away with his uninjured arm.

“He Yu, there’s nothing to be done,” Xie Qingcheng said. “The two of us have turned over a new leaf. As long as you don’t disrupt my personal life or pull me into more nonsense, I don’t want to hold onto those things from the past anymore. Let go of me, okay? You’re so heavy and so hot. You’re like a...”

You’re like a large dog. An extremely annoying large dog.

“You think I’m *heavy*,” He Yu whined.

Xie Qingcheng couldn’t muster a reply. Fucking hell. Okay, what if he stopped talking?

Although the idea occurred to him, Xie Qingcheng couldn’t hold his tongue, for He Yu really had managed to muddle his thoughts.

“He Yu, I still don’t understand what you want from me. I’m not planning to settle our old scores, so what is there for you to be unsatisfied with? I took a bullet for you because, regardless of what other people might think, *I* don’t want to owe anything to anyone. There’s nothing more to it. It’s not like I want to break off contact with you or cut you out of my life. Right now, you’re so—you’re a boy, but you’re being all clingy like a girl. Just what do you want?”

Actually, if it were a girl in He Yu’s place, Xie Qingcheng would understand right away that He Yu’s feelings toward him were romantic. It was too bad He Yu was a boy.

Not only that, but he was a boy as different from Xie Qingcheng as fire was from water. He Yu pestered him, tormented him, even humiliated him—Xie Qingcheng would never imagine *love* when considering He Yu’s feelings. Boys He Yu’s age were curious about sex, so he assumed their physical involvement couldn’t be taken seriously. Because of that, Xie Qingcheng wanted to know He Yu’s *real* goal.

Faced with this question, He Yu had no way of giving Xie Qingcheng an honest answer. He knew what Xie Qingcheng’s response would be. Knowing that, he could only take the words “Xie Qingcheng, I love you” and lodge them in his chest and throat where they would never be spoken, choking on them until his eyes filled with passion and shame.

“You’re the only person in the world I can really talk to, so I don’t want you to die,” he said at last. Those dismal words were the best he could do. “Xie Qingcheng, could you—please, promise me that in the future, you’ll never hurt yourself for another person? That you won’t sacrifice yourself for anyone else again? Because...your life is *also* a life. Qin Ciyan traded his life for yours. Think about it. Just think about it, okay?”

Xie Qingcheng had been listening indifferently, but when he heard these words, a slight shiver ran through him.

He Yu felt it too. “Xie Qingcheng,” he said, “you shouldn’t waste the life he gave you.”