

Innkeeper 45

The Innkeeper

Chapter 45: The keys

"Come in," Alexander said casually, as if unsuspecting of anything. He pretended not to notice Greg squeezing his stress ball even harder. Internally he was amused quite a bit - should a would-be assassin really be using a stress ball? In fact, what he did not know was that Greg was constantly in a lot of pain, as he was not inherently a Gu cultivator.

Gu were similar to spiritual beasts, but instead of beasts they were insects. Gu cultivators nurtured the Gu in their own bodies and shared everything from nutrients to spiritual energy. It was quite a rare form of cultivation, and was widely frowned upon not only because of how dark the practices were, but also because most people found it too disgusting to let Gu enter their bodies. Nevertheless, Gu allowed people with low inherent cultivation talent to easily surpass their natural limits as their cultivation depended on the Gu instead.

The door opened and an elderly man entered followed by two bodyguards. The old man had a slight hunch and snow white hair, but his eyes were energetic and warm.

"Senior Hammad" Alexander acknowledged, slightly surprised, as he quickly got up to greet the old man. This old man was actually quite old, at around 230 years. Although the average life expectancy for a Golden Core cultivator was 250 years, it was rare for them to actually reach or come close to such an age as 250 was considered the maximum and not a necessity. If Golden Core cultivators had a weak foundation or suffered from injuries their life expectancy would naturally be reduced. Which is why his long life was a surprise to many people as he was a war veteran from one of the last cultivator wars to take place on Earth. Naturally as someone with status this senior had crossed paths with Alexander's family before, even though they had never met themselves.

"Sit, sit, there's no need for formalities. I just had to come see you when I recognized your voice, I hadn't realized that you had come to Cairo."

Since Alexander was standing, Greg and Helen had stood up as well and stood behind him respectfully. They bowed to the senior but didn't say anything.

"I came on vacation with my friends. We're celebrating my breakthrough."

"Ah yes, your breakthrough!" the old man said, taking a seat. His two bodyguards stood behind him with their backs against the wall. "Congratulations! My boy, congratulations! What an age the world has come to, what an age! Back in my day, one could not even dare to imagine entering the Foundation realm before the age of fifty." The old man's eyes stared out into the distance, as if reminiscing.

"Indeed," Alexander agreed, taking a seat as well, "with space travel and terraforming technology, we have access to more Spirit Stone mines than ever before. In fact, we have already started preparing for asteroid mining as well as planning to explore Jupiter's moons. In the future, things will only get better."

"Phenomenal, what a time to be alive. But as they say, an age is built by the men of it's times. I have no doubt that you'll be setting even more records soon. Not to mention, you've even gotten your hands on those two inheritance keys from the Goddesses village." There was a subtle change in Hammad's voice at this point, and an air of tension filled the room. Hammad was still smiling, and the body guards had not moved, but Alexander sensed a stir in the natural flow of spirit energy in the room.

Spirit energy was like air, it seemed to be present everywhere in the world. When something interacted with it, the spirit energy tended to develop a flow, similar to the wind. But random things did not cause a stir in spirit energy, meaning a person walking through a room would not affect the spirit energy in the room. But if there was a person meditating in the corner of the room, spirit energy would flow towards that person, and the people sensitive to spirit energy would feel that flow similar to how a person could feel wind on their skin. Currently, it wasn't the spirit energy of the room that was moving but rather of the general area.

"Well so far there is no telling what the keys are. They may turn out to be nothing more than decoration pieces. Otherwise the owner would not have sold them."

"True, true, there's no telling what their use is yet. Still, you were quite decisive in the way you bought both of them. Some people may think you may know what they're used for."

Alexander smirked internally. He was giving the man respect due to age and achievements, but that did not mean it gave the old man the right to interrogate him. Who could question what Alexander did? But all this was only an internal monologue, he still wanted to see the performance that had been prepared for him.

"A friend of mine took interest in the keys so I am only acquiring them for her. I have no personal interest in the keys, nor do I know much about them."

"How fortunate it is to be your friend," the old man remarked and let out a chuckle. Before the conversation could continue there was a knock on the door, and a smartly dressed lady walked in with a briefcase.

"Your keys," she said to Alexander with a warm smile and handed over the briefcase before quickly leaving. At this time, all eyes in the room were on the briefcase in Alexander's hand. Even Helen, who had so far maintained a calm expression, wore a worried look.

Alexander, though, pretended like he did not notice at all and calmly opened the briefcase to take a closer look at his prize. The truth was, the mysterious girl had only asked for one of the keys but he had gotten both because he wanted to know what was so special about them. On a closer look, Alexander could immediately tell they were not 'decoration pieces'. Even without touching them he could feel them radiating warmth, and they seemed to have an alluring shine to them. Though what was a little strange was that while the auctioneer said that they had a healing effect, Alexander's instincts were telling him otherwise. He felt like a wider horizon awaited him so long as he took hold of the keys.

How was he supposed to know that the key affected everyone differently? It was just that the spirit energy on Earth was scarce, not to mention polluted. Most cultivators here carried injuries due to improper cultivation, which is why the key always gave them a feeling that it could heal them. Alexander, on the other hand, had been guided and taken care of by numerous professionals. Even when he sustained injuries or made mistakes in cultivation, his recovery was always assured. Which is why the feeling he got was not one of healing, but of freedom. Although he was not constrained anymore by his training and had the freedom to live how he wanted, the freedom was relatively new and he had not had a chance to taste it yet, so naturally that is what his heart still yearned for.

"May I take a look?" Hammad asked, waking Alexander from his reverie. His voice was no longer as soft as it had been, and his expression not as gentle as it was. Alexander looked at the old man with an amused look, but handed the briefcase over. Helen and Greg both looked tense now, though they sat behind Alexander so he could not see their faces. The atmosphere in the room had become even more tense, but Alexander maintained his calm as if he had not noticed.

The old man stared at the keys with evident greed in his eyes, and slowly crept one of his hands closer to the keys. Just as it was about to touch the key, however, he stopped himself and quickly withdrew his hand.

"It's a shame I didn't know the keys would be auctioned sooner, or else I might have prepared to buy them as well."

The old man closed the briefcase and held it out for Alexander to take back. The young man reached forward to take it, and just as Alexander took it back it happened! The old man, a late Golden Core stage cultivator, launched a dagger at Alexander, who was only a few feet away from him. The dagger was not a normal dagger, as it had the special function of being able to piece through any kind of spirit energy shield. But that was not all. At the same time that the old man attacked, the walls of the private room exploded and it seemed several projectiles shot towards Alexander, and even Helen as well as Greg.

All this happened in a moment, and in less than a tenth of a second the old man's dagger had reached Alexander's throat.

While a momentous event was taking place on Earth, Lex found himself soaking in a bath in one of his free guest rooms, drinking a Pina Colada. Figuring out how to make MP was really too stressful, and coming this close to potentially dying was way too much for him to take right now. So he decided to take a little break - to give his brain rest so that it could work better later! That was totally the reason! It definitely wasn't because he discovered that the Inn also provided bath bombs should a guest ask for one, and wanted to try it out! He took another sip of his drink - from a paper straw of course - before mentally adjusting the temperature of the water and raising it by a few degrees.

He should think about adding some hot springs to the Inn.

The Innkeeper

Chapter 46: 60 seconds

Alexander, who had been reaching out earlier to retrieve the keys, did not move to evade the incoming dagger, but only looked at Hammad with amusement in his eyes. The dagger reached him unimpeded, but when it struck his neck it sounded as if it hit a metal wall and sparks flew. Debris and dust flew into the room as several other attacks broke through the walls towards him, making it hard to see for a moment. However, when the dust cleared Alexander could be seen sitting casually on his chair, leaning back with his right leg atop his left. Helen and Greg, who were caught completely unprepared by the attacks, were picking themselves up from the floor, somehow unhurt as well.

Hammad stood up, his two bodyguards standing beside him, and seven other people in masks entered the room and surrounded the teens, giving off a threatening aura. All the people who had surrounded them were Golden Core cultivators.

"Go on, continue," said Alexander mockingly. "Attack a few more times, I won't dodge, I promise."

But the ten cultivators didn't attack, and only stared at them. They were trying to figure out how the three kids survived the attack, but could not see anything. Helen and Greg came and stood close to Alexander, the fear on their faces real.

"Do you know what you're doing?" Greg asked, trying to sound threatening. "Do you know who we are?"

"Oh they know," commented Alexander, slowly standing up. He looked Hammad dead in the eyes, the earlier amused expression changing to something more serious. "What's the matter, old geezer, confused? Times have changed since you last saw action. The world isn't so simple anymore."

Alexander would, of course, not explain how or why he had managed to remain intact from the earlier attacks. The truth was his body was covered by something called Red-Gold Dust, a unique metal his family discovered and processed on Mars. It was an unreactive metal, and had few if any uses at all normally. However whenever spiritual energy was released by a Golden Core cultivator, the ore would absorb it readily, to the point of disrupting spiritual techniques and formations. Whether the energy was directed towards the metal or not, it would absorb it. When the metal absorbed enough energy, it would evaporate. Alexander's family had processed it into a defensive treasure that would not absorb all Golden Core energy, only attacks in a certain radius. This is why even Helen and Greg remained relatively unharmed by the attacks. Of course, even with most of its energy gone the dagger that attacked Alexander still had enough momentum to cut through him, but Alexander had employed a defensive technique for body cultivators that turned his skin into metal. The only drawback of that technique was that he could not move while he used it.

"I'm impressed," said Hammad, "I cannot figure out how you avoided the attacks. But I believe if we keep attacking, your defensive measures will eventually run out."

"So what, you're going to threaten me now? Follow you, or you'll kill me?" Alexander looked around, trying to see if he could recognize any features of his assailants. Though they were wearing masks, he

could recognize some of the techniques they had used earlier so he had a good guess as to their identities.

They were all experts, and Alexander thought it was highly likely that there were more assassins still hiding. The auction house was in chaos, guests were screaming and running around, yet somehow no security was coming towards them.

"I could ask you all why you're doing this, and what's your motive. But to be honest, I don't care. Since you've attacked me, you should all just die!" As soon as Alexander spoke he pulled out what looked like a tarot card from his pocket and crumpled it. The ten assassins tried to stop him, but even at this distance, before they could reach the three teenagers disappeared.

"Find them!" Hammad roared. "They must be nearby!"

Indeed, they had not teleported far. The three of them appeared on the road outside the auction house, only some 50 meters away.

"We need to hold out for about 60 seconds," Alexander said, looking at his two 'companions'. "Do you have any defensive equipment?"

"None that can defend against Golden Core cultivators," Greg said, in a shaky voice. Helen gave Alexander a reluctant smile, indicating the same.

"We'll just have to make do!" Alexander said, before grabbing the two and bolting away from the auction house. Only a couple seconds later their ten assailants broke through the building and appeared right behind them. Searching for the kids wasn't a difficult task, a simple sweep of their spirit sense eventually revealed them.

Fortunately for the three teenagers, Alexander was practically covered in Spirit Tech, although it was not quite apparent. His shoes aided him in running which, along with his body cultivation and movement technique, had already put him at quite the distance.

"What about Zeus?" Helen asked as Alexander sprinted down the busy road.

"We'll find him later, we just need to wait for 50 more seconds," the running teenager said. His expression was focused, but he did not look too worried. However, even with his many advantages his pursuers ultimately had a higher cultivation level and were approaching quickly.

Hammad, who was at the forefront of the ten cultivators, threw another dagger at the teenager, holding nothing back! The dagger was covered in a visible red aura that gave off a malevolent feeling! Before the dagger could reach Alexander it was blocked by a blade that appeared floating behind the boy. Five more blades, all two feet long, appeared hovering in the air behind Alexander and began defending him from some attacks as he continued to run.

The six blades were Alexander's primary weapons, and all were coated in Red-Gold Dust, but even then blocking attacks put a great strain on Alexander, especially since he was using his spirit sense to determine where the attacks were coming from and blocking them. Unfortunately, things only become more difficult. Some of the assassins ran ahead of them and intercepted Alexander. Alexander immediately tried to change directions and run into a building, but it was already too late. He had once again been surrounded.

He dropped his two friends on the ground to free his hands, and turned all his focus on his enemies. Since he had teleported out, only 27 seconds had passed. He needed to delay for another 33 seconds!

"Stay close to me," Alexander said, but before he could explain more he felt someone grab his leg. He looked down to see his friend...to see the person who was once his friend, Greg, firmly grabbing onto his right calf. From his hand an extremely gruesome looking worm protruded out and tried to burrow into Alexander's leg. Alexander quickly deployed his defensive technique, Titanium Skin, but to his immense surprise the worm was able to tear through his hardened skin and enter his leg.

"A valiant effort," Hammad said, as he slowly clapped. "But you're still just a boy. Though you put up a good fight for someone your age..." Hammad was continuing his speech but Alexander was not listening. He was only looking at Greg, who wore a look of shame and guilt. Ultimately Greg looked away, unable to bear the gaze of the young man he had just condemned to death. Alexander turned to look at Helen and found that she too was looking at Greg, disappointment painting her beautiful face.

"Did you know?" he asked her softly.

The young girl paused for a moment, biting her lower lip till it started bleeding. Ultimately she shook her head and said, "I didn't know anything about Greg."

"And did you know about Zeus?"

"Was Zeus involved as well?" she asked, surprised. Her question in it of itself gave him an answer.

"So you didn't know about these two, but you did know about the assassination. What was your role in all this?"

Helen was about to answer but Hammad, who was becoming impatient, interrupted.

"Enough! Boy you've been implanted with a worm from the Heart Meridian Mother Gu! Your life is in my hands, so obediently put down your blades and stop resisting or you'll soon know the meaning of wishing for death!"

Alexander looked towards the old geezer indifferently, before looking up at the night sky. Only 7 seconds remained, and in the night sky he could see 10 shooting stars streaking through the night sky towards him.