

LONGEVITY CHRONICLES

Chapter 20 19: Tao Qian Assassinated, Four Beasts of She County

Seeking Immortal County, East Street—this area is known for its affluent residents but is still close to Vegetable Market Street, hence it sees quite a bit of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Various western imports like automobiles and bicycles are not a rare sight here, just as rickshaws and horse-drawn carriages are common.

What Tao Qian inadvertently noticed was an exceedingly common horse-drawn carriage.

The yellow-maned horse pulling the carriage seemed quite docile, but the carriage itself appeared somewhat larger than others.

There were four people on and around the carriage.

One held the whip, his head wrapped in a turban, with a slightly sunken face—a middle-aged man.

Another, a burly man in short attire sporting a broad, fierce face and slightly protruding eyes.

There was an old man clutching a walking stick, with a goat's beard.

And a young man with delicate features, whose complexion was deathly pale as if from excessive indulgence.

These four men seemed to be discussing something.

At this moment, the corresponding bounty information emerged in Tao Qian's mind.

Unlike solitary criminals like Three-headed Monarch, Gourd Demon, and Selling Chestnut Woman, these four were a gang—an utterly wicked human trafficking gang devoid of any scruples.

"Zhao Dou, Lu Daniu, Yang Ding, Zhang Xian — collectively known as the 'Four Beasts of She County,' all from She County in Fumin. Each has mastered an Evil Technique; together, they abduct special individuals, selling them to high officials or factions within worldly society for vast profits. The title 'Four Beasts' is by no means an injustice."

"Originally secretive, these Four Beasts have recently acted even more brazenly under the protection of the Devil God Army, exacerbated by the chaotic times, committing crimes across Southern Yue and neighboring provinces and cities."

"Among the Four Beasts, Zhao Dou and Lu Daniu excel in combat skills, complementing each other perfectly and able to fight Demons."

"Yang Ding has mastered a Subterranean Evasion technique, which allows him not only to escape but also to carry others with him, making him particularly troublesome."

"Zhang Xian possesses hypnotic and transformational Exotic Skills; he's responsible for abductions and is also the leader of the gang. His crimes run the deepest and he deserves Heavenly Punishment."

In the blink of an eye, Tao Qian recalled the origins and Evil Techniques of these four beasts.

At the same time, he also remembered the bounty placed on them.

"Information providers receive a hundred silver coins as a reward."

"Anyone who captures and eliminates them earns an eight-hundred silver coin reward."

Without a doubt.

These Four Beasts were worth a lot of money.

Tao Qian could completely surmise that the bounties on them most likely came from the victims' families.

If one were to rank the most heinous and unforgivable crimes, human trafficking would undoubtedly be among them.

And the targets these four were trafficking were not ordinary women and children.

They were individuals with special characteristics.

The sole criterion was an "Abnormal Trait."

This involved a common understanding within the Cultivation World, as Seeking Immortal Hermit Wu Ming had recorded in the Secret Book:

Due to the iron law "all cultivation comes at a cost," actually, most Mortals are unsuited for Cultivation, even unsuitable for contact with bizarre and transcendental matters.

Yet, some humans are quite fit for it.

This type of people usually demonstrates peculiar qualities different from ordinary people, which can collectively be termed as Abnormal Traits.

To put it in simpler words, it can be referred to as Talent.

But in this world, the talent for Cultivation isn't universally applicable; one Abnormal Trait almost always corresponds to a specific path of Cultivation, even a particular faction within that path.

It may be a certain sect within Daoist, a monastery within Buddhist, or a branch of heresy and heterodoxy.

Honest paths like Daoist and Buddhist have their methods of selecting and recruiting resources; they don't need the existence of entities like the "Four Beasts of She County."

But some unsavory sects or certain twisted figures do require these beasts.

"Boss Jia said that it's a typical trick of the Devil God Army, before they invade a place, they usually send some Heterodox Demon People ahead to create disruption and incite panic."

"Is the appearance of these Four Beasts a coincidence, or...?"

While mulling over this, Tao Qian found a dark alley corner to stand in after turning at the street corner.

Choosing his angle carefully, he watched the four men.

Indeed, Tao Qian had tentatively decided that the Four Beasts of She County would be his designated practice targets.

As soon as an opportunity arose and he verified their horrendous deeds as true, Tao Qian would not let them go.

"Since these Four Beasts have shown up, they must have already targeted someone and are about to act."

"If they gather together, it would indeed be tough to make a move."

"But if I could isolate one first, the odds are much better, especially against Zhang Xian and Yang Ding, who excel in hypnotic transformations and escapes, but not in combat."

"Moreover, it's not certain if all four have entered the 'Energy-Introducing Realm,' perhaps none have, although it is the first of the Nine Realms. It's not easy to break through that threshold."

"Left-path demon people without inheritance, at most having encountered some Exotic Skill by chance or possessing some special bonds—strictly speaking, they do count as individuals practising Cultivation, but not truly Cultivators."

"With the Power within me, I'm practically risk-free in a one-on-one confrontation."

"However, if they indeed are a human trafficking gang and have already been successful, then it seems I must visit the county government. I hope it doesn't come to that. Boss Jia mentioned that the county leader has requested the arrival of personnel from Forbidden Immortal Hall dispatched by the court, but he didn't specify when they would arrive. If it's only some ordinary constables, these Four Beasts probably won't take them seriously and would swagger off without any concern."

Having settled his thoughts, Tao Qian patiently began to wait.

As he had been wandering around all afternoon, it didn't take long for the day to fade into evening.

Seeking Immortal County, night fell.

The crowd on the street gradually dispersed, leaving only some nighttime snack vendors setting up, the clusters of lights flickering.

Those Four Beasts were extremely cunning, always hiding in the alleys near the peripheral areas of East Street. With Zhang Xian, who had mastered hypnotic techniques, occasionally casting spells, no one could detect them. Even the patrolling constables were oblivious to their presence and did not approach to drive them away.

The sole "exception" was Tao Qian.

He was fully immersed in his role as a hunter, constantly hidden in the shadows, waiting for the right moment.

Not long after, when the voice of a night watchman rang from afar

On the carriage, two men suddenly alighted.

The goateed elder, Yang Ding, as well as the excessively indulgent pretty boy, Zhang Xian.

After alighting, those two looked around for a moment and then headed deep into East Street.

At the time of parting, they even turned their heads back to say a few words to someone inside the carriage.

Despite some distance, Tao Qian exerted his utmost effort and still managed to hear the gist of it.

Though he appeared as a mortal scholar, both his body and soul had already become non-human entities.

The power of the Bo Dragon Bloodline had completely transformed his shell. Merely describing his combat ability as "able to tear apart lower-ranked Demon and Monster Beasts" was a vague summary. The enhancement of other senses, although not documented in his Record, was acutely felt by Tao Qian.

Zhang Xian's voice was unexpectedly magnetic, even carrying a certain enchanting charm that made him feel approachable.

At the same time, his words also directly confirmed what Tao Qian had already witnessed.

"Zhao Dou, Lu Daniu, guard this place well. If something unexpected happens, sound the whistle."

"Miss Zhou from the Zhou Family awakened some kind of abnormal trait involving flesh and blood a few days ago. It is said to have caught the attention of a major household clan. We are ordered to come here, and while the Zhou family is still unguarded, we must abduct the girl and present her to

General Tang, to aid him in mastering a powerful spell from his Lifebound Scripture."

"This is a significant deal, utterly different from those ordinary goods we traded in the past."

"Once this job is done, if we can win General Tang's favor, the reward of silver coins is a minor matter, but whether we can be taught the scriptures and magic skills is what truly counts."

"Whether the four of us brothers can prosper depends on this time."

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After giving the instructions, the pretty-faced Zhang Xian, along with the sleazy-faced goateed elder, Yang Ding, quickly reached the high-walled courtyard of a wealthy residence under the cover of night.

Though both possessed Evil Techniques, they failed to notice a secretive figure following behind them.

Tao Qian had not yet experienced combat, but the Bo Dragon Bloodline was indeed remarkable.

If he focused entirely on concealment, the slight breeze in the air would actively carry away any trace of Tao Qian's presence.

Unless there was some unconventional way to give an alert, no one could detect a colorless, odorless, and utterly silent person following them.

These two beasts clearly had planned ahead and arrived at a large courtyard known as "Zhou Mansion."

There stood the goateed Yang Ding, striking a bizarre pose, determining the directions.

He then began to chant quietly as if reciting a spell.

Soon, wisps of earth-yellow energy rose up from the ground, clinging to his hands.

"Ha!"

Suddenly, Yang Ding yelled out.

He placed both hands on Zhang Xian's shoulders, with earth-yellow brilliance flashing.

In the next second, Zhang's figure abruptly turned into a yellow shadow, diving into the ground and disappearing, evidently headed towards Miss Zhou's boudoir.

Witnessing this scene, Tao Qian's pupils contracted slightly.

This was the second time he saw a cultivator casting a spell, and although Yang Ding's Subterranean Evasion technique was not as impressive in its spectacle as the crazed young Daoist at the pier,

it was still utterly miraculous for Tao Qian.

After the casting was over, Yang Ding evidently suffered considerable exertion, and there seemed to be some side effects as his body uncontrollably trembled.

He slowly took out a black and yellow object from his chest, resembling a "dung ball."

He scraped off two pieces with his fingernail and stuffed them into his nose.

"Hisss"

This sleazy old man immediately began to enjoy it as if he was drawing from a pipe.

His body's trembling eased.

It was at that moment, after pondering for half a second in the shadows, Tao Qian moved.

Once he made a decision, Tao Qian did not hesitate.

With his current body's affinity for wind and absolute control over strength,

Tao Qian's figure "floated" like a ghost behind Yang Ding, without any pretense, reached out a hand boldly.

So swiftly that even Tao Qian himself was startled, his hand had already grabbed the sleazy old man's neck.

Yang Ding, this licentious beast, had done too many heinous deeds.

Always harboring ill-intentions, even while suffering the toll of his spellcasting, he remained vigilant and prepared.

The moment he felt unfamiliar hands on his neck and sensed the terrifying power within that grasp, he immediately paled, swiftly formed seals with his hands, and skipped chanting the spell.

He yelled out, and a surge of yellow light appeared.

His form was about to vanish into the ground.

But at that very moment, Tao Qian swiftly drew close, slightly opened his mouth, and likewise issued a low shout.

However, this shout, to Yang Ding's ears, was utterly different.

"Roar!"

In an instant, Yang Ding heard a drum sound that seemed to come from an ancient wilderness.

In that drumbeat was a power that his demon-like being absolutely could not resist.

For a moment, he seemed to see a terrifying exotic beast somewhere between a dragon and a Bo, roaring with the storm, thunder, and lightning as it charged, directly dispersing his other ethereal form, followed by his will, and lastly his soul, as if it was torn apart by a storm, leaving not even a trace.

Until the moment before his death, Yang Ding was shocked and infuriated, wanting to turn his head to clearly see who was attacking him.

But as he dissipated into the ether, he was unable to do so, only sinking into darkness in fear.

After his death, within the alley,

Tao Qian looked at his empty hands, then at the pile of clothes on the ground, and was also stunned.

"What happened? I didn't even get a chance to exert any force. I merely followed the Bo Dragon's Fragment's innate battle instinct and shouted."

"That was it? This Heterodox Demon, was his body and soul that fragile?"