

Mystical Journey

Chapter 7: The Bronze Cross

Garen stopped overthinking and began sorting things out. He took off his clothes and blew out the oil lamp. He then went onto the bed and covered himself with a blanket. In the darkness, he calmed down and fell asleep.

Dong... Dong... The morning bell kept ringing.

Bright sunlight was shining over the white bed. Garen was sleeping face up and he opened his eyes slowly. Still a bit dizzy, he took a deep breath and looked outside the window. He then slowly removed the blanket and got off the bed.

The peeling light red paint on the walls and floors revealed the pale-yellow colored lumber underneath. A silver framed painting of a wheat field was crookedly hanging on the wall. The window on the right was half-open, and the chilling wind whistled nonstop through it.

Ka-ta Ka-ta...

Amplified by the wooden floors, Garen could acutely hear Ying Er's footsteps from the living room. He tried to clear his head by rubbing his temples several times. Garen grabbed the loose part of his oversized grey-white long sleeved pajamas, but there was not much he could do about the bagginess.

"I haven't thought too much about it, but why am I still wearing my mother's pajamas? It just doesn't feel right..." Garen said as he walked towards the window and quietly closed it.

Below the right side of the window was a street in the district. Several people wearing thick coats were walking by, and one of them even had a boater hat and scarf on him. There was an empty ground behind the buildings on the left side with more cars parked in it than usual. Some of the cars were black, others were white, and the headlights of these antique cars were similar to the eyes of a goldfish.

"Cars like those look nice, but they have to be cooled down every forty miles..." Garen said as he shook his head. He sniffed several times and he could smell the mixed fragrance of fried egg and warm milk. Garen left the window, opened the door of the bedroom and walked into the living room. On the right side of the room, he saw the yellow-white window curtains billowing in the air due to the strong wind coming from

outside. On the left side, Garen could see his sister, Ying Er, carefully flipping fried eggs in the kitchen.

She had changed into a short one piece with a black apron on her waist. Garen could see the white lace on the edge of her skirt and the thick tights underneath; Ying Er also wore a dark purple shawl on her back. Her burgundy pupils intently stared at the fried eggs being cooked in the pan.

“Just woke up? Go brush your teeth. Breakfast will be ready soon. I bought some fresh white bread and warm milk. Making the fried eggs right now,” Ying Er said as she looked at Garen.

“They are not coming back?” Garen wiped his oily face with his hands and walked towards the washroom. He turned the tap on in front of a mirror.

Splash!

Water rushed out of the tap. Garen grabbed his red towel and soaked it in the water. He then wrung the towel and pressed it on his face.

“I told you before, right? They are on a business trip,” Ying Er answered.

“Do you know where?” Garen asked.

“I think they are going to Delin City... It would take three days for them to get there by the train. Plus the time they will spend on their way back...” Ying Er answered while turning the stove off. She put the fried eggs on a plate and brought them to the table.

“They won’t be back until next week. It’s you and me again this weekend.” Ying Er sat down, putting the bread, milk and fried eggs on the table.

“Let’s eat,” she said.

After rinsing his mouth, Garen put his wooden toothbrush back into the glass and then turned back and left the washroom. Ying Er sat across from him. The rectangular table was made of redwood, and they both had a silver-colored metal plate in front of them. There was a triangle-shaped piece of bread in each plate, and there were some tiny characters marked on them.

Garen grabbed the silverware and cut off a small piece of the bread. It tasted a bit hard and dry, but there was a hint of sweetness.

“It’s Saturday. You got any plans for today?” Ying Er drank some milk and asked.

“Yeah... I want to go to the new antique store in the southern part of the city. It opened on the old Pennington Street,” Garen said while eating the fried egg.

"It's pretty far from here... We are on Bluetree Street and need to pass through downtown. Then, we need to walk another half an hour. It's like walking from one side of the town to the other. Why are you interested in the new antique store?" Ying Er was confused.

"If it's not important, can you go to the fruit market with me? I also want to check out the pet shops on a street beside the market. You can carry the bags for me," Ying Er said as she took a subtle glance at Garen; she seemed to be looking forward to spending time with him.

"I want some white pears, my favorite fruit," she added.

"White pears?" Garen stopped for a second; the old Garen used to love white pears too.

"Sorry, I really need to check out the new antique shop. It's important," Garen said.

"Fine..." Ying Er nodded and stopped talking. She decided to focus on the food.

"It's fall now, make sure you wear enough clothes. Don't catch a cold," Garen reminded as he put the rest of the food into his mouth. He gulped it down with a few sips of milk.

"I'm leaving." Garen stood up and went back to the bedroom to change.

Ying Er listlessly sat by the table as she watched him leave. She kept stabbing the bread pieces in her plate with the fork.

Garen changed from his pajamas to a thick black coat and dark blue pants with a black and white scarf around his neck. He looked like a handsome teenager and was no longer thin and weak. However, his gaze looked deep, and his eyes looked like two pure gems with a sparkle of burgundy in the middle. Now, he looked totally different and more mature with the changes to his eyes.

"When will you be back? How long do you plan to stay in the shop?" Ying Er raised her head up and asked.

"I will be back before dinner. I have to go now," Garen said as he tidied his scarf. He walked to the door and put on his black leather boots.

He opened the door, walked out and saw that his neighbor's door was open. A middle-aged man with glasses turned back and looked at him for a second, but did not say anything. The man was holding a black bag in his hand and closed his door without greeting Garen. Garen knew this neighbor; the tenant, Boris, was the middle-aged man Garen had just met. He never saw the man's wife, but he knew that the man lived with a 7 or 8 years old boy. Garen barely talked to them and they never greeted him if they saw him around. Garen had only talked to them once since his family had moved here.

He introduced himself and greeted them, but they did not have any further conversation. Garen's family was irked by how impolite the man and his son were.

Garen carefully closed the metal door, then he rubbed his hands together for warmth. He walked down the stairs and followed the path towards the left, entering a grey road lit by black street lights.

Outside the district, the streets were between yellow buildings and had black railings protecting pedestrians on the sides. An antique car was driving along the road, and Garen could see the white smoke coming out of the exhaust. There was an ox cart full of fruits following behind the car, and the coachman whipped the ox while yelling from time to time.

While glancing at the yellow buildings beside him, Garen walked by the railings; each of these buildings was around 7 floors tall and some had their windows open. Others closed their windows tight and put barbed wire on them. The edges of the buildings were round rather than sharp right angles.

A chilling autumn wind blew through Garen's hair. He lowered his head and felt his skin numbed by the cold. There were young trees planted next to the railings, however, they were bereft of leaves. As such, Garen could only see the dark, bold branches.

After walking for about twenty minutes, he started to see more people and cars on the street. He walk passed a bronze sign labeled 'Garden Street'.

Garen turned left at a crossroads, and instead of yellow, the buildings became grey and white with complex designs. These buildings looked luxurious, and there were tall round poles around them. There were also some beautiful sculptures by the buildings, and the black street lamps were decorated with white ornaments on top.

The sidewalk was almost empty. There was a woman wearing a thick white dress walking her dog, and there were also two old men holding canes sitting on a black metal bench talking in hushed voices.

Garen tightened his scarf and looked over the building on his left. Garen's uncle lived on the fifth floor of that building; this uncle of his was the one who helped him and Ying Er get into the Shengying Nobles Academy.

Garen's uncle started his business from nothing and worked very hard to build up his reputation. He was one of the richest merchants in Huaishan City, and he treated Garen very well. However, he did not care about girls, so he barely talked to Ying Er.

"I should visit my uncle on my way back..." Garen thought as he walked faster towards the end of the street. He passed a bronze road sign standing beside the sidewalk that read 'Pennington Street'. There was a small store at the corner by the end of the street. The arched door of the shop was wide open, and there was yellow light coming out of it.

A bespectacled old man was sitting by the yellow shelves, carefully looking at the object in his hand with a magnifier.

Garen glanced at the top right corner, towards a triangle sign hanging on the white wall. It read 'Dolphin Antiques'. Garen walked into the shop and looked around the place. There were more than ten tables in the shop, and there were red fabrics strewn all over the tables and walls, but he was the only customer. Many strange items were put on the tables.

After entering the shop, Garen stepped on the dark yellow floor and was startled by the 'person' to his right. He looked over and saw an incomplete body sculpture of a kid with curly hair; it only had the head and the shoulders. There was a cuboid stone pole supporting the sculpture from below.

"What do you need?" asked the old man, who put down his magnifier when he saw Garen enter. The old man's skin was gray and yellow, while his wrinkled face was full of black freckles.

"Let me see..." Garen panicked for a second, trying to think of a reason for being there...

"Don't mind me, I am just looking around," he answered after calming down.