

LONGEVITY CHRONICLES

Chapter 12 11: Fish? The Bait?

The bookshop's partitioned space flickered in the glow of an oil lamp.

Tao Qian's handsome face was illuminated by the dim yellow light, his expression one of utmost focus as his gaze fell upon the last page of the book in his hands.

A thin volume titled "Bai Qin Play," spanning a total of ten pages.

It had taken Tao Qian nearly half an hour just to nearly finish reading it.

What he was concerned with was not the faceless little figures but the most important notes at the bottom.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the last of the ten birds to take the stage was mankind's close relative.

the Ape!

From the descriptions, the requirements to cultivate this form, the powers that could be gained, and the prohibitions to be followed were all bizarrely stringent.

"To practice the Ape Form, one must collect a sufficient amount of beast blood, yet most Ape Clan blood is unusable, only the blood from the White Ape Clan deep in the wilderness forests will suffice."

"Each morning, consume a jar of White Ape Blood, then practice the Ape Play."

"Practicing daily, depending on one's talent, the time to enter the threshold will vary; some can achieve it in half a day, while others may never find the way."

"Once practiced to great depths, one's body can temporarily transform into a White Ape, not only becoming strong and sturdy, akin to undying, invulnerable to water and fire, capable of going anywhere, but also possessing the strength to tear apart demons, skilled in transformation, adept with all kinds of weapons, and having a commanding power over all beasts."

"Those with exceptional talent may discover Bloodline Divine Powers during their transformation, with known abilities like metamorphosis, Primordial Spirit projection, Dharma Manifestation Heaven and Earth, Undying Body, and Yin Yang Spiritual Eye."

"However, practicing this technique requires strict adherence to many prohibitions: one must not eat human flesh, engage with women, violate the killing vows, succumb to anger, delve into worldly desires, or be baked in the qi of an official... Once a rule is broken, one's Spirit and Heart Soul are lost, shedding human form and transforming into an unrestrained deceitful object like an 'Ape Demon.'"

"Snap"

After finishing the last page, Tao Qian closed the book and tossed it onto the table.

Exhaling, he exclaimed, "This is just too tragic."

Tao Qian's gripe, naturally, was aimed at the harsh prohibitions required to practice these Bird Plays.

The first few weren't so bad.

But as they went on, they gradually became more perverse, with the last one "Ape Form" being utterly absurd.

"Not consuming human flesh, avoiding women, I could understand, but what about the prohibitions against killing and anger, meaning one can't kill nor get angry?"

"And what about the prohibition against entering the mortal world, one can't mingle in human society?"

"Not to mention the strangest of all, not to be 'baked in the qi of an official'...?"

As he pondered further, Tao Qian's expression grew increasingly complex, his urge to criticize becoming unstoppable.

"Considering these prohibitions, I have ample reason and evidence to suspect that the creator of this Cultivation Method, Bai Qin Elder, must have actually hailed from a Buddhist Sect."

"That last rule about official qi practically screams a nod to my grandpa, the Great Saint who once held the post of Horses' Fortune."

After a bout of muttering, Tao Qian figured that if not for the fact he could freeload this Cultivation Technique, he would never consider cultivating it.

Not because the requirements were too strict, nor because the power level was low, but because the prohibitions were just too abnormal.

Even renaming this book to "Buddhist Sect's Recruitment Standards" wouldn't be the slightest bit incompatible.

However, it didn't matter whether Tao Qian wanted to practice or not.

For the next day or even for a longer period of time, he couldn't practice it.

Not that he didn't want to, but rather he couldn't.

"This book records that the ten birds are the pig, sheep, dog, chicken, cow, snake, eagle, horse, elephant, and ape, respectively."

"According to the descriptions, the elephant form and the ape form are the most powerful."

"But regardless of which form, all require a substantial amount of beast blood, and it's not something that can be found just anywhere."

"The pig calls for black pig blood, sheep for Spiritual Sheep, dog for an old black dog on the brink of death, chicken for a Colorful Feather wild chicken... the later ones get even more ludicrous, with White Elephant and White Ape blood being so rare that even wealthy households can't readily come into contact with them."

"So for now, this is just an elusive desire; there's no way to actually practice it."

Tao Qian wore a face full of regret, akin to being on a flower boat, the pretty girls already in his arms, yet realizing his pockets were empty, without a single silver coin.

After sighing over the book for a while, Tao Qian quickly regained his spirits. He still had a spare option.

His hands and gaze shifted to another secret book.

The Nameless Secret Manual!

Compared to the fragmentary Bai Qin Play, this dirty secret book's origins and details were much clearer.

Even the author's name and age were listed, and he was also from Seeking Immortal County, a fellow townsman of the body Tao Qian inhabited.

Because of its Extraordinary Perception-inducing nature, Tao Qian approached the book with cautious reverence as he opened it slowly.

At first, he was interested in the last page of the secret book, which contained the Cultivation Method "Immortal Fish Technique."

But as Tao Qian turned the first page and began reading, his desire for the Immortal Fish Technique was immediately shelved as he became wholly absorbed in the other contents of the secret book.

The author of the secret book was named Wu Ming.

He was originally a scholar who repeatedly failed to pass the imperial examinations, clearly not academically gifted, yet he was haughty and disdainful.

Not until he reached sixty years old did Wu Ming turn to Cultivation.

This cultivation lasted thirty years, until he died on a cold couch at home, well into his nineties.

To others, even to his own children, he seemed like a stubborn old man, lacking self-awareness and prone to wild fantasies.

Though Tao Qian did not share this view, he also felt Wu Ming must have failed in his quest to become an Immortal, otherwise, he wouldn't have died at home.

As for the Immortal Fish Technique, it was probably his only strange encounter.

Even Wu Ming's death was most likely caused by practicing that cultivation technique, as its side effects were clear in Tao Qian's mind.

However, as he delved deeper into the reading, Tao Qian quickly realized that Wu Ming's experiences over thirty years were not so simple.

The so-called secret book was actually Wu Ming's "autobiography."

It depicted all the experiences of Wu Ming's thirty years of seeking immortality, asking about the Dao, and adventuring everywhere.

It was just that Wu Ming's mental state was unclear when he recorded it, so the content was also disorderly and chaotic; if ordinary people were to read it, they would feel an extremely strong disgust.

Forcibly reading it could drive one mad.

Of course, Tao Qian easily exempted himself from this minor repercussion.

Page by page.

Tao Qian's expression began with confusion, then turned to intense curiosity, followed by relief, and then transformed into excitement... His expressions shifted back and forth, under the dim yellow light, making it seem likely that he had some mental issues.

Not knowing how much time had passed, Tao Qian finally reached the last page.

There, he stopped without continuing.

Although he exempted himself from the repercussions, his expression still looked very fatigued, as if he had just gone through a life and death struggle.

In fact, it was almost the case.

It was just that what tormented Tao Qian was his spirit and will.

He had never thought before that just reading a book could be so exhausting.

Yet, even so, Tao Qian did not stop or take any breaks in the middle, insisting on finishing the experiences of the Seeking Immortal Hermit Wu Ming over thirty years.

Thoughts?

Tao Qian felt very complex in his heart.

The first emotions that emerged were resistance, disgust, aversion... not the envy, longing, and aspiration that most people would feel upon hearing "cultivation" and "immortal way."

The reason was simple.

The book didn't describe any kind of noble immortal demeanor or carefree lifestyle.

It was a cultivation world that was weird, horrific, brutal, and disgusting.

Although Tao Qian had some premonition about the atmosphere of the cultivation world after reading memories of heroes and scholars, and experiencing the wharf incident firsthand, the appearance of a believable account still shocked him.

"Wu Ming left home at the age of sixty to seek immortality, initially without much gain, but instead faced numerous calamities."

"First, he encountered bandits who practiced evil techniques, was captured and almost became their food, barely escaped, only to encounter a heterodox black store where after eating a meal, he transformed into a black donkey, whipped and tortured for five full years."

"In his despair, he finally met a Daoist who rescued him and allowed him to follow him back to a temple for cultivation, and with diligent work, he quickly made progress, his white hair turned black, and his old body returned to a youthful state."

"Just when he was delighted, one night he saw his master transform into a monster under a blood moon, devouring more than a dozen fellow disciples in the temple. Wu Ming jumped into a dung pit to save his life, avoiding detection until his master, full after eating, fell into a deep sleep, and Wu Ming covered in urine and feces, fled into the night."

"Thereafter, Wu Ming wandered around various provinces, relying on a few Daoist skills learned from the temple, barely considered a cultivator."

"Although he encountered disasters many times, Wu Ming was still not discouraged about seeking immortality, and wherever he heard of abnormalities or transcendence, he rushed there as quickly as possible."

"Thus, another twenty-some years of seeking immortality went by, and Wu Ming could no longer remember how many times he had narrowly escaped death; although his body remained, his mind and soul had been tormented into a daze, fragmented and battered."

"Perhaps sensing that his end was near, Wu Ming decided to make one last effort."

"He heard of the existence of a Great Cultivator somewhere and struggled to reach him. After spending decades of savings, he finally exchanged for a technique that could reach the Heavenly Dao."

"That technique was called: Immortal Fish Technique!"

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Tao Qian pinched the secret book, his brows slightly furrowed and with a complex expression, he internally summarized the Seeking Immortal Hermit Wu Ming's thirty years of cultivation experiences.

"Tragic! Tragic! Tragic!"

Tao Qian suddenly spoke in a low voice, lamenting three words.

Although he had yet to look at the last page, to see the specific content of the "Immortal Fish Technique."

But from Wu Ming's outcome, and some information sensed by his extraordinary perception, Tao Qian could already guess.

What the Seeking Immortal Hermit exchanged all his savings for was still not the true immortal Dao technique he had dreamt of.

Even more likely, it was the very cause of Wu Ming's death in his cold bed at home.

With that thought, Tao Qian's hand trembled slightly as he turned to the last page of the secret book.

The next moment, almost in an instant, Tao Qian's pupils shrank violently as if he saw something extremely horrific, his face uncontrollably distorted.

On the book page, it was still the handwriting of the Seeking Immortal Hermit Wu Ming.

The penmanship on the dozens and hundreds of pages before was already chaotic enough, but compared to this last page, it was already normal.

What Tao Qian saw was all bright red, extremely distorted ancient seal characters.

For a moment, it seemed as if the paper was painted with monsters, roaring at Tao Qian with their teeth bared and claws dancing:

"Immortal Fish Technique?"

"Fish, or bait?"

"No matter who it is! Don't practice! Don't practice! Don't practice!"

"What a wonderful feeling... this is immortality... I've become an immortal... hurry and cultivate, no one can stop me, I want to cultivate, I want to become immortal, I must become immortal!"

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