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As Qingxu's enthusiasm to express his sincerity reached Gideon's ears, a satisfied smile played upon his lips. Everything was unfolding precisely as he had calculated, and the pieces were falling into place just as he had envisioned.

Deep down, Gideon knew he had never been a virtuous person. Aside from his fervent devotion to the Lord, he couldn't even uphold the basic moral principles of honesty and integrity in his dealings with others. When he first arrived in the bustling city of Eastcliff, he had contemplated leveraging the connections and resources of Changyun Temple to aid him in his search for Maria.

Yet, upon careful consideration, he realized that revealing his true identity solely to exploit the temple's influence would not be a wise move. Setting aside whether Changyun Temple could truly assist him in uncovering Maria's whereabouts, the presence of a Taoist priest who had dedicated decades of his life to practicing the ancient teachings was an unnecessary complication he wished to avoid.

Thus, he had refrained from venturing into Changyun Temple, despite the growing urgency of his current situation. On one hand, the Lord had ordered the entire Warriors Den to lay low for a while, and Gideon sensed that his time to find Maria was slipping away. Furthermore, while the four Earls held esteemed positions within the Den, Gideon himself was not entirely free to act as he pleased.

His extended freedom during this period was solely due to the Lord's unyielding desire to capture Maria, but now the circumstances had abruptly changed with the mysterious death of one of the Earls. It was entirely possible that one day the Lord would issue a command, forcing Gideon to return.

Complicating matters further, the Lord was still keen on discovering the whereabouts of Bruce's son. Gideon could no longer afford to delay this matter and would soon embark on a journey to Aurous Hill. Therefore, his only option for locating Maria swiftly was to immerse himself within the confines of the temple.

Of course, such a course of action would inevitably expose the fact that he had lived for over a century and a half. However, if he could find Maria and emerge triumphant, he would consider it a victory and vow to never set foot in China again.

Unaware of Gideon's intricate plans, Qingxu was only aware of his old acquaintance's long life and his willingness to impart the secret of longevity upon him. All Qingxu needed to do was accept a nomination certificate, and there was no reason for him to refuse such an opportunity.

Without hesitation, Gideon seized the moment and swiftly turned to Qingxu, "Qingxu, you must work diligently in the coming days, mobilizing all the contacts at your disposal. Help me investigate the leads I need. I will be heading south. If you come across any clues or receive any messages, do not hesitate to contact me!"

Qingxu knelt respectfully on the ground and replied, "Master, rest assured, I will exert all my efforts."

With a nod of approval, Gideon handed him Maria's photograph and instructed him, "Find this person in the photo. Remember, the photo must never be leaked or spread online. Only you should possess it. Let your people use it to identify her in person. Do you understand?"

Gideon understood the potential ramifications if Maria's photo were to circulate on the internet. Despite his advanced age, he had a remarkable grasp of the digital world and was well aware that once something was uploaded to the internet, it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to stop its spread.

Thus, he entrusted the photo solely to Qingxu, with the strict condition that it be never posted online. Qingxu accepted the responsibility without hesitation. "Master, fear not, I will ensure its secrecy."

Curious to gather any general leads about the girl, Qingxu inquired, "Master, do you have any hints as to her possible whereabouts?"

Gideon shook his head and replied, "I am uncertain of her location. However, I speculate she might be in China. It would be best if you gather a group of disciples and conduct a thorough search throughout the entire country."

Qingxu nodded, determination gleaming in his eyes. "Consider it done. I will make the necessary arrangements."

"Very well," Gideon acknowledged with a slight nod. "I entrust this task to you. Should you acquire any leads, remember to notify me promptly."

"Roger that, Master!" Qingxu eagerly agreed before asking, "By the way, Master, the people waiting outside are all my disciples. If I am granted the opportunity to seek longevity in the future, may I bring them along? They have all devoted their loyalty to Changyun Temple for many years. If each one of them has a chance to pursue longevity, the foundation of Changyun Temple will be eternal!"

A smile curved upon Gideon's lips as he nodded approvingly. "They are all disciples of our esteemed Changyun Temple. Now that I have achieved enlightenment, it is only natural to elevate the entire temple to new heights."

He then shifted his focus and cautioned, "However, this matter must remain confidential for the time being. The world must not learn of such audacious attempts to defy fate, as it would undoubtedly cause an uproar and bring unnecessary troubles to Changyun Temple. After I depart, you must gather them and relay my words precisely, ensuring they keep this knowledge under strict lock and key."

"Master, fear not," Qingxu reassured. "I will impress upon them the importance of absolute secrecy."

Gideon expressed his satisfaction. "Very good. I eagerly await your positive updates."

Qingxu hastened to ask, "Master, I am curious about your current place of residence. If you don't mind, may I arrange accommodations for you?"

Gideon shook his head, dismissing the idea. "It is unnecessary, my friend."

Glancing at the time, he added, "Very well, I won't take up any more of your time today. I have numerous tasks to attend to, so please make the arrangements swiftly. I shall leave my contact details with you, and we can communicate whenever necessary."

"Of course!" Qingxu responded respectfully. "I shall not detain you any further, Master."

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When Gideon and Qingxu emerged from the secret room, the anticipation among the other Changyun elders was palpable. They had been eagerly awaiting this moment, not just Qingxu alone. Their dedication to the pursuit of longevity had kept them bound to this place with unwavering commitment, and now Gideon represented their best chance.

As Gideon stepped out, a swarm of people rushed forward, bowing respectfully before him. They were aware of the thoughts running through their minds, and Gideon, perceiving their expectations, addressed them calmly. "My esteemed disciples and nephews, I have already shared the path to longevity with Qingxu, who will elaborate on it in detail later. I must attend to some matters now and take my leave."

Disappointment washed over everyone upon hearing Gideon's departure. One of them, filled with respect, spoke up. "Master Gideon, you have been absent from Changyun Temple for so many years. It feels hasty for you to leave soon after your return."

Gideon cast a glance at Qingxu, who stepped forward immediately, his tone firm and resolute. "Ling feng, Master has urgent matters to attend to. We mustn't interfere or cause any delay. Master has already entrusted me with the answers to your inquiries, and I shall relay them verbatim."

He further cautioned, "However, let me be clear. Should Master Gideon's important affairs be delayed, he will never grant you the opportunity to glimpse the path to longevity."

Fear filled the expressions with those present, and no one dared to ask any further questions. Even Ling feng, who had been addressed, panicked and said respectfully, "Disciple Ling feng bids farewell to Master Gideon!"

The crowd echoed in unison, "Farewell, Master Gideon!"

With a graceful stroke of his long beard, Gideon walked away without looking back. As everyone prepared to see him off, his voice reached their ears. "Masters and nephews, remain here. There's no need to bid me farewell."

Unlike Gideon, Qingxu had grown up within the confines of Changyun Temple, and now he resided within its prison walls. He held a deep affection for the temple and didn't wish to enjoy the feast of knowledge alone.

After sharing the tale, the younger disciples sensed the gravity of the opportunity that lay before them. They were overwhelmed with excitement and hung onto Maria's photograph, attempting to etch her image into their minds.

Qingxu issued another command, "Junior brothers, tonight you must select someone absolutely trustworthy among your disciples. Compile a list for me. Tomorrow, I shall summon the individuals on your lists and present them with the photographs. They shall all be dispatched!"

The group readily agreed, speaking in unison. "Rest assured, Master!"

Qingxu continued, "Furthermore, esteemed seniors and junior fellows, I wish to share some heartfelt words with you. Upon my encounter with Senior Master Gideon earlier today, it was clearly evident that Master Gideon possesses impressive vitality and strength. His powerful demeanor and energy were undeniable, leaving a lasting impression on those present. His appearance belies his true age, which is nearly one hundred and sixty years. Judging by his current condition, living another forty years is not an unreasonable expectation. Therefore, it is conservatively estimated that Master Gideon may live up to two hundred years!"

Qingxu's words stirred the innermost desires and hopes for longevity within each individual, raising their aspirations to new heights.

Ling feng couldn't help but ask, "Senior Brother, in your opinion, what is the maximum life expectancy of Master Gideon? Records mention immortal masters who harnessed spiritual energy hundreds of thousands of years ago. They often lived for two or three hundred years, and some even surpassed five hundred years. While I cannot confirm the veracity of these accounts, considering Gideon's current state, we can certainly guarantee a lifespan of at least two hundred years. If his cultivation continues to improve over the next two hundred years, he might live even longer!"

With a serious expression, Qingxu replied, "Young brothers, you must not divulge Master Gideon's return or the path to longevity to anyone. This matter is of utmost importance, and any negligence may jeopardize our future. We might miss out on a hundred years of longevity! After witnessing Master Gideon today, I believe none of you juniors would wish to perish before reaching a hundred years of age, am I right?"

Everyone's countenance turned grave as they chimed in unison, "Indeed, we do not wish for such a fate!"

Qingxu nodded and said, "Then remember my words!"

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Night fell.

Gideon sat cross-legged in his temporary residence, lost in deep thought. While he appeared to be meditating with closed eyes, his mind was preoccupied with when he should depart for Aurous Hill.

Suddenly, his mobile phone buzzed, alerting him to a message from Lord. He swiftly powered on the device, accessed the special software, and established a connection.

Through the phone, Lord's cold voice resounded. "Gideon, I ordered you to proceed to Aurous Hill and locate Bruce's son. Why haven't you departed yet?"

Gideon quickly explained, "My Lord, I have some thoughts I'd like to share with you, if I may be so bold."

In an icy tone, Lord replied, "Speak."

Respectfully, Gideon began, "My Lord, I have always held the belief that Maria is most likely in Eastcliff. I have been searching for her there these past two days. As for any leads regarding Aurous Hill, if, as you mentioned, Bruce's son has been missing for twenty years, spending a few more days to find Maria seems to be a wiser choice. If he has already left Aurous Hill and departed at some point during the past two decades, it would be exceedingly difficult for me to unearth any clues about him upon my arrival. Therefore, it seems... the matter concerning Bruce's son is not as pressing. To truly allay your concerns, finding Maria as soon as possible is the best course of action."

"You insolent fool! That's insubordination!" Lord's voice dripped with disdain.

Panicking, Gideon pleaded, "I am devoted to serving you, my Lord. Please forgive me!"

With cold detachment, Lord warned, "I don't need to argue with you. But from now on, don't be surprised if I treat you harshly."

Anxiously, Gideon implored, "My Lord, please rest assured. I will diligently carry out your orders henceforth."

The Lord's voice chilled the air as he spoke, "Very well! This time, when you journey to Aurous Hill, I have an additional task for you."

Gideon blurted out, "Please command me, my Lord!"

Lord revealed, "I received information that the Evans family has also traveled to Aurous Hill, Samuels, his wife, and their three sons and daughter are currently residing in Wanliu Villa. I suspect they too are searching for Bruce's son. Therefore, I want you to go to Aurous Hill and eliminate them all without mercy!"

Gideon was absolutely shocked. "The Evans family? My Lord, there is a mysterious force backing them. I fear that assassinating them rashly may expose us to unnecessary risks."

With a contemptuous snort, Lord retorted, "What are you afraid of? Even if there is a master behind the

Evans family, their strength cannot surpass yours!"

Continuing, Lord asserted, "Jarvis met his demise because he fell victim to an ambush of close-defense cannons. But in a place like Aurous Hill, you need not worry. No one possesses

the capability to deploy such weapons there. Once you reach Wanliu Villa, you can charge in without hindrance. No one will be able to stop you!"

Though slightly perplexed, Gideon acknowledged the partial truth in Lord's words and inquired, "My Lord, upon arriving in Aurous Hill, should I prioritize eliminating the Evans family or pursue Bruce's son first?"

In a cold, authoritative tone, Lord commanded, "Dispose of the Evans family first. If Bruce's son is indeed alive, killing the Evans family in Aurous Hill will undoubtedly compel him to reveal himself!"

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As the sun set in Aurous Hill, Elaine, having finished preparing dinner, called out to Charlie and Claire, summoning them to the table. She couldn't help but complain, "It's already eight o'clock! Where on earth is that old rascal? I have no idea where he disappears to."

Charlie, nonchalant as ever, informed his mother, "Dad has recently taken up the position of Executive Vice President at the Painting and Calligraphy Association. Naturally, he'll be occupied with his duties from time to time. Let's be mindful of his work responsibilities."

Disdainfully, she retorted, "I understand his position. But let me tell you, being the executive vice president doesn't mean those in charge of the Painting and Calligraphy Association have any taste."

Just as she was venting, Jacob pushed open the door and entered the room. Claire quickly greeted him, "Dad, wash your hands and come eat!"

Jacob asked casually, "What's on the menu tonight? Any savory dishes?"

Elaine cursed, "If you want something hard to chew, why not try the pot lid? Gnaw on that, and I'll reward you with two yuan tomorrow!"

Hearing Elaine's words, Jacob winced and furrowed his brows. "You certainly have a way with words."

With that, he walked into the dining room, washed his hands at the kitchen sink, then leisurely made his way to the dining table. He looked at Charlie and said, "Good son-in-law, guess who I ran into while shopping in the antique street today?"

Charlie casually replied, "It must be Zachary. Who else would it be?"

Surprised, Jacob exclaimed, "You got it, my sharp son-in-law!"

Charlie smiled, "Dad, don't be so amazed. I already knew Zachary had returned to the Antique Street. Even if I didn't, I could have guessed. After all, who else sells counterfeit antiques in that place?"

"Yes!" Jacob nodded. Then, recalling the events in the Antique Street, he sighed, "This Zachary has really become bolder. Today, he had the audacity to display a piece of lightning-struck wood outside his stall."

"I asked him about its worth, and he shamelessly named a price of five million. Can you believe the audacity of this poor guy?"

As he spoke, another thought crossed his mind. "Oh, by the way, I heard that Zachary stopped dealing in antiques for a while and started hanging out with Orvel Hong. Now they can't get along? Has he been forced back into the antique business?"

Charlie chuckled and said, "Dad, you shouldn't concern yourself with what Zachary does. If he wants to sell lightning-struck wood at any price, let him. It doesn't matter if the price is exorbitant. The question is, who would actually spend five million to buy a piece of lightning-struck wood?"

With pursed lips, Jacob nodded and said with a smile, "You're right."

Elaine interjected, "Jacob, are you getting back into the antique business now?"

Jacob squinted at her and casually replied, "I'm not an antique dealer. What am I supposed to sell? I just have a keen eye for it, so I'm somewhat involved in the industry."

"I happen to be one of the best, so occasionally they let me take part in opportunities, and I always manage to make a killing."

"Only you?" Elaine scoffed. "Once you make a move, you can't help but show off!"

"You know nothing!" Jacob looked at her with disdain, then turned to Charlie and said, "By the way, my good son-in-law, our Painting and Calligraphy Association is organizing an exhibition of ancient calligraphy and paintings in Aurous Hill soon. It has garnered significant support, and it will be a grand event that could even catch the attention of national television! We might even get CCTV to cover the entire process!"

Curious, Charlie asked, "Is it such a big deal? Aurous Hill isn't known for calligraphy and painting. Isn't it a bit forced to make such a grand move?"

Jacob replied, "It doesn't matter if Aurous Hill isn't renowned for calligraphy and painting. As long as we can showcase remarkable works here, we're collecting famous pieces from collectors all over Aurous Hill. Our first step is internal financing. Our president and other vice presidents have numerous ancient calligraphy and paintings. As the executive vice president, I am less fortunate. Although I'm second in command, I don't have much. Could you try to use your connections to help me collect a few pieces? If that's not possible, maybe you can borrow a few. I'll return them to you after the exhibition!"

Curious, Charlie asked, "Dad, did you discuss this with Zachary when you were at the Antique Street today? Isn't he quite talented?"

"Zachary?" Jacob curled his lips and said, "You don't know. That kid's mother is a complete profiteer. He learned from her a few years ago. He even passed off fake calligraphy and

paintings as genuine. He sold them to Japanese and Korean antique collectors, causing a big fuss that ended up reaching the embassies. I sought his help at that time, fearing he might drag me into it. I didn't want to become a nationwide laughingstock."

Charlie had never heard of such a scandal and asked curiously, "Is Zachary still up to his old tricks? What happened afterward? How did you handle it?"

Jacob explained, "Zachary sold a batch of fake bronze wares to a few foreigners and charged them a hefty sum. He even helped them get the items abroad. Those foreigners believed they had found a treasure. However, when the truth came out, they were all caught and faced significant consequences. The Japanese and Koreans were too afraid to go to prison in China. In the end, nothing came of it."

Reflecting on the incident, Jacob smacked his lips and sighed, "Tsk Tsk, when it comes to Zachary, he certainly has some interesting stories."

Charlie chuckled and said, "Dad, you haven't witnessed Zachary selling the 'Mona Lisa.' It would be quite a spectacle."

Curious, Jacob asked, "Zachary sells the Mona Lisa? He actually sold it to a foreigner?"

"Absolutely," Charlie confirmed. "He did just that."

Jacob exclaimed in surprise, "Was that foreigner out of their mind? Isn't the real Mona Lisa hanging in the Louvre?"

Charlie nonchalantly waved his hand in the air, stating, "Oh, that one in the Louvre is just a copy by the one and only Da Vinci. It's actually based on the original masterpiece created by the Chinese painter Zhao Mengfu during the Yuan Dynasty."

"What?" Jacob was utterly confused. "Son-in-law, where did you learn all this? How could Zhao Mengfu have any connection to the Mona Lisa? Besides, he lived two hundred years before Leonardo da Vinci. It doesn't add up..."

Claire couldn't help but burst into laughter and said, "Honey, don't tease Dad..."

Charlie laughed and said, "Dad, I'm not joking. Let's eat now!"

Jacob snapped back to reality and grumbled, "Son-in-law, it's fine if you want to joke with me, but don't forget what I said earlier."

"Do you know someone who can provide calligraphy and paintings?" Charlie nodded and assured him, "Don't worry, I'll take care of it."

Jacob pondered for a moment and then said, "Our president mentioned that he would contribute five sets of calligraphy and paintings. As the executive vice president, I should have slightly fewer pieces, so let's settle for four sets."

Charlie nodded and replied, "Alright, leave it to me."

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Meanwhile, at Aurous Hill University...

The vibrant atmosphere of Aurous Hill University filled the air as the freshmen completed their registration, got their class placements, and were assigned counselors. Today, the school distributed military training uniforms to all the students in preparation for the two-week training that would commence tomorrow morning.

To avoid the hassle of daily commuting, both Maria and Claudia made the wise decision to reside on campus. As they chatted in their dormitory, they busied themselves with arranging their beds and personal belongings.

Ever since the tragic loss of her family, Claudia had become guarded and rarely engaged in conversations with others. During her time in Canada, she had placed her trust in only two people: Aunt Lewis and Lisa. However, despite Claudia's usual reserved nature, she discovered an unexpected connection with Maria. Their conversations flowed effortlessly, and Maria's engaging presence made Claudia feel as though they had known each other for a lifetime.

From Claudia's perspective, Maria possessed not only beauty and grace but also depth and education. Her every movement exuded elegance and decency. Deep within her heart, Claudia admired Maria and even subconsciously regarded her as a role model.

Maria, in turn, treated Claudia like a caring older sister in all aspects of their lives together—be it at school, in their dormitory, or in Claudia's presence. Maria's kindness and warmth nurtured a special bond between them.

Although Maria had a genuine desire to get closer to Claudia, she also felt that Claudia's personality was the perfect counterbalance to her own. Despite her curiosity about Charlie, Maria hesitated to bring him up in their conversations. She yearned for another encounter with him, but she also feared that he might not trust her and would test her with his spiritual energy once again.

Although Charlie's psychological suggestion had no practical effect on her, the aftermath of his spiritual energy entering her mind still lingered. Maria couldn't help but frown as she observed Claudia chatting away. Concerned, Claudia noticed her expression and asked, "Cathy, is something bothering you? Are you feeling unwell?"

Maria forced a smile, rubbing her temples, and replied, "It's nothing, just a headache."

Caution laced Claudia's voice as she inquired, "Is it your time of the month? Our counselor mentioned that if you're experiencing discomfort, you can inform her, and she'll help us request leave from the instructor."

Maria shook her head and explained, "It's not that. I think it's a migraine. My temples are throbbing, and the pain is quite intense."

Carefully, Claudia offered, "Would you like some painkillers? Sister Lisa gave me a few this afternoon—regular ones like ibuprofen."

Maria waved her hand and declined, "Thank you, but I've been taking painkillers for the past two days, and they haven't provided much relief."

Claudia exclaimed, "You've been relying on them for two days? You shouldn't overdose on those medications, right?"

Helplessly, Maria admitted, "I can't help it. The pain is unbearable. I've taken a couple more pills to see if it helps, but it doesn't seem to have any significant effect."

Sternly, Claudia asserted, "This won't do. Why don't we go to the hospital? I'll accompany you!"

Maria waved off the suggestion. "Forget it. Migraines are one of those stubborn ailments. The hospital doesn't offer a viable solution."

Maria was well aware that her headache stemmed from the aftermath of Charlie's psychological suggestion. Unfortunately, there was no easy fix for her condition except for time and gradual recovery.

After a moment of contemplation, Claudia suddenly remembered something and said, "Oh, by the way, Cathy, do you remember the gentleman, Charlie, who saw me off last time?"

Pretending to be curious, Claudia continued, "Is he the man who came to see you off?"

"Yes," Claudia nodded and replied.

"Sister Lisa mentioned that people in Aurous Hill refer to him as Master Wade, and he's reputed to possess extensive knowledge of Feng Shui and medical skills. How about I ask him to pay you a visit?"

Surprised by the opportunity that had presented itself sooner than expected, Maria hesitated momentarily. She pretended to be a little hesitant and said, "Um... I'm not sure if that's appropriate. I don't know him well, so it might be a bother."

Without a second thought, Claudia assured her, "Don't worry. Brother Charlie is wonderful. When I met him not long ago, he helped me immensely, including arranging my admission to Aurous Hill University. If I call him and explain the situation, he probably won't refuse."

Maria pursed her lips, feigning indecisiveness, and responded, "Well... it's already past eight o'clock, so it wouldn't be right to disturb him. Maybe things will improve by tomorrow morning."

"That won't do!" Claudia insisted decisively. "If your headache persists through the night, and you don't get proper rest, your condition will only worsen. And let's not forget you have military training tomorrow. Your body won't be able to endure it."

Seizing the perfect moment, Maria lowered her head and remained silent.

She knew that the time had come to accept Claudia's kind offer without politely evading it.

Observing Maria's silence, Claudia assumed she had consented but felt too embarrassed to speak. She promptly grabbed her phone, stood up, and declared, "Cathy, wait for me. I'll go outside and call Brother Charlie."

"Hmm..." Maria responded, then raised her head and expressed her gratitude, "Thank you, Claudia!"

Generously, Claudia replied, "You're welcome. Your well-being is what matters most. Wait here for me!"

With that, Claudia opened the door and exited the bedroom.

Once in the corridor, she wasted no time in dialing Charlie's number.

At that moment, Charlie had just finished dinner at home.

When he saw Claudia's call, a smile crept onto his face. He answered playfully, "Claudia, I heard from Lisa that your military training begins tomorrow?"

"Yes, Brother!" Claudia responded promptly. "I actually wanted to ask you for a favor."

Chuckling, Charlie replied, "Why so formal? Just tell me what you need. If I can help, I won't turn you down."

Grateful, Claudia said, "Thank you, Brother! I would like to invite you to help my roommate with her health issue..."

"My roommate?" Charlie furrowed his brow as Maria's image flashed in his mind. He had a rough idea of what might be causing her illness.

Curiosity lacing his voice, he asked, "What seems to be the problem with your roommate?"

Claudia explained, "She's been suffering from severe migraines these past couple of days. She's been relying on painkillers, but they haven't provided much relief. I wanted to take her to the hospital, but she believes they won't be able to help. I'm worried that her condition will worsen tonight. Lisa mentioned that you possess remarkable medical skills, so I thought maybe you could come and take a look. It would be a great help to my roommate."

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Charlie was taken aback when Claudia called him. He never expected her call to be about treating Maria's headache.

As he recalled the last time he saw Maria, when he dropped subtle psychological hints, he realized he had intensified the transmission of spiritual energy, which seemed to have caused some lasting effects. He had been a bit heavy-handed, and now that Claudia called him again, it was difficult for him to avoid the situation.

"So, you wait for me for a while. I'll drive over to you," he told Claudia.

Claudia's voice was filled with joy as she replied, "Okay, Brother. Call me when you arrive!"

"Alright," Charlie agreed before turning to Claire. "Honey, I have something to attend to and need to go out. I'll be back soon."

Curious, Claire asked, "It's past 8 o'clock. Who's looking for you at this late hour?"

Charlie didn't hide anything and answered frankly, "It's Claudia. Her classmate is facing a little trouble and wants me to help."

Perplexed, Claire inquired, "What kind of trouble? Is it serious?"

Charlie smiled and responded, "She's feeling a little unwell. I have a feeling she's been bewitched."

"I'll go and check if there's something wrong with the Feng Shui in their bedroom."

Claire nodded and said, "Alright, go ahead. Just make sure you don't come back too late."

"Okay," Charlie replied with a slight smile. He grabbed his car keys and left the house.

On his way to the university, Charlie couldn't help but wonder if Maria still remembered him. Although he had confirmed it once, something in his heart felt off. However, he didn't dwell on it too much. For Charlie, the best way to uncover lies was through psychological hints. If Maria truly remembered him, he had no reliable way to prove it.

Regardless, he didn't let himself get entangled in this matter because he firmly believed that he and Maria were not enemies. Setting aside the fact that he had saved her, the deep-rooted animosity between the Warriors Den and himself placed them on the same side.

With this understanding, whether Maria lied or not wasn't that important to Charlie.

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Meanwhile, in the girls' dormitory, Claudia was changing her outfit. She caught sight of Maria and couldn't help but smile.

"Claudia, why are you putting on lipstick so late?" Maria asked, amused.

Claudia blushed slightly and replied, "I'm going out to pick up Brother Charlie. If I don't go, he won't be able to make it."

Maria gave her a quick once-over and teasingly remarked, "They say women dress up for themselves. Are you dressed so formally and wearing lipstick because this Brother Charlie is the man of your dreams?"

Shaking her head vigorously, Claudia adjusted her hair, feeling a twinge of guilt. She said with slight unease, "That's not it... I treat Brother Charlie like my own sibling, and he has helped me a lot. I'm truly grateful to him."

Maria spoke earnestly, "Sometimes love grows from gratitude, step by step. If love were a fruit, gratitude would be the best fertilizer."

Nervously, Claudia replied, "Please don't say such things, Cathy. Brother Charlie is already married. If such rumors spread, it would harm the happiness of his family. Besides, I really don't see him as the man of my dreams..."

Maria smiled subtly and spoke calmly, "You don't need to convince me. As long as you can convince yourself."

Panicking, Claudia assured her, "I won't say anything silly. I'll go downstairs and wait for Brother Charlie, and I'll bring him up when he arrives."

Maria asked, "Has he arrived yet?"

"Not yet," Claudia answered without hesitation. "I'll wait for him downstairs for a while so I don't waste time going down when he arrives."

Maria stopped teasing and nodded lightly. She said, "Thank you, Claudia. I won't come down. I have a terrible headache. Please tell him for me, so he doesn't think I'm impolite."

"Okay," Claudia nodded and said. "Just wait here. I'll inform the housekeeper, and then I'll bring him up. Brother Charlie is very capable. Once he arrives, your migraine will definitely be cured!"

With that, she hurriedly left the dormitory, descended the stairs, and waited outside.

Maria forced a smile all the while, despite her excruciating headache.

After Claudia left, her complexion grew weak, and the pain intensified. Still, she subconsciously approached the mirror to examine herself and adjust her appearance. She rubbed her cheeks, trying to ease the tension in her facial muscles. In her subconscious, she worried that Charlie would see her looking terribly ill.

More than ten minutes later, Charlie arrived at the university. He drove directly to the foreign students' dormitory building.

About to call Claudia, he spotted her standing by the roadside. Claudia also recognized Charlie's license plate and dashed towards him with delight.

When Charlie parked the car and opened the door, Claudia reached him and said somewhat shyly, "Brother, you're here..."

Charlie nodded slightly and asked, "What about your roommate? How is she?"

Claudia replied, "Her headache hasn't subsided yet. She's waiting in the dormitory. She asked me to inform you that her migraine is severe, so she won't come down to greet you, please don't take it as a sign of rudeness."

Charlie nodded and smiled, "No problem. I'll go up and see her."

A thought suddenly struck him, and he asked Claudia, "Can I enter the girls' dormitory? Back in my school days, boys weren't allowed inside."

Claudia smiled and answered, "I've heard that ordinary female dormitories don't allow boys, but the rules are more relaxed for foreign student's dormitories, As long as the girls help with registration, opposite-sex visitors can enter. However, there's an 11 o'clock curfew, and you can't stay overnight."

Charlie nodded, saying, "If it's just a minor headache, it should resolve quickly. It won't take too long."

Claudia was overjoyed and quickly registered downstairs in the dormitory before hurrying back to the room.

As they reached the dormitory door, before Claudia could open it, the ring in Charlie's pocket began to vibrate once more.

Charlie had grown accustomed to this peculiar ring's behavior. In his eyes, there were only two known purposes for this mystical item.

One purpose was to siphon his spiritual energy without any ethical boundaries, giving nothing in return.

The other purpose was to act as a sensor specifically attuned to Maria. Whenever Maria was nearby, the ring would react intensely, indicating something significant.

Chapter 5367

Charlie nervously reached into his pocket, feeling the fast beating of his heart. He couldn't help but silently curse his luck, "I had such high hopes for you, but all my efforts seem to be in vain, You're nothing more than a letdown, a disappointment. What a useless piece of junk! Maybe I should toss you to Zachary and let him bury you in the latrine!"

As Claudia entered the bedroom, Charlie's attention was immediately drawn to Maria. She was sitting on the chair in front of the desk, looking slightly pale with a worried expression on her face.

Upon seeing Charlie enter, she quickly rose to her feet, her voice awkward and feeble. "Mr. Wade, I apologize for troubling you to come here so late..."

Charlie smiled at her and replied, "Miss Cathy, there's no need for such formality. Since you're Claudia's roommate, it's only right for me to be here."

Claudia chimed in, "Brother Charlie, you don't have to be so polite. Just call her Cathy. It's fine."

Then she turned to Maria and said, "Cathy, Brother Charlie is ten years older than me and almost eleven years older than you. Why don't you call him Brother Charlie like I do?"

Maria hesitated for a moment, taken aback by the suggestion, but finally spoke cautiously, "Brother Charlie..."

Charlie's cheerful smile widened. "Since you're calling me brother, just like Claudia, you're more than welcome. Cathy, Claudia informed me about your terrible headache. What's going on? Can you tell me about it?"

Maria couldn't help but inwardly curse, "Charlie, you scoundrel! It's all thanks to you that I'm suffering from this excruciating headache, yet here you are pretending like nothing's wrong, asking me what's happening. Don't you have any shame?"

Though she felt aggrieved, she dared not let Charlie see it. She gently pressed her temple with one hand and said sadly, "I don't know what's happening. I was perfectly fine until the day I started school. Suddenly, I developed this unbearable headache. It feels like countless needles are piercing my brain, connected by a thread that's tugging with each pulse. The pain is agonizing, as if my head might explode..."

She continued, "I've been taking painkillers, but they hardly make a difference. In fact, I even passed out at home..."

Charlie was taken aback. He never expected that his unintentional exertion of excessive force would have such severe consequences for Maria.

Meanwhile, Maria secretly thought to herself, "If I don't say anything, Charlie will never know the pain he's put me through. I hope his conscience suffers a little because of it!"

At that moment, Charlie couldn't help but feel a pang of guilt. He considered the seventeen-year-old girl sitting before him, who had nearly lost her life at the hands of the Warriors Den.

Studying in China, hiding from her own aura, and being tormented like this—her journey hadn't been easy.

Without wasting any more time, he said to Maria, "Cathy, let me take your pulse."

"Okay..." Maria agreed. But when she thought about the pulse examination, she grew a bit bashful and hesitated. Finally, she stammered, "Brother Charlie...how do you want to take my pulse?"

Charlie didn't think twice and simply moved another chair, seating himself in front of Maria. He patted his right leg and said, "Come on, place your right hand on my lap."

"What?" Maria asked instinctively. "Shouldn't I put it on the table for the pulse reading?"

Charlie pointed to the desk behind her and said, "The table is behind you, and it's inconvenient. Don't worry, I'm not overly particular about personal space. If you allow me to help, I might be able to understand what's happening."

"Okay..." Maria knew she couldn't refuse. She cautiously extended her hand, placing it nervously on Charlie's lap.

She had never been in such close contact with a man before, and as soon as her hand brushed against Charlie's thigh, her heart started racing, and her cheeks flushed a deep shade of red.

Charlie paid no attention to these details.

He knew that examining Maria's pulse was essentially meaningless.

Her headache wasn't due to any illness; it was a result of the damage caused by his spiritual energy. The best way to treat her would be to directly channel some spiritual energy to repair the harm to her brain.

As Charlie pondered on the matter, he took into account Maria's background. The fact that she possessed the fake ring indicated that even if she didn't fully grasp aura, she must have some understanding of it.

In other words, she grew up near the sea and had experience with fish.

If he were to pretend to be a fan of shark fins, she would likely see through it instantly.

Moreover, Charlie suspected that Maria probably didn't remember him. If he were to directly infuse her with spiritual energy, wouldn't that expose him?

Therefore, Charlie devised a plan. He would pretend to take her pulse and then give her half of a Blood-Scattering Heart-Saving Pill. After all, the pill held little value to him.

Furthermore, Charlie wasn't worried about the pill exposing him.

After all, his title as Master Wade was well-known in Aurous Hill. It was likely that even Claudia had mentioned it to Maria.

For the great Master Wade to produce a miraculous cure for all ailments seemed perfectly reasonable.

The reason why he only gave Maria half a pill instead of a whole one was to show her that the pill was very effective, but also to convey the message that he didn't own a plentiful supply of them. She would need to use them wisely.

So, he lightly rested his fingers on Maria's wrist, closed his eyes, and felt for a moment.

Then he said, "Cathy, based on your pulse condition, it seems that overexertion has caused your current state. You mentioned your headache started on the day you began school, so you must have been a little tired."

Maria knew Charlie was spouting nonsense, so she pretended to be puzzled and said, "But.. Brother Charlie...to be honest, I've been in Aurous Hill for a long time. If it were really an issue of acclimatization, it shouldn't have taken this long..."

She added, "Besides, I wasn't overexerted on the day of enrollment. Grandpa's butler brought me here and took care of all the formalities. I just had to make my bed in the dormitory. Logically speaking, I shouldn't have been tired enough to develop a headache..."

Charlie knew Maria had a point in questioning him. She no longer remembered his psychological influence that day, so she couldn't understand why she suddenly suffered from migraines.

However, since Charlie was here to see her, he wanted to sow some doubt in her mind and pave the way for what was to come. He said, "Sometimes acclimatization doesn't manifest immediately. It accumulates energy internally until it bursts forth selectively. It may erupt orally, causing mouth and tongue sores. Other times, it chooses the digestive system, resulting in long-term diarrhea or constipation. And occasionally, it manifests on the skin as severe hives, causing unbearable itching. In short, acclimatization is far more complex than one might think."

Then Charlie continued, "Overseas Chinese who have lived abroad for extended periods may lack a proper understanding of traditional medicine. Traditional medicine excels at extracting the essence from appearances, much like finding the hidden truth within a cocoon. It addresses the root cause."

Claudia was astonished by his words and exclaimed, "It sounds incredibly profound..."

In Maria's mind, she thought, "Ah, he's trying to fool me...just keep fooling me!"

Charlie believed he had laid the groundwork. With a casual wave of his hand, he said, "It's normal for young girls like you to be unfamiliar with traditional medicine. But don't worry, I have some elixirs here. Your condition, once you take them, will be cured!"

Chapter 5368

Maria's curiosity piqued when she heard Charlie's claim that the elixir could cure her migraines.

She suspected that he was the cause of her pain, so she was eager to learn how he could alleviate her symptoms without channeling spiritual energy into her. With an air of anticipation, Charlie pulled out a blood-scattering heart-saving pill from his pocket—an enhanced version refined with the legendary Taizhen Dao cauldron.

Charlie gazed at the miraculous elixir and introduced it to the two of them. "Behold, this is a panacea I stumbled upon ages ago. I won't make grand claims of resurrection, but it can heal all ailments."

With a touch of distress, he added, "Unfortunately, there are only a few pills remaining. I must conserve them. Just take half, no, a quarter should suffice."

Turning to Claudia, he asked, "Do you have a fruit knife?"

Claudia promptly produced a fruit knife and handed it to him. Charlie delicately cut off a quarter of the pill and passed it to Maria, urging her to consume it. "Cathy, take these pills. You'll feel better soon."

Maria maintained a hint of skepticism. While aware of Charlie's mastery of spiritual energy, she was uncertain about the reliability of the elixir he had presumably refined. Thus, she cautiously inquired, "Brother Charlie, must I consume this elixir directly?"

Charlie nodded and pressed, "Yes, eat it right away. You'll feel the effects once it's ingested."

"Okay..." Maria picked up the elixir, examining it momentarily before placing it in her mouth.

As the elixir dissolved, a surge of pure medicinal power transformed into a soothing warmth that coursed through her veins. The currents congregated in her brain, instantly extinguishing the pain as if flipping off a switch. All the agony vanished in an instant!

Maria was immediately astounded and whispered to herself, "I never expected Charlie to possess such incredible alchemical skills! And this elixir is beyond powerful! Just a quarter of it has mended the damage he caused. Its medicinal properties are truly astonishing."

Curiosity piqued, Claudia queried Maria, "Cathy, how do you feel? Did the pill work?"

Snapping out of her thoughts, Maria feigned excitement and exclaimed, "My head doesn't hurt at all!"

She then looked up at Charlie, brimming with enthusiasm. "Brother Charlie, your elixir is astonishingly potent!"

Charlie knew that this quarter of a pill could unquestionably alleviate Maria's headache, but he also understood that Maria was well-traveled and likely knowledgeable about aura, given her possession of the ring and connection to the Lord of the Warriors Den. His primary concern was that she might deduce his role as the savior who rescued her in Northern Europe.

Hence, Charlie nonchalantly claimed, "I chanced upon this pill in Antique Street. It was sheer luck."

Maria, catching his insinuation, couldn't help but sigh, "If only I could acquire more potent pills to keep on hand, just in case."

Charlie nodded, recognizing that carrying the blood-scattering and heart-saving pill with him could indeed be a lifesaver during critical moments. He recalled how Jasmine had nearly perished in Japan, saved only by the blood-scattering rescue pill he had administered.

Suddenly, a realization hit him hard - if the Earl of the Warriors Den ever came to Aurous Hill, Maria would be in great peril. However, Charlie knew that he would dedicate all his energy to protecting his grandparents and family in such a scenario, leaving him little time to tend to Maria. In those circumstances, Maria would need to rely on her own luck.

After some thinking, Charlie gave Maria the rest of the elixir and said, "Given that you're still getting used to Aurous Hill's environment, it's likely that you'll experience migraines at some point in the future. Keep the rest of the pill for emergencies."

Maria was taken aback as Charlie handed her the elixir. She understood that it held extraordinary value, and receiving half of it had already been a significant favor.

Moreover, Charlie had emphasized the preciousness of the elixir throughout their conversation, so Maria comprehended his intentions. It was evident that Charlie hadn't originally planned on giving her the remaining pills.

Thus, Maria hesitated and quickly declined, waving her hand. "Brother Charlie, your elixir is too valuable. I can't accept it."

Charlie observed her and felt a tinge of sympathy in his heart. Evading the Warriors Den after a near-death encounter was already arduous. It was highly probable that shortly after Maria arrived in Aurous Hill, she would once again be discovered and pursued.

With a self-deprecating chuckle, he admitted, "Yes, it's precious, but it's just that. I may have exaggerated its worth. Once it's divided, it becomes difficult to store. You should keep it."

At that moment, Maria glimpsed a trace of compassion concealed in Charlie's eyes. Was it directed at her?

Unaware of the pill's true value, Claudia chimed in. She only knew that Charlie was kind to Maria and thus chimed in, "That's right, Cathy. Just keep the medicine. Military training begins tomorrow, and enduring migraines would be unbearable. If you have another headache, take another quarter."

Charlie insisted, "Cathy, Claudia is right. You should hold onto this elixir. You may need it more than me. And if Claudia requires it, you can give it to her. It's better protection for both of you."

Chapter 5369

Maria fell into a momentary silence, her eyes searching Charlie's face with a mixture of gratitude and solemnity. Finally, she nodded lightly and spoke with earnestness, "Brother Charlie, I can't thank you enough..."

Charlie couldn't help but exhale a sigh of relief as he watched Maria accept the elixir. He believed he could do so much for her.

Although he possessed a Rejuvenation Pill now, he couldn't bring himself to give it to Maria, knowing that she had experienced so much in life. Instead, he opted to offer her three-quarters of the enhanced Blood Scattering Heart Rescue Pill as a guarantee.

As the evening wore on, Charlie stood up and addressed the two girls, "Well, now that Cathy is alright, I should head back."

Claudia's reluctance was palpable as she spoke up, unable to contain herself, "Brother, you've been standing here for a while. Why don't you sit down for a bit? I'll get you a glass of water!"

Charlie smiled gently and declined, "No need, Claudia. This is a girls' dormitory, and as an older gentleman, it wouldn't be appropriate for me to linger for too long. If I wait a little longer, I'm sure the dormitory auntie will come up and chase me away."

Suddenly, a thought struck Charlie, and he added, "Oh, by the way, both of you will begin military training tomorrow. It's going to be quite demanding, so if you have any free time until then, I suggest staying within the school grounds."

Claudia couldn't quite grasp the meaning behind Charlie's words, but she nodded instinctively and replied, "Brother Charlie, I've already spoken to Auntie and Sister Lisa. I've assured them that during the two weeks of military training, I won't be going anywhere."

Maria surmised that Charlie's concern for her safety was the reason behind his words. Even though she didn't understand the specifics, she spoke up, "Brother Charlie, don't worry. I'll be at the school during this time and won't leave."

Charlie's voice relaxed as he responded, "That's good to hear."

He felt reassured knowing that the university provided a relatively closed environment that made it easy for Maria to remain hidden. As long as she didn't venture beyond the university's confines, even if the Earl of the Warriors Den were to come to Aurous Hill, he would find it challenging to locate her. Charlie had already arranged for Ervin to act as bait, and once the Earl showed up, Charlie would seize the opportunity to eliminate him.

Until then, as long as Maria went undetected, nothing would happen to her.

Both girls accompanied Charlie downstairs as he prepared to leave. Though they held their own thoughts, bidding farewell to Charlie stirred a sense of reluctance within them.

Charlie got into his car but couldn't shake the feeling that something was amiss. He rolled down the car window and spoke to Maria, who stood beside Claudia. "Cathy, please remember my phone number. If you need anything, don't hesitate to contact me directly."

Maria was taken aback but quickly nodded and expressed her gratitude, "Of course, Brother Charlie. Thank you."

Afterward, she retrieved her phone and diligently recorded the number Charlie dictated.

Charlie turned to Claudia next and advised, "Claudia, you should also remember to reach out to me if you need anything."

Claudia's face lit up with a sweet smile. "I know, Brother!"

Feeling a sense of relief, Charlie concluded, "Alright, you two should head back now, I'm off."

With that, he started the car and drove away from the university.

As they made their way back to the dormitory, Claudia voiced her disappointment. "I can't help but wonder if there is someone else in this world as remarkable as Brother Charlie," she said.

Maria furrowed her brow, lost in her own thoughts. Upon hearing Claudia's words, she absentmindedly responded, "Finding someone like him is probably impossible. But if you genuinely like him, why not fight for him?"

Claudia blushed and shyly retorted, "Cathy, what are you saying? Don't talk nonsense..."

Maria smiled mischievously and teased, "You might as well wear your affection for him on your sleeve. It's amusing to see you call me nonsense."

Looking around anxiously to make sure nobody was listening, Claudia whispered sternly to Maria, "Please, Cathy, be more careful with your words. While I may have developed affections for Charlie, it's crucial for me to approach the situation in a mature and appropriate manner. Charlie is already married, and my attraction to him is only temporary, just a fleeting moment in the grand scheme of things. Therefore, it's essential for me not to speak frivolously about this matter and keep my feelings to myself."

Maria spoke seriously, "If you like him, and he likes you back, what does it matter if there's an age difference?"

Embarrassed, Claudia avoided Maria's gaze and retorted resentfully, "You... You have such warped views!"

Surprised, Maria asked, "Do I? Isn't the purpose of life to find happiness? If you like someone but can't be with them, then you'll likely never be truly happy in this life, right?"

Claudia earnestly replied, "Even if I can't be happy, I can't destroy someone else's family..."

Maria shook her head, emphasizing, "I'm talking about integration. It means becoming a part of his family. That's not destruction."

Flustered and ashamed, Claudia hurriedly pushed open the bedroom door and dashed straight to the bathroom, muttering, "Your views are too twisted. I won't discuss this with you anymore. Go take a shower!"

Watching Claudia retreat to the bathroom, Maria muttered under her breath, only audible to herself, "What's wrong with my views? Aren't they valid? Human civilization has existed for thousands of years. Monogamy is a relatively recent concept, isn't it?"

Then, shaking her head, she muttered again, "That's right... Charlie gave me the elixir and advised me not to leave the university in the near future. He must believe that there's danger on the horizon... Is it possible that the Warriors Den has already made its way to Aurous Hill? How could I have exposed myself so quickly after being so cautious?"

As she pondered the circumstances, she swiftly took out the nine copper coins from her pocket, climbed onto the bed, uttered a brief incantation, and tossed the coins on the surface.

Maria fixed her gaze on the hexagram formed by the coins, her heart filled with more confusion. "According to the hexagram, there's no immediate danger awaiting me..."

Suddenly, a surge of unease washed over her.

An idea struck her, and she exclaimed internally, "Charlie believes I'm in danger. He should be aware that the Warriors Den may arrive in Aurous Hill."

Since she hadn't revealed her true identity, Maria wondered, "Could it be that Charlie intends to expose me?"

With that in mind, she quickly recalled the information she had gathered about Charlie's birthday and began calculating. Softly uttering a few words, she tossed the nine copper coins onto the bed once again.

Fixated on the coins, Maria felt a sudden bang in her heart. "No... Charlie is in danger!"

Chapter 5370

As the hexagram pointed towards Charlie, Maria's heart tightened in an instant.

She was well aware of Charlie's strength, and most people couldn't possibly pose a threat to his safety.

The person capable of putting him in danger had to be superior in strength.

Her thoughts raced, "Could it be that the other earls from the Warriors Den are heading to Aurous Hill?"

"It must be! Otherwise, why would Charlie warn me to be careful?"

She subconsciously reached for her mobile phone, intending to call Charlie.

But when she held the phone in her hand, she hesitated.

After all, she had been playing dumb in front of him, letting him lower his guard around her.

If she now took the initiative to warn him, he might become suspicious once again.

However, after careful consideration, Maria decided she should indeed warn him.

After all, Charlie was her savior. He was in danger.

She might not be able to solve the problem for him, but at the very least, she could give him a heads-up.

Thus, after some contemplation, she made her way to the balcony and dialed his number.

Meanwhile, Charlie was on his way back, stuck at a red traffic light when an unknown number flashed on his mobile screen.

Curiosity piqued, he answered the call and heard Maria's voice on the other end, "Brother Charlie, it's Cathy..."

Charlie asked, intrigued, "Cathy, what's the matter? Do you need something from me?"

Maria hesitated for a moment before asking, "Brother Charlie, if you don't mind, could you tell me your birthday?"

"Why do you ask about my birthday?" Charlie inquired.

Maria carefully crafted her words, layer by layer, before speaking up. "You warned us not to leave the university grounds without caution. I assumed it was because you cared about our safety. So, I took it upon myself to perform a fortune-telling session for us..."

"Fortune-telling?" Charlie recalled the sight of nine copper coins on Maria's desk back in Northern Europe. He suspected they were used for divination, but never confirmed it.

He even consulted Orion Exeor, who mentioned that if those nine coins were indeed meant for divination, it could be the legendary lost hexagram—so profound that even Mr. Exeor himself dared not delve into it.

Charlie had initially assumed that Maria's nine copper coins were mere coincidence, but now it seemed she might truly be knowledgeable in the ancient art of the Book of Changes.

Maintaining an air of curiosity, Charlie asked, "Cathy, do you have the ability to tell fortunes?"

With a smile, he added, "It can't be that mysterious, can it?"

Maria smiled back and replied, "I don't know if it's really that mysterious."

Referring to her notes, Maria refocused on Charlie's birthday and politely inquired, "Would you mind sharing your date of birth, Charlie? I'd be happy to calculate your age for you."

At that moment, Charlie felt no cause for concern.

Maria skillfully paced her words, knowing all the details about him, yet still calling to ask about his birthday as if she hadn't investigated him at all. It made him believe that she simply wanted to perform a calculation for him.

That's why she had called about his birthday.

As for why she insisted on performing a fortune-telling session for him, the reason seemed valid. Charlie had repeatedly warned them to be cautious, hoping they would refrain from leaving the university premises in the near future.

Maria understood this perfectly well.

Thus, after grasping this point, she decided to perform a fortune-telling session for herself.

After her calculations, she concluded that she was not in any immediate

danger. Out of gratitude, she wanted to perform the same calculations for Charlie, which led to her call regarding his birthday. And so, everything came full circle.

In this way, the logic remained consistent.

Sometimes, it took a hundred lies to explain a single lie.

The difficulty for liars lay in maintaining logical consistency, as they were often exposed by others. But for an exceptionally intelligent girl like Maria, the logical consistency formed a closed loop in her mind even before she uttered the lie.

Charlie, unaware of any irregularities, sensed that Maria's call was simply a kind gesture to perform a fortune-telling session for him.

Thinking this, he no longer hesitated and shared his birthday with her.

Relieved, Maria discovered that Charlie's birthday matched the information she had obtained. The coincidence of their birthdays instilled confidence in the accuracy of her research.

It seemed that Charlie could truly trust her.

She assured him, "Brother Charlie, I will perform the calculation right away and let you know the results."

Soon after Charlie arrived home and stepped through the gate, he received a message from Maria.

In the message, Maria wrote, "Brother Charlie, I've performed the calculation for you. The hexagram indicates that you may face a grave danger in the near future. The danger will come from the north, and there will be no way to avoid it. Please exercise extreme caution."

Charlie furrowed his brow upon reading the message.

Instead of getting out of the car, he replied, "What do you mean by 'no way to avoid it'?"

"Can't it be prevented?" he asked.

Maria responded, "Unfortunately... there's no way to avoid it. You can only confront it."

Charlie's expression froze in an instant.

An intuition told him that Maria's words were far from baseless.

Considering her mysterious background and her profound understanding of the I Ching, she might even surpass Orion Exeor.

This further supported his belief that her words were targeted.

What's more, from the moment he first laid eyes on her, he had a foreboding feeling.

His grandmother's family had arrived in Aurous Hill, and so had Maria.

At that time, his initial thought was that the Earl of the Warriors Den might also be en route to Aurous Hill.

Now, it seemed that the danger Maria mentioned aligned with his own suspicions.

Charlie's heart raced with tension.

He felt like a soldier guarding a fortress, the sound of enemy cavalry growing louder, yet unsure whether to defend the east wall or the west wall.

Just as he thought his resources were dwindling, a detail from his conversation with Maria suddenly surfaced in his mind.

Maria had mentioned performing a fortune-telling session for herself, and it revealed that she was not in any immediate danger.

That meant his wife and grandparents were the ones he needed to protect.

Grandpa, Grandma, and the entire family were at Wanliu Mountain Villa.

With so many people coming from the United States, it would be difficult to remain unnoticed by those with ill intentions.

Therefore, Charlie concluded that if the other party were to arrive in Aurous Hill, his maternal family would be the target!

Chapter 5371

Charlie's heart raced with worry for his grandparents and wife. The looming threat of the Warriors Den had put him on high alert, but Maria's warning had intensified his concern. It seemed a formidable battle awaited him.

But Charlie was no stranger to fierce struggles.

Ever since he miraculously survived at the tender age of eight, he understood that every day of his existence was hard-earned.

What truly frightened him was the thought of both his grandparents and his wife being in danger simultaneously, leaving him torn and unable to protect them all.

As he pondered this dilemma, his mind fixated on finding a way to remove Claire from Aurous Hill as a precautionary measure.

If Claire wasn't in Aurous Hill, he could focus solely on safeguarding his grandparents without distraction.

But he couldn't fathom a foolproof plan to convince Claire to leave without raising suspicions.

Originally, he had concocted a scheme involving Elaine winning a grand prize by sheer accident. The plan entailed individuals posing as representatives from a prestigious company, offering

Elaine a ten-day European adventure with the stipulation that her companion had to be female. That way, if Elaine wanted to go, she could only choose Claire to accompany her.

However, upon reflection, Charlie realized that Claire had been consumed with her recent studies in the United States and had developed ambitious career aspirations. Asking her to embark on a ten-day trip might not yield the desired outcome.

Moreover, regardless of the method employed to divert Claire's attention, success was paramount.

If the overseas trip failed and another opportunity arose, Claire might become suspicious of the abnormal circumstances.

Deep in thought, Charlie's mind suddenly turned to Michaela in the United States.

If Michaela approached Claire under the pretense of work matters, Claire wouldn't refuse.

Claire held deep gratitude towards Michaela, not only for her impeccable work ethic but also for the invaluable master class she had conducted at the School of Design. Michaela was a resource Claire regarded highly and was eager to repay the favor in any way possible.

If Michaela asked for Claire's assistance, she would undoubtedly agree!

Without hesitation, Charlie retrieved his mobile phone and dialed Michaela's number.

In the United States, morning had just arrived, and Michaela had settled into her office at the Joules Group headquarters when Charlie's call came through.

Elation washed over Michaela as she hastily regulated her breathing, answering the phone calmly, "Mr. Wade, do you require my assistance?"

Charlie hummed and replied, "Miss Joules, I have a matter that requires your help."

Unhesitatingly, Michaela responded, "Mr. Wade, you may command me. Anything you need."

Charlie asked her, "Miss Joules, I would like to know if your Joules Group has any real estate projects that are being promoted in the United States recently?"

"Yes, In New York, we have a number of commercial real estate projects under development and construction." Michaela replied.

Charlie asked again, "Is there any project that is just about to start or is under preparation?"

"Yes." Michaela said, "We have a commercial center in New York. Preparations are underway, and it will be officially launched soon."

"Great." Charlie immediately said, "I want to ask you to find a reason for your work and help me call Claire to the United States for a while."

Curiosity piqued, she inquired, "Mr. Wade, don't you wish to be with Claire?"

Concern laced her nervous tone as she asked, "Mr. Wade, have the Warriors Den found you..."

Charlie clarified, "It's not me they're after; it's my grandparents. They're all in Aurous Hill."

Wrought with anxiety, Michaela pressed him, "You... have you met Grandpa Evans and Grandma Evans?"

"Not yet." Charlie sighed softly, and said helplessly: "If they are really in danger this time, I'm afraid they won't be able to hide and disappear."

Anxiously, she asked, "Mr. Wade, do you need assistance? If necessary, I will swiftly mobilize everyone to Aurous Hill!"

Charlie replied, "The more people involved, the messier it becomes. That's why I thought of a way to get Claire to leave first."

Charlie then inquired, "Miss Joules, can you find a means for Claire to visit the United States for a while? The sooner, the better."

Without hesitation, Michaela reassured him, "No problem! Don't worry, Mr. Wade. I'll contact Claire immediately."

Charlie expressed his gratitude, saying, "Thank you, Miss Joules."

After ending the call, Charlie parked his car by the side of the road in Tomson's prestigious villa area and didn't rush to return.

Five minutes later, Michaela called him back, excitement evident in her voice as she informed him, "Mr. Wade, I've already spoken to Claire."

She continued, "I invited her to join the preparations for the commercial real estate project."

"I explained that I had scrapped the previous design plan temporarily, and the project was at a standstill due to unsatisfactory proposals from renowned design companies. I told her I wanted her to come and help extinguish the fire."

Eagerly, Charlie asked, "What did Claire say?"

Michaela replied, "Claire expressed concern since it's a massive project with a two-billion-dollar investment. She doubted whether she was qualified to provide guidance. However, I assured her that sometimes inspiration strikes during the design process, and I emphasized my desire to incorporate a touch of Chinese style."

"American designers only grasp Chinese elements at a superficial level. I also emphasized the substantial losses incurred daily due to the project's standstill. Finally, she agreed to help but insisted on discussing it with you first."

Relieved, Charlie let go of the burden weighing on his heart and said, "Then I'll head back now."

Quickly, Michaela asked, "Mr. Wade, is there genuinely nothing else that requires my assistance?"

Charlie's smile brimmed with gratitude as he responded, "Your assistance in taking Claire away is an enormous favor."

Michaela sighed helplessly, conceding, "Very well, Mr. Wade. If you ever need my help, please don't hesitate to ask."

"Thank you," Charlie acknowledged before ending the conversation.

...

After a while, Charlie cruised back to his humble abode.

As soon as he stepped through the threshold, Claire greeted him eagerly, wearing a hint of embarrassment on her face. "Husband... I have something I need to discuss with you..."

Charlie put on a facade of curiosity and inquired, "What's the matter?"

Claire hesitated before speaking, "Well, Michaela just called me in a hurry, seeking my assistance with some design matters. I feel like she's in a bind, so I wanted to discuss it with you..."

Charlie nodded solemnly and responded, "You two are good friends, and if she needs your help, then go and extinguish that fire for her."

Claire hurriedly asked, "Darling, could you accompany me?"

Charlie's expression suddenly turned a shade of embarrassment. "Well... I might not be able to visit the United States anytime soon," he admitted.

"Several clients are awaiting my Feng Shui expertise. You know, we spent quite some time in the States on our last trip."

"I've already promised a few clients to provide consultations within the next few days."

Disappointment flickered across Claire's face as she expressed, "But the thought of venturing so far away to the United States without you... it's hard to bear..."

Charlie gently caressed her cheek and replied with a smile, "You're going there for work, my dear. I can't accompany you everywhere."

"People might laugh at you, just as they do when I don't bring my wife along for Feng Shui demonstrations."

He continued, "Furthermore, you and Miss Joules are close friends. If you go by yourself..."

"I imagine she might invite you to stay with her. It's a chance to collaborate during the day and engage in heartfelt conversations at night, don't you think?"

Although Claire possessed a gentle demeanor, she always strived to be a strong woman in her professional life.

Charlie's words had struck a chord within her.

A woman embarking on a work-related journey shouldn't carry her husband along as a mere backdrop. It would not only make her appear incapable but also reflect poorly on her husband.

Moreover, Charlie's final remark hit the nail on the head.

Claire and Michaela were good friends, and involving her husband all the time would undoubtedly raise suspicion.

With these thoughts in mind, she reluctantly nodded apologetically to Charlie and said, "Husband, if that's the case, I'll have to go alone. While I'm away from Aurous Hill, please take care of yourself and look after my parents."

Charlie smiled reassuringly and replied, "Don't worry. By the way, dear, have you given Miss Joules a definite answer?"

Claire nodded and confirmed, "I told her I needed to discuss it with you before responding."

Charlie's smile widened. "In that case, you can call her right now and let her know it's all settled. You can head to the United States."

Claire hummed in agreement and promptly dialed Michaela's number.

On the other end of the line, Michaela impatiently inquired, "Claire, have you informed Mr. Wade?"

Claire replied, "I've discussed it with Charlie, and I'll leave the household matters in his hands. I'll arrive in the United States as soon as possible. See you there."

"Great!" Michaela exclaimed. "I'll arrange for a long-range business jet to depart from Aurous Hill, aiming to reach there before dawn tomorrow."

"This way, you can leave early in the morning."

Surprised, Claire asked, "So fast?"

"Absolutely!" Michaela confessed with a tinge of helplessness. "Let me be honest with you—

things are extremely urgent right now. My project has suffered a day of shutdown, resulting in millions of dollars in losses. If it continues, I won't even have the face to confront the shareholders..."

Indeed, Michaela had temporarily halted the project, incurring daily losses in the tens of millions. However, the real blow wasn't just monetary.

The true setback involved scrapping all the previous design plans and associated preparations, amounting to over 100 million US dollars in direct losses.

But to the wealthy Joules family, that sum was inconsequential. In Michaela's eyes, whether it was 100 million or even 100 billion US dollars, she would readily pay it if Charlie asked.

Hence, these losses held no significance to her; she was prepared to shoulder them.

Hearing this, Claire understood the urgency and knew she couldn't waste any more time. She promptly responded without hesitation, "In that case, I'll pack my things shortly and head to the airport early tomorrow morning."

Then, a thought crossed her mind, and she quickly added, "By the way, Michaela, there's no need to go through the trouble of arranging a business jet."

"I'll check the available flights tomorrow morning and book a ticket accordingly."

Michaela interjected, "Don't bother, Claire. I've already checked, and there are no direct flights from Aurous Hill to New York."

"If you have to make a transfer in another city, you won't arrive until the day after tomorrow. So pack your bags, and let Mr. Wade take you to the airport tomorrow morning. I'll handle the rest."

"Alright..." Claire conceded. Her intention wasn't for Michaela to bear excessive expenses, knowing that a private jet to the United States would cost at least a million.

However, Michaela's explanation about the lack of time, coupled with the potential loss of over ten million dollars from one day's delay, made Claire drop her resistance.

Michaela offered another reminder, "Oh, and Claire, travel light."

"I have everything you need for daily life and work. Once you arrive, you'll be staying at my place, and I'll vacate a room for you."

"And if you need anything else, feel free to use what I already have. So, pack light this time—simpler is better."

"Alright..."

With Michaela's urgent explanation, Claire understood that time was of the essence. She hung up the phone, returned to her room, and began packing her belongings.

Despite Michaela's request to travel light, Claire ensured she included the essentials, wanting to avoid inconveniencing Michaela during their trip to the United States.

Meanwhile, Michaela swiftly coordinated with a business jet from the Joules family stationed in Hong Kong. It had taken off late at night, en route to Aurous Hill.

The plan was for the jet to land early in the morning, awaiting Claire's arrival before departing for New York.

Realizing the tight schedule, Claire also felt the pressure. She intended to head to the airport at 6 a.m. the next morning.

At that hour, traffic would be light in Aurous Hill, and she could reach the airport in just thirty minutes.

If everything went smoothly, she might even board the plane and take off by 7 a.m.

Contemplating the journey to the United States, thousands of miles away, Claire couldn't help but feel a pang of reluctance to part with Charlie.

Nevertheless, she had no other choice. After all, Michaela had been of great help to her, and Claire had always desired an opportunity to repay the favor.

Finally, Charlie breathed a sigh of relief, satisfied that his plan to send Claire away had succeeded.

After the couple finished packing their suitcases together, Charlie

suddenly remembered something and turned to Claire, asking, "Honey, do you want to inform your parents about your trip?"

Claire pondered for a moment, then shook her head. "Let's skip that. If I tell Mom that I'm going to the United States again, she might insist on accompanying me. But it's not a vacation this time."

"I can't possibly bring her along. So tomorrow morning, you'll take me to the airport, and once I'm on the plane, you can tell her."

"I'll explain that my decision to go to the United States was made hastily tonight, and I didn't have time to inform her. Even if she wants to come, it'll be too late."

Charlie nodded, sharing the concern that Elaine might cling to Claire like a persistent shadow.

He worried that Elaine's presence might cause trouble during their stay in the United States, a situation Claire wouldn't be able to handle.

...

On that restless night, Charlie lay upon his bed, eyes wide open, defying the embrace of sleep. Despite the imminent arrival of his formidable adversary, not a trace of panic danced upon his countenance. Instead, a flicker of anticipation kindled within him for the impending encounter with the earl in the forthcoming confrontation.

Ever since Charlie had acquired the sacred tome known as the "Nine Profound Heavenly Scriptures," he had never encountered another soul who had mastered the arcane art of spiritual energy. Memories of the eradication of the first earl lingered in his mind, a remote command given from Aurous Hill, executing a swift and lethal strike with uncanny precision in distant Cyprus.

This time, however, he knew beyond doubt that he would face the earl from the Warriors Den in a fierce battle, waged in close quarters. The future held no sway over his thoughts, for deep within his heart, a seed of expectation blossomed for this forthcoming clash.

The foes of yesteryear paled in comparison to this new adversary, their feeble attempts easily brushed aside. Now, an unparalleled opportunity presented itself to test the true depths of his own strength.

Though Maria warned him of the peril that awaited, Charlie nurtured a steadfast belief in his chances of victory. His confidence stemmed from the fact that he remained hidden, his true abilities veiled, while the enemy, he surmised, would unknowingly play into his hands, unwittingly setting the stage for Zachary to lay down the "bells."

Thus, even in the face of an adversary lurking in the light while he concealed himself in the shadows, Charlie knew that the odds swung in his favor. A better chance of triumph lay within his grasp, waiting to be seized.

Chapter 5372

The next day arrived, bathed in the gentle hues of dawn.

Charlie and Claire, driven by a sense of urgency, rose early and prepared themselves by six in the morning, careful not to disturb the still-slumbering Jacob and Elaine.

This particular journey marked the first time Charlie and Claire embarked on a solitary adventure since their union years ago. A bittersweet tinge tinged their hearts, for they knew deep down that circumstances demanded their separation.

Charlie harbored an earnest desire to ensure Claire's safety, entrusting her to the capable hands of Michaela, who would undoubtedly provide solace and protection. Meanwhile, Claire, cognizant of the pressing matters at hand, believed it imperative to aid Michaela in resolving her immediate predicaments.

And so, albeit reluctantly, they temporarily bid farewell to one another, compelled by duty.

Inside the airport, Claire's eyes glistened with unshed tears as she gently embraced Charlie, her voice filled with a soft tremor. "Darling, I cannot fathom how long my journey to the United States will consume, but I fear it will weigh heavily on your shoulders back home..."

Charlie's hand caressed her back as he offered reassurance. "Fear not, my love, with your husband by your side, I shall attend to your parents with utmost care."

Claire urged him, her words laced with concern. "Above all else, take care of yourself. Do not let the pursuit of Feng Shui and aiding others consume your every thought."

"Very well," Charlie replied, a gentle smile gracing his lips. His voice, like a caress, whispered, "You too, upon your arrival in New York, remember to find equilibrium between work and rest. Do not become consumed by your duties."

A tear-streaked cheek brushed against a tender touch as Claire wiped away her sorrow, her voice tinged with reluctance. "My beloved, I must depart now..."

"Alright," Charlie nodded, his smile remaining intact. "Notify me as soon as you touch down."

"Of course!"

Charlie maintained an unwavering gaze, attentively observing Claire navigate through the security check with ease. Once she completed the process and emerged from the checkpoint, she turned back momentarily before finally departing.

With time still on his side, it being merely half past six, Charlie chose not to hurry and found himself in the airport's arrival hall. The sparse crowd waiting for arrivals at this early hour provided a modicum of relief, and Charlie's eyes caught sight of a man holding a talisman at the exit.

A sense of reassurance coursed through him, for at this moment, everything seemed to be falling into place according to Zachary's arrangements.

Keeping his composure intact, Charlie silently approached the airport's large screen and paused, his attention fixated upon it.

The earliest flight from Aurous Hill was set to depart in a mere ten minutes, while the first inbound flight would not touch down until eight o'clock.

Amongst the list of arrivals, the majority hailed from major Chinese cities, with a few originating from overseas locations.

Charlie remained oblivious to the identity and origin of his adversary, but one thing was crystal clear—henceforth, he would station himself in Aurous Hill, unburdened by any lingering apprehensions.

His fists clenched, and within his heart, he took a solemn oath. "Whoever dares to continue their assault on my grandparents in this city where my parents met their tragic fate twenty years ago, I, Charlie, will confront them with unwavering determination and fight to the very end, even if it costs me my life!"

With steely resolve burning in his eyes, he cast one final glance at the arrivals board before turning away, striding purposefully into the distance.

...

At this very moment, Eastcliff—vibrant and bustling.

The clock struck 6:30 in the morning, and Eastcliff International Airport thrived with a liveliness that surpassed even Aurous Hill. The airport buzzed with activity as flights departed one after another, prompted by the influx of passengers. The overcrowding resulted in a chaotic symphony of takeoffs, commencing as early as 6:10 AM.

Amidst the commotion, a figure emerged, clad in an elegant robe, making his way into the domestic departure hall of Eastcliff Airport. Gideon, a Chinese national hailing from Argentina, sought refuge from the burdensome pressures that weighed upon him. Driven by his devotion, he had secured the earliest flight to Aurous Hill for the day.

Scheduled to take off at eight o'clock, the flight's estimated duration was one hour and forty minutes. Having completed the check-in procedures, Gideon sought solace in the sanctuary of the first-class lounge, where he rested his weary eyes, awaiting the moment of boarding.

Yet, his heart, which had been beating for one hundred and fifty-six years, inexplicably faltered at this very moment. It would stall, without rhyme or reason, at times racing with alarming speed, and at others, slowing to a disconcerting crawl. It was like riding a roller coaster, one that left a lingering sense of trepidation.

Gideon was well aware that this abnormal behavior stemmed from his own nervousness. Although he had grown unaccustomed to such sensations over the years, he could vividly recall the anxious tremors that plagued his youth. These behaviors, etched into his very being since childhood, had become inseparable from his past.

At this moment, memories of his long and arduous journey flooded his mind. He reminisced about his childhood, a time engulfed in the tragedies of a powerless and humiliated nation. Scarce food and threadbare clothing were the norm, while wolves prowled the land, accompanied by tigers and leopards.

For Gideon himself, the countless encounters with death were too numerous to quantify. The palpitations and agonizing pain that accompanied life-or-death moments remained etched in his memory. Even as time forged ahead, those unsettling recollections continued to haunt him.

Seeking refuge from the flames of war, to secure sustenance and survival, he sought solace within the confines of Changyun Temple, where he assumed the role of a Taoist priest. However, he soon discovered that Taoism offered more than a mere escape from destitution—it promised the elusive quest for eternal life.

Decades of pursuing the path of Tao had brought him to the precipice of longevity, yet the final revelation eluded him. It was then, at an uncommonly ripe age, that he left his homeland, driven by an insatiable desire to discover the true essence of immortality.

Ever since mastering the mystical aura, Gideon had never experienced the same sense of tension as before. Many years had passed, and his existence had become remarkably stable. Yet, on this day, after a century had slipped by, he found himself ensnared in the same anxiety that had once consumed him.

His mind couldn't help but wander, "Could it be that a calamity awaits me in Aurous Hill?"

Swiftly, he shook off the thought, seeking solace in self-reassurance. "Unlikely! How could there exist a behemoth capable of harming me in Aurous Hill? Twenty years ago, Bruce Wade and Lily Evans, who had retreated to seclusion in this very place, were no match for me! This time, I will eradicate the Evan family from Aurous Hill, and no one will be able to lay a finger on me!"

As the cruel, twisted arc of a smirk danced upon his lips, Gideon chuckled inwardly. "And let us not forget the lone survivor, Lily and Bruce's only son, who managed to escape twenty years ago. This time, I shall reunite him with his short-lived parents and grandparents!"

Just then, a member of the first-class lounge's staff approached him, radiating respect. "Sir, your flight to Aurous Hill has commenced boarding. Please make your way promptly to gate 36."

Gideon opened his eyes, allowing a faint smile to grace his countenance. "Very well, thank you."

With those words spoken, he stood up and made his way to boarding gate 36.

Forty minutes later, Gideon's aircraft took off from the Eastcliff Airport runway, executing a graceful half-circle in the sky before embarking on its southerly journey.

By ten o'clock in the morning, the plane landed at Aurous Hill Airport, ten minutes ahead of schedule.

As the soothing strains of cabin music filled the air, Gideon, who had kept his eyes shut throughout the flight, finally opened them. Gazing out the window, a fiery surge coursed through his veins. He recognized it for what it was—an insatiable thirst for bloodshed. In his line of work, every action required the Lord's approval, leaving him with limited opportunities to satiate this urge.

It had been twenty years since his last indulgence, and now, he aimed to eradicate an entire family in Aurous Hill.

A sigh escaped his lips as he acknowledged the curious connection he had with this town. However, the scent of bloodshed, underscored by his fate, was undeniably stronger.

As the plane came to a halt at the terminal bridge, Gideon swiftly became the first to step out of the cabin. Walking through the corridor and past the baggage area, he entered the arrival hall of the airport.

He was well aware of the Evan family's whereabouts, but attacking them immediately was not his plan. The Lord had entrusted him with two specific tasks, and he intended to carry them out with precision.

Apart from obliterating the Evan's family, he needed to plan a hiding place following the attack. In the depths of darkness, he would patiently await the arrival of Lily and Bruce's sons.

The first order of business was finding a suitable refuge. Just as he was about to hail a taxi to the city, something caught his attention—a flicker of peculiarity in the corner of his eye. He turned his head swiftly, fixating his gaze upon a middle-aged man positioned askew, holding up a sign to meet someone.

He didn't bother to read the words plastered on the massive sign; his attention was solely captured by the middle-aged man's right thumb. In an instant, his pupils contracted, shrinking to pinpricks.

If he likened his control over aura to an alternative form of sight, then the right thumb of this man was the lone flicker of light illuminating his darkened world.

Though various religions possessed disparate worldviews, they all acknowledged a common concept—the arrival of the Dharma's end, the age of demise.

These religions claimed that humanity's constant advancement had led to a loss of connection with nature, the heavens, and the universe. This has resulted in a widening gap between mortals and deities, according to these beliefs.

According to Taoism, the world was once brimming with aura. By grasping the method of absorbing and converting this vital energy, humans could ascend to immortality.

However, in the present era, the aura in nature had nearly been depleted, extinguishing any possibility for mankind to achieve immortality. Thus, in their eyes, this was the time of Dharma's end.

Regardless of the validity of such claims, those who had mastered spiritual energy at this stage experienced firsthand the absence of spiritual energy in nature. Their only means of attaining it was through pills or other exceptional objects infused with spiritual energy.

Gideon had gradually become proficient in aura with the help of elixirs bestowed by the Lord and a meticulously crafted array of spiritual energy within the Warriors Den. This unique combination of resources propelled him to new heights of strength and power.

When the formation was active, it emitted a constant flow of aura. Though not abundant, it had accumulated over the years.

During the past few years, the four Earls of the Warriors Den were fortunate enough to have the chance to cultivate within the formation. However, most of the time, the formation was exclusively at the Lord's disposal.

Consequently, the four Earls had become exceedingly sensitive to the traces of spiritual energy in their surroundings—much like a famished mouse that keenly detects the scent of food.

In Gideon's life, there existed only one mystical weapon that truly belonged to him—a wooden sword gifted by the Lord, containing an attacking formation. Apart from that, it held no value.

Hence, when he noticed the man possessing a magical weapon, his heart leaped with excitement, reaching his throat.

Halting his steps, he discreetly observed the individual.

Unbeknownst to Ladden, an elderly man fixed his gaze upon him from a short distance away.

Ladden brimmed with energy, knowing that by holding up a sign and working at the airport for a day, he could earn a hefty sum of three thousand yuan. It far surpassed the income he garnered from his stall on the antique street.

All he possessed was Larson Chen's business card. He knew nothing of Larson's identity, and he didn't want Larson to arrive too soon. In the upcoming four months, he could relish some well-deserved rest at home.

Gideon studied Ladden closely and came to the conclusion that this individual had a weak grasp on manipulating their aura. His brows and expressions exuded the raw street spirit of an ordinary citizen. Someone skilled in spiritual energy would never exhibit such a rudimentary street vibe.

Thus, Gideon surmised that this man was likely unaware that the talisman in his possession was, in fact, a magical weapon.

With this realization, an idea sprouted in his mind—he would test the waters.

Feigning a perplexed look, he surveyed his surroundings before approaching Ladden. Politely, he inquired, "Brother, could you kindly inform me of the best way to reach the city center?"

Ladden glanced back at him, seeing an inconspicuous old man, and responded nonchalantly, "Why do you need to ask? Taxis, subways, airport buses—don't they all head to the city?"

Though dissatisfied, he refrained from becoming angry. After all, this reinforced his judgment of Ladden.

With a smile, Gideon explained, "To be honest, brother, it's my first time in Aurous Hill. I'm unfamiliar with the place, and being old, my eyesight isn't the best. Thus, I'm a bit confused."

As he spoke, he retrieved a hundred-yuan bill from his pocket, presenting it to Ladden. He continued, "Consider this a small token. If it's not too much trouble, could you advise me on the most suitable means of transportation?"

Initially uninterested in conversing with the old man, Ladden's demeanor instantly improved upon seeing the bill. He accepted it with a smile and remarked, "The subway is undoubtedly the fastest, but it's past ten o'clock now, so the morning rush hour has ended. Taking a taxi would be quicker. Within half an hour, you'll reach the city—faster than the subway. Since money isn't an issue for you, I suggest you opt for a taxi."

"Very well!" Gideon thanked him graciously, cupping his hands in appreciation. "I'm grateful for your guidance, brother."

"You're welcome," Ladden replied, promptly pocketing the hundred-yuan bill.

In his mind, he believed that if he didn't stow away the money swiftly, the old man might request its return.

Meanwhile, Gideon pointed to the jade wrench on his right thumb, curiosity gleaming in his eyes.

He inquired, "Brother, your wrench seems remarkable. I wonder what it's worth?"

Though accustomed to swindling and scheming, Gideon possessed a keen eye. Nonchalantly, Ladden replied, "This little trinket is an ancient artifact. It's neither excessively valuable nor inexpensive. I reckon it'd fetch around ten thousand on the market."

Unfamiliar with antiquities, Gideon probed further, asking curiously, "What does that mean?"

Ladden responded, "It's the middle figure among ten thousand."

"Oh!" Gideon chuckled. "You make it sound so effortless, little brother. You must be in the antique business?"

"Yes," Ladden admitted, not bothering to conceal the truth. "I'm in the antique business, and I've been at it for over a decade or two."

Curiosity piqued, Gideon inquired, "Since you're an antique connoisseur, why would you be waiting at the airport to pick someone up?"

Ladden frowned, examining Gideon from head to toe. He then retorted, "Old man, you certainly have a lot of questions. Weren't you desperate to find the quickest way to the urban area? Time is of the essence."

Gideon's heart skipped a beat, realizing he had been excessively talkative and aroused the other man's suspicion.

Quickly, he adopted an apologetic expression and said, "Oh, I apologize profusely. You see, as one grows older, the words tend to flow freely. I enjoy conversing with everyone.

Please forgive me."

Unbeknownst to Gideon, Ladden's remark was a gentle reminder that if he wanted to continue prying, he should part with more money. The previous hundred-yuan allowance had been exhausted.

Smiling, Ladden offered a meaningful piece of advice. "Old man, it's alright to talk a little more. What matters is whom you talk to and how you do it."

To emphasize his point, he deliberately used his thumb and index finger, both adorned with the jade wrench, to mime the action of counting money.

Suddenly regaining his senses, Gideon cursed inwardly, "I've been blind! I overestimated you!"

Realizing he needn't beat around the bush any longer, he promptly cut to the chase.

Without hesitation, he produced another bag from his pocket. Sporting a friendly smile, he extracted several hundred-yuan bills and presented them to Ladden, confessing, "To be completely honest, I, too, have a fascination for antiques. When I saw the finger wrench in your possession, I found it incredibly captivating. I really admire it. So, brother, I wonder if you would be willing to part with it? We can discuss the monetary details!"

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Noticing the wad of cash, Ladden's eyes lit up as the other party handed him several hundred yuan bills.

Without bothering to count them, he swiftly pocketed the money, casting a furtive glance around before turning to Gideon with a miserable expression. "Master, to be honest, this finger charm isn't something I can sell at the drop of a hat. It belongs to my elder brother, you see. I'm supposed to wear it and use it as a token when I pick up people at the airport."

"A token?" Gideon's brow furrowed slightly.

He couldn't help but question why an ordinary person possessed a magical artifact. If it was merely a fortuitous encounter, he could buy it from this guy at a slightly higher price and consider himself lucky.

However, the man claimed that it was a token given to him by someone else, which made Gideon grow cautious. He deliberately probed Ladden, "Brother, can you explain the purpose of this token? Tell me more."

"Hehe," Ladden chuckled, lowering his voice. "My elder brother asked me to receive Hong Kong businessmen here. They're big customers in the antique circle, you know. There are some shady deals that can't be openly explained to outsiders. It's like secret agents. Communication requires a token."

Ladden pointed at his signboard, wearing a determined expression. "I reckon that 'Larson Chen' on my signboard is just a facade. It's all a charade. Hong Kong businessmen who come to purchase cultural relics won't use their real names. They'll probably rely on this wrench in my hand to confirm my connection with the family."

Ladden didn't lie to Gideon. Zachary hadn't fully explained things to them, intentionally keeping it vague and shrouded in mystery, allowing their minds to wander and speculate.

Why wasn't there a confirmation letter for the arrival? Clearly, caution and carefulness were necessary.

And why wear a potentially lethal wrench when picking someone up? Perhaps Zachary had some ties with tomb raiders and now intended to help them sell their ill-gotten gains!

Ladden also believed that no matter the dynasty, any artifact dug up and not surrendered was illegal. If it were dug up but secretly traded, it would be an additional crime. Zachary willingly offered him and his friend three thousand labor fees per day, indicating that he was planning something big and didn't care about such a paltry sum of money.

It was precisely due to these speculative possibilities that Ladden firmly believed his judgment was correct, that he had truly grasped Zachary's intentions.

At this moment, Gideon felt a twinge of conflict within himself.

On one hand, he suspected that this might be a scam, but on the other hand, after hearing Ladden's explanation, he couldn't shake the feeling that this damn gang was providing comprehensive services for tomb raiding—processing and selling stolen artifacts.

With these thoughts swirling in his mind, he tentatively asked, "Brother, may I ask if your elder brother is a professional antique craftsman?"

"Yes!" Ladden replied without hesitation. "He's been in the antique business for twenty or thirty years. He'd never stoop to stealing or cheating. He's well-versed in all kinds of antique calligraphy and painting!"

Gideon nodded, pulled out several hundred yuan bills, and handed them over with a smile. "Brother, can you introduce me to your elder brother? I genuinely want to meet him."

Ladden cast a sidelong glance at the old man, seeing his willingness to pay, and a plan took shape in his mind.

Coughing deliberately, he spoke earnestly, "Old man, you know our industry has

its own rules. I don't know who you are, so I can't simply take something from my elder brother. What if you're an undercover agent? If we get caught, my life would be ruined!"

Gideon hurriedly responded, "Oh, brother, you've got me all wrong! How could I be involved in something like that? To tell you the truth, I'm an overseas Chinese who recently returned to China after being abroad."

As he said that, he swiftly presented his passport to Ladden and said sincerely, "Look, brother, I have an Argentine passport, and the entry date is clearly stamped on it."

Ladden was fabricating stories himself, so he didn't expect the old man before him to be an undercover agent sent by the police. He mentioned it merely to raise the difficulty and threshold of the matter, in order to squeeze more money out of the old man.

With a serious expression, he said, "Old man, I also have a reputation to uphold. I can't just take this item and hand it over to my elder brother casually. If you throw a thousand dollars into an alleyway near our antique street, I might consider it. You can take as much as you want, but I won't keep track."

Not fully convinced, Gideon added more money and handed it over, speaking earnestly, "Brother, let's put everything else aside. Look at me, at my age. Even a police officer would be retired by now. How could I be an undercover agent?"

Then, Gideon further explained, "Brother, I genuinely admire this finger charm you possess. So, I sincerely want to buy it. Here's my proposal: convey my interest to your elder brother and ask him to name a price. As long as it's within my means, I'll transfer the money to him right away!"

Seeing the money pressed into his hands, Ladden feigned reluctance and said, "Oh, what are you doing, old man? Are you trying to ensnare me? If my elder brother finds out, and he accuses me of having no principles, I'll never find work again."

With that, he extended the jade finger under Gideon's nose, wearing a mysterious expression. "Old man, I won't say much. Just smell this ring. Take a whiff of the faint aroma lingering in the jade crevice. Believe me when I say, it's truly extraordinary! If you're an expert, you'll instantly recognize its origin just by the scent."

Gideon skeptically raised his nose, sniffing cautiously. He furrowed his brow and asked, "It smells stale, a touch foul, with a hint of earthiness..."

"Yes!" Ladden exclaimed, giving a thumbs-up and praising him. "Master, your sense of smell is remarkably astute! You've discerned so many notes. I don't even need to tell you the item's origin, right?"

"Oh... I see..." Gideon nodded subtly.

With 156 years of life experience, he knew the kid was speaking the absolute truth!

Carefully, he presented his conclusion. "Brother, these things were all unearthed, weren't they?"

In an instant, Ladden's eyes widened, and he let go of the signboard under his arm, eagerly clasping Gideon's hands.

With an admiring expression, he spoke cautiously, "Master, congratulations! You hit the nail on the head!"

Chapter 5374

Ladden graciously accepted the money, all the while showering Gideon with compliments. "Old man, it seems you have a discerning eye as well! Were you once involved in the world of pottery when you were younger?"

"To support a pot" was a well-worn phrase in the tomb raiding industry, referring to someone who organized and led a team of tomb raiders.

Gideon waved his hand and grinned. "As for me, I have some knowledge of antiques, but not the art of tomb-robbing."

Indeed, Gideon's familiarity with tomb-robbing was limited. In his youth, he had heard rumors of treacherous exploits and daring tomb heists, like Sun Tianying's audacious plundering of Cixi's tomb. However, his many years of monastic life had left him with little interest in such endeavors or the relics themselves.

Yet, when one has lived a long life, they inevitably accumulate a wealth of information, whether actively seeking it or simply absorbing it from their surroundings. Gideon had come across stories and whispers of the treacherous world of tomb raiding, including the intriguing concept of the backstabbing support pot.

Curiosity getting the better of him, Gideon cautiously approached Ladden. "Young man, would you be willing to show me this famous trigger finger of yours?"

Ladden understood that the old man's desire to see the finger was the reason behind his previous remarks. He had cleverly played his cards, extracting money from Gideon step by step. With a hint of difficulty in his voice, he replied, "Old man, this finger is not merely a gift but a token from my elder brother. Its origin is quite sensitive, and I cannot easily show it to you. I hope you can understand my hesitation."

Gideon was perplexed by Ladden's response.

To clear the air, he reached into his robe and pulled out two crisp hundred-dollar bills, presenting them to Zachary with utmost seriousness. "Young man, let me be frank with you. During my recent travels to Yanjing and Aurous Hills, I sought out exquisite antiques from these ancient

capitals. If this finger proves to be flawless, I will offer you a thousand US dollars. In return, I kindly ask for your assistance in connecting me with your brother."

Ladden had not anticipated such straightforwardness from the old man. Though money had changed hands on previous occasions, this time Gideon pulled out actual dollars.

The money-driven Ladden hesitated for a moment, but eventually, he steeled himself and said, "Yes! Since you hold this finger in such high regard, I will remove it and show it to you!"

Without further ado, he removed the jade trigger finger and handed it over to Gideon.

Gideon couldn't hide his excitement as he carefully received the exquisite jade artifact, gently holding it with both hands, afraid that it might fall and break into pieces.

As soon as the jade trigger finger landed in his hands, Gideon's senses tingled with anticipation. He could tell, without a doubt, that this exquisite piece was an authentic antique from the mid-Qing period.

Being born during the Qing Dynasty himself, Gideon possessed a remarkable talent for identifying such treasures. A faint scent of blood and decay wafted from the artifact, indicating that it had likely been recently unearthed. Perhaps it had been deliberately concealed alongside a corpse.

Eager to uncover the enigma shrouding the finger, Gideon infused it with his own aura. He yearned to unravel the secrets held within this captivating object.

The moment his aura intermingled with the trigger finger, a subtle formation within it sprang to life. Gideon was taken aback, pondering, "This formation has been active all along. I wonder what its purpose could be?"

Despite his proficiency with aura manipulation, Gideon was far from knowledgeable about magic weapons and formations. While he possessed a wooden sword adorned with an offensive formation, he lacked the ability to refine or comprehend its intricacies fully.

Confronted with the formation left behind by Charlie, he found himself momentarily bewildered, unable to discern its true function. Its purpose remained elusive to Gideon's untrained eye.

In truth, this formation was a passive defense mechanism, detailed in the Apocalyptic book. In case of attack, the magic weapon's formation automatically activates and channels its stored energy to shield its wearer from harm. This ensures that its wielder is protected from any form of danger.

The formation's effectiveness can be compared to a basic math problem. If the enemy's attack was weaker than the strength of the formation, then the owner would come out unharmed. However, if the attack surpassed the formation's capabilities, the formation would strive to defend its master, yet the master would still endure the brunt of the unremitting assault.

Having never encountered such a formation before, Gideon remained clueless about the intended purpose of the jade trigger finger. Frustration welled up within him as he silently cursed British Lord, muttering, "That old fox never bothered to share the deeper insights with us. Now I'm left in the dark, clueless about the true nature of this magic weapon. If I wish to discover its

effects, I might have to return and pry the information out of that wily old fox... But what if it's perfect, and he snatches it away without giving it to me?"

The mere thought of it stoked a seething hatred within Gideon.

Before he could fully comprehend the finger's mysteries, Ladden approached, urging, "Old master, are you nearly finished examining it? Please return it to me once you're done!"

Even British Lord found himself fixated on the enigmatic ring adorning Maria's hand, emphasizing the immense significance this magic weapon held for the monks.

Caught in a dilemma, Gideon sighed inwardly. "Should I simply seize this magic weapon or return it to its owner before proceeding with my plan? Snatching it away would be effortless; this young man couldn't possibly stop me. However, if he were to involve the authorities, traversing Aurous Hills would become arduous. Furthermore, what if his elder brother possesses other magic weapons? I might awaken the serpent and suffer significant losses over a trifle."

Moreover, in the midst of their conversation, Gideon's mind was ablaze with a crystal-clear understanding of the intricate web of events unfolding before him.

As he pondered, a theory sprouted in his mind: "This man standing before me, consumed by his insatiable greed, must be a mere pawn entangled in the treacherous world of tomb raiders in the legendary Aurous Hills. It is highly likely that the gang of thieves has recently discovered an ancient tomb that was long forgotten. Inside, they must have discovered a treasure trove of priceless artifacts, including the elusive trigger finger. These items are invaluable and could fetch a high price on the black market. The discovery is a significant development in the world of archaeology and history. Undoubtedly, they are now relentlessly scouring the realm for a wealthy buyer."

His thoughts swirled in a whirlwind of anticipation. "The shipment from the Hong Kong merchant has yet to reach my hands, but once I establish contact, I shall gain access to their entire plunder from the sacred tomb. And if there exists a substantial collection of mystical relics among their spoils, the potential profits would be immeasurable. This opportunity, laden with promise, must not be allowed to slip away!"

Moved by this revelation, Gideon cast a piercing gaze upon Ladden and spoke with utmost seriousness, "Dear brother, what price do you seek for this trigger finger? If it aligns with my expectations, I shall purchase it from you!"

"You wish to acquire it?" Gideon's affirmative nod prompted Ladden's surprise. "Indeed, I intend to acquire it. Pray, reveal the price to me!"

Upon hearing Gideon's inquiry, Ladden's thoughts immediately turned to Zachary's prior instructions.

Regardless of the potential buyer, Zachary had explicitly instructed them to quote a price one hundred times higher than the market value.

Ladden found himself puzzled by Zachary's intentions. After all, his role was to assist people and execute assigned tasks, not to delve into such convoluted affairs. His sole responsibility had

been to fetch Gideon, and if the elderly man indeed desired the finger, Ladden needed to consult with Zachary.

Valuing the jade finger at a modest 30,000 to 50,000 at best, Ladden reckoned that quoting a price a hundred times higher would bring it into the realm of three to five million.

Gritting his teeth, he extended three fingers and boldly declared to Gideon, "I estimate that this extraordinary item shall command no less than three million!"

"Three million?" Although Gideon, who rarely ventured outside his seclusion, had limited exposure to the business world, he comprehended the significance of such a sum.

Fortunately, as a prosperous warrior, Gideon possessed abundant wealth, rendering a few million, let alone several hundred million, a trifling matter.

Turning his attention back to Ladden, he inquired, "If I decide to proceed, can we complete the transaction now?"

Ladden was taken aback, never expecting the elderly man to genuinely consider making the purchase.

Thus, he responded, "Should you truly wish to proceed, you must engage with my elder brother face to face. I am not empowered to make the final decision on the matter."

"Listen closely, Gideon," he began, his voice imbued with certainty. "I shall offer you three million as a starting point. The sky is the limit, but if you find yourself disinterested, let us not waste each other's time. Give me the green light, and I shall contact my elder brother for further instructions."

Gideon nodded affirmatively, gesturing his acceptance, and uttered, "Three million is agreeable to me."

Ladden's heart raced as he processed the astonishing turn of events. With caution and trembling hands, he beseeched Gideon, "Sir, I implore you to return the trigger

finger. I must contact my elder brother without delay."

Reluctantly, Gideon handed back the trigger finger to Ladden.

As soon as he retrieved it, Ladden swiftly distanced himself from Gideon, ensuring there would be no possibility of eavesdropping. With his cellphone in hand, he dialed Zachary's number.

Once the call connected, Ladden immediately lowered his voice and whispered, "Brother Zachary, there is someone interested in purchasing the wrench finger you entrusted to me."

Zachary inquired, "How much did you quote him?"

Ladden hushed his voice further and murmured, "I quoted a minimum of three million, and he... he said he could accept it."

Zachary responded with a simple "oh" before instructing, "If he can accept it, have him come to Antique Street and meet me in person."

"Understood!" Ladden readily agreed and posed another question, "Brother Zachary, this old man has caused me considerable trouble. If the trigger finger does sell for three million, you must give me credit!"

"Worry not," Zachary assured him without hesitation. "Regardless of the deal's magnitude, I shall grant you ten percent of the reward."

"Truly?" Excitement coursed through Ladden's veins. One-tenth of three million amounted to a staggering 300,000! Even with a year of hard work, he could never earn such a sum.

"I never lie, my friend," Zachary continued, his words laden with sincerity. "In fact, I would have granted you an additional five percent if you had introduced me to a major client and facilitated the purchase of other items."

Ladden's joy knew no bounds as he exclaimed, "Very well, Brother Zachary! With your words as a promise, I shall surely bring you a lucrative opportunity, no, a golden opportunity!"

Zachary offered a reminder, "Don't limit your focus to just clients. Keep a vigilant eye on the airport as well, for it is there that the true heavyweight clients from Hong Kong Island might arrive. That's where the real fortune lies!"

"Fear not, Brother Zachary!" Ladden's excitement surged, his words teeming with enthusiasm. "I shall not drop the ball, I guarantee it!"

Chapter 5375

Hanging up the phone, Ladden bounced back with excitement, oblivious to the fact that Gideon had eavesdropped on their entire conversation.

After his talk with Zachary, Gideon felt more convinced than ever that his initial assessment was spot-on. He also believed that Zachary's brother, as mentioned by Ladden, must possess other valuable items, like additional enchanted weapons. Gideon was certain that there was more to uncover.

To him, obtaining a magical weapon was akin to a martial artist mastering a supreme mind technique or a football player claiming victory in the God of Power Cup. It represented the ultimate achievement in his field.

Just then, Ladden returned to Gideon, wearing a mysterious smile, and asked, "Old man, would you like to meet my big brother?"

Gideon raised an eyebrow and replied, "Exactly!"

Ladden licked his lips and spoke slowly, "My older brother isn't keen on meeting new people. When I mentioned introducing you to him, he scolded me for even considering talking to a stranger..."

Instantly, both of them locked eyes with a hawk-like intensity, radiating a flicker of anger and a hint of murderous intent.

Gideon overheard their conversation and realized that Ladden was trying to deceive him in order to gain more advantages. It had been a long time since someone had dared to play such a game in front of him. He wasn't the only one who could pull off such tricks.

However, Gideon also knew that, as the saying goes, a little intolerance leads to great chaos.

Though annoyed, he couldn't turn against Ladden. This was a minor inconvenience to him.

Without hesitation, he delved deep into his pocket and pulled out a stack of crisp bills, handing them over to Ladden. "Listen, my friend, I've made it clear that I'm serious about this deal. It's about time you showed me some reciprocal sincerity, don't you think?"

If he became greedy and insatiable at this moment, and if the old man complained to Zachary, the benefits promised to him by Zachary might be lost.

In the past, he wasn't afraid of Zachary, but recently Zachary had started following Master Hong Wu. He was worried that Zachary still had a connection with Master Hong Wu, so naturally, he didn't dare to offend him.

Thus, he quickly accepted the money and put on a busy smile. "Old master, look at what you're saying. I've been sincere with you throughout our conversation. Otherwise, I wouldn't have shared everything with you, don't you agree?"

Gideon's expression softened a bit, and he asked, "So, how can I meet this big brother of yours?"

Ladden replied without hesitation, "Here's what you do. Step outside and hail a taxi. Tell the driver to take you to the antique street. There's only one antique street in Aurous Hills, and he'll surely take you there. Once you arrive at the antique street, go to the middle stall and look for a man named Zachary. He's my big brother!"

"Zachary..." murmured Gideon. The Zachary brother he had just heard about and the one Ladden had mentioned seemed to be the same person. He could tell that this kid wasn't playing mind games with him anymore.

Gideon nodded and said, "Alright then, I'll head to the Antique Street to meet Mr. Zachary."

"No problem!" Ladden smiled eagerly and added, "But, old master, I have to wait for the Hong Kong merchant here, so I can't accompany you. I hope you don't mind!"

Gideon didn't bother wasting his breath. Right now, he just wanted to find this Zachary as quickly as possible. He wanted to see how many magic weapons he still possessed and claim them along with the jade trigger finger held by the kid in front of him!

After hanging up the phone with Ladden, Zachary wasted no time in reporting the situation to Charlie, eager to share the latest developments.

Charlie, having received the call, swiftly arrived at the Champs-Elysees Hot Spring Hotel. The hotel was conveniently located near Wanliu Villa, where Grandpa and Grandma resided. Charlie planned to stay there for the foreseeable future to ensure he could handle any unexpected incidents promptly.

Aware of the potential risks involved, Charlie had made arrangements with Richard Chen to have a highly capable rescue helicopter on standby at all times. If the need arose, the helicopter could take off in a matter of minutes and reach Manliu Villa, where the action was unfolding.

When Zachary revealed to Charlie that an individual at the airport was willing to pay \$3 million for the trigger finger he had designed, Charlie was completely surprised. The news struck him with astonishment. He knew in his gut that the moment he had been waiting for had finally arrived!

Charlie had anticipated that the members of the Broken Qing Society would make their way to Aurous Hills, but he never imagined they would arrive so swiftly. The pace of events caught him off guard.

Zachary, with an evident concern in his tone, asked Charlie over the phone, "What if that person manages to find me when he arrives at Antique Street from the airport?" "Is there anything I should be wary of?"

Charlie responded nonchalantly, "If he offers to buy the lightning wood I gave you, counter with a price of five million, if he agrees to it, go ahead and sell it to him."

Anxious for more guidance, Zachary inquired again, "Master Wade, is this person the one you've been searching for? Should I send someone to keep an eye on him?"

"No need," Charlie instructed firmly. "Your sole responsibility is to make the sale. Don't worry about anything else."

Charlie knew that as long as Zachary maintained a low profile and avoided direct contact with the Earl, he would be safe. Prominent figures like the Earl rarely took unnecessary risks, especially when their important missions were at stake. Thus, there was no reason for Earl to harm Zachary if he was only interested in purchasing the Thunderstorm Talisman.

However, if Zachary were to be recognized by the Earl, the situation would change drastically. The Earl would likely exploit Zachary as a means to uncover the identity of his true adversary, risking the success of Charlie's plans.

To prevent Zachary from being exposed, Charlie subtly planted a suggestion in his mind. He recommended to Zachary that in case someone asked about the source of the lightning wood, he should confidently assert that it was extracted from a holy birthing pit. This would make Zachary's interactions with the Earl appear entirely natural and eliminate any suspicions.

A sudden realization dawned upon Charlie. He had initially designed the Thunderstorm Talisman to be a disposable spell that would shatter upon use. The intention was for the enemy

to inadvertently activate the talisman, alerting Charlie to their location after they arrived in Aurous Hills.

However, considering the warning from his beloved Lin Wan'er about the impending danger, Charlie realized that a confrontation was inevitable. If that were the case, he needed to adjust his plans accordingly.

Moreover, the Thunderstorm Talisman, originally prepared for the upcoming battle, might as well be given to this long-distance client. Charlie decided to customize it to serve their particular needs.

Without delay, Charlie boarded a helicopter bound for Shangri-La Hotel in the city. He simultaneously contacted Zachary, instructing him urgently, "Zachary, bring the lightning wood I gave you to Shangri-La Hotel immediately, the sooner, the better."

Zachary was a mere five or six minutes away from Shangri-La Hotel on his electric bike, and

it would take Charlie a similar amount of time to reach the destination by air. In contrast, the other party would require at least thirty or forty minutes to journey from the airport to Antique Street.

Charlie had requested information about Zachary just a few minutes ago, and Zachary might not have even secured a taxi yet. This provided Charlie with ample time to execute his plans.

A helicopter swiftly departed from the Champs-Elysees Spa Hotel, hurtling toward Shangri-la Hotel as if racing against time.

Charlie and Zachary coincidentally arrived at Shangri-la Hotel at the same moment. In Richard Chen's office, they finally reunited.

Charlie wasted no time and asked, "Have you brought the lightning wood I gave you?"

Zachary promptly pulled out the thunderstruck talisman from his pocket and presented it to Charlie. "Master Wade, take a look."

Charlie nodded and directed Zachary, "Zachary, please wait outside for a while."

"Understood!" Zachary replied without hesitation. "Master Wade, feel free to call on me if you need anything."

With that, he respectfully exited the office, leaving Charlie alone to inspect the lightning wood.

Swiftly tapping into his aura, Charlie made several adjustments to the Thunderstrike Talisman's formation. Within minutes, he summoned Zachary back into the room, handing him the modified talisman. Using a fraction of his aura, Charlie instructed, "Zachary, take this Thunderstrike Wood and head back immediately. If the other party asks about the tomb raid or if you have any other items besides the lightning wood, inform them that you were entrusted with both the thunderbolt wood and the trigger finger by a superior for distribution. You have no knowledge of where the items were excavated or the quantity."

"In case he asks about your superior, claim ignorance as well. Explain that your superior contacts you periodically, and if he wants to meet your superior, ask him to leave a contact number. Once your superior reaches out to you, you can pass along the information. If your superior agrees to meet him, you will inform him via phone."

Unaware of Charlie's subtle influence, Zachary nodded earnestly and respectfully pledged, "Rest assured, Master Wade, I will remember everything you've instructed."

"Excellent," Charlie responded with satisfaction. "You may leave now. Keep the money you earn from selling these two items as a token of my appreciation. Don't hesitate to accept it."

Zachary hastily expressed his gratitude, saying, "Thank you, Master Wade!"

...

A few minutes later, Zachary returned to Antique Street.

Curious, someone approached him and asked, "Brother Zachary, what were those people asking you for earlier?"

Zachary replied casually, "Oh, I was just out and about. Had a bit of a stomachache this morning."

As he spoke, he nonchalantly placed the lightning talisman back in the center of his stall.

Unbeknownst to Zachary, Charlie had skillfully reshaped the talisman.

Twenty minutes later, a sprightly old man in a long shirt strolled into Antique Street.

It was none other than Gideon.

Although Gideon repeatedly urged the taxi driver to accelerate, it took almost forty minutes for them to reach Antique Street from the airport.

The moment he stepped onto the street, Gideon instinctively scanned his surroundings for any aura fluctuations.

His gaze swiftly landed on a middle-aged man with shifty eyes and two mustaches. The man stood in front of a stall, animatedly introducing a product to a curious tourist.

That middle-aged man was Zachary.

Gideon's attention then shifted to the lightning-struck wood prominently displayed on Zachary's stall.

A surge of excitement coursed through Gideon's heart. He knew that the thunderbolt wood was a magical artifact.

He had never encountered a magical artifact outside before, and yet, in Aurous Hills, he had stumbled upon two even before settling in properly!

Chapter 5376

Gideon felt like a person who had spent a lifetime yearning to win the lottery, but luck had always eluded him. Yet, here he was, winning the jackpot not once, but twice in a single morning.

In simple terms, it felt like purchasing several lottery tickets for many years, without winning even a small amount of five dollars, and then abruptly hitting the jackpot not just once, but twice.

At this moment, Gideon's 156 years of life experience couldn't shake his belief that this might all be a trap.

And why wouldn't he doubt? After all, magical artifacts weren't exactly a dime a dozen.

Throughout his years of service to the Lord, he had only been granted one magic weapon for self-defense. And it wasn't even his to keep; he had to return it upon his return to the Lord.

So, if the Lord was unwilling to give him even one thing, who would deceive him with two? Deep down, he felt unworthy of such fortune.

With no room for doubt, Gideon's heart brimmed with ecstasy.

He calmly approached Zachary's booth and asked, "Boss, are you Zachary?"

Zachary nodded, his demeanor casual as he replied, "That's me. What can I do for you?"

Gideon smiled and said, "Hello, I bumped into your younger brother at the airport earlier. I happened to notice a finger wrench in his possession, so I asked him about it and decided to come talk to you."

Zachary regarded the older man with a hint of caution and asked, "Oh, so you're the one willing to pay three million for that finger wrench?"

Curiosity getting the better of him, Zachary inquired further, "Do you have a great interest in antiques?"

Gideon instinctively responded, "Yes, I have a deep passion for them."

Furrowing his brows, Zachary pressed on, "If you're truly passionate, then you should be more knowledgeable. The ring isn't worth three million. If my brother asked you for that amount and you agreed, I would think you were an undercover agent trying to set me up."

"Uh..." Gideon was momentarily taken aback.

He had spent years secluded in his practice, unaware of the current market prices for antiques. Additionally, he hadn't set foot in China for two decades, making him unfamiliar with the prices there. To him, the asking price of three million yuan for a Qing Dynasty jade ring, of ordinary quality no less, seemed outrageously high.

Fortunately, he wasn't strapped for cash, and his desire for that magic weapon pushed him to rush into the purchase without much thought.

Now, confronted with Zachary's rhetorical question, he refrained from asking further. Unexpectedly, it wasn't Zachary who doubted him, but the other way around.

After a brief reflection, Gideon said somewhat sheepishly, "Boss, you've misunderstood me. I'm an overseas Chinese returning to visit relatives. This isn't a joke. I genuinely like that jade ring, regardless of its price."

Zachary scoffed, a smile playing on his lips. "I think you're quite advanced in years. How could you resort to lying? Who would believe such a story? Just a finger wrench, take it to the antique market, and you'll get thirty thousand yuan at most. If you truly like it, can you spare me fifty thousand yuan? The three million price tag is only for undercover agents like you who lack knowledge of antiques and jump at the opportunity."

Gideon was stunned by Zachary's response.

He never imagined that Charlie's latest scheme involved the three million yuan proposal for Zachary, leaving him speechless and unable to argue. He weakly defended himself, "Boss, I'm telling you that I'm not an undercover agent..."

"Enough with the excuses." Zachary impatiently waved his hand. "Let me tell you the truth. I asked for three million just to attract undercover agents. Any genuine antique connoisseur would publicly ridicule us upon hearing that price. They would outright refuse. My intention is to play along, gather more clues when they're lured in."

He continued, a smug grin forming on his face. "But let me tell you, your little trick won't work on me!"

Gideon was rendered momentarily speechless.

He hadn't anticipated that the three million yuan offers had been intended for such a purpose all along.

Considering his earlier speculations, he firmly believed that this group of people was a tomb-robbing gang specializing in selling stolen antiques. Zachary's words only reinforced his conviction.

After all, he believed that a criminal organization capable of long-term survival must be cautious and cunning, employing countless methods to evade detection.

Doubting everything was a necessary precaution.

In light of China's stringent and cautious organizational structure, Gideon had no doubts about Zachary's performance.

The more he feared Zachary's misunderstanding, the quicker he smiled and pleaded, "Boss, you've truly misunderstood me. I'm not an undercover agent. I genuinely want to purchase something I like..."

"Alright, alright," Zachary dismissed him with a perfunctory tone. "Say whatever you want. You enjoy fine things, don't you? If you like them so much, go on a shopping spree in the antique street and buy more. Just don't interfere with my business."

Witnessing Zachary's indifference and his refusal to listen to his explanation, Gideon seethed with anger, wishing he could strike Zachary down right then and there.

But he quickly dismissed those thoughts. He knew his mission in Aurous Hill all too well.

His orders from the Lord were clear: eliminate Evan's family and wait for Bruce's son to reveal himself.

Having arrived in Aurous Hill alone, he should have immediately set out to fulfill his task. Yet, he had disembarked from the plane and made a beeline for the antique street.

If any trouble arose from this, if word reached the Lord's ears, he would have no way to justify his actions.

Hence, Gideon suppressed the anger simmering within him and, in an almost pleading tone, said to Zachary, "Brother, please understand me. If you don't trust me, just provide me with your bank account number. I'll transfer the three million directly to you! After all, no undercover agent would genuinely spend three million to buy your antiques, right?"

"Well, who knows," Zachary sneered, his lips curling. "I'm not an enforcement officer. I've never encountered one before. What good would your money do? If you really are an undercover agent, that money would be your mission fund. You wouldn't need to pay it yourself. And once I receive the money, I would be convicted of illegally reselling antiques. At that point, you would flash your police badge and slap on the handcuffs. I'd be arrested, the money returned, and I'd be singing behind bars, crying in regret. That's what you're trying to accomplish, isn't it?"

"Why won't you listen!" Gideon stomped his feet anxiously.

He never imagined that this man would be so cautious, perhaps even overly cautious.

Moreover, no matter what he said, Zachary refused to believe him. He wouldn't even entertain the idea of receiving the money.

There was no room for a moment of reflection!

In his heart, he cursed furiously, "Damn it, if I didn't have to abide by the law, I'd rip your head off!"

Chapter 5377

Gideon seethed with anger, his fury blinding him to the fact that his rage had made him vulnerable to believing every word that came out of Zachary's mouth. Unbeknownst to him, he had unwittingly adopted Zachary's perspective as his own.

He had convinced himself that Zachary was an esteemed antique dealer with close ties to tomb raiding. And he firmly believed that these two magical artifacts, which he considered his good fortune, could never be a trap of any kind!

All he could think about at that moment was how in the world he could make that damned Zachary believe in him and persuade him to purchase the magical artifacts in his possession.

Suppressing his anger, he replied with a calm and humble voice, "Boss, I assure you I'm not an undercover agent. If you have any doubts, I can arrange for a settlement in US dollars through an overseas account."

"Dollars, you say?" Zachary's eyes gleamed as he inquired, "Can you trade in US dollars?"

"Yes!" Gideon blurted out without hesitation, "Just give me your card number, and I'll wire you the money immediately!"

However, he added a word of caution, "Once the money is in your account, you'll have to handle the exchange yourself to convert it into RMB."

Zachary gave him a blank stare and retorted, "Who do you think you're looking down on? We're in the business of dealing with overseas buyers all the time, alright?"

Realizing his slip of the tongue, Gideon quickly apologized to Zachary to avoid any negative impressions. "I'm sorry, boss. It was my mistake to speak out of turn. Please forgive me!"

Zachary maintained his composure but shot Gideon a displeased look as he bluntly remarked, "I don't appreciate conversing with expats like you who subtly belittle others, as if I'm not worldly enough to grasp such behavior. You send me some dollars, and I don't even know I have to settle the exchange?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes..." Gideon smiled with a tinge of regret. "I apologize. Considering the scale of your business, it's understandable that you were unaware of the dollar settlement..."

With that, Gideon swiftly changed the subject and suggested, "Boss, why don't you provide me with your bank card number, and I'll transfer the money right away!"

Zachary nodded and reminded him, "Dollars, ah, at an exchange rate of one to six, you can transfer half a million directly to me."

Gideon knew that the exchange rate must be off, and Zachary was pocketing hundreds of thousands in profit. But he didn't bother to count it at that moment. The fact that Zachary was willing to accept his money was enough to make him excited.

He immediately took out his mobile phone and said, "Boss, give me your card number, and I'll transfer the money to you right now!"

Zachary retrieved his phone and provided Gideon with his bank card information.

Not long after, Uncle Chang Sheng, using a Swiss bank card, transferred \$500,000 to Zachary.

As soon as Zachary confirmed that the money had been transferred, a smile lit up his face, and he joyfully exclaimed, "It seems my suspicion was unfounded. Since the money has successfully been credited to my account, you are definitely not an undercover agent!"

Gideon was ultimately absolved of any wrongdoing, and he couldn't help but feel relieved. However, a slight annoyance lingered within him as he exclaimed, "Come on, really? I've been around for ages. How could I possibly be some sort of police spy?"

Zachary nodded and chuckled, "I misjudged you earlier, my apologies! But you also know, in our line of work, caution ensures longevity. Those who only think about making money and are willing to sell to anyone who buys from them usually go under within a year and a half. Look at me, I've been in the Aurous Hills antique circle for over twenty years, never capsized. It all depends on being cautious."

Gideon smiled and agreed, "You're absolutely right. Being careful is always the way to go!"

With that settled, he asked, "Boss, now that I've paid you the money, when can I obtain the finger?"

"Later," Zachary replied casually. "I have my men waiting for the Hong Kong businessman at the airport. Hong Kong businessmen are cautious; they never make calls or send messages. They won't even disclose which flight they're taking to Aurous Hills. They'll only identify themselves using a code word and a token once they meet. So, they could arrive at any time, and my men have to wait there constantly."

Zachary dared not let Ladden come over because he had deceived Ladden as well. If Ladden came and left something behind, everything would be ruined.

Therefore, Zachary pondered and suggested, "How about this? I'll ask him to find a runner in the same city and send you the trigger finger."

Gideon quickly objected, "No, I can't do that. I can't entrust such an expensive item to someone else... If it's inconvenient for your man to come, then I'll go and collect it from him myself later. Just instruct him."

"The runners don't know what this is, and they're faster on a motorcycle than in a car. They can be there in half an hour," Zachary confidently assured him.

Seeing Zachary's unwavering confidence, Gideon didn't argue further. After all, he had a bigger target in mind—the piece of lightning wood displayed prominently on Zachary's stall.

So, pretending to be nonchalant, he said, "In that case, I'll wait here for a while and see if you have any other interesting items."

Zachary nodded and encouraged, "Feel free to look around and let me know if anything catches your eye."

"Great!" Gideon exclaimed. He pretended to scan the stall for a few moments before pointing at the piece of thunderbolt wood and inquiring, "Boss, how much for this thunderbolt wood?"

Without thinking, Zachary responded, "Five million."

Gideon wasn't concerned about the price; he simply asked, "May I have a closer look?"

Zachary nodded, saying, "Go ahead."

Gideon took the thunderbolt wood in his hand and immediately sensed the presence of a concealed attack formation within it.

He recognized it as an attack formation due to its striking resemblance to the one in the wooden sword given to him by the British lord. It appeared to be the same type of formation.

To avoid triggering the attack formation, he swiftly retracted his aura.

At that moment, his excitement grew even more!

Although he wasn't entirely sure of the Jade Trigger Finger's effects, he knew with certainty that the Lightning Strike Wood was an offensive magical weapon!

To a monk, an offensive magical weapon held immense significance. It served as a crucial tool to combat enemies when faced with danger.

He couldn't wait to find a secluded place where he could test the offensive capabilities of this magical weapon without any distractions!

With anticipation in his voice, he said to Zachary, "Boss, I'll take this piece of lightning wood as well!"

Zachary nodded in agreement, "You can have it for 800,000 US dollars."

Without hesitation, Gideon replied, "Shall I wire it to the same card you provided earlier?"

Zachary nodded affirmatively, "Yes, go ahead with the transfer!"

Chapter 5378

After an extensive period of persuasion and charm, Gideon had finally won Zachary's "trust."

With an air of excitement, Gideon transferred a whopping \$800,000 to Zachary's account.

A beaming Zachary exclaimed joyfully, "Oh, my dear friend, you're not an undercover cop! You're the God of Wealth!"

Impatiently, Gideon inquired, "Since I've paid the money, the goods are mine, right?"

Zachary handed the thunderbolt wood directly to Gideon and replied, "Take this for now. The trigger finger will be delivered later."

Gideon's joy knew no bounds as he held the thunderbolt wood, relishing its presence in his hands.

At this moment, all his bitter resentment towards Zachary dissipated. Now, all he yearned for was to find a secluded spot and unleash the power of this thunderbolt wood, a truly magical weapon.

While they awaited the delivery, Gideon couldn't help but inquire, "By the way, boss, do you have any more similar items? If you do, I'd love to see them. If they're suitable, I'll take them all."

Zachary shook his head and, following Ye Chen's instructions, replied, "The trigger finger and the thunderbolt wood were given to me by my superior. He instructed me to distribute them on his behalf."

Gideon looked around cautiously to ensure there were no eavesdroppers and whispered, "I can tell that you're peddling freshly dug-up antiques, young man. Since you're involved in this trade, it's unlikely that these two items are the only treasures from the tomb, right?"

Zachary responded earnestly, "Old man, I won't deceive you. The matter of freshly unearthed treasures is true, but I'm only responsible for selling them. Don't underestimate me; my superior is even more cautious. He knows where the treasures lie and which pots to unearth. I have no knowledge of his actions. He only gave me these two pieces and asked me to find buyers. If I sell these successfully, he might give me something new."

Excitement filled Gideon's voice as he exclaimed, "In that case, your superior must still possess other treasures!"

Then, hastily adding, he continued, "Young man, there's something else I'd like to request."

Zachary nonchalantly replied, "If you want something, just say it."

Gideon said, "Could you introduce me to your superior? I'd like to purchase more items directly from him."

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that," Zachary replied seriously. "My superior is extremely concerned about personal safety. He doesn't meet or contact me unless it's necessary. Our communication is strictly one-way. If he has something for me, he can find me, but I can't find him."

Zachary added, "How about this? If you're truly interested, leave me your contact information. After I submit the payment to my superior this time, if there are any similar items available, he will definitely sell them to me again. When I receive them, I'll contact you first."

Gideon hesitated for a moment and ultimately decided against revealing his contact information. With modern mobile phones, privacy was hard to maintain, as connecting to a base station for communication services revealed one's location. Gideon was well aware of the significance of protecting personal information, thanks to his education under a British Lord who emphasized the importance of staying current.

Although Gideon trusted Zachary, he was still unwilling to share his contact details with a stranger. So, he spoke up and said, "Boss, considering your experience in the antique industry,

you can quickly discern the quality of items. If you come across something remarkable, keep it here, and I'll come back tomorrow or the day after if I have the time."

Observing Gideon's cautious demeanor, Zachary understood that this matter shouldn't be rushed or forced.

He patted his chest and assured him, "I'll tell you what, old man. You can come back tomorrow morning and take a look."

Gideon approached and said in a low voice, "Boss, how about this? I'll pay you \$200,000 in advance. If anything new catches your eye, keep it for me. This way, no one else can grab it before me. If I like it after seeing it, that's fantastic. If not, you can sell it to someone else."

Zachary pondered for a moment and then nodded, saying, "Alright, since you're so eager, I won't rush. I'll do as you've suggested."

Gideon was thrilled and once again took out his mobile phone, transferring an additional \$200,000 to Zachary's bank account. He had now spent a total of \$1.5 million, yet he felt no pain; on the contrary, he was exhilarated as if he had struck gold.

As he looked at Zachary now, annoyance was replaced by gratitude.

Half an hour later, a courier returned the jade trigger finger to Zachary. After signing for it, Zachary handed it to Gideon and asked, "Is this the trigger finger you saw at the airport?"

Gideon could sense the spiritual energy and enchantments embedded within the jade trigger finger, confirming that it was indeed the one he desired.

Without hesitation, Gideon placed the jade trigger finger alongside the other two magical artifacts. Overwhelmed with excitement, he exclaimed to Zachary, "Boss, remember to keep anything new for me!"

"Don't worry," Zachary reassured, patting his chest. "If there are any new items in the future, I won't show them to anyone until you've seen them."

Gideon smiled and replied, "Good, I appreciate it in advance!"

"No need for thanks," Zachary replied casually. "If you ever need antique paintings and calligraphy, feel free to visit me at Antique Street."

"Alright," Gideon responded, his mind entirely captivated by the two magical artifacts.

At that moment, his greatest desire was to find a secluded location and thoroughly test the power of these two treasures.

He turned to Zachary and said, "Boss, in that case, I'll leave you to your business. If I have the time, I'll come back tomorrow morning."

"Sounds good!" Zachary smiled. "Old master, take your time. There's no need for me to see you off."

"Stop!" Gideon waved his hand and impatiently turned away, leaving Antique Street with determined strides.

As soon as he stepped out, Gideon hailed a taxi and got in, telling the driver, "Take me to the least crowded place in Aurous Hills. Preferably deep in the mountains and forests, where there's nobody around."

The taxi driver was taken aback and asked, "Sir, why, at your age, are you looking for a place with no one around? Do you doubt your own capabilities?"

Gideon pulled out a few hundred-dollar bills and placed them on the dashboard, his voice turning icy as he replied, "Enough with the questions. Just drive, or I'll find someone else."

The moment the taxi driver caught a glimpse of the US dollars, he immediately smiled and eagerly proposed, "Sir, if you're looking for a private location, why not let me take you to Phoenix Village tucked away behind Phoenix Hill Cemetery." "If that's not remote enough for you, continue past Phoenix Village and cross a mountain. The one behind it is completely inaccessible, let alone uninhabited!"

Without a second thought, Gideon exclaimed, "Yes! Let's go there!"

Chapter 5379

As Gideon made his way to Phoenix Mountain, little did he know that Charlie had already received a text message from Zachary.

The message contained just one sentence, announcing the opening of a new store next month.

Charlie wasted no time and immediately responded with an enthusiastic reply, using the secret code he and Zachary had agreed upon.

The opening of a new store was code for fresh tombs to be plundered in the circle of grave robbers.

This discrete method was employed to communicate their goals, in order to avoid arousing suspicion from sensitive individuals who could misinterpret their partnership as a harmless association.

As soon as Charlie received the news, he knew that the Thunderbolt Order had been sold, prompting him to call Isaac right away.

Within ten minutes, Isaac sent several videos to Charlie, showcasing the surveillance footage from the airport's arrival hall and near Zachary's booth on Antique Street.

It was in these videos that Charlie laid eyes on Gideon for the first time.

Despite his unimposing appearance, the man in his sixties emanated a certain amiability that made it difficult for anyone to perceive him as threatening, even in a bustling environment.

Charlie took note of Gideon's appearance and quietly mused to himself, "I reckon this man must be one of the four Earls of the Warriors Den. He's the one who purchased my Thunderbolt. I bet he's itching to test it out soon."

"Am I right?"

Suddenly, a loud noise erupted from Phoenix Mountain in the southwest of Aurous Hill, capturing everyone's attention.

A thunderbolt struck the valley with incredible force, causing a massive explosion that reverberated throughout the entire city.

The echo of the thunder lingered over Aurous Hill, gradually fading away after several repetitions.

Meanwhile, dark clouds amassed in the sky above the mountainous region, giving the impression that a heavy rainstorm was imminent.

The meteorological department promptly issued warnings of thunderstorms and heavy rain, with the possibility of hailstorms.

While everyone thought it was an ordinary thunderstorm, only Charlie was able to discern that the deafening boom was caused by the activation of the Thunderbolt!

With a grave expression, he whispered to himself, "It appears that the Earl of the Warriors Den has already tested the Thunderbolt!"

...

Meanwhile, in Phoenix Mountain, located in the southwestern suburbs.

Gideon stood before a five-meter-wide and three-meter-deep pit, his legs weak from what he had just witnessed.

Only thirty seconds ago, deep within the valley, he had carefully selected a massive boulder to be the subject of his groundbreaking experiment.

Channeling his spiritual energy, he had unleashed the immense power of the Thunderbolt formation, eager to test the might of this lightning-infused magical tool.

To his surprise, the formation activated with a sudden whirlwind-like motion.

He had poured a substantial amount of spiritual energy into it, but he struggled to complete the operation and cast the spell.

Desperate, he increased the inflow of aura, pushing himself to infuse one-third of his body's energy into the formation before finally considering it complete.

Just as he eagerly awaited the results, a dark cloud swiftly formed in the sky, engulfing several hills near Phoenix Mountain.

In an instant, a thunderbolt as thick as a bucket struck right before his eyes!

The deafening thunderclap assaulted his eardrums with excruciating pain, reducing the boulder to nothing but dust!

Not only had the summoned thunder shattered the boulder, but it also created a sizable hole in the ground beneath it.

This display of immense and almost terrifying power overwhelmed Gideon, leaving him elated and astonished.

He never could have imagined that the Lightning Strike Wood would possess the ability to summon heavenly thunder!

And the sheer strength of this thunder was comparable to that of a heavy artillery shell!

In comparison, the wooden sword bestowed upon him by his Lord paled in comparison.

Gideon's eyes widened with excitement as he peered into the deep pit. He was studying the unscathed wood that had been struck by lightning and whispered, "The untamed power of this Wood is truly formidable! With it, I may even stand a chance against stronger adversaries in the future. How fortunate I am to have come to Aurous Hill!"

Although, he couldn't conceal his apprehension as he stated, "Nonetheless, this method demands a considerable quantity of spiritual power and can merely be employed thrice, followed by a regeneration interval. If I were to use only one-tenth of my energy, it wouldn't suffice for future battles. I must ensure the completion of the task at hand to recover the energy I have just expended. Perhaps, I shall humbly request some restorative medicine from my Lord."

After a moment of hesitation, Gideon carefully stored the lightning strike wood close to his body, unable to contain a sigh, and pondered, "The exhilaration of summoning thunder was astounding! It felt as if I merged with heaven and earth. If only I had more time to savor the experience, but everything unfolded so quickly. I wish I could do it again!"

With that thought in mind, he couldn't resist reaching into his clothes, grasping the Thunderbolt in his palm. However, after a brief hesitation, he released his grip, withdrawing it from his clothing, and murmured, "No, this device consumes far too much spiritual energy."

"If I were to use it again, my strength would significantly wane within a short period."

"It would hinder the completion of my task. Patience is required!"

Unaware that the reason behind the Thunderbolt's energy consumption was Charlie's intention, Gideon took out the jade wrench and pondered, "What is the purpose of this wrench? It appears to trigger a passive formation."

"Could it be an amulet? If so, I mustn't recklessly experiment with it; otherwise, I might incur significant losses should it lose its effect."

Lost in thought, he touched his chest and exclaimed with enthusiasm, "Aurous Hill, the ancient capital of the Six Dynasties, lives up to its name! On my first day here, I've already acquired two items. If I wait a few more days, who knows what other treasures await me!"

Without further delay, Gideon resolved to temporarily spare the Evans family and set his sights on Antique Street the next day to find Zachary. He planned to leverage his connections to secure some mystical weapons from his superiors.

...

Meanwhile, Charlie continued to gaze at the dark clouds looming over Phoenix Mountain in the west, torn with indecision.

He grappled with the question of whether he should immediately board a helicopter and rush to Phoenix Mountain to confront Gideon.

By hurrying over, there was a chance he might find the Earl of the Warriors Den in the mountain.

If he managed to locate him, he would engage in a direct confrontation and, ideally, eliminate him.

However, Charlie quickly dismissed this idea.

Rushing over now would not guarantee finding the other party, and even if he did, it might be impractical to initiate a fight.

After all, it was broad daylight, and engaging in a prolonged battle that yielded no clear victor would undoubtedly attract unwanted attention.

Revealing his mastery of spiritual energy could potentially cause widespread panic in society.

Thus, Charlie hesitated for a moment and abandoned the immediate plan of heading to Phoenix Mountain.

As for how to deal with Gideon, it required careful long-term strategizing.

However, with Gideon in possession of the Thunderbolt, Charlie's chances of eventually eliminating him had increased slightly!

Chapter 5380

Aurous Hill University, in this very moment.

On the vibrant playground, thousands of freshmen from different colleges and departments were being divided into various squares for their military training.

The rigorous 14-day training had just commenced today.

Many of the freshmen still felt uneasy about the intense paramilitary exercises. Both boys and girls were brimming with complaints.

The scorching sun showed no mercy, its intense heat punishing the newly enrolled freshmen who had just embarked on their first year of studies.

A sudden explosion of thunder from the southwest startled all the students on the field. They turned their gaze towards the dark clouds, and a sense of hidden joy swept over most of them.

They speculated that perhaps a sudden downpour was imminent.

Everyone felt that if heavy rain did fall, the training at this moment would most likely be suspended, granting everyone a much-needed respite.

After all, training in the rain was far more bearable than enduring the searing heat of the sun.

Anticipating with hope, the students waited eagerly as a cluster of ominous clouds gathered in the southwest, longing for the sky to turn dark and cast its shadow upon them.

As everyone looked southwest with anticipation, Maria stared blankly at the dark cloud, furrowing her brow.

Something about the dark cloud seemed peculiar to her.

At that moment, Claudia, standing beside her, couldn't resist whispering, "Cathy, if it rains, maybe we can get an early break!"

Claudia, having lived abroad, lacked understanding of and psychological preparation for the tradition of military training for college freshmen.

She imagined it to be like a summer camp, with laughter and games, and the fourteen days passing by joyfully. However, the intense paramilitary training lasting two weeks proved to be a challenging adjustment for her. After a morning on her feet, she ended up with painful blisters, exacerbating her struggle.

Therefore, she secretly hoped that the military training could be temporarily halted, allowing her to relax.

Maria shook her head upon hearing Claudia's words and replied calmly, "I don't think it will rain."

Claudia persisted, saying, "With such vast clouds and such loud thunder, it's evident that there's intense convective weather. Rain is not out of the question. We could even have hailstorms! Let's keep our hopes up. Maybe our wish will come true!"

Maria forced a smile tinged with sadness and whispered, "To be honest, I hope for this rain more than anyone else."

The instructor noticed that many people were whispering and speculating about whether it would rain. He shouted disapprovingly, "Everyone, no whispering! Today, even if you were under the knife, you must continue training!"

Complaints filled the air.

At that moment, everyone observed the dark clouds in the southwest gradually dispersing, and the thunder did not resound again.

Claudia couldn't help expressing her disappointment, "Such massive dark clouds, and they're dissipating after just one thunderclap?"

It was then that Maria declared, "I need to go to the bathroom."

The instructor, upon hearing this, stopped insisting and waved his hand. "Go! Hurry back!"

Maria felt a tinge of embarrassment and said, "Instructor, I... I'm on my period..."

Upon hearing her explanation, the instructor relented and allowed her to leave. "Go ahead! Come back quickly!"

Maria whispered to Claudia, "Claudia, I have something to take care of."

Before Claudia could fully process Maria's words, she had already swiftly left the group.

In a rush, Maria left the playground and quickly changed into her military training camouflage uniform back at her dormitory. She grabbed her mobile phone and put on a black disposable mask before taking a pill that Charlie had given her from the cabinet. She then dashed out the door.

Outside, she sent a message to Sister Michelle and dialed Charlie's number while trotting toward the school gate.

The recent thunder explosion had made her anxious, fearing it had something to do with Charlie. So she kept repeating to herself, "Please answer the phone... Please answer the phone..."

After a brief moment, Charlie picked up the call and inquired, "Cathy, what's the matter?"

Maria let out a sigh of relief upon hearing his voice and hastily said, "Brother, I want to express my deep gratitude for what you did last time. So, I'd like to know when it's convenient for you. I want to invite you to dinner."

Charlie smiled and responded, "Let's discuss it after your military training is over. During this time, you should stay at school and not go anywhere."

Then, Charlie recollected something and asked her, "By the way, isn't it currently the time for your military training? How are you able to call me conveniently?"

Maria fabricated a story and replied, "There was a thunderstorm just now, and it seemed like it would rain. So the instructor asked us to rest and check the weather."

"Oh..." Charlie furrowed his brow slightly, his mind racing to decipher Maria's purpose for the call.

In his opinion, there were likely three reasons behind Maria's call. First, she genuinely wanted to invite him to dinner. Second, perhaps the thunderstorm had made her realize something was amiss, leading her to call and confirm his safety. Third, maybe she deliberately mentioned the incident and the thunderstorm on the phone to remind him to be cautious.

It was plausible that Maria called to ensure his safety and, once confirmed, subtly alerted him to the thunderstorm for precautionary measures.

Having ensured Charlie's safety, Maria decided to refrain from talking on the phone further, fearing that prolonged conversation might arouse his suspicions. Instead, she smiled and asked, "So, brother, what do you think? You won't refuse my dinner invitation once my military training is over, right?"

Charlie readily agreed, saying, "Sure, when your military training concludes, I'll accept your invitation."

Maria smiled and replied, "Great! No problem!"

"Okay," Charlie said, "let me know when your military training ends."

Maria took a deep breath and declared, "I'm sorry, brother, but I can't chat now. The sky has cleared, and we need to resume our military training."

"Alright," Charlie didn't overthink it and said, "Focus on your training."

After ending the call with Charlie, Maria didn't return to the playground. Instead, she headed straight for the school gate.

Wearing a mask, she waited there for a few minutes until Sister Michelle pulled up in a Rolls-Royce by the roadside.

The luxury car came to a halt in front of Maria, and she swiftly hopped into the backseat. Sister Michelle asked with surprise, "Miss Clarke, why did you suddenly ask me to come? What's the matter?"

Maria blurted out, "It's nothing important. The military training is just too exhausting, and I don't want to participate anymore. Take me back home."

Then she added, "By the way, Sister Michelle, please inform the school authorities. Tell them that I haven't been feeling well lately, so I won't be attending the military training."

Sister Michelle was taken aback for a moment but quickly regained her composure.

Military training was arduous, and it was understandable for a young lady like Maria to struggle with it.

She immediately replied, "Okay, Miss Clarke, I'll take you back to the villa first. After that, I'll communicate with the school authorities..."

Soon, the Rolls-Royce, driven by Sister Michelle, arrived at Zilian Villa.

Maria didn't wait for Sister Michelle to open the car door. Instead, she pushed it open herself and darted out. Without looking back, she made her way towards her petite courtyard on the highest level. "Sister Michelle, starting today, I'll be staying home and having three square meals a day. Just leave them outside my courtyard door and you can leave after knocking."

Sister Michelle was surprised. She understood that Maria didn't want to continue with the military training, but she couldn't comprehend why she didn't want to leave her home either. However, as a servant, she knew better than to ask too many questions. She responded without hesitation, "Alright, Miss Clarke, I understand. As for your meals, do you have any special requests?"

"Anything will do," Maria casually replied. "Just arrange it as you see fit."

With that, she hurriedly ascended to the top floor, opened the door, and entered her small courtyard.

From a distance, Larry, who was advanced in years, witnessed Maria climbing the final steps. Worriedly, he intercepted Sister Michelle and inquired, "Wasn't Maria supposed to be attending the military training at school? Why did she suddenly return?"

Sister Michelle shook her head blankly and replied, "Sir, Miss Clarke called me earlier to pick her up at the university gate. Once in the car, she mentioned that she didn't plan to participate in the military training. She wanted to come back home and live here for a while. She even asked me to leave three meals a day outside her courtyard gate..."

"Oh..." Larry nodded gently and said, "Apart from delivering meals to the young lady, no one should disturb her."

"Understood, sir," Sister Michelle acknowledged. She knew her master held Maria in great esteem, so his instructions didn't come as a surprise.

She took out her mobile phone and said respectfully, "Sir, I'll call the head of Aurous Hill University to inform him."

Larry nodded and replied, "Go ahead."

In that very moment, Gideon, exhilarated after testing the might of Thunderbolt, returned to the bustling urban area, brimming with joy. His first order of business upon reaching the city was to make a beeline for Antique Street in search of Zachary.

However, at that precise moment, Zachary had heeded Charlie's instructions and closed his stall ahead of schedule. Gideon, scanning the row of open stalls in vain for Zachary, approached one of the stall owners with a touch of desperation. "Excuse me," he implored, "why are you shutting down so early in the afternoon?"

The man's voice resonated louder as he replied, "Haven't you read the weather forecast? It warned of possible extreme weather. We're closing up shop to await the rainstorm. We're already behind schedule."

Gideon's realization dawned upon him in that very instant. He pondered to himself, "There's no such thing as extreme weather—it's simply the thunder I conjured up in the mountains. Nevertheless, this indirectly proves that the thunder I summoned was truly earth-shattering."

In his quest to locate Zachary, Gideon adopted a different approach and ended up purchasing two valuable antiques from him, paying a steep price. After careful consideration, he decided to find lodging near Antique Street for the night and resume his search for Zachary come morning.

Nightfall arrived, and Gideon found himself sitting cross-legged on the bed, yet unable to find comfort. The reason was clear—he was consumed by excitement, unable to extricate himself from its clutches.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, he reached for Thunderbolt once more. As he caressed the weapon, he couldn't help but muse, "Truly, possessing such a powerful magical tool is a divine blessing."

"Twenty years ago, I accomplished great feats by beheading Bruce and his wife at this very location. And now, two decades later, I've acquired another extraordinary treasure here. Aurous Hill truly is my blessed land!"

While he sighed, his mobile phone buzzed, receiving an Internet call from the Lord. Startled, he quickly answered the call and spoke with utmost respect, "My lord..."

On the other end, a cold voice inquired sharply, "Gideon, when did you arrive in Aurous Hill?"

Gideon hastened to reply, "Lord, I arrived this morning."

The Lord continued, "It must be late at night where you are now. You've been in Aurous Hill for over fifteen hours, so why haven't you taken any action against the Evans Family?"

"Lord, I haven't had the chance to familiarize myself with the surroundings in Aurous Hill..." Gideon explained.

The Lord interrupted, "Didn't I already inform you? The Evans Family resides in Wanliu Villa in Aurous Hill. Simply make your way there in the middle of the night and eliminate them all, without delay. We wouldn't want any unexpected developments during the night. What else is there to familiarize yourself with? It's a straightforward task."

"My lord, please understand that I may need some time to thoroughly understand the situation surrounding the Evans Family. If we attack them now and miss any escapees who aren't present at Wanliu Villa, it could complicate matters..." Gideon pleaded.

The Lord's voice turned icy, "Tonight, Samuels, his wife, and their three sons and one daughter are all at Wanliu Villa! This is your best opportunity to strike! It's already two o'clock in the morning where you are. If you set off now, you'll have enough time to send the Evans Family on their final journey before dawn!"

Respectfully, Gideon responded, "My lord, allow me to investigate Bruce and the whereabouts of Evan's family. I haven't found any clues regarding Bruce's son yet. If I attack the Evans Family prematurely, that boy may be frightened and remain hidden..."

The Lord snorted coldly, "All you need to do is eliminate Samuels, his wife, and their three sons and one daughter. The boy named Wade will naturally surface!"

Surprised, Gideon asked, "My lord, may I dare inquire why you're so certain?"

The Lord replied in an icy tone, "Samuels established the succession order for the Evans Family's assets. If anything were to happen to him and his children, the family's assets would be split in two."

"Half would be inherited by the three sons and one daughter, while the other half would go to Bruce's son. In other words, once they're deceased, the boy named Wade becomes the heir to the largest share of the Evans Family's assets."

"As long as that boy lives, he won't be able to resist the temptation. No matter where he is, he will undoubtedly emerge to claim this vast inheritance. And that's when you can easily eliminate him!"

With that, the Lord concluded, "Time is of the essence, so make your move now!"

Gideon's heart skipped a beat. For some time, he had known that his primary mission upon arriving in Aurous Hill was to eradicate the Evans Family. However, discovering not one, but two enchanted weapons upon his arrival had taken him by surprise.

Now, he hoped to follow Zachary's leads and uncover more magical artifacts. In this scenario, he wasn't willing to act against the Evans Family immediately.

Ranked as the third most powerful family worldwide, the Evans Family possessed the ability to sway global public opinion with every action they took. Their influence was widely recognized.

He was well aware that once the Evans Family met their demise, authorities would launch an extensive investigation. He couldn't fathom how many capable individuals and outsiders would flock to Aurous Hill to uncover the truth.

His actions in Aurous Hill would be severely restricted at that point.

It was even possible that after committing murder, he would be hunted by law enforcement agencies both in this country and around the world. How could he then pursue Zachary's trail?

After all, Zachary wasn't a pivotal figure in the grand scheme of things. Even if he killed him, it wouldn't lead him to his family's whereabouts. Such matters required finesse rather than brute force...

Thus, the optimal solution was to deal with Zachary. The Lord could grant him a few more days to delve deeper into Zachary's connections before focusing on the Evans Family without any distractions!

Just as he hesitated, unsure of how to request the Lord's forgiveness, the Lord questioned sharply, "Gideon, since I ordered you to go to Aurous Hill, you've been wavering. You still haven't given me a definitive answer. Do you have ulterior motives regarding the Warriors Den?"

Gideon trembled, feeling a cold shiver crawl up his spine as if he were being pricked by countless needles. Fearfully and sincerely, he responded, "Lord, you misunderstand me. I am loyal to the Warriors Den and would never entertain thoughts of betrayal... It's just... I still have something to report to you in the future!"

The Lord's voice turned cold once more, "Speak."

Gideon pondered for a moment, clenched his teeth, and said, "My lord, today in Aurous Hill, I obtained a magical weapon!"