

The Great Ming in the Box

Chapter 11: After Eating, There Would Be Many Troubles

A giant cabbage leaf descended from the sky!

Gao Yiye was startled at first, but quickly composed herself. It wasn't the first time she had been "fed" by the Great deity. She was no longer as shocked as when she first saw the giant egg.

Overjoyed, she first knelt down, kowtowed to the sky, and loudly thanked, "Divine gift!" Then she stood up and shouted at the top of her voice, "Everyone, come quickly, the Great deity has bestowed us with food again!"

The villagers, who had been carrying bamboo baskets and preparing to go foraging, swiftly gathered around.

The giant cabbage leaf left them momentarily dazed, but after experiencing the giant egg and the giant rice, they were only stunned for a short while. Then, the Village Chief gave an order, and everyone began to divide the large cabbage leaf.

“One piece per family! Set aside a few pieces for Gao Chuwu and those kids who went to the county town,” the Village Chief shouted. The villagers obediently lined up for distribution, each cutting a large piece of the leaf and taking it home.

As Li Daoxuan had predicted, with food bestowed early in the morning, the villagers were no longer in a hurry to dig for wild vegetables.

When hungry, people had only one trouble—food. But after the problem of food and clothing was solved, there would be countless troubles.

The villagers soon began to exhibit diverse lifestyles.

“Sanwa, the crotch of your pants has been torn for several days. Come here, I’ll sew it back as your mother.”

Li Daoxuan noticed that there was a middle-aged woman in the village who was very skilled at needlework. With just a pair of scissors and a needle, she managed to sew a beautiful piece of burlap clothing for her child.

“Labage, didn’t you say last time you would teach me how to fire pottery jars? I deliberately dug up a large piece of yellow clay. Teach me how to turn this into a jar.”

Li Daoxuan saw two middle-aged men playing with mud. It turned out one of them knew how to make pottery jars. This was a remarkable craft indeed. Shortly, he

shaped a lump of yellow clay into a beautiful pottery jar. The other, clumsy as he followed, actually managed to mold a crooked jar.

Moving his view to another part of the village, the Village Chief unexpectedly had skills too. He whittled a pile of bamboo sticks and soon wove a bamboo basket and two bamboo containers. His handiwork was incredibly neat.

“Gao Yiyi, my axe is dull. Can you forge it for me?”

Li Daoxuan’s gaze followed and discovered a blacksmith named Gao Yiyi who was helping his neighbor forge an axe. After a series of clanging sounds—Namo Amitabha—the axe was fixed and looked as good as new.

Now, the scenes in the diorama became much richer, and he watched with great interest.

“Huh? Wait! There seems to be something incredible to watch.”

Li Daoxuan suddenly noticed that Gao Yiye was drawing water.

She drew a bucket of water from the well, carried it back to her room, poured it into a large wooden basin, and then shut the door and closed the window tightly.

He suddenly understood—wasn't this exactly what those idle netizens in the forum had talked about?

The girl was going to use that bucket of water to wipe her body.

For some reason, Li Daoxuan's heart began to pound with a thudding rhythm.

He looked down at the magnifying glass in his hand and then at Gao Yiye's dilapidated house...

The house was full of holes everywhere, especially on the roof. Probably due to the three-year drought when little rain fell, nobody cared whether the roof leaked or not. There was a visible hole through which one could see inside.

If he aligned the magnifying glass to that hole's position... he would be able to see...

Li Daoxuan started to struggle: should I be a human or a wolf?

As he was deeply conflicted, he suddenly noticed a face appearing at the broken hole.

It turned out to be Gao Yiye. She piled up tables and stools, climbing to a great height, until she could reach the hole in the roof.

She looked up towards the sky through the hole; Li Daoxuan looked towards the hole from the “sky”.

Thus, their gazes met again.

A strange atmosphere was exchanged in their gazes.

After several seconds, Gao Yiye averted her gaze; she dared not look directly at the Great deity. Just then, her dirty little face flushed bright red, so red that even the smudges couldn't hide it, turning her entire face a dark crimson.

However, she was too small; her whole body was less than one centimeter tall.

Without a magnifying glass, Li Daoxuan couldn't clearly see the color of her face, let alone the trace of shyness on it.

With a “bang”, Gao Yiye pushed open the door and ran out.

She quickly ran to the Village Chief’s side, lowered her voice to a volume she thought the Great deity couldn’t hear, and whispered, “Village Chief Grandpa, I have something I want to ask you.”

Village Chief: “Oh? What is it?”

Gao Yiye’s face was deeply red: “The Great deity... seems to have been... up in the sky... watching me...”

Village Chief: “This is your blessing! The Great deity favors you; He has been watching over you from the sky, giving us food through your hands and divine messages through your mouth. You should be grateful; why do you look so strange?”

Gao Yiye: “I... have been... watched... so how will I... change clothes? How... bathe?”

Village Chief: “Tsk! So it’s this kind of nonsense. Don’t forget who gave you your life; changing clothes and bathing mean nothing. When the Great deity needs your service someday, you should obey obediently.”

At that time, in the folk, many peculiar beliefs existed, and it was common for some sects to require women to serve “deities.” Of course, the deities themselves gained nothing; those women were actually serving, with their bodies, monks, Taoist priests, or divine beings who “spoke for the deities.”

Hearing the Village Chief’s words, Gao Yiye’s heart sank: So that’s how it is? The Great deity saved my life and gave me food; does He need me... to serve Him?

Her mind flashed with the Great deity’s young and handsome face, but she immediately pushed it aside. Ah, what am I thinking? It’s too disrespectful.

Returning home, she looked up at the hole in the roof and dismissed the idea of repairing it. As the Village Chief said, if the Great deity wants to see, let Him; my life, Gao Yiye’s, was given by Him, so what can’t I show Him?

With trembling hands, she unbuttoned her clothes.

Her grimy body was exposed; she hadn’t bathed in too long, and yellow sand had caked on her skin.

Plus, with long-term malnutrition, she was all skin and bones, and her body couldn’t be called attractive.

She mocked herself in her heart: With this filthy, skinny body put before the Great deity, He wouldn't even bother to glance at it; why should I hide anything?

She picked up a ripped cloth, wrung it out in a water bucket, and began carefully wiping herself...

She didn't know that at that moment, Li Daoxuan had already put away the magnifying glass.

If he hadn't been discovered by the girl at first, he might have acted like a wolf.

But since he'd been caught spying once, a normal person wouldn't have the nerve to peek a second time.

He turned his gaze away and looked toward the edge of the scenic box, thinking: How are those small people who went to the county town to find the adviser? Once they left the scenic box, I couldn't see or care for them anymore. If they died out there, what should I do?

Chapter 12: We Need You to Come to Gaojia Village

Year Seven of Tianqi, 1627 A.D., Chengcheng County, Shaanxi.

Gao Chuwu led three youngsters from the Gao clan into the town gates.

All four were country bumpkins who'd never left their village. The thirty-li journey from Gaojia Village had been traveled by sweet-talking anyone they met on the road. Several wrong turns were corrected only by asking directions.

By the time they entered the town gates, the sun hung dead center in the sky.

Noon—the hottest hour. The sweltering outside heat hit 108 degrees. The four young men sweated profusely, hanging their heads low with exhaustion, their spirits frayed and bodies floating light.

“Chuwu brother, if we're looking for the secretary, we should go to the county office, right? I'm terrified of the yamen!”

“I've heard the County Lord eats men without spitting out the bones.”

“Those bailiffs are the same—horrible bone-munchers!”

The three young men showed fear in their eyes.

Gao Chuwu was scared too. A homebody whose longest journey hadn't exceeded ten li, this was his first town visit. He'd already been intimidated by the "grand mansions with courtyards," trembling all over.

He reached into a pouch tied to his belt, fingering the cracked bits of giant rice within. The Village Chief had stuffed five rice blocks into each man's pack before they left—for emergencies.

Feeling them settled his nerves. "Why be afraid? The Great deity has our backs."

At "Great deity," the three regained their courage, rushing with renewed pride.

Using their sweet-talking tactics, they asked strangers for directions until local passersby guided them before the county office.

Right at the entrance, an unsettling scene greeted them. A clean-shaven, slightly plump middle-aged man in scholarly robes was wailing before the building: "County Lord! Please don't cast me aside! Your humble servant has labored faithfully unto death—could you truly discard me like... [when the hare is dead, the hunting dog is cooked]?"

He drew out those last four words with exaggerated, foolish theatricality.

A bailiff by the entrance shook his head. “Third Scholar, stop this racket. His Lordship won’t change his mind. Keep yelling, and he’ll lock you up—is that what you want?”

Gao Chuwu’s eyes lit up. “Did you hear? They called him Third Scholar—must be that secretary Zhang Yaocai mentioned. Thirty-Two.”

The others gaped. “The secretary’s crying? Seems the County Lord fired him?”

Gao Chuwu shrugged. “Not our business. We just need to fetch him back. Watch him—when he ducks into an alleyway, we invite him.”

He pulled out a large wooden rod; he’d gathered it on the road.

Thirty-Two kept howling before the county office, but no luck. Magistrate Zhang Yaocai had grown sick of him—unmoved by cries, he’d sent two bailiffs to beat Thirty-Two into black-and-blue swelling.

Finally accepting the inevitable, Thirty-Two sighed bitterly. He shuffled away from the yamen down the street, then veered into a narrow lane—a shortcut toward home.

Yet only steps in, a young man wielding a heavy stick blocked his path. Thirty-Two jumped, twisting to flee backwards—but three more young men choked the opposite end.

Panic electrified him. Eyes darting, he instantly judged them all straw-legged peasants. Hands flew up defensively—“Don’t hit me! I stand on your side! Tax extortion was the County Lord’s doing—I counseled mercy! I have... [pleaded justice for the people]!”

Gao Chuwu gave a dim-witted grin. “Oh? You don’t say!”

Thirty-Two sputtered, “Truly! I got fired defending you! This very act is called... [sacrifice from head to heel]!”

Scratching his head, Gao Chuwu mumbled, “Can’t grasp half your talk... but you sound clever enough, no?”

“I am! I am a scholar!” Thirty-Two pleaded. “Treat educated men with respect—lower your club first! Civilian tongues—don’t you know... [arms down, horses scattered]?”

Gao Chuwu’s grin widened. “Clever’s what we need! Our invite’s for a scholar. Come take a stroll with us to Gaojia Village.”

“Eh? What backwater’s that? No—refused! Won’t—” Thirty-Two spluttered. “...you call this...[journey to the—]”

Thud! Wood cracked against skull. Thirty-Two dropped wordlessly. A villager sheathed his stick behind him. “Dunno why... something ’bout his last four words grated. Sounded annoying—pure babble.”

Gao Chuwu chuckled. “Ha! Was tempted myself.”

All four snickered. Two hoisted the unconscious Thirty-Two, whisking him fastest toward the town gate.

Mid-route, an official patrol emerged ahead. From afar they saw four peasants hauling a robe-clad “rich man”—who hung limply. Instantly, the authorities fixed their gaze.

Rich man kidnapped by poor men? Every detail screamed robbery

One official bellowed, “You four! What’s happening?”

Engaged in abduction, the villagers froze in terror—legs jelly, instincts screaming run.

Then it turned comical. The leader peered closer—recognizing Gao Chuwu instantly. He stammered, “Y-you from... Gaojia Village?”

Gao Chuwu squinted—then smiled in relief. “Yesterday’s official?”

Yep—it was the very officer who’d collected taxes at Gaojia Village yesterday... before Li Daoxuan plucked him airborne with two fingers.

That spectacle kept him sleepless all night, petrified divine punishment loomed. He hadn’t dared exit town since, rounding up colleagues for moral support.

Behind him skulked yesterday’s four blown-away bailiffs—similarly traumatized. Safety lay in numbers.

So encountering a Gaojia villager on their street paralyzed them.

Gods—did the Great deity send spies hunting loose talkers?

All five officials paled, green as gourds.

Equally terrified, Gao Chuwu rattled off excuses—“Our... uh... friend got dizzy from sun. Bringing him to wash face at the river!”

The five stammered back, “Go... ahead... by all means! Yesterday’s affair... our lips stay sealed!”

Eyes wide, both groups trembled violently, sidling past each other.

The moment backs turned, all nine souls bolted. Officials fleeing south, peasants vanishing northward—all kicking dust sky-high.

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Li Daoxuan stared at the scenic box, foolishly gazing at it for yet another entire day. When hungry, he ordered takeout.

Time slipped away this way until evening arrived.

Outside the window, Shuangqing City was draped in golden sunset hues. Strangely, the scenery in the scenic box also transformed into a sunset view. Though an overhead fluorescent lamp illuminated the scenic box in his home—light that logically should penetrate the glass—it didn't enter the box. Instead, the interior grew steadily darker and darker.

This box had too many peculiarities. Li Daoxuan had long stopped questioning minor oddities like the lighting.

He was slightly worried about Gao Chuwu and the three other young villagers. They had headed to the county town early in the morning and hadn't returned yet. Had something happened to them outside?

His feeling mirrored that of keeping a courtyard full of kittens. Seeing four mischievous ones run off, unaware of their whereabouts—this caregiver couldn't help but fret over their safe return.

Just then, five tiny figures suddenly appeared at the edge of the scenic box.

Li Daoxuan rushing with pride: "Great news! They returned safely."

Indeed, Gao Chuwu and his group had returned.

County Lord Thirty-Two, whom they had knocked unconscious, woke up halfway along the road. He found himself marched along by four villagers wielding

enormous wooden cudgels like Fearsome Deities.

Thirty-Two dared not resist. He stole glances at the four men, recognizing their simple, stubborn natures. Reasoning was futile; speaking too much nonsense risked another blow from their clubs. Thus, he remained silent, obediently trailing them all the way to Gajia Village.

Covering over fifteen kilometers was no small feat for the unaccustomed County Lord. Having eaten nothing all day, he arrived utterly exhausted, even unable to catch his breath.

Entering the village, Thirty-Two slumped to the ground: “Finally at Gajia Village. Fine gentlemen, what purpose is there in summoning me here? Will you reveal it now? This is called ‘The map unfurls and the blade appears.’”

Gao Chuwu: “You three, watch County Lord here. I’ll call Yiye.”

Sprinting toward Gao Yiye’s home, he hoped to notify the Great deity through her.

But Li Daoxuan had long spotted their group. No notification was needed. Addressing Gao Yiye’s house, he spoke: “Yiye, Yiye...”

Gao Yiye had just finished her evening meal and was mending worn clothes when the Great deity’s voice jolted her. She sprang from her broken stool onto the floor: “What instructions has the Great deity?”

Li Daoxuan: “Gao Chuwu has brought back a seemingly learned man. Ask him a few questions on my behalf.”

Gao Yiye understood: “I obey the Great deity’s commands.”

Li Daoxuan: “Go now. Gao Chuwu is almost at your door.”

Gao Yiye rose and pulled open the door.

The instant the door creaked inward, Gao Chuwu outside, hand raised to knock, froze: “Huh? Yiye? How did you...?”

Gao Yiye answered: “The Great deity told me you had returned, with a scholar.”

Gao Chuwu gazed upward at the sky with awe-filled eyes.

Gao Yiye dashed toward the village entrance. By now, nearly the entire village had gathered. Such a small settlement meant several households could glimpse events near the entrance from their windows; shouts ensured all emerged.

Forty-two villagers—men, women, young, and old—stood assembled before Thirty-Two.

The setting sun cast long, slanted shadows, draping the silent crowd in golden twilight. The scene felt distinctly eerie beneath the fading light.

Thirty-Two felt crushing pressure and fear. Before anyone spoke, he blurted out: “Good villagers, no misunderstanding here! I swear to heaven, it wasn’t my idea to press taxes! I spoke your case! I urged the County Lord against collection, and he expelled me from the county hall! Truly! I swear! Please don’t beat me! Lay grievances with the County Lord himself... This is called ‘Reckoning grievances justly!’”

The crowd parted, and Gao Yiye stepped forward directly facing Thirty-Two.

Positioned center stage, Thirty-Two’s gaze fixed on her. He puzzled internally: What manner of village was this? Typically, an esteemed elder took charge. Here stood merely a young girl?

Gao Yiye tilted her head, listening to the heavens, then adopted a stern expression: “State your identity, occupation, level of scholarship, and worldly experience.”

Thirty-Two stiffened slightly: “My surname is San. Born on the second day of the tenth month, hence the name Thirty-Two. Formerly, County Lord of Chengcheng County, Shaanxi Province’s... cough... former. Now dismissed. I’ve toiled through ten winters of dedicated study, traveled far and wide across the land. This is called ‘Surpassing talents and learning high as eight measures!’”

Li Daoxuan found him normal until the last four words. Suddenly louder, exaggerated expression, striking a pose. Utterly ludicrous. Li Daoxuan couldn’t help an inward laugh: “Yiye, ask him the current year and month.”

Gao Yiye rushing with pride; she swiftly relayed the Great deity’s words.

Hearing the question, Thirty-Two blinked in surprise: Current year? Peasants trapped deep within the countryside, oblivious to the wider world, certainly exist. Yet why seek such information?

Confounded though he remained, he dared not refuse an answer.

Thirty-Two drew himself sternly upright, face solemn: “The present is Year Seven of Tianqi, the seventh month. This is called... er... Damn it! No proper idiom fits!”

He clutched his head in visible distress, agony etched across his face, tormented by linguistic failure.

The crowd stood silent.

Villagers found his frantic plight both pitiable and amusing.

Li Daoxuan, however, didn't laugh. He froze solid. As a regular lurker on military history forums, "Year Seven of Tianqi" stabbed familiarity deep into him.

This was a real reign year of the Ming Dynasty!

Emperor Tianqi Zhu Youxiao died of illness that year. Emperor Chongzhen Zhu Youjian ascended the throne. Massive drought gripped the land. Ming Dynasty peasant uprising simmered, ready to explode. The Dynasty itself teetered on less than two final decades of existence.

How?! Could this scenic box view into authentic Ming Dynasty history?

No, impossible. Merely coincidental shared reign eras?

Li Daoxuan commanded low: "Yiye, ask him the Emperor's name."

Yiye pressed the question.

Thirty-Two turned grave at such audacity: “This lowly one dares not utter His Majestic Majesty’s exalted name. This exemplifies ‘Revering the sovereign and fostering his blessed people!’”

Li Daoxuan: “Beat him up.”

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Gao Yiye said: “This guy won’t say the emperor’s name. Great deity is really angry. Everyone, grab your chaotic equipment and beat him up badly.”

Gao Chuwu was the first to pick up a big wooden stick. Several other youths also tightened the sticks in their hands. The villagers each began to search for weapons.

Under the setting sun, a huge crowd of villagers raised all kinds of chaotic equipment: clay pots, hoes, table legs, shoulder poles...

Seeing this scene, Thirty-Two’s face darkened. Before the villagers could strike, he immediately screamed: “Zhu Youxiao, Zhu Youxiao, the current emperor is called Zhu Youxiao.”

He could no longer care about the taboo of not uttering the emperor's name. As the saying went, in this remote place, imperial power didn't reach the countryside. So his priority was to save his own life, regardless of breaking taboos. He even forgot to summarize every sentence the way he usually did.

"Hmph, it really is Zhu Youxiao." Li Daoxuan's face darkened. "Yiye, ask him about the state of the realm."

Gao Yiye quickly turned to ask.

Terrified by the variety of weapons around him, and unsure what she meant by "state of the realm," Thirty-Two recited an official document he had just seen at the county office: "On the eleventh day of the fifth month, Jurchen troops surrounded Jinzhou. The court dispatched soldiers to rescue Jinzhou. On the twenty-eighth day, the Jurchens divided their forces and attacked Dingyuan City again. Commander Yuan Chonghuan, along with eunuch Liu Yingkun and deputy Bi Zisu, led the troops to defend the walls. They set up camps in the ditches and used artillery to repel..."

Reciting to that point, he saw the villagers around him looked confused and clearly didn't understand. He felt a bit uneasy. But since their weapons weren't lowered, Thirty-Two knew he was on the right track and continued: "Man Gui led You Shilu and Zu Dasha with soldiers to come to the rescue. A big battle occurred outside the city, causing casualties on both sides. Man Gui suffered multiple arrow wounds. The Jurchen army soon withdrew, increased forces to attack Jinzhou, but failed to capture it either. Due to the severe heat, they returned with their troops..."

He paused at that point!

He couldn't remember the rest. Sweat poured down. He thought: Damn, I can't recite more. I don't know if they're satisfied. Will they beat me to death? This situation was incredibly critical.

In reality, he had recited enough.

Hearing this, Li Daoxuan was certain that inside the scenic box wasn't some Tiny Kingdom from another world, but—Great Ming.

And it was the late Ming Dynasty, the most difficult period.

No wonder Gaojia Village was desolate, and the villagers couldn't get enough to eat. Wasn't this exactly the life of ordinary people in the late Ming Dynasty? Seeing it only in history books wasn't vivid; witnessing it in the scenic box made him empathize deeply.

Now Li Daoxuan understood everything: "Fine, don't trouble him anymore. I've asked all I wanted. Seeing he was captured and is tired and hungry, give him some food to eat."

After saying that, he had no mood to bother with the scenic box anymore. He quickly opened his computer, opened the browser, opened Baidu, searched for

information on the late Ming Dynasty... plunged into it, and roamed in the sea of history.

His last words were relayed by Gao Yiye. The villagers immediately put down their weapons, kowtowed to the sky, scattered, and returned to their homes.

Thirty-Two sighed in relief. He thought: I've saved my life. These villagers are strange—they all obey this girl, who acts like a divine being with a typical scammer look of "I talk for the gods." Could it be a cult organization like the White Lotus Society? Facing danger in cult hands, I must go along to stay alive and get home. This is known as compromising to survive.

He also pretended, imitating the villagers, and kowtowed once to the sky. He didn't know which god he was kowtowing to, but it was right to do so. To save his life, it wasn't shameful.

Gao Yiye said to him: "Follow me. I'll get you something to eat."

Thirty-Two agreed and hurried after her. As he walked, he whispered: "Miss, I see everyone in your village worships deities... which immortal are you worshipping? This is called getting to the root."

Gao Yiye: "I don't know."

Thirty-Two: “!”

It was the first time he heard people not know who they worshipped. Were these villagers overly stupid?

Gao Yiye: “Great deity is Great deity. He hasn’t said his name, and we dare not ask. We only know he has vast magical powers, is gentle and kind, and cares for us all in Gaojia Village. We survive only because of him.”

Thirty-Two sneered inwardly: Myths made up by a divine being—only foolish, stupid people would believe them. I, Thirty-Two, have read the scholars’ books, so I won’t be tricked easily. This is called being clear-minded and strong-willed.

Just as he thought that, they arrived at Gao Yiye’s home. She creaked open the shabby wooden door: “Sit for a moment. I’ll go to the kitchen and get you some food.”

Thirty-Two glanced inside Gao Yiye’s house and froze in shock. In the corner of the room was piled a huge mound of “big” white rice grains—each one truly massive, like a millstone in size. Against the wall leaned a piece of cabbage leaf—not a whole leaf—judging by the veins it was just a small slice, but as big as the entire wall.

Gao Yiye casually picked up a few broken rice grains and tore off a piece from the enormous cabbage leaf. She put them in a bamboo basket and walked into the kitchen. It seemed she planned to cook him a meal with those things.

Thirty-Two's jaw dropped open in shock. It stayed gaping for a long time.

What was wrong with this rice? With this cabbage leaf? And what was wrong with this village?

Oh my god!

Thirty-Two was a typical ancient intellectual.

Though he knew far more than an illiterate and wasn't easily fooled by divine beings, he still couldn't shed all his "superstitions." That is, he didn't believe White Lotus nonsense like "Venerable Mother, Void Homeland," but he wasn't an atheist.

He did believe gods existed in the world.

After standing rigid for dozens of seconds, he darted to the kitchen door and yelled at Gao Yiye cooking inside: "Which great immortal bestowed you these foods?"

Gao Yiye: “Told you, I don’t know.”

Thirty-Two said: “You haven’t even gotten that clear? For shame, you’re supposedly a divine envoy. You’ve made the villagers kowtow without knowing to whom. When building a temple for the deity later, they won’t know what to enshrine. It’s downright muddle-headed.”

Gao Yiye: “Ah? You’re right! Educated people really think more thoroughly.”

She tilted her head back and shouted at the sky: “Great deity, Great deity, how should we address your honorable title?”

The sky remained quiet. No one answered her.

Li Daoxuan was now reading history books. The shameful history of the late Ming saddened him deeply. The faint sound of the girl figure in the box was impossible for him to hear.

Gao Yiye spread her hands at Thirty-Two: “Great deity doesn’t want to say.”

Thirty-Two: “Eh?”

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Dawn broke. Li Daoxuan, his eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep, glanced at the morning light filtering through the window.

Unconsciously, he had spent the entire night poring over historical records. He had roughly read through the pitiful, insulting history of the late Ming era, gaining a general understanding of the overall sequence of events. Yet, many details remained unclear to him.

Moreover, historical texts often employed subtle, judgmental language; they contained numerous contradictions and could not be fully trusted.

He double-clicked the mouse to open a file on his desktop—a document summarising some critical questions he had compiled overnight.

Question One: Items placed into the scenic box increase in length, width, and height by 200 times. Volume increases proportionally, and weight also increases. As a liberal arts student, he couldn't calculate the exact figure. But one thing was sure: a 50-gram egg would become hundreds of tons. Calculating based on this, feeding one little person wouldn't cost much. Supporting these forty-two little people posed no problem; he could let them live in comfort, enjoying good food and drink. However, trying to feed millions, perhaps tens of millions, of them and

protect their safety would inevitably lead to the awkward reality of bankruptcy. So, the question arose: What was his goal? To save only these forty-two little people? Or to use all his power to rescue as many common folk from the late Ming as possible? Or even more ambitiously, to save the entire nation? If the latter two were the goals, his financial resources were insufficient, forcing him to reconsider his target.

Question Two: Amidst the chaos of war in the late Ming, the little people faced constant mortal peril. He himself needed to eat, sleep, bathe, and occasionally even go on dates—he couldn't guard the scenic box 24 hours a day. It was entirely possible that after a simple trip to buy groceries, he could return home to find all forty-two little people slaughtered by the imperial court, the Jurchens, Li Zicheng, or Zhang Xianzhong, leaving the scenic box a ruin littered with corpses. This possibility was very real. Therefore, it was crucial to enhance the little people's capacity for self-protection.

Question Three: The scenic box, measuring 2.5 meters long and 1.5 meters wide, provided a visible range of only 500 meters long by 300 meters wide. This barely covered Gaojia Village and the surrounding fields. He couldn't directly influence areas "beyond sight." Was there any way to extend this visible range?

These were the most pressing problems he had contemplated throughout the night.

Of course, Question Three veered into the mystical; he could only let it take its natural course.

He needed to focus his energies on solving the first two problems first.

His gaze settled on Question One. Believing himself a fairly decent person, he naturally didn't intend to save only these forty-two little people. If possible, he wanted to rescue as many impoverished common people as he could. And ideally, saving the entire nation would be the best outcome.

Hence...

He couldn't rely solely on personally dropping food into the scenic box!

That approach was highly unscientific; it would only foster passive, apathetic parasites.

He had to motivate the little people inside the box to cultivate crops themselves and actively embrace life.

Having thought this far, it was time to act!

The first priority was providing water for the little people! Water was essential for their vitality.

How to provide water? Simply aiming a faucet at the box? That was clearly impractical. A 200-times thickened water pillar surging into the village wouldn't be supplying water—it would be causing a flood. A spray bottle? A humidifier? Li

Daoxuan searched online and found that the finest humidifier mist droplets were about 0.3mm in diameter. Passing through the box into the late Ming era, they would become massive water droplets of 6cm diameter, falling densely. Spraying that above the village would be like unleashing a super rainstorm; even grass houses would collapse under the deluge.

Li Daoxuan's eyes shifted to his Lock & Lock box.

He picked up the Lock & Lock box and gestured towards an empty patch of land next to the village. Good, it would fit here. He reached out his hand over that piece of ground, dug forcefully, and instantly scooped out a huge pit...

...

Early morning!

The villagers rose early. At the break of dawn, these hardworking people got ready for the day's work.

However, a severe drought gripped the land; the fields lay barren with not a sprout to be seen. There was no farm work to be done.

Digging for wild vegetables was their usual early morning task. But since they still had over a hundred “large” white rice grains and several substantial cabbage leaves stored at home, foraging wasn’t urgent. So, after getting up, the villagers busied themselves with various chores—weaving baskets, sharpening knives, mending clothes...

Gao Yiye planned to mend her tattered clothes. She picked up a needle and thread, took a small stool, and stepped outside. Just as she was about to set the stool down to thread the needle by the morning light, she heard a faint soughing sound near her house.

She turned and saw it was Thirty-Two.

“Huh? You’re still in Gaojia Village?”

After all, last night, following the Great deity’s instructions, she had given Thirty-Two a full meal, warned him not to disclose anything he had witnessed here, and sent him back to the town.

But after seeing a millstone-sized grain and huge cabbage leaves last night—phenomena he couldn’t grasp yet found profoundly astonishing—Thirty-Two had wanted to linger in the village a bit longer.

After leaving Gao Yiye’s home, he had simply curled up and slept under the eaves.

He was an advisor accustomed to privilege and comfort, rarely rising this early. Startled awake by Gao Yiye, his mind was still cloudy as he sat up, rubbing his face. “Huh? It’s already dawn?”

Gao Yiye found it strange. “After you ate your fill last night, didn’t I tell you to go back to the town?”

Thirty-Two, still groggy, mumbled, “Ah? Why didn’t I go back last night? It’s called ‘beyond one’s comprehension.’”

Just as he finished speaking, Gao Yiye’s expression changed dramatically.

She had spotted a giant hand descending from the sky, digging into an empty patch of land beside the village. Instantly, the ground rumbled violently as a colossal pit appeared.

Thirty-Two followed Gao Yiye’s gaze. He couldn’t see the hand, only witness the ground abruptly caving in to form a giant pit. Earth, sand, and rocks from within it were plucked up by an invisible force and moved aside...

The spectacle truly involved flying stones and swirling dust, earthshaking in its intensity.

Thirty-Two felt dizzy with confusion. “Ah? Did I wake up too forcefully? Should I maybe sleep a bit more?”

He even forgot to offer his trademark four-character summary.

Every last villager was jolted by the commotion and ran towards the site of the disturbance.

Gao Yiye quickly jumped up, shouting, “Hold on, Villagers! Don’t go over there! Don’t disturb the Great deity performing immortal techniques!”

The villagers stopped en masse!

After halting them, Gao Yiye watched intently. The Great deity’s enormous hand dug into the ground several more times, excavating a huge, square pit roughly over ten zhang long, five zhang wide, and eight zhang deep.

Then, a giant hand placed a transparent box onto the pit, packing down the surrounding soil...

Neither Thirty-Two nor the villagers could see the giant hand, but they clearly witnessed the transparent container slowly descend from the heavens, landing perfectly within the freshly dug pit.

Everyone stood gaping in astonishment, utterly bewildered by what had occurred.

Li Daoxuan clapped his hands. “Perfect, the reservoir is complete.”

He picked up a cup brimming with water and poured it steadily into the Lock & Lock box...

Thus, the people inside the box beheld a startling spectacle: a waterfall suddenly cascaded from the sky, a torrential stream plunging down to fill the massive container set into the ground. Very soon, the box was brimming with water.

The villagers stood dumbfounded, rooted to the spot for a long, long time.

Finally, Thirty-Two found his voice: “【It was said that a galaxy falls from the ninth heaven.】”

Gao Yiye observed, “That one’s way over four words.”

Thirty-Two clutched his head. “No other verse captures this grandeur!”

Chapter 16: Take Care of One First

Beside the Gaojia Village, there appeared a large pond about ten zhang long, five zhang wide, and eight zhang deep.

The water in the pond was all modern tap water, truly clear and bright.

The villagers, suffering from the drought, hadn't seen such good water for many years.

“Water! It's water!”

“Oh god, such a large pond of water.”

“It's very clean water.”

“Is this... bestowed upon us?”

“Can’t believe it.”

“Long live the Great deity!”

Li Daoxuan lowered his head, looking at Gao Yiye: “Yiye, tell the Villagers that from now on, I will refill this pond with water every day, and everyone can draw water from it for daily use or irrigation.”

Gao Yiye was overjoyed and hurriedly kowtowed in thanks; then she turned to the Villagers and loudly announced Li Daoxuan’s divine decree.

The Villagers cheered at once: “No need to fear the drought now!”

“We have water for farming! Great!”

“The seeds we treasured can finally be put to use.”

“What are we waiting for? Hurry home to fetch buckets and draw water.”

“Don’t rush foolishly, it’s too hot now—what crops can be planted? We must wait until early autumn.”

“Ah, that’s true, I was happy too soon.”

The Villagers were so ecstatic they became bewildered, almost forgetting what step to take next.

But the women’s eyes lit up; with this much water, they could wash clothes and bathe. Having lived dirty and smelly for over half a year, what woman could endure that? So they hurried to draw water, at least to fill their own water vats first.

Thirty-Two’s drowsiness was now thoroughly startled awake.

He looked up at the sky but saw nothing; yet the pond before him was real and present.

That earlier scene wasn’t imagined—it was truly an invisible, unseen force, conjuring a pond out of nowhere and magically pouring a waterfall to fill it.

If anyone dared say it wasn’t the work of the gods, he would be the first to leap up and slap them.

Still dazed, Gao Yiye nearby spoke: “Master Thirty-Two, the Great deity has words for you.”

Thirty-Two snapped alert and quickly bowed to the sky: “What does the Great deity command?”

Li Daoxuan said, “You seem to be the County Lord’s adviser, right?”

Upon hearing this, Thirty-Two looked dismayed: “I spoke up for the common folk two days ago, advising the County Lord not to collect taxes. It angered the County Lord, and I was kicked out, no longer employed. That’s bringing trouble upon oneself.”

Li Daoxuan said, “Oh, so you’ve lost your job?”

Thirty-Two kowtowed: “Uh... well... indeed... that’s called—”

“Shut up! It’s tiresome to hear!” Li Daoxuan said impatiently. “Your words are so irritating—don’t you know it? No wonder you were driven off by the County Lord.”

Thirty-Two stiffened: “.....”

Li Daoxuan said, “I’d assumed you were a clerk who could access documents at the county office and pass messages to Gaojia Village. But from the look of it, you’re pretty useless.”

This struck a chord in Thirty-Two’s heart: What does the Great deity mean? Could it be... he originally intended to take me under his service? To serve an immortal deity—that’s fortune earned over multiple lifetimes! I must not miss this chance. I’ll cling to this deity whether alive or dead, even just performing menial tasks!

He blurted out hastily, “I am useful, I truly am useful! Though I no longer serve at the county office, I’m clever, literate, and skilled with figures. For any complex matters, Great deity, the villagers here would surely... ahem... entrusting them to me would be far more reliable. This is what you call—”

He was about to summarize with four characters but abruptly recalled the Great deity finding him irritating. He snapped his mouth shut, the sudden stop leaving his face twisted in a comical fashion.

Li Daoxuan watched with amusement. “Alright! I can’t think of anything for you to do right now. Return to the county town. Keep your eyes sharp and ears perked. Gather as much news as you can about events nearby. Send word to Gaojia Village for anything truly significant. I’ll send for you when your aid is needed.”

Thirty-Two prostrated himself completely, forehead pressing against the ground. “Your humble servant obeys.”

Only after performing the proper courtesies did he rise and head toward the county town.

Li Daoxuan mused: For now, I still haven’t found a way to broaden my view. The scenic box is locked above Gaojia Village; I can’t see outside. Having this Thirty-Two means gaining an extra pair of eyes beyond the box. I hope these eyes prove useful at a critical moment.

He turned his gaze back toward the village. Every villager was diligently at work.

The young, able-bodied men were digging and breaking soil in the fields. With a large reservoir now, they had the confidence to cultivate crops. Though planting wouldn’t be suitable till autumn, their restless “farming hearts” were uncontrollable. They decided to dig irrigation ditches in advance.

Li Daoxuan gave a satisfied nod: Excellent. The villagers’ capacity for self-sustenance was awakened. They’d still rely on my support for several months, but come autumn, they would begin farming. The cost of sustaining this entire village would then start to decrease.

If he could use the same method to aid more villages, many more people could be spared from starvation.

Next, he started tackling problem two: “The villagers must be capable of protecting themselves while I’m away from the scenic box.”

Recalling the military history forums and novels he often consumed in modern society, an idea instantly surfaced in his mind: Arm all forty-two villagers!

But he realized immediately this approach wasn’t feasible for now.

Setting aside whether purchasing firearms would get him arrested by police, even if he could acquire them legally...

A gun, even the world’s tiniest Swiss MiniGun, was still 55mm long.

Placing such an item inside the box would enlarge it 200 times. To the villagers, it would appear as a colossal, eleven-meter-long super pistol.

How could such a thing be wielded?

Who could grasp an eleven-meter-long pistol to shoot enemies?

Another idea was to commission custom “ultra-micro weapons”—making various arms only a few millimeters long so that, magnified 200 times, they’d become 1-2 meters long. Then, people inside the box-world could use them normally.

Clearly, with the manufacturing knowledge he currently had, making guns smaller than a few millimeters was impossible. Ordinary swords or spears wouldn’t significantly boost the villagers’ combat prowess.

Li Daoxuan’s only viable solution was to teach the villagers how to craft their own firearms.

However, given the current technical capabilities of the forty-two tiny people inside the scenic box, crafting quality knives was challenging enough, let alone homemade firearms. They could likely only produce crude tools like axes or vegetable cleavers.

He dismissed this path for the time being; it was for future consideration.

The only viable method to protect the villagers in the short term might be...

A “Fortress.”

This was the most common means of self-protection for ancient villagers—huddling inside a sturdy bastion, capable of repelling most bandit raids. The most iconic structure for this was the “Hakka roundhouse.”

This was also something Li Daoxuan could realistically produce in modern society. By creating a “Hakka roundhouse”-like building at a 1:200 scale and placing it within the scenic box, he could have the villagers move inside, making them significantly safer.

This goal was absolutely achievable.

It was just... quite expensive indeed.

Chapter 17: Tank Version of Hakka Roundhouse

Li Daoxuan needed to go out to have someone create a 200:1 scale model.

But he knew that the world inside the scenic box was set after the end of the Ming Dynasty, so he wasn't comfortable leaving the box unattended for too long, worried that he might return home to find the ground covered with dead little people.

He thought for a moment, and an idea struck him like a light bulb lighting up; he moved the Surveillance Camera from his home close to the scenic box, adjusting the angle to face it directly.

On his phone, he opened the camera app and could clearly see the general situation inside the box.

Now he could go out with peace of mind.

He quickly hailed a cab and rushed to the home of his friend Cai Xinzi.

Fifteen minutes later...

Li Daoxuan stood in the living room of his friend Cai Xinzi's home.

Cai Xinzi was a businesswoman specializing in the model business—car models, ship models, figurines, robots, dinosaurs... in short, any model you could imagine, she made.

So when Li Daoxuan received the scenic box as a birthday present a few days earlier, he immediately assumed Cai Xinzi had given it to him.

Seeing her old friend arrive, Cai Xinzi grinned and chuckled, “Daoxuan, it’s been a long time since you came to play here. What are you trying to trick me out of this time?”

Li Daoxuan laughed, “I’m not tricking you this time; I’m paying to have something custom-made.”

Cai Xinzi squinted her eyes, “Stop it. You still haven’t paid me for the Liaoning ship model you commissioned last time. Every time you visit, you practically rob me.”

Without a word, Li Daoxuan took out his phone, transferred 1000 yuan.

Cai Xinzi jumped in surprise, “Holy crap, you transfer money so quickly? Oh dear, what you want must be a pain to make. I won’t accept this order.”

Li Daoxuan teased her, “You, when I transfer money quickly, you refuse; when I don’t transfer money, you don’t seem to care at all.”

Cai Xinzi said, “That’s a merchant’s intuition.”

Li Daoxuan gestured about half a meter in length, “I want a Hakka roundhouse about this big, at a 200:1 scale.”

When his items were placed in the scenic box, they would enlarge 200 times, so if the model was made half a meter long, it would become 100 meters long when put into the box, which was almost exactly the length of a large Hakka roundhouse.

Cai Xinzi was astonished, “What do you need this for?”

Li Daoxuan couldn't tell the truth, so he casually invented a white lie, “Lately I've been watching the cartoon ‘Bigfish & Begonia’ and became fascinated with Hakka roundhouses, so I just want to make a model to display at home.”

“I see,” said Cai Xinzi, “Then why get it custom-made? I have ready-made ones here, 100:1 scale, they look mighty and imposing...”

“No!” Li Daoxuan interrupted her before she could finish, “I only want it at 200:1.”

Cai Xinzi said, “Too big? I have 144:1 models here...”

“No!” Li Daoxuan said, “I absolutely must have it custom-made to 200:1.”

Cai Xinzi started to waver, “Dammit, I knew a smooth payment meant more trouble later. Go ahead, besides 200:1, what other specific requests? I bet it’s super complex without even hearing them.”

Li Daoxuan chuckled, “Alright, now I’ll start listing the requirements. The entire Hakka roundhouse must be built with extremely strong material—no thin foam boards, no plastic boards, and wood can burn easily. It should all be made of... uh, what material would work best? I’m not an expert; you help me decide.”

Cai Xinzi squinted, “Use composite material boards; they’re strong and lightweight, so you won’t strain your back carrying it home.”

Li Daoxuan thought for a moment and agreed. Modern composite material boards were indeed great; when placed in the box, their thickness would increase 200 times, making it awesome. Swords and firearms from the Ming Dynasty couldn’t pierce a composite board thickened 200 times; even a Frankish cannon might not be able to penetrate it.

Wait!

He couldn’t take the thickening to 200 times lightly; he needed to ask about its original thickness.

Li Daoxuan asked curiously, “How thin is the thinnest composite panel?”

Cai Xinzi said, “Three millimeters.”

Li Daoxuan did a mental calculation of three millimeters multiplied by two hundred times and froze: Damn, if it went into the box, it became sixty centimeters thick? That thickness took up too much space. If the walls between rooms were that thick, the number of rooms in the Hakka roundhouse would decrease greatly.

He frowned and asked, “Can it not be any thinner?”

Cai Xinzi shook her head and said, “No. To be thinner, we’d have to use iron sheet; there are iron sheets as thin as one millimeter.”

Li Daoxuan calculated in his mind: A one-millimeter-thick iron sheet inside the box became a twenty-centimeter-thick plate. Perfect, iron sheets were great—they took up less space than pressed panels and were much stronger.

“Alright, let’s use the one-millimeter-thick iron sheet.”

Cai Xinzi said, “Hey, a model made of this iron sheet will look very cheap, giving the feeling that—ah—it’s poorly made and cut corners.”

Li Daoxuan said, “I don’t care about the look; I want that cut-corner feel. Also, this model isn’t just about the outside being good; the inside has to be incredibly detailed too. Every room must be done exactly to scale...”

Cai Xinzi said, “That’s impossible! The Hakka roundhouse has over two hundred rooms. With all those tiny doors and windows, if I have to make them all detailed and functional—able to open and close—do you know how much manual work that requires? Add ten thousand!”

Li Daoxuan thought to himself: Damn, so expensive? Might as well skip the doors and windows altogether. Just get the main structure done right; the small things like doors and windows could be handled by the little people themselves.

Li Daoxuan said, “Then skip all the doors and windows; just leave dark holes where they should be. Also, the traditional Hakka roundhouse has flaws in its drainage ditch design; use a modern solution to fix it.”

Cai Xinzi nearly flipped the table: “Fucking idiot, why would a model need drainage ditch design? Using a modern solution ruins the authenticity of the Hakka roundhouse. What collector’s value would this model even have then?”

Li Daoxuan said, “I insist! I’m the client now. However outrageous my demands, you have absolutely no choice.”

Cai Xinzi said, “...”

Speechless and frustrated, Cai Xinzi almost coughed up blood. Rolling his eyes, he muttered sarcastically, “Why not add wheels under the Hakka roundhouse, install a motor and a remote control, so it can plow through everything like a giant tank...”

He was just spouting nonsense to mock the client, but this joke-like comment hit Li Daoxuan’s ears and made his eyes light up abruptly.

He slapped his thigh: “Damn, Cai Xinzi, you’re a genius! Exactly—add wheels, fit a motor and remote, turn it into a super roundhouse tank that plows unstoppably, unrivaled in the world.”

Cai Xinzi said, “Damn, don’t follow up on that! What results won’t be a Hakka roundhouse; it’ll be a stupid kids’ toy with no display or collection value.”

Li Daoxuan patted his shoulder and laughed heartily: “I want that stupid kids’ toy! Forget display value. Oh, make the tires bigger for light off-roading capability.”

“You want off-roading too?” Cai Xinzi rolled his eyes: “The client is insane! I fucking knew it—since the dawn of time, no client has ever been normal.”

After grumbling, he added, “For the tires, motor, and remote control, add another thousand yuan!”

Li Daoxuan paid the money, set a delivery date one month later, and then headed back home.

Reaching the supermarket at his neighborhood’s gate, he casually bought a piece of chicken breast weighing two hundred grams, costing five yuan.

Back home, he took a knife and cut off a piece of chicken breast, then gently placed it in front of Gao Yiye...

At that moment, Gao Yiye was carrying water from the pond to a vat at home, balancing two buckets while walking unsteadily. Suddenly, the enormous hand of the Great deity appeared, grasping a massive piece of chicken meat. Slowly, it lowered toward her, then whisked it back up to the sky in an instant.

From the sky, the gentle voice of the Great deity sounded: “Reminding everyone: If you eat simple foods often, consuming too much meat at once will upset the stomach. Take it easy and eat slowly.”

Chapter 18: The Water Theft Thief Comes

“There’s meat! The Great deity has sent us meat.”

Gao Yiye shouted loudly, instantly waking up Gaojia Village.

Everyone immediately crowded around.

“It’s chicken meat.”

“This is chicken breast meat; although it’s huge, it’s definitely chicken breast. I can’t be wrong.”

“Such large chicken breast meat—was it cut from a divine chicken?”

“It must be a divine chicken from the heavenly realm.”

The villagers had no idea how long it had been since they last ate meat.

Several years ago, in good harvest seasons, some people in the village had raised chickens. But as the drought grew fiercer year after year in recent times, they didn't even have enough food themselves—where could they find grain to feed poultry?

In Gaojia Village, it had long been like “not even a chicken or dog left”—apart from a bunch of starving villagers crying out in hunger, not half a living creature could be found.

Now, seeing a piece of meat, everyone was incredibly excited.

Gao Chuwu found a knife right away and prepared to cut off a few pieces to go home and feast.

Gao Yiye said with a serious face: “The Great deity said, we're used to eating plain food, so we can't have too much meat all at once; our stomachs won't handle it. We must eat slowly. Brother Gao Chuwu, you're the first to need caution.”

Gao Chuwu scratched his head foolishly: “Huh? There's a rule like that?”

The Village Chief stepped forward: “The Great deity must be talking about fools like Gao Chuwu. A bad stomach can kill someone. We can't give Gao Chuwu too much at once; he'll surely gobble it all up uncontrollably.”

Gao Chuwu: “Wha-what?”

The Village Chief ordered: “Each person takes only one liang of meat home; half a liang for children. Cut the remaining meat into strips and hang them to air-dry, to avoid rotting.”

A middle-aged villager stepped out: “Village Chief, we don’t have enough salt. If we dry chicken meat without salting it first, it’ll spoil. Rather than risk it rotting away, let’s just eat it all instead. I’d rather die from diarrhea than watch such good meat go to waste for nothing.”

Gao Chuwu: “Yes, yes, Village Chief, I’d rather die from diarrhea than waste it.”

Li Daoxuan was amused to hear this; rather than take back the extra meat into a fridge, he entered the kitchen, grabbed a packet of salt, and poured it down like swish, swish, swish—right in front of Gao Yiye, creating a small mound.

The villagers looked up to see salt flowing mysteriously from the sky; the pure white crystal salt crashed down like giant ice blocks, forming a little hill in no time.

Gao Yiye didn’t even need to relay anything; she just waved her hands: “You and your little thoughts—did any escape the Great deity? Don’t dream of getting fat overnight. With salt now, go salt the meat.”

“So much salt!”

“Salt is so expensive.”

“Oh my, he gave us so much.”

“We won’t need to buy salt for ages.”

Once again, the villagers knelt all over, knocking their heads frantically toward the sky.

Thus, for today, the Gaojia villagers had something to do.

The men swung knives, chopping chop, chop, chop on the meat, splitting the massive chicken breast into thin strips, crushing the huge crystal salt into powder, then rolled each chicken strip in the salt powder to coat it white and plump, before hanging it up. They let the dry wind suck the moisture from the chicken strips.

This working was actually quite tiring!

But while working, the villagers’ faces were all beaming with smiles.

That evening, smoke rose from chimneys in the village as every household was cooking.

Everyone in the whole village had chicken congee in their pots. They diced one liang of chicken into fine pieces and cooked it with giant rice until it thickened. Yes, they also added cabbage leaves. The finished congee was visually appealing, aromatic, and tasty, and it was gentle on the stomach.

Gao Chuwu eagerly gobbled down five large bowls.

Even Gao Yiye, the delicate girl, unexpectedly downed two bowls.

This made Li Daoxuan, a modern person, involuntarily swallow his saliva. He quickly grabbed his phone and ordered some “chicken soup rice” to soothe himself.

While he was slurping the chicken soup rice, he opened online banking and glanced at his balance. His savings were a little over twenty thousand yuan. That amount didn't seem sufficient anymore. Today, he used two thousand yuan to order a Hakka roundhouse. If he wanted to help more dwarves in the future, the money would surely flow out like water.

He thought seriously for two seconds, then opened QQ and found a long-uncontacted avatar. He clicked on it and sent a message: “Bro, I’m Li Daoxuan. Half a year ago, you approached me asking if I wanted freelance work. I refused then—that was my ignorance due to youth. If you have any design jobs available from now on, I’m willing to take them, and we can discuss the price.”

That avatar soon flashed: “Ha, I’ve waited for you to say that! Coincidentally, I have a job—character designs for a game company. It’s urgent: five days, four character sketches, for three thousand yuan! Will you take it?”

Li Daoxuan replied: “I’ll take it.”

...

Day broke! Shuangqing City welcomed a new day.

Li Daoxuan stretched lazily while rubbing his temples and getting out of bed.

For five consecutive days, he worked until 2 a.m., desperately completing the character designs the game company wanted. After the client inspected them, they pointed out a few minor flaws. He revised as per their request, but they then preferred the first version. So he finished, and three thousand yuan was deposited.

He confirmed the money had hit his card, then slept peacefully.

He slept so deeply he was unconscious, only waking and climbing out of bed when daylight returned.

Those five days, he was busy earning money to support the “family” and neglected caring for the dwarves in the box. He only fed them a little daily, refilled the Lock & Lock box with water each day, and didn’t scrutinize them closely.

Finally free of duties, he decided to spend the day properly with his small pets today.

As soon as he sat by the scenic box, he felt something was amiss.

All the dwarves in the village were gathered around the big pond now, murmuring softly about something.

Li Daoxuan swiftly closed the window to quiet the room, pressed his ear against the box, and could finally hear their faint buzzing sounds.

“Water theft occurred. Look, the water level in the pond dropped a lot overnight.”

“Yes, see here, many messy footprints. Plenty of people came for the water theft last night.”

Li Daoxuan peered closely. Indeed, the water level in the Lock & Lock box had sunk substantially. In reality, that box was 20 centimeters long, but it enlarged 200 times inside the dwarf world, becoming a huge pond ten zhang long.

Such a big pond, and overnight, the water level had descended by half a chi.

The water theft perpetrators must be quite something!

Or rather, there were many thieves involved.

Li Daoxuan’s gaze tracked the messy footprints of the water thieves toward the village outskirts. But soon, those footprints reached the edge of the scenic box, extended beyond it, and vanished...

He couldn’t help but frown deeply. The biggest flaw of this box was its narrow viewpoint; he could see too little. He only observed the Gaojia Village area; the world outside was pitch-black, and he knew nothing about what was happening.

He must devise a way to extend the viewing distance inside this box.

The Great Ming in the Box

Li Daoxuan was annoyed by his narrow field of vision for two seconds, then suddenly remembered that five days ago, he had installed a Surveillance Camera beside the scenic box, which had been monitoring everything inside all along. Since this thing did loop recording, he could certainly retrieve the video from last night now.

He quickly opened his phone, accessed the Surveillance Camera APP, and pulled up the video list.

Last night, he had not slept until after two o'clock, so he just needed to watch the videos from after that time.

In no time, he found the truth of the water theft.

In the night, a large group of poorly dressed villagers, similar in appearance to the villagers of Gaojia Village, appeared. Carrying buckets and using the moonlight, they cautiously approached the big pond at Gaojia Village, quietly placed the buckets into the pond, drew out two buckets of water, then picked them up and dashed toward outside the village.

After about an hour, the group returned, lifted two more buckets of water, and ran away again.

They did this three times over three hours, until dawn was approaching and the group stopped coming; by then, the water in the pond had been stolen, lowering by half a foot.

Seeing this, Li Daoxuan did not know what to say.

He put away his phone and heard the villagers discussing: “We don’t know where these thieves came from to steal our village’s water. It’s too much. This precious water was given to us by the Great deity. How can we let others steal it?”

“Where is the Village Chief? Ask him to come out and decide what to do. Should we follow these footprints to catch the water thieves and beat them?”

“That’s right! We must beat them and get the water back, otherwise the Great deity will blame us for not guarding the divine water he gave us.”

Li Daoxuan spoke: “Gao Yiye, tell everyone not to pursue the water theft.”

Gao Yiye was with the villagers, indignantly condemning the theft of the Great deity’s gift, when suddenly she heard the Great deity’s voice from the sky. She gasped “Ah” and looked up, seeing the slightly visible, young and handsome face of the Great deity in the clouds.

She quickly said: “Great deity, someone stole your blessing. Aren’t you angry?”

Her shout made all the villagers look over. Seeing her speaking to the sky, they guessed she was conversing with the Great deity and covered their mouths, not daring to make a sound.

Li Daoxuan said: “Tell them, these are villagers from another village. They had no water to drink and couldn’t survive, so they came to steal Gaojia Village’s water. This bit they stole means nothing—I’ll refill it for you. No need to chase or shout threats at people who are almost dying of thirst.”

Gao Yiye quickly relayed that to the whole village.

The villagers immediately put away their fierce intent to go out and fight. They all kowtowed to the sky: “The Great deity is merciful!”

“Divine grace enlightens the world.”

“Wide compassion and great mercy.”

“Saving from suffering and rescuing the people.”

A chaotic jumble of praises, like from Buddhism or Daoism, flew up skyward.

Li Daoxuan sighed deeply, thinking: Indeed, saving just forty-two villagers was far from enough. Next, I have to save more, starting with these water thieves. I hope my funds can handle it.

That night, when darkness set in, the forty-two villagers of Gaojia Village returned to their houses to sleep, and the scenic box returned to a “non-static scene.”

But Li Daoxuan didn't rush to sleep. He remained at his computer, reading historical records about late Ming, while occasionally glancing at the scenic box where the water thieves had come from last night.

The night grew deep—it was three in the morning.

Shuangqing City outside the window hadn't rested, though; modern people had lively nightlife. Cars sped on the roads outside, and people on the street beyond the housing complex ate barbecue and drank night beer, shouting things like “Five loss, oh Six six six, Seven fairies...”

Li Daoxuan picked up his phone and ordered a midnight barbecue delivery.

At that moment, activity stirred in the scenic box.

A poorly dressed villager emerged from the northern edge of the box. He peered toward Gaojia Village, waved back, and then a large group appeared, each carrying buckets, bent at the waist and tiptoeing toward Gaojia Village...

Li Daoxuan closed the window to block the noise outside, making the room absolutely quiet, then pressed his ear against the scenic box.

Inside, it was silent; the villagers made no footsteps at all.

Before long, they reached the Lock & Lock box.

The leader, Brother Wang, looked inside and said in surprise: “Huh?”

A villager behind him came up and asked softly: “Brother Wang, what is it?”

Brother Wang pointed at the Lock & Lock box and stammered: “Last night, we clearly stole a big chunk of the water level. Plus, Gaojia Village folks must have

used more water today, so it should have dropped even more. But look, the water is full again now.”

Li Daoxuan chuckled to himself: I added another cup of water.

The water thieves gathered around the Lock & Lock box, all bewildered, staring at the full water level and then up at the sky: “It didn’t rain at all today. How was it refilled?”

“It’s incomprehensible!”

“Where does this pond water even come from?”

Brother Wang was also totally confused. But as the leader, he couldn’t just stand there. He waved his hand and cursed softly: “Why worry about it? Get your buckets filled fast. Stop chattering—if we wake someone from Gaojia Village and get caught, we’ll all die of shame here.”

That made sense!

The group hurried to the pond, lowered the buckets in to fill them. Someone even plunged their whole head into the water, gulping eagerly...

Seeing this, Li Daoxuan felt deep pity. Poor disaster victims.

He turned his eyes to his rice bag, wanting to throw some rice down. But then he thought: If I do, the rice would grow to forty or sixty centimeters long. Their wooden buckets couldn't hold it, and they couldn't roll it miles back to their village like the Gaojia villagers shared rice. Better not to scare them at midnight and risk lives.

Give them something bucket-friendly instead.

He shifted his gaze from the rice bag to the flour bag nearby.

Modern flour was grinded finer than sand. Even enlarged two hundred times, it would still be coarse powder, not too alarming. This wouldn't startle them.

Li Daoxuan grabbed a tiny pinch of flour. While they focused on drawing water, he quietly, silently placed it behind them, forming a small mound.

Chapter 22: Even If Starving to Death, Do Not Eat Seed Grain

Admin Note: Chapters 20-21 are missing, check MTL: <https://NovelBin.net/mtl-reader/1206969/20/>

“Gao Yiye!”

Li Daoxuan called out loudly.

Gao Yiye immediately respectfully raised her head and looked up at the sky.

When she raised her head, Li Daoxuan could clearly see her face.

Her features were delicate, her cheeks slightly flushed—truly a beautiful woman.

Unfortunately, she was less than one centimeter tall, too beautiful to...

Ahem!

He was thinking too far ahead!

Li Daoxuan opened his mouth and said, “Send Gao Chuwu to the county town for a trip, find Thirty-Two to help, and get a few skilled craftsmen to come to Gaojia Village.”

Gao Yiye quickly responded.

She called Gao Chuwu over.

With a few words of instruction,

Gao Chuwu and the three young men who had gone to the county town together last time,

after eating a full meal and packing provisions, set off toward Chengcheng County.

Li Daoxuan picked up his Lego bricks again.

He prepared to use them to make a temporary wall for Gaojia Village.

It didn't need any complex shapes.

He only had to connect the bricks one by one,

forming a long strip.

Then he gently placed the strip into the box,

arranging it in a circle along the outer perimeter of Gaojia Village...

The villagers were still gathering firewood everywhere at that time,

when suddenly they heard the sound of wind and thunder, and the earth shook.

They looked up.

They saw a huge, multicolored bizarre object descending in midair.

It landed all around the village.

It quickly surrounded all of Gaojia Village,

turning into an enormous “city wall” with only an open gate left...

The wall was surprisingly high at two zhang tall, and terrifyingly thick.

Its material was just a bit odd; not as hard as stone, it seemed like the surface could be cut with a knife?

“Wow? What’s going on?”

“Does Gaojia Village suddenly feel like Gaojia City?”

“What kind of strange wall is this?”

“It has colors like a rainbow!”

Amidst the chattering villagers,

Gao Yiye climbed up along the “stairs” to the top of the “city wall.”

She stood at the high city gate and loudly spoke to everyone: “This city wall was granted to us by the Great Deity.”

“In the coming period, there might be many bandits causing turmoil.”

“The Great Deity wants us to make a wooden gate to seal the gate opening.”

“Have people stand guard in shifts. If bandits attack, we will take up weapons and put on iron armor to protect ourselves.”

The villagers quickly acknowledged:

“We respectfully obey the Great Deity’s commands.”

Li Daoxuan quietly watched.

The villagers quickly allocated some people to chop trees and make the gate.

Their craftsmanship was rough.

They felled trees as thick as an arm and stripped off branches.

Then placed them side by side and tied them together with grass rope...

At the same time,

under the arrangements of the Village Chief,

the villagers established the shift schedule for guard duty.

Two villagers carrying bows and arrows seized from bandits,

stood at the city gate, posing like “sentinels,” and it truly looked convincing.

Very good, now the village had basic self-defense capabilities.

As long as these men weren’t foolish, if they saw bandits coming, they could block the gate and defend fiercely; the bandits wouldn’t enter Gaojia Village.

And if they held out until he arrived, it would be fine.

Next, he just hoped Gao Chuwu, sent to the county town, would bring back something useful.

.....

Meanwhile, outside the county office in Chengcheng County.

Thirty-Two changed into a neat long gown.

He faced the door-guarding constable and respectfully folded his hands: "I..."

The constable said blankly: "The County Lord has ordered that if it's you coming, you're not allowed in under any circumstances."

Thirty-Two smiled: "I've not come to see the County Lord."

The constable was puzzled: "Then why are you here?"

Thirty-Two said: "I just wanted to inquire about any big events lately. When I served here as a clerk before, I treated you well. Could you give me a small tip without it being too much to ask?"

"This is called repaying kindness with gratitude."

The constable thought carefully.

True, this clerk always spoke the last four characters with an affected tone that annoyed people a bit.

But the man was decent; he had indeed helped him once before.

Giving him a little news wouldn't cause harm.

The constable lowered his voice: "Let me hint to you—two days ago, the County Lord sent several teams to some villages to collect grain. Do you remember how Mr. San opposed it and was driven out by the County Lord?"

Thirty-Two said: "I remember that incident very clearly; it was deeply etched in my memory."

The constable continued: "Teams were sent to Gaojia Village, Wangjia Village, Zhengjia Village... but the Gaojia Village team didn't bring back a single grain."

Thirty-Two thought to himself: With the Great Deity guarding there, it was no wonder they collected no taxes. He feared those officials had been dealt with harshly.

The constable went on: "The Zhengjia Village team collected a little tax, less than required. The one to Wangjia Village gained the most—they beat up those lowly folks there, burned an unoccupied broken house, scaring the Wangjia Village people so much they trembled. Finally, taking advantage of darkness, they barged into the lowlifes' homes and robbed them of their seed grain as tax."

Upon hearing this, Thirty-Two's heart skipped a beat; he urgently asked: "Seed grain? You robbed them of seed grain? Heavens! How could you dare take such a thing? Haven't you heard the saying: 'Even if starving to death, never eat seed grain'? How could you all actually rob that? This... is utterly acting against justice."

The constable wore an indifferent expression: "Who cares if they starve? The court pressures us constantly. If taxes aren't collected, the County Lord will face trouble, and all brothers under him suffer too."

Thirty-Two grew very anxious: "It's over! Wangjia Village will likely rebel."

The constable sneered: "A bunch of lowlifes—what nerve do they have to rebel?"

Thirty-Two didn't dare waste time at the county office entrance any longer.

He quickly sprinted home.

He returned home.

Facing his wife, children, maids, and servants, he said: "Quickly, quickly, pack your belongings. We must leave the county town and hide for safety. This is called fleeing from danger."

His wife was a plump middle-aged woman.

Hearing this, she asked in confusion: “Run away? Why?”

Thirty-Two rapidly said: “Three years of drought have left people destitute.”

“The County Lord sent men to rob farmers of their seed grain.”

“That will cause huge trouble.”

“We must escape fast. A step too late and we’ll suffer alongside the County Lord.”

“This is called... ah, no time to think of a phrase—just hurry, pack, and flee.”

Third Lady, hearing this, showed no tension: “Why fear just a few villagers rebelling?”

“Even if they rebel, they’ll just become bandits—they won’t attack the county town, will they?”

Thirty-Two lowered his voice: “You don’t understand!”

“That Wangjia Village isn’t ordinary. There’s a man named Bai Shui Wang Er, who came from Bai Shui County to join relatives—a well-known hero nearby.”

“With one staff in hand, dozens of men can’t near him; his fame spreads far.”

“If he leads a rebellion, raising his arm for a call to arms,—oh goodness, it’ll be awful. Chengcheng County and dozens of surrounding towns and villages could face catastrophe.”

“In short, a wise man avoids danger. Since I no longer work at the county office, fleeing far away is wise.”