

Stranger 621

Chapter 621: Hot When Chilled, Cold When Burned

Wenliang was cut into many pieces because she turned everyone against her.

Wen Qianqiu died in his own wife's hands because he couldn't remain faithful.

Tang Jincai was torn apart by five horses, and his whole family was executed because he turned into a dictator.

Li Hentian disappeared without a trace because he did whatever he wanted with no regard for social norms whatsoever.

And finally, Shen Wanjin was imprisoned and tortured because there was no low he wouldn't stoop to for money. The imperial court also confiscated all of his wealth.

The five people's endings matched Tian Xingzi's description of the Wenliang Pearl perfectly.

Everyone's breathing grew heavier when the realization struck them.

If most people were skeptical of Xi Duoduo's claims before, now they were truly starting to believe.

"Hahaha, I should remind you all that what I just told you is pure speculation on my part. Not even the quote in 'Identifying Truths' is necessarily the truth," Xi Duoduo added casually after observing the crowd's reactions for a moment.

Ye Qing smirked. He had to admit that Xi Duoduo was a masterful businessman. He never stopped claiming that everything he said was just guesses and conjectures on his part, when in reality he was consistently leading the people deeper into the hole he had dug for them.

He knew that, the more he insisted that he wasn't sure, the more people would think that Wenliang, Wen Qianqiu, Tang Jingcai, Li Hentian and Shen Wanjin's successes and reputation were thanks to the Wenliang Pearl.

Ye Qing's demonic thought told him that the greed and desire brimming in the main hall right now was akin to a live volcano ready to erupt at any moment.

They all knew that there was a chance—a good chance even—that the successes of those famous persons had nothing to do with the Wenliang Pearl.

They also knew that the Wenliang Pearl was most likely cursed. For all its boons, it would most likely lead them to a miserable end.

But the human heart did not care for logic. Never did, never would.

When presented with the promise of unprecedented glory and power, there was only one and only one thing most people would do: seize it with all their body like moths to flames.

"The authenticity of your stories aside, Xi Duoduo, I have but one question for you. Are you sure the Wenliang Pearl behind you is the genuine article?"

Ancestor Greenwood asked.

“Of course it’s real! Even if I am audacious enough to trick you all, I wouldn’t dare to risk my reputation as a Hill Carrier, would I?”

Xi Duoduo smiled. “To verify that it’s real, I had checked it with thirteen of my faction’s appraisers. They all believe that it is the Wenliang Pearl, if not a convincing fake that’s so real it might as well be the real thing. Please look.”

Xi Duoduo produced a round, transparent stone that looked like some sort of gem. At the center of the stone was a tiny, bead-sized blue flame swaying here and there as if the gem was hollow on the inside.

As soon as the stone appeared, the entire Popularity Tower suddenly turned as hot as a furnace. Countless people broke into a sweat instantly.

The heat did not last even a second when a soothing chill emanated from the Wenliang Pearl and dispelled the heat wave.

“The Flame In Stone?!”

Ye Qing raised an eyebrow, recognizing the flame Xi Duoduo was holding instantly. Its name was Flame In Stone, and it took five hundred years for a single wisp to be born from earthly qi. Stored inside a stone, it was thick, heavy, and rich in yang. It was one of the Spirit Flames of Five Phases and, while not as valuable as his Purple Sun Trueflame, was still pretty damn precious.

“As you know, the Wenliang Pearl is supposedly cold when it is scorched by fire and vice versa. What I’m currently holding in my hands is a Flame In Stone, and it is a flame of absolute yang. Let us see if the legend is true, shall we?”

Xi Duoduo began fanning the Flame In Stone, and as the flame grew hotter, so did the Wenliang Pearl become colder. Despite the growing intensity of the clash, the temperature within the main hall remained stable. No matter how hot the Flame In Stone became, the Wenliang Pearl would produce more cold to counteract it.

After Xi Duoduo put away the Flame In Stone, he produced an ice cube next and declared, “Now then. Let us check if the Wenliang Pearl will turn hot when chilled.”

The ice cube was sky blue in color. As soon as it appeared, the temperature inside the main hall immediately nosedived. It was like they had suddenly plunged into a frigid hell.

“This is the Ten Thousand Year Ice. An object of absolute yin, it—”

Before Xi Duoduo could finish, the universe within the Wenliang Pearl spun round and round and produced waves and waves of heat. It immediately washed away the Ten Thousand Year Ice’s cold.

Seeing this, Xi Duoduo fell silent and began stroking the power of the Ten Thousand Year Ice just like he did with the Flame In Stone. The outcome was the exact same as before. No matter how cold the Ten Thousand Year Ice became, the Wenliang Pearl would match it with the same amount of heat. As a result, the temperature within the main hall was soothing and comfortable like spring.

The Wenliang Pearl returned to normal after Xi Duoduo put away the Ten Thousand Year Ice.

Ye Qing had to admit that he was impressed by what he saw. Even if this was all the Wenliang Pearl could do, and it did not, in fact, possess the mysterious power to transform a person into a dragon among men as Tian Xingzi claimed, it was still a precious treasure. In extreme environments, it could even mean the difference between life and death.

Take the time he was at the Firewind Valley for example. If he had the Wenliang Pearl then, he wouldn't have almost burned to death because of the Burning Wind.

"So? You've witnessed its power with your own eyes. You now know that the Wenliang Pearl is real!" Xi Duoduo declared.

"Cough, cough... If this really is the Wenliang Pearl, then why are you auctioning it? Wouldn't it be better to keep it to yourself? Also, legend has it that the last time the Wenliang Pearl showed up was centuries ago. How on earth did you obtain it?" Weak Old Man asked before panting like a dog. His face was pale, and his breathing was heavy from saying so many words in one breath.

"My humble apologies, senior, but us Hill Carriers are required to obey a certain set of rules. For one, we are not allowed to reveal how we obtain our items. Therefore, I cannot tell you how I came across the Wenliang Pearl."

Xi Duoduo said apologetically, "However, I can promise you that the Wenliang Pearl comes with no strings attached. You have my word that you don't have to worry about some ancient monster springing out of nowhere and chasing you down for the Wenliang Pearl."

"As for why we are auctioning the Wenliang Pearl instead of keeping it to ourselves, there are two reasons. First, we are ultimately unable to confirm if this item truly is the Wenliang Pearl, or if it possesses the mysterious power the legends claim it has. Second, even if the Wenliang Pearl truly possesses the mysterious power of legends, it is ultimately just a merchandise to us Hill Carriers. All Hill Carriers are businessmen, and there is nothing we wouldn't sell so long as the price is right."

It was at this moment the Red Calabash Celestial burped and interrupted sleepily, "Enough already. How much longer is this introduction going to continue? Or are you keeping the Wenliang Pearl to yourself after all?"

"Of course not, dear customer." Xi Duoduo did not get angry despite the rude interruption. He declared with a wide smile on his face, "The starting bid is one pearl. Without further ado, let the bidding begin!"

There was a moment of silence after Xi Duoduo was done speaking. Then, an uproar.

"The bid has been increased to two pearls."

"Now it's ten pearls."

"Oh my! One hundred pearls!"

"Oh my oh my! Another customer has upped the bid to five hundred pearls!"

“One thousand pearls...”

Xi Duoduo was all smiles as he dutifully reported the latest bid. Ye Qing chuckled. Knowing that the Wenliang Pearl would not be wanting of bidders, the businessman had dared to set the starting bid to one pearl. He was right. In just a dozen or so breaths, the bid price of the Wenliang Pearl had risen to one thousand pearls and was still increasing at a terrifying rate.

In fact, this was just the foreplay. The truly wealthy ones such as Ancestor Greenwood, Weak Old Man and Red Calabash Celestial hadn't joined in after all.

In Ye Qing's own estimations, the Wenliang Pearl was going to sell at least as much as the Dark Overlord Token, if not more.

After all, the Dark Overlord Token only represented an opportunity to obtain the Dark Overlord's inheritance, whereas the Wenliang Pearl was a chance to lead a life that was as glorious and legendary as the legend's own.

Chapter 622: I'm Not A Shill!

Was Ye Qing tempted? He would be lying if he said he wasn't, but no, he didn't succumb to the temptation.

Ye Qing knew very well that, even if the Wenliang Pearl truly possessed the mysterious power to transform an ordinary person into a dragon among men, it was ultimately just an item. In the end, it was up to the person to weave their own destiny.

He did not believe for a second that Wenliang, Wen Qianqiu, Tang Jingcai, Li Hentian and more's achievements were solely thanks to the Wenliang Pearl. They had to be once-in-a-century geniuses in their own right, or else why was there only one Wenliang, one Wen Qianqiu, and one Dark Overlord for thousands of years?

If the Wenliang Pearl really was that miraculous, then there would be Dark Overlords and Sages everywhere already.

Besides, this was assuming that the Wenliang Pearl really did possess the mysterious power the legends claimed it had. If it didn't, then what was the point?

In conclusion, Ye Qing was going to *try* to bid for it, but he certainly wasn't going to wallow in abject misery and despair if he failed.

Despite the crowd's eagerness, the Treasure Appreciation Auction continued in an organized fashion. By now, the bid price had risen to three thousand pearls or 1.5 million silver.

It was also around this time the number of bidders began to drop drastically. It was 1.5 million silver. To most people, that was a sum they might never earn in a lifetime.

“Three thousand and five hundred...”

It was at this moment Amorous Mother's seductive voice entered the fray. “You're all manly men. Surely you wouldn't compete against a weak woman like me, right?”

“Cough, cough... I'm a gravely ill man with not much time to live, and I finally found something that might be able to stave off the inevitable. A manly man I may be, how can I give up this opportunity without a fight? Apologies, sister...”

Weak Old Man coughed twice before announcing, “Four thousand pearls.”

“If you’re sick, then you should take medicine. How on earth could the Wenliang Pearl help you? I heard that the Treasure Appreciation Auction would be auctioning a Root of Health that could treat all kinds of ailments. Rather than wasting your silver on the Wenliang Pearl, shouldn’t you be focusing your attention on what you truly need?” Ancestor Greenwood scoffed while fanning himself.

“Cough, cough... You say as if you don’t have one foot in the grave yourself. You might look young, but everyone knows that you’re nearing the end of your lifespan. The Wenliang Pearl is a waste in your hands as well.”

Weak Old Man said slowly, “Oh, right. I heard that the Treasure Appreciation Auction would be auctioning a Taisui Flesh that can extend one’s lifespan. I’m sure that is what you came for. If you spent all your silver on the Wenliang Pearl, how can you bid for the Taisui Flesh? It is unwise to pick up a sesame seed and drop a watermelon[1], you know?”

“Hmph! I’m rich, so what do you care? Four thousand and five hundred pearls!” Ancestor Greenwood got embarrassed and angry that his secret was revealed in public.

“Cough cough... unfortunately for you, I’ve saved up quite the sum of discretionary income throughout the years myself...” Weak Old Man declared, “Five thousand.”

“Five thousand eight hundred pearls!”

“Six thousand.”

The two men should be using the Psychic Gold Koi to announce their bid, but they didn’t. Xi Duoduo didn’t try to stop them either. The Psychic Gold Koi was just a safer, more reliable way to make a bid, and it was up to his customers whether they wanted to use it. If anything, he loved it when his customers dropped his guard and gave him opportunities to exploit.

Amorous Mother, Red Calabash Celestial and more tried to compete for a bit, but they all gave up after a while. The bidding price had grown too much to bear. In the end, only Ancestor Greenwood and Weak Old Man were still bidding against each other.

“Nine thousand pearls...”

When Ancestor Greenwood gritted his teeth and declared the price, Weak Old Man shook a little. A moment of silence later, he decided to let it stretch forever.

“Nine thousand pearls... is there anyone else?”

Seeing this, Xi Duoduo started fanning the flames. “This is the Wenliang Pearl. If you miss it, you might never get the chance to become a dragon among men like Wenliang, Wen Qianqiu, the Dark Overlord and more.”

“Are you sure you want to give up?”

“Can you afford to surrender this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to another person?”

“Who knows, maybe a slightly bigger bid—just a little—is the last straw you need to break the camel’s back. Maybe you can be the one with the Wenliang Pearl. What are you waiting for?”

“Oh! The hero has answered! The hero has answered the call! And their bid is... is...”

Xi Duoduo was overjoyed when he saw a new bid, but his smile quickly froze on his face. “... Nine thousand and one pearl. Is there anyone else?”

“Nine thousand and one hundred.” Ancestor Greenwood narrowed his eyes and squeezed out the words.

“Ancestor Greenwood ups the bid with nine thousand and one hundred pearls. Would you like to beat that number, customer? Yes, I’m talking to you, my dear customer who bid earlier. You just need to up the bid by a single pearl again, and the Wenliang Pearl could be yours, you know?” Xi Duoduo ignored Ancestor Greenwood’s icy expression and said.

“Oh, here it comes! Let’s see... it’s nine thousand, one hundred and ONE PEARL! I knew they would answer my call!” Xi Duoduo’s grin widened.

“The current bid is now nine thousand, one hundred and one pearls! Is there anyone who would like to beat that number?”

He said “anyone”, but his eyes were firmly fixed on Ancestor Greenwood. Who else but the money bag with more money than sense was going to spend more money on the Wenliang Pearl?

“Nine thousand and five hundred.”

By now, Ancestor Greenwood was past caring about his appearances. A black storm brewing on his face, he snarled, “I’ll just say this right now. I want this pearl, and I’m going to get it. If you test my patience again, I will not take this lying down any longer!”

It sounded like he was warning the other bidders, but he was staring straight at Xi Duoduo as he said this. It was because he suspected that the bastard who kept upping the bid by one pearl was done by Xi Duoduo’s skill.

After all, what kind of idiot would up the bid by exactly one pearl per bid if they really wanted the Wenliang Pearl? Did they think this was a game?

Xi Duoduo understood Ancestor Greenwood’s meaning, of course. For the first time, he dropped his smile and said with complete seriousness, “Ahem... I must clarify this, but whoever is bidding

against you, they are *not* my skill. We value impartialness and fairness above all else in our Treasure Appreciation Auction, and we would never try to scam our customers.”

“Hmph!”

Everyone scoffed at his declaration, of course. Everyone, except Ye Qing.

And why was that? Because he was the bidder who kept upping the bid with a single pearl. Naturally, he knew better than anyone that he was no skill.

His total wealth amounted to a little over four million silver only, and one pearl was equal to five hundred silver. That was why he had no choice but to up the bid by one pearl each time.

He was just trying to get lucky. He knew full well that the chances of him winning the bid was extremely low, but what if?

Who hadn’t enjoyed a bowl of jiaozi during the New Year[2]?

Alas, Ancestor Greenwood’s final declaration extinguished that hope completely. No, he wasn’t afraid of offending the pervert old man who was pretending to be young. He simply did not have the money to outbid nine thousand and five hundred pearls.

“Nine thousand and five hundred pearls, people! Is there anyone else?”

Xi Duoduo declared and waited for a moment, but this time, the shit stirrer did not stir up the shit any longer. Left with no choice, he finally launched into the end speech, “Nine thousand and five hundred pearls once... nine thousand and five hundred pearls twice... one thousand and five hundred pearls thrice... and done. Congratulations to Ancestor Greenwood for winning the Wenliang Pearl! Congratulations!”

Even as he said this, Xi Duoduo couldn’t help but feel a twinge of regret. Had that shit stirrer hung on just a little longer, he might have been able to squeeze ten thousand pearls out of Ancestor Greenwood. That was five million silver!

Ye “Shit Stirrer” Qing wanted to protest his innocence when he sensed Xi Duoduo’s regret. *I’m not a skill! I’m not!*

Chapter 623: Root of Health, Taisui Flesh

The Wenliang Pearl pushed the Treasure Appreciation Auction to a climax. Many people weren’t expecting it, but it successfully elevated everyone’s expectations for the next item.

Unfortunately, the next couple items were exceedingly boring. They weren’t bad per se—in fact, they were all useful high quality items. For example, a Spirit Master Magia martial arts manual, the “Thunderclap of Nine Heavens”, was auctioned. It was a demon subjugating thunder art originating from the Heavenly Master Monastery of Dragon Tiger Mountain. Overwhelming and grand, it was a powerful offensive-type Magia that excelled at killing one’s enemies.

A Five Senses Talisman was also on sale. If someone were to plaster it to their eyes, then they could view everything within hundreds of kilometers of them. If they plastered it to their ears, then they could hear everything within hundreds of kilometers. If they plastered it to their mouth, then they could consume metal and wood of the Five Phases. If they plastered it to their tongue, then they could taste anything down to the finest details. And if they plastered it to their forehead, then they

could stretch their senses much, much further than usual and perceive everything. It was a talisman with a broad range of applications.

If the Five Senses Talisman had one flaw, it was the fact that it could only be used once. Ye Qing found it useful and managed to win it for himself.

Some of the auction items were quite strange and peculiar as well. For example, there was a red paper with the word “Happiness” written on its surface. It was called Red Happiness. The Red Happiness was a Strange Artifact created from the undying feelings of a pair of eloping lovers after they died in the name of love. Imbued with the sincerest blessing of the two lovers, any couple who plastered this red paper on the wall during their wedding ceremony were guaranteed to enjoy a blissful marital life until the end of their lives.

Of course, there was no such thing as a Strange Artifact that could be used without a cost. Red Happiness was no exception. If one of the couple grew unfaithful and betrayed their sworn partner, or if they did something that was deemed unforgivable for a couple, then they would put on their wedding clothes during nighttime and commit suicide.

The Ghost Comb was a peachwood comb with strange powers. If someone were to comb their hair using the Ghost Comb in front of a mirror during midnight, a ghost would appear and answer the comber’s questions.

The more difficult the questions were, the bigger the price they must pay. A trivial question would cause them to be invaded by yin qi and fall ill for three to five days, whereas a serious question might result in them being possessed by the ghost.

The Brush of Literature was a brush that could compose poems, songs, essays and more on its own. It was said to be the possession of a late Grand Secretary. It gradually turned into a Strange Artifact due to constant exposure to the Grand Secretary’s talent and literary air.

Its usage was very simple. One simply needed to place the brush on a Xuan paper, and it would automatically compose a poem, a song, or an essay of outstanding quality.

The price was the user’s own talent and literary air. Even the most literarily talented scholar would devolve into an ordinary person if they kept using the brush.

The feather of a Sweet Voice Bird could produce sweet voices if it made contact with the wind.

The Beautiful Maggot was a maggot with a beautiful woman’s body. Eating it would grant the eater the body of a devil, but also a face only a mother could love.

The Beauty Portrait was a portrait of a gorgeous beauty. Simply serve it an incense stick during the morning and the night, and the woman in the painting would appear in one’s dreams and fulfill their wildest fantasies. The price was the dreamer’s own health.

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The items were all unusual and interesting in their own right. It certainly broadened Ye Qing’s horizons.

Objectively speaking though, none of the items could hold a candle to the Wenliang Pearl, which was a bit of a letdown.

Thankfully, two items successfully pushed the Treasure Appreciation Auction to the climax once more.

The first was the Root of Health Ancestor Greenwood had brought up, and the second was the Taisui Flesh Weak Old Man mentioned.

The Root of Health was a type of plant that could only grow underground. It would wither away and die if it was ever exposed to sunlight.

Despite being born in darkness and silence, it possessed a heart that yearned for the light. Its vitality could cure all sorts of difficult ailments, chronic conditions and grave injuries. It was as rare as it was valuable.

The Root of Health was obviously Weak Old Man's primary goal. Knowing this, someone intentionally upped the bid price all the way to five thousand pearls to make the old man miserable.

Although the Root of Health was rare and valuable, its range of application was actually quite narrow and useless to most warriors. At most, it was worth over a thousand pearls. However, this unknown bidder had raised it five times over its expected value. Weak Old Man was so pissed he nearly fainted on the spot.

The identity of this unknown bidder was quite obvious to Ye Qing. Only powerful warriors such as Ancestor Greenwood, Amorous Mother, Red Calabash Celestial, The Defeated and more would dare to butt heads with Weak Old Man, and the only one with a grudge against Weak Old Man—as far as he was aware—was Ancestor Greenwood.

If he could put two and two together, then of course Weak Old Man could do the same. This was doubly true for Xi Duoduo as evident by the fact that he had purposefully auctioned the Taisui Flesh right after the Root of Health. He was all too happy to pit the duo against each other for profit.

The Taisui was also nicknamed the Flesh Lingzhi. It was because it looked like a lingzhi and fleshlike. It had a head and a tail and was considered a living creature despite being attached to a rock. A red Flesh Lingzhi looked like coral, a white Flesh Lingzhi looked like fat, a black Flesh Lingzhi looked like sun spurge, a green Flesh Lingzhi looked like a green peacock's feather, and a yellow Flesh Lingzhi looked like purple gold.

Regardless of their color, all Flesh Lingzhis looked translucent and see-through like solid ice.

A Flesh Lingzhi took a century to take form, a thousand years to take shape, and several thousand years to gain sentience. Only then could they be called Taisui.

In other words, all Flesh Lingzhis that were several thousand years old and evolved into a Stranger could be called Taisui.

According to the "Herbal Classics", those who consumed Taisui would become "young in body and age like celestials". To put it in more secular terms, it meant that the Taisui was a pinnacle treasure that could restore one's youth and increase their lifespan.

In terms of its ability to extend one's lifespan, it was easily ten times more potent than Ye Qing's Nature's Water. It was practically a miracle to those who were almost out of lifespan.

But of course, the Taisui Flesh wasn't perfect. Although the Taisui could rewind the time of a human body and increase their lifespan, its efficacy would nosedive after consecutive consumptions. Not only that, the eater's consciousness would slowly disintegrate into nothing, and their body would gradually transform into a lingzhi.

A human who had transformed into a lingzhi was called a Human Taisui. Not only did it possess the exact same healing and deaging properties as a Taisui, it was better and more potent in every way.

It was why some ruthless, heartless monsters purposely nurtured Human Taisuis to increase their lifespan.

Xi Duoduo wasn't auctioning the flesh of a Human Taisui or a complete Taisui. He was simply auctioning a chunk of flesh that was cut from a Taisui. That was why it was called the Taisui Flesh.

Although it was just a small chunk, Xi Duoduo claimed that it could extend one's lifespan by fifteen years.

The Taisui Flesh was Ancestor Greenwood's primary goal. He might look young on the outside, but Ye Qing could sense an overwhelming amount of death inside his body. It was clear that he was nearing the end of his lifespan, and this Taisui Flesh was the one thing that could save him. Of course he was going to go after it with everything he got.

And so, Ancestor Greenwood received his karmic retribution. He screwed Weak Old Man over earlier, and despite his moniker Weak Old Man wasn't one to take it lying down. He did not hesitate to up the bid price again, and again, and again.

The Taisui Flesh was a valuable treasure that could increase one's lifespan. Anyone—even an ordinary person—would lust for such an item. Combined with Weak Old Man's efforts, and the bid price was increased to six thousand pearls in just the blink of an eye.

Ancestor Greenwood knew that payback was coming, but he wasn't expecting it to appear so fast and furious. He was so furious that his face turned as green as his moniker.

In the end, Ancestor Greenwood secretly came to an agreement with Weak Old Man. Only then the latter stopped his antics and allowed Ancestor Greenwood to win the Taisui Flesh at the price of seven thousand pearls.

The hype returned to normal after the two items. Ye Qing had taken part in several biddings as well. Then, Xi Duoduo hit him with the unexpected statement.

“Hahaha... with this, the auction has come to an end.”

What? That can't be right. The finish is so weak it doesn't match the hype at all! Ye Qing raised a puzzled eyebrow. Many people in the main hall seemed confused as well.

It was at this moment Ye Qing noticed that Ancestor Greenwood, Weak Old Man, Red Calabash Celestial and more did not take their leave. It would seem that the Treasure Appreciation Auction wasn't over yet.

As expected, Xi Duoduo followed up with this: “The auction may be over, but the Treasure Appreciation Auction has just begun.”

Chapter 624: The Strange Gravestone

That doesn't even make sense. What on earth is he talking about?

Ye Qing looked confused. It was the same for many others.

Sensing their reaction, Xi Duoduo explained with a chuckle, "Ah, it seems that some of you are participating in the Treasure Appreciation Auction for the first time. In that case, allow me to explain how the Treasure Appreciation Auction is normally carried out."

"Generally speaking, the Treasure Appreciation Auction can be split into two segments. The first is the auction, and the second is the appreciation."

"What do I mean by appreciation? It's already in the title. It's the part where we appreciate a treasure. As you know, we Hill Carriers travel to all sorts of places as is our norm, and we often encounter all kinds of strange and mysterious items as well. Some of these items are difficult even for us to appraise, or possess a kind of value that is difficult to quantify..."

"Therefore, we would not be putting a number on these treasures. Instead, we would simply give you a brief introduction and leave it to the rest of you to determine if it's treasure or trash, valuable or worthless. It is up to you whether you want to bid for it or not."

Now I get it! It's a bargain bin! An auction-style bargain bin to be exact!

Ye Qing smirked as his interest was piqued. This Hill Carrier sure knew how to play!

Xi Duoduo continued, "Of course, this segment has its own set of rules. First, you are not to touch or perceive the item in question with your spirit. You can only observe it with your own two eyes. Second, we don't accept returns. If you successfully bid an item only to find out that it is trash, then you'll just have to accept it. Finally, if you can identify an item's origin or use and inform me about it, then you may have it free of charge."

Countless people's eyes lit up when they heard this. This was especially true for the last rule. Who doesn't like free stuff?

Of course, the more experienced warriors such as Ancestor Greenwood, Amorous Mother and more merely scoffed at the crowd's reactions. Did they really think it was so easy to get one over the Hill Carrier?

Forget that the first rule made it incredibly difficult to determine the quality, value and origin of a certain item, Xi Duoduo put these treasures out only after his faction's team of experts failed to find anything. Did they really think that their insight would be greater than the Hill Carriers' experts?

It would probably be easier to stumble upon a treasure beside the road than get one over the Hill Carrier. The rule was there purely to trick the idiots who were participating in the Treasure Appreciation Auction for the first time.

Ye Qing himself was shaking his head, though he didn't say anything about the Hill Carrier's scheme.

“Without further ado, let us take a look at our first treasure.”

Xi Duoduo clapped his hands, and a gravestone about three inches tall appeared on stage.

The gravestone was dirty and covered in chips and cracks. A couple of words were engraved to the top and the bottom right part of the gravestone.

The words on the top of the gravestone was most likely the name, and the ancient script at the bottom right the date. However, they were blurry and indecipherable.

A grayish fog began leaking out of the gravestone after it appeared. However, a mysterious energy was keeping it from leaving the boundaries of the stage. Naturally, the same power was keeping the crowd from perceiving the gravestone as well.

Even so, just looking at the gravestone was enough to send a chill down everyone’s spine.

“This is a gravestone.”

Xi Duoduo began introducing the item. “It was extracted from a strange village by a group of Stranger Hunters.”

“The village was surrounded by a mysterious fog that allowed entry but barred exit. Once you entered the village, you will lose your way and never be able to leave.”

“Even worse, those in the village suffer a sudden, inexplicable death every once in a while. The deaths follow no rhyme or reason whatsoever and so are completely unpredictable.”

“The group of Stranger Hunters numbered over eighty people when they entered the mysterious village. Only three managed to leave with the gravestone after all was said and done.”

“According to the trio, the gravestone was the source behind all the anomalies that afflicted the village. If anyone stares at the gravestone for over thirty breaths, then it would leak blood and draw their name and date of birth and death on the gravestone.”

“The date of birth is the time a person was born in this world. The date of death is the time a person departed this world. Once the victim’s date of death takes form on the gravestone, they would die a sudden, inexplicable death on that exact date. There is absolutely nothing they can do to save themselves.”

As Xi Duoduo spoke, bright red blood began leaking out of the gravestone. The blood squirmed like it might draw a person’s name at any moment.

At the same time, everyone in the main hall felt an inexplicable sense of danger.

Having heard exactly how the gravestone functioned from Xi Duoduo himself, everyone in the room blanched in fear and worry. Even Ancestor Greenwood, Weak Old Man, Red Calabash Celestial and more were gathering their energies and staring at Xi Duoduo with hostile looks.

“What is the meaning of this, Xi Duoduo?”

According to Xi Duoduo himself, anyone who stared at the gravestone for over thirty breaths would lose their life. Xi Duoduo knew this, and yet he purposely did not tell them about this until it was too late. Was he trying to kill them or something?

“Hahaha! Relax, my dear customers. No harm will come to you.”

Xi Duoduo paid their hostility no attention, however. “A gentleman only accepts wealth that is obtained the right way. We Hill Carriers would never rob a person of their wealth like a base robber, so you have nothing to worry about.”

As he promised, the blood on the gravestone never formed a name or even a word despite its squirming. In the end, it simply slid off its craggy surface like it was weeping.

As this happened, the tombstone cracked some more and sent bits of stone flying here and there.

“What’s going on?”

Someone began voicing their doubts. “You said that the names of anyone who stared at the gravestone for over thirty breaths would appear on its surface, right? So what’s going on here?”

“Allow me to explain, my dear customer. This gravestone is a very special Strange Artifact. If your name and date of birth and death were to appear on its surface, then you will die no matter how strong you are. In a sense, it is unstoppable.”

Xi Duoduo explained, “Unfortunately, its activation requirements are just as stringent. First, the person must stare at the gravestone for thirty breaths at minimum. Only then would their name appear on its surface. If the person averts their gaze just a little or blink during this time, then its effect would be neutralized.”

“Second, whether or not it succeeds in killing its target, the gravestone would suffer a small amount of damage with every activation. It is impossible to say how many uses it has left before it breaks completely.”

“And finally, our analysis concluded that something very bad might happen if the gravestone is completely destroyed.”

The crowd oohed and ahed in realization, and Ye Qing realized why Xi Duoduo had decided to place this gravestone in the appreciation segment instead of the auction segment. It was because it was impossible to appraise the value of this gravestone properly.

The gravestone was undeniably powerful. No one, not even a Sage or a celestial-on-earth could survive if their name and date of birth and death appeared on its surface.

Was a Strange Artifact that could kill a Sage or a celestial-on-earth powerful? Of course it was. Stupidly so, in fact.

However, it was also situational to an extreme degree. For starters, the requirement that the victim must stare at it for over thirty breaths was nigh impossible to complete. Thirty breaths was neither too long nor too short a time, but any ordinary person would blink at least once during this time. And if they blinked, then the gravestone's deadly effect would be nullified just like that.

Even ignoring that fact, what kind of person would stare at such an obviously anomalous gravestone for long? An ordinary person would stay far, far away from it, and a warrior might try to attack it and see what happens. In any case, no one in their right mind would stare at it for long without blinking.

Due to its stringent requirements, it was extremely improbable for this gravestone to kill anyone.

Chapter 625: The Painting Inside The Hairpin

This did not explain how those eighty plus Stranger Hunters died though. There were still more truths they had yet to hear.

As expected, someone shared the exact same doubts as Ye Qing and voiced it, "If the gravestone's activation conditions are really that stringent, then how did the Stranger Hunters lose so many of their numbers?"

Xi Duoduo explained, "That's because the gravestone was surrounded by a kind of plant called the Daydream. When you daydream, you're not usually aware of the passage of time, are you? The Daydream is a very special kind of plant that sleeps during the night and blooms during the day. If someone encounters the Daydream during the day, they would sink into a dreamlike state without knowing. In this state, their eyes remain wide open like they were sleepwalking, and they wouldn't notice the passage of time at all. When they awake, they would think that only a few breaths had passed."

"Normally, the Daydream is completely harmless. But because it grew next to the gravestone, it resulted in most of the Stranger Hunters staring at the gravestone for over thirty breaths without knowing. That was why they lost so many of their numbers."

"I see!"

That explained a lot. It also opened Ye Qing's mind to new possibilities. On its own, it was nigh impossible for the gravestone to activate successfully. However, its chances of success would be much higher if it was used together with sense-warping Strange Artifacts, secret arts, Magic and more.

Even so, its usability in a practical situation could only be described as average. Anyone who could be paralyzed for thirty breaths using a Strange Artifact, secret art or Magic could probably be killed via normal means, and those who were strong would not be affected by such tactics for long. In the end, the gravestone remained an incredibly situational Strange Artifact.

In conclusion, the gravestone was okay versus weaklings, but no better than a particularly large brick against a true elite.

To borrow a saying, it was akin to a chicken rib—bland and uninteresting, but a shame to just throw away.

Ye Qing wasn't the only person with a brain in this room. Most people arrived at the same conclusion after their excitement cooled down and lost interest. In the end, the gravestone went to a random dude for one thousand pearls.

Despite the poor sale, Xi Duoduo didn't look too disappointed. He had probably expected this outcome. It wasn't long before he brought out the second item.

The second item was a strand of hair. That's right, a strand of hair. Pitch black in color, it looked no different from a normal person's hair. It also smelled quite fragrant.

But unlike a normal person's hair, this strand of hair was insanely long, over twenty meters to be exact. It looked like a bundle of black aquatic grass.

"As you can see, this is a strand of hair." Xi Duoduo pointed at the hair as he said, "As for who it belongs to, I have no idea."

"In fact, the only thing I can tell you is that the hair is insanely long, and it seems to be alive and growing every day. When we received this hair, it was only ten meters long. Just a little over a year later, it was over twenty meters long. It's quite unusual, don't you think? Is there anyone who's interested in this hair?"

It's unusual, sure, but why the fuck would we bid for a strand of hair?!

Everyone rolled their eyes, hard. Who in their right mind would spend fifty thousand silver on a strand of hair?!

"As a reminder, we can give away the hair for free if anyone knows about its origin!"

Unfortunately for him, no one knew anything about the hair. No one was interested in it either, so the hair was bought in.

With that behind them, Xi Duoduo produced the third item. It was a rough, shoddy-looking peachwood hairpin.

"This hairpin is carved using ordinary peachwood. The craftsmanship leaves much to be desired as well."

Xi Duoduo introduced, "On the surface, it looks perfectly ordinary. However, did you know that this hairpin was found in a millennia-old tomb?"

"It had been stored inside the tomb for over a thousand years, and yet it shows no sign of deterioration whatsoever. In fact, it looks brand new almost as if a craftsman had just carved it. That is clearly unusual. Despite its ordinary appearance, this peachwood hairpin is anything but ordinary."

"Would you be interested in owning it, customers?"

This piqued the crowd's curiosity, and murmurs broke out here and there. Despite their curiosity, the number of people who were actually interested in buying it could be counted on two hands. Ye Qing shared the sentiment as well.

The reason was simple. It was clear that the wooden hairpin was special, but what was the point of spending fifty thousand silver to buy a secret that could never be solved?

Disappointed that no one was interested in the wooden hairpin, Xi Duoduo was just about to declare that the hairpin was bought in when suddenly, a lazy voice spoke up, "Fools. I can't believe that no one recognizes or wants such a valuable treasure."

"Hmm? Are you going to bid for it, celestial?" Xi Duoduo's eyes lit up.

"Oh no, I am—burp—far too broke to bid anything." The Red Calabash Celestial sipped his wine before continuing, "However, I recognize its origin."

"Hmm? Are you sure?" Xi Duoduo asked. "If you're willing to enlighten us about its origin, you may have it for free as promised."

The Red Calabash Celestial sleepily forced open his eyelids just a tad and began slowly, "The hairpin is not a hairpin. It is a painting."

"A painting?" Xi Duoduo exclaimed in surprise.

Everyone else in the Popularity Tower was stunned as well. Specifically, they felt like Red Calabash Celestial was ridiculing them. Do you think we're blind or stupid?

"Did you accidentally drink your brain into your stomach, Red Calabash? That's obviously a hairpin!" Ancestor Greenwood taunted.

"You say that only because you're old. Your vision is so blurry you can't even tell right from left anymore!" Red Calabash Celestial shot right back.

"Is it really a painting, good celestial?" Xi Duoduo ignored their argument and prodded.

"Go bring a pot of hot oil and put the peachwood hairpin inside. You will know then if I'm telling the truth or not," Red Calabash Celestial said. "And before I forget, the oil must be boiling hot."

"Got it." Xi Duoduo did not hesitate. He immediately ordered someone to carry a pot of boiling oil onto the stage and set the wooden hairpin inside.

Unfortunately, nothing happened after awhile.

"This is the painting you're talking about, Red Calabash?" Weak Old Man coughed.

"Patience. Let it cook a while longer!" Red Calabash Celestial remained calm.

The crowd waited a little longer when suddenly, the wooden hairpin began swelling little by little. The longer the oil boiled, the bigger it grew until it unfurled into an exquisite-looking painting.

"A painting! It's actually a painting!"

“How is this possible?”

“But why is it blank?”

Everyone’s eyes widened like saucers when they saw this. They couldn’t believe their eyes.

The canvas was over one meter long, but only about as wide as a human palm. Its sides were adorned with elegant golden flowers.

Strangely, the canvas was completely empty.

“Celestial...?” Xi Duoduo subconsciously looked to Red Calabash Celestial for instructions.

Red Calabash Celestial shrugged. “You gotta lift it out of the oil to see its contents.”

Hearing this, Xi Duoduo immediately reached into the pot of boiling oil and scooped the canvas out with his bare hands.

Incredibly, things went exactly as Red Calabash Celestial said. As soon as Xi Duoduo scooped the canvas out of the pot, a painting slowly appeared on its blank surface.

Chapter 626: A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill

The painting showed a Taoist riding a green bull toward somewhere as white clouds sailed past his head, and the orange rays of sunset fell over his back.

The unknown artist didn’t use many lines to draw their painting. However, it was enough to sketch out a painting of freedom and an infinite horizon.

The white clouds were free and unfettered.

The sunset looked hopeful instead of forlorn.

The mountains and waters looked natural and in harmony.

And the lone celestial journey toward who-knows-where looked perfectly at ease.

The clouds, the sunset, the hills, the waters, the Taoist, and the bull. Had the artist chosen to add even an extra element to their painting, had they added even an extra brush stroke, the painting would’ve veered into the realm of excess. The opposite was equally true.

As it was, it was perfect and harmonious. It was like a window into a corner of the world.

“White clouds floating across an orange sky; a celestial riding a bull across a green hill... could it be ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’?!”

The crowd was still immersing themselves in the painting’s world when suddenly, Xi Duoduo’s musings hit a new crescendo, “Can it be? But it can’t be!”

As if to dispel Xi Duoduo’s doubts, Defeated—the one man who hadn’t said a word since the Treasure Appreciation Auction began—was staring at the painting and declaring, “It does look like the mythical ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’.”

“What are you two talking about? Is there something special about this Xi Duoduo?” Ancestor Greenwood voiced his doubts.

It was only now Xi Duoduo finally snapped back to his senses, but instead of answering his question, he asked, “Have you heard of Green Bull Li, ancestor?”

"Green Bull Li? Who's that?" Ancestor Greenwood frowned.

“Alright, what about Li Wangxian?” Xi Duoduo asked another question.

“Li Wangxian? You mean Li Wangxian, the ‘Unparalleled Dao’ from over a thousand years ago?” Ancestor Greenwood asked. “The better question is, who hasn’t heard about him?”

“Green Bull Li is Li Wangxian, and this painting—‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’—is his creation,” Xi Duoduo declared.

“What?! Y-You’re saying that Li Wangxian drew this painting?!” The crowd immediately exploded into an uproar. They were louder and more stunned than when Xi Duoduo revealed the Wenliang Pearl earlier.

Who was Li Wangxian?

He was a legend more legendary than even the Dark Overlord, Li Hentian.

Li Wangxian hailed from one of the three major Taoist sects, the True Martial Sect. He was the youngest disciple of the sect master of the Lotus Flower Peak.

Unlike Li Hentian, whose leap to the heavens came as a surprise to everyone, everyone knew that Li Wangxian was going to be amazing from the start. For starters, his talent was unparalleled. He was born with over a hundred bodily points unlocked, and his mind’s eyes open. He read Taoist scriptures at the age of three, grasped their essence at the age of five, and became the greatest person to ever master the arts of Taoism at the age of ten. No one could match his knowledge. Even the one they called the “Ancestral Ground of Taoist Court” and the Dao Sovereign and sect master of East Kunlun San Qing Temple, Profound Clarity Wondrous Tao Superior had praised Li Wangxian saying, “In terms of the arts of Taoism alone, no one in the past or future five hundred years can surpass him, much less I.”

Profound Clarity Wondrous Tao Superior had made this remark after Li Wangxian ascended East Kunlun at the age of ten and debated Taoism with him. It was also why Li Wangxian came to be known as the “Unparalleled Dao” later on. There truly was no one who was better than him in the arts of Taoism in the entire world.

Unfortunately, Li Wangxian’s talent in the arts of Taoism did not extend to his martial arts. In fact, one could go as far as to say that he was the most untalented practitioner the world had ever seen.

For example, Li Wangxian had taken over a decade just to make some small progress in the Body Tempering stage. That’s right, the Body Tempering stage. This was considering that the True Martial Sect did everything in their power to elevate his martial cultivation to a point where it wouldn’t dishonor himself too. Without exaggeration, they had tried purifying his blood vessels and re-establishing his marrows, poured true intent directly into his mind, and fed him all sorts of natural treasures, miracle pills and wonder medicine.

Despite their efforts, Li Wangxian's martial cultivation continued to progress at a snail's pace. Anyone else in his position would have grown into an accomplished warrior—if not the best among their peers—a long time ago, but Li Wangxian? Their efforts felt like a drop of water in the hopeless wasteland that was Li Wangxian's sheer lack of talent, futile and pointless. The True Martial Sect sect master at the time and now Demon Subjugating Monarch was so furious that he jabbed a finger at Li Wangxian again and again while yelling, “We have fed you so many cultivation resources that even a pig would have become a supreme champion by now, and yet you couldn't even crack the surface of the martial way! Have some shame, you, you~~~!!!”

Li Wangxian himself cared nothing for his lack of talent in the martial way though. He believed that there were benefits to being able to cultivate martial arts, but he also believed that there were benefits to being unable to cultivate martial arts. For starters, he could now focus all of his time and effort on studying the scriptures, could he not?

And so he did. Martial cultivation practically became an afterthought to Li Wangxian after discovering his lack of talent in this regard. There was nothing the True Martial Sect's sect master could do to change this, so he simply put it out of his mind.

For the next decade or so, every single one of Li Wangxian's peers had surpassed him in terms of martial cultivation and made a name for themselves. Meanwhile, Li Wangxian continued to study the Taoist scriptures at Lotus Peak like the passage of time meant nothing to him. Naturally, the people gradually forgot about him. It got to the point where people only knew about the Five Thunder True Gentleman of the Heavenly Master Mansion or Hao Yuan Dao Child of San Qing Temple. No one remembered the once unrivaled Li Wangxian.

Later, the Dark Ways rose, and the orthodoxy faltered. The Demon Lord of the Demonic Mountain was able to unite the Nine Demonic Ways and the thirty-six unorthodox ways with his immeasurable power and plunged the jianghu into chaos.

Unable to stand by and do nothing, the Two Temples of Buddha, the Three Temples of Dao, and the Five Profound Sects issued the Demon Lord a challenge letter. They would meet at the Mending Sky Peak and settle everything with a duel.

However, the Demon Lord was powerful beyond measure. He singlehandedly shattered the golden body of two great Buddhas, severely wounded the three sect masters of the Three Temples of Dao, and forced the Five Profound Sects to shut their gates.

For a time, the Dark Ways' ascent seemed unstoppable, and it looked like the jianghu

would never be the same.

Knowing that the opportunity of a lifetime was upon him, the Demon Lord advanced upon the True Martial Sect with the intent to vanquish them once and for all. Worse still, their sect master was still severely injured, and their guardian elder had betrayed them and joined the enemy. For a time, it looked like all hope was lost for the True Martial Sect.

It was at this moment Li Wangxian heard the news and left Lotus Flower Peak. He was going to meet the Demon Lord alone.

Everyone thought that Li Wangxian was committing suicide. They tried to stop him, but Li Wangxian replied smilingly, "Once upon a time, Dao Tzu (Ancestor of Dao) rode a bull through Hangu Pass to stop the Heavenly Demons. Today, Li Wangxian shall leave his mountain to face the demons."

Everyone thought that Li Wangxian had gone insane. The sect master was the only one who burst out laughing sounding happier than he had ever been.

And so Li Wangxian rode a bull down the mountains while holding a Taoist scripture in one hand. When he left the peak, his Yin God manifested into existence. When he passed through the mountain pass, he transformed into a Grandmaster. And when he finally reached the foot of the mountain, he had become... a Sage.

With one palm, he destroyed the demonic array that had pinned down his sect. With one command, he had pushed back the army of demons gathered outside the mountains intending to destroy it all. Then, he engaged the Demon Lord in a battle that would be remembered for eternity.

Such was the battle that historians later described it this way: "The Nine Heavens were split, and the elements returned to Primal Chaos. The sky was dark like the sun would never rise again."

No one except the combatants themselves knew who won the battle. What they did know was that the Demon Lord returned to the Demonic Mountain and shut himself in a secluded cultivation; one that was meant to last until his death if he did not find whatever he was searching for. Without an iron fist to keep them in line, the unruly demons and monsters of the Dark Ways naturally fell into shambles. The orthodoxy seized the opportunity to consolidate their forces, push back the warriors of the Dark Ways, and return the jianghu to normal.

After that, Li Wangxian's legend became immortal in the jianghu. No one would ever forget the young man who broke through stage after stage as he rode his bull down the mountain and practically saved the jianghu singlehandedly.

Countless strived to become Li Wangxian since. Countless were still striving to hold a candle to the legend today.

On a related note, Li Wangxian was also that era's youngest Sage. He was so far ahead of his peers they were like ants compared to him.

Speaking of Li Wangxian, the young man carried himself just like before despite his achievement. He continued to study the Taoist scriptures and did whatever he liked without a care for appearances.

The sect master of the True Martial Sect made Li Wangxian his successor before he passed away. Three years after he received the sect master seal, Li Wangxian returned the seal to his sect and journeyed west on a bull just like the Dao Tzu had. He would enter Hangu Pass and open a way to the heavens.

A long time ago, Dao Tzu rode a green bull through Hangu Pass and caused the sky within forty thousand kilometers of the area to be covered in purple qi. Heavenly Demons had fallen like meteor showers then.

Many, many years after that, Li Wangxian too rode a green bull through Hangu Pass and caused the clouds to vibrate with the sound of reading, and a heavenly gate to appear on the skies. After he and his bull ascended to the heavens, the man was never seen again.

This was why Li Wangxian was considered a more legendary and colorful figure than even the Dark Overlord, Li Hentian. It was also why he was more popular and well-known, and why everyone was speechless when they learned that the painting was drawn by the legend himself.

“It’s just a possibility,” Xi Duoduo clarified. “Legend has it that Li Wangxian had drawn a painting for the later generations after he exited the Hangu Pass and got ready to ascend the heavens. That painting came to be known as ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’.”

Chapter 627: Fight Over

“Li Wangxian enjoyed a legendary status in the True Martial Sect. If ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’ really was made by him, then it should have been kept in the True Martial Sect, right? Why would it be here?” Someone questioned.

“You are right, customer. After Li Wangxian opened the sky and ascended to the heavens, ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’ was kept in the True Martial Shrine at the Lotus Flower Peak and worshiped daily.”

Xi Duoduo explained, “Unfortunately, something terrible happened to the True Martial Sect just three years later. Li Wangxian never appointed a successor three years after resigned as the sect master, and that resulted in a fierce clash between the disciples of each peak as to who should become the next sect master. This was especially true for the two disciples of the late Demon Subjugating Monarch, Li Chunfeng and Ren Huayu.”

“The two disciples had formed cliques and grown their powerbase to defeat the other person. Such was their conflict that it almost resulted in the True Martial Sect being torn in half. In the end, the farce only ended after the sect master of San Qing Temple and the Elderly Heavenly Master of Dragon Tiger Mountain stepped up and chose Li Chunfeng, the Demon Subjugating Monarch’s eldest disciple, to be the new sect master on the basis of primogeniture.”

“Ren Huayu personally believed that his martial cultivation, talent and gift were all on par with Li Chunfeng, if not better, but now, his rightful place had been robbed from right under his nose. Furious and defiant, he stole ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’ from the True Martial Shrine and left the sect.”

“Obviously, Li Chunfeng wasn’t going to let this slide. He did not hesitate to send his men after Ren Huayu. Not long after that, a rumor sprung in

the *jianghu* claiming that the reason Ren Huayu had stolen the painting, and the reason Li Chunfeng wouldn't stop pursuing the man was because 'A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill' hides the secret to Li Wangxian ascending to the heavens and transforming into a celestial."

"This time, Li Chunfeng wasn't the only one who was after Ren Huayu. Every warrior from both sides of the *jianghu* was after him as well. In the end, Ren Huayu was surrounded and killed at Celestial Pilgrimage Mountain, and Li Wangxian's 'A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill' disappeared to heavens-know-where. It was never seen again."

"Both the True Martial Sect and the *jianghu* never stopped searching for the painting for the past couple centuries, but they never found anything. In the end, the painting too became a legend."

"'A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill' contains Li Wangxian's secret to becoming a celestial? Really?" Ancestor Greenwood asked, his breathing quickening before he knew it. Most people shared the same reaction. After all, who didn't want to become a celestial?

"That is just a legend. I have no idea if it's real or not."

Xi Duoduo shook his head and said honestly, "I'm not even sure if this painting truly is the legendary 'A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill'. I mean, I literally just found out about this!"

"Speaking of which. Celestial, since you know that 'A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill' is hidden within this wooden hairpin, you must know if it is genuine or not, right?"

Everyone looked at Red Calabash Celestial instinctively when they heard this.

"What are you looking at me for? How would I know if this is the real thing or not?"

However, the Red Calabash Celestial looked just as confused as them. "I don't even know that this painting is that whatchamacallit!"

"Huh? Then how did you know that the wooden hairpin is a painting?" Someone asked.

Red Calabash Celestial explained, "The wooden hairpin is something called the Art Vault. I'd seen something like it from an old friend working for the Exploitation of the Works of Nature. He told me that it was a unique method invented by a craftsman named Gungshu Yang^[1] to store various arts."

"As you are aware, arts like paintings and calligraphy are normally created on a piece of paper or fabric. Unfortunately, these materials are flimsy and difficult to

preserve, not to mention that certain famous and expensive art pieces were constantly targeted by thieves.”

“Gongshu Yang was a craftsman and a zealous collector of the arts, and he had collected many famous art pieces in his time. In order to protect them, Gongshu Yang used a unique method that somehow transformed these soft, frail, easily damaged art pieces into small, tough objects such as wooden hairpins, bracelets, jade necklaces and more. This both protected the items from damage and hid them from prying eyes. He named it the Art Vault. If he needed to extract the items for whatever reason, he only needed to boil them in boiling oil to restore them to their normal appearances.”

“Unfortunately, the method was lost after Gongshu Yang’s passing. My old friend happened to obtain an Art Vault that was also a wooden hairpin. It took him a long time before he was finally able to figure out its secret. That is how I know that the hairpin is really an Art Vault that’s hiding a painting.”

“However, I have no idea what kind of art piece was hidden in the Art Vault, and I definitely did not know that it was ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’ until just now.”

Red Calabash Celestial looked a little disgruntled as he ended, “If I knew it was Li Wangxian’s ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’, I wouldn’t have told anyone about it.”

If the painting really was the legendary ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’ by Li Wangxian, and if it really hid the secret to becoming a celestial, then why the hell would he share it with anyone?

Even if it turned out that he was incapable of deciphering its secret, he could still sell it to the highest bidder or return it to the True Martial Sect for a huge favor.

Just how stupid would he have to expose the painting right here and now?

The only reason he did it was because he truly did not know that the hairpin was hiding ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’.

“I see. Thank you for answering, celestial.” Xi Duoduo nodded.

It was at this moment Ancestor Greenwood interrupted, “How much is this painting? I want it.”

But Xi Duoduo replied with a chuckle, “Hahaha... my humble apologies, ancestor, but I do not have the right to make that decision.”

“What do you mean by that?” Ancestor Greenwood asked.

“It’s simple. I cannot make that decision because the painting is no longer ours.” Xi Duoduo smiled. “I mentioned it before, didn’t I? Anyone who can reveal the origin of an item during this segment shall receive said item for free.”

“Since Red Calabash Celestial had done exactly that, the item now belongs to him. Naturally, it is up to him whether he wants to sell the painting or not, not me.”

“Huh?”

Xi Duoduo’s declaration surprised everyone. After all, ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’ was no ordinary painting. Assuming it was the real thing, then its value was literally immeasurable. It would be more valuable than even the Wenliang Pearl.

This item was worth a fortune and a half, and yet Xi Duoduo had given it away without any hesitation whatsoever. On this at least, the Hill Carrier was without a doubt a man of principles.

“You’re... really giving it to me for free?” Red Calabash Celestial exclaimed in surprise.

“But of course! We Hill Carriers are men and women of our word. I gave you my word, so of course I’m going to keep it,” Xi Duoduo said. “Congratulations, celestial.”

Red Calabash Celestial was overjoyed for one instant. Then, he noticed the hungry looks all around him and jolted back to reality. *I like free stuff, but free stuff that might cost me my life? Not so much!*

If he was powerful, then he would happily accept the painting. But as he was, ‘A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill’ was no different from a time bomb.

“Just say the price, Red Calabash, and I’ll pay it!” Ancestor Greenwood rose to his feet and stared straight at Red Calabash Celestial.

“Cough cough... Red Calabash, you and I share an amicable relationship, don’t we? Why don’t you sell the painting to me?” Weak Old Man spoke up next.

“Haha... you are as shameless as you are old, Weak Old Man. Who doesn’t know that you and Red Calabash Celestial are enemies?”

Amorous Mother licked her lips and giggled. “Big brother, I’m not as greedy as they are. I’m unwilling to steal another person’s opportunity either. All I ask is that you allow me to serve you as your faithful mistress and the chance to study the Great Way with you. Let’s become a couple that everyone envies, shall we?”

Chapter 628: Red Calabash’s Counterattack

Holy shit that sent chills up my spine. You’re old enough to be my grandma, and you’re calling me big brother? Have some shame, woman!

Red Calabash Celestial’s heart skipped a beat when he heard Amorous Mother’s words. *Also, Ancestor Greenwood and Weak Old Man at least offered to pay me, but the bitch wants the painting and my body for free! What the fuck!*

“Hmph! Have some self-awareness, you fools. Haven’t you heard that uncontrolled avarice brings death?” Ancestor Greenwood scoffed after hearing Weak Old Man and Amorous Mother’s words.

“Cough, cough... I’m the one who should be telling you that,” Weak Old Man shot right back.

“We are, if nothing else, acquainted. I have no desire to collect the body of an old acquaintance.” Ancestor Greenwood sneered. “The same goes for the rest of you. I have zero interest in your corpses, understand?”

Neither Weak Old Man nor Amorous Mother said anything, though it was clear from their expressions that they didn’t think much of Ancestor Greenwood’s threat.

“I too am interested—that is if you are willing to part ways with the painting, celestial.”

It was at this moment Defeated looked at Red Calabash Celestial and voiced his interest. Ancestor Greenwood narrowed his eyes, but this time, he didn’t say anything at all.

He was confident enough to threaten the likes of Weak Old Man, but Defeated? That was a completely different story. Unwilling to provoke Defeated, Ancestor Greenwood chose to stare at Red Calabash Celestial and upped the intensity of his glare. He said, “What do you say, Red Calabash?”

Weak Old Man, Amorous Mother, Defeated and more turned to stare at Red Calabash Celestial as well.

“Burp... look at yourselves. You don’t even know if this is the real thing or not, and you look like you’re about to fight each other to the death. What if it all turned out to be a huge waste of time and effort?” Red Calabash Celestial asked while sipping his wine at leisure.

“That is for me to worry about, not you. Just tell me how much money you want for the painting?”

“I’m sorry, everyone, but I’m not selling this painting,” Red Calabash Celestial declared.

“Red Calabash, you’re a smart man. I’m sure you understand what kind of value this painting holds, and that it is too much for the likes of you. I’d urge you not to do something stupid,” Ancestor Greenwood clutched his fan tightly as his eyes narrowed into slits.

“I’m well aware that this painting does not belong to me, thank you. However, it does not belong to you either.” Red Calabash Celestial said slowly, “In fact, it doesn’t belong to anyone in this hall.”

“What do you mean?” A bad feeling suddenly overcame Ancestor Greenwood.

What Red Calabash Celestial said next surprised everyone, “This painting originally belonged to the True Martial Sect. Naturally, it should be returned to them.”

“You’re planning to give the painting to the True Martial Sect?” Amorous Mother instinctively repeated.

“I’m not giving it to them, I’m *returning* it to them. The painting was theirs to begin with, so of course they should have it back,” Red Calabash Celestial said slowly. “On that note, can you please send True Martial Sect a message, Mr. Xi? I shall wait here until they arrive.”

“Urk!”

Xi Duoduo was enjoying a good show from the sidelines when suddenly, Red Calabash Celestial pulled a fast one on him. It was beautifully done too.

As it was, the painting was a time bomb that could explode at any moment, and the best and most obvious way to avoid the consequences was to give it up to another person. However, the painting also represented a massive opportunity. There was no one in the world who could just give it up like that without feeling at least a semblance of reluctance. It would be like telling someone to throw up the food that was already halfway down their gullet.

It was never easy to get the best of both worlds, and Red Calabash Celestial wasn’t clouded enough by greed to think that he could defend himself against all these elites. So, he made a compromise. Keeping “A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill” to himself was impossible unless he endangered his own life, so that option was out of the question. However, that didn’t mean he couldn’t get something out of this.

And how could he maximize his gains while still preserving his own life? By trading with the True Martial Sect, of course.

The True Martial Sect was one of the Three Temples of Dao and a famous orthodox sect. If he returned the painting to them, he would earn their favor and gain a powerful connection.

Second, the True Martial Sect was famous for their righteousness. If only for the sake of their reputation, they would never receive the painting without giving him something valuable in return.

Again, the True Martial Sect was one of the Three Temples of Dao. Even their garbage would benefit him substantially more than whatever Ancestor Greenwood or Weak Old Man could give him.

But of course, it was the favor and connection he obtained from this trade that was truly valuable. Admittedly, connections were ephemeral, intangible things that were useless in many situations. But when they were useful, their value was usually immeasurable. It could even mean the difference between life and death.

For example, he could call upon this favor if he ever encountered some sort of obstacle or a life-or-death crisis. He could ask for their help or their protection, and that was something Ancestor Greenwood and the others could not offer him.

Even if the painting was fake, True Martial Sect should still appreciate his effort. No matter how he looked at it, returning the painting was by far the superior option.

To begin with, he had gotten the painting via pure luck. It would cost him nothing to give it away.

Of course, those after the painting would surely keep a close eye on him until the disciples of the True Martial Sect showed up. That was why he set his sights on Xi Duoduo. He wasn't going anywhere until he successfully transferred the painting to the True Martial Sect.

And what could Xi Duoduo do to combat this?

Nothing of course!

It was the Hill Carriers' rule after all!

There was nothing more a businessman valued than prestige. If he shunned Red Calabash Celestial because he was afraid of the danger it entailed, then who would ever trust his protection again? It wasn't just him who would suffer either. The integrity of every Hill Carrier in the world would be called into question.

Worse, if he chased Red Calabash Celestial away, and the painting was stolen by his killer, the True Martial Sect would surely turn their wrath against him.

As massive as the Hill Carriers were, there was no way they could withstand the True Martial Sect's wrath.

Therefore, Xi Duoduo had no choice but to endure even though he knew full well that the painting was a time bomb.

"You are most noble, celestial. Just leave it to us," Xi Duoduo replied while hiding his disgruntlement. He was a businessman for countless years, and he had always been the scammer, not the victim. To think that there would be a day where he would taste his own medicine!

"If you play with fire, it's only a matter of time before you get burned." The ancients did not lie about this for sure.

"Thank you, Mr. Xi." Red Calabash Celestial saluted the Hill Carrier and slowly sank back into his seat. He drank his wine and paid the unfriendly looks from Ancestor Greenwood, Weak Old Man, Amorous Mother and more no heed whatsoever.

Come bite me if you dare, bitch!

"Tsk ts... a shame."

Ye Qing was feeling a twinge of pity as well. Had Red Calabash Celestial chosen to sell 'A Celestial Rides A Bull Across A Green Hill', he would've gotten involved as well. But since the elite made a wise decision, the idea died before it could ever bear fruit.

With that finally behind them, the Treasure Appreciation Auction finally resumed its course. Thanks to Red Calabash Celestial's precedent, everyone wanted to try their luck and see if they could be as

dogshit lucky as him. As a result, many people generously loosened the string around their wallets and purchased all sorts of weird stuff such as a tree bark that wouldn't stop bleeding, a fruit that was shaped like a smile but really induced tears, a block of metal that weighed tens of kilograms but would never sink to the bottom, a broken sword that would cut your palms everywhere if you gripped it, so on and so forth.

This turn of events delighted Xi Duoduo as a matter of course. "To lose at sunrise, but gain at sunset." It still didn't quite balance out the scales, but it sure was better than nothing.

As for whether the buyers could actually get dogshit lucky, that was completely up to fate.

"Alright! We've finally arrived at the finale! Can you feel the anticipation, dear customers?"

Several long hours later, the Treasure Appreciation Auction finally approached its end. As usual, Xi Duoduo gave a flamboyant, almost long-winded introduction before he finally showed off the item: a human hand.

Chapter 629: Strange Hand

It was a human hand that was cut off from the wrist.

Logically speaking, a human hand that was cut off from the human body would rot and shrivel up over time. However, the hand looked perfectly alive. It had a healthy complexion that resembled frozen fat, it looked so smooth and unblemished it was as if it had been carved out of jade. Even the cross section of the hand looked as smooth as a mirror.

Its fingers were as slender as spring onion, and the finger nails were painted with red nail polish. Despite being submerged inside some sort of transparent liquid, the hand looked both gorgeous and stunning.

It was clear at first glance that it was a woman's hand. The woman must have been extraordinarily beautiful during her lifetime too. Just looking at the hand was enough to stir feelings of admiration, love, infatuation and such in everyone's heart. It was almost as if they were looking at a beauty of the ages, not a simple hand.

What a terrifying hand.

Ye Qing narrowed his eyes as the Heavenly Demon of Freedom inside his Paranirmita Vasavartin Heaven waved its hand. The unnatural emotions immediately disappeared, and he regained full clarity of his mind once more. He looked at the hand again with renewed wariness and alertness.

His spirit was stronger than most, but even he had experienced a moment of confusion as feelings of love, infatuation and adulation sprouted inside his heart. It was as if he had fallen in love with the hand at first sight and was willing to do anything for it. Anything.

If even he had temporarily lost himself to the hand, then everyone else could only fare worse. All around him, people were staring blankly at the hand like it was the center of their world.

It was worth noting that Defeated snapped out of it not long after him though. As expected of the seventh named warrior on the Human Champions Ranking.

Xi Duoduo waited for a bit before producing a bell from his sleeve and shaking it a little.

Ring!

The bell ringing sounded crisp and melodious, but for some reason, it elicited feelings of deep sorrow in all listeners. Everyone still stuck in the hand's mind-bending influence slowly but surely began to pull themselves out of the mental quagmire.

“What on earth is that hand, Xi Duoduo?”

Red Calabash Celestial licked his lips and stared at the hand with trepidation after snapping out of it.

“As you can see, it is a severed hand.” Xi Duoduo began his explanation, “However, I don’t know who it belonged to or why it was severed. It was put up as a collateral by a tomb raider five years ago. The tomb raider promised to redeem it a year later, but in the end, he did not return. According to our rules, we have the right to claim any item that wasn’t redeemed within the promised time and deal with it as we like, so here we are.”

“According to the tomb raider, he and his acquaintances had found the hand while they were washing sand at the Death Sea. They were a group of over a hundred people, and they fell hopelessly in love with the hand upon finding it. As if possessed, they had cut off their own hands as an offering to the strange hand. As a result, nearly everyone perished because of blood loss.”

“The tomb raider was the only person who survived that annihilation because he happened to possess a unique Strange Artifact. Even so, the tomb raider was mentally disturbed by the time he showed up at my Hill of Services. His babbles were barely coherent at the best of times, and he looked like he was moments away from succumbing to madness completely. It was impossible to say if it was due to trauma or the hand’s mind-bending influence.”

The Death Sea? Could it be related to the Dark Overlord’s inheritance again?

Ye Qing couldn’t help but feel a little suspicious. Earlier, Xi Duoduo had auctioned the Wenliang Pearl, an item that might share karma with the Dark Overlord. Now, he was promoting a severed hand that came from the Death Sea, the supposed location of the Dark Overlord’s inheritance. Was it a coincidence, or...?

A tomb raider was, in essence, a fancier grave robber. Both dug graves and profited off grave goods, but a tomb raider was far more skillful and strong. They were well-versed in fengshui, the Five Phases, the Eight Trigrams, and all sorts of unique knowledge. They were a rather mysterious bunch.

“Washing the sand” was a jianghu argot. It meant tomb exploration.

Ye Qing was still thinking when Xi Duoduo continued, “After various inspections and experimentation attempts, we discovered that the hand is quite special. First, we confirmed that it

was a woman's hand. Second, it doesn't decompose even though it is devoid of life force. And third, it is extremely powerful and contagious. Anyone within a certain range would fall madly in love with the hand whether they are male, female, old or young."

"The longer the victim is exposed to its power, the more obsessed with the hand they would become. You've already sensed its insidious influence earlier, but would you believe me that that was but one percent of its true power?"

"What?! One percent?" Someone exclaimed in shock.

"It is the truth," Xi Duoduo confirmed. "The liquid it is currently submerged in is a special Strange Artifact we had specifically created to counteract its power and influence. Otherwise... Please don't take this the wrong way, but if the hand is allowed to unleash its full potential, then everyone within ten kilometers of the Hill of Services would be exposed to its power, and only a handful of us would be able to survive it."

Everyone including Ye Qing gasped when they heard this. The severed hand was practically as strong as a Disaster-class Stranger. If it was unleashed in a highly populated area like this one, the consequences could only be described as unimaginable.

"So, is anyone interested in this hand?" Xi Duoduo asked.

No one said a thing for a time. They would be lying if they said they weren't interested, but the value of the hand was... fluid to say the least.

In the right circumstances, the hand could mean the difference between life and death considering how powerful and contagious it was. But in all other situations, its value was drastically lower. It was because its oppressive, contagious power did not discriminate between friend and foe. To call it a double-edged sword would be an understatement. Without the proper preparation, it was entirely possible for the wielder to perish alongside their enemies.

What this meant was that this hand was unusable in most situations. It could only be used as a trump card and only when it was do or die.

If the wielder could find a way to suppress or even manipulate the hand's corruptive power to their advantage, then it was like they had gained a Disaster-class Strange Artifact. Unfortunately, reality was a cruel mistress. If such a method existed, Xi Duoduo most likely would've kept the hand for himself. Even if he didn't want it, he would not have sold it like this.

If even the Hill Carriers with all their wealth and power could not find a proper way to neutralize the hand, then what were the chances that they could do the unthinkable? Not likely at all.

Did they want the hand? Of course!

But how much were they willing to spend to obtain it? That was a very delicate question.

"Hahaha... besides its inherent power, the hand could potentially hide other secrets."

Xi Duoduo was well aware of his customers' doubts, of course, so he continued, "Just think about it. If this hand alone contains so much power, then how strong was its owner?"

"If someone could somehow find its owner's grave through this hand, then they might obtain the opportunity of a lifetime and leap to the heavens, no?"

Xi Duoduo's words immediately aroused the greed and lust in everyone's heart. But before they could act on it, a slightly maddened, enraged voice suddenly broke out, "You speak nonsense! She's not dead. She's alive and well!"

Chapter 630: She's Alive

Ye Qing followed the voice. He saw a man wearing a black robe and a mask standing on his feet. He was staring at Xi Duoduo—or more accurately, the hand beside him.

The mask was stopping him from getting a good look at the man's expression, but he could still see the madness and infatuation swirling inside his bloodshot eyes.

"Hmm? Do you know where this hand came from, customer?" Xi Duoduo asked immediately.

"She's still alive. She's not dead, she's not dead..."

The man didn't seem to notice his question. He simply stared fixatedly at the hand and repeated his own words.

"We can give you the hand for free if you know about its origin, customer!" Xi Duoduo said.

"Give it to me?" The man trembled once, and the madness in his eyes suddenly swelled. "She is mine to begin with! Mine!"

The man actually left his seat and started walking unsteadily toward the stage.

"Calm down, customer."

Xi Duoduo frowned deeply when he saw this. "We are willing to give you the hand for free if you know about its origin, but if you don't, then please remain at your seat and don't disrupt the auction."

"Oh. Right. Yes, I know about her. I know who she is. She is still alive," the man answered somewhat incoherently while still walking toward the stage.

"You don't need to come forth to speak, customer. Stay where you are," Xi Duoduo said warily.

"No. No. I will tell you and only you her secret. She is still alive. I know where she is right now," the man answered. His tone had suddenly become much lower, and he seemed to be holding back some sort of eagerness and fervor.

Xi Duoduo hesitated for a brief moment. That was enough time for the man to reach the stage.

"Stop him! He's been infected by the hand!"

Suddenly, Ye Qing turned as pale as a ghost. He knew that something was wrong with the man from the start, but the cloak and the mask he was wearing had prevented him from scanning his spirit and thoughts. It was why he hadn't yelled out in warning immediately. But when the man got close to the stage, a presence that felt exactly identical to the hand on the stage suddenly washed out of his body. Such was its power that not even his cloak and mask could mask it.

What really scared Ye Qing was the fact that he saw the hand curling its index finger after the man got close to the stage. Every hair on his skin had stood up at that moment.

Thanks to Ye Qing's warning, Xi Duoduo realized that something was amiss and moved to block the man. At the same time, the man sped up and raced toward the container holding the hand.

A bit of steel entered Xi Duoduo's eyes. As he curled his fingers, the azure dragon on his arm roared and swam around him, causing a terrifying pressure to wash over the entire Popularity Tower. Then, he launched forward and grabbed the man by the arm.

However, the man stunned Xi Duoduo by ripping off his own arm, leaving the Hill Carrier with nothing but a useless stump. While this happened, he threw himself forward and caught the container with his remaining arm.

“Do you know what you're doing?! Let go of the hand, now!”

Xi Duoduo was furious. His anger took on tangible form as a stream of pure power washed out of him and suppressed most of the people inside the Popularity Tower.

As if resonating with Xi Duoduo's fury, the restrictions and arrays of the Hill of Services itself activated and flooded toward the man from every direction.

Xi Duoduo was a Half-Step Grandmaster to begin with, but inside the Hill of Services, he was as strong as a Grandmaster.

Naturally, the man couldn't withstand the pressure. His bones began popping like peas, and blood began pouring out of his eyes, nose and mouth furiously. It dripped down his mask and dirtied his clothes.

It was said that a Grandmaster's fury was like a mountain on one's back. If an ordinary person was struck by its force, they would shatter like a paper that was struck by a tsunami.

At the Grandmaster stage, a warrior had become one with the world around them. As their qi, essence, spirit, power, qi and intent had become one with nature, they could borrow strength from nature itself. For example, they could imbue a single wisp of energy or pressure with the weight of mountains. They could also condense their aura into an unstoppable flood and crush their enemies with pure pressure alone.

In this case, it was clear that Xi Duoduo's pressure had broke the man's bones, shattered his blood vessels, and reversed the flow of his vigor.

Despite this, the man couldn't seem to feel the agony that should be coursing through his veins. He simply clutched the container tightly and caressed it like it was the love of his life. While wearing an infatuated, gentle, and adoring smile on his face, he said,

“I'm here...”

“I’ll never leave you again...”

“No one can separate us any longer...”

The man murmured before tightening his grip. Cracks began spreading all across the container, and the liquid inside it began seeping out earnestly.

“Are you mad?!”

Xi Duoduo turned as pale as a sheet when he saw this. Knowing that he only had seconds left at most, he rushed forward to stop the man with all his might.

He knew better than everyone here just how powerful the hand was. If the container was destroyed, and the liquid suppressing its power was gone, then the hand would be able to unleash its full power and inflict unimaginable consequences.

“Hahahaha! No one can separate us! No one!”

The man suddenly looked up and stared at Xi Duoduo. First, he removed his mask and laughed like a madman. Then, he tightened his grip again and finally crushed the container with a loud crack.

As the suppressive liquid drained away into nothing, an anomalous power washed out of the hand and struck Xi Duoduo head on. His expression flitted between struggle and infatuation for a moment, but he ultimately lost the mental battle and just stared at the hand lovingly.

It wasn’t just Xi Duoduo. Besides a handful of people, everyone in the entire Hill of Services instantly lost their minds and stared at the hand’s direction with infatuated expressions as well. They all began walking toward the Popularity Tower.

Ye Qing was one of the powerful few who was still conscious, albeit just barely. He had anticipated this from the start, and his Heavenly Demon Yin God was resistant toward this type of influence to a certain extent. That was why he was still conscious.

Defeated was conscious as well. He was currently surrounded by a cyclone of mysterious energy. Knowing the warrior’s reputation, Ye Qing wasn’t surprised by this. However, there were two other people who were able to maintain their consciousness despite the hand.

He couldn’t identify their faces since they were wearing masks. One of them had cold, green flames burning on top of their head. It was full of calamitous energy. The other person was surrounded by countless beautiful butterflies, but both the butterflies and the person were indistinct blurs almost like they were a dream.

“This seems like a good opportunity, Dream Master. Should we go now, or...?”

The black-robed person with green flames burning on top of their head glanced briefly at the bewitched crowd before whispering to their companion.

“Not yet. The Hill Carrier won’t fall this easily.”

The other person’s voice was clearly masculine, but it was crisp and melodious like he was singing. “Let’s wake up Shadow Dancer and Slaughterer first. I’ll tell you if it looks doable.”

“Okay! Hehehe, if we can get everything inside this Hill of Services... hahaha!”
The person with green flames on his head—Earth Walker—let out a strange cackle and licked his lips.

Neither of them noticed that a villager A heard their hidden conversation loud and clear.