

THE
TERMS
— OF HIS —
SURVIVAL

MONEY • POWER • CONTROL

— CHAPTER FOUR —
THE RECKONING

HONG KONG

*LOYALTY HAS
BECOME THE MOST
DANGEROUS CURRENCY.*

PORT TRINITY,
TEXAS

WASHINGTON, D.C.

JULIE SCOTT

Chapter Four: The Reckoning

36 hours earlier, “Arthur” Kwan Tsz Chung’s private line rang. He picked up the receiver and entered his security code, the familiar sequence clicking beneath his fingertips. He listened without interruption as General Cheung Wai Chong spoke.

When the call ended, Arthur walked to the bar in the corner of his office and poured a generous measure of amber liquid into a crystal glass. He stood before the floor-to-ceiling windows, looking out over the Hong Kong Central district from his pent-house corner suite. As Co-Chief Executive Officer and Head of Global Logistics & Infrastructure at Zhenhua Global Holdings, he oversaw the day-to-day operations of a conglomerate built on multi-billion-dollar contracts, all while maintaining a pristine, philanthropic public image.

He caught his reflection in the glass. Still handsome but not aging as gracefully as he once imagined. The scowl carved across his face only distorted his features further.

He had done his best to shield his family from the darker corners of his business dealings, the stress, the consequences of failure, the alliances that could not be refused. Now, digesting the conversation, he realized his weakness had set off a chain of events he could no longer manage. He had given his children

too much freedom, too much access. And now immediate action was required to save face and perhaps his daughter.

He swallowed the rest of his drink in one angry gulp, the burn sharp against the back of his throat. He resisted the urge to shatter the glass across the room.

He thought through the options available to him, each one narrowing into a single unavoidable truth: he could not afford to cross General Cheung Wai Chong or the powerful family and allies behind him. Everything he and his family possessed — money, position, influence, his very life — hinged on his compliance.

He pressed the intercom and rang his assistant.

“Arrange a private tearoom,” he said, his voice low, controlled. “And bring my daughter Genji there immediately.”

He poured himself another drink and loosened his tie, unbuttoning the stiff collar. Not because he wanted to relax; the rise in his blood pressure had begun to constrict his throat, his pulse tugging at the fabric around his neck and beating up into his temples. A car was brought around for him. He wanted to arrive before his daughter, to confirm the room was private enough, and to be seated and composed before she walked in.

Across town, a driver pulled up to a private residence, where Genji had been summoned from. She waited until the driver stepped out and opened the door before leaving the house. The call from his assistant had not alarmed her. Occasionally, when her father found time in his crowded schedule, he invited her to spend time with him — lunches, dinners, teas, or, on rare occasions, a surprise trip out of town. She especially looked forward to their time alone together, with no mother or siblings to divert his attention from her.

Genji scrolled on her phone and listened to music along the

fifteen-minute drive to The Hong Kong Club. The driver pulled up to the sand-colored building and stopped. He quickly ran around and opened the door for her before anyone else could. He bowed politely as she walked into the club. *Ms. Catherine*, they greeted her in English by her British name. The club's general manager was there to meet and escort her to the private room he had arranged.

"Your father has already arrived," the manager assured her.

As they walked through the club, staff respectfully stopped and bowed as they passed. Genji politely smiled and gave each a small acknowledgment.

She entered the private room, with teak furniture polished to a distinct sparkle, precious artwork hanging on each wall, and a beautiful antique chandelier suspended elegantly above the table. Her father stood and held her chair for her as she sat down.

Genji looked at her father with a grin; his hair was tousled, as if he had been running his hands through it. She noted she had rarely seen his hair out of place in public.

"I took the liberty of ordering your favorite tea and sandwiches," he said. "I thought it best that this conversation not be interrupted."

At this, Genji began to second-guess what this time with her father really meant.

The tea was poured, and they both took a sip. Arthur looked at his daughter; she looked up at him and saw something in his face. Anger? Concern? Fear? She could not tell, but it scared her.

He looked at his daughter for several seconds before speaking. She met his gaze as she watched his eyes soften.

"Ah-Zi," he said, tears welling as his voice broke, "give me your phone."

Her hands visibly shaking at the sight of her father so emotional, she dutifully handed her phone to him across the table.

He powered it off and placed it in his inner jacket pocket.

“Ba-Ba...” she whispered as the magnitude of the meeting sank in.

“Genji, you betrayed my trust,” he began.

She opened her mouth out of instinct, but he lifted a hand — a small, quiet gesture that told her not to speak. His eyes stayed on her, steady and unblinking.

“Your betrayal has put you in danger,” he continued. “It has put our family in danger. And it has put others in danger as well.”

“Taio?” she whispered.

Her father nodded once. “He is among those who will suffer consequences.”

He let the words settle before continuing. “You deceived a connection, someone whose loyalty was not yours to use for your own agenda.”

Arthur’s voice stayed calm, but there was a weight behind it she had never heard before. “It is unclear how you learned about him or what you understood of his capabilities. The mere fact that you knew anything at all has caused grave concern in places and circles you do not possess full knowledge of.”

He paused. “These people don’t panic. They permanently resolve situations.”

Her eyes widened, fear moving across her delicate features. She tried to speak again, but Arthur urged her to remain silent.

“Once my colleague discovered you had deceived him — using my power and influence to secure his services — it was already too late.” His voice thinned. “His loyalty to me, and to the powers that be, has cost him his life.”

Arthur let the truth hang in the air.

Genji's breath broke. She covered her face with her hands, crying softly, shame tightening her shoulders.

Her father spoke more slowly now, explaining what they had learned from the man before his death — and what they still did not know.

Genji nodded through her tears, acknowledging the truth of what he said. She told him she had known very little beyond the initial introduction, her suggestions to Taio, and the way Taio had paid for the services. She explained the inheritance from his grandmother, the crypto accounts he kept hidden from his father and from Leung-Yee — the only way he could move money without being seen.

Her father folded his hands on the table. He looked directly at his daughter and, with more authority, spoke: "You involved yourself in a family matter, and it has consequences that go much deeper than you know."

Genji's jaw tightened instinctively.

"He's a boy," she said finally. "He needed to disappear."

As the words left her mouth, she regretted them immediately. She became fully aware she had crossed a line — something she would not have dared to do before.

Arthur continued: "General Cheung Wai Chong, Leung-Yee's father, was notified of the breach. I don't know how long they have known — weeks or months, maybe." Continuing, "The General controls all imports and exports from China and Hong Kong, as you may be aware. The items Taio intended to send ahead of him were seized and searched. Items of importance were removed, and the boxes were sent on."

"Leung-Yee?" Genji asked.

"She didn't accuse," her father went on. "She asked questions

of them. Framed as concern. Framed as protection.”

Genji understood then.

Leung-Yee hadn't come for her. She'd come *through* her.

“They wanted the documents,” Genji said.

“Yes,” her father replied.

He folded his hands before him on the table as she looked to him for more. When he didn't speak, she steeled herself and asked his permission to speak.

He nodded once, eyes again softening with emotion.

She began, “Ba-Ba, Taio did not ask for my help; I offered. He did not want me involved. He knows nothing, and he is not a threat to anyone.”

“That is to be seen, Zi-Zi,” he replied.

“Are you still in contact with him?” her father asked.

She shook her head and explained, “Taio would not tell me his plans beyond leaving the country. I do not know the dates or times, nor his destination, Ba-Ba. He kept this from me to protect me from further involvement.”

“I know you did this out of love and concern for him,” he acknowledged. “But you have set things in motion that cannot be stopped. I will do what I need to do to protect you — and the company.”

She began to softly cry as she said, “I understand, Father. My actions have consequences.” Arthur simply lowered his head.

His phone vibrated softly in his pocket. He looked at the screen and typed something.

They sat together in silence for a moment; she was unable to consider what would come next.

Looking up at the sound of a door opening, she saw her father's driver enter carrying a small parcel.

Heart pounding, she continued watching his every move in

silence.

Arthur handed the box over to Genji. “This is your new phone,” he said. “It has one number — mine.”

“All your accounts have been permanently shut down, and all your devices will be handed over to the authorities for inspection and forensic evaluation. You will no longer have access to the internet,” he explained.

“I have only one choice: to protect you and the company’s involvement in international matters,” he continued.

Genji sat in shock as the words reached her. She had been cut off from everyone and everything, and her father was allowing it.

At this, her father stood, walked over to her, and said, “It is time.”

Dutifully, she stood, her mouth dry, her tears stopped flowing.

“You are to go with the driver now,” he whispered.

“Ba-Ba,” she pleaded.

“You will be safe, Genji. I will see to it, even if it costs me my own life.”

She clung to him — half begging, half because she knew this could be the last time she saw her father.

He reluctantly untangled himself from her embrace and turned toward the door as she dutifully walked toward it.