

Stranger 371

Chapter 371: I Am Ye Qing, And I'm About To Die

Right before Seventh Young Master would die, a sack suddenly appeared in the air and sucked him into it. Once he was inside, the red string around the opening tightened, and the sack kept shrinking with every passing second. By the time the sack landed in Greenlake's hand, it had transformed into the size of a purse.

"Why did you keep him alive?" Ye Qing asked.

"He can't die, at least not now." Greenlake explained smilingly, "He's a member of the Ghost Tower, and he's both strong and wields enough authority to check our location. We're in the yin world right now. If we kill him now, there's a good chance the master of the Ghost Tower would find out about our transgression. That would be very bad."

"Makes sense." Ye Qing nodded before asking, "You helped me, didn't you?"

Seventh Young Master might have experienced a swift defeat, but he wasn't actually weak. In fact, he was a powerful Phenomenon-class Stranger. Although Ye Qing wasn't a normal Spirit Purifier himself, and his strongest abilities just so happened to be the bane of ghosts, it still should've taken him a lot of energy to defeat him on his own.

Ye Qing keenly sensed the ghosts Seventh Young Master were controlling were far weaker than they should be. It was like someone was keeping their powers suppressed. Seventh Young Master himself just stood there like a training dummy when he unleashed his ultimate attack. Since he had nothing to do with it, it could only be Greenlake.

"It wouldn't have mattered if you weren't strong enough to end things swiftly," Greenlake admitted honestly.

"Let's talk later. We need to leave the Yin Market first," Ye Qing declared. Killing Seventh Young Master would most likely alert the Ghost Tower that something was wrong, but there was no saying that capturing him wouldn't result in the same thing. Besides, if there was a Seventh Young Master, who was to say that there wasn't a Young Master Eight or Nine lusting after their riches as well? The sooner they got out of this palace, the better.

Greenlake replied with a gentle smile, "As you wish, husband."

"But how are we going to do that?" Another question occurred to Ye Qing.

He knew that everyone would automatically be ejected from the Yin Market as soon as dawn broke, but that was the only method he knew. Considering the circumstances, he seriously didn't want to leave his fate to luck and hope for the best.

"How about we take off our clothes?"

He remembered Mank Ee saying that the reason one must wear a set of burial clothes before entering the Yin Market was because yin and yang were natural opposites that repelled each other. If

he tried to enter the Yin Market without it, it wouldn't have worked. Maybe the same principle would work here.

"Excuse me?" Greenlake was dumbfounded for a moment. Then, she began shaking a little with amusement. "Oh, husband. You're not trying to eject yourself out of the Yin Market by exposing your yang qi, are you?"

"Er... I'm assuming it doesn't work?" Ye Qing rubbed his nose.

"When someone crosses into the yin world, they must wear a set of burial clothes to prevent the clash between yin or yang from ejecting back into the yang world. But after you entered the Yin Market, the boundaries between the two worlds became solid once more. Naturally, you won't be able to cross it via mundane means."

Greenlake teased him, "In other words, you won't be able to make it out even if you strip down to your underwear."

"Oh, I see. Thank you for answering my question." Ye Qing forced down his embarrassment and feigned calmness. *Embarrassment is just a condition! If I have no shame, then no one can embarrass me!* "In that case, do you know a way to leave the Yin Market immediately? I would rather not wait until the Ghost Tower or the yin guards search us en masse."

"You really are a cute man, husband." Greenlake chuckled and handed him a yellow talisman. "This is a Void Breaching Talisman. It can breach the barrier between the two worlds. You can use it to return to the yang world immediately."

"Thank you, Miss Bai." Ye Qing accepted the talisman without hesitation. What was one more debt when he was already neck deep in them?

"One thing, Miss Bai. I don't like to take without giving anything in return, so whatever your intentions are, I cannot accept these items. Also I will pay you back what I owe when next we meet," Ye Qing declared and tried to give back the Nature's Shell Greenlake had given him earlier.

But Greenlake didn't accept it. She grumbled, "Aren't we husband and wife? What is mine is yours, right? Wait, did you find a new lover when I wasn't looking?"

"Sigh... It is natural for the new to replace the old, but I had hoped that our love would last longer than that. You are a cruel man, husband."

To say that was Ye Qing was confused by her reaction would be an understatement. *What's with this overreaction, sister? I just want to give you back*

your stuff!

“They say that one day of marriage is equal to a hundred-day relationship, but to think that you’d be so cold, so cruel, so heartless. In that case, I shan’t stay here any longer.”

Greenlake uttered in an aggrieved tone, “Yes, I shall leave. I shall make space for you and your vixen. Hmph!”

Greenlake then ripped apart her own yellow talisman and turned transparent. She looked like she might leave this place at any moment.

Before she left, she gave him a final warning, “But although you’re an unqualified husband, I shan’t be an unworthy wife. I would advise you to leave Auspicious Phoenix Market as soon as possible, husband. Trust me, you won’t want to be around.”

“Wait! At least explain what the heck you mean before you leave! Who are you?” Ye Qing hurriedly shouted.

“I’m Greenlake Bai, husband. Goodbye.”

The next moment, Greenlake disappeared into thin air, leaving behind only her gentle voice.

“I don’t get it.”

Ye Qing frowned deeply. He just could not understand what Greenlake was thinking or what she was trying to do.

“Oh well. I can think after I get out of this place.”

Ye Qing ripped the Void Breaching Talisman, and a strange power erupted from it and surrounded him. The next moment, vertigo struck him with the force of a jackhammer. It only lasted for an instant though. When light hit his eyes, he abruptly realized that he had left the Yin Market.

He wasn’t at Mank Ee’s residence though. He was standing on top of a mountain. To the east, he saw a hint of white peeking out of the horizon. It was going to be daybreak very soon.

“Where is she?”

Ye Qing immediately searched for Greenlake after checking out the horizon. For some reason, he felt like she was setting him up. Unfortunately, he was unable to find her despite searching the nearby area thoroughly.

“Hmm? Why is this on my person?”

Suddenly, Ye Qing discovered a purse hanging on his waist. It was none other than the purse that Greenlake had used to capture Seventh Young Master.

“Something definitely isn’t right about this.”

His fingers clenched around the purse as he licked his lips. His sense of unease was growing stronger and stronger.

A moment of thought later, Ye Qing took out the Annon Sutra and asked, “Is someone plotting to hurt me?”

Ye Qing spat a mouthful of blood on the Annon Sutra, but to his surprise, the blood slid right off the vellum's smooth surface.

"It won't answer?!"

Ye Qing frowned before realizing that his question was probably too broad. He had many enemies, and even those he never offended wished him harm for one reason or another. That was probably why the Annon Sutra didn't answer his question.

"Is Greenlake Bai trying to set me up?" This time, Ye Qing specified the name before spitting another mouthful of blood. The blood slowly seeped into the vellum, but no words appeared.

"Gotcha."

This was normal. This reaction meant that the Annon Sutra could answer the question, but he would need to offer more blood before he could do so.

Ye Qing proceeded to spit a dozen mouthfuls of blood essence before the Annon Sutra's bloody words slowly emerged into view.

"I am Ye Qing, and I'm about to die. Why? It's because someone has framed me for a most heinous crime. And who is the person who set me up? It was none other than a woman named Greenlake Bai. However, is that really her name?"

"Motherfucker! I knew there was a conspiracy!" Ye Qing's gaze turned cold and steely. "But what did it mean by 'framing me for a most heinous crime'?"

"What is Greenlake plotting?" Ye Qing spat some blood and asked another question, but this time, his blood slid off the vellum again.

"What is it now? Is it because Greenlake isn't her real name?" Ye Qing frowned deeply.

To be honest, he still hadn't figured out how the Annon Sutra decided which question it could answer, and what it couldn't. Sometimes, it felt like he knew why the Annon Sutra wouldn't answer a certain question—perhaps it was because the question was too broad, or because the question involved someone way above his power level etc—but honestly, he was just guessing.

Sometimes, the Annon Sutra gave him an answer instantly. Sometimes, it took a lot of wrangling before he got the answer he wanted. And sometimes, it just outright ignored him.

To put it simply, it was all up to the Annon Sutra's mood.

He was certain about one thing, however. The Annon Sutra had never told him a lie. Everything it told up until this point was the truth.

"What is Greenlake's true name? And where is she right now?" Ye Qing asked tentatively, and this time it properly absorbed his blood. Delighted, Ye Qing hurriedly spat out a dozen mouthfuls of blood essences.

Bloody words slowly appeared on the vellum's surface:

"I knew a woman in the Yin Market. I told her that my name is Bluehill Ye, and she told me that her name is Greenlake Bai. But is that really her name?"

"Clearly, it isn't. I gave her a fake name, so she must have given me a fake name as well."

"In fact, her real name is Bai Xiao—"

The message abruptly stopped at the word 'Xiao'. In fact, the word 'Xiao' kept appearing and disappearing like the Annon Sutra had run into some sort of obstacle.

"What's going on?" This was the first time he saw the Annon Sutra reacting like this.

"Is something stopping it from deducing Greenlake's true name?"

The next moment, a thick coat of bright red blood enveloped the entire vellum.

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At an unknown location beneath a peach tree, Greenlake was holding up a mirror. There was a black silhouette inside the mirror that was crouching down and throwing up black water.

As the vomit was trapped within the mirror, the mirror slowly but surely grew darker and dirtier.

"Who's trying to look into my information and location?"

Greenlake furrowed her brows slightly as she examined her mirror. "Did Ghost Tower discover the theft already? It couldn't be. It's not time yet."

"Is it my convenient husband? Or is it my dear senior uncles, brothers and sisters?"

"Blargh... Blargh..."

Inside the mirror, the black silhouette was still throwing up black water. It eventually grew to the point where black fog was rising inside the mirror, and the mirror itself was deteriorating at a visible rate.

For the first time, Greenlake's expression grew severe. "This isn't good. I can't believe there exists a diviner who can push my Soul Hiding Mirror to this extent."

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Back to Ye Qing, the Annon Sutra was still leaking blood. In fact, so much blood had leaked that every inch of ground within twenty meters of the vellum was covered in blood.

Ye Qing was standing beyond the circle of blood and struggling not to panic. This had definitely *never* happened before.

The next moment, the word "FUCK OFF" appeared on the Annon Sutra's surface, and the blood began shaking violently. It was like the Strange Artifact was livid with anger.

Chapter 372: Theft

Bang!

Greenlake's Soul hiding Mirror shook once before the black silhouette inside the mirror abruptly exploded into black water. The mirror itself turned old, tattered and ordinary as if it had lost all of its power.

“Who are you?”

Greenlake frowned at a blackened mirror for a moment before breaking into a calm smile. “It looks like someone misses me dearly. That’s not a good thing, is it? Hahaha...”

Greenlake put away the Soul Hiding Mirror and opened her red umbrella. Then, she slowly disappeared into the darkness.

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“Is it over?”

Ye Qing watched as the massive pool of blood slowly receded back into the Annon Sutra’s body. The words previously on its surface were nowhere to be seen as well.

“I wonder if it won or lost against whatever it was?” Ye Qing muttered to himself.

As soon as he said this, the blood on the Annon Sutra converged to form a massive, gold-emblazoned word:

It was an incredibly flamboyant reaction. Ye Qing couldn’t help but remark, “Are you boasting about your success?”

As he killed more Strangers and fed the Annon Sutra more blood, he noticed that the Strange Artifact was growing increasingly sapient. Or more accurately, it was regaining what sapience it had before. He didn’t know if it was a good thing or a bad thing, but for now, he was glad that his buddy was growing better and stronger.

The word “Victory” was still shining on the piece of vellum, and Ye Qing couldn’t help but tease it a little, “Since you’ve defeated your opposition, can you tell me what Greenlake Bai’s true name is and where she is right now?”

Before this, he had to cough up copious amounts of blood essence just to ask it one question. It wasn’t even enthusiastic about it, if the varied responses it gave him was any indication. But now, it was exerting itself without any prompting whatsoever.

“*Get lost*”

He should’ve expected this, but the word “Victory” had turned into “Get lost”. The only way it could be clearer with its meaning was if it turned into a middle finger.

Ye Qing: “...” *It’s quite short-tempered, isn’t it?*

But of course, he understood what the Annon Sutra was implying. It was saying that those two questions were best left unanswered.

He thought for a while longer before asking, “How can I survive this crisis?”

Since he couldn’t figure out Greenlake’s identity or scheme, then he should focus on saving himself.

Ye Qing spat a mouthful of blood essence on the Annon Sutra as usual, but it wasn’t absorbed. Instead, the word “get lost” transformed into:

“*Get the fuck out*”

Ye Qing furrowed his brows deeply when he saw this. *If you don't want to answer, then just don't answer. Why are you cussing me out, man?*

Ye Qing unhappily put away the Annon Sutra and got ready to return to Auspicious Phoenix Market when suddenly, he realized that the Annon Sutra wasn't necessarily cussing him out, at least not completely. It was telling to get the fuck away from here if he wished to survive.

It made sense. The Ghost Tower was coming after him, and Auspicious Phoenix Market was the first place they would search as soon as they discovered whatever timebomb Greenlake had left him. Naturally, he should be away from here as soon as possible. Death couldn't kill him if it couldn't catch up to him, right?

It was too bad he still hadn't figured out what Greenlake had done, and what crime she had framed him for. If he could figure out the truth, then maybe he would be able to save himself without needing to run away.

"Fuck. I knew I shouldn't have entered the Yin Market," Ye Qing cursed under his breath before starting toward Auspicious Phoenix Market once more. Once his companions were out, and he had told them about the situation, he would go as far away from this village as possible.

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At the Ghost Tower, Fire Skull was floating back and forth while singing an eerie song that was only fit for a ghost. It looked incredibly happy and excited.

Not only had the auction ended with resounding success, their expected profit was well above their expected profit. Of course it was very happy with this outcome.

Bang!

Suddenly, an imp barged into the room in a panic. "Ma, manager!"

"Don't you know how to knock?" Fire Skull's flames shot a couple inches taller as it turned around to look at the imp.

"S... sorry," the imp apologized in a hurry before rushing ahead, "but you need to hear this!"

"What is it now?" Fire Skull joked. "Did your newly wed concubine cuck you, or did you cuck her?"

Fire Skull generally didn't like cracking jokes, but it was in a fantastic mood today.

"No! Someone broke into our vault. We got robbed!" The imp hurriedly replied.

"WHAT?"

Fire Skull's joy was snuffed out in an instant. It abruptly flew closer to the imp and asked urgently, "I will *destroy* you if this is a joke. What treasure did we lose?"

"We didn't lose any treasure." the imp clarified, "It's the yin gold we just moved in the vault today that we lost."

“The yin gold?” The flames on Fire Skull’s body exploded. It was this close from losing control and killing the imp by accident. “How much did we lose?”

The imp stuttered, “Two hundred and fifty thousand yin gold, manager.”

“Two hundred and fifty thousand...?” The flames surrounding Fire Skull abruptly froze. It was like someone had stopped its time.

“Manager? Manager?” The imp called out to him cautiously.

Whoosh!

The next moment, the flames returned to normal, and Fire Skull vanished in a flash of light.

“Manager, you’re finally here!”

At the vault, a short, fat Stranger covered in bronze coins was pacing back and forth with a walking stick anxiously. It looked like it was moments away from a full-blown panic attack when Fire Skull finally showed up. Its features immediately lit up like it saw its savior.

“What the hell happened, Yin Toad? How did we lose our yin gold?” Fire Skull demanded.

“I don’t know, manager!” Yin Toad answered in a hurry. “I closed the vault as soon as I moved today’s money into the vault. But when I came back to perform a routine inspection, I discovered that two hundred and fifty thousand yin gold had suddenly gone missing!”

“Did we lose anything else?” Fire Skull asked.

“N-No. Only the yin gold is missing,” Yin Toad replied despairingly before begging, “You gotta save me, manager! I swear I have nothing to do with this! You have to save me!”

“Silence!” Fire Skull shouted down Yin Toad while nursing a throbbing headache. “Tell me everything from the start until the end. Don’t leave out even a single detail!”

“Yes, yes!” Yin Toad began retelling everything it did after the auction was over. After it was done, it started lamenting its fate, “I carried out the process as I always did, and it has never failed me before. Why is this happening now? Why am I so unlucky?”

“Stop whining! You’re annoying me!” Fire Skull yelled impatiently, “Did you find anything while you were carrying out your inspection? Anything at all?”

Yin Toad shook its head dejectedly. “No. The doors were intact, and none of the restrictions and arrays were triggered. It’s almost as if the yin gold had vanished into thin air.”

“Bullshit! There’s no way that could happen. Someone must have stolen it!” Fire Skull was furious. “I’m going to ask you one more time, but are you absolutely sure that

you've checked everything? Can you swear on your life that you haven't missed anything?"

"I swear it, manager," Yin Toad declared with absolute certainty. "In fact, the first thing I did after discovering that the yin gold was missing was to lock the vault. No other ghost had entered the vault besides me, so everything is exactly the same as it was before. You can check it yourself if you want to."

Fire Skull did just that and went through the entire vault with a fine tooth comb. However, it failed to find anything just like Yin Toad.

"Did you find anything, manager?" Yin Toad asked carefully as Fire Skull pondered in silence. "Do you think that a powerful senior could've carried out the theft?"

Fire Skull shot Yin Toad a glance but said nothing.

Yin Toad continued, "The vault is the most heavily guarded place in the Ghost Tower. For someone to steal the yin gold it holds without disturbing any of its restrictions and breaking its locks... I just can't imagine a normal warrior or Stranger carrying out such a feat. It has to be a super powerful senior or something."

"Yes, that has to be it. In fact, they must be on par with master at the very least. After all, master is the one who installed those restrictions himself. I just can't imagine anyone weaker than him entering and leaving the vault like it's their own house."

However, Fire Skull remarked after a moment of thought, "That's very unlikely."

"Why do you think that?" Yin Toad blurted. It took it a lot of brain cells to come up with the likeliest possibility, but Fire Skull had rejected it all too quickly.

"Use your brain, fool. If the thief really is as strong as you say, why would they steal the yin gold instead of the more valuable treasures? Pretend that master is the thief for a second. Did he really need that yin gold? This is but a small percentage of his total wealth. Why would he ever lower himself to do such a thing?"

"Of course, I'm not saying that your theory is impossible. It's just improbable."

"But if it's not a powerful senior, then who? Who could possibly steal from our vault without being detected?" Yin Toad frowned deeply.

"There is, in fact, one type of person who could steal from our vault without being detected," Fire Skull answered.

"Who?" Yin Toad asked.

"An insider," Fire Skull said slowly. "Someone like you and me."

“W-What? You think it’s embezzlement?!” Yin Toad frowned. “But you and I are the only ones who can enter the vault... Wait, you’re not suspecting me, are you? I didn’t do it, manager! I’m innocent!”

Yin Toad abruptly shrieked in terror. It looked like it was seconds away from dropping on its knees and begging for mercy.

“I didn’t say it was you! You don’t have the guts to do such a thing!” Fire Skull said coldly.

“Yes, yes, you know me well, manager! I wouldn’t dare do such a thing even if someone lent me the courage of ten men!” Yin Toad smiled obsequiously before continuing, “But if it’s not you or me, then who? There’s no one else who can enter the vault, is there?”

“You’re wrong,” Fire Skull said slowly. “The master and the young masters can enter the vault.”

“Wait, what?” Yin Toad exclaimed in surprise. “That can’t be right!”

“Why not? As you say, who else can infiltrate our vault and steal our stuff without being detected?”

Fire Skull’s tone grew icy. “Or are you admitting that you embezzled the yin gold after all?”

“Absolutely not! I would never!” Yin Toad shook its head in panic. “O-Oh! I remember now! Seventh Young Master came to the Ghost Tower today. He even killed a few ghosts who disobeyed him. Do you think it was him who stole the yin gold? But why though?”

“And how the fuck would I know that? His reasons are his own, and for now, it’s the best theory I can think of,” Fire Skull said coldly. “This would also explain why the thief only stole some yin gold instead of the priceless treasures.”

“Phew... Does that mean we’re safe?” Yin Toad let out a sigh of relief.

“We’re safe? Are you stupid?” Fire Skull sneered. “The young masters may have the right to enter the vault, but Ghost Tower is master’s property. Without his express permission, no one is allowed to remove a rock or even a speck of dust from the vault. No one.”

“Maybe master would forgive Seventh Young Master for taking the yin gold without permission, but you and I would definitely be charged with dereliction of duty! Worst case scenario, we might even be executed for our ‘crimes!’”

“Ahh! What... What do we do then? I don’t want to die!” Yin Toad panicked again. “Should we hide this from master then?”

“Fool!” Fire Skull spat. “There is a small chance we might survive if we hide this from master, but we are dead the second he finds out about it. You can commit suicide if you want to, but I’m not dying or living in fear for the rest of my life!”

Yin Toad realized that Fire Skull had a plan and asked urgently, “Do you have a plan, manager? Tell me, please!”

“What other plan is there? We need to find Seventh Young Master as soon as possible,” Fire Skull declared.

“Right, right! The sooner we locate Seventh Young Master and ask him why he sto—I mean, took the yin gold, the sooner we’ll be saved! If we can take back the yin gold from him, then even better!” Yin Toad exclaimed in excitement. “I’ll send everyone to search for Seventh Young Master immediately!”

But Fire Skull chided him immediately, “Fool! Do you want everyone and their mothers to know about the theft? By the way, how many people know about this?”

“O-Only three people. You, me, and my subordinate,” Yin Toad answered.

“Thank goodness. Find a handful of people we can absolutely trust and have them search for Seventh Young Master. I shouldn’t need to tell you, but the search must be conducted with absolute secrecy. If the master finds out about this, you and I are both going to die, understand?”

“Yes, yes. You’re a wise ghost, manager,” Yin Toad flattered.

“No time for bootlicking. Go get it done now,” Fire Skull ordered. “And remember, we’re against the clock here. There is only so long I can keep this hidden, understand?”

“Yes, yes, I understand!” Yin Toad hurriedly nodded and left the place to carry out its orders.

“I hope it really is Seventh Young Master who stole the item!”

After Yin Toad was gone, Fire Skull looked up and sighed deeply. “Otherwise... sigh...”

Chapter 373: The Missing Mank Ee

“You’re leaving? What happened?” Lin Yuhuai asked.

Not long after they got out of their coffins, Ye Qing had beckoned them to his side and expressed his desire to leave Auspicious Phoenix Market immediately.

“Well, how should I put it...” Ye Qing tried to keep his explanation as brief as possible. “I encountered some trouble after entering the inner market, and I accidentally offended a... bigshot. They’re probably going to come find me very soon. That is why I need to leave as soon as possible.”

It would take too long if he told them everything that had happened at the Ghost Tower. It was also best if they didn't hear about the details. He didn't want to drag them into his situation.

"Bigshot, huh? How big are we talking about?" Chu Nianjiu asked.

"Big enough that they could take on all of us with room to spare," Ye Qing replied. He couldn't bring himself to say that he offended the Ghost Tower *and* Mister Nine as well.

"You just can't stop attracting trouble wherever you go, can you Joyless?" Chu Nianjiu teased.

"Do you think I want this?" Ye Qing rubbed his nose in disgruntlement. Greenlake seriously screwed him over. The prettier they were, the deadlier the poison.

"In that case, let us take our leave immediately," Lin Yuhuai declared.

"No, no, I'm saying that I'm leaving alone. We'll be going our separate ways," Ye Qing clarified.

"What? Why?" Chu Nianjiu asked.

Ye Qing smiled. "Did you forget about the Peng brothers? What if the person who executed the Five Punishments Ritual shows up? They need you. You're all needed here."

There was a chance the Ghost Tower might decide to take it out on his companions, but honestly, he wasn't very worried. For one, they might not necessarily figure out that they were affiliated with him. Even if they did, this wasn't the yin world anymore. They would only ruin themselves if they tried something here.

"What about you?" Lin Yuhuai frowned.

"I'll be fine. In fact, I'll be safer if I travel alone!" Ye Qing answered honestly. "I'm a middle-stage Spirit Purifier now."

Lin Yuhuai: "..."

Chu Nianjiu: "..."

Both men felt offended and looked down upon, but they had to admit that Ye Qing was safer alone. If he was attacked, there was a higher chance that they would drag him down than they were of help. So, they agreed to his suggestion, "Fine!"

"Very well. I shall be taking my leave now. It's unfortunate that Peng Hu hasn't returned here, but do give him my well wishes. See you all later!" Ye Qing smiled.

Suddenly, Ye Qing recalled something. "Oh right. Where is Xuanyun?" The young Taoist was already gone by the time he returned to Auspicious Phoenix Market.

"He went to Mank Ee's house[1]!" Chu Nianjiu replied.

"Did something happen?" Ye Qing asked.

Lin Yuhuai replied, "As soon as we came back, Mank Ee's sister-in-law came to us and said that Mank Ee had gone missing. Xuanyun decided to head over and check it out first. We were just about to join him."

"Well, it so happens that their residence is close to the exit, so I'll join you. I would like to bid Xuanyuan goodbye as well." Ye Qing nodded.

On the way there, Ye Qing asked, "So, give me the details. Why did Mank Ee suddenly go missing?"

Lin Yuhuai answered, "We're not sure. This early morning, his sister-in-law knocked on his door to deliver him breakfast, but no one answered. Confused, she went inside his room but found no one. Later, she searched the whole residence but still couldn't find Mank Ee."

"That's not really strange, is it? Knowing the kind of person he is, I wouldn't be surprised if Mank Ee disappears for a whole day or two." Ye Qing shrugged.

"We thought the same thing, but she insisted that that isn't the case. However, she was a little too panicked to explain things clearly, so Xuanyuan went with her before we could get the full story out of her."

They arrived at Mank Ee's house. As soon as they stepped through the door, they saw Mrs. Hou weeping and the young Taoist doing his best to console her.

"Did you find anything, Xuanyun?" Ye Qing asked while scanning the whole place. He couldn't find anything besides a faint mist of yin qi, and this yin qi was most likely the remnant of the two worlds overlapping with each other. While prolonged exposure would harm an ordinary person, it would naturally disappear once the sun was fully up.

"Brother Ye, Brother Chu, Brother Lin, you're here!" Qi Xuanyun greeted them all before saying seriously, "Mrs. Hou[2] is right. Mank Ee is definitely missing."

"And how would you know that? Maybe he's still out there somewhere, or maybe he went out before dawn broke," Chu Nianjiu said.

"No, Mank Ee was definitely in the house. He didn't leave in the morning either." The young Taoist led them to Mank Ee's room and pointed at his bed. "Look."

"His bed is disturbed, and his clothes are thrown over his bed. Even his shoes are still on the floor. Mrs. Hou mentioned that these were the clothes he wore when he came back last night, so obviously, he must have come back last night."

"That doesn't really prove anything. He could've put on a new set of clothes and left earlier in the morning, right?" Lin Yuhuai argued.

“Impossible,” The young Taoist declared. “Mank Ee is single, so Mrs. Hou is the one who usually tidies his clothes. She can tell you with absolute certainty that not a single piece of his clothing is missing from the house.”

“Not even one? Are you sure about this, Mrs. Hou?” Ye Qing realized his point as well.

“I am sure!” Mrs. Hou sobbed.

“Mank Ee’s clothes and shoes are right here. What are the chances he left his house naked?” Qi Xuanyun said seriously. “Just in case, I checked the doors and windows. They’re all locked from the inside, and there are no secret passages anywhere. That is why I’m certain that Mank Ee went missing right here inside his house.”

It was at this moment Lin Yuhuai stepped into the room. He declared, “I just checked the place. It is as Xuanyun said.”

“But I can’t sense anything out of the ordinary. Just how did Mank Ee go missing?” Chu Nianjiu sipped his wine, frowning.

“I want you guys to spread out and search the place again. Maybe we missed something. I’ll stay here and ask Mrs. Hou a couple more questions,” Ye Qing ordered after thinking for a moment.

“Sure.”

After the trio stepped out of the room, Ye Qing pulled a chair over and sat down next to Mrs. Hou.

“Have you found any clues regarding my Mank Ee, scion?” Mrs. Hou asked urgently.

“I’m sorry. We’re still looking.” Ye Qing shook his head before asking, “Mrs. Hou, I have a couple of questions for you. Please answer them as truthfully as you can. Mank Ee’s life is on the line here.”

“Yes... of course...” Mrs. Hou forced down her worry and impatience and asked, “What do you want to know?”

Ye Qing said, “It’s like this. Why are you so certain that Mank Ee had gone missing? I mean, it hasn’t even been twenty four hours yet.” *Not that that kind of logic operates in this world*, Ye Qing chided himself mentally. “Most people wouldn’t jump to that kind of conclusion so quickly, you know?”

The reason Qi Xuanyun and his colleagues were able to confirm the truth this quickly was because they were warriors. Their senses were far sharper than your ordinary person. However, Mrs. Hou was just an ordinary person. It was almost like she knew something they didn’t.

Mrs. Hou answered, “That’s... That’s because Mank Ee was acting weird the whole day yesterday. It was like his mind was elsewhere. When he came back last night, he was horribly drunk and muttering, ‘I’m haunted, I’m haunted’ non-stop, and I know he didn’t have a good night’s sleep because I could hear him tossing and turning around all the way from my room. That’s why... I’m certain that happened to him when I couldn’t find him this morning.”

"I see." Ye Qing nodded in understanding. "Mank Ee did mention that he had a poor night's sleep yesterday."

"Exactly!" Mrs. Hou answered, "After he helped you guys and returned home, he asked me to boil him a sleep-well soup. He went to sleep as soon as he finished the soup."

"I was washing his clothes at his house at the time, so I know that he slept very, very poorly. He startled awake at least a couple times during the short time I was there, and each time he was covered in sweat and looking as pale as a sheet."

"I see!" Ye Qing frowned deeply.

"You have to save Mank Ee, scion. My... My husband died early, and Mank Ee is the sole ricewinner[3] of our whole family. If something happened to him as well, then... then... what are we going to do?"

Mrs. Hou wiped her tears away and begged, "Please save him, please! I'll even go on my knees if that's what it takes!"

"Please, Mrs. Hou. You don't need to do this!" Ye Qing stopped her before she could fall on her knees and consoled her. "Don't worry, Mrs. Hou. I promise you that we will do our best."

"O-Okay. Thank you, scion. Thank you!"

"You're welcome."

It was at this moment Lin Yuhuai, Chu Nianjiu and Qi Xuanyun came back from their search. They all shook their heads when they saw Ye Qing. It looked like no one had found anything.

"I can't sense any anomalous energy, nor could I find any signs of struggle. It's almost like Mank Ee suddenly vanished into thin air while he was lying in bed," Lin Yuhuai told Ye Qing.

"What are the chances Mank Ee offended someone far above his stature and got kidnapped?" Qi Xuanyun asked.

"I doubt it. You said it yourself, didn't you? The doors and windows all look intact, and Lin Yuhuai just said he couldn't find any signs of struggle. If someone did kidnap him, there is no way they could do it without a trace," Chu Nianjiu answered.

"In that case... It has to be a Stranger!" Qi Xuanyun muttered.

"Maybe." Ye Qing rubbed his nose and told them everything Mrs. Hou said earlier.

"How is it, scions? Where is my Mank Ee?" Mrs. Hou asked urgently after all four of them fell silent.

"We haven't found him yet, but don't worry, Mrs. Hou. It's only a matter of time," Ye Qing consoled her before saying, "Why don't you go home first, Mrs. Hou? I'm sure you have things to do. Leave Hou Er to us."

"Well... okay. Thank you very much, scions! Thank you! I'll be heading back then!" Mrs. Hou thanked them profusely before taking her leave.

"Sigh..."

After she was gone, all four men exchanged glances with each other before sighing deeply. Although they promised the woman that they would do their best to find Hou Er, they knew that the chances that he still lived were very, very low. Assuming that he did have a run-in with a Stranger, Hou Er was most likely dead already.

Therefore, the only realistic thing they could do was to find the Stranger and take revenge for Hou Er. It was to prevent more people from falling victim to the threat as well.

"You can leave first, Joyless. Leave this to us." Lin Yuhuai patted Ye Qing on the shoulder.

"Leave? Are you going somewhere, Brother Ye?" Qi Xuanyun asked.

"Yeah. I need to leave for some business." Ye Qing smiled. "In fact, I came here to say goodbye."

"Ah... does that mean you won't be traveling to Tian Yong with us?" Qi Xuanyun asked.

"Yeah, I have something important I need to take care of." Ye Qing gave him a pat on the shoulder. "But don't worry. I'll see you all at Tian Yong."

"What's this business you need to take care of? I can help you if you want!" Qi Xuanyun offered.

"It's fine. I can handle this myself." Ye Qing chuckled. "Alright, I'm leaving now."

"Take care, Brother Ye!" Qi Xuanyun said seriously.

"I will. Thank you," Ye Qing replied. "You should be careful as well. Auspicious Phoenix Market is not a safe place. Once you've wrapped up your business, I would advise you to take your leave as soon as you are able."

As the four men stepped out of Mank Ee's room, the painting hung at the center of the room suddenly swayed twice. Then, the two men in the painting slowly turned around to look at the group. They were both wearing strange grins on their faces.

The man to the left was Old Hu,

And the man to the right was Mank Ee.

Chapter 374: Corpse Child

"It's been a whole day. A whole day! Have we not located Seventh Young Master yet?"

Inside the Ghost Tower, Fire Skull was glaring down on Yin Toad from above, its flames flaring and shrinking erratically as if it was doing its best to control its temper.

"Not... Not yet," Yin Toad answered fearfully.

"Trash!" Fire Skull yelled.

Yin Toad argued, "This... this isn't my fault. I did my best!"

"I've mobilized at least several hundred ghosts and kin to search for Seventh Young Master and turned nearly the entire Fengdu upside down, but there's just no sign of him anywhere! Not even a hint!"

"I... I really did my best!"

"If your best isn't enough, then do better! If you can't find Seventh Young Master, then both you and I are going to die!"

Fire Skull raged. "Now go!"

"Y-Yes, manager."

Yin Toad transformed into a gust of yin wind and flew toward the exit. It was halfway there when suddenly, it let out a bloodcurdling scream. The yin wind that was Yin Toad suddenly began decaying and rotting as if it was being eroded by something. The stench of death immediately filled the room.

Yin Toad was already dead, and it didn't even have a physical body, not to mention that it was just a gust of wind right now. However, there was no denying that it was rotting somehow. As Yin Toad transformed uncontrollably back to its normal self, bluish purple spots began appearing on its body as well.

The more they spread, the weaker Yin Toad's screams became. When its whole body had become discolored, Yin Toad stopped screaming and vanished into thin air, leaving behind only the terrible stench of rot.

"You can stop now."

An old, calm voice rang inside the room. Fire Skull shuddered, and a bluish purple spot appeared on its flame, causing it to decay rapidly.

"First... First Young Master... why are you here?"

"How much longer are you going to keep this hidden?" The voice spoke, and a pool of disgusting corpse water seeped out of the floor. Multiple bodies were floating inside the pool.

A dead child crawled out of the pool. He was wearing a black burial shirt and a round skullcap. He had a long ponytail behind his head.

Although he looked like a child, every part of his body except his face was covered in bluish purple spots. His body reeked of the stench of corpses as well.

“First... First Young Master...” Fire Skull greeted the child shakily, “I... I don’t understand what you mean?”

“No, you know exactly what I’m talking about.” First Young Master said slowly, “Yin Toad died because it failed in its duty and tried to conceal its failure from the master. Are you going to make its mistake, Fire Skull?”

“I was wrong! I was wrong! Forgive me, First Young Master! I would never do it again!” Fire Skull dropped from the air and hit the ground repeatedly with its head, kowtowing[1].

First Young Master was a Corpse Child[2] who fed on corpses to sustain himself. His death qi was so potent it could corrode anything and everything be it animate, inanimate, tangible or intangible.

“You lost the master’s property, tried to cover up the crime, and you were stupid beyond hope. Any one of these crimes is punishable by death. Can you give me a single reason why I shouldn’t kill you?” Corpse Child asked unhurriedly.

Fire Skull shivered and answered as quickly as it could, “First... First Young Master, I already figured out who is the one who took the yin gold. Just give me time, and the yin gold will be back before you know it.”

“Are you telling me that Seventh is the one who stole the money?” asked Corpse Child as he looked down on Fire Skull scornfully, but the Stranger couldn’t see his face. Fire Skull explained its reasoning in a hurry,

“Yes, it has to be him. I already dispatched the men to look for him. They will find him very soon.”

“This is why I said you’re stupid beyond hope,” Corpse Child said slowly.

By now, Fire Skull realized that Corpse Child was ridiculing him. It looked up in confusion and asked, “Am... Am I wrong, First Young Master?”

“You are *completely* wrong,” Corpse Child declared. “Seventh is a bold child, but he would never, ever dare to steal from the vault without father’s permission.”

“But... who could possibly steal the yin gold without a trace then?” Fire Skull was stunned. *My brilliant deduction was all... wrong?* “Could it really be a senior?”

“It’s bad enough that you’re stupid, but you like to think you’re smart too. How on earth did you become the manager of Ghost Tower?”

Corpse Child sighed. “You thought that someone must have entered the vault and stole the yin gold, but why didn’t you consider the possibility that the yin gold was already lost before they entered the vault?”

“Impossible!” Fire Skull rejected the possibility immediately. “I had personally checked the yin gold several times before they entered the vault. I am certain that not a single gold piece was missing!”

“Nothing is impossible. There are plenty of things in this world that are beyond your paltry imagination,” Corpse Child said slowly. “In fact, the true responsibility of this failure lies not on Yin Toad, but you.”

“I... I don’t get what you’re saving First Young Master,” Fire Skull replied in an aggrieved tone.

“You think I’m wronging you?” Corpse Child scoffed and enveloped Fire Skull with his corpse pool. Then, Corpse Child, Fire Skull and the corpse pool all vanished into the floor.

The next moment, the duo appeared inside the vault.

“Have you inspected the vault yet?” Corpse Child asked.

“I have. Everything is fine inside the vault. The locks are intact, and the restrictions aren’t triggered,” Fire Skull answered.

Corpse Child countered, “Is that so? Didn’t you notice there is something inside the vault that isn’t there before?”

“W-What? What is it?” Fire Skull asked.

Corpse Child walked up to the carcass of several insects and said, “Look. There are insects inside the vault now.”

“Insects?” Fire Skull floated up to the carcass and exclaimed in astonishment, “You’re right! But this can’t be! The vault is protected by all sorts of restrictions. There is no way any insect can make it inside the vault!”

The vault was where they stored all kinds of precious treasures. Naturally, it was installed with restrictions that were specifically meant to keep out insects and other vermin. It would be terrible if a vermin damaged a precious treasure otherwise.

The reason Fire Skull and Yin Toad hadn’t discovered it sooner was because the carcasses were incredibly tiny, and they were scattered in different places.

“It is strange that these insects somehow appeared inside the vault,” Fire Skull voiced its puzzlement. “Perhaps they have something to do with the missing yin gold?”

Corpse Child replied, “That’s an understatement. They are the culprits behind the disappearing yin gold. Do you know what they are, Fire Skull?”

Fire Skull couldn’t say anything for a time. When it finally recovered, it stuttered, “Wha... What is it?”

“These insects are called the Gold Insect. It is an extremely rare Stranger in the yang world,” Corpse Child answered. “You might have inferred from its name, but it is a type of insect that can transform into gold.”

“The Gold Insect is pitifully weak and in possession of no offensive powers whatsoever, but it can transform into gold. Moreover, its disguise is impossible to see through.”

“Of course, all things in the world have their weaknesses, and the Gold Insect’s weaknesses are quite distinct. One, it can only turn into gold for a short time. Two, it can only turn into gold once in a lifetime. Once its transformation runs out, and it turns back into an insect, it would die.”

“In fact, it’s not the only Stranger of its kind. There is the Silver Insect and more.”

“Do you understand why I said it’s your fault now?”

“Mercy, young master! I... I was wrong. Please, mercy!” Fire Skull began shaking violently.

“Tell me, what were your mistakes?” Corpse Child asked.

Fire Skull stuttered, “I... Someone used the Gold Insects to buy our goods and services, but I never realized it. After the fake yin gold entered the vault, the Gold Insects returned to normal. When Yin Toad entered the vault to inspect the items, he thought that someone had broken into the vault and stolen our yin gold.”

“As the manager of Ghost Tower, I failed to discover the culprit’s ruse and lost our yin gold. That’s my first mistake. After the yin gold was stolen, I failed to inspect the vault thoroughly[3] and instead made my investigation based on empty conjectures. That’s my second mistake. And finally, I failed to inform master about this as soon as possible and even tried to keep this from it. That’s my third mistake.”

“Good. Perhaps there is hope yet to cure your stupidity,” Corpse Child nodded in approval. “You know you deserve death thrice over, but do you know why you’re still alive, while Yin Toad is dead?”

“I... don’t know?” Fire Skull replied fearfully. Now that it thought about it, Yin Toad wasn’t really to blame for this incident because the yin gold had already been switched when it entered the vault. It might have failed to identify the Gold Insects, but the same could be said for it. In fact, if Fire Skull couldn’t identify the Gold Insects, then there was no chance Yin Toad, a weaker Stranger, could hope to do better. However, the blameless Yin Toad was executed, while it was still alive. It really didn’t understand why.

“The answer is very simple. The reason you’re still alive is because you haven’t submitted to me or my dear brothers. You are loyal to father and the Ghost Tower alone. However, Yin Toad had submitted to another. Do you understand now?” Corpse Child answered in an indifferent tone.

“I... understand. I understand!” Fire Skull bowed its head even more. It was both afraid and thankful that it had made at least one wise decision in its life.

The master of the Ghost Tower had seven adopted sons, and of course every one of them had their own powerbases. It was perfectly normal for someone in the Ghost Tower to secretly pledge their fealty to one of the young masters to solidify their own position. However, Fire Skull was one of the few ghosts who never found a backer for itself. It wasn’t because no one had tried to recruit it, nor was it because it was absolutely loyal to the master. It would be lying if it said it was never tempted by the offer. It just thought that the Ghost Tower belonged to the master, and the master was the greatest of them all. Why on earth would it swear its fealty to someone below the master when it could be serving the master itself?

It didn’t think that its caution would save its life today.

“Remember this well, Fire Skull. The Ghost Tower is father, and you are all father’s dogs. My father can tolerate a stupid, lazy dog, but he can never tolerate one who betrays his trust.” Corpse Child’s mouth spread into an eerie grin. “That is why you’re still alive.”

“Yes, yes! Thank you for your mercy, First Young Master! Thank you for master’s mercy! I am forever loyal to master and the Ghost Tower!” Fire Skull kowtowed repeatedly.

“Enough. Get up.” Corpse Child declared, “We still have things to do.”

“Yes, Young Master.” Fire Skull floated into the air.

Corpse Child continued, “Two hundred and fifty thousand yin gold is but a drop in the bucket, but the crime of tricking the Ghost Tower is terribly grave. The culprit who dares to impugn our reputation must be brought to justice.”

“But... we have a lot of customers today, and most of them concealed their identity as a matter of course. How are we going to find them?” Fire Skull asked.

Corpse Child replied calmly, “The Gold Insect is an extremely rare Stranger. Even considering the caliber of our customers, few among them would possess it. There is a high chance the culprit was only one person.”

“Check our account books and find out who had spent at least two hundred and fifty thousand yin gold today. They are most likely the culprit.”

“A wise deduction, First Young Master. I shall check the account books immediately!” Fire Skull’s eyes lit up and flew away. A short while later, it returned with a

disappointed expression, "First Young Master, I'm sorry to say that no one has spent at least two hundred and fifty thousand yin gold today."

"There is none?" Corpse Child thought for a moment before answering, "The culprit is cautious, it seems. They must have spent some real yin gold so we wouldn't be able to identify them immediately."

"Even so, they couldn't possibly spend too much real yin gold. That would be defeating the point. Check who has spent almost two hundred and fifty thousand yin gold, Fire Skull."

Chapter 375: Head

"As you command!"

Fire Skull produced an account book and flipped through it carefully. A while later, it replied, "There are three people who spent around two hundred and fifty yin gold, First Young Master. However, we never register the names of our customers when we carry out a transaction, young master. There are only numbers in the account book. How are we going to identify the culprit like this?"

Instead of answering, Corpse Child took the account book from Fire Skull and brushed his finger across the three unnamed transactions. The next moment, three silhouettes appeared above the account book. They were all donning burial clothes and wearing masks, and they could be seen making purchases in the Ghost Tower.

If Ye Qing was here, he would recognize himself among the silhouettes. However, Greenlake was nowhere to be seen.

"It's them." Fire Skull nodded before frowning at Ye Qing's silhouette. "But I thought... I'm sure he..."

It thought that something was off with Ye Qing's silhouette, but it couldn't really pinpoint the source of that strange feeling. It was almost like it had forgotten something.

"You may leave and go about your normal business. Leave the rest to me," Corpse Child instructed before sinking into his corpse pool.

After he was gone, Fire Skull shook its head and muttered, "Strange. I keep having this feeling that I've forgotten something."

A pool of corpse water appeared on the seventh floor of Ghost Tower. Corpse Child quickly emerged from it.

Most people thought that the Ghost Tower only had three floors. In fact, it had nine. It was just that the floors above the third floor weren't open to outsiders because they were sealed with all kinds of evil and terrifying Strangers and Strange Artifacts. The higher the floor, the stronger they were.

After appearing on the seventh floor, Corpse Child opened a door and stepped inside. The room was empty besides a single jar. The jar held half a human brain, or at least it looked like it. It was soaked within some sort of smelly, yellowish liquid.

Corpse Child waved his hand while staring at the brain, and a youngster abruptly plopped down on the floor. It was a living human.

“Who... who are you? What do you think you’re doing?” The youngster fired off some hollow threats after he recovered from his shock. “Do you know who I am? I’m a member of the Manor of Dragons! You’d let me go if you know what’s good for you! The Manor of Dragons will never forget this transgression!”

Corpse Child paid no attention to his threats, of course. He walked up to the jar, opened it, and grabbed the brain. Then, he walked back toward the youngster.

“W-What are you doing? No. Don’t come closer! Don’t come closer!” The youngster screamed on top of his lungs as Corpse Child came closer and closer, but the pool of corpse water beneath his feet kept him pinned. He was unable to move a step no matter how hard he struggled.

When Corpse Child finally reached the youngster, he slapped the half a brain on top of his head.

The second the brain made contact with the youngster’s skull, it immediately twitched once as if it had come alive. Then, it began pulling the youngster’s head apart.

“What are you doing?! Let me go! Let me go!!!”

The strange head bobbed up and down with exertion. It wasn’t long before the youngster’s head slowly split into two like it was cut open by a knife.

The youngster was still alive, however. He was howling with rage and terror. He could clearly feel his skin being torn apart, his skull snapping in half and a tingling sensation that suggested that his brain was exposed in the air, but there was nothing he could do to save himself, nothing at all. The fear, helplessness and despair drove him into madness.

After the youngster’s head was exposed, the brain threw the youngster’s brain out of his head as if disgusted before taking over the space. The split head began healing slowly until not a single wound was left behind. If it wasn’t for the blood and brain fluid splattered all over the youngster’s hair, face and shoulders, it would be as if nothing had ever happened.

As if on cue, the youngster stopped screaming. The fear and despair etched on his face was replaced by an eerie smile. Then, he greeted Corpse Child teasingly, “Oh my, it’s you, Corpse Child? You’re not dead yet?”

“Why would I die before you die?” Corpse Child replied expressionlessly. “Cut the nonsense, or I’ll toss you back into your jar.

“Oh, I’m so scared, hahaha...” The youngster patted his chest and laughed mockingly. “But you clearly need me for something, or you wouldn’t have released me. Feel free to put me back if I’m wrong. I’m fine either way.”

Corpse Child couldn’t be bothered to waste his breath on the youngster and produced an account book. “The Ghost Tower lost some items, and I need you to identify the thief, his background, and his current location.”

“Oh. My. Hells! The Ghost Tower actually lost stuff? Unbelievable, truly unbelievable...” The youngster remarked with a mad cackle. His expression was full of ridicule and schadenfreude. “Let me see, let me see. Oh, you didn’t lose your items, you were scammed! Ahahahahaha! The scammer finally got scammed for once, and by their favorite victim no less! Oh no no no no, how embarrassing it is for the Ghost Tower, how embarrassing!”

“Say, did this anger the crap out of that little bitch? Did it piss him off so much that he jumped out of his coffin?”

“Insult father again, and you will regret it.” Corpse Child narrowed his eyes, and a deathly energy spread throughout the room. Bluish black spots began to appear on the youngster’s body, but...

“Hahahaha! Are you serious right now? Come on then, kill me dead! If you can’t, then I am your father, and that little bitch your mother!”

The youngster wasn’t intimidated in the slightest. “Seriously, we both know it’s the truth. Your so-called father is neither a woman, a man, or even a hermaphrodite! He’s just a freak of nature who got the short end of every deal, kakakakaka!”

“I don’t know what you know, but back in the day, that bitch was so submissive when I got him under my... alright alright, I’ll stop. Man, youngsters these days can’t hold a joke!”

The youngster finally shut his mouth when the bluish purple spots on his body exceeded a certain threshold, and he started feeling like an old man.

“I’ll ask you again. Who is the one who stole our items, what is his background, and where is he right now?” Corpse Child repeated.

“Haha, it’s quite easy for me to answer those questions, but you know the rules, don’t you?” The youngster replied.

“I do,” Corpse Child answered. “I’ve prepared ten thousand yin souls as your payment.

“Hahaha... I love interacting with people with direct personalities like you!” The youngster cackled. He sucked in a deep breath, and the three silhouettes were pulled into his mouth.

.....

“Phew...”

Inside a dilapidated temple, Ye Qing suddenly opened his eyes. His eyes were bloodshot, and bloodthirst rolled off his body like a tidal wave. There was a red flash that looked like the spring wind and fine rain, and suddenly, crisscrossing cuts appeared on the temple’s walls, roof, floor and

more. The bird singing and insect chirping happening outside the temple instantly disappeared like they were dead.

A fog appeared inside the temple, and there was a vague silhouette inside the fog. “What kind of nightmare did he have? He just barely stopped himself from cutting this poor temple into bits. Strange!”

The next moment, the redness in Ye Qing’s eyes faded, and his killing intent was pulled back into his body. Then, he let out a deep sigh and put on a refreshing smile on his face.

“What the hell did you dream, boy? It felt like you just crawled out from under a pile of dead bodies!” Although Ye Qing looked no different from normal, the Fog Demon felt like he was different for some reason.

“You guessed right. I had just crawled out from under a pile of corpses!” Ye Qing sighed again and stepped out of the temple. As he stared at the bright sun outside the temple and basked in its warmth, his smile widened. “I’m so glad I could see the sun again!”

“You look like you’ve lost more than a few brain cells, boy!” The Fog Demon floated over to Ye Qing and mocked him.

“I did. In fact, I almost went insane.”

Ye Qing felt a shiver when he recalled what happened last night. After arriving at this temple, he had asked the Fog Demon to protect him and used Nanke. Although it was clear from Chu Wangsun’s actions that the Duckweed Flower was far more valuable than most people seemed to believe, whatever power it might bestow him would arrive far too late to aid him with his current predicament. He needed power now, and Nanke was the only Strange Artifact that could do so.

This time, he didn’t get greedy and try to hone all of his martial arts at once. Instead, he focused on the “Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain”, “Illusionist’s Grace”, and the “Nine Impetus of Tai Chi”.

He chose to hone his saber art to improve his offense, his movement art to improve his ability to escape, and his defensive art to improve his defense. These three martial arts he needed to hone to maximize his growth given the amount of time he had.

He had considered improving his fist art of course, but he had reached a bottleneck. It would be difficult for him to break through it even with the help of Nanke, and he didn’t want to risk dying inside the dream and getting ejected prematurely again.

On the other hand, the “Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain” was new to him and still had a ton of potential to uncover. That was why he chose to hone it after careful consideration.

In this dream, he was a greenhorn participating in his first war, and he was just an early-stage Vessel Augmentor. The martial arts he knew were none other than the “Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain”, the “Illusionist’s Grace”, and the “Nine Impetus of Tai Chi”.

His martial arts were incredibly powerful, but at the beginning, he had actually performed worse than an ordinary veteran. He nearly died multiple times on the battlefield either because he was too kind, too careless, or placed in a situation where his martial arts were less than useful.

After barely surviving his first major battle, he was forced to fight almost everyday. He had fought in a forest, a mountain, a desert, a river and more, and he had participated in all kinds of operations such as assassinations, raids, sieges, wipeouts and more, sometimes as the receiving party. Barring exceptional circumstances, he had encountered almost everything a soldier might encounter on the battlefield.

Life was cheap, and the fight was endless. His comrades kept dying, the enemies kept coming, the battlefield was littered with countless broken bodies, and the end seemed as far away as eternity itself. Such were his hardships that he nearly broke down and lost his mind inside the dream.

He didn't know how long he spent inside the dream, only that he went from a greenhorn to a veteran whose spirit was just as old and scared as his body. As his friends and allies disappeared from his life one after another, his heart slowly turned numb, and his blood gradually turned as cold as ice.

In the end, after killing several hundred people during a siege and completely exhausting himself, a crossbow bolt finally hit him in the head and ended his life.

That was why he was overflowing with killing intent when he awoke just now. Luckily for him, the "Paranirmitava?avartin Heavenly Demon Sutra" was excellent at curbing one's emotions. Otherwise, he strongly suspected that he would've suffered a mental breakdown and turned into a madman.

This was probably one of the hidden dangers of Nanke.

Chapter 376: Heartless Brain

The dream was hyper realistic and beyond terrifying, but thankfully, its effects were just as extraordinary. First, he had reached the adept level in the "Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain". He had grasped its intent, understood its impetus, mastered its moves, and even eliminated some unnecessary moves from its saber art. Finally, he managed to combine it with the "Soulchasing Saber" and turned it into a three-move attack.

The first move was the spring wind, the second move was the fine rain, and the third move was the soulchasing saber.

The "Illusionist's Grace" was just an Astral Refinement-stage movement art, and he had gotten it first before the "Saber of Spring Wind and Fine Rain" or the "Nine Impetus of Tai Chi". Even before he entered the dream, he was close to grasping the essence of the martial art. After he entered Nanke and honed it repeatedly, he had fully mastered the movement art. He could now move about like a shadow, a dream, a demon, or a god. He could conjure a maximum of nine illusions that were near impossible to distinguish from the real thing.

As for the "Nine Impetus of Tai Chi", it was a Trueman-stage martial art for a reason. Despite the long dream, he was only able to grasp the various forms of all nine impetuses and enter the journeyman level. He was still far, far away from being able to master the techniques and entering the adept level.

Besides his cultivation level, his combat experience, intuition and perception when battling against all sorts of enemies and in all sorts of environments had improved drastically. More importantly, his willpower and mental strength had become stronger and more tenacious than before.

In conclusion, this one dream had improved his strength in every way. He was at least twenty or thirty percent stronger than he was before he entered Nanke.

Twenty or thirty percent didn't sound like much, but he was a Spirit Purifier. At this stage, even a small step forward was enough to make him seem like a new man.

At his current level, and adding in powerful Strange Artifacts such as the Blue Demon Hand and Boundless Mara Buddha into the picture, he was confident he could go up against Half-Step Spirit Masters and even weaker Spirit Masters.

Even if he assumed that he had overestimated himself, he was confident that he would be able to escape to safety.

Rumble!

Right after Ye Qing stepped out of the temple, a small breeze abruptly caused the entire building to crumble. Not only that, it transformed into fine dust almost as if they had been eroded by the passage of time.

It was because of the attack Ye Qing had accidentally unleashed when he woke up, of course. The saber qi had destroyed the whole place, and it was a miracle it had held up until now.

"Sorry, sorry. Didn't mean to make life difficult for the travelers who would come after me." Ye Qing shrugged as he watched the collapsed temple. It wasn't on purpose.

Fog Demon couldn't stand his smug face and criticized him, "Quit showing off, boy. There's no one here to see it."

This brat is growing way too quickly. At this rate, how am I going to make my escape?

"True. What's the point of showing off to an artifact spirit?" Ye Qing nodded in agreement.

Fog Demon: "... Ah, I feel very offended.

"Let's go!"

Ye Qing had just taken two steps when suddenly, he sensed something. He withdrew Fog Demon back into the Mara Buddha and pulled out the Annon Sutra.

The Annon Sutra was leaking blood just like the last time. Ye Qing hurriedly unfolded it and laid it on the ground. More and more blood leaked out of the piece of vellum, but this time it didn't spread out until it was the size of a lake. Instead, it formed rows and rows of text on its surface:

"My name is Ye Qing, moniker "Joyless". If you see this, that means I'm in trouble."

"Right now, the Heartless Brain is divining my name, background and location. If it succeeds, I'm not the only one who will be in danger. My friends and family will be in danger as well."

"After all, the Ghost Tower wouldn't attack me only. They would kill everyone I loved to set an example to all who might emulate me!"

“The Heartless Brain? It’s helping the Ghost Tower to divine my name, background and location?” Ye Qing didn’t know what the hell a Heartless Brain was, but there was no doubt that the Ghost Tower was behind it all.

“Dammit. I knew this was going to happen.”

The Annon Sutra wasn’t done messaging, however.

“Thankfully, luck is on my side. While the Heartless Brain was performing its divination, it suddenly slipped on the corpse fluid it was standing on and broke its head. As a result, its brain fell into the deadly corpse fluid and died.”

While the Annon Sutra was manifesting the words, “and died”, it suddenly shook as it hit some sort of wall. The words disappeared, and a new line appeared:

“... and it only managed to divine my location.”

The moment this happened, the Annon Sutra began shaking again. The line kept surfacing and fading as if it was struggling to manifest.

It was at this moment a golden dragon-serpent rune suddenly crumbled into dust. A wave of anomalous energy washed out of the Annon Sutra, and the line of text solidified.

A horrified scream broke out, “My... My golden dragon-serpent rune! Damn you, Ghost Tower! Damn you, Greenlake!”

.....

On the seventh floor of the Ghost Tower, a youngster was muttering something under his breath and walking about the room like a true diviner. As he walked, the walls began wriggling like it was alive, and all kinds of people appeared on the wall. As the images became clearer, small passages of text appeared beside them as well.

It was at this moment an accident happened. The youngster was walking past Corpse Child when he accidentally slipped on the corpse fluid pooling around the Stranger’s feet and fell backward. His head hit the floor so hard that it splattered into pieces, and the half-a-brain fell into the corpse fluid.

The images on the walls immediately became distorted as if its process had been disrupted. Only one person’s silhouette remained clearer than the others.

Corpse Child couldn’t be bothered to check out the information on the wall, however. He hurriedly picked up the brain from the corpse fluid.

At first, the brain was still pulsing rhythmically. But a few seconds later, it stopped completely as if its life was spent.

Corpse Child frowned and summoned another living human into the room. Then, he slapped the brain over the man’s skull and let it do its thing.

After the brain had taken over the body, Corpse Child asked, “What happened?”

“What happened? You happened! If it wasn’t for that stinking pool beneath your feet, I would never have slipped!” The man launched into a furious rant the second he

came back to life. "What's so cool about standing in a pool of stinking water anyway? If I didn't know better, I would've thought that you wet your pants! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Corpse Child paid his rant no heed, however. He simply asked, "Did you find him?"

"I did, but the information is deeply flawed." The man looked at the clearer silhouette on the wall and said, "I could only divine his location."

"And why's that?" Corpse Child looked displeased.

"Are you seriously asking me that? I could've divined it all, but your fucking pool made me slip at the most critical moment!" The man grumbled.

"Can't you just perform your divination again?" Corpse Child asked.

"What the fuck do you think divination is? I can't just piss out the answer whenever I want!" The man scoffed disdainfully. "Still, you can find him now that you have his location. You can interrogate the information you need out of him yourself."

"This isn't worth ten thousand yin souls," Corpse Child said expressionlessly.

"*Excuse me?* I did what you asked for, and you're going back on your promise? Just how immoral can you get?" The man raged loudly, "Also, I could've performed my divination flawlessly, but *someone* doesn't know the meaning of hygiene! It's *your* fault my divination failed partially, and now you're blaming me for the consequences of your own actions?"

"Where is your fucking shame, dude? I thought that bitch was shameless enough, but you're even more shameless than he is! Fucking shameless, despicable, nasty piece of..."

Corpse Child waited until Heartless Brain was done swearing. Then, he said, "Are you done? Then it's my turn now. You divined the thief's location, but they're alive, not dead. They wouldn't stay in one place. If we get there, and they're already gone, then it would be a complete waste of time and energy, wouldn't it?"

"So what? It's not my fault!" The man argued.

"But it is." Corpse Child said, "If you managed to divine their name and background, we could've tracked down their friends and family and used them as hostages even if they managed to elude us. However, not only did you fail to do that, the one clue you provided didn't offer any real value either."

"That is why it's not worth ten thousand yin souls. It's not worth even one yin soul."

"Uwah... You're too shameless Corpse Child! How can you bully an old man like this! This isn't right, this isn't right!" The man abruptly fell on his butt and started flailing

his limbs about like a child whose candy was stolen. However, Corpse Child remained unperturbed no matter how loud a tantrum he threw.

After he got tired, he asked in an aggrieved voice, "You could've consoled me, you bastard."

Corpse Child didn't even react to him.

"Fine, fine, so boring." The man climbed back to his feet and looked down on Corpse Child. "Tell me, what do I need to do to satisfy you?"

Corpse Child answered, "Find me the thief."

The man replied slowly, "Let's see. You know I can only use my ability once per month, so if you want me to divine his full information again, then you'll have to wait another month."

Corpse Child: "... *Everything would be over by then! I might as well stuff you back into your jar and do it myself!*

The man savored Corpse Child's expression until the Stranger was about to speak. Then, he interrupted, "Of course, it would be too late by then. The Ghost Tower's reputation would be in tatters. That is why I offer you an alternative."

"What is it?" Corpse Child asked.

The man answered, "It's true I can't divine anything relating to that thief until a month later, but since I did manage to divine their location, it means that there is now a bond of destiny between me and them, however weak it might be. So long as I'm within a certain range of that thief, I'd be able to sense their presence. Theoretically speaking, I can find them even if they escape to the ends of the earth."

"So, you want me to bring you with me." Corpse Child looked thoughtful.

"You can find them yourself if you want to. At worst, I'll give up on that ten thousand yin souls." The man crossed his arms, fearless.

Corpse Child narrowed his eyes. "This isn't a ploy for you to make your escape, is it?" The man raged immediately, "Do I look like that type of person? Do you think everyone is as untrustworthy as you and that bitch?"

"Bring me if you want to, get lost if you don't. You've bothered me enough, you piece of shit!"

Corpse Child fell silent for a moment. "Very well, I can bring you with me. But if you dare to escape, trust me when I say that I'll leave you in your jar for eternity."

"Hmph!" The man harrumphed loudly before saying, "Since you begged for my help so sincerely, I suppose I can lend you a hand. C'mon."

But as soon as he finished, the corpse fluid on the ground abruptly formed a hand and stabbed into the man's skull from behind. It ripped out the brain and shoved it back into the jar.

"Yes, but I think you're better off inside the jar for now. I'll let you out after we reached our location."

Corpse Child grabbed the jar and took a few steps forward. Then, he sank into the pool of corpse fluid and disappeared.

Chapter 377: When Yin Soldiers Walk During The Day

“Huh... Why did the sky turn dark all of a sudden?”

At Auspicious Phoenix Market, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai had just left a residence when suddenly, the bright, sunny sky was covered by thick, dark clouds, and the wind howled like it might turn into a rainstorm at any moment.

“Something’s not right,” Lin Yuhuai remarked with a frown.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh!

The world grew darker and darker, and the howling wind grew increasingly powerful and icy. It wasn’t long before it got to the point where it was impossible to see anything without squinting.

A troop of yin soldiers abruptly marched out of the yin wind. Such was their yin qi that it overshadowed even the yang qi of the sun itself. Despite this, their march did not elicit any sound whatsoever. The ordinary citizens couldn’t see them either. Only warriors like Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai could.

“Yin soldiers appearing during the day? Is the Fengdu planning to invade the yang world again?”

Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai exchanged severe looks with each other. This was a lot worse than yin soldiers appearing during the night because only a yin soldier who was sufficiently powerful could manifest during the day. This meant that their strength was such that even they felt threatened to an extent.

Even worse, this was a whole platoon of yin soldiers. Such were their numbers that their yin qi could blot out the sun and change the weather itself. It was terrifying to say the least.

Thankfully, the yin soldiers disappeared as quickly as they came. They were gone in just the blink of an eye.

After the yin soldiers were gone, the yin wind and yin clouds slowly faded, and the clear sky and hot sun were revealed once more. An ordinary person would’ve thought that it was just a passing storm.

“Should we inform the Feng Yang Pacification Bureau about this?” Chu Nianjiu took a sip of wine to calm his nerves.

“Unless everyone in the Feng Yang Pacification Bureau is blind, they should’ve seen the yin soldiers as clearly as we had. There’s no need to tell them about it.” Lin Yuhuai frowned deeply. “What worries me is something else.”

“What a coincidence. We may be worrying about the same thing.” Chu Nianjiu rubbed his chin as he sent Lin Yuhuai a sound transmission. “You don’t think they’re after Joyless, are they?”

“I don’t know,” Lin Yuhuai also replied via sound transmission. “Joyless didn’t tell us exactly what he did this time, but judging from his history, I’d say that it is very likely.”

“Should we notify Joyless about this?” Chu Nianjiu asked.

“It’s fine.” Lin Yuhuai shook his head. “Assuming that this really is Joyless’ doing, he would have anticipated it and made the appropriate preparations already. I don’t want to risk sending him a letter and having it intercepted by his enemies.”

“I think so too.” Chu Nianjiu nodded. “We have our own problems to take care of anyway. We haven’t even found Hou Er yet, and another two people have gone missing. What a pain.”

A day and night had passed since Ye Qing left, and they looked into Hou Er’s disappearance. Another two people had gone missing in the exact same way.

“Yeah.” The two Peacemakers exchanged a glance with each other before leaving.

They didn’t need to worry about Qi Xuanyun at least. The young Taoist had no idea why Ye Qing had left and where he went.

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At a location where the two Peacemakers couldn’t see, Corpse Child was standing on top of a one-horned giant’s shoulder and looking at Auspicious Phoenix Market from the distance.

Suddenly, a tall, brawny, ghastly general covered in tattered armor and smoking black qi appeared in front of Corpse Child and saluted him. “Young master, I have intercepted nine letters and caught three people who were leaving Auspicious Phoenix Market.”

“Speak. Did you find any useful information?” Corpse Child asked.

“None,” The ghost general responded in a muffled voice, “After interrogating the suspects, I discovered that two of them were Patrolmen leaving Auspicious Phoenix Market on official business, and the third man was just a paranoid man thinking that something is about to befall Auspicious Phoenix Market because of our ascent[1].”

“Good job. Keep a garrison of yin soldiers in Auspicious Phoenix Market. Inform me immediately if you find anything suspicious,” Corpse Child instructed. “You may leave.”

“As you command.” The ghost general saluted. The earth beneath him split in half and devoured him whole.

“What are you thinking, big brother?” The one-horned giant underneath Corpse Child asked after the ghost general was gone. When he talked, countless sparks spilled out of his mouth and burned the ground it touched. His voice was also loud and reverberating.

Corpse Child said slowly, “Although the thief had left Auspicious Phoenix Market, who is to say that they don’t have an accomplice or two? That’s why I tried beating the bush to check if there are snakes still hiding in here. If they sent the thief a letter or something, then it would lead us straight to the thief and give us some bargaining chips.”

“Since no one sent a letter just now, does that mean that the thief has no accomplices?” The one-horned giant asked.

“Maybe. Or maybe, the snakes are just extremely smart. That is why I left behind some men just in case,” Corpse Child replied while taking a seat.

“It doesn’t need to be so troublesome, brother. Just let me eat them all, and you’ll know everything you need to know,” the one-horned giant complained.

“That won’t do.” Corpse Child shook his head. “This is the human’s world, not Fengdu. There are rules we must obey, or there will be great trouble.”

“Hmph. I don’t like this.” The one-horned giant looked down and muttered, “Human flesh is so tasty.”

“Oh, you...” Corpse Child patted the one-horned giant’s head like he was consoling a child. “You may eat to your heart’s content when we find the thief.”

“It’s only one person. They won’t even fill the gap between my teeth,” the one-horned giant grumbled.

“I never said that. You’ll get to eat his family and friends as well. You may eat all of them. Surely that would be enough?” Corpse Child asked.

“Oh, that’s great! I’m so happy!” The one-horned giant cheered, scarlet flames rushing out of its mouth and turning everything around him into ash.

“You really are a kid.” Corpse Child chuckled and extinguished the flames with some of his corpse fluid. “Let’s go.”

“Yeah! Let’s go, let’s go and eat some meat...”

The one-horned giant took off, but its footsteps made no sound whatsoever. It was gone in the blink of an eye.

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“Young master, this is the place Heartless Brain had divined earlier,” Ghost General appeared beside Corpse Child and reported.

"I can't sense any living human's presence in the area. They're probably gone. But just in case, have the soldiers scour the place for any signs of abnormality," Corpse Child ordered from atop the one-horned giant's shoulder.

"As you command." The ghost general waved his hand, and the yin soldiers split into several squads and vanished into the trees.

Just a short while later, the ghost general reappeared and reported, "We found something, young master."

"What is it?"

The green flames in the ghost general's eyes flickered a little. "Come with me, young master."

"Hmm?" Corpse Child didn't understand why his subordinate didn't just report the situation to him, but he said, "Lead the way!"

"As you command."

The ghost general led Corpse Child to what looked like a huge pile of sand, and on top of the sand was a wooden board with a couple of words scribbled on it.

The one-horned giant crouched down and recited the words loudly, "You think you can catch me, Ghost Tower? Eat shit!"

Both Corpse Child and the ghost general had to resist slapping their own faces. *Are you trying to spread our shame?*

"They found out that we were coming after him?" Corpse Child muttered, "How?"

"Eat shit... big brother, they're telling us to eat shit? Are they swearing at us?" The one-horned giant finally processed the words.

"What do you think?" Corpse Child narrowed his eyes a little.

"Ah? He's actually swearing at us?! Ahhhh! I'm going to kill them!" The one-horned giant's fist-sized eyes turned red, and it brought its feet down on the wooden board.

BOOM!

As soon as the wooden board was crushed, a huge explosion consumed the one-horned giant and the ghost general before they could react. It sounded like the sky itself had collapsed as lightning and fire engulfed everything within tens of meters of the center. The explosion was such that the trees, the rocks, and the earth closest to the center were blasted into smithereens, and many yin soldiers were annihilated just like that.

"Raaaarrghh!"

It was at this moment a thunderous roar ripped through the sea of lightning and fire. An axe ripped through the overpowering heat and light and struck the ground, causing it to split apart. The massive crack was at least tens of meters long and several inches deep, and burning within the crack was a line of crimson flames.

The next moment, the one-horned giant, Corpse Child and the ghost general rushed out of the sea of flames. However, the one-horned giant had lost half of its foot, and the ghost general's armor was barely clinging to his body. A copious amount of yin qi was seeping out of the cracks as well.

Countless yin soldiers rushed over to their location. They had heard the explosion as well.

"How dare this scum set a trap for us!" Corpse Child rarely showed emotion, but this time, there was clear anger on his face. The surrounding plants immediately began to wither earnestly[2].

"Grrr... I'm going to kill them! I'm going to kill them!" The one-horned giant also let out a throaty roar. The yin wind he discharged sent some of the flames into the air, and countless ghosts roared from the yin wind.

"Earth Ghost, tally our losses and give me a report," Corpse Child ordered the ghost general while waiting for the one-horned giant to vent its fury.

Earth Ghost received his order and rounded up their remaining troops. But before he could do anything else, the yin soldiers suddenly started crumbling like burned paper.

"Shit!" Earth Ghost blanched as well. It was because he noticed that a strange energy was rapidly corroding his yin body and soul.

"Poison?!"

Corpse Child's face turned ugly as a coin-sized spot on his face grew bigger and bigger until it covered his whole face. At the same time, he emanated a strange energy that felt rotten, decayed, and dead. A short while later, Corpse Child spat out a glob of black liquid, and the liquid instantly eroded the ground in front of him.

Earth Ghost was lying on the ground and shoving soil into his mouth non-stop. It wasn't long before he had dug a deep pit. As more and more soil entered his mouth, Earth Ghost also grew increasingly solid. Soon, he looked just like an earth golem.

A while later, the earth surrounding his body crumbled, and Earth Ghost regained his normal appearance. However, the chunks of earth he discarded were pitch black in color.

"What are you doing, big brother? What happened to them?" The one-horned giant asked. It was the only one who didn't get what Corpse Child and Earth Ghost were doing. He didn't understand why the yin soldiers had suddenly disintegrated into nothing either.

"Young master, the soldiers?" Earth Ghost asked Corpse Child urgently after he returned to normal.

“It’s too late,” Corpse Child said in a low, emotionless tone. “This is the Fruit of Death’s poison[1]. It is poisonous enough that it could rot the body and contaminate the mind. It is especially effective against ghosts like us as we don’t have a physical form to split the damage. There is no ordinary ghost that could survive it.”

“Our yin soldiers may be powerful veterans, but even they cannot withstand the corrosion. Since their minds are gone, of course there’s no saving them.”

Earth Ghost was silent for a moment. His body was shaking and the ghastly orbs in his eyes were flickering erratically. Suddenly, it let out a full-throated roar full of rage and sorrow.

When he was still alive, he was the general of a small country. These yin soldiers were the very same soldiers who served him back then. Forged from countless battles, and one might say that their bond was deeper than blood. Unfortunately, they were so good at their jobs that their emperor became wary of them. As a result, they were killed by a conspiracy concocted by their very own sovereign[2].

Their resentment was such that their souls turned into ghosts after they died. Together, he and his soldiers wandered Fengdu for over a century before the Ghost Tower finally recruited them.

Although most of the yin soldiers didn’t possess any sapience whatsoever—all that remained in their ghastly self was their resentment—they had still accompanied Earth Ghost for countless years. But because of the thief’s trap, over half of them were wiped out before his eyes. How could he not be saddened by this?

“We must kill the thief, young master. We must take revenge for my comrades!” Earth Ghost looked at Corpse Child and roared.

“He won’t escape. He angered me too,” Corpse Child said indifferently. He sounded perfectly calm, but the bluish purple spots on his face kept increasing in size. Anyone who was familiar with Corpse Child would know that he was truly angry.

It was at this moment the one-horned giant interrupted, “What are you guys talking about, big brother? I don’t understand what you’re saying.” It didn’t seem to be interrupted by the Fruit of Death’s poison in the slightest.

“You don’t need to understand. You only need to know that I am very angry right now,” Corpse Child said slowly. “So angry that I need to kill something as soon as possible.”

Corpse Child produced the jar holding the Heartless Brain and a living human. Then, he pressed the Heartless Brain against the human’s skull until it had taken over the body.

“Hahaha! You sure took your time, Corpse Child!” The Heartless Brain cackled. “Oh my, this fresh air... It’s been too long since I returned to the yang world!”

“So? Did you find the thief yet?”

“What do you think?” Corpse Child retorted.

“Your face says obviously not, hahahaha! Let me see...” The Heartless Brain swayed back and forth for a bit before bursting out in laughter again. “The thief actually tricked you? They killed so many of your yin soldiers before you even caught a glimpse of their face? Ahahahaha! I can’t, I can’t! You never thought this would happen to you, did you? Hahahaha...”

The Heartless Brain laughed so hard that he was rolling on the floor.

“I’m not feeling good right now. If you’re done, then let’s get serious!” Corpse Child said emotionlessly.

“But I am being serious! I’m seriously laughing right now! Ahahahaha!” The Heartless Brain continued to laugh.

“Argh!”

The next second, the one-horned giant abruptly ripped off the Heartless Brain’s arm and began chewing ravenously. The pain was so sudden and overwhelming that the Stranger couldn’t help but writhe in pain.

The Heartless Brain was a unique Stranger who could take over any body and use it like its own, but at the same time, it also inherited all of the body’s senses such as pain, fatigue, hunger and more.

“Are you done laughing now?” Corpse Child asked.

“I’m done, I’m done. I swear, youngsters these days are so rude.” The Heartless Brain staggered to his feet while holding his bleeding stump. “Well? What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to locate the thief,” Corpse Child answered.

“You could’ve just said that from the beginning!” The Heartless Brain harrumphed and closed his eyes. A few breaths later, he opened them again.

“How did it go? Did you find them?” Earth Ghost asked in a hurry.

“Of course I did! Who do you think I am?” The Heartless Brain puffed up his chest with pride.

“Cut the bullshit and tell us where they are already,” Corpse Child said with displeasure.

“They went this way.” The Heartless Brain pointed in a certain direction while letting out a strange cackle. “In fact, they just left a while ago. Had you let me out sooner, you might have caught them already. Youngsters these days are too clever for their own good.”

“This is a bold one,” said Corpse Child while narrowing his eyes. He never thought that the thief would be bold enough to hide in the area.

“Heartless Brain, I can give you this body, but you’ll have to help us catch the thief as soon as possible.”

“Hahaha, you finally wised up, Corpse Child! No problem!” The Heartless Brain exclaimed with delight. “However, you need to get me some food first. I don’t ask for too much, I just want a steamed lamb, steamed bear claw, braised duck, sauced chicken, cured meat, braised pork with pine nut, deep-fried dried pork, sausages, meat plate, smoked chicken, steamed babao pork and marinated duck with glutinous rice... Just get me one of everything, and I’ll be satisfied.”

In response, Corpse Child said coldly, “One Horn, eat his arm if he breathes another word of nonsense. If he tries to run away, you may eat him whole.”

“Okay!” The one-horned giant licked its lips hungrily until it recalled something. “But he only has one arm left. What should I do if he breathes more nonsense after I eat his arm?”

Corpse Child answered, “No problem. You can just move onto his legs, his ears, his eyes, his nose...”

“Okay! Okay!” The one-horned giant chirped excitedly before staring at the Heartless Brain, salivating.

For the first time, the Heartless Brain’s grin turned into a frown. He swore mentally: *Stupid giant. It’s your own fault Corpse Child made you into his slave!*

On that note, who’s the bastard who screwed Corpse Child over? If you’re going to set up a trap, at least make one that’s powerful enough to kill them all! Seriously, what’s the point of taking out the small fries only?

Unreliable. Youngsters these days are just unreliable.

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“Ridiculous. These ghosts are fucking ridiculous. I used five Thunder Flame Bombs and a whole pack of poison made from the Fruits of Death, and it barely scratched the big bosses? Come on!”

Meanwhile, Ye Qing was swearing under his breath while galloping away on a paper horse created from a Horse Talisman. The Thunder Flame Bombs he used to set up the trap had been looted from the *jianghu* warriors he killed back in Luo Shui. It was a powerful explosive created by the Thunderclap Hall using a specific combination of black powder, secret art and restrictions.

The Thunder Flame Bomb was a restricted weapon because just one could destroy a small hill. Even its creators, the Thunderclap Hall, were forced to cooperate with the imperial court. But of course, a small supply of Thunder Flame Bombs still circulated within the *jianghu*,

and those warriors who got their hands on it normally used it as a trump card.

Ye Qing had looted a total of five Thunder Flame Bombs from his kills, and he had saved them until now. He wasn't willing to spend them when he was fighting against the *jianghu* warriors or even struggling to survive in the Demon's Tomb.

Today, he used it all and even added the poison Feng Qingyou had made for him into the mix. It was because he was hoping to kill all of his pursuers in one fell swoop. His plan was very simple. He just placed the bombs and the poison underneath the wooden board. The bombs would explode if a small amount of pressure was applied to it, which was why he wrote those words on the wooden board.

He was certain that anyone who wasn't a Bodhisattva or a saint would fly off their handle and destroy the wooden board. That would cause the Thunder Flame Bombs to explode at the same time. Combined with the poison made from the Fruits of Death, and anyone below the Spirit Master stage should be dead.

Even if they weren't, he imagined that they would take severe damage. That was why he stayed behind. He wanted to deal the last hit.

His imagination was pretty, and his plan went perfectly. The only problem was that he had grossly underestimated the Ghost Tower's strength.

The one-horned giant, the child sitting on his shoulder and the ghost general were one hundred percent Phenomenon-class Strangers. In fact, they were so strong that five Thunder Flame Bombs plus the poison of the Fruits of Death barely tickled them.

What could he do in this situation? Why, he could only run, of course?

The moment he confirmed that the three Strangers were far beyond his ability to defeat, Ye Qing had run away without a second thought. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to escape at all if he was too slow.

The silver lining was that it wasn't a fruitless endeavor. For one, he more or less figured out how strong his pursuers were. Second, the yin soldiers who died provided him a hefty number of dragon-serpent runes.

The yin soldiers were quite strong, and even the weakest among them was a Malice-class Stranger. The explosion and the poison had killed at least a hundred yin soldiers, and he had earned just as many silver runes.

It was still a loss in his opinion though. More importantly, how on earth was he going to save himself? There was no way the Ghost Tower would accept a surrender now even if he was willing. What if he hid himself for five to six years and came out of hiding after he was much stronger? Yeah, that wasn't going to work either.

His enemy had already found him once. It was entirely possible for them to find him twice. Short of hiding in the Pacification Bureau and never setting foot outside the headquarters, they would come after him by hook or by crook.

More importantly, hiding in the Pacification Bureau wouldn't work not because the Ghost Tower had the balls to challenge the Pacification Bureau, but because they would find out his identity

eventually and target his acquaintances, friends and family. This was the last thing he wished to happen.

In the end, there was only one way. He must kill all of his pursuers somehow.

But how am I going to do that?

The yin soldiers were one thing, but he couldn't defeat even one of the Phenomenon-class Strangers, much less the three of them together.

In the end, Ye Qing let out a sigh. *Oh well. I'll decide when the time comes.*

That time came sooner than he hoped. Ye Qing's paper horse had galloped about tens of kilometers when suddenly, the sky above his head began darkening at a visible rate. Yin wind howled like a rainstorm might happen at any moment.

"That fast? I didn't even get to sip my wine yet. This confirms that someone among them has the ability to track me down." Ye Qing scrunched his eyebrows together.

How could he shake off his pursuers if they could track him down this quickly?

Just because he had expected this didn't mean that he wasn't troubled by it.

Ye Qing massaged his forehead and produced a paper doll. Then, he blew at it.

The next moment, the paper doll quickly grew bigger and turned into Ye Qing. It saluted him before running off in a certain direction.

After the paper doll was gone, Ye Qing sucked in a deep breath and withdrew his energies completely. Then, he took off in the opposite direction of the paper doll, moving so quickly that he left behind several afterimages. By the time the afterimages disappeared, he was already gone.

Chapter 379: Strange Village

Just dozens of breaths later, the one-horned giant, Corpse Child, Earth Ghost and the Heartless Brain appeared at the exact spot where Ye Qing was earlier.

The one-horned giant was holding the Heartless Brain by the head. As soon as he let go, the Heartless Brain immediately dropped to his knees and began throwing up non-stop. But because his "allies" didn't give him any food, the only thing that came out of his mouth was stomach acid.

"Where are they?" Corpse Child looked at the Heartless Brain and asked.

"Can I have a moment to breathe, please?" The Heartless Brain complained in between vomits. "That 'ride' was so bumpy I could throw up my intestines!"

"Intestines? Where? I love intestines!" The one-horned giant asked eagerly.

Corpse Child ignored the one-horned giant and said coldly, "Don't make me repeat myself."

"Youngsters these days have no civility whatsoever," the Heartless Brain grumbled before pointing in the direction where the paper doll had disappeared to. "They were

here, and they went that way. Assuming their speed hasn't changed, we should catch up to them very soon."

"Let's go." Corpse Child ordered without hesitation.

As the one-horned giant picked the Heartless Brain up by the head again, the Heartless Brain looked in the real direction Ye Qing had escaped to with an odd smile on his face.

Hopefully, this will buy them some time.

.....

Ye Qing was currently running across a barren mountain as swift as lightning. At the speed he was going, it wouldn't be surprising if he sounded as loud as a jet, but in reality his run was perfectly silent.

He was using the "Illusionist's Grace" instead of the Horse Talisman. Although the "Illusionist's Grace" was more suited for evading attacks within a small area, its top speed was way higher than the Horse Talisman at full mastery.

The paper doll Ye Qing used just now was called the Shaping Talisman. It was a very special talisman that could take the appearance of anyone who blew a puff of pure yang qi on it. For a short time, the paper doll would possess the exact same presence and energy as the person.

The main reason he used the Shaping Talisman was to lure the Ghost Tower away from him. However, the talisman would only last an incense stick, so he needed to put as much distance from him and his pursuers as possible before it expired.

"Phew... I should have shaken them off for now, right?"

Ye Qing finally took a break two hours later. He had run almost two hundred kilometers, and during this time he had used nearly every trick in the book to confuse his enemies and lead them astray. If even this wasn't enough to shake off his pursuers, then he might as well give up right now.

He was lucky he had a strong body and the dragon-serpent runes to replenish his stamina and astral qi. Another person would be completely exhausted by now.

"My lead won't last more than a couple more hours though. I still need to kill them somehow."

It was at this moment Ye Qing noticed something downhill. "Hmm? There's a village up ahead. I might as well buy some food here and prepare for the long haul."

With his body, he could go three to five days without eating or drinking. But why stress himself when he didn't need to?

A few breaths later, he arrived at the village entrance. His senses immediately prickled with unease, however. Something about the place felt very off, lifeless and lethargic. He couldn't spot any guard in the vicinity either.

After he entered the village, he discovered that it was almost empty. There was barely anyone on the streets even though it was broad daylight, and everyone he saw was shockingly thin as if they hadn't eaten for days. Even stranger was the fact that they were all carrying a round stomach like they were ten months pregnant be it men, women, old or young[1].

"Strange?" Ye Qing furrowed his brows. He went up to a skinny, emaciated man and asked, "Brother, can I—"

The man was gone before he even finished his question. It was as if he hadn't heard him at all.

"Elder..."

"Lady..."

He tried getting a couple more people's attention, but not a single one of them responded to his inquiries. The most he got out of them was a lethargic, lifeless glance.

"What are you doing here, youngster?"

He was in the middle of the street when suddenly, someone called out to him from behind. When he turned around, he saw an old man with white hair and a long beard looking at him with kind-looking eyes. He was accompanied by six armed men with hostile expressions.

In fact, Ye Qing had noticed them a long time ago. They seemed to be the only people in the village who were normal. Their stomachs weren't bulging, for starters.

"Oh, good day to you, elder. I'm visiting a relative at Qing He, and I was going to rest my feet in your village." Ye Qing saluted the old man and asked, "I hope my presence here isn't too much of a problem?"

"I see! Not at all!" The old man responded in a kind voice, "I'm the village chief. Please, come with me."

"Thank you, elder." Ye Qing walked up to the old man and looked at the villagers around him with a bit of fear and puzzlement. "Elder, what's wrong with those villagers? Why do they look like... that? Are they ill?"

The village chief's expression turned severe. "They are. To tell you the truth, people who live in this village will catch a strange disease we call the Big Belly, and as they grow older the illness would get worse. I wonder what sins our village committed to suffer such a curse, sigh..."

"What do the doctors say?" Ye Qing asked.

The village chief sighed deeply. "It's no use. We've invited countless famous doctors, miracle doctors, and even the Pacification Bureau to treat them, but no one could help us. Since then, everyone stayed away from our village like it was struck by a plague. I could hardly blame them. Those poor children!"

“Anyway, let’s not dwell on such depressing matters any longer. We’ve arrived.”

The village chief led Ye Qing to a house that was bigger and more luxurious than any other house in the village. He then said, “Please, come in.”

“Thank you, elder.”

Ye Qing quickly discovered that the interior of the building was just as exquisite as the exterior. The decor was quite tasteful and elegant as well.

“You haven’t eaten, have you brother? Would you like to have a meal before you resume your journey?”

“It’s fine. It’s too much trouble!” Ye Qing hurriedly turned him down.

“It’s fine, it’s been a while since there are visitors in Red Sand Village. I would love it if you would enjoy a drink with me.”

“I... Er...” Ye Qing hesitated.

The village chief chuckled. “Just accept my offer. I can tell you were on the road for a long time. You must be pretty thirsty and hungry, aren’t you? How can you continue your journey if you don’t have strength?”

In the end, Ye Qing agreed. “In that case, I shall impose on you, elder.”

“Hahaha, good!” The village chief guffawed loudly.

A while later, a bunch of servants filled the dining table with delicious food and fine wine.

“Please take a seat, young one.” The village chief offered with a hand.

“Oh my heavens, this is incredible!” Ye Qing chirped with excitement.

“Hahaha! As long as you’re happy. Come, let us drink!” The village chief declared and filled Ye Qing’s glass with wine.

“Yes. Thank you again for the food, elder.” Ye Qing didn’t hesitate to down the wine in one gulp.

Something flickered within the village chief’s eyes as he watched Ye Qing. “Good! Good! I can see you’re quite the drinker, young one. Now, let us enjoy the food, shall we?”

Ye Qing did, but just two bites later, his eyes abruptly rolled to the back of his head, and he collapsed on his back.

“Young one? Young one?” The village chief cried out twice. When Ye Qing didn’t wake, a cold expression replaced his warm smile from before.

“Hmph.”

“Is it done, boss?” A voice called out from outside.

“It is done. Come in,” the village chief declared.

The men who accompanied him before filed into the room. One man kicked Ye Qing hard in the ribs while saying, "Boss, it's obvious he's just an ordinary person. We could've just captured him on the spot. You really didn't need to waste all this food."

"It's always better to be safe than sorry." The village chief shook his head.

"And I think you are too cautious, boss." Another man chuckled. "So, are we going to turn him into a Human Pill?"

"What else are we going to do if not that?" A third man scoffed.

The man answered, "Well, he's quite young and handsome, isn't he? It'll be a shame to turn him into a Human Pill when we keep him around for... you know."

"Fuck, I completely forgot that you're gay! No wonder you kept poking me with your thing when we were in bed last night! You ruined me!" Another guy yelled.

The village chief chuckled. "Enough. I'm aware that you've been holding it in this whole time. You may have him. It's not like we can't turn him into a Human Pill after you're done with him."

"Our current batch will turn into pills very soon. I expect you to carry out your duties to perfection, understand?"

"As you command!" Everyone said.

The one guy who was gay thanked the village chief profusely, "Thank you very much, boss! I won't forget this!" He then strode toward Ye Qing with obvious lust in his eyes.

Snap!

Suddenly, the sound of a finger snap resounded throughout the room. Everyone's eyes lost their focus in an instant.

On the floor, Ye Qing abruptly opened his eyes and rose to his feet. He stared at the man who tried to lay his hands on him with dripping disdain as he scoffed, "I would rather fuck an old woman than be touched by the likes of you!"

Then, he looked at the village chief with frigid eyes. "Making Human Pills out of people? What an audacious, heinous plan!"

"You... You're fine?" The village chief abruptly startled awake and stared at Ye Qing incredulously. He had broken free from Ye Qing's "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul" using some sort of secret art.

"You seriously thought that tiny bit of knockout drug is going to knock me out? Come now." Ye Qing chuckled.

"Knockout" was an extremely powerful knockout drug. A single gulp was all it took to knock out anyone below the Astral Refinement stage. It was so potent that even a Spirit Purifier would have a hard time trying to stay conscious, much less fight.

Too bad for his attackers, he was immune to poison.

"I knew you weren't normal." The village chief's face looked ugly. "You saw through us from the start, didn't you?"

"You can say that." Ye Qing smirked. "Everyone in the village is carrying a big belly except you seven. Everyone looked emaciated and lifeless, but you guys are practically the picture of health. Besides that, your subordinates are clearly skilled and reeked of blood. It was obvious that you lot had a lot of blood on your hands."

"Finally, you claimed that it had been a long time since Red Sand Village saw an outsider, but I saw a few people who obviously looked like outsiders, not to mention that there were escort carts and merchant carts at the entrance. So yeah, you can say I saw through you somewhat."

"No wonder they say that all heroes are young!" The village chief fell silent for a moment. "You may leave now that you've enjoyed my hospitality."

"Leave? And why would I do that?" Ye Qing shook his head. "I thought you guys are making Human Pills? I've never seen one before. Why don't you show it to me?"

"Some things are better left unsaid, boy."

The village chief's face slowly turned cold and stiff. "I gave you an out. You could've walked away and pretended that none of this had ever happened. But now, it's too late for you."

Chapter 380: The Chaos Heaven Brigands

Is that so? Ye Qing smiled. I wonder. I personally believe that its never too late until Im dead.

Dont worry. Youre going to die very soon. The village chief sneered. Black, pungent smoke abruptly flowed out of his nostrils, and a soft sword abruptly slid out of the village chiefs sleeve. Like a viper, he unleashed a double thrust at Ye Qings throat and heart that was somehow menacing and perfectly soundless at the same time.

The soft sword pierced Ye Qings throat, but the village chief was the one who flinched. It was because the young man had popped like a bubble.

Shit! Its a fake!

The village chief withdrew his sword and jumped away faster than when he attacked Ye Qing. He appeared outside the building in just an instant and unleashed thirty six thrusts while doing so. The sword thrusts combined into a powerful gale that turned the entire building into a crumbling pincushion in an instant. The sword art was named the Thirty Six Gale Swords.

Dude, that was a perfectly good house. Its such a waste to destroy it.

The village chief had just caught his balance. He didn't even have time to draw his breath when a regretful voice came from behind. Every hair on his skin stood on end, but before he could make a move, an icy hand grabbed his shoulder and froze him in place. No, he wasn't actually encased in ice or anything. He just knew that something horrifying would happen if he so much as twitched a muscle.

W-Warrior, i-its all a misunderstanding, The village chief stuttered as the blood drained away from his face. His well-groomed hair was drenched in sweat right now.

A misunderstanding? You drugged my wine and plotted to turn me into a Human Pill, and you're telling me that it's a misunderstanding? Ye Qing smirked. Okay, let's pretend that it's a misunderstanding. But what's this about turning an entire village of people and the merchants and escorts who came to this place into Human Pills? Do you think that the local government and Pacification Bureau will treat this as a misunderstanding if they hear about this?

Large beads of sweat appeared on the village chief's forehead. Mercy, warrior! It was just a momentary lapse of judgment! I know I deserve death, but please, mercy?

Oh my, it isn't everyday I encounter someone with a sliver of self-awareness. But then again, maybe I'm wrong. After all, what kind of self-aware person would do such a heinous thing? Aren't you afraid that karma will catch up to you?

Ye Qing was smiling, but his eyes grew colder by the second. A Human Pill was, as the name might suggest, a pill that was made from humans. A pill seed was implanted in the victim's body, and the victim's qi, essence and spirit were used to nourish the pill seed until it became a pill through the use of a horrifying secret art. This was the reason the victim's belly kept growing larger, but their bodies were skinny and emaciated.

When the pill had fully ripened, the pill would fall out of the victim's stomach like a fruit. Of course, the victim whose everything was completely absorbed by the pill would die.

However, there were many benefits in creating pills this way. For starters, it took less time than creating pills via fire or water. It was also easier to create the pill. Not only that, a Human Pill contained the essence, qi and spirit of a person, so it contained a tremendous amount of refined energy. Consuming such a pill would not only improve one's cultivation drastically, but also increased their lifespan. Naturally, there were plenty of inhuman bastards who created Human Pills in secret despite the risks.

Ye Qing had learned of Human Pills while he was living at Luo Shui, but he had never actually encountered such an incident until now. In fact, he was sure he would never encounter such an incident simply because he refused to believe that humanity would stoop so low. Of course, reality proved that there was no such thing as the lowest, only lower.

I was wrong! I was foolish! I could tell that my death is near, and in my fear and panic drove me to committing such a heinous crime! I deserve to die! The village chief wept. Please take me to the authorities, warrior. I'm willing to confess my crimes and submit to their judgment!

Oh? Ye Qing raised an eyebrow. Nah, I don't think you actually want to submit to anyone's judgment. You're just stalling for reinforcements.

I don't understand what you're saying. The village chief looked confused.

No, you understand exactly what I'm saying. Ye Qing loomed over the village chief like the executioner as he spoke. You repeatedly refer to yourself as the village chief, and that you made the Human Pills because the end of your lifespan is near, and you're afraid to die. In reality, it's all bullshit.

One, I can tell that you're quite the vigorous bastard despite your white hair. You have at least twenty more years before you actually approach the end of your lifespan.

Two, you're not the village chief. There is no Half-Step Spirit Purifier in the world who would choose to languish in a small mountain village, and if you really are who you claim you are, you would never dare to turn the entire village into a Human Pill farm.

And three, you are not alone, because there is no one person who can turn an entire village into a Human Pill farm and somehow keep it hidden from the Pacification Bureau. Therefore, you must have accomplices.

That is why your so-called confession and regret are all bullshit. You're just hoping that your accomplices will save you while I deliver you to the authorities. Am I right?

You are a discerning man, warrior. The village chief shuddered, and hatred flickered in his eyes for just a moment. Then, he roared angrily. Since you already figured out the truth, then there's no point in hiding it any longer. Me and my subordinates are members of the Chaos Heaven Brigands. The Chaos Heaven Brigands?!

That surprised Ye Qing a little. Generally speaking, criminals could be broken down into three categories. The small-time criminals were called thieves, the middling ones were called bandits, and the actual threats were known as brigands.

In Chu, there were a total of thirteen infamous brigand groups. Their numbers were great, and their members were as strong as they were ruthless. Murders, pillages, raids and more, there was no evil under the sun that they wouldn't commit. Despite Chu's many attempts to eradicate these brigands, they were never quite able to succeed. Over time, they came to be known as the Thirteen Brigands.

The Chaos Heaven Brigands were one of them. The leader of the Chaos Heaven Brigands was a Half-Step Grandmaster named Chen Ah Sheng, and he called himself the Chaos Heaven King. He was supported by Four Protectors, Eight Vajrapanis, and thirteen armies. The Four Protectors were Spirit Purifiers, the Eight Vajrapanis were Astral Refiners, and the thirteen armies consisted of five thousand and eight hundred warriors[1].

With this amount of forces, the Chaos Heaven Brigands could go up against any county in Chu and potentially win. Despite this, the Chaos Heaven Brigands ranked near the bottom of the Thirteen Brigands. In fact, they were the second weakest brigand group of the thirteen.

Thats right. The village chief nodded before his expression grew sorrowful. To tell you the truth, my family was murdered by the Chaos Heaven Brigands. We used to run an escort agency until Chen Ah Sheng set his eyes on us. Not only did he steal our merchandise, he even killed my younger brother and and cooked my wife and son alive. That bastard!

The village chief uttered through gritted teeth. I only survived because I pretended to be dead. Later, I joined the Chaos Heaven Brigands in order to find an opportunity to kill Chen Ah Sheng and take revenge for my family once and for all. Unfortunately, Chen Ah Sheng is cunning as he is strong. I never found my chance even to this day.

Is that so? Ye Qing raised an eyebrow. It was true that Chen Ah Sheng had the horrific hobby of cooking humans alive and eating them. He had read about it while going through the Pacification Bureaus files. As for the village chiefs story, he had to admit that it sounded pretty tragic.

So, you decided to join your sworn enemy because you couldnt defeat them?

No, I was forced to. The village chief uttered bitterly. I am a human as well. I dont want to turn humans into Human Pills either. But what can I do except obeying Chen Ah Sheng? If I dont do it, then they would just kill me and send someone else. In that case, I might as well do it myself. At the very least, Id be able to save some innocent people.

So, youre saying that youre a good person? Ye Qing smirked.

A good person? Of course not! How can someone whose hands are covered in blood like me be a good person? The village chief let out a bitter chuckle. But now now, I have a chance to atone for my sins.

Chen Ah Sheng had taken some of the villagers to his mountain. If you wish to rescue them, then you need to act fast. I can lead you up the mountain. I can help you save the villagers. You may do whatever you want with me after that. Just please give me a chance.

Ye Qing let out a soft chuckle. Ah, your offer is appreciated, but I dont think Ill be taking you anywhere. I dont want someone to stab me in the back, you see. Your story is surprisingly elaborate, and I gotta admit that I almost believed you for a second there. But too bad for you, Im not a three-year-old.

Warrior Im telling you the truth! The village chief flinched.

Ye Qings lips curled into a devilish smile. Maybe, maybe not. Ill know the truth very soon.

The village chiefs eyes abruptly grew cloudy and unfocused. A few breaths later, it regained its light, and a devilish cackle escaped his lips. Kekeke, how interesting! Do you know, boy?

Do I know, what? Ye Qing asked.

The reason Ye Qing was willing to waste his breath on the village chief was because he was waiting for the Fog Demon to dominate his mind. Normally, the Stranger could do it in just a matter of seconds, but more time was necessary since Ye Qing didnt want the Fog Demon to damage the village chiefs memories.

In the future, when his mastery of Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul had reached the adept level, he would be able to capture his enemys mind in an instant and view their memories himself.

This guy was actually telling you the truth. A modified version of it, at least. The Fog Demon couldnt stop cackling. He was part of an escort agency, and Chen Ah Sheng was part of the reason his family died. He was running an escort mission when Chen Ah Sheng took out his men and captured him. In order to survive, he murdered his own young brother, cooked his own wife and son, and served their flesh to Chen Ah Sheng. Now this is one bastard I can stand behind, kekeke!

Ye Qings eyes flickered with scorn and killing intent. Heh. Such is human nature. When ones life is on the line, some people will give up their lives to save a total stranger, while some would sacrifice their own loved ones just to live a second longer. To be human on the outside, but a Stranger on the inside. How lamentable.

Anyway, did you get Chen Ah Shengs location and information from his memories?

But of course! You know, this guy is no joke. His name is Hu Fengsan, and hes one of the Eight Vajrapanis. The reason hes creating Human Pills is because Chen Ah Sheng is planning on entering the Grandmaster stage. Naturally, Chen Ah Sheng himself is based not far away from here. Look.

The Fog Demon and Ye Qing shared an eternal contract, so they could easily share memories with one another. It took the Fog Demon only a moment to share Chen Ah Shengs location with Ye Qing.

A while later, Ye Qing rubbed his nose and fell silent. He remained like this for a while until the Fog Demon grew impatient and asked, What are you blanking out for, boy? You saved who you needed to save and killed who you needed to kill. All thats left is to send a message to the Pacification Bureau, so get it done already. You havent forgotten that youre being hunted, have you?

What do you think will happen if we go to Chen Ah Sheng? Ye Qing asked suddenly.

I dont have a death wish. On the contrary, I think its my only chance to live. Ye Qing wore an enigmatic smirk as he beckoned the Fog Demon to follow him. Come on.

Where are we going?

Were going to get justice for the innocents, and a way out for myself.