

Lethal Dose

Chapter 01

At 8:13 PM Beijing time, Miao Zijing posted on Twitter: "Miao Zijing is retiring from the entertainment industry from now on."

At exactly 8:00 PM tonight, nearly a thousand people collectively died at a concert held by a domestic celebrity at a sports center in a district of Shanghai.

On Twitter's Worldwide Trends, the name of Chinese celebrity Miao Zijing, who has just over a million fans, skyrocketed to the top of the trending list. His tweet garnered hundreds of thousands of comments in less than twenty minutes.

On Weibo, the top trending topic is: "Miao Zijing Concert: A Thousand Deaths," followed by "Miao Zijing" at number two, and "Miao Zijing Retires from Entertainment Industry" at number four.

In Thailand, the top trending topic is: "Concert Mass Death."

In Singapore, the top trending topic is: "Concert Mass Death."

Subsequently, hundreds of Chinese celebrities have expressed their views on the incident, while media reporters worldwide are preparing their reports and interview tasks.

Inside the sports center, the bodies lay like dead fish dredged from polluted waters—pale bellies upturned, piled haphazardly in disarray across the spectator stands. Notably, there was not a single injury on any of the bodies; each corpse was completely intact.

It's hard to imagine that just minutes ago, these were living people, cheering joyfully for their idol. Over two months ago, at the First People's Hospital of Muhai City.

Dr. Su took off his surgical gown after completing a surgery on a superior vena cava tumor thrombus, which primarily stemmed from intravenous leiomyomatosis and liver-kidney tumors. The surgery was quite risky, so Dr. Su, along with two other physicians and an intern observing and learning outside the glass window, had been standing in the operating room for about six hours.

Even after the surgery, he couldn't rest immediately. He stayed behind with the intern to clean up the operating room. Exhausted, he prepared to return to his office for a short nap, as he would soon have to perform another surgery on his next patient.

After cleaning the operating room, Dr. Su and his only intern returned to the office.

Dr. Su had been scheduled for the day shift. He glanced at the clock hanging next to the office door, which showed it was already 6:00 PM. His official off-duty time was 5:30 PM, but as a surgeon, his working hours were far from fixed and often depended on the circumstances.

Shortly after, a duty nurse walked in. She looked at Dr. Su in the office and inadvertently glanced at his intern, Zhao Chai, sighing, "You've had a tough day." The nurse placed four consent forms for the upcoming surgery on Dr. Su's desk.

"Is the next surgery for the patient in room 110?" Dr. Su asked, turning his head as he walked to the restroom, not yet having changed into his white coat.

"Yes, the patient's family was hesitant to sign the surgery and self-pay consent forms. They took a long time before finally signing," the nurse said, visibly unhappy. She stood waiting for a while, and soon, Dr. Su came out of the restroom after washing his hands.

"It's a minor surgery, nothing to worry about," Dr. Su said with a smile.

Dr. Su's hands were as if made for playing the piano—fair and slender. He shook his hands vigorously and then dried them on a towel hanging nearby. As he walked out, his checkered glasses reflected the office light. The nurse noticed that Dr. Su was slightly hunched. He turned around, adjusted his glasses, and after clearly seeing the approaching nurse, he coughed lightly, "By the way, has Dr. Yao, who's on duty tonight, arrived yet?"

"Not yet," the nurse shook her head helplessly.

"Got it, you can go back to your work," Dr. Su said with a bitter smile, waving his hand.

When only he and his intern were left in the office, Dr. Su closed the door and pulled up a stool for his intern, Zhao Chai, placing it next to his desk. Dr. Su flipped through the patient's test results on the table and reviewed the four consent forms, shaking his head thoughtfully. He turned to gaze at Zhao Chai, "Why did you come to our hospital?"

Zhao Chai, who studied at a medical university in a neighboring city, had slightly curly hair. Before reporting to the hospital, he had gone to a barber to trim his hair, which was about to cover his eyes, making him look fresh and cute. If not for his white coat, one might mistake him for a celebrity based on his appearance.

Zhao Chai was puzzled by the question and said, "Teacher, I just want to be a good doctor because doctors can save lives. Also, my mother is a head nurse, and my father is a doctor." After speaking calmly, Zhao Chai nervously looked at Dr. Su.

"You want to save people...' Dr. Su raised an eyebrow slightly. 'Oh, that's just empty words.'" Dr. Su propped his chin on his hand, lost in thought. He glanced away, blinked once, then turned back and lightly flicked Zhao Chai's forehead with two fingers, shaking his head. The two exchanged awkward smiles.

"But why did you come all the way from another city to intern at our hospital under me?" Dr. Su pressed further."

Before he could finish, Zhao Chai blurted out loudly, "Because you're exceptional!" His eyes sparkled. "Our university has its own affiliated hospital—all my classmates intern there. But you're my idol! I really wanted to train under you. I admire you so much!"

Zhao Chai suddenly fell silent. His deer-like lively eyes darted nervously across Dr. Su, who had closed his eyes and slumped over his desk. Thinking the doctor disliked his rambling, Zhao Chai clammed up.

Yet half a minute later, Dr. Su reopened his eyes and drawled, "Keep praising. Don't stop."

Zhao Chai exhaled in relief and perked up. "Dr. Su, you're a miracle worker! I've heard about all those complex surgeries you've performed! I've idolized you since freshman year—studying at Manchester University as an exchange student, becoming deputy director of General Surgery at 30, publishing sixty top-tier SCI papers..."

"Enough," Dr. Su cut in, smiling like a blossoming flower. "Compile your praise into a poem and send it to me on WeChat. Oh, and don't forget—bring your internship evaluation form tomorrow. You do realize I've never mentored interns before? Most choose internal medicine." Suddenly stern, he flipped through a patient's scan results, checked the time, and declared, "Once the anesthesiologist arrives, we'll insert a central venous catheter for Patient 110. You'll assist in this surgery."

"W-what? So soon? B-but... but..." Zhao Chai stammered, panic rising.

"Why the nerves? Didn't you practice during school internships? I thought clinical rotations started in the fifth undergraduate year?" Dr. Su frowned.

"N-no, it depends on the program—wait, no, clinical internships are in the fifth year! We did simulations, but... real living people? Hah... We never actually tried. Sir, weren't you nervous during your first internship?" Zhao Chai gulped, voice tinged with defensiveness.

Dr. Su arched an eyebrow in disbelief.

"Today's literally my first day interning," Zhao Chai emphasized.

"If you were in ancient times and were selected as a palace concubine (Refers to young women selected to serve in the imperial palace. These women were often chosen for their beauty and talents and could potentially become concubines or serve other roles in the palace) to serve the emperor, on your first night with him (The act of serving the emperor in his chambers, often implying intimacy. In ancient China, a concubine's first night with the emperor was a highly ritualized and significant event), you would be terrified. You'd go to the emperor and tell him that you've studied all the materials on the proper posture and facial expressions for such an occasion, and you know exactly what to do in theory. But when it comes to actually doing it, you can't. You're too scared. Let me tell you, the next day, you'll be sent straight to the Cold Palace (The "Cold Palace" was a place where neglected or disgraced concubines were sent, often considered a form of punishment)."

Dr. Su's face remained utterly impassive as he spoke. Without waiting for Zhao Chai's reaction, Dr. Su retrieved two apples from his drawer, walked off to the restroom to wash them, and as he strolled back, he took a bite from one before tossing the other to Zhao Chai. Trembling, Zhao Chai caught the apple and muttered, "Alright then, I'll give it a try."

"Mm," Dr. Su replied. Catching sight of the anesthesiologist entering the office, he took another bite of his apple and smiled at Zhao Chai. "That's why I chose you today."

A short while later, Dr. Su and Zhao Chai emerged from the office, and with courage barely intact, Zhao Chai made his way to the ward. His eyes flitted nervously toward the patient, fearful that the patient might learn he was merely an intern—a student who had only ever assisted in surgeries during the final year of his undergraduate training. With a resigned sigh, Zhao Chai carefully observed Dr. Su's expression, awaiting his next instruction.

It wasn't long before Zhao Chai discerned that the patient's wound infection was far more severe than he had imagined; it had escalated to a critical level, demanding immediate intravenous antibiotics. "Find the vein," Dr. Su ordered, his gaze on Zhao Chai sharp enough to kill. Zhao Chai's whole body shuddered as he gingerly grasped the patient's arm. Suddenly, a sensitive family member of the patient interjected, "Is this doctor still a student? Just an intern?" The question carried an edge of anger.

"Please, don't worry. Zhao Chai studied at Lirong University," Dr. Su replied, pausing for effect before adding, "Lirong." The mere mention of that name made the patient's family stiffen—after all, Lirong University was renowned for its medical and

computer science programs. "Moreover, he ranked first in his class. Please, have no doubts." With that, the family member fell silent.

Swallowing hard, Zhao Chai soon located the vein on the patient's arm—a small relief amid the tension. Gathering his resolve, he rose to his feet under the scrutinizing eyes of other patients, Dr. Su, and the patient's family. He helped the patient lean against the bed and fetched a disinfectant swab to cleanse the patient's chest.

Next, Zhao Chai gently placed an oxygen mask over the patient's face. Casting a cautious glance at Dr. Su, he saw a slight nod—a silent cue to be bolder. He then quickly stole a look at the anesthesiologist, who had briskly entered the room. "Don't get distracted," Dr. Su whispered firmly. So startled was Zhao Chai that he dared not utter a sound, nodding repeatedly instead.

In his half-awake state, the patient breathed softly, his brows knitting in mild concern. Under the careful guidance of the anesthesiologist, Zhao Chai found the precise spot for the injection and administered a dose of anesthetic. The act left the family visibly tense and worried; their faces etched with anxiety as skeptical glances, sharp as blades, were directed at Dr. Su. Yet Dr. Su merely offered a slight smile and a reassuring nod, as if urging them to trust Zhao Chai.

With newfound determination, Zhao Chai skillfully inserted the needle beneath the patient's collarbone. Growing bolder, he pressed in a bit deeper; though his heart pounded relentlessly, his hand remained steady. As he drew back the syringe, a sense of accomplishment welled up within him. The syringe filled with deep crimson blood, and he meticulously secured the needle once more before slowly withdrawing it. He then adjusted the patient's position on the bed, propping him up with a pillow. Once this task was complete, Zhao Chai swiftly attached the dilator. Finally, he sought confirmation: "Shall I insert the catheter now?" Noting the family's approving nod, he proceeded with a measure of relief.

Finally, they successfully completed the installation of the catheter. The anesthesiologist said little more—he simply flashed a thumbs-up before turning his attention to inquiring about the diet of the patient in the adjacent bed.

Dr. Su and Zhao Chai returned to the office together. With a long exhale, Zhao Chai murmured, "At last, the first day of my internship is over." Only then did Dr. Su notice the doctor waiting in the office to take over his shift.

This incoming doctor was slated for the night shift. Since Dr. Su had been at this hospital for less than a year, he wasn't well acquainted with his colleagues—more so given that he had arrived already as the deputy director, a fact that inevitably incited envy and made it difficult for him to instantly forge good relations. Fortunately, the doctor taking over for the evening turn proved to be a decent man. "Sorry, but you can come in two and a half hours later tomorrow," he said.

Glancing at his phone's screen, Dr. Su frowned, "It's seven o'clock already." He removed his white coat, hung it neatly on a rack, tidied his attire, and bid farewell to Zhao Chai. Thus, an ordinary day came to an end.

On his way home, Dr. Su counted the streetlights he passed; his house was but two bus stops away from the hospital. With his briefcase in hand, he stood waiting at the bus stop, looking up at the pale purple sky. In this bustling metropolis, where he resided, the night sky was devoid of stars—a sight that occasionally made him nostalgic for the days he had spent in Singapore conducting scientific research.

Yet, he thought, his life in Muhaishi had finally stabilized. Busy yet fulfilling—this is how life ought to be: steady and unremarkable. And on weekends, he need not, like other resident doctors, frequently visit patients. How wonderful that was.

Lost in thought, he was suddenly interrupted by an incoming call. A smile froze on his face, as if someone were playing languid, soothing music by his ear—a melody that left his mind in a slight daze. Soon he realized it was merely the dizziness brought on by his exhaustion after work. Consequently, he missed the call, and his phone soon fell silent.

Perhaps because he had not rested well at noon—his morning and afternoon surgeries had run consecutively—Dr. Su rubbed his brows. Before long, the bus arrived. A few elderly ladies seated behind him promptly shoved past him, boarding the bus ahead of him. Nearly losing his balance, his phone rang once more. As he fumbled to retrieve it, the driver bellowed, "Hey, are you getting on or not?" In a flurry, he produced two coins from his pocket, all the while answering the call as he climbed aboard.

"Su Yaoshi! The patient you were in charge of this afternoon is bleeding from his body—and he's losing a great deal of blood. Hurry back to the hospital!"

Had the surgery failed? In an instant, it was as if a bucket of icy water had been poured over Dr. Su's head. He trembled momentarily, then spun around, disregarding the driver's shouts, and immediately ended the call before dashing off towards the hospital.

"Did the surgery fail? Could it be that I didn't suture the wound properly? What on earth went wrong?" Dr. Su panicked. At that moment, the briefcase clutched in his right hand suddenly felt unbearably heavy. He ran—sprinting all the way back to the hospital—until he reached the entrance, where two physicians, scolding him, accompanied him back to the ward.

Su Yaoshi, the attending physician bearing the greatest responsibility, was at the center of the unfolding crisis. "In fact, it isn't your fault; it's mainly due to the side

effects following the surgery—issues we had explained before the operation—but..." one doctor said calmly to Su Yaoshi. The three doctors hurried into the elevator, where they encountered two knowledgeable nurses. Their troubled expressions and the doubtful glances they cast at Dr. Su weighed on his heart as if a huge stone were bound to it.

"This was always a high-risk surgery," the doctor patted Dr. Su on the shoulder. After a moment's pause, he leaned in and said, "But this time, the patient's family belongs to the wealthiest in Muhaishi—they wield enormous power. If you fail the surgery, they may file a complaint against you directly. With a stroke of luck, they might be reasonable; however... clearly, even the most composed family would go mad upon losing their son."

Complaint!

Dr. Su, ever so proud and self-assured, felt his composure shatter at that word. He stared anxiously at the rapidly ascending elevator. Although no surgeon can guarantee success with every procedure, for a young doctor like him, a single failed surgery could irreparably damage his reputation.

Standing at the ward's door, Dr. Su recalled the question he had once posed to Zhao Chai: why become a doctor? That question now seemed to echo within him, challenging his very purpose.

After a brief moment of hesitation and with the reassuring pats on his shoulder from his colleagues, Dr. Su opened the ward's door. Inside, he was met by the sight of the patient's family—faces streaked with tears—while the patient lay on the bed, barely clinging to life, his blood staining the sheets a ghastly red.

"There's nothing more we can do," a resident whispered in Dr. Su's ear. "Try to console the family."

"Are you Dr. Su?" asked a woman dressed in elegant attire as she dabbed her tears, addressing him in a raised voice. Her husband, seated on a nearby sofa with his head bowed, had swollen, tear-stained eyes that blazed with anger.

"Yes," Dr. Su replied, his heart a tumult of conflicting emotions.

Before he could even gather his thoughts, the woman lunged at him with an apple-peeler knife. Her attempt to assassinate him, however, was thwarted instantly by two nurses who intercepted her. Clutching the knife, her tears streaming unceasingly, she shouted, "Murderer! Murderer! Return my son to me!"

"Please, don't be impulsive, please!" the two doctors cried out as they hurried to restrain her.

Because it was the VIP ward—with the best soundproofing—the commotion went unnoticed by anyone else.

Dr. Su was so frightened that he couldn't move, as an overwhelming sense of guilt welled up in his heart. "It must be my fault. It is my fault," he repeated, unable to stop blaming himself—as if a depressed child inside him were incessantly reproaching him. In an instant, anxiety and a crushing sense of failure filled his entire being, leaving him so burdened with guilt that he could barely lift his head.

"Cut off these hands of mine!" Suddenly, Dr. Su collapsed to his knees with a thud, startling everyone. Two resident physicians looked on in bewilderment.

His eyes were red and swollen, yet the fury of the patient's family remained unyielding—in fact, it only intensified. The woman pushed aside those nearby; overwhelmed by her anger, she cared nothing for her appearance. All that mattered to her was the child who had just died because of a failed surgery.

"Killing in the name of justice—what is wrong with that! This doctor, the one who killed my son, deserves to die; he should first die at my hands!"

That was what the patient's family thought. In her eyes, Dr. Su was like a slender nail, and a mere glance at him made her feel that he deserved to be torn apart.

Then, without hesitation, a knife was thrust straight toward Dr. Su's wrist. His hands—hands that had performed countless surgeries—seemed fixed to the floor, obediently waiting for the "blade of justice" to strike.

Everyone's eyes widened, frozen in place as they watched in horror the woman advancing with the knife aimed at Dr. Su's hand.

"No!" Dr. Su immediately sprang to his feet.

His hands were too precious—how could they simply be severed?

Dr. Su's regret was entirely justified. How many hardships had he endured from childhood to become a doctor? He had excelled every step of the way, studied medicine for five long years, pursued further specialization, and sacrificed so much time and money—only for it all to be ruined in an instant.

Why doctor?

Naturally, to save lives, to perform miracles.

Yet in that moment, Dr. Su no longer wished to be a doctor.

Doctors save lives—but who will save the doctor?

Lifting his head, Dr. Su scrutinized the site of the patient's bleeding. The surgery had not failed; it had succeeded. Suddenly, he froze in the doorway, clarity replacing his confusion. The massive bleeding was not directly related to his operation; after all, the bleeding was coming from the stomach—not where he had made his incision.

So where was the failure?

"Um, I'd like to explain—please, calm down. Actually..."

"Murderer!"

Before Dr. Su could utter another word, the family member charged at him. In a desperate bid for survival, he clumsily fled outside and dashed toward the elevator. Why hadn't anyone called the police? Dr. Su frowned, but he could think of nothing else.

For he had come to a stark realization: he no longer had any chance to explain.

He gasped, slowly recovering, fully aware of the grim truth. No one would care about the actual facts—they wouldn't listen to his explanation. They would only know that Dr. Su of Muhaishi First People's Hospital had failed in his surgery, and that the family had caused a commotion.

They would strip away all the peripheral details and focus solely on the main issue—exactly what a public that cares little for the truth would do.

Yes, this incident was about to unleash a storm of bloodshed and turmoil.

Standing in the elevator, Dr. Su gasped once more. It was clear he was not yet prepared to be overwhelmed by public opinion.

What should I do?