

## Chapter 11: Empty Millstone (2)

This person's pupils were abnormally dark without even a single glint of starlight and gave a haunting vibe. Two dark shadows hung under his eyes and his skin was so deathly pale that one could see the faint veins of blue underneath. To come face-to-face with someone like that so suddenly was quite terrifying. If it were any normal person, as soon as he turned around and saw such a ghost, he would have immediately jumped so high in fright that he'd hit the ceiling.

However, Xuan Min and Xue Xian were obviously not just any ordinary humans.

One of them was audacious while the other was unwavering—the two probably had no idea how to spell the word “fear”.

And so, this icicle-like Baldy and the vile spawn on his waist stared at the person dead on with identical expressionless faces.

The face of the person who just arrived turned pale when he looked up, patting his own chest as he mumbled, “Why did you suddenly turn around? It scared the heck out of me.”

Xuan Min, “...”

Xue Xian, “...” Nerdy has definitely become brain dead from all that reading.

The person standing behind them was none other than Jiang Shining.

Xue Xian felt a little troubled upon seeing him. He thought, If this Nerdy would have heard everything that Advisor Liu just said, he might have rolled up his sleeves and charged right in. Who knows, maybe this man who is as thin as a stick would even be able to beat up the two old fellas.

But judging from Jiang Shining's tone, he knew that Jiang Shining had not heard those insults about his parents.

Because of this, Xue Xian felt somewhat relieved, thinking, At least I won't have to worry about Nerdy going knocking on death's door. He hung onto the mouth of the pocket and looked at Jiang Shining with evident displeasure as he chased him off. “Turn back at once! Leave, leave!”

“Why are you in such a rush to get me to leave?” Jiang Shining would argue with Xue Xian sometimes but in reality, he had a soft temperament. Otherwise, he wouldn't have put up with Xue Xian bossing him around for so many days, having to endure complaints all the while stuffing food into his mouth to shut him up.

As Jiang Shining asked “why”, his body had already responded to Xue Xian’s words. He turned around to step over the threshold and exited through the back door. Though confused, he did not question anything.

Seeing this scene, Xuan Min was about to put down the hand he had just raised when he heard Xue Xian question him angrily, “Baldy, what were you raising your hand for? Have you finally had enough of Nerdy’s idiotic look and want to give him a round of beating?”

Xuan Min, “...” By that logic, the first one to get a beating should be you.

“...” Jiang Shining asked, “Wait, what have I done to deserve a beating?”

Xue Xian urged, “ Keep walking. Stop talking nonsense.”

Xuan Min, “...” This restless thing has the nerve to reprimand another from saying nonsense.

But Xue Xian’s guess wasn’t entirely wrong. As a wandering ghost that depended on possessing items such as a paper to have a human form, he was only hanging on to it by a breath of *yin* energy. The Gate of Life was located in that three-inch hollow area behind the neck. If he was hacked with a hand in that area, that final breath of *yin* energy would disperse and he would turn back into his original form.

Xuan Min was worried that Jiang Shining would act rashly and mess things up. He wanted to smack him back into paper form, making him easy to carry. After all, there was already a lawless half-cripple to worry about. Wouldn’t a spirit that could walk around as they pleased only cause chaos?

But who would have known that he would turn out to be an obedient person. Xuan Min decided to temporarily bear with it, retracted his posed hand, and followed him through the backdoor.

He grabbed onto the back of Jiang Shining’s collar and, with a turn of his toes, hid them both in a tight gap between the corridor and the side of the house. If he didn’t want to make a sound when he walked, he could really do so without even the slightest sound of a thump. His monk robes were light and thin and the hem fluttered as they flashed past a withered tree branch, brushing against the wall’s corner as it landed back in place. However, there was not even a single speck of dirt on it and the withered tree branch remained undisturbed.

Xue Xian’s gaze swept past the unmoving withered branch, followed by the string of copper coins hanging from Xuan Min’s waist. He thought that this Baldy was quite mysterious indeed.

Xuan Min’s timing was perfect, too. Just as the tip of his robes touched the ground on the other side of the wall, Advisor Liu and his old friend stepped through the backdoor. Most likely, the two were getting on in years and their hearing had been dulled. They did not notice anything strange.

Jiang Shining managed to catch a glimpse of Advisor Liu's silhouette from between the gap. Although he was extremely unhappy to see Advisor Liu, he couldn't help but wonder, Why did Xuan Min have to avoid Advisor Liu to such an extent as if it would be too troublesome to deal with him?

It was a good thing that he feared posing trouble for others and so he never said anything out of line, never did anything with haste, and never tried anything funny. Even if he was brimming with questions, he would hold his breath and stay behind the wall obediently. With wide eyes, he watched as Advisor Liu walked through the courtyard towards the main house with the stranger trailing behind.

When Advisor Liu was about to enter the main house, a murmur was heard. "Father?"

Xue Xian, who was behind the wall, frowned as he said, "Great. The real idiot is here. And he picked such great timing, too".

As expected, Liu Chong appeared out of nowhere to stand right under the corridor's roof and called for his father.

The first thing Xue Xian looked at was his robes. Back at the Gate of Death, the "Liu Chong" they met was wearing an ochre coloured robe, but this one at the corridor was wearing a thick, grey-blue robe; the exact same as the one that he wore in the spell earlier.

Xuan Min, who was hiding in the gap, stepped out. Before Advisor Liu could react, he had flashed to where Liu Chong was with a single large step and reached out to grab him before he could scream. He dragged him in a rough manner towards the narrow doorway of the house. Fortunately, the courtyard wasn't big and could be crossed with just a few steps and so the distance between the door and the gap was closed within a blink of the eye.

Advisor Liu, who was left stunned in front of the main house, finally reacted. His face changed, and he immediately lifted his foot to charge over.

Luckily, Xuan Min reacted faster and hid behind the door with a leap and a twist.

*Guang*—<sup>1</sup>

The narrow door of the house was slammed shut by Xuan Min while Jiang Shining instinctively barricaded the door with his hands.

But as soon as he looked up and saw the blockhead Liu Chong's blank expression, he let out a puzzled shriek.

Once behind the door, Xuan Min let go of Liu Chong's hand. Xue Xian discreetly looked up and thought, This Baldy looks so skinny but he actually has so freaking much strength. That

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<sup>1</sup> 咣: A sound effect the equivalent of a creak of a door.

Liu Chong is nothing like the paper-thin Jiang Shining and he's also a blockhead who doesn't know how to cooperate. To drag an entire person like that with his arms, just how much strength would one need?

Xuan Min did not have to look down to know that a certain vile spawn was staring at him. He could feel his gaze on him from the corner of his eye. Who knows what he was thinking about.

Regardless, it would definitely be nothing proper.

With an expressionless face, he moved his hand towards his waist, using it to cover up that eyesore who had an expression as if he had died with his eyes open. The hand immediately got thrown off by both of Xue Xian's hands.

Xue Xian, *Ptooeey!* How dare you?! Did you think that you could cover a dragon's head as you liked? Who do you think you are?!

"Has the...the mole on his face changed places somehow?" babbled Jiang Shining as he pointed at Liu Chong with a bewildered face. As soon as he had spoken his piece, he felt that it was impolite to point at someone and so he quickly retracted his finger and looked awkwardly at Xuan Min.

Xuan Min froze after Xue Xian threw his hand off.

"Wasn't it on the left? How did it transfer to the right?" questioned Jiang Shining softly.

*Translation: X*

*Translation Check: iarrod*

*Checking: ascii*

*—Suibian Subs and Scanlations*

## Chapter 12: Empty Millstone (3)

It wasn't a good idea to contemplate these words too closely and as Jiang Shining said them, he himself couldn't help but shiver. This shiver was caught head-on by Xue Xian who once again raised his head.

Xue Xian was quite impressed by this Nerdy. He was a ghost himself and yet he was shameless enough to be afraid of ghosts!

Jiang Shining's whispered words were soft and fast. Hearing them, Xuan Min's brows knitted and quickly relaxed again. He said monotonously, "I understand now."

Xue Xian said, "The heck you do!"

He had a naturally impetuous personality and an explosive temper and he ended up running into a mellow Jiang Shining and then a Xuan Min who would never run even if the sky was falling! Xue Xian felt like his entire lifespan was being shortened. Too impatient to wait for Xuan Min's reaction, he flipped out of the hidden pouch and with a couple of twists and tumbles noiselessly grabbed onto Liu Chong's pants. Within the blink of an eye, he had already disappeared underneath those thick grey-blue robes.

The remark that Xuan Min calmly made immediately roused the foolish Liu Chong whose reactions were a beat behind. As soon as Jiang Shining raised his head, he locked eyes with Liu Chong.

The pupils of those eyes were unfocused, big but soulless, and looked very strange. With them staring fixedly at anyone, they could even end up wetting their pants.

Jiang Shining turned, wanting to run away. Little did he know that encountering ghosts was just like encountering wild dogs—in a standoff, they may hesitate and hold back but as soon as you moved a little, they would immediately pounce. Liu Chong let out a low growl from the back of his throat, subconsciously forgetting about Xuan Min, and rushed at Jiang Shining, who had made a slight movement.

The Nerdy's ghastly pale face rapidly turned green. His frightened yell had barely escaped him when it was forcibly swallowed back down. Even at a time like this, he still could not put aside what books described as "a gentlemanly image". He wanted to run but not in an overly awkward manner. With one leg about to spring up and the other rooted in place, he almost twisted himself into a knot.

*Thunk—!*

The uncoordinated Jiang Shining finally fell to the ground as expected and began using his two palms to scurry backwards.

The “Liu Chong” fabricated by the array possessed the foolishness of the real Liu Chong, his every movement clumsy and illogical. He gave off the impression where one would not know how to even begin to try to stop him.

Jiang Shining watched as Liu Chong came rushing at him. He sucked in a breath of cold air, shrunk back, and closed his eyes.

Within a flash, a muffled *thump* sounded. Jiang Shining felt only the breeze produced by sleeves sweeping over him. Following this, the stone tiles in front of him trembled violently for a second. Those ice-cold fingers that he could imagine strangling his neck never reached him.

Grimacing, Jiang Shining carefully opened his eyes only to see Liu Chong sprawled head-over-heels at his feet. He had clearly taken a hard tumble for some reason.

The fool probably didn’t think that he would fall and had reacted a bit slowly. He didn’t even have time to stretch out his arms for support and thus landed squarely on his face.

He was shocked for a moment but quickly made use of both arms and legs to scramble up, all the while shaking dirt off his body and staring at the ground in disbelief.

Meanwhile, Xue Xian had just rolled out from Liu Chong’s grey-blue robes, holding a thin strip of cloth in his hand. Somehow, it looked quite like a...

Waistband?

Jiang Shining took another look and discovered that the fool had fallen only because right as he pounced, his pants had fallen to his ankles and tangled up his feet. Liu Chong was clumsy in the first place and his feet were not very agile so with his pants tripping him up, he took a good fall. And since he knocked his forehead, he stayed on the ground shaking his head for a long time and still could not recover.

As Xue Xian rolled onto the ground with the waistband, he handily tossed it onto Jiang Shining’s face. “Stop idling and tie this dummy’s hands and feet together!”

Then, he turned to Xuan Min with a disdainful expression and said, “Quick, pick me up. Pulling out that ragged cloth strip almost ripped my arms apart”.

Pick me up...

Jiang Shining was silently speechless. How is a paraplegic able to keep himself so busy, somersaulting around like that?

On second thought, it occurred to him that *he* was actually the hindrance causing trouble for others and suddenly felt quite ashamed. No longer concerned about the fact that “pulling out someone’s waistband” was ungentlemanly, he obediently used a long strip of cloth to tie Liu Chong’s left hand and right foot together, muttering “excuse me” as he did so.

Xue Xian scoffed at his sickly-sweet habits.

In order to help these two scoundrels escape danger, he had to drag along his two useless legs and put down his pride to pull out someone else's waistband. This Baldy ought to kneel respectfully with a *thump* and use both hands to raise him up and place him back in his original spot. Who knew that this Baldy lacked any good sense—truly a lowlife!

Xue Xian tilted his head up to glare at Xuan Min and intended to glare at him till he felt some guilt. However, at this moment, he discovered that Xuan Min's left hand was wrapped around the string of copper coins at his waist. Clearly, he was about to detach them to do something.

Could it be that the Baldy had already decided to act?

It probably never crossed Xuan Min's mind that "pulling out the waistband" was a possible subduing tactic nor could he have predicted that things would turn out this way. He stared blankly for a moment before realizing what had just happened.

And so, Xue Xian could only watch as the Baldy once again removed his fingers from the string of copper coins.

When Xuan Min picked him up off the ground, Xue Xian suddenly felt a little regretful—if only he had known sooner, he would not have rushed to pull that fool's waistband. Perhaps, he would have finally seen just what the baldy was capable of!

Having missed this superb opportunity, Xue Xian's mood deflated instantly. His entire paper body went soft and his head drooped as if he was being hanged while he stayed suspended from the opening of Xuan Min's hidden pouch.

Xuan Min glanced over him with a furrowed brow, thinking that he might be up to some new antics. Using a finger, he lifted the paper head hanging from the pouch opening. While his finger was in contact, the paper head just barely remained upright; as soon as his finger let go, it flopped down again, boneless.

Xuan Min, "..."

With this, Xuan Min could pretty much confirm that this vile spawn had caught some disease. He shook his head and said "Let's go" to Jiang Shining without much of an expression.

As soon as the words were said, Advisor Liu and his party began banging ferociously on the narrow door. After a couple of consecutive strikes, even the bolt of the wooden door began loosening up a bit.

*Bang, bang, bang—!*

A quiver ran through Jiang Shining's body at the sound of the door being struck. He hastened to follow behind Xuan Min.

Going through numerous doors in this maze-like mansion, they bumped into many groups of people along the way. Those people would be talking among themselves as if they were actors in some great play. But they turned hostile as soon as they caught sight of Xuan Min's group, immediately becoming enshrouded in a ghostly aura. Some quick and some slow, they followed behind Xuan Min's group, screeching. They were like kites, attached behind them at a distance neither too far nor too close.

By the time Jiang Shining turned at the corner and entered a door, he had jumped out of his skin more than twice. Among those people were a few nameless servant girls and boys of the Liu family and three Advisor Lius, two Liu Chongs, two wooden cane-wielding, small-footed old grannies and the like...

Two very frail-looking little servant girls used their bare hands to rip apart an old tree barring their way while they were in pursuit. Although that old tree was drying out and near death, it could not be described as thick and sturdy. And yet, to tear it apart, those hands had to be as sharp as knives!

Jiang Shining felt a wave of lingering fear as he watched this. Before all this, he had woken up in an empty room and had only gone through two doors before bumping into Xue Xian and the others. That was really some dumb luck he had.

By now, if he still had not realized that the doors and paths of this mansion had significant patterns, then all of his studies would have been for naught.

Fortunately, Xuan Min appeared completely unperturbed. His strides were long and quick but his demeanor did not carry a single hint of fear nor panic. He seemed to have already made his calculations, entering courtyards through doors without any hesitation. Jiang Shining self-proclaimed that he wasn't bad at directions but he still dizzily lost his way among these twists and turns. However, Xuan Min still remained clear-headed.

After hanging there for quite some time, Xue Xian suddenly raised his head like a corpse coming back to life and asked a question, "Baldy, where are we going?"

Xuan Min replied, "The Gate of Life, through the Gate of Death."

With his voice full of suspicion, Xue Xian said, "Unless I've gone blind, we've passed through this courtyard three times already."

Xuan Min said calmly, "The Gate of Concealment is here".

Xue Xian asked, "And so?"

Xuan Min said, "You'll understand if you look behind you."

Xue Xian silently lifted his droopy head and put aside his pride to turn around. He saw a wall of white linen. "...Are you making fun of me? Behind me is your tattered old monk robe."

Xuan Min, "..."



On the other hand, Jiang Shining also turned to look behind him. After taking a few more hurried steps, he suddenly realised something. "Where did those people back there go? Why did they disappear? Just now, I could still hear their growling."

Only then did Xue Xian understand what Xuan Min had meant. Tilting up his head, he said, "Did you purposely shake them off?"

Xuan Min replied with a bland "Mn".

Among the Eight Gates, neither ominous nor auspicious, the two neutral doors of Concealment and Circumstance were not completely useless. The Gate of Concealment was a place for hiding away, making it perfect for seeking refuge.

By entering and exiting three times, Xuan Min cleanly lost the kites behind them.

Then, turning on his heel, he left the yard through the south-west narrow door, walking down a long corridor with large strides.

"Isn't this the Gate of Death that we accidentally entered?"

Just when Xue Xian expressed his surprise, he saw Xuan Min open the narrow door at the corner of the corridor and push Jiang Shining inside with a single motion. "The Gate of Death is the path of the ghosts. To you, it is highly auspicious."

Jiang Shining was startled by the push and stumbled a couple of steps, stepping over the threshold and into the courtyard.

Liu Chong and Old Granny Liu who had been inside originally had long since been drawn out by Xue Xian and Xuan Min. However, it was barren now; aside from Jiang Shining, there wasn't even the shadow of a ghost left.

As soon as both of Jiang Shining's feet stepped into the yard, he promptly disappeared, dispersing like bubbles.

"Did Nerdy exit the array?" asked Xue Xian.

Xuan Min nodded and began making a beeline through twists and bends towards the Gate of Life.

The location of the Gate of Life, Xue Xian was even more familiar with...

"Isn't this Liu Chong's shabby old room?" Xue Xian looked upon the shadowed little room at the end of the stone-paved path. No matter how he looked at it, that place shrouded in gloominess could hardly have anything to do with a "Gate of Life". "If you tell me that this is the Gate of Death, I'd find it more believable."

"It once was," Xuan Min replied in a deep voice. "However, the eight directions of this Liu Mansion have been reversed. The Gate of Death has become the Gate of Life."

“How so?” Hearing this, Xue Xian furrowed his brow. Suddenly, he recalled Jiang Shining mentioning before that “the mole on Liu Chong’s face had switched positions. It used to be on the left, but now it was on the right”. An idea flashed through his mind. “The mirror?”

Xuan Min lowered his gaze and swept a glance over the paper head. This vile spawn was indeed rowdy but not stupid. “With the Liu Mansion’s previous Eight Gates, the Gate of Death was located at the room on the south-west side, the main room on the north-west was the Gate of Opening and on the north-east was the Gate of Life.”

Xue Xian thought back to what Xuan Min had asked Advisor Liu as he stood outside Liu Chong’s room...

The north-west room belonged to Advisor Liu, whereas his still pre-pubescent son, Liu Jin, lived in the north-east room.

The Gate of Opening was the head of the Eight Gates, an analogy to setting foundations and establishing campaigns. What Advisor Liu wanted was none other than to rise through the ranks and have a successful career. So naturally, he would stake claim to the Gate of Opening.

All of a sudden, Xue Xian realized the purpose of Advisor Liu’s Array of River Draining into Sea.

It was unfortunate for the foolish, slow-witted Liu Chong who could not tell the difference between life and death, *yin* and *yang*. After living for more than twenty years, his most presentable skill was probably folding those half palm-sized ingots. Using this sole expertise, he filled a room with his filial piety, even making separate piles and labelling names for fear of being partial.

Mountains of gold and silver abound. All is safe and sound...

Who knew whether Old Granny Liu had ever said such words in front of a young Advisor Liu while burning paper ingots. However, even if she had, he probably would have forgotten all about it. Otherwise, how could he bear to treat his foolish son in this way, casting him aside like old shoes.

The Array of River Draining into Sea.

Liu Chong was the river and the Liu family was the sea.

It was just that Advisor Liu probably had not realised that *fengshui* arrays must be completely perfect. Any slight variation could cause Heaven and Earth to reverse, turning calamity into auspiciousness and turning auspiciousness into calamity. The copper mirror that Old Granny Liu and Liu Chong had buried under the tree together, representing “switching auspicious and calamitous omens for yearly peace”, happened to be such a variable.

And so, the Eight Gates reversed and the Gate of Death became the Gate of Life.

...Just then, only a few steps away from that gloomy little room, the narrow door leading to the main room creaked.

Xue Xian was already becoming numb due to these sudden turn of events. He thought, It couldn't be another Liu Chong, right?

Plastered to Xuan Min's waist, he stretched his neck to look...

It really was Liu Chong again!

"There's no end to this!" Xue Xian's temper rose up in a second. He lifted a hand to vault out but just as half of his body made it out, he stopped again. Shooting a sidelong glance at the string of copper coins by the Baldy's waist, he thought, Perfect chance!

And so this paper named Xue, with tongue sticking out and claws outstretched, snagged Baldy's copper coins like a fish hook and stuffed them into Baldy's hand. Head upturned, he said, "What are you waiting for?"

Xuan Min used a finger to press him back down. "Do not rush. This person's mole is on the left."

"..." Xue Xian choked on air in anger, his neck once again falling to hang on the opening of Xuan Min's hidden pouch.

*Translation: radishtears*

*Translation Check: iarrod*

*Final Checking: ascii*

—Suibian Subs and Scanlations

## Chapter 13: Empty Millstone (4)

This time, as Xuan Min said, Liu Chong really had a mole on the left and was wearing the grey-blue robe from that morning. From head to toe, there were no signs of any problems.

Clearly, this time, it was the right person.

When Liu Chong entered from the narrow door, his expression was three parts confusion and seven parts frustration. He hesitantly stepped through the doorway, took two halting steps forward, and then finally saw Xuan Min.

He was startled for a moment and then his expression turned sombre as he frowned. “Just now, I saw, I saw Grandmother...”

“Just over there.” The blockhead pointed outside the door as he spoke.

Grandmother?

Granny Liu?

They had just escaped the mob chasing them. This blockhead couldn’t have attracted another group over, could he?!

Hearing this, Xue Xian lifted himself up from Xuan Min’s hidden pouch, raising his head to look at Liu Chong, and asked without thinking, “Where is she?”

“I chased but Grandmother left,” the blockhead’s expression was filled with sorrow, his voice fretful. He didn’t even notice that the question hadn’t been voiced by Xuan Min. “She didn’t see me and I couldn’t find her. I couldn’t find her at all.”

He twisted his fingers together, looking extremely mournful. With his head raised, he anxiously stared out the door for a long while, repeating disappointedly, “I wanted to talk to Grandmother...”

Xue Xian thought about the conversation Advisor Liu had had with his friend—Granny Liu had already passed away and, according to the rumours in town, she had died while being treated by Jiang Shining’s father and mother. After she died, the Jiangs’ medicine hall caught fire and burned down completely.

Jiang Shining had been dead for three years so Granny Liu must have been dead for around three years as well.

Blockheads were usually inflexible and single-minded—if he said he thought about it, then he really must have thought about it day and night. To him, these three years must have been exceedingly lonely and long.

"Let's go." Xuan Min neutrally gestured towards him and immediately started walking towards that decrepit old room, not waiting a moment longer.

Perhaps because his severe, monkish manners were overly intimidating or perhaps because his immediate movement to walk didn't allow for further thinking, Liu Chong subconsciously followed along hurriedly. He stumbled along and chased up to Xuan Min's side before muttering again, "I...I want to find Grandmother."

"What's the hurry? Let's go back to the room first," Xuan Min couldn't help but urge persuasively.

Liu Chong restrained himself for a moment and said, "I'm still...I'm still in a hurry."

"Deal with it!" said Xue Xian bluntly.

Liu Chong stared at the profile of Xuan Min's cold face for a bit, appearing a little scared. He restrained himself for another two steps, then braved himself and mumbled, "How are you speaking without opening your mouth?"

Xuan Min, "..."

"Ventriloquism. Uh, simply put, it's using one's stomach to speak," Xue Xian lied through his teeth.

Liu Chong's eyes roved around slowly and his glance landed on Xuan Min's stomach.

Xuan Min, "..."

Luckily, as they spoke, they had already arrived in front of the room. Once they entered, they would be able to escape from the array.

Xuan Min did not hesitate, briskly stepping forward and at the same time pulling Liu Chong, who was standing half a step behind him. Liu Chong stumbled and set a single foot through the doorway.

Just as Liu Chong's other foot was about to step inside, a *dudu* noise came from somewhere, sounding like something striking on stone tiles.

"Huh?" Liu Chong probably had never reacted to something this quickly in his life before.

His foot paused, still raised in the air and he subconsciously murmured, "Grandmother." He hurriedly pulled back the foot he had placed through the doorway, turned around, and rushed out.

"Hey! Wait!" Xue Xian could not help but shout.

He saw Xuan Min raise a hand as if he was about to tug at the blockhead, but just as he lifted his hand, he heard a dim buzzing noise inside his head. His vision blacked out and the world around him spun.

In the blink of an eye, the scene in front of him changed—they were standing in front of the door to Liu Chong's room and in front of them was Jiang Shining's white face with Liu Chong nowhere to be found.

Clearly, they had escaped from the array. However, right before they did, Liu Chong had pulled his foot back and therefore had been left inside the array.

"You've finally returned." Jiang Shining heaved a sigh of relief on seeing them unharmed. But before he could fully relax, his nerves pulled taut again and he asked, "Where are Eldest Young Master Liu and Advisor Liu? Still stuck inside?"

Xuan Min nodded, turned his head, and stepped straight into the room without a single word.

With Xuan Min keeping his mouth shut, Jiang Shining was a little too scared to ask. He just slowly followed behind him. Standing in front of the doorway to the inner room, he saw Xuan Min crouch down in front of the copper nails and talismans nailed down to the ground.

Jiang Shining understood absolutely nothing about these kinds of things but Xue Xian knew a thing or two.

There were two methods to break an array: either from the inside or from the outside.

If one was trapped inside, then naturally they would want to find the door of the trap. But if one was outside the array and wanted to free the people trapped inside it, then the simplest method would be to destroy the array.

Of course, destroying an array is a task that takes technique, Xue Xian thought. After all, those people dedicated to hunting ghosts and spirits relied on removing these arrays to make a living. If they could be easily removed, how would those people live?

The moment he saw Xuan Min crouched in front of the yellow talisman, he became alert. He craned his neck and kept his eyes wide open, planning to properly witness just how this Baldy was going to dissolve the array and what kind of talents he possessed.

He reached out his hand, he has reached out his hand!

Xue Xian muttered internally, not taking his gaze off of Xuan Min as he reached out his hand towards the yellow talismans on the floor and pinched one of the copper nails.

Was he going to cut his hand to draw a drop of blood?

Or was he about to use some ability dependent on the finger?

Xue Xian held his breath as he watched and guessed.

Just then, he saw Xuan Min use some force to pull out that copper nail from the ground and then tear off the yellow talisman on top.

And then...

Xuan Min pulled out a second nail, tore off a second yellow talisman.

Then, a third.

And then, there was no more.

Xue Xian, “.....”

He watched as Xuan Min used the most common method to destroy the copper nails and yellow talismans, even casually wiping his hands. In an instant, his expression became as if his parents had died, as if he had chugged down the waters of hell. He did not know what other people specialized in this job would think upon witnessing such a sight, but personally, he sure did not want to live anymore.

Xuan Min got up and went to the outer room, looked around on the table, and found a matchstick. He struck it on the wall to light it up and burned all three yellow talismans completely without hesitation.

Of course, to Xue “didn’t want to live anymore” Xian, it no longer mattered if he observed this step or not.

From the looks of it, just like that, the Baldy had probably destroyed the array for sure and they would soon hear the blockhead Liu Chong’s wailing once again.

Yet, even after ten minutes, Liu Chong and Advisor Liu did not appear.

Xue Xian stretched his neck out to peer outside the door and then looked back inside the room. Except for Jiang Shining, there wasn’t even a shadow of a ghost to be seen.

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It didn’t work? Or was Baldy just dragging things out for suspense?

Going by what had happened before, the *yin*<sup>2</sup> energy in the room was very strong, in part due to the Array of River Draining into Sea and in part due to its location at the Gate of Death.

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<sup>2</sup> *Yin* = dark power

Currently, the Gate of Death had turned into the Gate of Life and the Array of River Draining into Sea had been simply and brutally destroyed by Baldy, and yet, the house's *yin* energy exhibited no signs of dissipating.

The morning light was already shining brightly into the Liu courtyard from the east. Due to a firewall obstructing the rays, a large swathe of shade covered the front of the room; half of the room was in the shade, the other half in the light, just like the intersection of *yin* and *yang*.

"Ah..."

Xue Xian raised his head to look at Jiang Shining and said, "Why are you sighing all of a sudden? You're not the one trapped inside the array."

"I didn't sigh. Wasn't that you sighing just now?" replied Jiang Shining with an innocent expression.

"Of course not! I never sigh. It's too discouraging," said Xue Xian firmly.

Jiang Shining, "..."

Xue Xian, "..."

They both stopped talking, exchanged a glance and both slowly moved their gazes onto Xuan Min's face.

"Ah..."

Another soft sigh, however, Xuan Min's mouth did not open. Even if he had moved his mouth, they still wouldn't have thought that he was the one who sighed, because this time, the sound dragged on a bit, sounding shaky towards the end. The breath was without strength and was obviously the sound of someone old. No matter what, it couldn't have come from Xuan Min.

"It sounds like an old lady," Xue Xian guessed.

"Don't you think that it doesn't seem like a sigh?" Jiang Shining gestured from side to side. "Rather it sounds like a tired exhale...just like the one elders with weak bodies give out. After walking a long distance or carrying something heavy, tired and not breathing properly, yet without the strength to pant, they would sound like this—as if they were sighing but not quite."

After thinking for a bit, he added, "This person sounds breathy and tired, soft and weak. They are ill."



"You can deduce that from just this little sigh?" Xue Xian looked at him dubiously.

Jiang Shining waved his hands saying, "If my parents were here, they would be able to understand even more from their hearing."

"Ah," Xue Xian answered and fell silent though he was thinking internally.

Old lady? Tired panting? And sick as well?

Hearing him put it this way, it really did seem like a possibility.

Xue Xian suddenly thought of a person. He raised his paper claw to pat rapidly at Xuan Min. Fearing that the force he could exert was not strong enough, as he hit he also shouted, "Baldy, look at me!"

Xuan Min lowered his head.

Xue Xian raised his head. "..."

After a moment, Xue Xian choked on his words and finally waved his hand in a shooing motion saying, "Nevermind, actually don't look at me. Put your eyeballs away."

Xuan Min, "..."

This was his first time hearing that eyeballs could be "put away". This vile spawn really was unreasonable.

He did not know that in the previous half of his life, Xue Xian had gotten used to being cocky—if he wanted to go to heaven, he could go to heaven and frequently sneered down on everyone. He had never been looked down on by someone before. Up till now, Xuan Min would sometimes glance at him and that was fine. But to be seriously stared down like this, he truly couldn't tolerate it.

Dragons—they all cared about saving face.

Xue Xian could ignore other things, but in a situation like this he especially cared about saving face.

Xuan Min did not glance away according to his wishes. Instead, as if deliberately defying him, his heavy gaze remained on Xue Xian.

He really is a bastard, Xue Xian thought resentfully.

He turned an unsightly "I died with regrets" expression towards Xuan Min and fake smiled while rolling his eyes. Then, he turned himself around to speak with the back of his head facing Xuan Min, "I'm talking about Granny Liu...Have you ever heard of this one particularly

extreme method of guarding a home? I had previously heard of it in the city. It was said that if an elder passed away at home, burying them beneath the house would give the descendants continuous good fortune.”

What kind of grandchildren would be able to think up this type of an immoral deed?

“...” The student Jiang Shining felt like the courtesies and sense of honour that he had spent more than ten years learning had all been shattered.

“I have,” Xuan Min said in a low voice. “This method is called Construction of *Yin* Foundation, turning the human soul suppressed beneath the house into a *yin* spirit that will protect the house. If matched with a *fengshui* array, the effect is augmented.”

As they were speaking, there was a sound of another shaky sigh.

If the previous two sighs were a little inaudible, this one was clearer, enough to hear where it was coming from.

Xue Xian’s gaze swept over a patch of the wall on the right side of the room and walked over to it.

Paper ingots were spilled messily all over the ground, covering up a majority of the floor, such that it hadn’t been apparent to them until now that the ground underneath the paper ingots had been concealing a mystery. Xuan Min crouched down in front of the wall. From here, it was possible to see that the five wooden cabinets of the inner room matched up perfectly opposite from the three copper nails and yellow talismans.

Xuan Min swept some of the paper ingots aside with his hand, raised his index finger lightly, and knocked twice against the ground.

*Knock knock—*

The sound was curiously resonant. Hearing it, it was clear that the ground wasn’t solid.

“It’s hollow!” Xue Xian and Jiang Shining spoke at practically the same time.

Xuan Min glanced around. Following the wall, he found a place with a crack. His gaze followed the line of the crack and finally found four horizontal narrow cracks, which coincidentally were on a square tile whose sides were approximately the length of four hands.

“This seam...” Jiang Shining extended his hand to test it out. “In any case, even a finger can’t fit into it.”

The seams on all four sides were all extremely thin. Since even a finger could not fit into them, it meant that there was no way to pry up this stone slab. If the stone slab could not be pried open, then of course they would not be able to see the things stored under it.

Xue Xian looked at Jiang Shining's ghostly pale hands and then looked at Xuan Min's slender and clean hands and finally said with some difficulty, "All right, I'm the only one who can get through this crack. I'll deign to slip in and look inside for you guys."

I'll deign...

Jiang Shinight felt like this genius turn of phrase was seriously shameless.

After he spoke, Xue Xian resolutely loosened up his neck and climbed out of Xuan Min's hidden pouch.

Xuan Min didn't spare the effort of looking after this vile spawn and let him flip and scramble towards that crack in the stone. As Xue Xian went, he reached into his hidden pouch and retrieved a cloth bundle, peeling back the outer layer and revealing the inner layer. Inside the cloth bundle, from left to right, laid a line of uneven silver needles. The longer ones could reach from one's wrist to knuckles whereas the shorter ones were only as long as two phalanges.

There even appeared to be engravings at the tip of each silver needle, but because they were too miniscule, they could not be seen very clearly. Jiang Shining could only vaguely make them out from the side and was too embarrassed to move his head closer to see more clearly.

Xuan Min retrieved a slightly thicker needle from the cloth bundle and placed the rest back inside his hidden pouch.

Xue Xian was busy and just as he crawled with some difficulty towards the stone crack and was about to slip inside, a hand descended from the sky, pinched him by his head, and lifted him back.

He didn't even need to look to know that it was definitely that bastard's hand!

"...Baldy, this kind of evil behavior will have consequences!" said Xue Xian.

"I shall wait for them patiently then," replied Xuan Min calmly.

Then, he put Xue Xian, who had wasted all his efforts for nothing, back inside his hidden pouch, and stuck the needle in his hands into the stone crack and pressed on the end to forcefully pry it open.

They heard the echoey sound of stone tile scraping slowly grow in volume. That silver needle, which didn't look like it was strong enough to bend, was actually able to pry open the

stone tile on one side. Xuan Min's finger immediately grasped onto the side that was raised up and lifted the entire stone tile completely.

In that instant, innumerable cries that were filled with bitterness or mournfulness rushed forth like a tsunami.

Xue Xian felt like ten thousand pounds of force pushed against his chest, such that in his dizziness he lost all sense of direction. Good thing he was just a piece of paper, otherwise, his heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys would have all been thrown up from the force.

Jiang Shining's fearful, undignified cry and Xuan Min's low hum passed through his ear simultaneously. When he finally regained awareness, Jiang Shining had already rolled to the side of the wall from the force of the push and, with a popping sound, resumed his original form, a light and thin piece lying half dead on the ground.

Xuan Min also lifted his hand, pressed down on his chest, and coughed a number of times before slowly recovering.

"What is this thing?" Xue Xian had totally lost his strength and had to hang half-drooping on the hidden pouch's opening.

He weakly lifted his head a bit and looked towards that square hole in the ground. He saw that it was half-filled with yellow dirt and could vaguely see an iron chain peeking out. A yellow talisman was wrapped around the iron chain and, curiously, this iron chain was coiling and moving around in a circle.

With a frown, Xuan Min swept a glance at that slightly damp yellow dirt and lifted his head to look around the room.

Xue Xian watched in confusion as he stood up, walked to the table, rummaged for a brush that had lost half its bristles, and then returned near the hole. He used the brush to sweep away the yellow dirt.

"..." Xue Xian was really done with this Baldy and muttered to himself, "How pointlessly fussy. Will his fingers rot if they touch dirt?!"

The yellow dirt on the surface was quickly swept aside by Xuan Min and revealed the object hidden underneath.

"This is...a millstone?" said Xue Xian hesitantly.

From the looks of it, this circular stone block had a hole in the middle, a platform on the bottom, and, on the side, even had a horizontal lever. It was clearly a millstone. But it was particularly small, not much larger than a palm. The surface also was not ordinary. It was engraved with two sections of complex talisman symbols. One end of that silver chain was

fastened to the platform beneath the millstone whereas the other end was fastened on the horizontal lever.

Without the yellow dirt's buffer, the iron chain landed directly on top of the millstone and moved sluggishly, causing a fragmented clanging. With every inch it moved, the horizontal lever also turned a bit, as if next to the empty millstone an invisible person had been locked, pushing the millstone without pause day and night.

"Granny Liu?" Xue Xian called out without thinking.

"Ah..."

That extremely weary sigh sounded once again.

*Translation: yichen*

*Translation Check: yuedou*

*Final Checking: ascii*

*—Suibian Subs and Scanlations*

## Chapter 14: Empty Millstone (5)

Xue Xian felt goosebumps rise across his body.

Of course, it was impossible for paper bodies to get goosebumps and he was not scared. However, the thought of someone actually capable of burying their own mother under their house for a prosperous and smooth career made him think that some people in the world are ingeniously disgusting.

It would have been better to raise a millstone than to raise this son!

Xuan Min picked up the millstone, just larger than his palm, from the hole in the ground and placed it on the floor. He peeled the yellow talisman off the chains and lit a small fire to burn it all up.

While the yellow talisman burned, Xue Xian, who was hanging from Xuan Min's waist, could feel a faint buzz as if someone was tapping lightly on his bones with a small hammer. In short, it was not that comfortable.

This millstone had been buried underground for at least three years and during that period, it had absorbed much of the dark and resentful energy that passed by. Now, as the yellow talisman was burnt, the strands of dark and resentful energy bound to the millstone were pulled away, one by one. Discomfort was a normal reaction. Except that he, a half-dead piece of paper hanging on an inner pocket, felt very uncomfortable. Baldy, who was burning the yellow talisman directly, must have felt even more uncomfortable.

Xue Xian turned his head and glanced at Xuan Min, only to see him look like the eight winds could not move him. His expression was stoic as if he was doing something completely unrelated.

He suddenly felt that this Baldy was not quite the same as the monks he had seen in the past but he could not pinpoint why.

Probably because...he was exceptionally easy to piss off!

While Xue Xian continued to speculate, Xue Min had already finished burning the yellow talisman. As the last speck of dust fell to the ground, the chain on the millstone broke with a *click* and also fell onto the ground.

A shadowy figure clutching the handle of the millstone gradually appeared. Just like a withered branch curled on the floor, the figure expanded under Xue Xian and Xuan Min's gazes, turning into an old granny with a hunched back.

The lady's white hair was scarce and tied in a small bun behind her head. She was wrinkly and her two eyes were glossy as if she was always holding in the tears.

Just by her looks, one could vaguely recognise her as Granny Liu. Compared to her illusion holding a walking stick in the array, this ghost Granny Liu looked even more fragile as if she would close her eyes and fall down on the ground at any moment.

Without the walking stick, her slanted body looked even more deformed. The left side of her body hunched over even more than the right. It was only with the support of the millstone's handle that she could even stand.

"What iniquity..." muttered Xue Xian.

In his immortal life, he had no parents and did not have a deep understanding of blood relationships. But after being forced to spend half a year in the mortal realm, he at least knew of the basics.

This Advisor Liu had indeed expanded his horizons. How much must one hate their own mother to be able to do something this inhumane!

Hearing this, Xuan Min looked down and gave him a sweeping look, which added to Xue Xian's pent-up frustration. Raising his chin, he glared back, but still looked unintimidating no matter how hard he tried.

This Ancient One rolled his eyes and after some thinking, a new idea popped up—

To the top of his head!

As a man of spontaneous actions who did whatever he wanted, Xue Xian wasted no time clawing onto Xuan Min's monk robes and climbing up much faster after last time, reaching the front of his robes in the blink of an eye.

Just as he was about to move up another layer, a sharp cry came from the door.

"Ahhh! Don't touch me, don't touch me! Help—Help—"

The voice was shrilly and bitter, as if someone had seen a ghost.

It was deafeningly loud and unpleasant and shook Xue Xian so much that he clawed empty air, falling down from Xuan Min's chest and onto the ground face first in a rather inelegant landing pose.

An embarrassed Xue Xian didn't want to see anyone after he landed on the floor, his four claws rigid and motionless, as if he had fallen to his death.

Xuan Min ignored the screams outside the house, merely squatted down to look at the paper man lying on the ground and asked monotonously, "Aren't you going to get up?"

Xue Xian continued pretending to be dead.

Xuan Min gently knocked the back of the flat head of the piece of paper, "Then, I'll burn it."

After finishing his words, he actually lit a matchstick. The tiny flame roasted the paper hot.

"..." Xue Xian said in a muffled voice, "Don't you have any mercy? Or did you feed it all to the dogs?"

Xuan Min's fingers halted, as if he had remembered something. His expression softened for a split second and then he shook his head. Waving the matchstick to put out the tiny flame, he picked up a foot of the paper man and scolded in a low voice, "Will you still climb?"

Xue Xian, probably still feeling ashamed, covered his face with two hands as he was picked up upside-down. Yet, he managed to spit out a retort: "Climb your ass!"

As soon as this bastard had been put back into the bag, clumsy footsteps thudded and ran out of the house.

He moved his hand, only to see the blockhead Liu Chong looking at his direction with a blank expression. He had just escaped the array, his blue robes torn in numerous places, exposing the cotton fillings. Who knows what he had been through?

His face was scrunched up, his eyes red. He opened his mouth to speak to Xuan Min. However, before he could speak, his eyes swept past Granny Liu, who was holding onto the millstone for support and he froze.

"Gr...Grandmother?" asked Liu Chong hesitantly. Maybe it was because he was still scared by the illusion of Granny Liu in the array but he flinched and did not dare to step closer.

Granny Liu glanced at him with her lifeless eyes and tears fell down her face immediately. Gripping the millstone, she waved her hand at Liu Chong and sighed, "Chong-er, what happened to your clothes?"

Liu Chong pushed all his guilt to the back of his mind as soon as he heard her tone. He rushed over with red eyes and knelt down on the floor, trying to clutch Granny Liu's hands. "Granny, why have you grown shorter? Wh-why can't I hold you?"

The old lady had been depleted by the millstone for too long and had shrunk to half the size of a normal elderly person, making her seem exceptionally shrivelled and pitiful.

She brushed it off and flashed a deflated smile at Liu Chong. "Granny is old, and when Granny is old, Granny shrinks. As for holding, then let us not hold anymore..."

"Granny, why didn't you...why didn't you visit me? I folded so many paper ingots. Didn't you say that after folding them, writing down your name and burning it, you would come and take them? I...I folded them every day, burned them every day, but no one came to visit me. Why



didn't you come, not even once? I want to listen to you talk, I want to chat with you, but I never see you and I...I forgot what I wanted to say..."

Liu Chong still had the mind and heart of a child. As soon as he saw the grandmother he missed so dearly, he sniffled through the last of his words and started to cry. He didn't have the patience and strength of a grown man and just bawled as if he could express three years of forgotten words by crying all at once.

"Granny has been listening, Chong-er need not cry. Granny knows everything," Granny Liu wiped her tears. "Oh, I've been watching over you every day and night..."

The grandmother and grandchild pair were in the middle of crying when a crazy man rushed in the house. "Help! Help! Don't touch me—don't come near me!"

The man looked as horrible as a madman, his hair was tangled, his clothes all messed up and dusty as if he had rolled on the floor for who knows how many times.

Xue Xian looked closely, "Isn't that Advisor Liu?"

Considering this, Liu Chong was rather lucky. Advisor Liu was clearly shocked in the array. He busted into this house hurriedly, not caring how much he had hated entering it before.

Xuan Min saw Advisor Liu's dirty figure and stepped aside while frowning. Without anyone blocking him, he bumped into Liu Chong and fell to the floor.

And found himself face to face with Granny Liu.

*Translation: Arlena*

*Translation Check: CyanRoses*

*Final Checking: ascii*

*—Suibian Subs and Scanlations*

## Chapter 15: Silver Doctor's Bells (1)

Adviser Liu stilled, eyes wide and body rigid with fear, so frightened that he forgot to breathe.

If one commits too many evils, there will be a day when even their own mother would not want to see them. The difference between him, a scoundrel, and the tear-stained Liu Chong was obvious, ironic even.

Old Granny Liu wiped off a handful of tears as she watched Advisor Liu, her sobs gradually subsiding. While her expression collected, her eyes were still filled with cloudy tears, revealing her profound grief.

"Why are you shaking?" Old Granny Liu restrained her distress. "Could it be that you are still scared of your mother coming for your life?"

Advisor Liu instinctively shook his head, his face a ghastly white and his lips trembling uncontrollably, stammering, "Your son only just....only..."

His voice choked up, unable to continue. Lowering his head, he heaved in two deep breaths before hurriedly kneeling, knocking his head harshly on the ground as he bowed towards Old Granny Liu, "Your son recklessly trusted that cultivator's wicked lies and meddled with evil. Your son has been unfilial."

Weeping a face full of tears and mucus, he pressed his welted forehead to the ground, unable to form any other coherent sentence.

"What have you done?" Xue Xian shot a loathsome glower at the huddled figure. Being a blunt and straightforward person, he hated people who obfuscated to excuse themselves the most. Unfiliality is unfilial and toxicity and selfishness are precisely toxic and selfish. To just shove all the blame onto the cultivator, he really was shameless. He was literally deceiving his dear mother with these lies.

Old Granny Liu said nothing and just silently looked at Advisor Liu. To see one's own child, whom they raised, turn out to be such a person, anyone would feel unsettled. After a long pause, she softly sighed, "A clap does not sound with only one hand."

If one did not care, even if a cultivator spoke flowers into existence, they would not listen.

The still-prostrating Advisor Liu stiffened at her words. He carefully lifted his head, hoping to glean an inkling from her eyes but did not find any aura akin to a malevolent spirit surrounding her.

Granny Liu sighed again, beckoning him with a hand. "Come closer."

This grandmother must have been blessed with a slow temper. Her tone remained soft and gentle but there was still a hint of helplessness.

Hearing no resentment from her request, Advisor Liu disregarded his previous hesitancy and shuffled toward Granny Liu with a glimmer of hope in his eyes—after all, someone who had changed into a malevolent spirit would not speak with such tenderness. Perhaps there was a solution.

“Look at your mother,” said Granny Liu quietly.

“I really haven’t looked at you like this in a very long time.” Advisor Liu pushed his luck, tacking on another sentence.

Old Granny Liu stared at him and swung back an open palm!

*Smack!*

No one expected her to suddenly do such a thing, leaving all of them in a dumbfounded stupor.

Affected the most, Advisor Liu held his face, wearing an expression of utter shock.

“Mother, you...” He was speechless.

“Ahhhh...My hand is also itching,” sighed Xue Xian disappointedly.

Xuan Min, “...”

Being in such a state, Advisor Liu completely missed Xue Xian’s mutterings. After pausing for ages with a hand to his face, he finally found his mind. “I, I didn’t know of any other method. I really didn’t have any other option. I asked the cultivator for your sake.”

He finished the sentence and, suddenly, as if he had suddenly found a way to explain, said, “Since the beginning, I requested the cultivator for your sake. Your body was getting weaker and weaker with one side always hunched over. That charlatan from the Jiang family told me that with one sickness ushering in another, it would be difficult for you to ever fully heal from it. Only then did I consider asking a cultivator. Mother, you don’t understand, your north-eastern room was in a good location. The cultivator told me that once the arrangements were made, the place would be able to raise human flesh and bone back from the dead and I just wished for you to heal sooner. But...Uhh...”

“Isn’t the north-east room where your son Liu Jin lives?” asked Xue Xian in a puzzled tone.

Coincidentally hearing the comment between the gaps of his sighs, Advisor Liu instinctively clarified, “Jin-er moved in there later!”

After a prolonged silence, Old Granny Liu straightened and spoke, “I know.” She gazed at Advisor Liu reflectively. “Not only did you let me stay in a good room of the house but you

also came in every single day with tea and water. In the end, when I was paralyzed and couldn't get up, you would sit by my bed whenever you had spare time, waiting on me...Mother remembers it all."

How could a person contradict with themselves to such an extent? Claiming that he was not filial but he truly did his duty as a son for his mother. Claiming that he was filial, yet with just a few words from the cultivator, he looked away when his dear mother was being bound to the house and whatever could be used was used without even a little bit wasted.

"But..." Old Granny Liu said abruptly, "it wasn't until you confined me to the house when I realised why you had let me stay in the good room, that it was for taking my Chong-er's life in trade."

"This slap is for Chong-er!" Old Granny Liu swiftly raised her hand.

*Smack!*

The second palm hit the other half of Advisor Liu's face.

"This slap is for the sake of the Jiangs' medicine hall's doctor!" Slowing, Old Granny Liu continued, "The medicine I ate on my last day, it was you who switched it, wasn't it? Though my mind wasn't as clear, you can taste it when medicine changes. I gave birth to you, I understand your inner thoughts..."

She shook her head, sighing, "You only saw that mother wasn't improving in any case so you acted filial for a half-dead person to see, hard work but no need to please. Once the reputation spread, you listened to that impudent cultivator's words and urged mother to pass on conveniently early, right?"

Advisor Liu knelt there, utterly silent.

"You have done what you've done but you truly shouldn't have placed the blame on Doctor Jiang. Though I could not see or speak by then, I could still hear the discussions between the servant girls. Doctor Jiang was labeled as a charlatan for the rest of his life because of you. Do you even feel guilty?"

Granny Liu shut her eyes. Having maintained her human form for so long, it had started to slowly fade with parts of her face becoming unclear. "I am your mother, Chong-er is your son. One's own family has a personal method of calculation, outsiders have their own. Mother helped you turn the millstone for three years. Consider it paying my debt to you as my child. Also consider Chong-er living under the roof for this long as a payment for the debt of you raising him for twelve years...And the debt you owe the Jiang family should also be paid."

"Mother...Mother, what do you mean?" Advisor Liu straightened and lifted his head, his lost expression tinged with alarm and bewilderment.

"To owe someone is just that, it cannot be blotted out. Debts must always be repaid." Old Granny Liu looked at him one last time, before turning away towards Xuan Min and asked in a quiet voice, "Master, shouldn't I move on now?"

She probably took Xuan Min for a Buddhist monk who guided lost souls to the afterlife.

Xuan Min looked down at her and pointed at the millstone.

Without needing to hear him speak, Granny nodded, seeming to already understand what he meant. She turned to look at Liu Chong. The fool who had been curled up into a ball and crying lifted his head. He did not really understand her words just now but reacted to Old Granny Liu's movement, "Grandmother...are, are you tired?"

"Yes, Grandmother's really tired," said Old Granny Liu tenderly. "I have to go sleep for a bit."

"Then when I burn ingots in the future, can I still see you?"

"Everything you say, Grandmother will hear. Though you may not see Grandmother, Grandmother will always...watch over you." With these words, Granny Liu sank into the millstone.

Xuan Min picked up the millstone and Jiang Shining's paper form off the floor, turned and walked out of the house.

"Master! Master! My face—" Dazed and dumbfounded, Advisor Liu stumbled and crashed his way out of the house. He shakily felt at his face while hollering, "Why's it swelling up?!"

Xuan Min glanced over at him.

Both of Advisor Liu's cheeks were swelling up profusely in the distinct shape of handprints. The handprints were a bloody red and the skin was so thin that the veins underneath could be seen clear as day, like spiderwebs. It honestly looked a bit terrifying.

"Resentful spirits cannot touch humans," said Xuan Min.

Blinking rapidly, Advisor Liu's face was so swollen that he had difficulty speaking, "Then why am I..."

"Resentful spirits with grievances have a single chance to seek retribution," said Xuan Min. "They are able to mar the body of those who wronged them."

Advisor Liu looked alarmed. "What about after they leave the mark? Will she be coming back to take my life?"

Xuan Min coldly stated, "She did not leave it for herself, it is for your son Liu Chong and Doctor Jiang's family. These two people suffered a lifetime of bitter hardship because of you and they shall be returned to you."

Give him a taste of his own medicine.

"Don't go, don't go, save me! Master, save me—" Advisor Liu dropped to the ground, kneeling before Xuan Min, and shuffled forward on his knees, grabbing the hem of Xuan Min's robe in a death grip.

From his position at Xuan Min's waist, Xue Xian suddenly asked, "The one with the surname Liu, I ask you this! This past summer, did you go to Huameng County in Guangdong?"

In the midst of his panic, Advisor Liu had assumed Xuan Min was the one asking. Shaking his head, he repeatedly assured, "I haven't, I haven't, I've never travelled that far away before."

After answering, he continued to beg, trembling, "Save me, please, save me..."

"How's that possible?" asked Xue Xian harshly.

"It's the truth! The complete and utter truth! Not a single sentence is false. Why would I even dare to trick you?" Considering his current state and the way his head scraped the ground, Advisor Liu certainly did not seem to be faking it.

How could that be? If he has never been to Huameng, why does he have the blood mark?! Xue Xian glared at the side of his ear where the blood mark that Xuan Min pointed out was. He was half perplexed and half infuriated.

"If there's even half a sentence where you're hiding something—"

"I wouldn't dare, I really wouldn't. Why would I...Oh!" For the sake of salvation, Advisor Liu was so zealous that he seemed willing to slice open his head for others to see. "Right! Now that you mention Guangdong and Huameng, I do remember someone who came from around there. A fisherman, but I barely interacted with him. I only bought an orb that looked like gold but wasn't actually—"

"An orb?! What did it look like?" Xue Xian interrupted Advisor Liu the moment he heard, fiercely reminded of the familiar humming anticipation before a game and couldn't help but ask, "Where is the orb now?"

Advisor Liu cowered a bit, hemming and hawing as he muttered, "It's..."

"What are you mumbling?! Speak louder!" Whenever Xue Xian came across people who obfuscated at crucial moments like this, he just wanted to pick them up with a claw and chuck them into the Southern Sea.

“The cultivator said that the gold orb had ample spiritual energy so he helped me smelt it into the millstone...” Advisor Liu’s head had nearly shrunk into his collar.

Xue Xian, “...” You f\*cking took the body of a true dragon and smelted it into a millstone? How about you stuff your f\*cking self into it?!

He was so enraged that he straight up clawed his way over.

Xuan Min noticed that he had stopped moving and speaking so he lifted his leg.

“You can’t leave, you can’t. Save me, save me, please...” Advisor Liu aggressively clutched the corner of Xuan Min’s robe, not letting it go for the life of him.

Xuan Min looked at him and crouched down. He whispered a sentence that Advisor Liu did not understand, something similar to an ancient line from the Classics.

He then knocked the back of his hand against the forehead of Advisor Liu, who felt a tremor in his head akin to tens of thousands of bells ringing.

He perked up and murmured, “Is the mark gone?”

Xuan Min looked at him and calmly replied, “It only assures—that the debt will be repaid.”

Advisor Liu froze the instant he heard this.

Xuan Min smoothly ripped off the edge of his robe that Advisor Liu clutched, stood up, and walked away.

Advisor Liu swiftly changed his tune, rolling and calling out, “Buddhists and Buddhist schools have always valued compassion above all else—”

Xuan Min did not even spare him a glance, striding out purposefully, and replied indifferently, “This poor monk has never cultivated compassion.”

*Translation: CyanRoses*

*Translation Check: Arlena*

*Final Checking: ascii*

*—Suibian Subs and Scanlations*

## Chapter 16: Silver Doctor's Bell (2)

Xue Xian, who was currently in a haze after being pissed off to the point of fainting, seemed to hear something reverberate from below the Baldy's waist bone with a *clang*. It sounded both nearby and far-off, the jolt causing him to lose his breath. Thus, the vile spawn's fainting spell continued for a long time...

By the time he woke up and opened his eyes, slowly curling up from within the hidden pouch to poke his head out, he realised that he was no longer in the courtyard of the Liu Mansion.

Xue Xian swept a glance over the area and realised that this was probably a bedroom. There was a neatly made bed with a lamp lit with a yellow glow next to it. A light, mellow woodsy scent with an almost imperceptible medicinal aroma wafted through the room. Xuan Min was standing in front of a flower carving wooden roundtable. On top of the table, was the unconscious paper-skinned Jiang Shining, the millstone swiped from Adviser Liu's mansion, a thin, light-looking cloth pack, a copper basin filled with spring water and a set of celadon teaware with three words on the handle of the teapot: Guiyun Inn.

As he looked around, he realised that this was the upper floor of a certain someone's guestroom.

Guiyun<sup>3</sup> Inn...

When Xue Xian had muddled along for a short period at the marketplace, he had seen the Premier Scholar<sup>4</sup> Building that scholars loved to visit, the Thriving Business Building that merchants loved to visit, along with the commonly seen "Arrival of Happiness" and "Smooth Wealth", most of these buildings were all very auspiciously named. With a place having a name like "Guiyun Inn" that pretty much meant "rest in peace<sup>5</sup>", would it not be only the people with brains pecked rotten by chickens who came here?

It seemed like Baldy was exactly this sort of a brain-pecked-by-chickens person.

Xue Xian saw that Xuan Min was currently meticulously washing his hands in the copper basin. It had to be said—this Baldy's fingers really were long and good-looking: skinny and pale with ramrod-straight tendons between each knuckle. It seemed like he had been born not knowing the concept of hurrying, doing everything in a slow, unworried manner. Even when it came to washing hands, he could emit an aura akin to the deep, solemn contemplation derived from reading the Buddha's sutras.

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<sup>3</sup> "Guiyun" means returning or belonging to clouds.

<sup>4</sup> "Zhuangyuan" is the title of the top scorer in civil service exams. Scholars visiting this building do so out of hopes that the auspicious name would help them achieve their goal of doing well in the exams.

<sup>5</sup> Since the inn's name means "returning or belonging to clouds", Xue Xian is interpreting it as returning to heaven (as in dying lol)



At this, Xue Xian was beyond done with him. “The way you wash your hands, it’s like you’re about to send someone off to a funeral procession.”

Xuan Min lowered his eyes and glanced at him, replying, “I am.”

Xue Xian, “Who’re you sending off?”

Xuan Min said simply, “Madam Xu.”

Xue Xian, “Madam Xu?”

A quiet sigh emitted from the millstone. “Thank you for your trouble, Master.”

If not Granny Liu, who else would it be.

Xue Xian lifted his face expressionlessly. “I—cough, how long did I sleep for? You’ve already found out the old granny’s surname?”

He had wanted to ask, “How long was I unconscious?” But after a moment of anger he realised that the situation would not look very dignified. So for the sake of saving a dragon’s face, he changed the word to “sleep” on the spot.

Xuan Min shook the water off his hands and picked up the white towel nearby, carefully drying them as he replied, “Ten hours. It’s already late in the night.”

Xue Xian, “...” How has this kind of wooden person who deliberately pokes at people’s sore spots not already been tossed into a moat?

He was extremely irritated so he quickly closed his eyes, not wanting to speak with this Baldy any longer. What a boring, socially incompetent person!

Xuan Min did not mind him much, setting down the towel and unfolding the cloth pack with a few swift movements. From within it, he took out a small stack of yellow paper and a brush.

Beside the copper basin, there was a plate of ink, prepared for use. Xuan Min spread out a piece of yellow paper, dipped his brush in the ink and wrote a few words on the paper—

Madam Xu of the Liu Clan

23rd day of the seventh month of the *Bingyin*<sup>6</sup> year

Xuan Min then took out an incense stick from the cloth pack and folded the piece of yellow paper with Granny Liu’s name and clan three times. He lit it aflame using the candle and placed it on top of the millstone. The thin piece of yellow paper burned at a curiously slow

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<sup>6</sup> “*Bingyin*” (丙寅): Third year of the 60-year cycle

rate while the surface of the millstone quickly turned black as if it had been coated in a layer of ash.

He slowly twisted the incense stick within his hand, letting it catch fire from the yellow paper, burning completely.

“Are you performing salvation for the soul?” Xue Xian tried to keep his mouth shut but ultimately failed.

In the past, he had only seen the most common type of salvation method, known as the Seven Buddhas. A bunch of baldies invited to perform the salvation would sit in a circle, their shiny heads reflecting all around brightening up the room considerably. They would split into two groups, taking turns facing the coffin, restlessly chanting lines from the Sutra of Life<sup>7</sup> for seven days and seven nights straight. One time, Xue Xian tailed the wrong person and accidentally entered a random home that was conducting a funeral ritual. He had to helplessly listen to a group of baldies murmuring and chanting by his ear for a full seven days to the point that his head was about to burst open and he wanted to drop dead right on top of the coffin.

Ever since then, whenever he saw a monk, his head hurt.

Xue Xian was scared that Xuan Min was about to murmur like this for seven days and seven nights. He thought that if this was really going to happen, he might as well just jump out of the window and die to solve all his problems.

As Xuan Min twisted the incense stick in his hand, a thin wisp of smoke curled around the millstone, emitting a diluted scent of sandalwood. “Cleansing of the hands, folding of paper, lighting of fragrance, and chanting of sutras are to send the deceased towards life.”

As expected, he really was about to chant sutras!

Xue Xian wordlessly began to flip out of the hidden pouch.

Xuan Min glanced at him. “What are you doing now?”

Xue Xian, “No point in living anymore, gonna jump out the window.”

Xuan Min, “...”

Naturally, Xue Xian was not able to successfully jump out of the window. He was only able to flip down from Xuan Min’s waist, landing on top of the flower carving roundtable. He had only flipped around in a single circle on the table, then flipped right onto the floor, before getting caught by Xuan Min and being placed back onto the tabletop.

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<sup>7</sup> Sutra of Life is a text describing the life and origin story of Siddhartha Gautama (Gautam Buddha) and some of his disciples.

The only thing that this Baldy was capable of was being painfully particular with rules, not even close to halfway seeming like a legitimate monk. He gathered this fact from his observations of the Baldy's usual mannerisms and this upscale guestroom.

At this point, Xue Xian did not know what was up with Xuan Min but he seemed to be bothered by the creases on Xue Xian's body left by the many times he was bent and folded. He went ahead and used his fingers to smooth Xue Xian out, then placed a stone paperweight (that was by no means light) on top of him.

The paperweight was over half the size of a palm and a narrow, rectangular bar. Placed on top of Xue Xian, he could only peek out his head from the top, two skinny legs from the bottom, and his two claws from both sides.

Xue Xian struggled for a bit, but other than being able to slightly lift his two claws, he could not move at all.

Xue Xian, "... Damn you!

Xuan Min did not pay any more attention to him, focusing on lighting the incense.

The moment the tip of the incense stick was lit, Xuan Min lowly murmured a mantra and went silent thereafter. This was pretty much the entirety of his "chanting of sutras", completely different from what Xue Xian had initially imagined.

At the end, the yellow paper and incense stick burnt out at around the same time. When the last few scarlet sparks blew out, Xuan Min knocked a few times with his finger on the millstone that had bound Old Granny Liu for over three years.

With a couple of *snap* sounds of breaking, the millstone that had initially seemed to be heavy and unbreakably thick actually cracked into several pieces. At the same time, Old Granny Liu's quiet voice rang out once more. "A heavy burden has been released from this old body. I will be on my way now. Many thanks."

Just as these words carried through the air, Xue Xian saw with his own two eyes a faint shadow flash past him from the centre of the millstone. Even the ash from the incense stick and the paper that had fallen on the surface of the millstone had completely disappeared without a trace.

However, during the period of time in which the millstone had cracked open and Old Granny Liu had disappeared, an obscure sound lightly rang out from within the room with a *ding ding dong dong*. It was like a bell that had been hung on a horse or some other animal, reverberating from a long alleyway, a fine and far-off sound.

Just after, something rolled out of the crack in the millstone and landed onto the table.

*Ding ling—dong long*—another two sounds followed.

Xue Xian sensed something rolling along the surface of the table, going right past the back of his head before he could lift it. "What the heck is this thing?! Blind thing not even watching where it's going—Smash it!"

Xuan Min reached out and the round roly-poly thing rolled right off the edge of the table into his palm.

He held it between his fingertips and said blandly, "A golden orb about the size of a sheep's eye."

Xue Xian was dumbstruck. "About the size of a sheep's eye? A golden orb?"

As expected! So you see, when it came to the body of a real dragon that had been smelted into a golden orb, how could any old cultivator properly accomplish the job! This cultivator had only just carelessly inserted the golden orb into the millstone.

He immediately became incredibly excited as he suddenly heard Xuan Min reply, "Mn. Since this thing didn't watch where it was going, I'll smash it."

"No! Wait!" If not for the paperweight pressing him down, Xue Xian would probably have flown up into the sky. "If you dare to smash it, I'll smash *you*!"

Xuan Min said blandly, "So it's got eyes now?"

Xue Xian replied in a muffled voice. "Yeah."

Xuan Min, "Not to be smashed anymore?"

Xue Xian, "Not anymore. It's mine; who would dare to smash it!"

"It's yours?" Xuan Min replied calmly. "How can you prove it?"

Xue Xian took the opportunity to try to turn the situation to his advantage. "All right, if you move the paperweight off of me, I'll prove it to you."

Xuan Min shot a glance at him and spit out four words. "You can just speak."

"..."

Xue Xian wanted to spit his guts out onto his face.

Nevertheless, his golden orb was extremely important. With such an item in the hands of this Baldy, he felt completely restrained. He had no choice but to put up with being a bit more agreeable.

He numbly responded, his tone completely void of any fluctuations, “If you place the golden orb in front of the candle flame and let it shine, you’ll be able to see—”

See the faint shape of a dragon coiled up inside. However, the dragon’s head and claws were curled within its body and not completely visible.

However, Xue Xian did not mention this. He bit the tip of his tongue and said, “You’ll be able to see a curvy pattern on the inside. Have you ever seen a golden orb that lets light shine through?”

Xuan Min listened to his words and held the golden orb close to the candle flame.

Sure enough, the round orb that had originally appeared to be made of ordinary gold turned slightly transparent and there was a faint coil that could be seen inside.

Xuan Min spoke, “Snake.”

Xue Xian, “...” Snake, your ass!

He endured this with difficulty, hardening his face with a huff. “Do you believe me now? Can’t you remove this stupid paperweight already? Give me back my orb!”

Xuan Min was not an unreasonable person. He saw that this vile spawn had a point and moved the paperweight away.

Xue Xian sat up, sticking to the surface of the table while shaking his head, trying to recover from the dizziness of being “trapped under a stone mountain”. He swayed his paper head to and fro and stretched his hands out toward Xuan Min, speaking with a slightly impolite tone. “What about my orb? Hurry up and give it to me!”

Xuan Min pointed at the centre of the table with his finger, responding, “First—”

“Cut the crap! Give it to me already,” Xue Xian cut him off impatiently.

Xuan Min closed his mouth and regarded him silently. He placed the golden orb the size of a sheep’s eye onto the two outstretched paper claws.

*Clatter!*

The golden orb wasn’t light, how could paper skin hold it properly?

Xue Xian only felt his two claws suddenly drop as his vision went black. He had been dragged off the table by that darn orb, directly falling onto the ground.

“...”

Life was so hard.

When Xuan Min picked up the vile spawn from the ground, his two claws were still gripping tightly onto the golden orb, unwilling to let go, like a stingy miser.

"I was suggesting that you move towards the centre of the table a little." Xuan Min placed him back in the middle of the table, regarding him with half-lidded eyes. "Still going to interrupt me?"

Xue Xian thought to himself, "Psh! What do you care?!" Nonetheless, the fall left him dizzy and out of sorts. He was afraid that the Baldy was unhappy and about to take away his treasured orb again so he reluctantly held back and huffed, "Fine. I don't really want to but next time I'll let you finish."

Hugging the golden orb, he rolled around on the table a couple times until he knocked against a certain thing with a *ding*. Only then did he remember that a while ago there was more than one object that had fallen out of the millstone.

Xue Xian splayed out on top of the golden orb, staring with concentration and realised that the object he had bumped into was a round, silver-coloured disc the size of an apricot. There was a seam in the middle part of the disc that would let out a fine, crisp sound whenever touched.

"What is this thing?" asked Xue Xian and rolled over to the side with a small rumble.

Looking at it from far away, it truly was something he had never seen before.

"It's a doctor's bell." Jiang Shining's cold voice rang out abruptly.

Like a Daruma doll, Xue Xian, who had become one with the golden orb while sticking to its surface, rolled over to the stone paperweight, stopping only when he bumped into it. "You're awake?"

"I was awake the whole time. I just wasn't able to speak anything in the beginning," Jiang Shining replied. "Probably since it's night-time now, I can speak." His voice was very warm, with an unexplainable liveliness compared to before—not as dead and heavy-sounding, exactly as if...some internal burden had suddenly been lifted and he was now much more relaxed.

Just as he finished speaking, he proceeded to fall from the table onto the chair, then from the chair onto the ground, and returned to his appearance of a scholar.

He reached out and picked up the doctor's bell, stroking it between his fingers as he said, "This is my family's doctor's bell."

Xue Xian was startled. "Your family's?"

"Mn," Jiang Shining nodded, showing Xue Xian the side of the doctor's bell on which a name had been carved—Jiang Yong.

"This was my great-grandfather's", he explained. "He was a bell doctor and would go down the street doing appointments for others everyday. At the time, in order to catch people's attention, bell doctors would hang a silver doctor's bell on their medical supplies box. Wherever he went, there would be the sound of the bell. By hearing the bell's sound, anyone with an illness or ailment would know when he came by and could go ask him for medicine or a checkup. This doctor's bell was what my great-grandfather used. Nowadays, bell doctors who go around in the streets like this are rare. Most of them have dignified offices and medicine halls. During our Jiang clan's generation, we practiced medicine; in order to remember our origins, this doctor's bell was passed down from my great-grandfather all the way to my parents."

"Your parents?" Xuan Min furrowed his brow, reaching out to take the doctor's bell from Jiang Shining and looking it over. He used a finger to touch the bell, quietly listening to its ring. "Do you still have living blood relatives?"

"Yes, my older sister married off and moved to Anqing. She managed to avoid the disaster," Jiang Shining answered.

"Your parents' souls are trapped within this doctor's bell. It's a different situation from Madam Xu who was under the influence of the millstone. For the time being, there is no way to perform salvation besides dripping three drops of a living blood relative's *laogong*<sup>8</sup> blood onto it," Xuan Min explained.

"*Laogong* blood?" Jiang Shining had been born into a family of doctors and immediately understood Xuan Min's words. "Are you referring to blood from the *laogong* acupuncture point?"

Xuan Min nodded.

He handed the doctor's bell back to Jiang Shining and swept a glance over the cloth pack.

Xue Xian followed the direction of his gaze and happened to see that there was still another stick of incense left.

He pointed at it and asked, "Baldy, performing salvation for that Old Granny Liu only used up one incense stick. There's still one more left, what do you plan to do with it?"

Xuan Min spoke directly and to the point. "Perform salvation for this scholar."

Jiang Shining hadn't even fully reacted before Xue Xian lifted his head up first. "What?! You—"

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<sup>8</sup> *Laogong*, lit. "Palace of Labor", an acupoint found in the middle of a person's palm.

Before he could finish, Xuan Min abruptly placed his hand on the table to steady himself, his brows deeply furrowed and his eyes shut tight as if he suddenly felt slightly nauseous.

Xue Xian was at a loss, swallowing his words. "Baldy?"

He tried calling out a couple times, only to see Xuan Min making no move to answer, simply sitting in the chair with his eyes closed as if he was meditating. Thin red marks suddenly started wriggling from the small mole on his neck, their movements like tiny spiders.

But Xue Xian didn't pay attention to these small details. He stared at Xuan Min for a bit and after determining that he was not dying but was also not about to wake up, cautiously waved his hand at Jiang Shining.

After about ten minutes, a thin, sickly looking scholar was hurrying down the path from Guiyun Inn towards the Ningyang District suburbs. On top of his shoulder sat a paper-skinned man who held a golden orb tightly within its arms. It was Jiang Shining and Xue Xian.

*Translation: yuedou*

*Translation Check: yichen*

*Final Checking: ascii*

— Suibian Subs and Scanlations



## Chapter 17: Silver Doctor's Bell (3)

"I—" Jiang Shining hurried his pace under Xue Xian's urging on the one hand, but on the other, he spoke hesitantly, "I still think that there is something about the plan that isn't proper."

"What isn't proper?" asked Xue Xian, stroking his golden orb.

"Deciding for ourselves to hurry on and leave Master by himself," replied Jiang Shining.

Xue Xian sent him a moody glance. "I say, are you sleepwalking, Nerdy? He captures ghosts and he caught the two of us. Have you ever seen anyone breaking out from jail call out to the jailer?"

"No, I haven't." It sounded right when he first heard it, but Jiang Shining thought it over carefully and could not help but say, "But—"

Xue Xian, "There is no but."

Jiang Shining, "Still—"

Xue Xian, "There is also no still."

Jiang Shining tilted his head helplessly and looked at him.

Xue Xian's entire body was sprawled on top of the golden orb. He said, completely shamelessly, "I am just speaking logically."

Jiang Shining, "..."

The city in Ningyang County had a night curfew. Fences and checkpoints were already erected at several intersections of large roads. The bailiff on night duty carried a wine pouch to keep his body warm during the night and was keeping watch next to the checkpoint. The gates in all four directions were secured; if a commoner wanted to leave the city during this time, for the most part, they would have to grow wings and fly away.

But for these two non-humans, this night curfew was not as much of an inconvenience.

Jiang Shining's paper body had some advantages at this time. If necessary, it could be compressed into a very thin sheet that could easily slip through doors and pass through cracks.

"Turn east."

"At the next intersection, stick yourself to the foot of the wall and turn into the alley."

“Go straight and turn westward.”

Xue Xian’s moves were more effective than a dog’s. He could always spot the shadows of the bailiffs on night watch from far away and could issue commands while feeling in the right and self-confident, resolutely and decisively. Jiang Shining was a soft-tempered person and had grown accustomed to being ordered around by Xue Xian; as soon as Xue Xian had spoken, he would act to satisfy him and would not think more about it.

As a result, Jiang Shining believed in his nefariousness and walked for a good while, before he finally could not help but stop, his face full of vexation, and say, “Ancient One, please be merciful and stop talking.”

Xue Xian shot him a glance. “Why? Haven’t we been doing well and avoided being detected by that group of people on night watch?”

Jiang Shining said moodily, “Mn. We haven’t been detected, but I have come across this silk shop at least three times already. If I continue to listen to you and move around like this, we won’t be able to leave the city even by next year.”

Xue Xian said while hugging the golden orb, “Ss...The sky is somewhat gloomy, we should find a place to settle down soon.”

Jiang Shining, “...” This ruffian is dead set on saving his face.

Without the commands of Xue Xian, who had no sense of direction, Jiang Shining’s pace immediately quickened a lot. They rapidly left the area, which they had made three laps around, and headed in the right direction.

“This building looks familiar.” Xue Xian looked left and right and felt that everything on this street seemed familiar.

Jiang Shining made an “mn” sound. “You really don’t recognize any roads, huh. We were here just this morning. How did you forget as soon as you turned your head?”

Only after being reminded by him did Xue Xian realise that if they continued walking forward on this road for a while and then turned east at the intersection, they would be able to see Adviser Liu’s mansion. The night was peaceful; if something moved and made a noise, it would be much more noticeable than it would be during the day. As they crossed the intersection, they shot a glance at that familiar gate of the mansion and could faintly hear fragments of voices from within the mansion that sounded like people quarrelling. Or it could have been something else. In any case, it was not a peaceful conversation.

Jiang Shining’s steps halted briefly.

Xue Xian turned and swept his eyes over the Liu family’s mansion and said, “What is it? You want to see him reap what he sowed?”

“That is Adviser Liu’s own business and already has nothing to do with me.” Jiang Shining shook his head and no longer hesitated, walking towards the city’s gate.

It could be the inherent nature of someone raised in a family of doctors, yet after all was said and done, he could not bear to personally watch someone suffering. This perhaps was the most obvious difference between him and Adviser Liu.

There were many wooded mountains outside of Ningyang County but most of them were flat and beautiful, only a few were dangerous and steep.

Due to the National Advisor being a monk, many mountain temples arose in the mountains and fields of every province a few years ago, and, for a time, the burning of incense in front of temples was at its peak. However, for some reason, winter had started coming earlier in recent years. Even the south was hit by constant snow. Timely snow was an omen for a prosperous year, but for the past few years, rain had been unexpectedly scarce, the harvests had been poor, and the commoners had to live more and more frugally. It was hard to even live, let alone visit a temple to make donations.

As a result, there was an increasing number of abandoned temples in the mountains and fields, so many that they actually became temporary rest stops for many rushing travellers.

When Jiang Shining brought Xue Xian into an abandoned temple on Jiguan Mountain to rest, it had already started snowing.

As soon as Xue Xian entered the temple, he picked a good spot—this shameless vile spawn directly dredged up the dry sogon grass on the ground, spread it out at the base of the Buddha statue, and sat down while leaning on the statue, completely disregarding the taboo nature of his behaviour. As they were not hastening onwards, he naturally did not need to painstakingly maintain his paperman appearance and would rather turn back into his original form.

Dressed in black, he sat with a negligent appearance, as if he were boneless. His elbow was propped on the lotus platform on which the Buddha sat and his bent knuckles were supporting his chin loosely as his other hand continued to fiddle with his precious golden orb.

Jiang Shining massaged the space between his eyebrows, his head hurting from looking at this Ancient One. “Even if it is an abandoned temple, you should still show at least a little decorum. Can a Buddha statue be sat on so casually like that?”

Xue Xian patted the Buddha’s leg. “Give me half. If you’re dissatisfied, just let out a groan.”

He even waited in deadly earnest for a moment before poking at Jiang Shining’s chin. “See? The statue didn’t groan.”

Jiang Shining, “...You can joke around however you like. I won’t concern myself anymore.”

He blew at the candlesticks covered in dust in front of the Buddha statue and asked Xue Xian for a match, trying hard to light the somewhat damp and old candle wicks on the one hand while protecting himself from catching on fire on the other hand.

"Where did you get a match?" Jiang Shining asked casually after he had finished lighting the candles and extinguishing the flame on the head of the match.

"Took it from Baldy's cloth bag before we left," said Xue Xian without any flushing of his face or fluttering of his heart.

Jiang Shining said helplessly, "This is the first time I have ever seen someone who has broken out from jail even dare to take something from the jailer while escaping."

Xue Xian, "He isn't going to miss this anyway."

Once Xuan Min was mentioned, Jiang Shining always felt somewhat apologetic. He could not help but ask Xue Xian, "Do you especially dislike that master? Is it because he caught us?"

Xue Xian shook his head.

"Then why did you throw him off so urgently and leave him behind? Forgive me for speaking the truth..." Jiang Shining pointed at himself, then at Xue Xian. "The two of us cannot shoulder much. If we come across any trouble en route, we would have to just suffer through it. From head to toe, I only have one doctor's bell, which has little value. That golden orb of yours, though, is another matter. If by any chance someone fixes their attention on it..."

Xue Xian pinched the orb in his fingers and twirled it in front of the candle flames.

There was a reason he ran away that very night and the reason lay in this golden orb of the real dragon's body. At the moment, his body had still not recovered and its connection to the golden orb was truly empty and indistinct. Even though he was holding the orb like this in his hand, he practically had no awareness of it, almost as if he were holding an extremely ordinary orb.

But Xuan Min was different. The unusual change he felt under the skin and bone at Xuan Min's waist was extremely odd. The first time it happened, it could have been a misperception, but it could not be ignored after it happened a second time.

Despite Xue Xian still not having seen how he would handle something seriously, he was already almost certain that Xuan Min was not that simple.

Currently, Xue Xian could not feel anything from the golden orb while Xuan Min seemed to be able to. While he carried the golden orb, the longer he stayed at Xuan Min's side, the

more easily it would be influenced by Xuan Min. If it became abnormal, he could just forget about recovering his dragon's body.

Furthermore...

Xue Xian told Jiang Shining, "His origin is unclear and his goal is even more so. He does not seem like a cultivator who is trying to earn money or make a living, but he also does not seem like an honorable monk who travels everywhere to help others out of a merciful heart. There have even been a few short instances where I could sense a sort of coldness and ruthlessness in him."

Jiang Shining asked, baffled, "What coldness and ruthlessness? Say something I can understand."

Xue Xian made a "tut" noise, shot him a disdainful glance, and said, "I said it very clearly. He's not like ordinary monks. Previously, I could not figure out how he was different, but now I've realized that it's probably the lack of the gentleness of someone who abides by teachings scrupulously. Don't you feel that at certain times he would even violate the Buddhist monastic principle not to kill?"

"..." Jiang Shining held back his words for a moment, shook his head, and said, "That, I've never felt. But speaking of it, I feel ashamed that I am actually somewhat afraid of him."

Xue Xian moodily said, "That's exactly it. Same thing."

Speaking of unclear origins, Jiang Shining suddenly thought of something. "That reminds me, previously, when we were in that house, did you notice the smell of medicine?"

"Yep, I noticed it. I even felt somewhat puzzled; does Baldy even take medicine?" Xue Xian replied.

"I grew up with the smell of medicines and am rather sensitive to them," Jiang Shining concluded after some pondering. "The smell of medicine in that house was somewhat familiar. It smells very similar to the medicine taken by a neighbour who sought treatment at my family's medicine hall for many years."

Xue Xian asked, "What kind of disease does it treat?"

Jiang Shining hesitated for a short time, then said, "Lost soul disease."

Someone who had lost their soul often could sleep through the night and had many nightmares that caused them to tremble in fear. Sometimes, when they woke up, they would have already forgotten what had happened. Their memories were defective, as if their mind had left their body, hence the name "lost soul disease".

“Lost soul disease? That Baldy?” Xue Xian scoffed and waved his hand saying, “Where is there even the slightest sign that he wakes from nightmares shaking in fear or that his mind is unclear? How could that be possible?”

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“It definitely doesn’t seem like his memory has any defect, but—” Jiang Shining recalled, “According to what I’ve seen, there are several people who suffer from lost soul disease that have relatively obvious manifestations of the disease. Because of memory deficiency or confusion, they are rather hesitant whenever they discuss something and they look worried and tired all the time. However, there are some that aren’t like this, probably from a natural defense against overanxiety. They are especially shy with strangers and are always somewhat restrained in their words. They would exhaust all methods to avoid the parts that are omitted and only speak of what they remember. If you don’t interact with them in a meaningful way, it would truly be difficult to see that they have a problem.”

Xue Xian heard what was said and shrugged his shoulders. “Even if he were to be of the latter kind and were able to guard against overanxiety, he wouldn’t randomly wander about in a packed street, right? Since he wouldn’t want people to become aware of his problem, he would have acted cautiously and refrained from interacting too much with other people in case he slipped up. Who would wander all over the place by themselves after losing their memory and would provoke both people and ghosts? That wouldn’t be called losing their memory. It would instead be called losing their mind.”

Jiang Shining nodded. “True.”

“But even if he isn’t suffering from the lost soul disease, that Baldy still has other problems.” Xue Xian recalled the appearance Xuan Min had when he suddenly sat on the table while he was in the middle of speaking and said grimly, “This type of person whose origins are unclear and whose depths can’t be made out would never wander all over the place without a purpose. He must have come to Ningyang County for a reason. But in the span of one day, he only did two things that were not related to him at all: catching the two of us and tearing down the *fengshui* array of the Liu family.”

Hearing this, Jiang Shining could not help but add, “He also performed the Soul Directing Ceremony for Granny Liu, helped me get the doctor’s bell, helped you obtain the golden orb and—”

Before he finished speaking, he came to a stop. Thinking about it in this way, Xuan Min’s actions made his purpose even less clear. If these were all easy tasks, his actions would not be anything special. But in reality, he wasted an entire morning at the Liu family mansion and these tasks were both time-consuming and required a great deal of effort. What was he ultimately planning?

“Before, it seemed like he even intended to deliver the Buddha to the West<sup>9</sup> and bring this doctor’s bell to where your sister is.” Xue Xian turned the golden orb around in his hand and continued, “Coincidentally, I have been to Anqing before. Although the distance from Ningyang isn’t even 1000 *li*<sup>10</sup>, there is a river in between. If he really did not have a purpose and was helping others while he passed by, this would be overly enthusiastic. That Baldy’s entire face is as cold as a world of ice and snow and as desolate as the north wind. Does he have anything to do with the word ‘enthusiastic’?”

Having said this, Xue Xian could not help but visualise what that Baldy would look like if he became enthusiastic.

After a moment, this vile spawn trembled from top to bottom. With an expressionless face, he said, “Save me. That scares me to death.”

Jiang Shining, “...”

Although this Ancient One looks unreliable, everything he said was reasonable. But when he talked about Xuan Min’s unknown purposes in conveniently helping others, Jiang Shining tilted his head and looked at him. “The first day you came to Ningyang County, didn’t you also have no proper business to deal with and didn’t you make me a paper body without any payment...?”

Xue Xian blurted out, “That’s not the same.”

“To be honest, I never actually understood why you came to my family’s abandoned mansion when there were so many other mansions in Ningyang County.” Jiang Shining shook his head and said, “It’s cold and dim. This taste of yours is truly original, you really love finding suffering for yourself.”

“I am happy with it. Would you be able to stop me?” Xue Xian retorted back.

When this impolite Ancient One talked back, he did not even spare one look at the person, preoccupied solely with appreciating that precious orb.

The yellow candle flames gave Xue Xian’s pale skin a tint of warmth and spirit. Although he opened his mouth in a yawn, he had a rather good-looking appearance. The flames cast bent shadows from his long and thick black eyelashes. In his lazily half-closed eyes, his pupils reflected the bright golden orb and the heavy snow falling outside.

There were so many mansions that could provide shelter in Ningyang County, why did he go to the Jiangs’ medicine hall and why did he also waste an entire day’s effort to give this nerd a paper body...?

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<sup>9</sup> Deliver the Buddha to the West 送佛送到西 - phrase used to describe someone who not only does a good deed, but also carries through with it to completion.

<sup>10</sup> *li* - ancient unit of measure for length, approximately equal to 500 meters.

Xue Xian could not clearly remember the finer details of his reasoning. His life span was much, much longer than an ordinary person's. If he remembered all the minor details of every situation of every day clearly, this dragon brain of his would probably explode.

He only remembered that he went north in the winter of a random year because of some business and happened to pass through Ningyang County on his way back.

That should have been in the evening and Ningyang County was experiencing a rare snowstorm, one that was similar to tonight's, and hence there were very few pedestrians on the road. Even the inns and restaurants had closed early. The whole street was empty and silent.

At that time, Xue Xian still had not had his muscles and bones drawn out of him yet and it was easy for him to walk. His true dragon's body naturally did not fear the cold; to him, wind and snow were just some decorations for cold winter days. Hence, he wore thin black robes and walked through the snow at a steady pace. As he walked into the mouth of an alley, his arm was grabbed by someone.

Xue Xian was an independent person and never liked any close contact with others so of course he was not used to being pulled at by someone.

His brows wrinkled as he turned his head impatiently to see that the person grabbing him was a middle-aged man wearing a grey coat. He was holding up a greased-paper umbrella and carrying a rectangular wooden box hanging from a cloth band on his shoulder. Looking at the footprints, he had come from within the alley.

Xue Xian already could not remember clearly what that middle-aged man looked like and could only remember that he had a beard and a good-natured appearance.

As soon as he grabbed Xue Xian, he pointed at the back of his hand and said, "This is such a deep wound. If you don't apply medicine and don't bind it, your skin and flesh will freeze and be damaged. In this wet and chilly weather, if you freeze for two days, you'll have to suffer whenever it rains or snows from now on."

That middle-aged person was somewhat long-winded, talking as if he were speaking to someone of a younger generation in his own family and not to an outsider. After Xue Xian stared blankly for a short while after hearing this, the man subconsciously looked down at his own hand.

The hand grabbed by the middle-aged man had indeed suffered an injury that was left by a lightning strike when he had been careless earlier. To him, this type of wound was just like losing a thin bit of skin when brushing against a tree branch, something that would be forgotten within the blink of an eye and heal in less than two days. But in the eyes of a common person, it looked scary indeed—after all, it cut through half of his hand horizontally,



blood was clotting at the edges of the wound, the skin and flesh were turned outwards, and it was deep enough for the bone to be seen.

That middle-aged man immediately dragged Xue Xian, who was too slow to react, and hurried down a small stretch of the alley he came from and stopped in front of a gate painted with red lacquer.

That was most likely his home. He lifted his hand to push the gate half-open and shouted something that sounded like someone's name into the house, then said, "Bring out that small stove on my table."

Afterwards, he opened the lid of the wooden box and meticulously applied medicine to Xue Xian's wound without delay.

Someone quickly came out of the house and handed over a small and exquisite copper stove.

Xue Xian glanced over; the person carrying the small stove was a middle-aged woman and she also had a good-natured air, similar to that of the middle-aged man. Behind her, a boy who looked around seven or eight years old stuck his head out to look around. When he saw Xue Xian, he gave him a smile and made a show of being very earnest, pointing at Xue Xian's hand and saying, "It can't touch water for two days, especially cold water."

"Go and read your books." The woman turned her head and urged him laughingly. She then turned her head towards Xue Xian and added, "Indeed, any contact with water should be avoided. In this weather, you have to be especially careful, otherwise the pain will become rooted and will cause you major pain attacks every year from now on."

This was no different from what the middle-aged man had said.

"Are you hurrying on on your journey? Would you like to come into the house to warm up for a bit?" The middle-aged man asked good-naturedly as he bound his hand well with sackcloth, carefully tying a knot while avoiding any place that would hurt.

"No, thanks. I still have business to attend to," replied Xue Xian. After a pause, with slight awkwardness, he added, "Many thanks for your kindness."

"Then take this small stove with you. This type of wound must be covered up for a while." The middle-aged man allowed for no discussion and pressed the small stove that was about half the size of the palm of one's hand into Xue Xian's hand.

Although Xue Xian did not fear the cold, he could still distinguish between differences in temperature. When the warm little stove was pressed into his hand, he raised his head and swept a glance at the area above the lintel of that mansion where three words had been written—Jiangs' medicine hall.

Afterwards, there was one year when he happened to pass through Ningyang. He took advantage of being undetected by people to overtly enter the Jiang family's courtyard and place that small copper stove along with a small bag of golden orbs on a stone table. He then departed in a leisurely and carefree manner.

This time, he arrived in Ningyang County once again and thought of the Jiangs' medicine hall. He planned to take a look as he passed by, but who knew that he would see such a ruined scene. The red lacquered wooden gate and the medicinal garden in the courtyard from the olden days had changed beyond recognition. All that was left was the lonely ghost of Jiang Shining.

He helped out a bit in passing.

After all, this world was not entirely populated by cruel and cold-hearted people like Adviser Liu. While there were people who forgot favours and violated justice, there also were people who understood benevolence and virtue.

Xue Xian swept his eyes over the snowstorm outside the temple and leaned his back against the Buddha statue.

Jiang Shining suddenly asked, "Before we left, you had me wait at the side of the gate. What did you tinker with at that master's desk?"

Xue Xian responded lazily, "I left him a little something in passing that can be considered an expression of my gratitude for helping me get the golden orb back."

What he left for Xuan Min wasn't just anything: it was a dragon scale from his original body. In any case, it was still a portion of a true dragon's body. Although it was not as good as the flesh and bones of the living dead, compared to mountain ginseng or lingzhi mushrooms, it was still much more valuable. If the Baldy's body bore an illness, even without knowing the cause, simply applying a dragon scale as medicine would at the very least have some beneficial effect.

When ordinary people saw a dragon scale, they would of course not recognise what it was. It would appear to just be a round, thin disc about the size of a coin that was suffused with a greenish-black luster. It would emit a faint and unique scent, like the damp smell that arises when rainwater strikes a mountain stone. There was even a bit of a...fresh smell that could not be described, like a freshly peeled shrimp that was pure and limpid.

Xue Xian silently opened his eyes and expressionlessly mumbled, "I'm a bit hungry."

In the central room on the second floor of the Guiyun Inn<sup>11</sup>, Xuan Min continued to sit at the table with his eyes closed, maintaining the same position that he had held before Xue Xian left, not having moved for quite a while.

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<sup>11</sup> "Guiyun" means returning or belonging to clouds.

In front of his table, a piece of yellow paper was spread out. On the paper was the dragon scale that Xue Xian had left behind. That special scent slowly dispersed, floating in the air, and finally wafting to his nose.

Xuan Min wrinkled his brows and suddenly opened his eyes. The spider-like mole on the side of his neck quietly returned to its original form.

He gazed down at the tabletop and saw the yellow paper in front of the table on which someone had left large words that looked like the marks of a dog crawling: "Legendary medicine. It can heal every illness. Feel free to believe it or not."

Xuan Min picked up that black disc next to the dog-crawled words and took one look at it. Suddenly, he knew what he should do and pulled out a thin, folded piece of paper from between his lapels.

He unfolded and flattened the paper, looking at the first three words written on it: Find the person.

Coincidentally, next to these three words, there was a drawing of a black disc that looked identical to this one on the table.

Find the person...

Xuan Min frowned and carefully compared the two for a while. He then folded the paper properly once again, picked up the thin disc that was left by someone, and sat quietly under the light of the candle flame.

Outside the window, the cold wind whipped around the snowstorm, quietly rustling and hitting the gate of the building.

Regardless of whether it was a small trail on a mountain or a narrow street in a city, they were all streaks of darkness, travelling far and wide.

*Translation: Cazi*

*Translation Check: Arlena*

*Final Checking: ascii*

— Suibian Subs and Scanlations

## Chapter 18: Blind Diviner (1)

There was scattered snowfall throughout the entire day and night. For Xue Xian and Jiang Shining, this was both advantageous and disadvantageous.

The advantage lay in Jiang Shining, who was acting as the main force in terms of the actual walking during their hurried journey, being a ghost that feared *yang*<sup>12</sup> energy. The snowy sky was covered in black clouds for the entire day, so the *yang* energy was stifled and the *yin* energy was flourishing, making it easy for him to walk so that he did not have to stop at the first glimmer of dawn.

The disadvantage was...

"Lift your hand and shield my face! Quickly! My head is about to be blown off by the wind!" Xue Xian yelled at Jiang Shining in an absolutely imposing way.

With such a strong and evil wind, he obviously could not sit on Jiang Shining's shoulder. For lack of a better option, Jiang Shining could only wedge him between his own front lapels with only his head exposed so that this restless cargo could talk idly about important matters. However, this evil wind did not abide by the common laws of nature; it followed no rules or regulations, whistling from all four directions at once, causing a person to become extremely annoyed.

Jiang Shining lifted his hand with a pale face. He protected Xue Xian's paper head while struggling to go forward in the middle of the evil wind. He said, "You can tuck that precious head of yours into my clothes."

Xue Xian resolutely and decisively refused. "No. I'm afraid that you'll stray off course as soon as I turn my attention away."

Jiang Shining, "... Where did this directionally-challenged person get his confidence<sup>13</sup> from?

Xue Xian laughed coldly. "Once you have entered the city, you'll cry as you ask me for directions."

Jiang Shining, "..."

They were trying to get to Wolong County<sup>14</sup>, one of the county seats of Linjiang, which was a distance of two cities away from Ningyang County and had an ancient ferry crossing.

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<sup>12</sup> *Yang* - of *yin* and *yang*, indicating light among many other things.

<sup>13</sup> "Confidence" here was chosen as a translation for the more literally translated "face", which is used in Chinese to represent someone's sense of confidence and/or pride.

<sup>14</sup> Wolong (卧龙) - means "slumbering dragon".

That ferry crossing was not considered large and the number of boats that went back and forth every day was not high; it wasn't even the only crossing that allowed travel towards Anqing. But the only reason they were going there to cross the river was because Xue Xian needed to go there to search for someone.

"There is a family that lives on the eastern side of the ferry crossing. It should be a family of two brothers but they don't seem to be very close. I've been there twice and both times, I saw them making a racket. The one who is a bit older has a bit of ability so I need him to take a look at this golden orb. He might be able to find out the location of the person who sold it to Adviser Liu," said Xue Xian to Jiang Shining.

As he had already gone twice, this clearly meant that he should be a very reliable person. Jiang Shining naturally had no objections and obediently rushed towards Wolong County.

In order to avoid the inconvenience of entering and leaving the city, they purposely took detours around the two cities they had to pass, taking mountain trails the entire way. Of the two, one was a dragon and the other was a ghost; both were used to travelling at night. It was reasonable to say that there was nothing that they would fear.

However, rumor had it that there was a group of bandits that roamed this wooded mountain and, although they were not very successful, they still limited the number of vehicles and horses that passed through. Because Xue Xian was carrying that golden orb in his arms, Jiang Shining was on tenterhooks the entire journey. He was afraid that they would run into a group or two that would tear the two of them up.

He had seen that the walls and pillars of several abandoned temples in which they had rested had hack marks left by knives and hatchet fights. Then, he later saw that a corner next to one of the gates had dried dark-red bloodstains and his anxiety finally reached its peak.

Maybe it was because they took a different route or maybe it was due to some other reason, but they did not run into a single living bandit during their entire trip. They occasionally came across vehicles and horses and would even turn back into their paper forms to conveniently hitch a ride.

In short, that all was calm and quiet<sup>15</sup> was really somewhat strange.

This continued until the fourth day when they arrived outside the gate of their destination without suffering the least bit of harm. Jiang Shining was still hesitant to believe it. "Is our luck really this good?"

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<sup>15</sup> "All was calm and quiet" was originally an idiom meaning "the breeze was still and the waves were quiet".

“Other people are all unafraid of thieves robbing them and instead fear thieves fixating on them<sup>16</sup>. You are the complete opposite and must be the only one who spends all day fixating on thieves.” Xue Xian raised his head and looked at the city gate.

“Wolong County—” Jiang Shining read the words out loud and then said, “It’s said that all places that have ‘*long* (dragon)’ in their names are places where dragons had really appeared before. This Wolong County sounds like a place where a real dragon previously slept.”

Xue Xian’s face was full of disdain. “This county is barely bigger than a hand and isn’t even large enough to step on. You must be the one who slept here!”

Jiang Shining looked at him in bewilderment. “It’s not like I’m talking about you.”

They happened to arrive just as it became *wugeng*<sup>17</sup> and the morning bell rang from within the city, one peal after another, resonating from the inside to the outside. After the lingering echoes of the fifth peal faded away, the city gate opened slowly.

When the guards opened the city gate, Jiang Shining went to hide in a nook. He planned to take advantage of the lingering dimness and turn back into his paper form to slip in between the edges of the gate to avoid any potential trouble that might occur during an inspection. But just as he retreated one step, he felt his heel chafe against something for a moment.

“What is it?” asked Xue Xian.

Jiang Shining crouched down, brushing away the snow from his footprint, and felt a slightly deformed piece of iron plate.

Borrowing the light from the lanterns hanging from the city wall, Xue Xian squinted his eyes for a moment and saw that that deformed piece of iron plate was about the size of a thumb. One side had a rough carving of a wolf’s head while the other side had a name carved into it, a name which had been ruthlessly scratched out by someone using a knife so that its original form could no longer be made out clearly.

“It’s another one,” Jiang Shining muttered and pulled a similar piece of iron plate from his chest.

This was what he had picked up previously under a Buddhist statue while they were resting in an abandoned temple. There was even a dark bloodstain on one side. The side on which the name was written was also similarly scratched and thus it had become a total mess. There was absolutely no way to make out the words.

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<sup>16</sup> Chinese 不怕贼偷就怕贼惦记 is a modification of the Chinese phrase 不怕贼进屋就怕贼惦记, which can be translated as “unafraid of a thief entering the house, but afraid that a thief fixates (on the house)” because the latter situation is more dangerous in the long-term.

<sup>17</sup> *Wugeng* is 3-5 a.m.

Xue Xian said, "Put it away for now."

Jiang Shining put the two pieces of iron plate away and no longer tarried, taking advantage of the unsuspecting guards and hurriedly going along the seam of the gate to enter the city.

Once they passed through the city gate, he could not make sense of what he was seeing.

The appearance of this Wolong County was extremely different from that of Ningyang County. At a glance, one would be hard-pressed to see even a single straight street because almost all of them were winding and intersecting in a complicated mess. At first glance, it looked like a chaotic maze.

Jiang Shining held back for a long time until he finally lowered his head towards Xue Xian to ask, "Where...do we go?"

Xue Xian held the golden orb with immense pride in himself and said, while looking extremely pleased with himself, "At the next intersection, turn eastward down the road with the Zhang family's pastry shop."

"Do you see that stall that sells sweet sesame cakes? Turn westward at that corner."

"Which side road smells of fresh wonton soup? That's right, just go down that road."

...

After rushing through several streets and alleys, Jiang Shining was actually directed to the point of feeling hungry. As a ghost, only another ghost could understand how long it had been since he had felt hunger.

"Are you so directionally challenged that you have to rely entirely on food as landmarks?" he asked in a completely monotonous voice while his entire face showed that he had nothing left to live for.

Xue Xian continued to embrace the golden orb as he nodded. "That's right. You better walk more and talk less. The sky is about to lighten. We just have to pass by a stewed meat store and a Bai Shun<sup>18</sup> Restaurant and we'll be there!"

Jiang Shining silently rolled his eyes.

Although this Ancient One's way of remembering landmarks was somewhat annoying, he did pick out the shortest route there. Sure enough, after they passed the Bai Shun Restaurant, Jiang Shining could just make out a ferry crossing some distance away amidst the snow and fog. Its flag was flapping around wildly in the wind and several passenger boats seemed to be moored at the shore.

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<sup>18</sup> Bai Shun = numerous arrangements.

Jiang Shining used his hand to cover the paperman that was sticking his head out from his front lapel. He tucked his neck in and walked against the wind towards the area on the eastern side of the ferry crossing.

“Ancient One, can you please sit still and stop moving? If you get blown away by the wind, I won’t go and pick you back up,” Jiang Shining grumbled moodily.

Xue Xian stubbornly turned his head to take several more looks at the side streets, clicked his tongue, and said, “I keep feeling as though there’s someone behind us.”

Jiang Shining subconsciously came to a halt, straightforwardly turned around to look in all directions, and said, “I don’t see anyone weird. Did you mistakenly think that you saw something because the snowflakes keep drifting sideways past our eyes?”

“Maybe,” Xue Xian mumbled indistinctly before withdrawing his neck, reluctantly settling down a little.

He said to himself, “If there really were someone following us, the snow would have made crunching noises under their steps. There’s no reason I wouldn’t be able to hear it. Perhaps I really am thinking too much...”

Following Xue Xian’s directions, Jiang Shining quickly arrived at the gate of a house in the outskirts of the city. Calling it the gate of a house was truly an exaggeration. Looking in from beyond the wall, the courtyard looked like a small chicken coop; the single-doored gate was old and discoloured. Due to the moisture, even the corners of the gate had grown mouldy and no one had taken care of it.

It was clear that this household was not one that was really getting by.

“Knock on the gate,” said Xue Xian.

Jiang Shining had a reserved personality and even his knocking was extremely refined, making three *du du du* sounds that were both easy and unhurried. Listening to it made Xue Xian’s teeth ache. “If the pair of brothers could hear the mosquito buzzing that passes for your knocking, it would be a miracle. One of them previously suffered an ear injury. Don’t worry and just knock boldly.”

Having heard this, Jiang Shining grudgingly used more strength while muttering “forgive me, forgive me” as he knocked repeatedly.

After quite a while, the *crunch crunch* sound of footsteps was finally heard from inside the courtyard.

Maybe the snow on the ground made it difficult to walk but it somehow sounded as though the person was kind of...hobbling?



“How old are the two brothers?” Jiang Shining could not help but ask.

“Oh,” Xue Xian answered, “the younger one is about eight or nine while the older one is probably sixteen or seventeen.”

Jiang Shining was stunned. “What? You’re asking a child to do divination?”

While he was stunned, that old wooden, single-doored gate was suddenly pulled open by someone inside.

“Thief! Get lost!!”

A childish roar came from beyond the gate.

After that, there was a thunderous crash. A large basin of water from who-knows-where splashed forth, thoroughly soaking Jiang Shining from head to toe as he was unable to react in time.

Jiang Shining’s actual body was made of paper after all, and so, after his entire head and face were splashed with water, he began to quiver at once and his entire body softened and fell powerlessly to the ground. Xue Xian, who was in his front lapel, was also unable to escape and slipped out, soaking wet, sticking onto the wet ground with a *squish*. The golden orb that was in his clothes rolled out with a *clatter* and happened to stop at the side of the gate.

The person standing at the gate cast aside the wooden basin in his hand with a *crash*. He hesitated for a moment before suddenly reaching out a hand to grab the golden orb lying by the side of the gate and nervously tried to get up to close the gate.

Just as Xue Xian was stuck on the ground and stifling his anger in preparation to start cursing, a warm hand reached down from the sky and picked him up from the ground.

That hand even brought that familiar scent of bitter medicine with it. When Xue Xian smelled it, he immediately sneezed. His head was soaking wet and hanging down so even though he wanted to straighten up, he was unable to. He could not help but explode. “Baldy! Did I excavate your family’s ancestral tomb or did I dig up your grave?! Why do you have to fix your attention on me alone and catch me?! Having chased me across 800 *li*<sup>19</sup>, aren’t you f\*cking tired? Huh?!”

A cold and indifferent voice spoke from above Xue Xian’s head. “Thank you for your concern. I am not tired.”

“...” Xue Xian almost vomited blood and immediately wanted to plant him headfirst into a river!

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<sup>19</sup> *Li* = unit of distance of ~500 meters.

The person who was standing in front of this small, chicken coop-sized courtyard was none other than Xuan Min.

He carried the soaking wet Xue Xian in one hand and also picked up Jiang Shining, who had returned to his original form after being drenched. He sandwiched them both between two of his fingers. Afterwards, without a trace of politeness, he slammed open that wooden gate.

He strode into the courtyard and caught a hold of the “little thief” who was trying to run away in a hurry. Lowering his line of sight, he serenely said, “Do not be greedy. Return the golden orb.”

*Translation: Cazi*

*Translation Check: iarrod*

*Final Checking: ascii*

*—Suibian Subs and Scanlations*

## Chapter 19: Blind Diviner (2)

Xuan Min was rather tall, so the little thief's head barely passed his waist. He was like a scrawny monkey, only around 8 or 9 years of age. After being seized by the back of his collar, he instantly started struggling, baring fangs and brandishing claws. He could not seem to reach Xuan Min and agitatedly wailed, "Help—! Robbery—! Ahhhhhhhh—! Let go—!"

"A thief calling 'stop thief' and causing such a scene. This youngster's smart," thought Xue Xian, impressed.

It was a pity that the Baldy had a different set of sensibilities. Men, women, the young, and the old were all equal in his eyes, completely unlike the usual monks. Xuan Min seemed as undisturbed as a still lake, holding onto the little thief by his collar with one hand and pulling a talisman out from between his own lapels with the other. He pressed it onto the crown of the little thief's head with a force neither light nor strong and said, "Prohibit speech."

Little Thief, "..."

The unrestrained wailing squawked to a sudden stop, choking the petty thief nearly to his death, with his face turning a vivid shade of red.

Xue Xian discreetly touched his mouth with a damp claw, feeling that the scene was strangely relatable. However, because he was soaked through and had become flimsy, his claw accidentally stuck to his mouth. If he carelessly forced them apart, either his claw would break or his mouth would get ripped. It was an absolutely awful situation.

Xuan Min coincidentally glanced at him just then and was treated to the sight of that vile spawn frozen in a foolish position.

Xue Xian expressionlessly closed his eyes. "... A lifetime's reputation, ruined within seconds. Someone give me a rope to hang this Baldy with so that no one will ever know of my humiliation.

Xuan Min lowered his gaze to the little thief, lightly saying, "Extend your hands."

With a slight twitch from the yellow talisman on his forehead, the little thief complied, straightening both his hands in front of him like a puppet on strings with the expression of someone who had lost all will to live.

When Xuan Min took the golden orb from him, one could not tell if the little thief was embarrassed or furious. He was flushed red from the top of his head down to the base of his neck, even the rims of his eyes were red. He looked rather surly with an expression that said "if you have the guts, then come and beat me to death". He really was picking a fight.

Having met his objective, Xuan Min stopped suppressing him and lifted his hand to remove the talisman from his forehead. He refolded it nicely and neatly and put it away.

Xue Xian anxiously stared at the golden orb in Xuan Min's hand, waiting for the Baldy to give it back to him.

He admittedly never expected the Baldy to help him like this and it dug out the minuscule speck of conscience from under his belly. So, he thought, "All right. Once he returns the orb, I'll take on the **insurmountable task** of being slightly more well-behaved for a few days. I'll act as if it is to give the Baldy some face. I really can't give him another dragon scale, even though there are a few pieces left."

However, after Xuan Min examined the golden orb between his fingers, his brows furrowed.

For a split second, a sliver of an indescribably strange expression crossed his face. It seemed somewhere between being lost in thought and absolute confusion.

After staring at the orb for a moment, he stroked it once with his thumb and furrowed his brows as he brought the golden orb a bit closer and sniffed it.

Xue Xian, "....."

He rolled his eyes, feeling indescribably uncomfortable.

Fortunately, his current body had not recovered fully yet and he had not established a connection with the golden orb, melding his body and spirit. Otherwise...with this stroking and sniffing, Xue Xian would have lost control ages ago and stomped his claw on his face.

His heart uttered 800 sentences of extreme hatred for the Baldy but with his claw stuck to his mouth, he was unable to open his mouth no matter what, thus he was helpless and could only swallow it all back down. It was amazing that he did not choke.

Good thing that the Baldy's sickness did not last long. He only took a sniff before returning to that bland expression again and lifted his head.

He briefly considered it before asking Xue Xian, "I can temporarily hold onto the golden orb for you. Any objections?"

Yes! I'm not giving it! In your dreams!

Xue Xian internally shouted but was still unable to utter a single word.

"Okay." Taking his silence as agreement, Xuan Min put the golden orb in the hidden pouch at his waist. As it was placed close to his body, there would be a constant pressure whenever he moved and so it would also be hard to lose.

Xue Xian slumped over listlessly, his head hung low and droopy, not in the mood to do anything at all. To be frank, he was not truly scared of Xuan Min coveting his orb. It was just

that he had lost his true body for more than half a year and only recently found it so he was unwilling to let go of it again.

He trembled faintly in place and only then did Xuan Min realise that his posture was strange. He had kept a hand over his mouth for ages and did not even switch hands. Xuan Min stared blankly for a moment before finally realising the reason why the vile spawn was behaving and remaining silent. He turned to the little thief. "May I borrow a fire basin?"

Though the little thief had the guts to snatch Xue Xian's golden orb, he was still a half-grown child. After being dealt with by Xuan Min, he could not help but feel guilty and fearful.

It was Xuan Min who had requested this and so he did not dare to ignore. Therefore, the little thief glanced over with an air of discontent, then begrudgingly turned on his heels to enter the sole building within the courtyard that could house a person. After a bit of noisy clattering from within, he dragged out a heavily dented copper basin and tossed it in front of Xuan Min with a *crash*.

"Thank you." As always, Xuan Min responded indifferently with a word of gratitude.

In the corner under the eaves where it was comparatively drier were two bundles of firewood. Compared to regular households, these two bundles were too thin. The majority were twisted twigs, not at all good firewood. Xuan Min easily snapped a few dry sticks, lit them with a match, and tossed them into the basin. It took some time for the dried sticks to burn up but they still ended up with a ball of fire and the chicken-coop of a courtyard filled with warm air.

At first, the little thief stubbornly ignored Xuan Min, but after a while he gave in to the toasty fire's warmth, silently shifting over to the fire basin and sneakily rubbing his hands.

Xue Xian and Jiang Shining were placed by Xuan Min to dry on a branch of a winter jasmine plant at the perfect distance away from the fire basin; any closer and the tongues of fire would scorch his crotch, any farther and it would not be warm enough.

To remedy a soaked paper, baking by the fire still helped no matter how little. At least Xue Xian could feel himself slowly drying up.

Hanging from the branch, he saw Xuan Min withdraw a piece of thin, folded paper from another hidden pouch between his lapels. From his angle, he could only see that the page had a multitude of characters, some were linked with lines, others were separated by paragraphs and there were even...pictures?

Xuan Min swept his eyes across the paper to a particular place, then refolded the page properly and stowed it away.

Turning towards the 8- or 9-year-old little thief, he asked, "Is your surname Lu?"

Both Xue Xian and the little thief were dumbfounded.

The little thief stared at him with alarm. “What do you want?”

“It seems so.” Upon seeing his reaction, Xuan Min immediately understood. He asked another question, “Do you have a blind older brother?”

The little thief surnamed Lu saw red and exploded, “Who are you?! Looking for Lu, what do you want from him?!”

Xue Xian looked at Xuan Min weirdly and thought, “It turns out that the Baldy isn’t here just to catch him but is here to find someone? How coincidental?”

In the midst of contemplation, his damp mouth and claws had already become half-dry. His claw plopped off his mouth and finally stopped obstructing his speech.

“Where’s Lu Shijiu?” Xue Xian could no longer resist and asked the little thief. “I’m looking to borrow something and find someone.”

He had been here twice before where the Lu brothers lived but they were not close and he only had a rough understanding of them—for instance, their parents and seniors were all already gone for reasons unknown. He had heard that one brother had become blind due to his innate cultivation of *yin* and *yang* while the other suffered an injury to the ear, causing some hearing issues. The two relied on each other to survive over the years though their relationship was not the best. Because they neither had elders nor had established themselves through marriage or career, the brothers did not even have formal names; only casual nicknames based on their birthdays. The older brother was called Lu Shijiu<sup>20</sup> and this 8- or 9-year-old younger brother was called Lu Nianqi<sup>21</sup>.

This Lu Nianqi was fairly young but he did not have the foolish air of a child. He immediately reacted after hearing Xue Xian speak. “I remember you. I’ve heard your voice. You’ve come looking for Shijiu before.”

Being around Lu Shijiu caused him to often encounter strange and chaotic things. Seeing a piece of paper speak did not frighten him speechless. Instead, he was rather unperturbed.

“I’ve been here twice but this is the first time I’ve been welcomed with a large gift.” Xue Xian thought of that face drenched in water and could not help but laugh. “Anyway, don’t get off topic. Where’s Lu Shijiu? Where did he go and when is he coming back? Also, what’s up with you randomly stealing from people?”

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<sup>20</sup> Shijiu (十九): 19

<sup>21</sup> Nianqi (廿七): 27

Who would have known that as soon as he spoke, tears the size of beans would roll down from Lu Nianqi's eyes without warning. "I'm also looking for him. I've been looking for him for over half a month. He, he's in the river."

Xue Xian, "..."

No, what does 'he's in the river' mean?

## Chapter 20: Blind Diviner (3)

Lu Nianqi wiped away his tears and resumed his obstinate and hard-headed expression. Clutching a corner of his clothes, he did not look at Xuan Min and Xue Xian but had his head tilted to stare at the slowly shrinking tongue of flame in the fire basin, depressedly saying, "About half a month ago, Lu Shijiu told me that he would go to Grave Mound Island in the middle of the river..."

Every segment of the river around Wolong County was relatively shallow and narrow compared to the areas farther upstream and downstream. Most of the small islets were like pellets of land. Even the islet on which the small, chicken cage-like courtyard of the Lu brothers was located looked exceptionally congested. The slender white sogon grass that grew all over those small islets provided the water birds in the river places to rest during the day.

The only islet that could be considered larger could barely be considered a small island in the middle of the river.

From far away, that small island could be seen to be covered by a wild forest with interconnecting branches and looked like a green steamed bun and also like a grave mound. Because of this, the locals called it "Steamed Bun Island" or "Grave Mound Island".

Ordinary people were not inclined to go to Grave Mound Island. After all, other than weeds, only miscellaneous trees grew there and it was desolate and dark. It was not a good place. The only people who went to Grave Mound Island were the apothecaries from near and far as it was said that the soil of the island was fertile and moist and many medicinal herbs grew there on their own.

Lu Shijiu had gone there three times.

At daybreak on a day half a month ago, Lu Nianqi woke up to find a brief note left at his bedside. Lu Shijiu could not use a brush and so he always dipped his finger in ink to fumble out words, making his handwriting especially recognisable. There was only one sentence written in the note in a trembling scrawl: Going to Grave Mound Island.

As outsiders could perceive, the Lu brothers were not very close. Lu Nianqi acted as though he was covered in thorns from head to toe and had a crabby temper that made him hard to raise. Lu Shijiu had an eccentric temperament and scarcely spoke; leaving a brief note and going away like this was something he would normally do.

And so, Lu Nianqi did not think much about it. He just grunted and stepped out to pick up firewood to cook himself food and continued his daily work while waiting for Lu Shijiu to return.

As a result, he waited until nightfall. It had even started to rain, but he still did not see any sign of Shijiu.



"I went to the ferry crossing. The boatman whose boat was anchored there said that the rain was falling heavily and so he wouldn't go to the middle of the river. Anyway, he said that Shijiu went on Old Man Liu's boat and he hasn't returned yet. They are probably resting there because of the heavy rain." Lu Nianqi, despite looking young, spoke very clearly. "I vaguely saw a fishing lantern on a boat in the middle of the river, reckoned that they were taking shelter from the rain, and so I came back. Who knew..."

Who knew that it would rain continuously for three days, even causing the river level to rise a bit. Lu Nianqi went to the ferry crossing every day and only came back after seeing the fishing lantern as he restlessly waited for the rain to stop. He grabbed several copper coins, went to find a boatman at the ferry crossing and set out for Grave Mound Island in the middle of the river. Who would have thought that he would find neither Lu Shijiu nor Old Man Liu.

"I walked almost all over Grave Mound Island and still couldn't find him. But I did hear his voice once," said Lu Nianqi. "But when I called out to him, that sound had already disappeared."

Just like this, Lu Nianqi went back and forth six or seven times to and from Grave Mound Island, but he still could not find Lu Shijiu. Over the past few days, a dark whirlpool had formed in the vicinity of Grave Mound Island and two boatmen had their boats capsize there, one after the other. The boatmen were no longer willing to go there, regardless of how much Lu Nianqi bothered them.

What was even more annoying was that over the past few days, Lu Nianqi always heard the sound of someone knocking on the door early in the morning and in the middle of the night. The first two times, he thought that it was Lu Shijiu returning. He hurriedly ran to open the door, only to find that there was no one there. When he returned to the house after searching for a while, he sensed that the boxes in the house seemed to have been moved by someone.

"The four strings of coins we had collected and stored inside were all gone! Not a single coin was left! What could I use to hire a boatman?!" When Lu Nianqi brought this up, he was like a wild dog with all its fur exploding.

Hearing this, Xue Xian clicked his tongue and tutted, "No wonder you splashed a whole basin of water on me when you opened the door. Which asshole could be so virtueless and shameless that they would steal from an eight- or nine-year-old child? Even so, you can't steal my orb just because someone stole your four strings of coins. What kind of reasoning is that? Luckily for you, I can't move freely right now, or else I would have certainly hung you upside down and dipped you into the river twice."

"Who's eight or nine years old?" Lu Nianqi was entirely red from being lectured, biting the bullet to retort back.

“You!” Xue Xian sighed, exasperated. “Who else could it be?”

“I’m fifteen!” Lu Nianqi’s entire face was twitchy and he shouted angrily. “It’s only because I was sick before and so didn’t grow much taller. Don’t go randomly guessing a person’s age by simply looking at their face.”

Xue Xian was somewhat flabbergasted. However, how old this bad-tempered brat was and how tall he was were none of his business. What he was more interested in finding out was whether Lu Shijiu was still alive or not.

Obviously, he was not the only person thinking this.

As soon as Xuan Min lifted his sleeve, the gradually weakening tongue of the flame in the fire basin completely went out with a *pfff*, leaving only green smoke spiralling upwards in the air. He passed his finger through the green smoke and plucked Xue Xian and Jiang Shining down from the winter branch. The two thin paper men had already been roasted completely dry without any major issues.

Everything was fine except for one small detail: the strokes on the paper men’s faces were rather smudged because the ink had run.

Jiang Shining, still confused, hurriedly transformed into human form off to the side. The running ink had made two black streaks under his eyes that formed dark circles, which were much more obvious than they had previously been, spreading nearly halfway across to his cheeks. He looked as if he had an incurable illness and had one foot in the grave<sup>22</sup>. On the other hand, Xue Xian looked even more wretched, unable to walk and not in an appropriate state to transform back into human form. The smudged ink marks on his paper form looked even more eye-catching after the ink ran, directly flowing from the corners of his eyes down his nose.

Originally, he had only been dead with his eyes open<sup>23</sup>, but now, he had directly turned into someone bleeding from the seven orifices<sup>24</sup>.

Truly...a horrifying sight<sup>25</sup>.

Xuan Min glanced down at him and decisively stuffed him into his hidden pouch, his cold expression showing a trace of the apathetic feeling of “what remains unseen is deemed to be clean”<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> One foot in the grave (行将就木) is translated from the Chinese idiom that literally means approaching one’s coffin and is used to describe someone quickly approaching death.

<sup>23</sup> Being dead with one’s eyes open 死不瞑目 is a literal translation of the phrase that figuratively means being dead while carrying heavy resentment or everlasting regret (the opposite of resting in peace).

<sup>24</sup> Bleeding from the seven orifices 七竅流血 is a literal translation that means bleeding from the seven openings of the head (eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth), usually a sign of serious injury and is always a pretty scary sight.

<sup>25</sup> Horrifying sight 辣眼睛 is from the Chinese phrase that literally means “burning the eyes”, a phrase used to describe a sight so horrifying that it burns one’s eyes to see it.

<sup>26</sup> What remains unseen is deemed to be clean 眼不见为净 can also be translated as “what the eye doesn’t see, the heart doesn’t grieve over”.

Lu Nianqi saw this cold monk lifting his feet and preparing to leave and so he could not help but ask, "Where are you all going?"

"The middle of the river," Xuan Min responded.

Hearing this, Lu Nianqi leapt up and chased after him, asking urgently, "Are you going to look for Lu Shijiu? Can you bring me with you? I'll go too!"

"As you wish." Xuan Min did not even turn his head when he threw out these words and strode towards the ferry crossing.

After not staying in Xuan Min's hidden pouch for several days, Xue Xian discovered some new things inside as soon as he entered. Other than his precious golden orb and that cloth bag holding silver needles, there were some additional hard bits and pieces. Xue Xian silently moved over, lifting his hand to touch them and even tried to take a bite...

They were small pieces of silver and there were quite a large number of them, with no sign of where they were exchanged from.

It was flurrying at the ferry crossing. Several black-awning boats<sup>27</sup> were anchored there and all the boatmen were probably taking shelter under the awnings of their boats, looking especially cold and cheerless.

Xuan Min shook the copper bell hanging next to the flag. Several boatmen stuck their heads out from the cabin one after the other and one of them lazily shouted, "The fog is too thick to cross the river. Wait and come back later."

"I don't want to cross the river." Xuan Min pointed towards the middle of the river. "I wish to go to the Grave Mound Island."

As soon as these words were spoken, those boatmen all shook their heads and withdrew back under the awnings of their black boats without another word. Only one boatman who seemed to be a bit more talkative explained to him, "There's a dark whirlpool near Grave Mound Island where boats have capsized. Little master<sup>28</sup>, you're not a local, are you? Whatever it is you want to do, I advise you to switch to a different place. There are no boatmen here who would be willing to go there."

Xuan Min quietly listened until he finished speaking and asked, "How much would it cost if I only wish to rent this boat?"

The boatman stared blankly.

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<sup>27</sup> Black-awning boat 乌篷船 - type of boat with a bamboo awning that is painted black.

<sup>28</sup> Little master (little shifu) 小师父 - referring to someone skilled as opposed to a lord.

There were often people who wanted to rent pleasure boats but those who wanted to rent such a small boat with a black awning were very rare. After all, a customer would find such a narrow and small boat difficult to control; without a boatman, an ordinary person would find it very difficult to safely row the boat to the opposite bank of the river.

“This...” The boatman was somewhat hesitant.

Xue Xian, who could not see anything on the outside of the hidden pouch, pulled out two pieces of silver and silently lifted them through the opening of the pouch.

Xuan Min, “...”

With a lightning move of the hand, he grabbed the silver rummaged out by that vile spawn and pressed his claw back inside. Without any delay, Xuan Min directly gave the pieces of silver to that boatman.

Xue Xian was unhappy about being pressed back into the bag and so he noisily slapped Xuan Min's waist and said, making a show of being very much in earnest, “It's not very convenient for me to fish out money in my current form. But don't worry, I won't take advantage of you, Baldy. I'll pay back double later with thanks.”

Xuan Min treated him as if he did not exist.

The boatman received the silver pieces. Even without weighing them, he could tell that the amount was significant. He felt rather awkward and said, “I can't take these.”

However, Xuan Min's expression was extremely cold, making people feel even colder than when the entire sky was filled with snow dregs floating indiscriminately. The boatman saw that he did not have the slightest interest in changing his mind and could only embarrassedly alight from the boat to allow Xuan Min and the others to board it. Just as they went on board, he could not help but ask worriedly, “Can you really row a boat?”

Lu Nianqi had the same worry as the boatman. But he was also afraid that if he asked anything, Xuan Min might change his mind. And so, he could only choke back his doubts. He stared at Xuan Min and Jiang Shining impatiently and with some suspicion in mind and followed them onto the boat.

Before Xuan Min stepped onto the boat, he casually picked up a water reed.

While Lu Nianqi was puzzled as to why he wanted to bring a water reed, he saw Xuan Min pull out a folded talisman from his chest, slap it onto the bow of the boat and say “Go” before putting the reed in his hand into the water like a pole. The boat responded to his command and moved, slowly breaking through the water. Xuan Min shook the reed pole lightly and the bow of the boat changed direction, heading straight towards that cluster of islands in the middle of the river.

Nianqi stared at that familiar-looking talisman for a while and finally recalled that this was what Xuan Min had previously stuck onto his forehead. Instantly, he became angry and thought, can you please use a different move?!

Even though there was the talisman that caused the small boat to move as soon as it was commanded to and there was also the reed pole to control the direction, Xue Xian still felt somewhat uneasy about Xuan Min. He silently crawled up to the opening of the hidden pouch and stared at the reed pole in Xuan Min's hand without a sound, unable to tear his eyes away.

After watching for a while, he could not help but look up and ask Xuan Min, "Why are you looking for Lu Shijiu? Is it also to use his skill to search for someone?"

Xuan Min was just about to open his mouth to reply when he heard Lu Nianqi at the side suddenly crying out with an "Ah!"

*Translation: moomoomooncake*

*Translation Check: Arlena*

*Final Checking: ascii*

*—Suibian Subs and Scanlations*