

LONGEVITY CHRONICLES

Chapter 2 2 Ledger Diary

The drizzling rain gathered like curtains, still enveloping Seeking Immortal County.

The daylight was bustling with excitement; however, as each head fell to the ground and was placed on the wood post known as "Soul Summoning Pole" at the center of Vegetable Market Street under everyone's gaze, the curtain eventually fell.

Except for the few people obsessed with medicine, most held a grievance for the death of those several heroes and sighed incessantly.

Regrettably, with the chaos of troubled times already apparent, everyone was too preoccupied with their own problems to concern themselves with others.

After night fell, Vegetable Market Street became very peaceful.

Only a young night watchman wearing a magua, carrying a lantern, and holding a copper gong, with heavy dark circles, walked along the street, striking his gong and calling out the watch.

Having completed the watch, the night watchman glanced at the nearly thirty-foot tall Soul Summoning Pole in front of him.

According to the court's law, those qualified to be hanged there were either members of the rebellion or notorious bandits.

Currently, a series of heads hung there, precisely those of the young men who were executed at dusk.

A gust of night wind blew by, causing the heads to sway.

The sound of flesh and bone rubbing against the pole sounded especially eerie.

The night watchman sighed softly and quickened his pace, soon leaving the pitch-dark Vegetable Market Street.

Just as he left, in a shop at the end of the street.

In the darkness, a corpse that had been lying on the ground with eyes closed suddenly snapped its eyes open.

Having just "resurrected."

Tao Qian seemed to be in some sort of rigid state, his mind bombarded with a delayed torrent of information forcefully infusing into his thoughts.

Initially, these pieces of information were disorganized and obscure.

They appeared to be ancient words, some incomprehensible nonsense, and even some ghostly symbolic talismans.

But gradually, they organized themselves.

Eventually, they formed a special format that Tao Qian could understand.

[Name: Tao Qian.]

[Record Type: Abnormality.]

[Record: Gained the "Undying" characteristic due to chanting an unknown fragmented formula during decapitation, entering a state of neither living nor dying, with Source Qi intact remaining immortal until death comes again where chanting the fragmented formula to congeal the Source Qi is required, failure resulting in true death.]

[Note 1: Each recitation of the fragmented formula will incur the following price: Permanent decay of the body, soul daze, after possession transforms into a deceitful creature called "Soul corpse".]

[Note 2: Soul corpse, existing between life and death, dazed, craves human flesh, prefers dark and damp environments, on nights of the blood moon runs a mad three thousand miles without knowing exhaustion.]

[Note 3: Price is waived!]

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After digesting the stream of information, Tao Qian was stunned.

Many questions were now answered.

Why was he not dead despite being decapitated due to that fragmented formula?

And there were the sensations relating to "decay" and "corpse" he felt during the execution.

Clearly, those were the price required for immortality.

But inexplicably, his soul seemed different, and at the crucial moment, it dispersed that sensation, allowing him to waive the price.

"So, this is likely my "Golden Finger" hack, with a strong perception of transcendent abnormal information, and price waiver?"

"But validation is needed, as solitary evidence cannot establish the truth."

With that thought, Tao Qian came to his senses.

He slowly got up and fumbled around the shop.

After a while, he lit an oil lamp.

The dim yellow light gradually spread, barely filling the small bookstore.

Using the light, he found a well-polished copper mirror in the corner.

The next second, Tao Qian clearly saw what he looked like now.

Unexpectedly, he was a young man.

About twenty-five or twenty-six years old, tall and lean with pale skin, he also looked rather handsome, with smile lines around his mouth, overall exuding a sunny, warm aura.

How did such a person die?

Just as this question arose in Tao Qian's mind, naturally, a flood of memories surfaced.

Along with the life profile of this body, there was also an included "tragically beautiful" love story.

This person also bore the surname Tao, named Zhiming.

A twenty-five-year-old scholar who had repeatedly failed examinations and, burdened by the death of his parents and resentment towards the court's incompetence, decided not to continue studying.

Recently having exhausted his savings, he moved to the county town and rented the corner shop on Vegetable Market Street to open a bookstore.

Naming it "Chengyou Bookstore," he sold all kinds of books.

New books, ancient books, and calligraphy models, it had everything.

In theory, selling books wasn't a lucrative business, but earning a living should have been easy.

However, the scholar was naive and stubborn, utterly lacking cunning, which naturally didn't bring in much money, resulting in rapid losses.

Fortunately, the bookstore had one female regular who often came by to offer gentle consolation.

Gradually, the two took a liking to each other.

But unexpectedly, a maid came with a message a few days ago saying her lady had been arranged by her mother to marry into a wealthy family in the city as a concubine.

Their love affair would have to wait for another lifetime, and she asked the scholar to forget about her.

Seeing this, Tao Qian's gaze shifted towards the counter top.

Indeed, there lay an empty wine glass and a paper packet still containing some suspicious powder.

Clearly, the scholar's understanding of the situation and those words about "another lifetime" was probably... to die for love?

"Zhiming, Zhiming, why not try resisting fate."

Tao Qian sighed and then continued.

With a sigh, Tao Qian thought no further.

This scholar had taken his own life and left behind the body, which for Tao Qian was a great gift.

Tao Qian stood in place for a few minutes, waiting for his soul to fully merge with the new body without any barriers, and then began to move around within the bookstore.

It took him less than ten seconds to walk there and back.

This little store was truly pitifully small and simply laid out.

The front held three rows of wooden bookshelves with a short wooden stand for piling books in the middle, and then there was the checkout counter.

Beyond that was a small partition used for sleeping.

Before long, Tao Qian had completely familiarized himself with his new identity and new home.

He had been decapitated not too long ago, and had just been reincarnated.

Such life and death experiences were enough to see through the red dust of the world.

For Tao Qian, it left him without a hint of sleepiness.

He washed up by lamp light and tidied up all the books scattered on the floor. Finally, Tao Qian, following the memories in his mind, took out a book from the drawer of the counter. It wasn't very thick nor very thin, similar to a ledger, but it somewhat resembled a diary as well.

Although Tao Qian could peruse the body's memories without barriers, they were, after all, not experiences he had lived personally, and many details like prices were vague.

Having a journal ledger was more than convenient to deepen the learning.

Speaking of which, if his new identity had belonged to a person without credentials, Tao Qian would have definitely fled to hide himself immediately.

But now, fortunate to have a body that could be exposed to the public, naturally, he should first adapt and settle down.

"This world is a lot like the last years of some dynasty in my former life, but many more aspects are completely different."

"Not to mention the social structure, historical customs, and such, just the absolutely real demons and ghosts, mysterious phenomena are enough to show how deep and perilous this world is."

"Being new here, I must first survive by cautiously scrapping by with this cover."

He murmured a few words.

Then, Tao Qian casually opened the ledger.

"Ninth year of Tianming, June 3, clear, no wind."

"Although I, Tao Zhiming, have not established a family, I have established a career. Today, Chengyou Bookstore officially opens, attracting friends from all quarters, all generously contributing, with a good sale on miscellaneous books."

"One friend, Mr. Ge, took a liking to the 'Yue Man Hall Notes' I had specifically procured for the store—this book, written by the great scholar I most revere, reached an imposing twenty yuan. Mr. Ge mentioned he was a bit strapped for cash and asked to borrow it, promising to settle the account in a few days."

"Between scholars, how could I refuse such a cultured gesture—I gladly consented."

"In the evening, I gathered with friends at De Shun Residence; we intertwined cups and laughter, thoroughly enjoying ourselves, with two dishes named 'bamboo mushroom and abalone' and 'Dragon Beard Fish Fin,' both delicious. To my surprise, they were ordered by Mr. Ge, truly the descendant of a wealthy family, knowing good food, although the prices of the dishes were indeed steep—just these two made up two yuan, truly lavish dishes."

"Today's income: ten yuan six jiao four."

"Today's expenditure: twelve yuan."

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"June 4, slight breeze, some rain."

"Fewer customers today, but with the continuous light rain, . perfect leisurely time for a half-day's leisure."

"Fortunately, I also sold a volume of 'Shenyuan Pen Talk,' total income: one yuan two jiao."

"Main expenditures were for meals and paying to listen to stories, totaling: three jiao ten copper coins."

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"June 5, heavy rain."

"Just as I opened the doors early in the morning, terrible news was delivered. A friend came by to inform me that Mr. Ge's family had vacated their house, apparently having decided to move to the provincial city to settle down long ago. The day before yesterday, hearing that I had opened a new bookstore, he purposely came here to borrow the most expensive great book from my store, intending to default on his debt."

"To borrow and not return is to be a thief; this guy is utterly despicable. If I ever run into him again, I'll definitely smash his dog's head."

"Too angry to continue, I only opened the shop for half the day."

"Sold a word poster, income: eight copper coins."

"Today's main expenditure was on meals; I ate a bit more, totaling: two jiao."

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"June 6, no wind, no rain."

"A tofu shop just opened at the street corner. The owner is a lady with decent looks and an extraordinary figure, truly a Diao Chan among tofu sellers."

"There were really too many customers; it was hard to squeeze in, but I managed to buy a few pieces of broken tofu, still sweet."

"Today I sold a few handwritten volumes, income: two jiao, two copper coins."

"Main expenditures on meals and theater tickets, totaling: seven jiao."

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"June 7, clear skies, the sun harshly blazing."

"Few people came to buy books today; only the neighbor selling strange stones came here to pick up the 'Night Talk' they had reserved yesterday. I quickly flipped through a few pages, all full of bizarre and secret affairs of human-demon-ghost love, still worth a look."

"Not long after that shop owner left, another shopkeeper from the neighboring street's medicine store came over, asking me to go to the book market to purchase 'Yulou Spring,' 'Nine-tailed Turtle,' and other books, and to advance a dozen or so yuan."

"I never expected such vulgar books to not only be pricy but also have so many enthusiasts."

"If I purchased some more and sold them, wouldn't it be... No, no, I am a scholar and must not disgrace myself."

"Though today's income was substantial, tomorrow I still have to spend it to buy books, totaling: fifteen yuan seven jiao six."

"I was in a good mood and ate a bit more, the mutton at Taian Inn was too delicious, expenditure: six jiao."

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"June 9, clear."

"Today there were slightly more customers, sold many children's books and word posters, which greatly comforted my heart."

"I heard that a new Western restaurant had opened at the street corner, the proprietor originally an apprentice in a major restaurant of the provincial city, trained by a golden-haired, blue-eyed old barbarian. The neighboring strange stone shop owner had just gone to eat there, highly praising the butter bread and fried pork cutlets; just hearing these crude and vulgar dish names, I didn't believe him, tomorrow I'll also try these uncivilized Western dishes."

"Today's income: one yuan two jiao, six copper coins."

"Today's expenditure: three jiao."

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Tao Qian held the ledger in his hands, which, though seemingly an account book, was actually more akin to a diary.

Possibly because it was originally "written by oneself"

At first, he felt unfamiliar, but as he read on, Tao Qian became completely immersed.

During this process, his sense of strangeness to this world rapidly dissipated, and a sense of reality and integration gradually emerged.