

## I! Cleaner 65

Chapter 65 The value of life\_1

Could all this gold... possibly buy my life?!

The gentle inquiry resonated within the hearts of the tens of thousands of citizens in the shopping plaza. Instinctively, they all shuddered in unison, their consciousness lapsing into a state of disorientation.

When they regained their senses, these thousands of citizens were horrified to discover that they were all standing upright, facing the large money box in the center of the shopping plaza, organized into a uniform fan shape.

Meanwhile, an enormous toad, as tall as a two-story building, lay lazily atop the large money box of comparable height. It peered at each person with great interest through its massive protruding gold compound eyes.

"..."

\*So... have I stumbled upon another supernatural event?\*

Leon, frowning deeply, touched the badge on his chest, which was scaldingly hot. First, he confirmed the status of his ram's head and broom. Finding them still functional, he sighed in slight relief and then attempted to move his feet.

No, he couldn't move...

Looking down at his feet, Leon was startled to discover a giant frog hand with suction cups growing out of the shopping plaza's floor, firmly gripping his calves.

On the back of this strange frog hand were numerous deep green protrusions, resembling embedded Copper Wheels in the skin, numbering about twenty-three or four.

Having determined that escape was temporarily impossible, Leon observed the others around him and found they were in similar predicaments. Each one was firmly held by the frog hands to the ground, struggling and screaming in panic, their faces reflecting utter terror.

However, unlike him, the protrusions on the frog hands gripping them were not uniformly deep green; many were a sinister silver-white, with occasional glimpses of dazzling gold.

Gold, silver, and copper... It seemed to involve a rule about money.

After frowning in contemplation for a few seconds, Leon, who had two sets of children's clothes and a knitted sweater hanging on his broom, roughly guessed the meaning of those protrusions.

The items stacked in the Charl Department Store were indeed much cheaper than the market price, and as he passed through the shopping plaza, he was likewise attracted by the extremely enticing prices.

With the thought of taking advantage, to save some money for his family, he perused the clothing section and bought items for his younger siblings. The price difference from the market average equated to about twenty-some Copper Wheels, similar in number to the green protrusions on the frog hand's skin.

\*So, by merely harboring 'greed,' one would be captured by frog hands proportionate to the intensity of that greed?\*

Trying to discard the shopping bags in hand, finding himself still firmly held, Leon squatted down and attempted to touch the frog hand. Yet, he couldn't feel any substance nor received any cues from the [Materialist Soul].

\*It seemed these bizarre frog hands didn't truly exist but were a manifested rule triggered by the opponent's ability.\* He judged that he could only break free by dealing with the main body, but the giant toad was some six to seven hundred meters away. What could he possibly do to injure its main body?

...

"Why doesn't anyone want to agree with me?"

Just as Leon was hesitating about trying the director's red hair, seeing the panicked crowd in the plaza, the giant golden toad atop the money box blinked and sighed softly in a somewhat disappointed tone,

"Humans, you claim to love money so deeply, even to the point of worshipping its magic, but when I follow the wishes in your hearts and bring money before you, you refuse even to glance at it. Why is that?"

"Because... because the cost is too great!"

Seeing the giant toad wasn't particularly "violent," seemingly an entity that could communicate, a nearby man surrounded by shopping bags bravely answered,

"Money is nice, but it can't compare to life; life is priceless."

"Oh, but that's not true."

Glancing toward the man, the golden toad's lips curved upward, it lightly laughed as it addressed him,

"From what I understand of your species, life seems to be something that can indeed be measured with money, rather cheaply at that."

Seeing the massive creature look his way, the man instinctively wanted to flee, but the frog hand originating from the floor clutched his legs steadfastly. Unable to leave, he could only scream in terror.

"You're being so noisy."

With a webbed foot still sticky with transparent mucus, it lightly touched the mountain of gold in front of it. After pulling up a substantial amount of shiny Gold Wheels, the golden toad clenched its "palm" slightly, and the Gold Wheels stuck to its foot disappeared instantly, leaping over thirty meters to pile up before the man.

"Sell me your voice, then you can learn to be quieter."

With the golden toad's gentle voice, as if strangled in an instant, the man's screams and pleas abruptly ceased. Despite his horrified eyes bulging and desperate fingers clawing at his throat, he couldn't produce even the most basic "hoarse" sounds.

After promptly "buying out" the man's voice, the golden toad nodded in satisfaction as the plaza fell into silence. It then turned to gaze at the people nearest to it: a shivering young couple, softly inquiring,

"And you? Would you be willing to sell your lives to me?"

"N-no... no!"

The husband in the young couple was too frightened to speak, while the terrified wife restrained her urge to scream, clutching her husband's arm and desperately shaking her head as she refused,

"Our lives... we only have one each! If... if we sell it to you, then we'd be gone!"

"Is that so?"

Tilting its head regretfully, the golden toad mused in confusion,

"You claim you're unwilling to sell your lives to me, yet you've always been selling your lives."

"We... we haven't! We've never sold our lives!"

"Oh, but you have."

Extending its fingertip of the webbed foot, gently lifting up two Gold Wheels, the golden toad blinked its gigantic fly-like compound eyes and spoke in an uncompromising tone,

"For these two little sparkly things, you must work in the cotton mill for seven days, handling several tons of raw cotton. In the meantime, your husband has to wear non-breathable rubber boots, soaking for five whole days in a dye pool filled with chemicals and reagents.

So, I evaluate objectively, seven days of your life equal five of his, while five of his days equal those two Gold Wheels. Over the past four years, this exchange has persisted, and visibly, it will continue into the future.

So, instead of selling this precious life cheaply to others, trapped for decades in hot and noisy factories, painfully repeating labor that's utterly meaningless, why not choose a simpler path by selling this portion of life directly to me with joy?"

Having given the conclusion on evaluating life's worth, under the couple's fearful gaze, the golden toad began grabbing handful after handful of Gold Wheels in front and delivered each expensive golden currency to their feet.

As more Gold Wheels piled underfoot, the strands between the couple's hair gradually turned white, facial muscles swiftly sagged, and furrows deepened at the brows and corners of their eyes, transforming them into a vision of middle age, continuing to grow older.

More alarmingly, while the golden toad's address was aimed at the couple, they were far from alone in receiving the Gold Wheels underfoot. Throughout the entire shopping plaza, more than fifty thousand people's feet simultaneously witnessed a surge of Gold Wheels.

Accompanied by the clinking sound of metal currency colliding, everyone in the plaza who received "payment" began uncontrollably advancing into old age!