

Mystical 51

Chapter 51: The Beginning of Misfortune (1)

For almost 20 days, Garen practiced the White Cloud Combat Arts under Second Senior Brother Farak's supervision. Farak corrected all of the mistakes that might cause Garen injury before Farak could spend time on his own training.

Since Farak's supervised him in person, Garen could not use the two Attribute Points he had accumulated from all these training days. The abrupt enhancement of power would alert Farak and expose his special ability.

Boom! Boom!

In a bright training room, two arm-sized dark iron sticks were mercilessly hitting Garen's back and chest as beads of sweat splashed all over the cement floor.

The two strong students wielding the sticks were panting and had no strength left to continue striking.

"Okay, thank you. Get some rest."

Garen stood up straight, relaxing the muscles of his upper body.

"Yes, Brother Garen," said the two students, as if they were just absolved of a severe punishment. They put away the iron sticks and left the room hastily.

Standing alone in the center of the room, Garen felt the bright sunlight shining through the window and onto his naked upper body, reflecting the glossy sweat.

Whoo...

Garen let out a long exhale as his muscle gradually relaxed.

It was lively outside as the indistinct sounds of an accordion drifted from the street, along with loud roars.

Garen glanced at the window.

"Looks like the government holding a celebration for completing the central sculpture. It's surprising that it lasted so many days."

Garen paced to the window and looked down.

A group of kids with red shirts, black hats, and small black-and-white striped Federation flags were passing by the dojo in lines. They were looking around aimlessly, and the lines were a mess, but with their cute faces and young skin, they had attracted a lot of people on the street. There were also parents and relatives following them, cheering them on. The scene was chaotic, yet rhythmic.

There were several long tables placed by the streets, covered with white tablecloths. People were busy setting out fruit plates and cakes on them, but some, including a group of beautiful girls, had already sat down and start tasting. The two students who helped Garen practice were also there, smiling and chit-chatting with two girls.

Garen couldn't help laughing.

"No wonder they were so reluctant."

"Of course they were. You couldn't possibly forget which holiday it is today?" Third Senior Brother Joshua spoke from behind.

Garen turned around and found that Joshua had shaved all the white hair from his head. Now his head was covered with bandages and he was wearing a white suit, which presented a weird scene, since he looked like a monk in a tuxedo.

"What holiday? Isn't for the completion of the central sculpture?" asked Garen puzzled.

"It's the Carnival! The Carnival!" said Joshua speechlessly while rubbing his bald head. "Have you practiced too much and lost your mind? Hiding indoors to train on your own on Carnival day? This is a once a year event."

"1230"

"Carnival..." Garen suddenly understood and said, "Every December 30th, I almost forgot..."

He pulled his jacket from the hanger and put it on slowly, covering his powerful muscles.

"Brother, how do you have time to come back to the dojo? Shouldn't you enjoy yourself during the holidays?"

"If only First Senior Sister didn't beat me into pieces, then you wouldn't even have the chance to tell me to enjoy myself," said Joshua sourly. "Okay, okay, hurry up. You must have someone you want to see, right?"

"Yeah..." Garen smiled, dressed himself up, and grabbed his key from the shelves. "So excuse me for leaving first. Thank you, brother, for reminding me or I would have missed something really important."

"That's more like it! Bring me something nice to eat when you come back," said Joshua, waving his hand.

Garen stepped out of the training room. He washed off the sweat from his face with tap water and left.

A noisy and sweltering turbulence blew directly on his face as soon as he stepped outside. Everyone was crowded on both sides of the street while watching the slowly marching parade. A circus troupe passed by as pigeons burst out from magic tricks and soared up into the sky.

Garen followed the street and went toward Pennington Street. He made a few turns, bought some tarts and two glasses of tomato juice, then he headed to the Dolphin Antiques store.

It was noon and the store door was open. Old Man Gregor sat on a wooden stool by the door, smiling and staring at some young girls passing by.

They were dressed in refreshing short red skirts and white stockings. From time to time, while holding up their fluffy pom-poms, these girls shouted out the slogan:

"Aria School! Forever the best!"

They were only around 16 years old and passed by the antiques store in a very neat queue, shining with youthful vitality.

Garen looked at the Old Man on the other side of the street across from the girls. He smiled and held up his food to him.

Garen really stood out with his tall figure, handsome face, dark-purple short hair, and maroon eyes. He had not stopped exercising and was becoming more robust. Like a heating furnace, his Spirit outshined others. Some girls flirted with him, showing great interest.

"Hello, handsome!"

A blonde left the queue and nudged Garen a bit. She had her dark blue eyes on him and looked coy. She flicked a note to Garen without anyone noticing and Garen caught it.

"You are beautiful, but..." said Garen. He pinched the note in his fingers, shrugged and shook his head.

Disappointment flashed in the blonde's eyes.

The girls moved away and shouts of slogans would sound out occasionally. It was so packed that Garen had to push through the crowd as he went directly to the antiques store.

"How are you, Old Man? I mean for the Carnival," asked Garen. He sat down on the stairs beside Old Man Gregor, disregarding the dirt. He passed the tomato juice and tarts to him.

"Same-old, same-old. Ain't the girls from Aria School beautiful? You feel tempted? I saw someone gave you a note just now!" said Old Man Gregor with an obscene laugh.

"Such an old age, yet still a pervert," said Garen speechlessly.

"Mom!" A little boy ran past Garen and lost his balance. He fell over in front of Garen.

Garen lifted the boy up. The boy didn't even shed a tear and continued to rush forward to a beautiful woman's embrace. The woman gave Garen a gentle smile to thank him and left with the boy.

"My grandson should be that age if he were still alive..."

Garen could hear the sorrow in the Old Man's words. He did not reply and simply sipped on his tomato juice. He stared at the lively street, waiting for the Old Man to continue.

"It was my fault for getting my son and daughter involved. How regrettable..." Gregor sipped his juice and murmured, "It's a pity... but there is no medicine for regret in this world..."

"Is there even any sense in regretting?" asked Garen lightly. "Looking back, the only point is to learn from your lessons and grow up."

"You are still young. You don't understand," said the Old Man with a smile. He exhaled deeply and said, "When memories of the past occupy half of your life, you will know."

"Maybe." Garen didn't pursue the topic further. His face showed no expression.

"Garen, lad," said the Old Man who suddenly became formal, "Have you been curious why I would open an antique store here?"

"Curious? Why would I be curious? Isn't it nice living and ordinary life like that?" Garen gave the Old Man an odd look. "Right, do we continue our lessons today?"

"Of course, learning is something you must stick to every day. No breaks," said the Old Man who eventually collected his thoughts and stood up. "Come on in. Today is the Carnival, so I have a special treat for you."

Mystified, Garen followed him into the Antique store. The Old Man closed the front door. Light came in through the small window above the door and illuminated the room.

Gregor carried two thick books from the back room and sat at the desk. Pointing at the books and he said, "These two are the textbooks that I will spend most of the time to guiding you through. You can go through them yourself now. There are hardly any errors in them, I'm sure. I proofread them myself very carefully so don't worry."

"Thanks." Garen randomly picked one book on the side. The pages were full of red marks and notes, which covered the entire 2,000-page book.

He switched to the next one. It was the same.

"I annotated those two books a long time ago. All errors have been corrected. I meant to prepare it for my grandson. Well, who would have known that you'd get to use it first?" said the Old Man.

Garen smiled. He knew that the Old Man prepared these books specifically for him since the notes were still new. Old Man Gregor only told him that the textbooks were prepared for someone else out of the fear of pushing Garen too much.. Previously, Garen unintentionally mentioned that he wished to have more systematic textbooks. To his astonishment, Gregor actually took out two heavy dictionaries.

Garen was honestly touched seeing all those densely marked pages. God knew how long it took for the Old Man to complete everything.

"So these two books are all the rudiments I need to know?" he asked as he closed the book.

"More or less. The next step is to learn appraisal by hand. To enhance your level, you must feel the object in your hands. Plus, you have to know every detail and the history of all kinds of objects," said the Old Man, who took out a pair of glasses and started polishing.

Garen nodded. He moved a stool to the Old Man's side and sat on it with his back straight.

"Where do we start today?"

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"Regarding theory, you've mostly understood the basics. You will become an appraiser after understanding these two books and experiencing some practical application. Your mission for today is to start reading these two books. You can even take them back with you if you want. The things that I've told you are all in these books. You can come find me again if you have any more questions," the Old Man replied calmly.

Garen nodded, flipped open the first page, and began reading the book attentively.

Two hours went by without a notice. Garen let out a long and deep breath, remembering the page number he had last read before closing the book.

"Old man, it's already 3 o'clock. I need to go back and celebrate the holiday with my family."

"Take the books with you. I will be meeting some of my old friends soon anyway. It'll be better if you're not around then." The Old Man's eyes never left the book he was reading. He waved at Garen impatiently, as if wanting him to be gone at once.

Garen grinned and picked up the two books.

"Then I'm heading out now. I'll be back tomorrow."

"Mmm, hurry up! Seeing you taking your time annoys me." The Old Man didn't even bother to look up.
"Remember to write down the questions you want to ask on a paper."

"Got it."

Garen walked out of the shop playfully swinging the books. He turned his head to look at the old man before letting out a smile.

"Stubborn Old Man, I know you're celebrating the holiday alone. If you truly have friends, they sure took their time visiting you."

The streets were filled with flowers and paper confetti. There was also some dove feathers and smashed cupcakes lying around.

Garen had not even gone far before noticing Grace standing with a stern look beside a car near the entrance of Pennington Street. She seemed to be waiting for him.

Garen hurried himself over.

"Did something happen?"

"Dale Quicksilver is here. He wants my company to help him identify something!" Grace whispered,
"Let's talk in the car."

Garen frowned. He was a bit startled when he heard that Dale Quicksilver was looking for Grace.

The two of them sat side by side in the front seats. They cranked the windows closed to dampen the sound of the marching band passing by.

Grace took a photo from her purse and passed it to Garen.

"Dale Quicksilver approached us out of nowhere this morning. He took this along with him and asked me to identify it."

Garen received the photo from Grace. He was clearly shaken by what he saw.

The photo showed the Bronze Cross Emblem he left at the Silversilk Castle.

"Is this..." He observed the emblem in the photo carefully. The black and white photo was shot at a very close distance. Everything was shown very distinctly.

"Hasn't Dale Quicksilver investigated the Silversilk Castle incident thoroughly? Doesn't he know where this emblem came from?" Garen asked softly.

"Of course he knows! What he wants to know has nothing to do with the information about the Silversilk Castle." The look on Grace's face was exceptionally serious. "He wants to know the origins of the emblem – from before the Silversilk Castle incident!"

"Before!?" Garen felt goosebumps recalling the strange events he encountered during his time at the castle. He almost broke both of his arms back then and he had tried to forget about fleeing with his tail between his legs.

"Looks like they're facing the same problem as us..." He glanced out of the car window at the marching band. He spotted a kid wearing fake armor and dancing delightfully with a balloon and a badminton racket in each hand.

Garen closed his eyes. His eyes reflected with a bit more seriousness when he reopened them.

"So where is our 'Detective' now?"

"At our company."

"Let's go and find him then," Garen replied heavy-heartedly. "If it is as predicted, we could even lend a hand to our detective to know more about what happened to me last time at the castle..." he murmured, looking out the window.

He had a hunch that everything started at the Silversilk Castle.

"Ok," Grace replied as she started her car and drove slowly toward the crowd.

The scene shifted to a small room in a motel.

"Hahaha... Mr. Quicksilver, it's been a while." Garen gave Dale Quicksilver a big hug with a big smile on his face.

"Indeed it has been a while." Quicksilver had happiness shown all over his face. "Did that Golden Hoop guy bring you any trouble, Mr. Kelly? I had asked some of my men to find you after the incident but to no avail. After all that effort, I can't believe that you are here, standing in front of me. Such fate we have."

The detective still carried a smoking pipe with him, along with his black coat.

Standing beside Dale was a beautiful lady in a white gown with a feather hat. Her arms crossed delicately at her waist, showing off her elegance.

"This is?"

"This is my wife, Marianne," Quicksilver introduced.

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Quicksilver," Garen nodded while smiling.

"Oh please, Mr. Kelly, you're being too formal," Marianne answered sheepishly.

All three of them sat on the couches, facing each other.

Garen then took out the photo showing the Bronze Cross Emblem.

"Mr. Quicksilver, I'm actually a professional appraiser from the Manuyllton Corporation. When I heard that you wished for this item to be identified, I immediately took this matter into my own hands. Time went by so quickly my friend and it has been two months since the last time we met. "

"Indeed my friend. Such a coincidence, I admit I did not expect that you were working for the Manuyllton Corporation.." Dale smiled before continuing, "Do you by any chance know where this thing came from?"

Garen frowned after hearing this. He sat silently, looking as if he was recalling something.

Regardless, the couple was not in a rush. They sat there quietly, waiting for Garen to speak.

Garen only let out a word after a few minutes of silence.

"Truthfully speaking, I'm afraid that this emblem is an ancient artifact left by a kingdom from 1,000 years ago."

"1,000 year artifact?!" The couple jolted from what they had heard.

"Indeed. 1,000 years ago, there was an ancient kingdom called Natama, located where our federal state is now. There's very little information left regarding this kingdom. Thus, I based my judgement on the characteristics of this emblem. As for the origins... I'm afraid that I cannot help you with that."

Garen let out a sigh. The information given was not from Garen, but from real appraisers from the Manuyllton Corporation. He was just pretending like he knew the details.

"If that's the case then..." The couple exchanged eye contact, both looking worried.

"But..." Hesitation could be heard from Garen's tone. "I'm not sure if I should tell you this."

Dale's eyes sparkled with hope, so he immediately asked, "Mr. Kelly please do not hold back on us. We've been through so much together that there's nothing that you should hide."

Garen glanced at him and saw the determination from his eyes. He showed a face of determination in return.

"If that's so, regardless of whether you guys believe me, I will be telling you two about the other data that we collected."

He hesitated before continuing, "No, it is not categorized as a 'data,' but more of a hunch that I have." He eyed them before saying, "I think that this emblem is a cursed antique."

"A cursed antique!?" Dale Quicksilver staggered. He regained his posture before mumbling, "I should've known! I should've known..."

Mrs Quicksilver was still seated at the side. Sweat could be seen dripping down from her forehead. She was worried about her husband's reaction.

"Indeed, this is an antique that brings misfortune." There was some firmness in Garen's tone. "I have a natural talent for recognizing antiques that are cursed and I'm confident in identifying anything that falls into this category. However... would you mind letting me have a look at the emblem? Before I even came back to the company, the other appraisers had already returned the emblem to you two. I didn't have the chance to examine it for myself."

"This won't be a problem." Dale took out a small black box from his coat, clearly worried.

Garen received the box and immediately opened it. What rested inside was a burgundy emblem surrounded by black swan feathers. The exact same emblem he had left at the Silversilk Castle.

Garen placed the box carefully on the coffee table, cautiously picking up the emblem.

His expression immediately changed the moment the emblem fell into his hands.

Without a doubt, the Potential residing inside the emblem had grown since the last time he made contact with it. A cold piercing sensation slowly seeped from the emblem into Garen's body. With the emblem in his hands, it felt as if he was holding ice itself. This emblem definitely had at least a fraction of the Black Jade Disk's Potential residing in it. Judging by what he felt now, this power had grown at least twofold.

"Could it be?!" Garen seem to remember a possibility. He raised his head and look at Dale Quicksilver, who sat across from him. "Mr. Quicksilver, you have to answer me this. Did anyone meet any accidents before you two got a hold of this emblem!?"

"How did you know?!" Dale's eyes opened wide. He stood up, breathing heavily.

"Please! Stay calm!" Mrs. Quicksilver ran over to comfort her husband, trying her best to make him sit back down. "Please listen to what Mr. Kelly has to say."

Huff...

Dale Quicksilver let out a long breath.

"I apologize for my rudeness Mr. Kelly."

"It's alright. Please, call me Kelly. We are friends, right?" Garen nodded.

"Sure, Kelly. Would you mind telling me how you knew that there were people involved in accidents with this object?" Though Dale Quicksilver sat down, he did not break eye contact with Garen. "This is very important to me!"

"Did someone close to you have an accident?" Garen did not wait for him to answer before continuing, "I apologize, this is also one of my natural talents. I can properly identify the status of these cursed antiques. It may be related to the fact that I'm fascinated by items like this. It's an instinct, an indescribable one."

"Instinct? Good, your instincts are indeed very accurate. Aside from this fascination, I think you were born to become an expert in identifying cursed antiques. Right now I need your help." Dale Quicksilver spoke in a serious tone, "Do you know how to break the curse from this emblem? My friend, the White Eagle's son is in danger!"

"In danger?! What happened?!" Garen asked worriedly.

He owed Dale Quicksilver a debt due to the case involving the Black Jade Disk, but Garen thought he had repaid Dale last time after the rescue. Though he was not particularly fond of Quicksilver's daughter, Garen still held respect for Dale. Regardless, the Black Jade Disk had helped him through a lot. He still felt that he was progressing from time to time.

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Dale Quicksilver picked up the coffee on the table and had a sip to calm his nerves before speaking.

"Since the Golden Hoop incident, things have been happening consecutively. Silvica, my old friend the White Eagle's son, unexpectedly received this emblem by chance. He subsequently got himself into trouble during his time at the Silversilk Castle."

"What happened?" Garen asked.

"He fell from the top of the castle." Dale took a breath in and continued, "Fortunately, there was stuff below him that helped to disperse the impact. But after the incident, he fell into a coma and we don't know which region of his brain was injured."

Lady Marianne continued from where her husband had stopped and said, "What's strange is that the doctor performed a full body examination on Silvica and found no damage to his brain. Yet, he still lies unconscious in a hospital bed." She also had a worried look on her face. "If it is possible, we will be glad if Mr. Kelly can lend us a hand."

Garen frowned, looking at Dale Quicksilver and Lady Marianne. It was obvious that both of them thought of Garen as someone who had extraordinary ability. No doubt they hoped that his "ability" could help him resolve Silvica's situation.

"I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint you..." Garen had all of his fingers crossed, with a weary look on his face. "I gave a judgment on the cursed antique based on my hunch. It's not like what you guys have in mind... I'm just a normal person with a natural born talent... but still a normal person."

"But... What about Silvica..."

"Stop mentioning it, Marianne."

Dale Quicksilver prevented his wife from finishing her sentence. "I can very clearly see that Kelly can't help us in any way. He isn't lying."

The detective scowled, then slowly returned to being calm and logical.

"From the looks of things, we still need to know about the origins of this emblem. I have stayed at the Silversilk Castle for so long, yet nothing has ever happened to me. Why did Silvica encounter danger so quickly?"

"Indeed, this matter needs to be analyzed thoroughly," Garen nodded in agreement. "How about this? I'm quite free during this time of the month, so maybe I can check things out with you guys and give you a heads up if I find anything relevant to the cursed antique."

"I've always thought curses were a myth, but after witnessing how you deduced the situation so accurately, maybe there are some secrets hidden inside this emblem. Screw it!" Dale Quicksilver stood

up. "If this cursed antique is really useful and if it's the root of Silvica's condition, then we have to take this emblem and experiment on our own to fully understand the situation."

"Please, let me be the one to do it."

A male voice came through the window. A white shadow came into the light and a man with a white coat and blonde hair can be seen from the half-open window. He took a seat on a corner of the couch.

"I'm sure the Golden Hoops are the ones behind my son's situation! Curses are just some folklore made to frighten kids. This world is full of people trying to deceive others by making up myths and fairytales."

Garen raised his head and discovered that this guy was the one that showed up beside the kids that night. He still remembered being criticized by this guy for being too violent and that his martial arts swayed onto the demonic path.

"This is....?"

"He is the White Eagle, who is also my best friend," Dale Quicksilver introduced him while standing up. In the meantime he reintroduced Garen to his friend, but this time as Kelly.

The White Eagle used his sharp vision to scan Garen and nodded, "I'm afraid we might need to depend on you this time." He did not recognize Garen as the look-alike disciple of the Behemoth Gate from that night.

"It's no big deal. I have endured hardships with Dale before and it is only right if friends help each other out. Plus, this incident involves the cursed antique, which pretty much suits my interests." Garen dismissed the formality and said, "Okay, let's not waste any time. When are we going to the castle?"

"How about tomorrow? We gather here at Manuyllton Corporation in the morning and then head off to the Silversilk Castle," Dale suggested.

"No problem."

"Sure."

"Then it's settled." Dale then reached for the emblem on the table. "I got this emblem from Silvica's body. I thought that it was suspicious, so I brought it here to be identified. Who would've known that things would turn out like this?"

"My friend, don't worry too much. Everything will be alright." Garen let out a sigh, while one of his hands patted Dale's shoulder. There were two reasons why Garen was being so nice to them: one, he sincerely wanted to repay Dale Quicksilver's kindness and two, he was genuinely interested in knowing the secrets hidden inside the cursed antiques – especially after being affected by it at the Silversilk Castle.

"If there's nothing else, then I need to go back home to celebrate the holiday with my family." Garen stood up. "Please excuse me."

"Please."

"Please do."

The Quicksilvers immediately stood up formally.

"Please make yourself at home you three. I'll be going now." Garen turned and left the room. The moment before the door fully closed, his eyes were focused on the White Eagle. He couldn't help but have a weary look on his face.

"That guy stayed hidden outside the window throughout the conversation and I didn't even manage to notice him. This guy is definitely not an average joe..."

Grace awaited him at the door and they both headed downstairs.

"This here is one of the divisions that I'm in charge of. Basically, everything here is at my disposal. The results regarding the situation you want us to check on are already here."

She handed Garen a copy of the results.

Garen looked at the results and was thrown deeper into confusion.

"No obvious scars, the first judgment is a cardiac arrest?"

"Yes, it is possible that it's related to poisoning. In a manner of speaking, the suspect has already taken action and, judging by the looks of things, he is very determined this time around. I can't believe he will strike at this crucial moment, but I'm afraid I cannot assist you this time," Grace said disappointedly.

"It's alright. I will investigate this matter with the help of the detective and his friend. It helps that this is according to what we initially intended," Garen replied, winking.

Grace had no idea what his initial intention was, but she nodded along. "Any preparation needed?"

"If it is possible, please prepare me a gun." Garen grinned.

Garen reached his home before dawn and spent his evening celebrating the festival with his family. They only had a simple meal and some conversation about each other's recent situations. He went to bed after washing up. The next morning, he went to the Manuyllton Corporation's division after applying his makeup. Surprisingly, Dale Quicksilver and the White Eagle were already there waiting for him.

"You guys are early. Are we driving there?"

Dale stood beside the White Eagle in front of the building. Marianne and Dale's pretty assistant were nowhere to be found. Parked beside them was a black sedan with two car lights as big as goldfish eyes – dead goldfish eyes to be exact.

"I'm driving straight to the Silversilk Castle. Is everything prepared?" Dale Quicksilver opened the door and sat inside.

The White Eagle and Garen followed suit.

After the doors were closed, the White Eagle took out some cigarettes from his pocket and handed one to Garen.

"Thanks, but I don't smoke."

"Mr. Kelly, I'm sorry we have to drag you out this time." The White Eagle lit his cigarette and took a puff from it. He lets out the white smoke before continuing, "Regardless of this case being solved or not, I owe you one."

"You're Dale's friend, which makes you my friend as well. There's no need for such formality between friends. Plus, I volunteered to do this myself." Garren grinned. "I can see that you're a righteous man and worthy of being a friend."

"Likewise." The White Eagle smiled in return.

The car engine slowly warmed up, then they drove onto the streets into traffic.

After 10 minutes or so, the car slowly drove out of Huaishan City onto a mountain road. The car sped through the withered grass and through the wilderness.

Inside the car, Garen toyed with his black revolver. Flipping it from front to back and then from left to right, as if he wanted to try it out soon.

"Kelly is this the first time you've handled a gun?" Dale noticed Garen's actions from the reflection of the rearview mirror.

"Yes, there's practically no use for guns within the city, but since we are going out in the open, Grace gave me one for protection purposes." Garen seemed to be fond of his mini revolver. In this world, a revolver can only hold up to six bullets at a time and after a bullet was shot, it reloaded automatically. It can be regarded as a semi-automatic.

"We should spend some time at the shooting range when we're free." The White Eagle chewed on the remains of his cigarette and suggested half-heartedly. He took out a white revolver from his waist. "For now, let's take care of those filthy pests behind us."

Before he even finished his sentence, he forced open the door and jumped out.

Bam Bam!

Two consecutive shots were fired, then the sound of a car skidding as it suddenly braked was heard.

Screech....

Dale Quicksilver instinctively stopped the car. He immediately got out from the car.

Garen, not wanting to be seen as a weakling, also pointed his gun behind him. From the car window, he saw the White Eagle had gunned down one tough henchman, rolled forward, and executed two other henchmen who were hiding behind.

There were two additional black cars following behind the first car. Six other henchmen came out from their cars and four of them were instantly shot dead by the White Eagle. The remaining two tried to escape by driving off with one of the cars at the back.

The White Eagle smirked and fired two more shots from his gun.

Boom!

The car exploded while trying to make a turn and burst into flames. The smell of petrol mixed with burning rubber wafted over the air.

The battle was over before Garen even exited the car.

"Such rapid movement, such precise aiming!" Garen could not help but be impressed by the White Eagle's killing efficiency.

Their three faces were red from the glow of the burning flames.

Dale Quicksilver bent over to examine the corpses.

"They're from the Golden Hoop."

"Filthy pests!" White Eagle spat and swung his white coat to shake off the dirt he picked up from his actions earlier. He noticed Garen getting out of the car and was impressed by how Garen handled the situation calmly.

"Looks like Mr. Kelly has been through situations like this. I've heard that you took care of the man from the Golden Hoop last time right? Care to spar with me some time?"

"I can't compete against professionals like you! I'm just interested in ancient antiques and I'm sure you understand we can't be in this field if we can't adapt," Garen shrugged bitterly.

"True. Okay gentlemen, let's head back to the car. Leave the killing for professionals like me." White Eagle kicked away the corpse at his feet and turned toward the car.

The other two followed.

Igniting the car, the three of them drove faster to make up for lost time.

Nobody said anything inside the car.

Garen snuck a peek at the White Eagle. The White Eagle may look like a relaxed person, but he was actually always on high alert. Rumor was that he had certainly learned a lesson after they were injured by the explosive trap set by the Golden Hoops. Since then, he did not let his guard down like he used to.

Dale Quicksilver was focused on driving. From his eyes, it could be seen that he was thinking of something.

"Since White Eagle is always on high alert, I might as well take a nap."

Garen decided to rest in his seat. He then slowly drifted away into slumber.

Chapter 54: Companion (2)

After what felt like an eternity, the car slowly came to a halt.

"We are here." Dale Quicksilver's voice transmitted from not too far away.

Garen slowly opened his eyes as his gaze extended beyond the car window. On a simple yet beautiful hill, Canoe Town's two story buildings hid among the mists and decorated the hill. A boy riding in a cow-drawn carriage curiously looked at the black car while passing by.

"Are we here?" Garen stretched.

"Yes, after a couple hours of driving we have arrived at Canoe Town. We still have some ragged distance before we reach the Silversilk Castle, but we can't get there by car." Dale Quicksilver exited the car and stared into the sky. "The weather doesn't look too pleasant, so we should make our way there as soon as possible."

Garen followed him out of the car and gazed at the gloomy gray clouds in the sky.

The wind was picking up in speed as a hint of rain flourished.

"It is noon, but the sky looks murky. I think heavy rain is inevitable today."

"Then let's get there before the rain." The White Eagle switched to the driver seat. "I'll go park the car. You guys go find a carriage."

"No problem."

Collectively, the three tasked with different duties managed to find a driver who was willing to go to the Silversilk Castle at twice the regular fare.

The carriage hit the road again. It took the group of three another two hours to finally reach the small hill they visited before.

They gazed at the distant Silversilk castle as they stood on the grassy, dark green hill.

The castle and its grounds were still shrouded by white ashes. . Some black charcoal was mixed in, which made it look like coffee mixed with baby formula.

The triangular castle was quiet, casting an uneasy silence. The sound of tree leaves rustling from the forest dispersed to the surroundings.

Roar...

The booming thunder spread from the dark, overcast sky. It rumbled from the distance, passed over them, , and finally resounded into the horizon.

"Oh... Is this the Silversilk Castle? It's got a pretty nice atmosphere." The White Eagle laughed sarcastically. However, his eyes rapidly scanned the area.

"We are going to live here for the next few days. The police department initially left two people to watch this place, but I told them to leave yesterday. The scene is the exact same as when Silvica was injured." With a serious face, Dale Quicksilver said, "Let's go. It's going to rain."

He took the first step to walk down the hill. The White Eagle followed.

Garen carefully examined the far left window on the second floor of the castle, where he had fallen after being pushed, then followed them.

The group of three tread on the dark green hill as if they were three small ants on a giant green carpet. They looked insignificant.

There was not another soul within the vast tract of grass and forest surrounding the castle. Only three figures approached the Silversilk Castle.

Kacha!

Blue lightning broke the sky as thunder roared.

The three of them sped up to the castle fence. They quickly came through the front gate.

Dale Quicksilver took out the key to open the door. The White Eagle was examining the surroundings with his eyebrows raised.

Garen gazed at the castle in front of him with a hint of gloom pervading in his mind.

Last time, he was pushed and fell out of the second floor window without a clue of what happened. He had not seen a figure when he turned around, but heard a chuckling noise. Now that he was in front of the castle again, the Silversilk Castle was masked by a layer of mystery.

"If possible, I want to go back to that room again." In the previous life, Garen was not a fearful person. Although goosebumps covered his skin and his head tingled, it made him even more excited.

[The more I feel afraid and frightened, the more it exposes the weakness in my heart. This world is much more entertaining than the previous one.] The thought crossed his mind.

Crack!

The door opened.

The three of them strolled past the door. Dale Quicksilver slowly closed the door behind him.

The hall was pitch black. Dale Quicksilver took a torch from the wall and lit it.

"Should we go separately or together?"

"Together. It would be problematic if we encounter the Golden Hoop." The White Eagle said with a stern face.

"True," Garen agreed.

"Then let's go the crime scene first. The place where Silvica found the emblem," Dale Quicksilver suggested.

Garen and The White Eagle didn't disagree. The three of them followed the curved stairs to the second floor.

Crisp footsteps echoed in the hollow, yet frightening, castle .

The three of them hastily entered the room where Garen was pushed.

With a squeak, the door was forced open. A layer of white dust fell from the doorframe.

"I thought Kelly settled here last time, but it looks like you didn't stay in this room." Dale Quicksilver smiled. "Why is it so dusty?"

He didn't walk into the room but squatted in front of the door.

The room looked run down.

The floor was covered with a thick layer of white dust. There was nothing in the room besides a giant bed, a box, and a chair.

In the middle of the dusty floor, there was a faint trail of footprints.

"Those are Silivca's footprints. It appears that he found the emblem on the bed or on the box and then for some strange reason decided to jump out of the window," Dale Quicksilver said in a deep voice. "I didn't let anyone touch the crime scene."

The White Eagle nodded as he also examined the placement within the room.

Only Garen felt a tingling sensation on his scalp and goosebumps the moment the door opened.

He vividly remembered that he had entered this room before. Everything in the room was arranged the exact same way as before.

Yet, there is no way there would be this much dust in the room after a period of just two months.

The key point was that Dale Quicksilver had rested on this bed before! They even changed the bed sheets for a brand new set.

Now, the bed looked like no one had used in years and was covered in dust and cobwebs. The bed sheets were a faded yellow color. "Dale, the last time you came with me, didn't you live in this room?"

Throat dry, Garen squatted down.

"How come?" Dale Quicksilver glanced at Garen with a puzzled look. "Only Silivica came in this room before. The dust on the floor is at least a few years old."

Garen remembered the last time he came into this room and a peculiar feeling that could no longer be suppressed overwhelmed him.

[Then, which room is the one that I came to last time?] Garen was no longer calm. [Could it be Dale that purposely fabricated this place?]

He carefully inspected the room as he looked from outside the door.

Everything was identical. The only difference was that the place was dustier and worn down.

"What should we do?" He lowered his voice but didn't tell them the story about last time.

"Tidy this place up again. We'll live in the two rooms beside it. I want to see how strange this Silversilk Castle is," Dale Quicksilver said with conviction.

"How should we organize the room?" The White Eagle looked at Garen. "Why don't we move a bed and all live in a room together. There is no way I can keep both of you safe at the same time otherwise."

Garen took a moment to think before he shook his head. "Don't worry about me. I'll sleep in a room by myself. You guys can share a room. The White Eagle can protect Dale. Don't forget I am not a powerless ordinary person." He showed a slight smile.

"Okay this works, I want to see the truth behind the Antique of Tragedy!" Dale Quicksilver nodded.

Kacha!

Another lightning bolt flashed across the sky. The bright light cast a pale white on their faces. The thunder continued to roar in the distance.

Splash...Splash!

Giant raindrops hit the windows of the castle and cascaded into a continuous wave of impacts.

"Who is it!!"

Dale Quicksilver's vision sudden focused as he immediately pulled out his pistol and aimed directly behind Garen. The two of them were facing each other and the pistol pointed toward the hallway behind Garen.

The White Eagle slightly frowned as he didn't feel anyone behind him. He, like Garen, was also facing Dale. He turned around and asked in a puzzled voice, "What happened? I didn't feel anyone behind me."

Garen also turned his head around to see an empty hall.

"No. I saw a black shadow flash down the hall. It was clearly spying on us," Dale said with a stern face.

"If it was because of the metal lamp on the right side of the hall, I would not be able to see the person's shadow."

"So you are saying you saw a person's movement through the lamp's reflection." The White Eagle pondered as he followed Dale's vision to the copper mounted lamp on the wall.

Strangely, the bottom of the lamp looked bright without any corrosion.

"Yes. Let's stay in a room together. It's probably safer this way," Dale said with his voice lowered.

"I don't mind," Garen nodded in agreement. He looked at the Bronze Cross Emblem around Dale's neck as caution flashed across his eyes.

"Perhaps they were from the Golden Hoop. Looks like we have to be cautious now to see what tricks are they up to!" the White Eagle said with a cold voice.

The three of them moved two individual beds into an adjacent room. They tidied the room up a little before it was habitable to sleep with clothes.

Garen knew that Dale Quicksilver and the White Eagle did not believe in the power of the Antiques of Tragedy. As long as someone else had control over the information, anything he said before could be impersonated and faked. They thought that the tragedies related to the Antiques of Tragedy were all caused by people.

Garen wasn't certain either, but the Silversilk castle was strange.

[This time it isn't me that carries that bronze cross emblem, but Dale. From another perspective, I want to see what will happen to the owner of the emblem!] When Garen moved to his bed, he secretly watched Dale Quicksilver.

Bang!

A dull thud reverberated through the door as if the wind had pushed the window against the window frame.

The three of them sat separately on a bed or a chair. They didn't make any noise as they listened silently.

The sound of raindrops rose as they smashed against the window. It felt like someone was pouring water profusely onto the window. The howling wind from the other parts of the castle wailed in the hallway as if ghosts were screaming within the mysterious Silversilk Castle.

Chapter 55: Rainy Night (1)

The White Eagle held out the pistol and slowly stood up against the wall. He gave the other two a signal.

The two of them immediately understood and stood up. They grabbed the guns from their waists and opened the safeties.

Kacha!

Another lightning flashed across the sky, and the light blinded the entire room.

The White Eagle pressed his ear against the wall. He was listening to something.

"Someone is outside." He lowered his voice. "There is more than one person!"

When his ear left the wall, mists of white dust dropped from the wall with a constant brushing sound.

"Who is there!" The White Eagle let out a deep roar as he rolled forward. Two bullet holes appeared from the wall he originally stood against. Someone had shot through the wall.

The White Eagle rushed to the door. He slammed the door open and dashed out.

Garen and Dale Quicksilver cautiously remained in the room without moving.

Garen held the gun in his hand and leaned beside the window while staring cautiously at the door. All of the sudden he felt his collar get pulled.

He turned around to discover the window was open. There was no one that could be seen outside. Rain continued to pour down, blurring the vision as close as a few meters away.

"What's going on Garen?"

"Someone was grabbing my collar," Garen said in a bewildered voice. "Maybe I am just too nervous and got my clothes caught."

Dale approached the window and peeked outside. "This is the second floor and high above the ground. The window probably caught it. Be careful and don't stand in front of the window. Even if you can't see anything in this weather, it's still dangerous."

"Got it," Garen responded.

Bang!

A gunshot rang in the adjacent room.

"Let's go!" Dale dashed out of the door, and Garen followed.

The two of them rushed to the adjacent room. It was the same room from which Garen had been pushed out. It was empty.

"White Eagle!" Dale yelled.

No response. Only the door behind him creaked.

He turned around only to discover that Kelly, who had followed him, had disappeared as well.

"Kelly?" He raised his voice. He tightened his grip on the pistol in his hand, and his expression tensed up.

"The White Eagle! Kelly! Are you guys here?"

The wind suddenly blew on the half-open door as it gradually opened.

Creak!

The noise was oddly disturbing in the quiet hallway among the sounds of rain. Outside the door was a pitch black emptiness, there was nothing visible there.

Dale felt his hand holding the pistol begin to tremble. He realized something was strange.

He scanned the room.

The room was abnormally clean. The spider webs on the bed were gone and replaced with a clean white bedsheet. Multidimensionally shaped tiles covered the floor without a trace of dust.

The box at the end of the wall was spotless as well.

"This place is strange." Gloom covered Dale's face as he deliberately opened the gun's safety.

Bang!

Garen followed. He saw Dale dash into the adjacent room. The wind pushed against the door and closed it for a moment before he opened it again.

"Hmm?"

The peculiar thing was that he couldn't see a trace of Dale who was just one step ahead of him.

"Dale!?" Garen slowly opened his safety and walked into the room.

The room was littered with dust. Water spilled on the floor in front of the window. Someone stood in front of it with his back turned.

Garen looked carefully. The person's clothes resembled the White Eagle's.

"Dale?" He questioned with his voice lowered.

Tatata.

He heard footsteps behind him.

Garen turned his head and saw the White Eagle run into the room.

"Where's Dale?" The White Eagle asked breathlessly. "Someone was in the room beside us. I didn't manage to catch them."

"Dale was beside the window?" Garen pointed at the window as he turned around. He was shocked to discover that the figure had disappeared. It was as if it had vanished into thin air.

"What happened? I just saw someone at the window!" he said in a deep voice.

"Could you have made a mistake?" The White Eagle walked over, frowning. He examined the floor by the window. "There are no footprints. There's no way that someone was standing there."

"That's impossible," Garen said firmly. "I am confident that someone did stand in front of the window. Oh right, where is Dale?"

"Isn't he with you?" The White Eagle asked with agitation.

"I just saw him rush into this room, then all of the sudden he vanished! My vision got blocked by the door for less than two seconds, and he was no longer here!" Garen said with seriousness.

Kacha!

Lightning painted their face pale white.

"This is going to be a problem." The White Eagle's face became sober. He took out a match to light up a torch he'd brought with him. The bright yellow light slowly lit up a small portion of the room.

All of the sudden, he thought of something. His expression changed as he leaped beside the window and looked down. The dark grass field was empty. He let out a sigh of relief.

"Dale only came in one step before me!"

"Are you certain?" The White Eagle's face was calm as the way he looked at Garen turned vicious.
"There is no way he could have left in such a short time."

"I'm certain!" Garen answered with conviction.

The White Eagle stared at him without blinking. He tightened the grip on his pistol when he remembered something. He slowly backed away from facing Garen. He retreated to the door and squatted down. The White Eagle used his empty hand and gently touched the ground. Suddenly, his body began to loosen up.

"You are right. There are three people's footprints! But one of the people disappeared as soon as he stepped into the room."

Garen felt a terrified feeling edge into his mind. He took a few steps to check. There were three sets of footprints with one set vanishing as soon as it entered the room. Due to the humidity, the other two sets were still visible.

Bang!

A sudden furious wind gusted into the room and slammed the door close. It almost hit Garen's nose.

"The wind is picking up its speed." The White Eagle stood up. "I am sorry I didn't trust you." He apologized as he pushed against the door, it didn't open.

"Not a big deal. The door must have locked itself, use the key to open," Garen suggested with a grave expression. He kept alert for any movement in the surroundings. "We need to find Dale now. He may be in dire danger right now."

"I got it!" The White Eagle nodded and his expression became grim. He took out a set of keys and examined the labels. He picked out one to insert into the lock.

Creak, creak.

The key turned a few times in the keyhole. The door didn't move. The White Eagle pushed again but couldn't move it in the slightest.

"Hmm?" The White Eagle paused. "This is not right!"

"Kick it open!" Garen also saw the problem.

The White Eagle agreed. He took a step back and kicked the door with full force.

Bang!

The door didn't even shake. Only a flurry of dust fell to the ground.

"There is something wrong with this room!" Garen stepped back to give his companion more space.

"Go grab the stuff. I'll kick open the door. We'll leave this place as soon as we find Dale!" The White Eagle yelled out, feeling the absurdity of this as well.

"Ok!"

Garen sprinted back to the room they'd stayed in before and packed everything together. Just as he was about to leave the door, another sound rocked the place.

Bang!

A gunshot was heard from the hallway. Then the sound of the door cracking followed.

Garen took their belongings and rushed out. The hallway was empty, and silence returned.

The room beside them was still locked without any signs of damage.

"Then how did I hear the noise?" His head felt numb as he was certain he'd heard gunshots and the sound of door breaking. But now even the White Eagle was gone.

"Could it be because of the emblem?" He caught a trace of the cause.

He stared at the closed door. He knew that if he didn't do anything, Dale could die in there.

"Although I have repaid your favor already, but..." He took out his pistol and aimed at the lock.

Bang Bang Bang!

Three gunshots and lock was destroyed.

He tackled the door with full force and opened it.

There was no one in the room, but the bed was moved out of its position. There was a flight of stairs leading to the first floor hidden on the ground.

Garen took a deep breath as he walked to the hidden exit and peaked down. From this angle it directly faced the first-floor ground. Dale Quicksilver lay there, motionless on the ground.

"Dale!" Without any consideration, Garen jumped down. He used a couple of rails to break his fall and landed firmly beside Dale.

"Dale! Are you okay?" He helped the detective up and checked if he was still breathing. He was.

The detective gradually opened his eyes, mumbling in drowsiness, "Below me, below me."

Garen noticed that there was a bronze cross emblem in the place where the detective had lain. It had a visible white scratch mark, most likely done by the detective himself.

Dale began regaining his consciousness. He sat up straight and gasped for air.

"That was dangerous! Just before, you guys disappeared all of a sudden! I managed to find an enormous secret in that room!"

"Don't worry about that now. The White Eagle is gone!" Garen said in a stern tone. "I just heard him break into the room, but when I got there, the door was completely fine!"

"The White Eagle is gone?" Dale looked rather calm. "Don't worry, he is stronger than both of us. If we are okay, then he should be all right too."

"What do we do now?" Garen helped Dale to get up. Both of them unanimously agreed not to pick up that emblem.

"No wonder The Antique of Tragedy is known by its name. I finally witnessed it today." Dale Quicksilver had a perplexed look as he gazed at the emblem.

He took out a gun and aimed up.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Three straight shots.

The gunshots sounded oddly unbearable. The noise even suppressed the sound of rain outside.

Quickly, a white shadow sprinted from the second-floor stairs and landed in front of them.

"Are you okay?" The White Eagle asked.

"I am okay!" Dale nodded. "I just saw the Golden Loops! They definitely have something to do with this!"

"Me too! I saw a figure jump from the window and pursued him," The White Eagle said solemnly, "but unfortunately I didn't manage to catch him. Follow me."

The White Eagle took both of them out through the gate. They walked to the left side of the castle and into a small hut.

A dead body covered in black lay lifeless inside the hut. Blood dripped from its chest and rolled onto the grass field before being diluted by the pouring rain.

"Golden Loop Number 114."

The White Eagle threw the golden loop at Dale.

"Golden Loops' hundred numbered member. Of course they're the ones causing headaches!" He walked beside the body to examine it. He asked The White Eagle for some specific details before he starting to analyze based on logic and deduction.

Chapter 56: Rainy Night (2)

Garen was not listening to their analysis. He was standing slightly behind, alertly surveying his surroundings.

The two of them were talking at the front, while Garen was paying attention to the rear. Standing at the back, he could see the two of them through the rain—one of them was standing, while the other was squatting—in the pavilion. Their voices were carried to him intermittently by the wind. Garen lifted his head and looked toward the room that they had just come from.

He could actually faintly see a person standing at the window, but was unable to clearly see the person's face. The room was pitch black and even the contours of the figure could not be made out.

Garen was quietly looking at the figure.

"Let's go! I found the key to the problem!" Dale Quicksilver and White Eagle walked over and tapped Garen's shoulder, then headed towards the entrance of the castle.

Garen quickly followed after them, but when he looked up at the second floor window once more, the figure was gone.

The three of them walked into the lobby and reached the place where Dale Quicksilver had jumped down previously.

The detective squatted on the ground, inspecting something. Then he looked at the Bronze Cross Emblem that was still on the floor, as if he was calculating something.

After a while, he stood up again.

"Follow me."

Garen knew that Dale definitely found something. He followed the detective together with White Eagle and the three of them walked toward the back of a staircase on the first floor.

Dale examined the floor in the corner, then suddenly lifted up a black piece of floorboard, to reveal an underground entrance.

As the dark, rectangular entrance was uncovered, the thick smell of blood instantly gushed out.

The three exchanged looks as their expressions changed. Then White Eagle took out a matchstick and lit it.

Chi.

Under the dim light of the matchstick, the three finally saw the scene under the entrance.

The interior of this small cellar was filled almost to the brim with corpses.

The corpses were all wearing black clothes and golden earrings.

Even though they were mentally prepared, the three of them were still shocked by the amount of corpses and drew in breaths of cold air. For a while, they did not manage to recover from the shock.

Afterward, White Eagle was the first to react.

"They're all from the Golden Hoop! What's going on?" He carried out a corpse that was closest to the entrance. "I can't believe so many people died here! No.89, a two-digit from the Golden Hoop is not that easy to kill!"

Dale knitted his eyebrows and said, "I only accidentally found the clue. I didn't think that following it would give me a result like this. It looks like this castle may be more mysterious than we imagined..."

"He died within a day." White Eagle inspected the corpse and sullenly said, "What should we do now Dale?"

"There's still some things that I haven't understood! Let's get out of here first!" Dale Quicksilver looked around the surroundings, as if he was checking for the presence of enemies. "This place isn't safe any more, so we shouldn't stay here. We'll go back and contact the police department, then mobilize some men here."

"What about the emblem?" Garen jokingly said with a low voice. "Don't tell me that it grew legs and ran back to the room?" He forced himself to laugh due to the slightly heavy atmosphere.

However, when Dale Quicksilver heard his words, he became startled. He stood there absentmindedly, as if he thought of something.

"That's right!! The position of the emblem! I actually forgot about it! How did I not think of it just now!" he muttered to himself.

"You guys, follow me!" He suddenly turned around and started to run. As he ran, he looked at the carved reliefs on the walls.

Garen and White Eagle were baffled, but still followed after him. They moved from the back of the staircase to a room that was like a study.

Dale moved an empty bookcase aside and knocked on the floor. He soon found a ring and firmly pulled it.

A large wooden board was lifted up and the pitch black entrance underneath was revealed.

Dale took a lit matchstick from White Eagle and held it towards the entrance. There was a dark, metallic staircase connected to the entrance that extended all the way down.

Garen leaned over and looked in. The black metallic staircase extended downward into a very wide chamber.

Dale Quicksilver did not say anything further and just placed the wooden floorboard to one side, allowing the subterranean entrance to be permanently accessible. Then he tucked his shirt into his pants and went down the stairs.

White Eagle immediately followed after him, while Garen changed positions and looked down from the entrance.

The spiral staircase continued all the way down, extending to the bottomless darkness below. It was like a spiral funnel.

"We'll go down and take a look first. Please stand guard at the top. Fire your gun if something happens," Dale said softly after turning back.

Garen nodded. As he looked down at the anticlockwise spiral staircase that extended downwards to a bottomless depths, he felt slightly terrified deep in his heart.

The other two descended after lighting up a torch, yet the glow that it gave off seemed oddly weak on the spiral staircase.

Garen thought for a while, then picked up a rotting piece of wood from the bookcase. After weighing it in his hand, he threw it down the central gap of the spiral staircase.

The piece of wood rolled as it hurtled down, then, there was no sound at all.

The two that just went down—and had not yet gotten far—stopped. Dale found something, then lit it up and threw it down from the center as well.

The blazing red object rolled as it hurtled down, illuminating its surroundings as it fell.

They could only see section after section of stairs as the ball of light fell. The light from the fire became smaller and smaller and traveled further and further. It soon became a tiny dot and completely merged with the darkness. Then nothing could be seen.

Dale and White Eagle immediately turned around when they saw the result. They soon returned to the entrance and came out.

"From my estimation, this staircase is at least five hundred meters deep! It might even be deeper!" Dale Quicksilver sullenly said, "The secret of the Silversilk Castle might be inside here and this might be the final goal of the Golden Hoop."

Even though the two of them only went down for a short time, a thick moldy smell radiated from their body. They were shivering as well and their faces were slightly pale. Garen was only standing next to them, but was able to feel the cold air emanating from their bodies.

"Let's get someone to survey it tomorrow! I don't think the Golden Hoop would be able to properly explore it within such a short time," White Eagle suggested.

"By the way, I found this thing in my room earlier. Kelly, do you know what it is?" Dale Quicksilver passed over an exquisite ring with a black gem. The ring was silvery but there was some rust on it.

Garen received the ring and carefully inspected it.

"It's nothing. It's just an ordinary metallic ring, not an Antique of Tragedy. I am not sure what the black gem in the middle is, but it might be a black crystal." Garen had picked up a lot of antique and jewelry appraisal knowledge, so he was able to recognize most materials.

"It's something from 50 to 60 years ago," he added.

"Really? But I feel that this thing might have an important function..." Dale took back the ring and muttered to himself.

"One more thing," White Eagle suddenly said. "I found that guy from the Golden Hoop hanging on by a thread. The strange thing was that he actually accused us of killing a lot of their guys." He frowned and continued, "But we did not even encounter the people that he mentioned and what's going with the corpses in the cellar?"

"It looks like this castle isn't an ordinary place after all... I didn't think that there's actually someone—other than us—who could cause such a huge loss for the Golden Hoop..." Dale Quicksilver closed his eyes, as if he was thinking.

"Let's leave this place first. We need to carefully examine the information on this place..." he calmly said after opening his eyes.

"Even though I want the Golden Hoop to completely disappear, it doesn't feel good to be framed like this." White Eagle shrugged his shoulders.

"There's nothing we can do for now. We can't stay here tonight any more," Garen agreed with a nod.

The three of them returned the bookshelf to its original position and silently left the castle. They jogged in the direction of Canoe Town under the rain.

In the middle of the night, under the heavy rain, the three figure swiftly disappeared into the darkness.

The rain drops continued to intensively smash onto the surface of the castle, creating a pitter-patter sound as they collided.

After two hours, the night deepened and the rain subsided a little.

A human figure swiftly returned from the same direction the three of them had headed toward. It was Garen in a black outfit.

His eyes were calm as he changed his clothes and put on a black mask. He jogged back along the original route and circled around the right side of the castle. There was a french window missing its glass panes. Propped by his hand, he easily vaulted through the window.

He nimbly exited the room and walked to the lobby.

When he reached the lobby, he spotted a black figure standing at the staircase. The figure was faced away from him, looking in the direction of the cellar with the corpses.

Garen's expression went cold, but he could not prevent the sound of his footsteps.

"Who is it!"

The figure suddenly turned around and looked towards him.

Boom!

A flash of lightning illuminated the earring on her left ear. A large number ten was displayed on it.

Garen's gaze went cold and he slowly approached.

"Since you're someone from the Golden Hoop, hand that thing over and I can let you leave here alive," he said with a hoarse tone after deliberately altering his voice.

The figure who turned around was a tall woman with faint purple eyes and her hair tied into a high ponytail. With a frigid expression and tight black clothing, she gave off a cold and pure aura.

"You'll let me leave here alive? Ridiculous." The woman icily said, "Are you here for that thing as well?"

"What do you think?" Garen laughed bitterly as his right arm suddenly swung to his back.

Bang!!

A man in black behind Garen was sent flying. After hitting the ground, the man rolled a few times before crashing into the wall, then ceased moving.

"I already said, hand that thing over and I can let you leave here alive." He did not even look at the attacker behind him and slowly walked towards the purple-eyed woman. The closer he got to her, the more he could feel the aura of potential exuding from her.

The purple-eyed woman sneered.

"Very well, you are qualified to make me fight you."

She slightly bent over.

Ssss...

A long hiss of breathing slowly sounded out. The woman raised her hands and grabbed her own collar.

With a tearing sound, her upper clothing was completely torn off and revealed her fair, naked skin.

"I will sacrifice your head to my dead brother...!"

The woman did not mind in the slightest that her naked chest was completely exposed. Her purple eyes faintly became deeper and her hands were clenched together with one above the other—as if she was holding something at her chest—while an oval space was left between them.

"Polaris... Fierce Arts!!!"

The woman suddenly breathed in once more, then her body rapidly inflated and thick muscles—covered with blue veins—appeared all over her body.

Her breathing sounded like a large airbag swallowing and spitting out air.

Within mere seconds, the cold, slim woman transformed into a muscular warrior who was as large as Garen.

The muscles throughout her entire body were twisted together, like steel ropes bouncing under her skin. A gigantic airstream slowly expanded from her body as a torrent of scorching air heated up the surroundings.

"Is that a Secret Martial Art?" Garen's eyes became more focused. The muscles of his body slowly tightened.

Huff...

He took a deep breath and slowly assumed the starting pose of the Mammoth Secret Technique.

No matter how he saw it, he needed to go through a hard fight in order to obtain this new, accidentally discovered Antique of Tragedy.

Chapter 57: Fight (1)

The woman's eyes were a deep purple, as if a purple liquid was about to seep out of them.

Bang!

The ground slightly shook as she stepped forward and charged towards Garen, like an arrow shot from a bow. If seen from above, a straight line was gouged into the floor of the lobby.

Both of their arms connected with each other as their fists and palms collided, sprinkling tiny drops of sweat onto the ground.

Bang!

Garen maintained his blocking pose and was forcefully pushed a few meters back, almost touching the wall.

Without a word, the woman swung both of her fists forward once more. A series of fierce impacts sounded out. Both of them did not shift positions and exchanged blows while standing in the same spot. The huge force caused the surrounding windows in the lobby to slowly begin to shake and even the sound of the rain was gradually overwhelmed.

Every time their fists collided, both of their bodies slightly trembled and the faint sound of bones cracking could be heard.

"Break!!"

As the woman shouted, a burst of warm air gushed out of her nostrils and her right fist instantly disappeared.

Garen could not react in time and her fist reappeared directly in front of his chest. With a loud boom, his chest visibly caved in as he flew backwards and crashed into the wall.

The walls of the lobby abruptly shook and huge amounts of fine dust fell onto both of them.

The woman sneered.

"You're not bad considering the fact that you were able to face me head on for this long while I used my Polaris Fierce Arts."

With a loud click, the chandelier from the ceiling suddenly fell straight down onto her head. This black chandelier was over a hundred pounds, was entirely made of metal, and the ceiling was over ten meters tall. It would easily kill a grown man if it landed on him.

The woman looked up toward the chandelier and swung her right fist at it. With a loud bang, it broke in two and smashed into opposite walls.

She shook out her right hand, though her skin was not damaged in the slightest.

Garen took the opportunity to stand up and stabilize his body. He sullenly looked at the woman, desperately thinking of a solution.

[I only discovered the Antique of Tragedy when the cellar with the corpses was opened. I didn't think that they would be looking for that thing as well. This lady is quite strong...]

[However, when it comes to the Antique of Tragedy, the more the merrier. Now that I finally came across one, I can't let it go. Even though she is strong, my Explosive Fist Arts isn't weak either!]

He felt his chest was still slightly painful. He took a deep breath and stabilized his body.

[White Cloud Secret Art!] he shouted in his mind.

All of the muscles in his body slowly expanded, as if a human shaped balloon was slowly inflated, and he grew from 1.7 meters tall to 1.9 meters. His head seemed a lot smaller compared to his current body.

"It looks like I've underestimated you." He calmly walked back to his original position, facing the woman. The distance between them was only a few meters. "However, I think you're mistaken. I wasn't the one who killed your men."

"You're not the one who killed them?" the woman sneered. "In a rural place like this, are you telling me that there's another Martial Adept hanging around?" Her eyes were constantly scanning Garen's body. As a martial artist who had reached the human limit, her insight had naturally reached the corresponding level. She could easily tell that the man in front of her had already reached the human limit as well.

"I don't care where you're from. Since you've messed with the Golden Hoop, you shall experience our endless vengeance!"

Before she even finished speaking, the woman roared and suddenly charged forward. She moved silently like a gigantic white python, drawing out a fine arc.

Her fists were like the top and bottom fangs of a python—opening and closing—constantly changing their position as they bit down toward Garen.

"Python Stab!!"

As her fists overlapped, a faintly audible sound due to the air resistance could be heard.

This was her true killer move: her fists appeared to be the attack, but the true attack was from the metal blades hidden in the soles of her shoes. Even though it was obvious that her opponent was an expert at the Body Hardening Technique, her legs had slaughtered a countless amount of such experts. As long as this attack connected, even the hardest muscles and bones would be pierced through.

She had previously used this move to puncture through a wooden board that was thicker than her fingers.

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[I will kill you with one move!] She focused most of her energy into the tips of her toes. Silently, a silvery-white object slowly emerged from the bottom of her shoes.

Garen sullenly looked at the female figure charging towards him. It was not that fast, but the immense heat blowing towards him was as if a gigantic white python was really pouncing at him. He could even hear its hissing as its jaws opened and closed.

He slowly rotated his body, facing his opponent with the right side of his body.

Bang!

The two of them viciously collided and tightly stuck to one another; neither of them took a step back. As their arms intersected, they were only inches apart and could even hear each other's breathing.

Chi chi!!

The clear sound of cloth tearing sounded out twice and a triumphant look appeared in the woman's eyes.

Her legs were viciously wrapped around Garen's waist and her entire body was coiled around him as well, forming an abnormally amorous position. If she still had her previous beautiful appearance, someone might have the wrong idea. However, as she was tall and brawny at the moment, it looked like two muscular men were wrestling.

The woman was topless and had fair skin. Garen was wearing a large black shirt and even though his muscles had expanded at the moment, it was still mostly black. That was why the differences between their bodies were exceptionally clear.

The woman clung onto Garen's body as the blades of her shoes stabbed into the lower back of Garen's torso, at the position of his kidneys.

"Goodbye..." she whispered and laughed.

Garen suddenly grinned.

"That's my line!"

His right elbow instantly moved forward—like a black baton—and viciously smashed into the woman's face.

Bang!

The two of them instantly separated, while droplets of blood sprinkled all over the place.

The woman stumbled backwards. She could not keep her balance and knelt down on one knee.

"You... You're actually alright?!" She lifted her head and stared at Garen in astonishment. Blood was coming out of her eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. After receiving the elbow strike, her entire body was still violently shaking. Her ears were ringing as if she was standing inside a large bell that was being sounded.

"This is Vibration! Damn it! He's actually an expert that has grasped Vibration!" She could not believe it as she stared at Garen.

Garen touched the back of his waist and found two light wounds that were faintly bleeding.

"Too bad... If it was someone else, this move might be able to cut them into them. It's too bad that your opponent is me."

He slowly walked toward the woman.

"Hahaha..." the woman suddenly laughed. "What a terrifying Body Hardening Technique!" As she stood up, her right hand swiftly reached to her back and a silver pistol appeared in her hand.

"It's too bad that your opponent is me."

Her body seemed to have shrunk a little after the close combat just now. Even her muscles were softer than before.

Noticing this, the woman made a circle with her hands once more.

"Polaris Fierce Arts!!"

After fiercely inhaling, her body returned to the previous state.

"Combat Gun Arts!"

She charged towards Garen once more, like a white line.

Garen raised his right elbow again to use his most familiar stance: Shooting Form. Suddenly, he felt a numb sensation at the back of his waist.

"Damn! There's poison!"

With his waist suddenly losing strength, he could not even maintain the basic stance.

It was too late for him to do anything about it, so he could only use all of his strength to block with his arms raised.

Bang bang bang!

A series of gunshots rang out and Garen violently smashed into the wall behind him. Three brass bullets were lodged in both of his arms, the right side of his face, and his abdomen. He could feel a metallic taste in his mouth.

"Damn it! The handgun was too close, I am shocked!"

An ordinary bullet would need to stay within a human's body to maximize the lethality. When fired from such a close range, the penetrating strength was too high. If it was someone else, they would not be too injured and would only suffer a penetrating trauma at most. However, as Garen's Body Hardening Technique was too strong, the penetrating strength of the bullet only served to pierce his skin and the bullet successfully entered his body.

The bullet in the right side of his face was originally aimed towards his forehead, but was timely avoided. However, the other two positions were on target. Both of his arms were struck by a punch as well, but it was weak. However, it was just enough to break his stance and allow the bullet to hit his face.

Leaning on the wall, Garen did not even have time to catch his breath. He saw a white figure viciously pouncing at him as, the silvery blades on her feet drew an arc in the air as they aimed for his abdomen.

With the poison on the blade, he would definitely die if he was struck a few more times.

"Damn it!!"

Garen roared. Though his opponent was slower than No.101, she was still extremely quick and faster than him. At that moment, he could already feel the cold blade touching his abdomen.

"Since I can't avoid it, then we'll see who's tougher!!"

"Ah!!!"

With a roar, his abdominal muscles tightened to trap the blade, his left hand grabbed onto her leg to prevent her from escaping, and he viciously swung his right fist at the purple-eyed woman's head.

Bang!!

"Umph!" The woman was struck in the head by the punch and she reeled back from the blow, splattering blood everywhere."

The two of them separated, breathing heavily.

Even though the fight between them did not last long, the situation was abnormally severe. Both of them were heavily injured.

The woman's right eye was completely destroyed, her entire body was shaking, and she was bleeding even more from her facial orifices.

Garen was poisoned, his lower back was getting numb, and his abdomen was starting to get numb as well. If the woman was not too weak and the blade was longer, the attack might have directly penetrated his gut.

Garen was leaning on the wall. It was the first time that he met his match. Even though his opponent's defense was lower and she had not grasped the Vibration Technique, her power was comparable and her blade could easily pierce his skin and muscles with enough strength behind it. The high defense of the Explosive Fist Arts was nothing for his opponent. With the addition of the gun and poison combination, Garen knew that he would not be able to get that mysterious Antique of Tragedy on this day.

"I've taken a huge loss this time!!" he muttered to himself. Lifting up his head, he saw the woman struggling to stand up. She was holding the silver handgun and was slowly aiming at him.

Bang bang bang!

Out of the three shots, only one managed to hit Garen's right shoulder. The bullet did not even manage to pierce through the skin and only left a red mark before it ricocheted. It made a clear sound as it fell to the floor.

"Your eyes are finished, hehe... You should have just handed that thing over. You were asking for it." Garen gloatingly laughed.

"You... Very well!!" The purple-eyed woman took two steps backward, then sagged onto the ground. "Unfortunately, you're poisoned. So you'll only... die earlier than me. To be able to die... by the hands of the No.10 Golden Hoop, your death isn't wasted."

It seemed that the two punches—using the Vibration technique—to her head had made her slightly sluggish.

Chapter 58: Battle (2)

Garen knew that the vibration was taking effect. The lady standing across from him must have had her insides injured by the power of vibration. His version of the second level of the Explosive Fists Art was unlike that of others. The lady might even have internal bleeding from it. Garen was confident in his actual strength and, if he were to use his it, he might even surpass his third senior brother. A simple gun would not pose any threat to him now. Originally, he planned to sneak out once he had finished searching for the antiques, but he had not expected this purple-eyed lady to discover her henchmen's corpses.

Everything was smooth up until this point. Garen had not expected his opponent to be so vicious. The lady did not hold back on him using guns, fists, and even poison.

"I have to leave here now!" He felt that the numbness in his back had intensified.

Garen sneered and then closed his mouth. He focused on the upper bracket of the attribute panel.

The potential bracket was already at 233%, so he still had two attribute points remaining.

"Physique influences the recovery rate. It might prove to be useful now against poisonous effects."

In this emergency situation, Garen was running out of ideas. He needed to recover and escape to prevent unforeseen accidents from happening. The enemy body count of men from the Golden Hoop was no joke.

He fixated his attention and added one skill point to his Physique attribute .

The Physique attribute increased from 1.57 to 1.87.

The moment the point was applied to his Physique, Garen felt nothing but tingling all over his body. It only took one second for him to return to normal. He felt the numbness around his back and his lower abdomen start to fade away. He even recovered enough strength to stand up.

"Effective indeed!"

He was pleased by what happened.

"It is not worth becoming like this for a cursed antique! I even started a feud with one of the masters of the Golden Hoop. If I don't take care of it now, I'll be in even more trouble in the future!"

He was determined to finish his opponent to prevent any inconvenience in the future.

He stood up and began slowly walking toward the purple-eyed lady.

"How can you still stand?!" The purple-eyed lady covered her right eye with one of her hands. The remaining eye stared at Garen in shock. "How can you still move after taking hits from the Roman Flower King's poison?!"

Her whole body was deadened and without strength due to blood loss. Though she could still aim her gun, her effort seemed meaningless against her opponent. She could not even reload and shoot in time due to the short distance from her opponent.

"This is the end!" An ugly smile could be seen on Garen's face. He felt his body recovering rapidly. The 0.3 increase to his Physique attribute that he applied earlier had really helped his body. He sensed the numbness almost disappearing from his back and the feeling of pain returned from the injuries to his abdomen area.

"Hurry! Master has been waiting for a while now!" Hurried steps were heard coming from the outside.

Garen's facial expression changed and he had one last look at the lady before deciding to escape. He jumped out from the same window he had snuck in from, turned the corner, and disappeared into the rain.

The lady had her head down and only let out her breath after confirming that Garen had left the hall. Blood and tears seeped through the fingers of the hand she held over her eye and dripped onto the black tile floor.

She picked up the clothing that she threw on the floor from earlier and covered her naked chest. Her body began slowly shrinking down, like a deflating balloon. In no time, she returned to her original form – a pretty lady with a petite figure.

The living room door swung open widely. A man and a woman dressed in suits swiftly came through the door. They were startled by the mess that was left behind and the purple-eyed lady who sat on the floor.

"Boss! Are you okay!" The tall man rushed over and bowed beside the lady on the floor.

"Go away!" Thump!

A muffled sound was heard. The man stumbled backward with his face looking pale. His eyes stared at the sword marks left on his chest. A line was neatly cut across his shirt, with his skin almost injured.

The woman in a black suit, who was smaller in size than the man, stood aside and laughed at what the man had been through.

The purple-eyed lady sat up on the floor.

"Any updates on the tasks I've ordered you to complete?"

"Master, I've been to Dale Quicksilver's house and some of the White Eagle's hiding spots. Both of them are nowhere to be found. We suspect that they've been hiding in some new place ." The woman in the suit bowed before answering.

The man's eyes focused on the purple-eyed lady as she wrapped up the injuries to her eye region. He tidied his suit before speaking respectively.

"I, on the other hand, found both of them! Unfortunately, White Eagle's friend Black Panther showed up unexpectedly during the search and took both of them with him."

"A bunch of useless pricks!" the purple-eyed lady roared while rising from the floor. Her right eye had stopped bleeding with the bandage wrapped around it. "You can't even capture one little White Eagle! I think it's time for me to ask for new henchmen to assist me. After I finish recovering I, will take care of the White Eagle on my own!"

She subconsciously glared at where Garen had stood. With hatred in her eyes, she said,

"If this skilled fighter had not shown up and weakened me, I'm certain that tomorrow would be the death of Lily!"

"Master 10" The tiny woman spoke softly, "your plan is to force Lily into a corner and take care of her. However, Lily's personal disciple, the White Eagle, was able to escape from Canary's hands in the previous encounters. This has proven to be a hindrance to the organization's plan. I personally think that things couldn't be so coincidental every time. What if..."

"Are you implying that..." The expression of the purple-eyed lady dimmed. She glanced over toward the man in black suit. "Canary, do you have anything to say?"

"Are you suspecting that I let them go intentionally?" the man replied in disbelief. "I have no reason to do so!"

"I will see things through. Dale Quicksilver and the White Eagle are just secondary. Either of you can go to take care of them. The main mission now is to take care of Lily. She has been an obstacle for the organization for years now. Everything will be easier once we get rid of that old lady. Without her, the puny detective won't dare to stand against us." Number 10 of the Golden Hoop said coldly, "Be gone now you two! Have the brothers outside take care of the corpses. We leave now!"

The two did not dare say a word and left the living room immediately.

Standing in the rain, the man named Canary stared at the sword mark on his chest in dismay. He was not affected by the fact that he was suspected by the woman in the black suit.

"Lola, Master 10's Body Hardening Technique has reached the point that not even a bullet can pierce through. What monster did she meet that can be on par with her level?"

"Who knows?" The tiny woman seemed to be chewing something in her mouth. She answered half-heartedly, "Senior Sister 10 hasn't been in a situation this bad for a few years now. Things are getting more and more interesting."

A group of henchmen in black suits moved rapidly toward where the duo were standing. The woman walked forward and started assigning them their tasks. Those who went in the lobby to move the corpses lying on the ground each wore a golden ring on their ear. Their movements were swift and tidy, yet silent.

Garen jogged slowly under the rain. The mist from the rain only allowed him to see within a range of 10 meters of his surroundings.

He followed the shortcut in the forest that led directly toward Canoe Town. He felt the numbness fading away, yet there was still some left in his body that he could not seem to cleanse.

Raindrops kept falling on his body. The atmosphere was oddly cold and quiet. The air that he breathed in slowly reduced the heat within his body.

Vapors emerged from his body, signifying that his body temperature was overheating.

He wiped his face and smeared makeup all over his hand.

"The makeup is gone and I did not get the antique either. I should just go straight to the dojo and clean up before heading home."

He left a note for Dale Quicksilver and the White Eagle before leaving. He decided to head back first and then return to the Silversilk Castle with them tomorrow. This decision proved to be useful in the long run.

"Lying with the note will definitely raise Dale's suspicion." Garen jogged while formulating a plan in his mind. "Screw worrying, he will discover my identity sooner or later. Still, who is that lady that I've just met? If it wasn't for the remaining attribute points, I'm afraid I would be crawling my way home now. I can't believe that there is such a vicious lady within the Golden Hoop. How did the White Eagle face off against them previously?"

He suddenly recalled the Bronze Cross Emblem he had left in the room on the second floor.

"Hopefully the Golden Hoop will have a taste of the Silversilk Castle. Hehe." he sneered, before holding his hand over the abdominal injuries and coughing vigorously.

Ever since he began training, his body strength had been growing more potent. Simultaneously, he perceived that the desire residing in his body was building up like a volcano. It felt as if he could erupt at anytime. The effort put in training combined with his extraordinary ability had provided him tremendous power, yet this power had never got the chance to show itself. It was as if there was a time-bomb planted inside Garen's heart, waiting to explode.

Though the injuries he had suffered this battle were unlike any before, it helped to relieve the suppressed force within Garen's body.

"I will definitely defeat you the next time I meet you!" Garen shrugged when he recalled the purple-eyed lady. He clearly understood his current condition and was plainly not relieved.

The moment he tried to laugh he felt the pain surging through his abdomen, killing his mood.

"Damn it!" He punched the tree beside him to release his anger.

Crack!

A tree large enough for a person to hug now had a hole in its body. The insides could be seen covered in whitish-yellow tree sap. Some of it gushed out from the trunk, but was immediately washed away by the rain.

Garen did not waste his time looking at the tree. Instead he sped up his pace and ran toward Canoe Town.

After this battle, he could measure his current Potential level.

With his total strength, he should be on par with the purple-eyed lady, stronger than Third Senior Brother, but far weaker than Second Senior Brother and First Senior Sister. As for the Grandmaster, his strength should not exceed First Senior Sister since he had aged and his power should be waning.

Garen was excited to find out how his strength would be ranked according to the standard criteria. He decided that he would take the ranking exam to see which rank he can reach after concluding the Silversilk Castle exploration with Dale and the White Eagle.I.

"E"

[First Senior Sister and Grandmaster are said to be at Rank E. Anyone who reaches a letter rank is above the normal standard. Judging by this, I think I can be ranked by the amateur standard? I suppose I am not even at lowest letter rank.]

Garen had some doubt in his heart. He had the impression that First Senior Sister and Grandmaster were beyond what they showed on the surface. They should be at a higher level.

Chapter 59: Bodyguard 1

"It's you again..."

In the plain colored emergency room, Dr. Ash from Canoe Town was sitting besides Garen. He was carefully taking out the brass bullet head from his arm, and slowly putting it in the metal plate on the table.

Cling!

The bullet landed in the plate, making a crisp sound.

"Tsk tsk, the bullet head had gotten bent. You were very fortunate that it went through something else before hitting you, otherwise you'd be dead for sure," Dr. Ash exclaimed. "Last time your arm was dislocated, but this time you got hit by a bullet. Did you meet some bandits?"

"Yes." Garen nodded. "If I wasn't this lucky, I'd be done for. All of those bandits were wearing golden earrings. They stole all my antiques as well. If I hadn't trained in martial arts, I'd be dead for sure... Ouch!"

He moaned as the bullet in his stomach was removed. Dr. Ash dropped it in the metal plate.

"Those cursed bandits! The residents of our town also get robbed by them frequently, and we end up having to pay them every time." Dr. Ash shook his head hopelessly. "You should report this to the Huaishan City Police department, a case like this isn't solved in one or two days."

He dabbed the cotton ball with alcohol and started cleaning Garen's wounds. As the alcohol touched his injuries, Garen gritted his teeth to endure the pain.

After cleaning, Dr. Ash took out a small bottle from his bag. He dipped a cotton swab inside, and a purple colored liquid soaked it, emitting a strong smell like that of a disinfectant.

Garen endured the pain, watching Dr. Ash anoint his wounds with the medicine.

His face was bruised white and yellow while his eyes differed in size. One was small and the other big. It was so because of his makeup not getting fully washed off. But at least it was still good enough to cover up his face.

"Oh and Dr. Ash, I've heard that detective Dale Quicksilver has come to Canoe Town. Do you know if he's still here?"

"Ah, Detective Dale..." Dr. Ash paused to think. "I'm not too sure either, but I did see him and two other people getting on a carriage headed to Silversilk Castle. I don't know if they're back."

Garen nodded in silence.

After ten minutes or so, Dr. Ash finished dealing with Garen's wounds. Garen paid the doctor and put on his soggy jacket, ready to leave.

"Wait!" Dr. Ash stopped him from behind. "You are going back like this? Although it's not raining outside, your jacket is still wet, you will infect the wounds!"

"No problem, I have a strong body, I'll be fine." Garen chuckled indifferently.

"You don't care but I care, this is my work!" Dr. Ash mumbled as he treaded inside, shortly after he came out with a grayish suit jacket. "Take this and put it on, don't wet the wounds! Think about all the time and effort I put into binding them. Don't forget to return my jacket!"

Garen smiled and took off his wet jacket and put on the grey one.

"Thanks, I'll return it in a few days!"

"Hurry up and leave, don't let them see you." Dr. Ash waved his hands impatiently. "Be careful and don't let the wounds become infected."

Garen nodded and walked out the door with his soggy jacket in hand.

It was already dark outside. It must've been late in the night. Garen stood in front of the small clinic and gazed outside, listening but hearing no sound of anyone nearby.

"Woof woof."

A faint dog bark came from a distance, making the night even more lonesome and quiet.

The houses on the sides were dark, without any lights. The moonlight shone from above, showering the road with a faint light.

Garen closed the door behind him and suddenly felt exhausted.

"After that battle, I rushed here on foot, and then spent half an hour in the clinic. My body seems to be overloaded." He fixed the grey suit and strode along the road out of town.

The pitch-dark town seemed empty, the houses on all four sides standing like indistinct silhouettes. In the complete silence, Garen could only hear his own footsteps.

He stepped into a small puddle, and the muddy water splashed all over his pants.

Cursing under his breath, he continued walking along the street.

While walking down the road, Garen decided to check his attribute pane.

"I have one more attribute point, so I have to carefully consider everything before using it this time."

He reached into his pockets and touched the black jade disk, a stream of cool qi flowed into his skin. Even though it was slow, the value was in its stableness.

"The enhancement of attributes needs time to precipitate, but the improvements in techniques are immediate. My techniques right now are ..."

Garen's eyes moved up to the techniques pane.

His eyes swept past the unimportant skills such as basic archery and swordsmanship and landed on the few special techniques he had learned.

White Cloud Secret Arts: Max(level 4) Explosive Fist Arts: Intermediate. White Cloud Combat Arts: Elementary.

The option for White Cloud Secret Arts was in grey, meaning it couldn't be improved further. Garen had reached a level of mastery that no one had achieved in the history of White Cloud Gate. Currently, only his talented second senior brother could compare to his strength.

The Explosive Fist Arts were at an intermediate level, the power of this technique was astonishing. During his combat with the purple eyed woman, he had only hit her twice, but these two contacts had severely injured her. Those hits had completely ignored her Body Hardening Technique, going through the surface and directly hitting her insides.

"People who achieve the level of Vibration are scary. It really is the counter to martial artists like me who are well trained in Body Hardening Technique. I have to be extra careful from now on," Garen warned himself.

He tried to see if he could enhance the level of Explosive Fist Arts again, but was unable to do so. There were some other requirements before he could enhance it. To level it up from elementary level to intermediate, he had had to take the body enhancing pills from the White Cloud Gate.

White Cloud Combat Arts, Garen thought about the fight just now.

"If my body wasn't strong enough, I wouldn't have been able to trade with her blow for blow. My combat techniques were too weak, so she could effortlessly block my attacks. If she had been more careful, I couldn't have hurt her at all.

"If I had better combat techniques, I could use a completely different fighting style. My resilience is better than her's, my strength is higher, so I could easily kill her," he thought to himself.

"My White Cloud Secret Arts have reached mastery, and because of it my muscles got enhanced, and I could double my defensive stats. I could fight blow for blow with second senior brother. My Explosive Fist Art is at intermediate level, only a few in the Gate being able reach this level. I also have exceptional physique and vitality. With these conditions, I still almost lost to her. If I had had the combat skills of senior sister, it wouldn't have been like this."

Garen's eyes gleamed. "The problem is that I have too little combat experience. I could only take the attacks from the enemy and fight back after. If she was another cautious fighter..."

He pictured a fight in his mind.

The purple eyed woman swiftly circled around him, occasionally dashing forward to promptly slice at his arms and legs. The poisonous blade paralyzing his body in a breeze.

"It seems that I have great strength but could not put it to use." He held in the temptation to enhance Vitality attribute and put his eyes on the White Cloud Combat Arts.

Cling!

The White Cloud Combat Arts jumped from Elementary to Intermediate level.

Garen's body shivered. His limbs instantly felt more flexible and alive. It became easier to move them in all directions.

"The White Cloud Combat Arts at an Intermediate level enables the effortless use of Four Big Forms during combat. Changing forms during combat feels natural and instinctive. I wonder what the Advanced level would be like." Garen moved his body and limbs, feeling like he had complete control over the area within the radius of one meter around him.

He raised his hand and did a karate chop in front of himself.

Shoo!

He instinctively used the Shot Form. The air snapped and made a crackling sound like a firecracker.

"I could only use Shot Form with my right elbow before, but now I can freely use all Four Big Forms with any part of my body. This intermediate level is indeed stronger." Garen grinned with satisfaction.

After trying out the speed of his Four Big Forms, he was sure he could now beat two of himself from before.

"Now if I meet someone who is faster, I'll be able handle them with my strength."

He nodded with satisfaction and quickly stepped into the darkness, on the road back to Huaishan City.

It was past 2:00 am when Garen arrived at Huaishan City. He went back straight to the dojo. He asked one of the students to inform his family and stayed at the dojo for the night. The next morning, he woke up early to put on the makeup and headed right back to Canoe Town.

"Kelly! You're here early."

The sky at dawn was not yet bright, but grey and gloomy.

At the open-air restaurant, Garen sat at a round table with his silver suit. There was a smile in his red eyes. Grace stood next to him, dressed like a secretary, and holding a black notebook in her hands.

The two silently watched as Dale Quicksilver strolled over with a yawn.

Garen lifted a cup of coffee from the table and took a sip.

Dale fell into the chair in front of Garen. "What happened to your face? Why is it banded in gauze?" He drank a big gulp of coffee and asked. "Didn't you say you were going back?"

"I accidentally chafed it, no big deal. What about yesterday? Was there any results?" Garen asked.

"We'll go again today. The White Eagle has already informed Huaishan's Police Department. I'm guessing someone should be there by noon. This is a big case with lots of casualties, so it'll be troublesome. If I had to guess, the Golden Ring must have thought we killed their men, so we might run into some trouble at the Silversilk castle today."

Dale Quicksilver frowned with worry.

Garen's eyebrow flinched as he thought about last night. He was a little surprised about detective Dale's predictions. His guess on the Golden Ring's reaction was spot on.

"What? Are they going to find trouble with the police?"

Dale chuckled. "You probably don't know, Kelly, but this has happened more than once." He took out the smoking pipe that he forgot to bring yesterday, lit it up with a match, and sucked on it with great pleasure.

"Should I get some help?" Grace suddenly suggested.

Chapter 60: Bodyguard 2

"That's not necessary, we have enough hands this time. But Kelly, you really should stay away this time. The White Eagle and I will go with our friend. If something happens, we won't be able to protect you," Dale Quicksilver told Garen.

"Don't worry, I can protect myself. Don't forget about when you gave me the black jade disk." Garen winked at Dale.

"I knew you wouldn't give up so easily, up to you then. We are going to go down that hole and take a closer look. Oh right, take a look at this." Dale took out an old looking yellow paper from his pocket. Garen spread it out and revealed a colored oil painting.

A man was running forward on a vast grey plateau. The man was headless and facing the opposite direction. A flock of birds were flying out from his neck.

"There is more on the back," Dale Quicksilver reminded Garen.

Garen flipped the paper over, and there was another painting on the back.

A man's rough and coarse hand reached out from underground. There was a bloody hole in the middle of this hand, and a man in a black robe stood inside this hole.

At the bottom of the painting was a line written in a language Garen did not understand.

"The line at the bottom is written in an ancient language, Archon. It means 'To bestow goodness of heart upon mankind'." Dale's face looked serious. "I did some research. You should prepare mentally for this."

Garen nodded mutely. He had a feeling that things at Silversilk castle could be on a whole different level of trouble.

Dale drank some coffee and continued, "We found this piece of paper under that hole yesterday. I left as soon as I found it because I immediately recognized the origin of this writing." He paused. "Archon is a language used by one of the most mysterious people in ancient times."

"Mysterious?" Garen squinted at him.

"They were always on the dark side of the world, and their powers were mysterious and enigmatic. In ancient legends, they were the symbol of the devil, blood and uncanniness, but no one had ever seen their true faces. They were called the Warlocks."

"Warlocks..." It was Garen's first time hearing this word.

Grace mumbled in surprise.

"Those people in the myths and legends that learned how to use magic?"

Dale nodded. "Correct. It is said that Warlocks learned their magic from the devil and fear itself, that's why it's called magic. In the legends, they would mate with mythical creatures and give birth to offspring with powerful bloodlines. They had control of the demon arts. They blended in with common people, becoming nobles, businessmen, or even travelers. But of course, these were just myths," he concluded. "However, there are numerous people worshipping these Warlocks. It was especially common in ancient times, and I suspect that entrance was constructed by some of those people."

Garen was originally shocked by the story, but he calmed down after hearing they were merely myths and legends. He remembered the story of Warlocks from Garen's memory. "I think I have heard of the Warlocks from stories and legends before, but aren't those all made up? What could these worshippers possibly do?"

"Ceremonies, bloody sacrifices, making flutes of people's femurs - these are all actions attributed to them. They've formed some kind of cult."

"If that's the case, I would have even more reason to follow." Garen licked his lips. "After all, these Warlocks and their magic doesn't really exist. The stuff down there would be nothing but men's creation."

Dale Quicksilver nodded. "I've ran into cases like this before, involving ancient cults. And like you said, these things are all man made, not particularly mysterious. They are, however, gory and cruel. And since this time Golden Hoop has a part in it, the situation is more dangerous. These cults may have leftover tools from sacrificial ceremonies. They could be worth a lot of money as antiques."

"When are we taking action?"

"We are waiting for The White Eagle and his friend. We've asked for some reinforcements from the police as well, so we shouldn't run into too much trouble." Dale Quicksilver looked at his watch. "It's 6:40 right now, and they will be arriving before 10."

"Are we just going to wait around?" Garen asked.

"It's nice to have some rest, don't you think?" Dale Quicksilver laughed. "Don't worry." He tapped Garen's shoulder and said, "We have to wait until our expert on ancient traps arrives, or we cannot safely investigate that underground cave. Until then, you can have some free time with your pretty-faced secretary."

Garen chuckled reluctantly and watched Dale Quicksilver leave the restaurant. As he relaxed in the chair, he felt a sudden warmth and suppleness behind his neck.

Grace blushed behind Garen, but she did not dodge and let Garen's head rest between her breasts.

"In my company's eyes, I'm now your spokesperson, the key connection between you and the company. If you really want it, I won't turn you down," she whispered.

"I don't like to force it." Garen smiled and stood up. "We'll be going to Silversilk castle in a bit. It's very dangerous out there, so you have to take care of yourself. I cannot protect you."

"Don't worry, I have made adequate preparations this time. The company has sent someone to protect us, so I'm getting some benefit by staying with you."

Grace smiled and clapped her hands. "Cynthia, what are you waiting for?"

From behind the bush outside the restaurant walked out a girl with strong and vigorous body. The girl had a girl-next-door look, wearing a low neck tight dress. This black as ink dress contrasted with her clear skin that looked like gelatin. Her lips were shining pink, and her curly brown hair trailed over her shoulders.

Garen was a little shocked by her beauty. "Cynthia, are you eighteen yet?" he asked in astonishment, concurrently glancing around the restaurant. Fortunately, there wasn't anyone in this early. Besides his table, there was only the chubby owner, who was dozing off at the bar.

The girl's long and slim legs were especially dazzling. She was wearing a pair of boots that almost covered her entire calves. "The company has sent me to protect you both, and there is another team of men responsible for guarding and security. Don't you worry, Mr. Kelly, I'm already nineteen years old."

Her brown eyes were bent slightly, like those of a kitten, making it look like she was always smiling. Her ripe and round breasts along with long and firm legs made her look lively and energetic.

The girl came to stand next to Garen. "Mr. Kelly, I was sent to be your bodyguard. I will excel at any task given to me. What Grace can do, I can do better. What she can't do... I am totally up for it as well..."

While she was finishing the sentence, she purposely straightened her back to show off her full breasts, and gave an aggressive look to Grace.

Grace's face turned blue. She knew this was the company sending someone to replace her because she could not form a close relationship with Garen. Cynthia was a younger and prettier squad leader. She could fight better and her looks were superior to Grace's. Most importantly, she was trained as a tool to please people with authority.

"Do you think that there can only be one kind of a relationship between men and women?" Grace asked in a cold voice.

"Isn't that kind of relationship the closest?" Cynthia replied, acting cute. She put her finger on her lips. "I can do anything for Mr. Kelly, or let him do whatever he wants to me..." She held the chair arm and slowly leaned toward Garen.

Garen stood up with a wry smile.

"All right, that's enough. I appreciate Manuyllton Corporation's sincerity, but it really isn't the best time. Cynthia right? How many men did you bring?"

As he started talking business, Cynthia's smile wavered and disappeared. "The squad has seven members including myself, sir. They have spread out and started patrolling the area. You can put your trust in us, we are professionals trained by the Weisman Trident Corporation. Your safety is our top priority. Also, after this trip, Mr. Adrian would like to have a word with you."

"Adrian?" Garen remembered hearing that name from Grace.

Adrian was the man in control of Manuyllton Corporation. The reason he sent Grace to work for Garen, and had Cynthia be his bodyguard, was to befriend the White Cloud Dojo. Most importantly, Manuyllton Corporation had some conflicts with Garen's third senior brother, Joshua's family, who had control of another company in the antiques business. Manuyllton Corporation had been in a disadvantage for a long time, so they might be thinking to ask Garen to ease up their relationships and escape the suppression.

"It's about my third senior brother, right?" Garen didn't know if Joshua would be nice enough to help. "Don't have too many expectations, these kind of things aren't decided by Joshua alone."

"That's fair." Cynthia nodded, she had a trace of doubt in her eyes. Before meeting him, she thought Garen was just a sixteen-year-old high school kid, who only came to the corporation's attention because of his martial arts talent. There was no way he could be tenacious enough to withstand her charm. As long as she finished the job and gave him a few winks in bed, everything could be dealt with easily.

But she didn't expect Garen to have a completely different personality. His actions and his speech did not look like a high school kid's, but resembled that of a thirty-year-old man's. And he was completely oblivious to her seduction.

Garen nodded back to Cynthia. He knew that everything he had was based upon his identity as the disciple of White Cloud Gate. Be it Grace or Cynthia, they were only respecting him because of his position in the White Cloud Gate and not his actual strength. Although, he had never paid much attention to what others think, with his special abilities and talents, he was destined to get noticed.