

THE GREAT MING IN THE BOX

Chapter 1: The Magical Scenic Box

July 10, 2023, summer, Shuangqing City.

The scorching heat pushed the outdoor temperature beyond 40 degrees.

Li Daoxuan switched off his computer, shook his head, vigorously rubbed his temples, then slumped backward into his chair, collapsing into a heap.

Finally, the work was done! Outside, the sky had turned completely dark.

It was his birthday today. He'd planned to take the day off, but the client's demand of "finish it by today" shattered that hope. Instead, he spent it buried in overtime.

Was this really a happy life?

After lying bonelessly for a while, he pushed himself up from the chair and walked to the entrance.

There sat a massive cardboard delivery box. A courier had dropped it off that afternoon; the package bore only the words “Happy Birthday” and nothing else.

He couldn’t guess which friend sent it. He thought hard—he didn’t have many friends besides his close buddy Cai Xinzi. Nobody else would send him a birthday gift, right?

Busy with work all day, he hadn’t had time to open it. Now, finally, he could see what the devil this sole birthday present was.

The box was as big as a refrigerator. Heaving it open with effort, he found an enormous scenic box inside. It was about two meters long and over a meter high and wide. Placed on the floor, he saw through its glass panel a miniature “ancient village.”

The village looked dilapidated—broken houses, tattered thatched roofs. The surrounding land was barren, blanketed by swirling yellow sand...

Li Daoxuan couldn't help but complain, "Most scenic boxes go for elegant pavilions, waterfalls, and rockeries—lovely sights. Why set up a shabby village buried in yellow sand? Does this mean my taste only deserves this?"

Just then, the wooden door of a broken house in the village creaked open.

Out stepped a tiny plastic figure, barely one centimeter tall. It had long hair—clearly a young girl.

Li Daoxuan jumped. A moving plastic figure? An electronic toy? The realism was astonishing. This scenic box was intriguing. Cai Xinzi really was buddy material—this must have cost a small fortune.

Squinting for a closer look, he noticed the plastic girl had delicate, pretty features. Her only flaw was extreme thinness, like someone malnourished.

Unaware of the “giant” staring from outside the scenic box, she carried a bamboo basket out of the village onto the barren, sandy ground. She dug and scraped at the earth, soon unearthing something which she carefully placed into the basket.

She was tiny—under one centimeter—her basket minuscule, and whatever she’d dug up too small for Li Daoxuan’s unaided eye.

He scrambled through drawers, pulled out a magnifying glass, and peered through it at the girl. It was a segment of grass root.

Frantically searching the sandy patch, she unearthed grass roots, found dried shrubs, peeled off bits of tree bark, or with luck discovered a few edible green leaves—treasuring them like gems before tucking them into her basket.

She ran back to the village, carried the basketful of bark and roots into her little hut, and smoke soon rose from the chimney.

Through the magnifier, Li Daoxuan could see across to the window: the girl and a middle-aged woman inside were using cracked bowls to mimic eating movements.

“Surviving on bark, roots, and wild greens?” Li Daoxuan understood at once. “This scenic box depicts famine years from some dynasty in history, highlighting the hardships of impoverished good citizens to remind me today’s prosperity didn’t come easy.”

He pulled out his phone and called Cai Xinzi immediately. “Old Cai! This birthday gift of yours is a rare one—even comes with a wave of positive-energy warning. Brother, I love it. Deeply grateful.”

A baffled Cai Xinzi answered, “What birthday gift? Is it your birthday today?”

Li Daoxuan: “... !”

Right then, a strange noise echoed from the scenic box. Li Daoxuan dropped the phone, startled, and spun around. Outside the village, a large crowd of plastic figures surged. They wore ragged clothing, holding rusty swords, spears, even using pot lids as shields. Some wore tattered wooden armor...

Mountain bandits—plain as day!

They stormed into the village, bellowing something.

But their voices were minuscule—a chaotic squeak to Li Daoxuan’s ears, like insects chirring.

He hastily shut windows and doors tightly, blocking all modern noise, barely making out what the mountain bandits yelled: “Listen up, villager! Bring every crumb of grain from your houses and hand it over! Else, we slash every single one of you—clean sweep!”

Every door in the village stayed tightly shut; no one showed themselves.

Peeking through the glass, Li Daoxuan saw the girl who had dug for roots earlier huddling with the middle-aged woman, trembling.

“The realism of this scenic box is unreal,” Li Daoxuan marveled. “The details are perfect! Who sent me such an incredible toy?”

The mountain bandits began their rampage. Kicking open doors, they dragged the cowering villager figures out. Howls and shrieks rose as one pleaded, “We have no food either! Kill me, it won’t produce grain!”

“Thud!” A bandit’s swift chop landed on the villager’s neck. The villager collapsed instantly, unmoving—red medicine fluid bursting from its neck.

Li Daoxuan shook his head, his heart twisting painfully.

Another bandit reached the hut where the herb-eating mother and daughter hid. One kick shattered their door.

The pair broke into sobs. Li Daoxuan heard the girl’s voice faint for the first time: “Your Highness, spare us... We truly have no food... Look...”—she gestured to their bowl—“...only roots...”

Her voice was finely fragile, pleasant even, yet faint and weak—likely from permanent hunger sapping her strength.

The mountain bandit cursed, “Screw you, poor trash! I don’t care if you eat roots or bark—no grain, I slice you apart and eat your meat!”

The girl burst into terrified wails. The middle-aged woman threw herself over the girl, yelling “Spare her life, sire!”

The bandit’s blade chopped her neck. Red fluid sprayed wide. She fell silent.

The girl collapsed onto her mother’s body, weeping uncontrollably.

The bandit stayed mercilessly unmoved, raising his blade again to strike the girl’s neck...

Li Daoxuan could watch no longer. He whipped off the scenic box lid, reached inside, crooked his index finger—and flicked!

THUD!

That flick launched the bandit figure a full meter away. He sailed from the village center onto the yellow sand beyond, crashed hard, neck bent strangely. Stillness.

Li Daoxuan, bewildered: "Huh? Killed with a flick?"