

A Snake 501

Chapter 501 So Many Zombies

"I'm fine, my clothes are quite thick."

Xiao Li sprang to her feet in a panic, pointing in a direction, "Quick, go after them, my Ice Silkworm Gu was stolen and escaped."

From the looks of the figure fleeing in a panic, it was a child.

They wore clothes that looked very similar to those of the men from Barbarian Village who were shouting earlier, and despite being small, only about five or six years old.

Yet their pace was fast and steady, about to disappear from sight in the blink of an eye.

When Xiao Li was attacked by the flock of crows just now, it was this child who took advantage of his small size.

Using the crows as a cover, he managed to elude Beichen's and my line of sight and snatched Xiao Li's Ice Silkworm Gu.

Beichen didn't immediately follow Xiao Li's command, "Are you sure you're alright?"

"I'm really fine!! The clothes are too thick, I only got superficial injuries." Xiao Li was almost in tears.

After Beichen quickly checked the injuries on Xiao Li's back and saw they were indeed superficial, he firmly heeded his wife's plea and went after the child who had stolen the Ice Silkworm Gu.

"Brother Chenn is already going after the Ice Silkworm, he's reliable, so don't worry," I said, holding the umbrella and consoling the distraught Xiao Li.

Xiao Li clenched her fists, furious, "The Ice Silkworm Gu is available in the market for anyone to buy, they could have bought it themselves, but they chose to wait for us to pay and then steal ours."

"Right, why would those people want to steal the Ice Silkworm from us?" I suddenly caught on and smelled a hint of conspiracy.

Xiao Li took it for granted, "Hmph, they wanted the Ice Silkworm Gu without paying, a bunch of robbers."

I recalled the fighting power of the twenty or so crows from before.

If I hadn't had heavenly fire, the three of us would have been too occupied to avoid getting injured.

The three snake handlers at the market just now seemed like normal people judging from their spiritual power fluctuations.

Even if they knew Mysterious Art, it was only superficial.

It would make more sense to steal from them than from us, and there was no need to pay.

"Maybe... they were trying to lure Beichen away??" An idea flashed in my mind, and I blurted out, narrowing my eyes.

Xiao Li immediately became worried about Beichen's safety, "Could Brother Chenn be in danger?"

"Don't worry about that, your Brother Chenn is tough... pfft..." The urge to vomit blood that I had been suppressing all this time couldn't be restrained any longer, and I spat out a mouthful.

Xiao Li was terrified and propped up my sliding body, grabbing the handle of the umbrella I was holding, "Wanwan... don't scare me... why are you vomiting blood? Did you get hit with Gu Poison? Poisoned? Or cursed?"

"None of those... I... I've been backlash by myself." I barely had the strength to speak, my vision went dark, and my body felt like a withered leaf about to fall, "Can you help me to a quiet place to recuperate? Cough cough cough..."

The turmoil inside was making my thoughts chaotic, just when I had started to unravel the plot.

Now, as internal injuries flared up, my brain couldn't continue to process thoughts...

I must adjust quickly.

To protect Xiao Li, to protect myself.

"Yes, we're almost at the courtyard, Wanwan, I'll protect you, don't be afraid." Xiao Li, trembling with fear like a sieve, carried the chill in my body, and hurriedly walked.

I weakly leaned against Xiao Li, still unable to open my eyes, barely feeling the cool touch of rainfall on my face, "Okay, cough cough...cough cough... I'm not afraid."

I didn't know how much time had passed when the air grew warmer.

My body was carefully placed on a soft mattress, covered with a quilt, Xiao Li grasping my hand, "Should I call for a doctor? Your face looks terrible, you've lost all color."

Chapter 502: The Banyan Tree and the Well

"Don't worry, I'm just... *cough*..." I barely uttered that I was fine when I coughed up another mouthful of blood.

Feeling that Xiao Li was about to leave, I tightened my grip on her small hand, "I pushed too hard earlier, used the heavenly fire, and overconsumed it backlashed onto myself, calling a doctor won't help."

"Oh, I remember now, you turned into a phoenix."

With a sudden realization, Xiao Li heeded my words and stayed. After a while, she murmured softly, "It was seeing me attacked by crows that made you disregard your health and unleash your full power, wasn't it?"

Don't look at how careless the little girl usually is; at this moment, she's more meticulous than anyone.

The scene that just unfolded was perfectly deciphered by her.

"If it were you facing danger, you'd do the same." A warm current flowed through my heart, and after a heavy sinking feeling, I fell into a deep meditation.

This must be the first time I've entered meditation, completely oblivious to the outside world.

But my mind was clear, and I could silently recite the spiritual power cultivation mantra Yu Longting taught me: "Dark waters surge, fate is vast; no joy today, the past is lost. The multiverse, so immense..."

Suddenly, inside my Qi Sea arose an enormous Yin Yang Fish.

As the Yin Yang Fish circled, the dried-up meridians were once again filled with surging spiritual power.

The heavenly fire that I had excessively depleted, which at first was just a tiny spark, gradually rekindled into a small flame.

However, the flame's dance was strong on the outside but hollow inside; it would need at least a year or so of cultivation.

If forced to use it again, I fear it might be extinguished forever.

Still, thankfully, I managed to regulate my internal injuries, salvaging at least half a life.

If I hadn't tended to my breath properly, I would likely have been permanently wounded.

Having recovered, I slowly opened my eyes, my blurred vision gradually clearing, "Xiao Li... Beichen..."

The room was pitch black—they hadn't turned on the lights.

Perplexed, I slipped into my slippers and got out of bed to peek out the door.

The entire courtyard was dark, too, as the lonely sound of rain softly pattered on the ground.

Could it be that Xiao Li and Beichen were not in the courtyard?

The thought flashed through my mind and I instantly returned to the room.

Picking up my phone, I called Xiao Li, only to hear the familiar ringtone coming from nearby.

Following the ringtone, I found a tattered coat by the bed.

It bore marks of a crow's claws and bloodstains from where Xiao Li was injured.

It was Xiao Li's coat.

She was gone, but her coat remained in my room.

Without time to think, I reflexively called Beichen.

Beichen's phone was turned off.

At that moment, my heart felt cold, and I snapped back to reality.

Then I remembered that just before meditating, I had surmised that Beichen had been lured away, and then my thoughts came to an abrupt halt.

"If... all this was orchestrated by the High Priest, then Xiao Li... might she have been captured for the River God's sacrifice?"

I muttered this conclusion, my whole mind bewildered. If that were true, wouldn't Xiao Li be in mortal danger?

Regret gnawed at me for my helplessness.

If only I had gritted my teeth and held on, instead of immediately passing out into meditation.

If only I had called Beichen back right away...

Xiao Li would definitely not be missing!!

Quickly regaining my composure, I picked up the ragged down jacket from the floor, took a pair of scissors, and cut off the bloodstained piece. I then stitched the bloodied fabric onto a Patchwork Man with Mysterious Silk.

As I finished sewing, the Patchwork Man sat up abruptly, clamoring, "Hurry, save me... save me... Su Wan, there are so many zombies..."

It hopped around, pleading for help.

Chapter 503: Staying at the Corpse-Driving Inn

"Lead the way." My heart was on fire with urgency, only wanting to find Xiao Li quickly, I commanded.

Where exactly had Xiao Li been taken to?

And they were all zombies?

The Patchwork Man trudged ahead, then suddenly, with a cry of "Ouch," he fell to the ground.

After a faint sound of "zzzip," all of the embroidered threads on the Patchwork Man's body snapped; his legs flailed weakly, "I'm so dizzy~ ah~! I can't get up~ oh~"

At the same time, it felt as though something had struck me in the chest.

A prickly pain spread throughout, but it disappeared in an instant.

I immediately realized that some kind of witchcraft blocking off her aura had been cast on Xiao Li.

Anyone who tried to use Mysterious Art to find her would be backlashed by their own Art because of the witchcraft.

Luckily, the embroidery was an external Art, so it wasn't strongly connected to me.

I wasn't severely hurt by the backlash, the prickly pain in my heart was fleeting, "Hurry and tell me your approximate location."

"To the west... there is a large banyan tree, and also a well..."

The Patchwork Man ran out of Spiritual Power, spoke in fits and starts, and then completely turned into just pieces of cloth.

I picked up the pieces of cloth from the ground and immediately set off towards the west.

My heart sank; there were banyan trees all over the southwestern region, countless to the west, how was I to find one specific tree?

Fortunately, the town was exceptionally small, and heading directly west would bring me to the market.

The night market was pitch-black and shrouded in eerie white fog.

All the daytime vendors were gone, I expected it to be desolate and empty.

To my surprise, there were two or three vendors still doing business at night, with their stalls illuminated by the bright incandescent lamps.

One was selling sweet soup, another was selling ancient coins, and there was also one with particularly strange wooden puppets.

I walked past the stalls with a shiver of horror and quickened my pace.

Suddenly, from behind, a haunting voice called out, "What's a living person doing in the Ghost Market so late at night, girl, are you lost?"

"Doing business with the living or the familiar, it's all the same, all making money," I replied, my scalp tingling and my stomach cramping with fear, yet somehow finding the courage to turn around and strike up a conversation with the emaciated stall owner.

The stall owner was selling a pot of sweet soup that gave off steam, with the liquid inside bubbling vigorously as if it were Four-Fruits Soup, emitting a rather fragrant aroma.

As the soup bubbled, a human hand that seemed about to dissolve surfaced.

Sweat broke out on my forehead, and I stepped back half a step.

The shrewd stall owner's eyes flickered, and he quickly covered the pot with a wooden lid, "This sweet soup is prepared for water demons, not for human consumption. Just a dead hand scares you this much, and you want to do business with me?"

"I'll buy two bowls of sweet soup and also ask you something," I glanced at the QR code beside the incandescent lamp, scanned it, and following the price listed, transferred two hundred yuan.

The emaciated stall owner, who had a long-standing business in the Ghost Market, had sunken eye sockets and permanent dark circles as if always wearing smoky makeup, spoke with a voice like sawing wood, "So you're here to inquire about something, go on and ask."

He casually spoke while ladling out two bowls of the Four-Fruits Soup.

"Where can I find a place with both a water well and a banyan tree?" I looked at my watch, already twenty minutes into my search.

It was around ten o'clock at night now, peak time for evil spirits to stir.

But my concern for Xiao Li's safety turned all my fear into a single urge, to find her as quickly as possible.

The stall owner cackled, his gaze slowly drifting to an ancient wooden structure not far away, "Isn't that it?"

I slowly turned around, looking towards the Corpse-Driving Inn, fifty meters away, as if cloaked in the shadows of the Netherworld.

The place was darker than any other, and even with my Spiritual Eye, visibility was very low; I could only make out vague outlines.

In front of the inn was a large banyan tree that would take three to four people to encircle, but there was no well, and I resolutely said, "Are you sure you're not mistaken, Boss? I've checked several times in front of the Corpse-Driving Inn, there's only a banyan tree, no well."

Chapter 504: No Clients After Hai Hour (9-11 pm)

The vendor let out an odd laugh, "Whether there's a well or not, you'd know once you go in."

"Thanks for the tip." I sensed the deep meaning in his words, thanked him, and then turned towards the Corpse-Driving Inn.

Apart from the vendor's guidance, Patchwork Man also confessed that Xiao Li had been taken to a place full of zombies.

Behind me, the vendor asked with a sinister laugh, "You bought the sweet soup, aren't you going to take a sip? Don't let it go to waste."

"No need, keep it for yourself." I tightened my grip on the oil-paper umbrella, certain that the vendor wasn't a demon, but I still couldn't help feeling scared of him.

It felt as though he, although living, carried an eerie chill of decay, more terrifying than the dead.

"Gulp gulp..."

Suddenly, I heard the vendor gulping the soup loudly from behind me.

He really was drinking the soup!!

Wasn't it supposed to be for the water demon?

The thought of the dead hand in that soup made my stomach churn, and I felt so nauseated that I could barely walk.

Without realizing it, I had arrived at the front of the Corpse-Driving Inn.

White lanterns hung in a row on the inn's façade, all four glowing brightly.

They emitted a faint white light, swaying in the wind and rain.

Standing in front of the firmly shut wooden door, I hesitated only for a moment before knocking.

I was indeed worried that the people inside the inn might be in league with those from Barbarian Village.

Knocking on the door like this could very well be walking into a trap.

But then I thought, no venture, no gain.

"Who is it, looking for lodging in the dead of night, don't you know it's past Hai Hour and we don't accommodate guests then?"

An stooped old crone opened the door, holding an oil lamp in her hand, only reaching up to my stomach.

Looking up and seeing my face, the deeply wrinkled old crone suddenly asked, "Girl, what's your relation to Yan Hua?"

"(☹o☹)... I... my grandmother..." even though she doesn't acknowledge me as her granddaughter.

I was startled and stuttered in response to the old woman's question.

It was too strange; the old woman looked unfamiliar.

Yet just at first glance, she could see the connection between Yan Hua and me.

The old woman gave a cold laugh, "I thought so, the granddaughter of that decrepit old Lin Huan, no wonder you look just like Yan Hua did when she was young. Speak up, what brings you to this crone's place in the middle of the night?"

"To... to stay over..." I was inexplicably intimidated by the old woman's aura, stammering and trembling before her.

The old woman's attitude was very dismissive, "A member of the Lin Family, exorcists, seeking lodging in this wretched place? Who would believe that?"

"..." I was wracking my brain trying to concoct a reason to stay at the inn.

The old woman turned and said, "Come in, it's windy outside, don't catch a cold."

"..." I scratched my head, quietly following behind her.

What's going on?

I was confused; was she welcoming me, or not?

One moment, mocking and jeering, the next, showing concern.

I had just stepped inside the inn when the door behind me slammed shut with a loud bang.

I was nearly scared into a heart attack.

From upstairs, a guest yelled angrily, "Granny Long, making such a racket in the middle of the night, how is anyone supposed to sleep?"

"What's there to yell about, there are guests checking in, if you want to stay, stay, if not, pack up and get lost," Granny Long cursed loudly.

The shouting guest stood in the upstairs corridor, and I glanced up to see it was the burly man who had kidnapped the girl for the River God, instantly breaking out in a cold sweat.

If I were recognized at this moment, wouldn't that lead to a fight?

I didn't even have anything on me for self-defense.

The burly man, however, ducked his head, completely failing to notice me, and sheepishly returned to his room, still muttering, "Running a business like this, so fierce and threatening, bound to go out of business eventually."

"What's your name? How many nights are you staying? Do you want a room facing east or south? Where's your man?" Granny Long put down the oil lamp, flicked the abacus with one hand, and with the other, took a brush to record in a ledger.

Chapter 505: The Bridal Gown Girl

"I barely knew she was the Granny Long whom Beichen had found to make the Poison-Resistant Herbal Bags for us; I couldn't help but feel a thread of trust and told her the truth, 'My name is Su Wan. My man is busy with something and didn't come with me, so I just need lodging for one night. A room on the south side or the east side will do.'

'I'll arrange a room for you on the south side. If you hear any sounds at night, don't leave your room. Cover your head with the quilt and sleep till the morning light.'

Granny Long instructed, gave me a copper key, and continued to do her accounting without looking up."

While Granny Long was busy with her ledger, I had already observed everything around me.

All the guests were staying upstairs, and the bodies were centrally placed in the Coffin Room.

At a glance, it looked eerie, filled with coffin planks stacked as high as small hills, truly deserving the name Coffin Mountain.

Within the Coffin Mountain, there was only one space clear.

There was a Yin Well in that place, with lotus death symbols gathering yin from all directions.

I took the key, pretended to go upstairs,

then sneaked back down in less than twenty minutes.

Granny Long was no longer at the counter, and I tiptoed into the Coffin Room.

Upon entering, I was hit with the pungent smell of preservative herbs.

Through my Spiritual Eye, I searched for the breath of living people.

Under a loose floor panel, I found two signs of life.

I knelt on the ground, opened the panel, and discovered the space below the wooden floor—the Underground Pit.

Below, it was all coffins too, with one in particular shaking continuously.

If it were any other time, I'd surely have thought it was a body coming back to life and would have been scared out of my wits.

But now, I climbed down using a rope ladder, picked up the tools hanging on the wall, and pried open the nails of the shaking coffin.

The moment the coffin lid was pushed open, an alarmed cry came from inside. "Who? Who is it...? I won't marry the Dragon King... Help... Ah..."

Lying in the coffin was a girl in a red bridal dress, her face smeared with tears. Her face was originally painted whiter than a lime wall, but after crying, her face was stained with white marks.

Upon sitting up, the heavy head ornaments on her head clinked and made a tinkling sound.

"It's me, be good, don't be afraid. I'm here to save you," I said as I embraced Xiao Li, who was shivering all over and sobbing violently.

Realizing it was me, Xiao Li cried even louder, clutching tightly to me, "Wuwuwu, I thought I'd never see you again. My back injury contains hallucinogenic Crow Poison. After you fainted, I was affected by the illusion. My back hurt as if it was on fire, and then... I stumbled out in a daze."

"By the time I came to, I had already fallen into the hands of those villains. They stripped off my clothes, dressed me in this bridal outfit, and shoved me into a coffin."

Considering her condition, it seemed like her injury was minor, so the poisoning was light.

Even though she walked out uncontrollably, she was conscious the whole time, aware she was under the influence of an illusion and not in control of her actions.

The toxins must have dissipated by now, allowing her to cry out so vigorously.

"What about that girl called Bai Zhanhe?" I let go of Xiao Li, wiped the tears off her face with the sleeve of my clothes, and gently helped her out of the coffin.

When I was above just now, I perceived two traces of life, but when I got down, there was only Xiao Li.

Xiao Li tilted her head, pondering between sobs and constant hiccupping, "Bai Zhanhe... who is that? Oh, I know, the girl who was also abducted, right? She... she... was locked in that coffin with the phoenix painted on it... wuwuwu..."

"I'll get her out. Just stay put, well behaved. It'll be quick," I said as I pulled the nails out of another coffin; the girl inside was pale as death, also dressed in a red wedding gown.

Her pale, nearly transparent skin contrasted with the blood-red bridal dress like a crystal lotus grown deep in the abyss of Hell.

I touched her; her hands and feet were icy, and she wasn't even breathing.

Looking at the confined space inside the coffin, I guessed that she died of suffocation after the oxygen ran out.

A moment of sorrow flashed through my heart as I took her out.

I tried administering heart-lung resuscitation and breathing air into her mouth, "Zanhe, Bai Zanhe... wake up, these people are too damn cruel... locking someone in a coffin without caring if they'll suffocate to death."

"What... what are you doing?" Suddenly, the girl's long eyelashes fluttered and, upon opening her eyes, she was shocked to see me blowing air into her mouth.

Chapter 506: Witchcraft Grass Ring

I hurriedly climbed up, "Don't be afraid, I was giving you CPR, you almost suffocated in the coffin just now."

I nearly suffocated to death!

I thought so, I clearly saw two breaths of life from above.

But after coming down, I only found Xiao Li alone.

If Bai Zanhe had been rescued any later, this young girl would probably have been doomed.

"I remember now, you are the passerby who was going to save me." Bai Zanhe still remembered me and recognized me at a glance.

I bent down to try to pull her up, "Come with us, let's escape from here."

"It's useless, we are certain to die if we escape, look at the grass ring on my wrist." Bai Zanhe struggled to stand, her beautiful watery eyes drooping as she looked at the grass ring on her pale, delicate wrist.

I immediately went to Xiao Li and picked up her hand, discovering the same type of grass ring on her wrist.

The grass ring was woven very plainly and simply, yet on a closer look, the way it was knotted was special and complex, undoubtedly involving some kind of witchcraft.

I tried to approach it with my spiritual power, but the witchcraft pushed it back out.

Bai Zanhe's fingers touched the grass ring helplessly, saying, "The moment I put on the grass ring, I was already a dead person! If it's not taken off, the High Priest can take my life with a single spell."

"There's a witchcraft on this grass ring, which will drain the host's blood until dry if taken off, yet it can be broken." I examined the grass ring for a while and, based on Yin Yang Embroidery, ingeniously decoded the mysteries of the witchcraft, "Once taken off, as long as someone else immediately puts it on, the witchcraft that haunts the original host can be broken."

"I am a Barbarian Villager, how could I not know this method, but who would be willing..." Bai Zanhe said, her eyes widening.

I myself took down the grass ring from Xiao Li's wrist and put it on my own, "Xiao Li, quick, take off the wedding dress, I'll put it on."

"What do you mean, Su Wan, you aren't planning to take my place, are you?" Xiao Li stepped back half a step, her eyes filled with resistance.

I nodded, fully agreeing with her statement, "Yes, I am taking your place. I wanted to enter Barbarian Village, and this relationship just provides a good opportunity. You put on my clothes and leave through Corpse-Driving Inn, try your best to meet up with Beichen."

"What about you... what if you encounter danger... what will you do?" Xiao Li's eyes reddened, and tears rolled down.

I went over and hugged her, "Listen, I can absolutely protect myself, and even if not for myself, I have to protect Dumpling. You were taken away by them and had no ability to defend yourself. If something happens to you, I will have lost my best friend, and Beichen will be without a wife. How could we go on living then?"

"Okay... I'll listen to you... listen to you..." Xiao Li cried, actively taking off the complex, ethnic-style wedding dress on her body, "You must not let anything happen to you, if you die, I'll commit suicide, sob, sob, sob..."

Goodness, what is she even saying, if I die then she'll commit suicide.

Anyone who didn't know better would think she had fallen in love with me and wanted to die for love.

I also took off my clothes, leaving only the White Python Cheongsam.

As I put on Xiao Li's wedding dress, I said to Bai Zhanhe, "Zhanhe, don't worry about the grass ring on your wrist, we'll go into Barbarian Village together, I'll be with you. I'll figure out a way to remove the grass rings from both our hands, you won't come to harm."

"You... you want to figure out a way to help me remove the bracelet... do you know how powerful this witchcraft... this grass ring is..." Bai Zhanhe watched from the side, her entire expression shattered.

Chapter 507: The Girl's Encounter

I put on Xiao Li's inner and outer layers of wedding clothes, beginning to try on the complex hair ornaments, and was very optimistic in spirit, "No matter how strong the difficulties are, there are always more solutions than problems, we'll face them together."

"We... face them together?" Bai Zhanhe murmured with a hint of helplessness, leaning against a coffin.

Xiao Li had put on all my clothes, her lips puckered, and she didn't want to leave anymore, "I might as well stay and face it with you. If I just leave like this... I'd really seem like a traitor."

"Silly girl, you still need to find Beichen, to inform your Brother Chenn to come and save us," I comforted her, patting the back of Xiao Li's head and leading her to the soft rope ladder. I casually tied a cloth strip, which concealed one's presence, around her wrist, "This isn't betrayal; it's preserving the spark of revolution."

"When did you become so eloquent, speaking even better than singing, I think you're just finding excuses to get rid of me, to face the danger alone," Xiao Li vigorously wiped away her tears with her sleeve, her eyes full of resentment towards me.

I earnestly instructed her, "Xiao Li, this is the Corpse-Driving Inn. The innkeeper probably isn't in cahoots with the people of Barbarian Village. As long as you don't make too much noise, you should be able to leave. There's a ghost market outside in the fair, which seems eerie, but you'll be fine as long as you ignore them."

"Oh."

As I wiped away the last tear on Xiao Li's face, she firmed up her gaze and firmly grasped the rope ladder to climb up.

I watched Xiao Li's retreating figure, sighing softly.

It was just a chase after a Ginseng Spirit, who would have thought that things would turn out this way. If I'd known, no matter what, I shouldn't have brought Xiao Li into this mess.

"I really envy your friend, to have met someone as good as you," Bai Zhanhe remarked with a cool tone of admiration.

Settling on a coffin lid, I continued to fumble awkwardly with my hairstyle and ornaments, "They say true colors show in adversity, we can be good friends too."

"Good, these headdresses from Barbarian Village are too complicated to wear, let me help you with that," Bai Zhanhe readily agreed, coming over and gently taking the silver hairpin from my hand, starting by smoothing my hair with her hands, "What is your name? And what brings you to Long Town?"

Her skills were deft, not like my clumsy attempts.

"My name is Su Wan. You might not believe it, but something of mine was stolen by a little demon, and I tracked it here," I released my hands, allowing my body to relax.

Bai Zhanhe's fingers danced swiftly, arranging the complex array of silver ornaments neatly, "I believe it, recently there have been quite a few monsters infiltrating Barbarian Village."

"Hey, what's your status in Barbarian Village, and how come they chose you to marry the River God?" Having revealed my own name and purpose, I also inquired about Bai Zhanhe's circumstances.

Bai Zhanhe fell silent for a long while before softly saying, "Originally, I was the village's Miao Doctor, but unfortunately, I later became the Maiden of Luohua Cave."

"The Maiden of Luohua Cave, such a backward and cruel custom, wasn't it abolished long ago?" I abruptly looked up, shocked as I stared at Bai Zhanhe.

Bai Zhanhe had delicate features and skin as white as milk.

In this place where the UV rays are intense, most locals are tanned, making her pale, snow-like skin extremely rare.

Bai Zhanhe's eyes were filled with desolation, "It was the tribal chief's son; he took a liking to me, but I refused to marry him. Typically, the Maidens of Luohua Cave are older, but the tribal chief chose me specifically because of that, to be offered to the deities... Normally, the Maidens starve to death in the cave. Being chosen as the Dragon King's Wife... I'd probably drown..."

I listened, completely stunned, empathetically saying, "You appear fragile, yet possess a proud spirit. Rather than being coerced and harmed, you refuse to marry someone you don't love."

Chapter 508: Daddy Bullies You So Much

"Let's not talk about me anymore, let's discuss what to do next." Bai Zanhe lowered her gaze to my belly, "I've restored your hairstyle to look just like your friend's, but this face and this belly of yours, the High Priest and his people will notice immediately once they arrive, and then... who knows what they'll do to you."

"Once the red bridal veil is on, it'll cover our faces," I replied.

I picked up the bright red veil from the coffin where Xiao Li had just lain, draping it over the top of my head, "As for the belly issue, I must ask the little one inside."

"You mean to say your belly can shrink on its own?" Bai Zanhe, usually so repressed, now even managed to joke with me, finding humor amidst the bitterness.

I touched my rounded belly, "Almost, Dumpling, mommy's going to tie you up; you won't get hurt, will you?"

"Nope, Dumpling is very tough," a tender child-like voice came from my belly, Dumpling then touched where my belly was, seemingly comforting me to rest assured.

Bai Zanhe stammered in shock, "Did... did I... hallucinate? I heard a child's voice."

"Don't be scared, it's my baby talking," I said, knowing Bai Zanhe would be frightened, and laughed.

A layer of red silk was spread at the bottom of the coffin. I tore into it to bind my belly. I tied it very tightly, still a bit worried for Dumpling, "Dumpling, are you uncomfortable? If you are, you must tell Mommy, and Mommy will loosen it a bit."

"Mommy, don't worry, Dumpling can handle it. Daddy bullies you so much, and I didn't... eh..." After hearing Dumpling's innocent and kind words, my face turned red, and I instantly diverted the Spiritual Power in my Qi Sea to silence his tiny mouth.

Yu Longting, that big flirt, always driving. He must have corrupted Dumpling!

When he comes back from the Serpent Domain, I'm definitely going to beat him up!

Bai Zanhe was almost completely speechless, stuttering after a long while, "Your belly... after being bound, does look smaller, not noticeable as pregnant unless observed closely. However, the nails from the coffin were pulled out and even if nailed back, the marks can be seen."

"Then let's not restore it, Sister Zanhe, with me here, leave everything to me."

"Alright, I'll listen to you."

"Come, let's sit down and rest for a bit."

"Okay."

As dawn was breaking, noisy footsteps came from the underground mortuary.

The burly man leading the group barked, "How did you get out of the coffins?"

Me and Bai Zanhe, dressed in dark red bridal gowns with veils on our heads, sat side by side on a coffin.

Hearing the man's voice and feeling the hostile and frigid demeanor of the approaching group.

Bai Zanhe instinctively tightened her grip, holding my hand more firmly.

Her palm was sweaty; she was clearly very scared of these people.

"It was too stuffy inside the coffin, nearly suffocated us to death. Granny Long couldn't bear to leave us in there," I replied boldly yet respectfully, my heart pounding.

Just don't foolishly lift my veil, or my cover's definitely blown.

The man showed no sign of doubting my words, his voice took a turn, "Granny Long found you?"

"What happened?" The discordant voice of the High Priest, sounding like sawing wood and apparently just arrived, asked as he elongated the question.

The burly man reported, "High Priest, Granny Long discovered that there were live people in the coffins. To prevent them from suffocating, she let them out last night."

"Long Xiangkui really detests the Falling Cave Girls. Many tribes had to forsake them before, just because that old hag meddled," the High Priest said displeasingly, apparently both resentful and fearful of Granny Long.

The burly man's voice grew stern as he inquired, "Then what should we do? Granny Long won't take action to save them, will she? If they run away, it could anger Lord Dragon God."

Chapter 509 A Body of Proud Bones

"Hmph, Long Xiangkui wields vast power and high prestige; she is not to be trifled with," the High Priest snorted coldly and issued the command, "To avoid any complications, we depart immediately."

Su Wan and Bai Zanke were roughly stuffed into two separate coffins.

As soon as the coffin lids closed, the people outside clumsily nailed them shut.

These men were deft and endowed with brute strength.

In a short time, they had the coffins securely nailed down.

I couldn't help but worry about Bai Zanke inside my heart, afraid that she would pass out again due to lack of oxygen.

But at this moment, I was trapped in a solid coffin.

Like a fish on the chopping block.

I could only temporarily resign myself to fate.

Confined in the cramped coffin, I couldn't stretch my limbs, and my chest felt stuffy due to the lack of oxygen.

Groping around, I felt the coffin begin to sway.

It was lifted by people, tied to some kind of rope, and hoisted above.

The Yin Well, previously engraved with lotuses and meant to suppress evil spirits with Buddhist rites, was in fact a passage for transporting coffins via ropes.

When the coffin dropped to the ground, I was shaken to the core.

Being alive in a coffin is really unbearable; I was so jostled I almost threw up.

"You're leaving just like this?" Granny Long's hoarse voice sounded.

The High Priest replied, "Granny Long, there are urgent matters back in the village, so we won't stay long."

"Don't think I don't know what you've got in those coffins, there are living people inside," Granny Long said sternly.

A ripple went through my heart, and I listened intently to the sounds outside.

Granny Long had actually discovered that there were live people inside the coffins!!

Would she... come to our rescue?

Far from being afraid, the High Priest laughed coldly with a sense of impunity, "Heh heh heh, they are all personally chosen by the River God to be his brides."

"The River God hasn't given a Divine Oracle in a hundred years, so why suddenly take a wife?" Granny Long asked with regal and stern authority.

"Who are we to question the Divine Oracle? In ancient times, Gun risked his life to steal the Xirang to control the floods, and today we merely follow the same example. With your status, even if you don't help, you wouldn't go against us," said the High Priest.

"Let me see you out," Granny Long said in an even tone, speaking slowly.

It was clear that she wasn't angered by the High Priest's disrespect.

The High Priest: "As you please."

The coffin swayed from side to side as a line of people carried it outside.

Through the coffin, I strained to hear the sounds outside.

The market was bustling with people coming and going—a continuous throng of noise.

Suddenly, I felt a tap on the coffin, "Su Wan, is it?"

It was the somber voice of Granny Long; she actually knew I was inside the coffin!!

"Unexpectedly, you would sacrifice yourself to replace that girl," Granny Long said with a mocking laugh, her low voice tinged with a hint of sigh, "If you want me to save you, knock on the coffin lid, but I can only save one."

She knew everything... even the fact that I had switched places with Xiao Li was crystal clear to her...

What kind of insight was this?

And...

What did she mean by she could only save one??

Could it be that even a figure like Granny Long feared the so-called Dragon God and thus wanted to leave one person to continue the marriage to the Dragon King?

I pursed my lips inside the coffin.

I remained motionless, not knocking on the coffin lid.

My respect for Granny Long diminished a great deal.

"You don't need me to save you?" After a long while, Granny Long seemed to be talking to herself, murmuring, "This pride, it's quite different from Yan Hua's."

Suddenly, Granny Long raised her voice, "This is as far as I'll take you. There's still plenty to take care of back at the inn."

"Granny Long, we shall meet again," the High Priest said respectfully in Granny Long's presence.

Only after Granny Long had left did he curse under his breath, calling her an old hag.

Both coffins were made of solid heavy wood, weighing around fifty or sixty pounds each.

Considering my weight, it was already over a hundred pounds.

The strong men carried it for more than ten miles; even the hardest bodies couldn't withstand it.

Panting all the way, it felt as if it wouldn't be long before someone collapsed from exhaustion.

"Release the two of them," the High Priest suddenly ordered.

Chapter 510: The Water Demon Turns into a Fish

I couldn't help but become alert, the High Priest barely kept us nailed down in the coffins.

Why all of a sudden did he want to let people out?

Before I could ponder, a tinkling clatter ensued.

The coffin nails were pulled out, and the lid of the coffin was lifted again.

"Are we at the riverbank? Are we going to cross the river to Barbarian Village?" I leaned on the side of the coffin, slowly stood up, and felt the moist river breeze blowing in.

A burly man beside me sneered with a lewd smile, his rough, dirt-covered fingers lifting my red bridal veil, "Little lady, your senses are quite sharp, and your voice is pleasant, just like this, marrying the Dragon God..."

"Ah Bing, how dare you! Even the bridal veil of the Dragon King's Wife, you dare to lift, you want the entire Barbarian Village to be buried with you?"

The High Priest shouted angrily, stopping the man's action.

The man, in a panic, hurriedly knelt down, "High Priest, I know my mistake, I was just curious... I didn't mean to offend the Dragon King's woman..."

"Too late, someone, chop off his hand for me." The High Priest was merciless.

When I heard that because of this man's little curiosity, his entire hand was to be chopped off.

A chill struck my heart, and my body shivered uncontrollably.

Are they this ruthless to their own people?

"No, please, if my hand is chopped off, I will be useless, please no... High Priest, spare me... I won't dare anymore." The man was so scared that he sobbed and kowtowed relentlessly.

The other people also knelt down one after another, pleading for the man.

The High Priest's worship and veneration for the Dragon God had reached a sickening extent, "No, no one can covet the Dragon God's woman, not even the slightest intent."

Amidst the man's screams, a fine hand was chopped off.

I was covered with a bright red veil over my head.

Looking down at the hand on the ground, its muscles not yet dead, still twitching, my pupils couldn't help but contract.

"Where are the people to row the boat? Why are they missing at a critical moment?" the High Priest asked discontentedly.

One of the burly men said, "He's probably gone to urinate."

"Put them on the boat first, and we'll split up to look for someone nearby," ordered the High Priest.

Someone said, "High Priest, do we need to leave someone to guard them? It won't be good if they escape."

"Escape? They are wearing the Grass Rings that I personally weaved. If they dare to run away, they will turn into mummies in an instant," the High Priest mockingly said.

Bai Zhanhe and I were pushed and shoved to the dockside, placed onto a particularly simple bamboo raft.

As soon as the weight of a person went on, chilly river water began to overflow the bamboo.

It seeped around my feet, the cold pressing in.

In this river water... there was a terrifying... unspeakable resentment...

After those burly men put Bai Zhanhe and me on the raft, they went down to find the specialized rowers of Barbarian Village.

"You live by the water, and you don't know how to row a bamboo raft?" I was quite curious and asked Bai Zhanhe.

The two girls, facing such a terrifying situation, held hands with each other the entire time.

My hand was still warm due to my practice of Mysterious Art, while Bai Zhanhe, frightened, had both hands icy and stiff.

Bai Zhanhe sighed softly, "Every Barbarian Villager knows how to row a raft, but there is a Poison Barrier near the island, which requires experienced people to maneuver past it."

"That Poison Barrier seems to be for repelling outsiders, but from what you're saying, its main function can't be to prevent your own people from escaping, could it?" I always felt something was off, if the Poison Barrier was for protecting against invaders, why even the High Priest didn't know how to break it.

Before Bai Zanhe could answer, I looked down at the thick reeds swaying by the river, spotting a big fish with its belly up near the water, "What a big fish."

"Close your eyes quickly, don't look at it, beware of being bewitched. It might be a water demon," Bai Zanhe hurriedly cautioned.

Then I heard someone on the shore shouting excitedly, "Everyone come and see, there's a big fish by the river."

"Wow, such a big one, indeed rare, hurry and figure out how to haul it ashore," another one added.

I lifted half of my bridal veil and sneaked a peek.

I saw five grey-robed Taoists standing by the river, one of them had taken off his shoes and socks, directly entering the water to fish out the big white fish.

Despite the reeds growing on the riverbank, the water appeared shallow.

In reality, the water depth, distorted by the Demon Qi, was at least three to four meters. A chill ran down my spine, "Be careful, the water is deep."