



盗墓笔记

# 南部档案

The South Bureau

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# **Grave Robbers' Chronicles: The Southern Archives**

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## **Summary:**

**From 1877 to 1878, droughts occurred in nine Chinese provinces, accompanied by thirty-two other disasters. Those affected accounted for half of the country's population. During this year, China quickly became a cannibalistic hell. This period became known as Dingwu Qihuang. Dingwu Qihuang started with a drought and ended with a plague that spread from China to all of Southeast Asia, lasting for nearly half a century. Our story takes place in this period. The plague in the southern jungle, the truth about Dingwu Qihuang, a father and daughter...**

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## **The First Case—Flower Reef**



# Chapter 1 – The Origin of The South Sea Archives

The Flower Reef case was such a famous case in 1906 that most people in the South Sea<sup>(1)</sup> had heard about it. Throughout 1906, a total of twenty-seven ships went missing on the route from Xiamen to Malacca, twelve of which were passenger ships with more than a hundred people.

All these missing ships had passed near Flower Reef. There were no warning signals before the disappearances, the weather was good, and there weren't any debris, corpses, cargo, or extortion demands from pirates afterwards. Everything was silent, as if these ships had never existed.

People said that there was a flood dragon entrenched in the sandy sea near Flower Reef that swallowed boats, ate people, and made the sea muddy, which was why the fleet avoided going near it.

In November of that year, a fog settled on the sea's surface. Most of the ships on the Malacca route had been diverted to Mayu, so only a few cargo ships carrying the sacrifices and worship goods for the dragon mother still passed through Flower Reef.

The crews on those ships started to witness strange phenomena.

Some of them saw numerous people's shadows standing on Flower Reef amid the thick fog. There were thousands of them standing there with their heads down, just like water ghosts looking at their hometowns. The sight was enough to make people shudder.

In order to find out the truth, the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office established the South Sea Archives. They investigated strange things that happened in the South Sea and gathered the stories into volumes, which

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<sup>(1)</sup> It's called "Nanyang" in Chinese. It is a sinocentric Chinese term for the warmer and fertile geographical region along the southern coastal regions of China and beyond, otherwise known as the 'South Sea' or Southeast Asia. [Wiki link](#)

became known as the “South Sea Volumes”. They recruited sailors and merchants from all over the world to relay news and information. The first major case they handled was the Flower Reef case.

Zhang Haiyan, whose original name was Zhang Hailou, was among the first group of spies to enter the South Sea Archives. He was trained at the age of sixteen, and originally thought he would go into maritime inspections to work for foreigners in the concession<sup>(2)</sup>. What he didn’t expect was to be sent to Perak<sup>(3)</sup> to work as a foreign agent on such short notice.

When people in Perak pronounced the word “lou”, it sounded like “yan”, so his name became salty<sup>(4)</sup>. His nickname had also changed from “Lou Ghost” (probably because he liked to work at night and rest during the day) to “A Bin”.

He was tall, so the military uniform he wore made him look like an outstanding man in Xiamen, but to the people in Perak, he looked like a mad man wearing strange clothes.

He was stationed in Malacca with Zhang Haixiá during the same period, so in order to have Zhang Haixiá’s name match his own, he gave him the nickname “Zhang Haixiā”<sup>(5)</sup>. The two were about the same age and worked together, so it felt extremely “fishy” whenever they gave out their names.

When the two of them set foot on Flower Reef, it was already 1916. Zhang Haiyan jumped onto the reef, straightened his military cap, and lit a cigarette. The sea breeze was very strong and ended up blowing the smoke he exhaled into a thin line that passed through the corner of his mouth.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Foreign concessions were enclaves occupied by a foreign power in China in the 19th and 20th centuries. [Wiki link](#)

<sup>(3)</sup> Perak is a state of Malaysia on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. [Wiki link](#)

<sup>(4)</sup> In Chinese, “hai” means “sea”, and “yan” means “salt”. Therefore, the Chinese characters of Zhang Haiyan literally look like “Zhang Sea Salt”.

<sup>(5)</sup> Zhang Haixiá. “Xiá”(侠) has the meaning of “hero”. “Xiā”(虾) means “shrimp”. Therefore, the Chinese characters of Zhang Haixiā literally look like “Zhang Sea Shrimp.” (I’ll just use “Zhang Haixia” in the future because it’s easier that way.)

Zhang Haixia followed close behind, dragging a fisherman with him, who ended up getting thrown onto the reef.

Even after traveling on a boat for two weeks, Zhang Haixia's skin was completely unaffected, and he looked more youthful and handsome than before. It annoyed Zhang Haiyan to no end. Meanwhile, the other party was staring at the cigarette in his mouth with an annoyed look on his face. It was obvious that Zhang Haixia disagreed with his bad habit of smoking while investigating.

"Don't worry, these things happened ten years ago. Any clues that can survive here for ten years won't be destroyed by a single cigarette."

"Your cigarette..." Zhang Haixia still kept his eyes on the cigarette in Zhang Haiyan's mouth. "I already recommended some other tobacco to you that won't make me feel so disgusted. The smell of your cigarette is going to distract me."

Zhang Haiyan sighed. He had no other choice but to toss his cigarette down onto the reef.

The fisherman had obviously been abducted and looked around at the reef, shivering. This person was named Chen Libiao, and he was one of the crew members who had witnessed the "water ghosts looking at their hometowns" from this reef ten years ago.

There was a reason he had been brought back to this reef. Ten years ago, a drunk Chen Libiao was with another fisherman when they saw hundreds of ghosts on the reef looking at their hometowns. His colleague dared to get closer and see what was going on, but Chen Libiao wasn't as drunk as him and sobered up once he got close. The other fisherman went onto the reef, but after the fog subsided, both he and the ghosts had disappeared. The fellow never appeared again.

According to Chen Libiao, when you approached the reef, you could see the water ghosts standing next to the water. They were covered in salt-

encrusted scabs, and their faces were blue. They were all dead and coated in salt but had completely disappeared after the fog had cleared.

After Chen Libiao returned to China, he informed the South Sea Archives that he was the only one who had been on Flower Reef at the time of the incident. Ten years later, he was the only informant they could find.

Zhang Haiyan looked at Chen Libiao, "Where are the ghosts?"

"It's been ten years. Maybe they got tired of standing, so they all left this place."

"Stop lying. I bet you killed your fellow back then and threw him into the sea. Then you lied that he was taken away by ghosts. Based on the way you're talking now, you look more and more like a murderer. Maybe I should just shoot you on the spot, so I can go back and close the case."

Chen Libiao looked at Zhang Haiyan fearfully and immediately shook his head.

"Call out the ghosts if you don't want to die!" Zhang Haiyan shouted.

Although it was almost dusk, the visibility around the reef was still very high. Not only were there no water ghosts, but it could be said that there was nothing around at all.

Chen Libiao was trembling all over and obviously terrified of this reef. He looked around and said softly, "The last time I was here, I saw the ghosts in the fog. Once the fog subsided, there was nothing."

"Fog? When does it become foggy?"

"The wind will stop before the sun goes down, and then the heavy fog will show up. Around midnight, the wind will rise again, and the fog will be blown away. It was at this time when we saw the water ghosts before."

Zhang Haiyan took out his pocket watch and looked at it. There was still about half an hour before sundown.

This pocket watch was the standard equipment of the South Sea Archives, and all the maritime personnel had been given one. There was a hermit crab pattern on it, and the watch was considered priceless in this era. But his pocket watch was blue while Zhang Haixia's was white.

Zhang Haiyan glanced at Zhang Haixia, who was already carefully examining the cracks in the reef and ignoring them.

Chen Libiao was covered in a cold sweat as he anxiously looked between Zhang Haiyan, the setting sun in the west, and the sea around him. He was obviously very terrified.

After watching this back and forth a dozen times, Zhang Haiyan became a little irritated and waved his hand. Chen Libiao quickly fled back to the barge that had brought them over. "Thank you, sir, for having mercy on me!"

As Chen Libiao jumped onto the boat, the boatswain—who had been cursing the whole time—turned and shouted to Zhang Haiyan, "Sir, how long are you going to stay on the reef?"

"Why, boatswain, are you afraid as well?"

"Sir, we're more afraid of you. Please let us anchor three hundred steps out. When you want to come back, just call us over again. If you refuse, we'll wait here, but we won't ever go up on the reef."

Zhang Haiyan laughed. Since the establishment of the South Sea Archives, he had encountered lots of incredible things, such as Maleficium<sup>(6)</sup> and

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<sup>(6)</sup> Maleficium is an act of witchcraft performed with the intention of causing damage or injury. In general, the term applies to any magical act intended to cause harm or death to people or property. [Wiki link](#)

keeping little ghosts<sup>(7)</sup>. But most of them were man-made tricks, and all the strange situations and bizarre magic had actually come from the human heart. He didn't believe that what had happened on Flower Reef could escape this pattern.

“After you toss some bottles of wine up to us, you're free to do whatever you want. But if you don't arrive here thirty minutes after I send a smoke signal, you'll never get another job in Malacca.”

Before Zhang Haiyan finished speaking, the boatswain had already thrown all the wine and rice bags onto the reef. By the time Zhang Haiyan went over to pick them up, the boat had already left the reef.

Without a boat, there was no way to get to any of the land around the reef. Zhang Haiyan suddenly found himself trapped on an isolated island surrounded by the sea.

When all you could see in the distance was endless water and you were alone on an isolated island, it didn't matter if you had excellent skills. In the face of nature, people were so small.

When the waves hit, Zhang Haiyan suddenly became a little unsteady. He immediately shifted his eyes and found that his feet were still stable, but the rolling waves caused the illusion that the reef was moving.

He opened a bottle of wine and took a sip before he heard Zhang Haixia shout in the distance, “Can you go downwind?”

Zhang Haiyan secretly cursed in his heart as he turned to sit behind a section of reef and waited for the fog to come.

He and Zhang Haixia had been working together for a long time, so he was very familiar with his temper. Zhang Haixia's nose was very sensitive, so

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<sup>(7)</sup> Keeping little ghosts, or raising ghosts, refers to the act of adopting and supporting the soul of a child who has died or died prematurely. People who do this worship little ghosts and hope their wishes will come true. It is considered sorcery.

Zhang Haiyan's smoking and drinking habits were pure torture for him. A lot of times, Zhang Haixia wished he could wash Zhang Haiyan's body and get rid of all the smells. They could usually live in peace as long as Zhang Haiyan sat downwind of him.

As expected, Zhang Haixia left him alone after that. Zhang Haiyan watched the sun slowly sink into the sea in the distance as thick clouds gathered on the horizon. The dying rays of light slowly turned red as they were hidden by the clouds, making it seem as if the clouds were on fire. The sea breeze also gradually died down.

He still missed bits and pieces of Xiamen. He hadn't returned for many years. He remembered that before he left the mainland and came to Malacca, his master—the woman he called godmother—asked him if he could live alone in Malacca for thirty years. He agreed, thinking it wasn't a big deal. Now that he thought about it, however, he realized that he had been too naive. At that time, he didn't understand what thirty years meant to a person.

Even if he had received enough training and could get along well with the local people, a person floating in a foreign land couldn't completely settle down. There was always a strange feeling that made him think he didn't belong here.

If it hadn't been for the fact that Zhang Haixia was with him, he would have escaped and returned to China many years ago.

He had forgotten what his godmother had said at the time, and could only remember that Zhang Haixia wouldn't let him agree. But at the time, he only knew that his godmother had been very kind to him, so he would do what was asked of him.

After he nodded, his godmother handed him a piece of paper, which he drew a circle on. His godmother looked relieved as she touched his head and then went to see a play. The next day, he was put on a ship to the South Sea and traveled all the way to Perak.

After boarding the ship, he found that Zhang Haixia was already there. When he asked why, it turned out that Zhang Haixia had become extremely anxious when he found that Zhang Haiyan had drawn a circle, and felt like he was going to lose a lot of hair. Zhang Haixia had a weird personality and didn't have any friends besides Zhang Haiyan. He couldn't accept that he wouldn't be able to see his best friend for thirty years, so in the end, he had no other choice but to draw a circle and follow Zhang Haiyan.

Zhang Haiyan was rather happy when he found out the truth. He thought that Zhang Haixia was just being a loyal friend, but now he understood that this wasn't Zhang Haixia being loyal. It was Zhang Haixia willing to go to hell with him.

When the two of them were on the boat to Malacca, Zhang Haixia was furious and wouldn't talk to him. As a result, neither side addressed the issue. At that time, he was too young to care at all, but now that he was older, he realized how long thirty years were and why Zhang Haixia didn't want him to leave.

*That fucking white piece of paper had me sign my life away! If I violate it, I'll go to jail when I return to Xiamen.*

As he was thinking this, the sea in front of him slowly became hazy. He took a deep breath and found that the air was thick and salty—the fog was about to come.

He stood up, took a sip of wine, and straightened his military cap. It was already dark by this point, and the sun was only a thin line on the horizon. He lit a lantern and turned his head, finding that Flower Reef had instantly been covered in a thick fog that had drifted up from the sea.

Zhang Haixia was already engulfed in the thick fog, so Zhang Haiyan couldn't see him clearly. He raised the lantern and started to walk towards him while saying, "Don't start looking for the ghosts, we have to stick together when it gets foggy." But as he spoke, he suddenly saw that where there had only been Zhang Haixia's shadow in the fog before him, now there were dozens



of shadows. They were all standing there with their heads down, just like ghosts.

As Zhang Haiyan narrowed his eyes and froze for a moment, more and more shadows appeared in the fog. He couldn't see clearly in the impenetrable fog, but he could tell that the densely packed figures had him surrounded.

## Chapter 2 – Cured People in The Fog

People had an instinctive fear of human-shaped figures when they couldn't see clearly. In addition, Zhang Haiyan could clearly tell that the postures of these shadows were different from those of living people.

All the shadows were standing upright with their heads down, and any human would know that it was very difficult for a living person to maintain that kind of posture. Plus, these shadows were almost as motionless as zombies.

"Haixia, are you still here?" Zhang Haiyan shouted into the thick fog.

At the moment when the thick fog had come up, there was a faint worry in his heart. If ghosts were really behind this, it wouldn't matter that Zhang Haixia was the number one lethal weapon in the South Sea.

"I'm here." Zhang Haixia's calm voice came from within the thick fog.

Zhang Haiyan breathed a sigh of relief and asked, "What do you think?"

"The smell of corpses is everywhere." Zhang Haixia said. "They really don't seem to be alive."

"Should we meet up first or something?"

"Are you scared?"

"No. Can you stop arguing with me?" Zhang Haiyan looked around. Those figures weren't close to him, but it was getting darker and darker, and the dense shadows were creepy. He raised the lantern. As the light split the fog, he unhesitatingly walked straight to the nearest figure.

After getting closer, the figure gradually became clearer, and he found that it really was a person standing there. But this person's posture was very strange.

Zhang Haiyan had seen many processed corpses in the South Sea before. Since the degree of muscle rigidity in corpses was different during such a process, it was common to see weird postures, such as the wrists turning out, the head slumping against the chest, or the upper and lower body distorting excessively. It appeared this was the case with the corpse here. Its mouth was opened so wide that it seemed to be dislocated, and its whole body was covered in crusty white salt.

“It’s been cured<sup>(1)</sup>.” Zhang Haiyan shouted. “This is a big lump of ham.” *Fuck*, he thought to himself. *Is it possible that someone’s been having fun curing people on the reef for more than ten years?*

He was suddenly taken aback and felt like something was wrong with the corpse. He moved the lantern closer and immediately found that the corpse standing in front of him was actually Chen Libiao.

He was only frozen for half a second before he realized something. *No! The boat!*

Chen Libiao had been on the boat just now, which should have already anchored some distance away. But now he had suddenly appeared on the reef covered in salt, which indicated that something must have happened to their boat.

“Shrimp<sup>(2)</sup>, something is wrong with our boat.”

They both knew what it meant to lose a boat on an isolated island.

“It’s ok. People are the only ones who can do things like blocking the way back. Since it’s not haunted, it means that humans are behind this and there must be another ship nearby.” Zhang Haixia said from within the thick fog.

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<sup>(1)</sup> He means like cured meat. You know, to help keep it from spoiling. Packing meat in salt is a way to preserve it by drawing out the moisture from the meat, preventing the meat from spoiling due to bacteria growth.

<sup>(2)</sup> Remember, the “xia” in Zhang Haixia’s name means “shrimp”.

He leisurely walked out of the fog, passed through the ghosts, and returned to Zhang Haiyan's side without even lighting a lantern.

"I'm a little worried about the boatswain. He has parents and children to look after."

"And looking at this situation, it seems like they want to scare us so we'll continue spreading stories that this place is haunted. That means they must have a way for us to get back." Zhang Haixia said.

"Come out!" Zhang Haiyan shouted into the dense fog.

No answer.

Zhang Haixia stared at the dense fog and found that it was getting thicker and thicker. The shadows of the corpses also became more erratic and kept flickering in and out of sight.

Zhang Haiyan continued, "I am Zhang Haiyan, the South Sea Maritime Affairs Supervisor. If you keep this up, I will punish all of you. If you surrender within three minutes, we will only arrest the leader. Once three minutes have passed, all of you will be arrested."

After speaking, Zhang Haiyan looked at his watch and began to unbutton his collar.

Zhang Haixia also stretched his neck.

After three seconds had passed, Zhang Haiyan put down the lantern and started walking forward. Zhang Haixia said, "It hasn't even been three minutes yet?"

Zhang Haiyan straightened his military cap, completely baffled by the question, "I can't believe you'd trust a word I say. Hurry up. Let's attack while they're thinking it over."

The two quickly entered the dense fog and crouched low, walking on tiptoes. Zhang Haiyan sighed when they saw the boatswain's body, but didn't bother approaching. It was clear to see that all the corpses had been cured with salt, and some were extremely dehydrated.

Zhang Haiyan quietly muttered to Haixi, "They seem to be the passengers who disappeared ten years ago, but now they've become bacon." But before he finished speaking, both men suddenly felt like something was wrong.

They turned their heads and found that something was actually moving in the dense fog. Without a second's thought, Zhang Haiyan rolled his tongue and spit out three objects that glistened in the light. At the exact moment those things shot out, he had already bent down and rushed over.

## Chapter 3 – Out to Sea

Many people knew that Zhang Haiyan had blades in his mouth, but no one knew where the blades were usually hidden, how he could shoot and hurt people with so much force, or even how he could use them to penetrate three layers of iron.

According to Zhang Haiyan's later explanation, training the tongue and mouth muscles was very important, especially when it came to the trick of sucking in air and making the mouth into a kind of vacuum.

The reason why he particularly liked to hurt people in this way was because when he looked at someone, his mouth was facing that person at almost the same time.

Anyone who did archery knew that you could aim accurately with the help of your mouth. And when trying to shoot arrows, the fletching would definitely have to be close to the mouth. In addition, it was extremely difficult for people to notice how your mouth was moving when you turned to look at them.

That was why when Zhang Haiyan started to act aggressively, people fell whenever he looked at them.

This was also the case here. When he looked in that direction, the blades had already been forcefully spat out.

Moreover, he was never in the habit of waiting to see if his prey had been hit. Whether they succeeded in evading or not, Zhang Haiyan would have already appeared right in front of them.

Zhang Haiyan's movements were already considered fast, but by the time he arrived at his intended target, Haixia had already shown up before him. He hadn't even sensed Haixia move.

In the end, they found that there was nothing in the area. Zhang Haiyan found two of his blades embedded in the reef at his feet, so he pulled them out and put them back in his mouth, wondering where the third one was.

Haixia moved his nose, knelt down, struck a match, and saw blood on the reef.

“Someone was hit.” Zhang Haiyan became excited.

“Sure enough. It’s human.” Zhang Haixia sighed in disappointment.

Their training was very strict and arduous, but most of what they had learned didn’t seem to be something they could use to deal with people. But even when they arrived in the South Sea, they didn’t see a single zombie, let alone any monsters or ghosts.

Every time they went out to work, the two people hoped to encounter a real major event. Zhang Haiyan was bored, and Zhang Haixia hoped to be transferred back to China for meritorious service. But after so many years, the cases they investigated had been closed because they were just “rumors”.

At this time, they didn’t know whether it was because they were too fast, or if the opponent had become disoriented. They both heard various sounds come from the thick fog.

When the two stood up, they saw the figures in the thick fog begin to disappear one by one. The speed was so fast that they really looked like ghosts.

Within just three or four seconds, all of the shadows receded into the depths of the mist and disappeared.

“What’s going on?” Zhang Haiyan squinted. He felt the sea breeze coming and watched the thick fog start to dissipate.

They hastened to give chase but found that none of the corpses were in the mist. The sea breeze grew stronger as they searched, and they could even see the fog start to move with the naked eye. After a few minutes, all the fog was blown away, and it was as if nothing had happened on the reef.

A bright moon lit up the sky, the sea breeze gradually rose, and the waves began hitting the rocks again. The moonlight shining on the sea in the distance looked just like scales. They didn't see any ships or people.

Zhang Haiyan went to look in the direction their own ship had headed in before, only to find that there was nothing there. The ship was really gone! If not for the bloodstains, it would be like everything that had happened just now was all an illusion.

"These fake ghosts are quite kind-hearted." Zhang Haiyan murmured.

Zhang Haixia returned to where the bloodstains were and squatted down.

"This is magic."

"Where'd they go? Can you find them with the bloodstains?" If it was magic, then these corpses should still be on the reef, just hidden somewhere. Nevertheless, when they searched carefully just now, they didn't find anything like a hidden door.

"Blood isn't a particularly good scent marker. The transmission distance isn't far enough."

Zhang Haixia turned his head and sniffed the air. The sea breeze here was strong, so many smells would be quickly blown away, but he suddenly looked at the place where Zhang Haiyan's cigarette butt was. Both of them went over and found that it had been trampled.

"Someone stepped on this cigarette butt." Zhang Haiyan picked it up. "I put agarwood in this cigarette. The smell is very strong, so as long as you pass through here, you'll have the smell all over you. Since it's so pungent, you



can definitely trace it.” With that said, Zhang Haiyan held it under Zhang Haixia’s nose. “Be a good boy and smell it.”

Zhang Haixia gruffly took the cigarette butt, sniffed it, and then threw it aside before closing his eyes and sniffing the air. He did this for a while before opening them again. “I can’t do it. The smell of alcohol and tobacco on your breath is too stinky.”

Zhang Haiyan didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. “Since I started hanging out with you, I’ve had to wipe my butt three times. You’ll know if I only wipe it once. It’s even a death sentence if I fart. Life is too difficult. You might as well find a place to smash your nose so we don’t have to torture each other anymore.” With that said, he walked away.

Zhang Haixia ignored him and closed his eyes. After a moment, he looked to the sea on one side.

It was the edge of the reef, where the black sea was like rolling obsidian under the moonlight. Zhang Haixia pointed to the front. “They’re at sea.”

The waves were so huge that there were no boats in sight.

“You mean to tell me that these people quickly moved all those bodies to the sea? And then went far away from the reef? What kind of ship is that fast?”

“Maybe it’s not a boat, but something else. If you want to know, just go and have a look.” Zhang Haixia looked at the darkness in the distance. “There must be something there.”

A big wave hit the reef. For ordinary people, jumping into the sea at a time like this was tantamount to suicide. But the two men looked at each other, took off their military uniforms, jumped into the sea together, and swam forward.

## Chapter 4 – Unlucky Smell

Swimming skills were the first thing the Southern Archives considered whenever they selected trainees.

People either liked water or were afraid of it. Zhang Haiyan's and Zhang Haixia's heartbeats would slow down when they were in the water, and they felt more comfortable in it than when they were on shore.

That was why the word "hai"<sup>(1)</sup> was included in their names, so people could better distinguish who they were. In the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office, those who had "hai" in their names would have an extra bundle of bacon for lunch and an extra steamed bun, which was very enviable.

The two people were like fish in the water. Every time they went underwater, they advanced more than ten meters before poking their heads above the surface again. They seemed to do it effortlessly based on their movements, but only they knew how they had achieved such skills.

On the reef west of Gulang Island in Xiamen, there was a pit about twenty or thirty meters wide that was so deep, it seemed bottomless. The pit would be full of water whenever the tide rose and would become a deep pool whenever the tide ebbed. Even though this deep pool and the sea weren't connected, fish and shrimp came and went with the tide every day.

Zhang Haiyan remembered that there were so many crabs in the deep pool, they couldn't catch them all. At that time, his godmother would fish a snapper out of the sea and throw it into the deep pool after the tide had receded. She would then have them try to catch the snapper with their bare hands. If anyone succeeded, they got to sleep in the bed with her.

How could you possibly catch something like a snapper with your bare hands?

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<sup>(1)</sup> "Hai" means "sea" in Chinese.

Eight months later, these children's shoulders and abdominal muscles looked as if they had been chiseled with knives. Of course, no one had ever caught the snapper, and it often ended up being scared to death.

What Zhang Haiyan still remembered most clearly was that under the blue sky by the blue sea, a group of little kids gradually grew into adults. They stood on the edge of the deep pool, no longer feeling frustrated that they couldn't catch the snapper. Those years were so wonderful, and he often found himself missing those days. These experiences also enabled him to move among the sea waves like a fish.

Soon, they could no longer see Flower Reef. They were completely surrounded by the sea, and the waves were becoming bigger and bigger. Every time Zhang Haixia surfaced from the water, he would correct his position and continue moving forward without hesitation. They swam about four or five kilometers before they saw lights on the sea.

The lights were a cyan color and were used by pirates during sneak attacks. The lights were made from dried rotted eggs that were mixed with oil. When seen from a distance, they looked like the moon reflecting on the sea's surface, so they weren't easily noticeable.

The two of them approached slowly and found that it was a large iron passenger ship. They could see that there was more than one of them, and they were all of varying sizes. Four or five of the big ones and more than a dozen small ones were chained together to form a ship formation.

The ships were very old and obviously lacked maintenance since they had barnacles and rust all over them. They could vaguely see that the ship closest to them had the word "Ru Sheng" painted on it. Zhang Haiyan remembered that it was one of the passenger ships that had disappeared ten years ago. More than two hundred passengers had disappeared with the ship at that time.

A dozen anchors had been thrown into the sea around the ship formation. The waves here weren't very high, so Zhang Haiyan knew that the water was shallow and there were reefs on the seabed below.

The two of them used one of the anchor cables to climb out of the water, and while they were hanging upside down, they heard someone talking on the ship. The two climbed to the ship's railing and stepped on the anchor cable to investigate. First, they saw four or five guards on top of the passenger cabins, all wearing military uniforms and holding rifles.

Various words could be heard coming from different places on the ship, and they listened intently.

"Why are they talking with a Guixi accent?" Zhang Haixia asked.

There were many warlord factions in Guixi that were constantly plotting against each other. They had heard of warlords ordering fishing boats from the Gulf of Tonkin to conduct piracy and collect military pay and provisions, but this place was too far from the Gulf of Tonkin. What did the Guixi warlords come to Malacca for?

The two listened attentively for a while. They didn't understand the Guangxi dialect, but they were sure that these soldiers worked for a warlord.

Zhang Haiyan saw that their rifles were all German-made Mausers, and not Hanyang-made. This was a big deal among the warlords and indicated that the soldiers here had a high rank.

A closer look showed that the soldiers were even equipped with German-made pistols. Zhang Haiyan had taken over the import of these kinds of pistols during one of his missions. Twelve of them had been transported from Malacca back to Xiamen for the officers in the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office to use, so he knew how powerful they were.

"A Guixi warlord came to Malacca to be a pirate. Is it possible they're the remnant forces of a defeated warlord, and they hijacked these ships to make a living?" Zhang Haixia asked.

Zhang Haiyan took a closer look at the ship formation. The ships had been hijacked ten years ago but were still here. The hijacking was already a strange case back then, but it was even more strange to chain these ships together into a formation. And they had even managed this place for ten years. They were able to hide the cases that took place on international routes for ten years and were still active at the crime scene.

If they were conducting things on such a large scale, then the boss behind the whole thing should be some sort of conspirator! How could a man with this kind of ability be a defeated warlord? Moreover, the chains and ship formation looked very logical, and the sentries were clearly distributed and strictly on guard. For ten years, the sentries on Ru Sheng didn't slack off for one bit, which showed that the boss here certainly wasn't an ordinary person.

Zhang Haiyan said to Zhang Haixia, "Look at the ship formation. There's no ship in the center, and it's shaped like a square. It seems like the ships are surrounding something in the middle."

The two of them boarded the ship. Zhang Haiyan hid in the shadows and looked up at the sentry above. The sentry's position was well designed and the deck was clearly illuminated by sixteen reasonably distributed lights. It would be impossible to pass without being noticed.

Zhang Haiyan calmed himself down, took a deep breath, and spat out three blades, managing to extinguish three of the blue lights. The guards were immediately attracted by the sudden change in lighting, and as soon as their attention had shifted, the two men sprinted without hesitation. They ran across the deck, reached the other side of the passenger ship, and retreated into the darkness.

There was another ship's railing right behind them, which was where the area surrounded by the ship formation was. They could see that the lights on the outer edge were denser here, and there really was something in the center.

The two secretly investigated and found that the ships were surrounding a reef. A huge hole had been dug in the reef, and there were mining equipment and scaffolding all around it. This hole seemed to have been dug by people, and it went very deep.

These soldiers used so many ships to surround a reef in this area and then dug a hole in it.

There were a lot of people in non-military uniforms and shackles working on the reef. Zhang Haixia covered his nose.

“What do you smell?” Zhang Haiyan asked.

“There’s an unspeakable smell coming from that hole.” Zhang Haixia said.  
“It smells very unlucky.”

## Chapter 5 – South China Sea Plague Ship

Zhang Haiyan poked his head out again but didn't glean any more information. He retreated back into the darkness and wondered, "What's under this reef?"

"What do you think? Have they just been digging one hole on this reef for the past ten years, or have they been digging holes all over the reefs here?"

Zhang Haiyan nodded. He knew what Haixia meant, but what could be under this reef? Reefs were structures formed by coral reefs on top of undersea mountains, after all.

If they had dug all over the reefs here, then did that mean there were special minerals in the reefs? Or did it mean that precious treasures were stuck in the aged coral reefs?

"Should we go down and have a look?"

"It's not possible. Look. These guard posts form a ring. There aren't any blind spots, and the lighting is very sufficient." Zhang Haiyan said. He wondered if the workers were passengers from ten years ago. If so, it was truly miserable to be abducted and then ordered to work here for ten years. "We'll do the usual. Catch someone and ask what's going on."

Both of them looked around. There was only one conning tower<sup>(1)</sup> on the deck of this steamship, along with two huge chimneys. The main superstructure was arranged in the middle of the hull, and the cargo hold was placed between it, the bow, and the stern. The bow was straight and

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<sup>(1)</sup> It's a raised platform on a ship or submarine, often armored, from which an officer in charge can conn the vessel, controlling movements of the ship by giving orders to those responsible for the ship's engine, rudder, lines, and ground tackle.

shaped inward just below the waterline, which was typical of North Atlantic bows<sup>(2)</sup>.

The guard tower was on top of the superstructure and there were about seven or eight guard posts around the two large chimneys. There were probably hundreds of ropes hanging down, all connected to the ship's railings, and clear lanterns had been hung three or four meters apart. The deck was very clean and no one was around.

They could see that in addition to the bow, the windows of the cabin and superstructure were both dark. It seemed like no one was around, but Zhang Haixia shook his head. "I can smell them moving around inside. There must be people in the cabin."

"You're smelling people going to the toilet again?" Zhang Haiyan looked at Zhang Haixia empathetically.

Zhang Haixia huffed, "It's the smell of wine." As he enunciated each word, he pointed to the bow, where someone just so happened to come out to check the extinguished lights. But the bow was quite far away from them, so it was very easy to be spotted if they tried to go over there.

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<sup>(2)</sup> It's a bulbous bow (aka a protruding bulb at the bow of a ship just below the waterline). The bulb modifies the way the water flows around the hull, reducing drag and thus increasing speed, range, fuel efficiency, and stability. Looks like this:





The person who had come out was dressed in a military uniform. They looked at the broken glass on the ground in confusion and then said something in the Guixi dialect to the guards posted above.

These people were also Chinese, and it was well known that when it came to Chinese and Malays, Chinese were more difficult to deal with. The closer the Chinese were to the mainland, the harder they were to deal with. But Zhang Haiyan was able to understand a few words this time. They were saying that they had just met two people with amazing skills on the reef over there, and now that there was a strange situation here, it was probably related to them.

After they were done speaking, the sentries nodded and raised their guns, aiming them at the deck. Soldiers with loaded pistols also appeared on the deck and started searching.

Zhang Haixia looked at Zhang Haiyan sullenly. It was obvious that he had an opinion on Zhang Haiyan's reckless handling of the lights.

Zhang Haiyan listened to the approaching footsteps in the dark. Although the two of them had incredible skills, he also knew that they had absolutely no chance of fighting back against those kinds of automatic pistols. It was the sorrow of the changing times.

Mind racing, Zhang Haiyan quickly raised his head and aimed the cyan-colored lantern hanging in the middle of the hole on the reef. He spat out a blade, and the precise hit caused the lantern to shatter. Sparks and glass fell to the ground, causing a commotion below.

The most interesting thing about Zhang Haiyan was that he never made a fuss like normal people and almost never came prepared for situations. But while "normal people" always thought one step ahead when something happened, he didn't. He lived in those twenty or thirty seconds right before people could come up with another idea. In those twenty and thirty seconds, he was the absolute king.

The reef below was more important than the ship, so if the light on the reef had been broken, that meant someone may have snuck over there. Everyone would become nervous, which would create a twenty-second cognitive buffer.

Twenty seconds was enough.

As all the guards and search team members looked towards the reef, Zhang Haiyan grabbed Zhang Haixia's hand and pressed his other hand against the ground. With a move that was extremely difficult for humans to do, Zhang Haiyan threw Zhang Haixia out.

Zhang Haixia landed on the bow of the ship, pressed his hands against the deck, and then slid into the nearby door.

Zhang Haiyan followed behind with a barrel roll, but their movements were too conspicuous. A sentry upstairs turned his head and almost caught the both of them, but Zhang Haiyan quickly spat out a blade. It flew across the deck and hit the sole of another soldier's shoe. "Ouch!" the soldier cried out.

When the sentry turned his head towards the cry, Zhang Haiyan used that moment to slide through the door.

Zhang Haixia caught him. "They'll discover us in a minute."

"Is a minute not enough?"

They were in the ship's observation room, where they could see a set of stairs in the middle leading down to the cabin area below. That was also where the cargo hold was. The two of them went down and discovered countless salt-covered corpses standing there.

The hundreds of corpses were covered in salt scabs, which created a sight that was both spectacular and terrifying. The corpses were of varying shapes and sizes and ranged from men, women, children, and old people. Their eyeballs had withered away due to dehydration, and the empty sockets were looking down at the ground, which was very creepy.

There weren't any lights in the cargo hold, and all the windows had been sealed shut from the inside, preventing any external light from coming in. There was only one light source they could make out, which was coming from the deepest part of the cargo hold where a door had been set in a partition. The door was open, revealing an orange-colored light that was very bright and warm.

The two of them walked through the pile of corpses and went towards the partition, where they saw a man with a significantly different military uniform and rank.

He was wearing a mask and gloves and injecting something into a corpse. Zhang Haixia covered Zhang Haiyan's mouth and whispered very quietly, "The smell is very pungent. I don't know what kind of concoction it is. What is he doing?"

Zhang Haiyan pushed Haixia's hand away and also whispered quietly, "Ask him directly." Just as he was about to move forward, however, he heard the phone ring.

The officer picked it up and took off his mask, revealing a very young and handsome face. He listened to the person on the other end of the phone for a while before saying in Mandarin, "No one can swim here from Flower Reef. If they can, they must be working for Zhang Qishan, which means you won't be able to find them like this. Get the submachine guns out." The phone call seemed to be from the people on deck.

*Zhang Qishan?*

Zhang Haiyan was stunned but didn't hesitate. Whenever someone answered the phone, they were at their second most vulnerable.

He immediately burst into the compartment and rushed in, but the officer suddenly turned his head just as Zhang Haiyan was about to subdue him. The officer drew his pistol and aimed a shot at Zhang Haiyan's head. A loud bang sounded, but Zhang Haiyan reacted very quickly and leaned his head to the side to avoid it.

The scorching bullet grazed his face, causing him to break out in cold sweat. It wasn't the bullet that made him sweat, but the fact that the officer didn't hesitate. Based on his actions, it appeared he had been prepared and waiting for Zhang Haiyan to attack.

It was at that moment that Zhang Haiyan realized he had underestimated the enemy. He didn't know how long it had been since he had been in this kind of situation, but at that moment, the mentality of underestimating the enemy made him feel a deep fear.

The source of his fear didn't come from the enemy, but from how his godmother had taught him before. She would always give out the most terrible punishments for underestimating the enemy, because for their clan, doing such a thing was an absolutely unforgivable mistake. Yet he had still forgotten that ten years after he had left.

While Zhang Haiyan was dodging the bullet, he reflexively shot the blade out of his mouth. It penetrated the officer's mouth and went through the back of his head in an explosion of blood. The officer stumbled and fell to the ground.

Zhang Haiyan knew he hadn't controlled his strength well. He immediately supported the officer's neck with his hands, kicked the gun away, and asked, "Who are you guys?"

The officer's mouth was full of blood, and he looked at Zhang Haiyan with pain in his eyes. When he tried to push Zhang Haiyan's hands away, Zhang Haiyan said, "If I let go, you'll die. Tell me the truth, and I'll sew the wound up for you. In the future, you'll just have to go to the toilet several times at night. Everything else will be fine."

The officer's eyes fluttered. He kept looking at a cabinet on one side of the room that was full of formalin bottles and drawers. Zhang Haixia leisurely walked in, closed the door, and started looking through the drawers, which were full of documents.

The officer's blood was flowing all over the floor, and his eyes rolled into the back of his head as if he was about to go into shock. Zhang Haiyan had no choice but to let go.

Zhang Haixia found a stack of documents from the cabinet and flipped through them. "The soldiers above will come down soon. You'd better prepare for that. One more thing. Look at this. I know what they're looking for." He tore one of the documents out and showed it to Zhang Haiyan. The words written on it were "Research on the Ming Dynasty Plague Ship in the South China Sea".

## Chapter 6 – Things in the Sunken Ship

In the late fifteenth century, something called the “ship of fools” appeared in Germany. Each city gave all their lunatics to passing sailors, who gathered them onto ships and wandered from town to town.

There were many philosophers and poets among these lunatics, and the sailors would sometimes take them into the wilderness between towns and banish them there. As a result, a group of lunatics would gather and stare into space in the wilderness.

But things weren't so romantic afterward. Leprosy began to spread in large numbers, and those afflicted with it were also sent to the “ships of fools”. But in those cases, they were left on isolated islands to fend for themselves. These kinds of ships were famously called “leper ships”.

Coincidentally, a plague was running rampant around the end of the Ming Dynasty, and someone had a similar idea. People sent their critically ill relatives to ships that set off from Dongying. There were a total of sixty-seven ships that sailed along the eastern coast, heading for the South Sea.

At that time, everyone knew that once the ships were in open water, the South Sea sailors might throw the afflicted into the sea to drown, but they still sent them anyways. The plague had ravaged northern China for so long that everyone just hoped that this disaster would come to an end.

Based on the historical records, the prevalent plague at that time was probably the bubonic plague. County records and documents mentioned that the rats' behavior was very strange, and they were seen crossing the river one right after another.

But there were also various plagues called “big head plague” and “green line plague”, and it was even said that there were dozens of other plagues breaking out at once. At that time, a few people were standing around talking when they suddenly shook their heads and died. Everyone else

scattered, leaving thousands of corpses on display as they rotted in the streets. The smell was unbearable.

These kinds of ships that set off from Dongying were called “plague ships”, and each one held more than a hundred patients. The patients were all crammed into the cargo hold, and forced to endure the rotting corpses of those who died alongside them until they could be thrown into the sea a few days later. But historical records stated that many plague ships didn’t abandon the sick and actually sailed to the South Sea and landed ashore. Some of them even recovered from their illness and settled in the South Sea.

It made sense that the people here were looking for a plague ship. If a ship from that time went to the South China Sea, ran aground, and sank here, then the entire ship would be buried under hundreds of years’ worth of coral reefs.

There were many hidden reefs here, so it was easy to see how it would take them ten years if they were searching one reef after another. And based on the scene Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia had witnessed just now, those people might have found it.

The officer seemed to be dead, and Zhang Haiyan could hear footsteps coming from outside. He used the officer’s clothes to wipe the blood from his hands and said to Zhang Haixia, “Keep reading. Try to find something interesting for me.” With that said, he pulled three golden needles from his belt and jabbed them into his throat.

He coughed a few times after the golden needles pierced his throat, and then his voice changed. He tried to say something in a low voice but had to adjust the position of the golden needles before he sounded like the officer.

Zhang Haixia continued, “Look at this. An ancient book is quoted here. A doctor in Dongying recorded a plague that came from the south. It was called wudou disease, and it spread very quickly. After they discovered the first case, it only took a month before everyone in the village died. Could it

be that the plague ship the people here are looking for had patients with wudou disease on it?”

Zhang Haiyan touched his neck and then took the information, while Zhang Haixia went to hide in the corner. Zhang Haiyan put on the officer’s clothes, went to stand behind a table so that his pants would hide the corpse, and then turned his back to the door.

At that moment, the sentry above who had heard the gunshot came in and asked, “Why was there a gunshot, Lieutenant?”

“Someone came in just now, but they already ran away.” Zhang Haiyan turned his back to the sentry, seemingly focused on flipping through the papers in front of him. His voice was almost the same as the officer’s. “Gather a team to search the whole ship. We have to speed up. What’s the situation right now?”

The sentry immediately gave the other soldiers a look and continued to report, “We’re about to reach the bottom. We’re being more careful now for fear that the things inside will come out.”

Zhang Haiyan’s was racing as he thought to himself, *what things might come out?* He turned his head slightly and looked at Zhang Haixia’s face in the dark. Zhang Haixia also seemed very interested in this new piece of information.

Zhang Haiyan continued to question the sentry, “Let me give you a test. If you’re worried that those things will come out, what should you do to prepare?”

“You said that we should make those laborers do the work. As long as we put the concoction on our bodies, we’ll be fine. Isn’t that enough? You’ve tested it on those people who have died these past few years and sealed them with salt. We thought that was enough.”

Zhang Haiyan didn’t understand, but his mind was still racing. He knew it wasn’t good to stall anymore, so he waved his hand. “Tell them that no



matter what method they use, they have to reach the bottom tonight. Zhang Qishan's people are already here.”

The sentry was relieved and immediately left. As Zhang Haiyan flipped through the papers for real this time, he found it odd that they didn't mention what was in the plague ship. If something would come out, and the ship had lain there on the seabed for hundreds of years, then what kind of monsters could possibly survive inside?

## Chapter 7 – Wudou Disease

While Zhang Haiyan was thinking things over, he suddenly had an idea. Seeing that the sentry hadn't walked far away from him, he immediately stopped him.

"Wait."

Zhang Haixia was very uncomfortable hiding in the corner, but just as he wanted to step out, he heard Zhang Haiyan call out. He had no choice but to shrink back and continue to hide.

When the sentry came back, Zhang Haiyan still didn't turn around but pretended to fiddle with the bottles and cans on the cabinet as he said, "There's something I didn't tell you before, but I've thought it over. Since the situation is critical, I can't lie to you anymore."

"I'm listening, Lieutenant."

"Have you heard of a man called Zhang Haiyan?" Zhang Haiyan asked.

Of course, there was no way the sentry would know of him. He shook his head. "I've never heard of him."

Zhang Haixia, who was still standing in the dark corner, frowned. He had no idea what Zhang Haiyan was trying to do at this time.

"This person works in the South Sea Archives under the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office. He specializes in investigating strange cases in the South Sea area. He's a famous master. The person who was on the Flower Reef just now was him. He's my mortal enemy. I've lived in his shadow for a long, long time."

The sentry was extremely puzzled and hesitated before cautiously saying, "Oh. I understand. But... didn't you just say that it was Zhang Qishan's people?"

“I said that because I didn’t want to scare you. This Zhang Haiyan is a thousand times more troublesome than Zhang Qishan. I said it was Zhang Qishan because I was afraid you would piss your pants if you knew it was Zhang Haiyan.” Zhang Haiyan lowered his voice, trying his best not to laugh. He looked at Zhang Haixia, who rolled his eyes in the darkness.

It was obvious the sentry was more afraid of Zhang Qishan, so he was utterly confused at this time. “So—you want us to—”

“Blow the reef up. We can’t wait any longer. Even if the things inside are scary, we have to finish our work tonight and leave here!”

The sentry looked uncertain. “But—”

“I’ll take responsibility for everything. I’m ten thousand percent sure that Zhang Haiyan is already among us. If we can’t finish it tonight, we’ll all die here.”

The sentry had no choice but to nod and quickly retreat. It seemed that he had been very well trained.

Zhang Haiyan turned around and closed the door before saying, “See? There’s a problem with being trained too well. If you had treated me like this, I would’ve drop-kicked you a long time ago. There’s no way I’d let this kind of trick succeed.”

Zhang Haixia came out of hiding, unwilling to talk to Zhang Haiyan at the moment.

Zhang Haiyan thought for a while and then pulled the needles from his throat. “Of course, ordinary people wouldn’t believe that someone could be this shameless. I also have to admit that I’m quite gifted.”

“There are still a lot of prisoners here. If you’re giving out orders indiscriminately, all those people might die.” Zhang Haixia said.

“This place is heavily guarded. These soldiers are well-trained and equipped with fearsome automatic pistols. They’ve made hundreds of hostages work as laborers. You still think we can get out of this unscathed?” Zhang Haiyan took a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it. “In this kind of situation, we’ll all die. We won’t stand a chance unless we cause some trouble.”

Zhang Haixia inspected the corpse that the lieutenant had been handling before. “The matter isn’t as simple as you think. What do you think is locked in the ship?”

“Water ghosts? The yaksha Ye Sha? Nezha<sup>(1)</sup>? Oboi<sup>(2)</sup>?”

“The Dragon King of the East Sea is called Ao Guang<sup>(3)</sup>.” Zhang Haixia corrected him. He picked up a pair of rubber gloves from the side and saw a stack of surgical masks nearby. He took one for himself, and then put a few in his pocket before he opened the mouth of the corpse on the table.

It was the scrawny female corpse of a Southeast Asian woman who had yellow hair due to long-term malnutrition. Her eyes were sunk so deep into the sockets that she no longer looked human, and there were wounds all over her body and feet that were caused by barnacles on the reef.

The female corpse’s mouth was completely damaged, and she had yellow and black decayed spots on her teeth. Her tongue had been cut out, and her exposed throat was filled with salt. As Zhang Haixia took a sniff, his face turned serious. “You’d better rescind your order.”

“Why?”

“This female corpse should be a passenger from one of those ships ten years ago. She was forced to work on the reef here, but she didn’t starve to death.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Zhang Haiyan started to name the characters in the story “Nezha Conquers the Dragon King”. Nezha is a warrior deity. The yaksha (aka malevolent spirit) Ye Sha worked for the Dragon King and found children for him to eat. The plot can be found [here](#)

<sup>(2)</sup> Oboi was a prominent Manchu military commander and courtier. [Wiki link](#)

<sup>(3)</sup> Ao Guang is the Dragon King in Chinese folklore. Basically, Zhang Haiyan wanted to say Ao Guang, the Dragon King mentioned in Note (1), but he said it wrong and said Oboi lol.

She died of illness. The salt and concoctions are used to disinfect, which means the workers get sick and die during excavation. The lieutenant thought that the disease might be contagious.”

Zhang Haiyan thought for a while. “Are you saying there aren’t any living monsters on the plague ship, but only—”

“The plague.”

It was wudou disease, the most rapidly spreading plague.

Zhang Haiyan took a deep breath, immediately inserted the golden needles back into his throat, flipped through the phone book on the side, and said to Zhang Haixia, “Help me grab the phone. I’ll tell them to stop—”

Before he finished speaking, there was a loud noise outside, and the whole ship shook. All the bottles and cans were thrown to the ground, and the corpses outside swayed. The both of them had to hold onto the female corpse to steady themselves.

The two looked at each other, and then heard someone on the deck shout, “We made it! We made it!” Countless footsteps could be heard above as if numerous people had rushed over to look.

“We’re screwed.” Zhang Haiyan rushed out, climbed the stairs, and went onto the deck that was now full of people ranging from laborers to soldiers.

The guards up top were no longer focused on keeping watch and were all looking at the center of the reef. No one noticed as Zhang Haiyan squeezed through the crowd.

The heat from the explosion was still there, and some laborers were slowly leaning towards it.

It was obvious that the bombed hole was rapidly exchanging air with the outside, and the smoke kept getting sucked into it before being expelled again. The smoke and dust were visible to the naked eye as they started

spreading towards the entire ship. Zhang Haiyan felt a burning in his eyes and fear in his heart. Many people started to cough.

Zhang Haixia, who had been behind him, helped him put on a mask before handing him the gloves.

“Did I do something wrong?”

“No, you were right. We’ll die either way, but now is the time to clean up this mess. If we don’t go to hell, who else will?” He rubbed disinfectant on his hands, revealing three or four buckets full of it at his feet. “Let’s go.”

“I understand now. I was too reckless. Stop talking and let me reflect on it.” Zhang Haiyan picked up a bucket, and the two of them squeezed through the crowd, headed towards the reef.

Zhang Haixia said, “What you did just now wasn’t reckless. Signing your life away and going to the South Sea was reckless. Do you know godmother fooled you?”

“She had a reason for doing so.”

“Godmother fooled you because you’re easily fooled. Why didn’t she try to fool me then?!”

As the two of them arrived at the reef, they found that the heat from the explosion was still scorching. Some people started to react, but when they saw the two of them carrying the disinfectant so casually, they thought that they were there on the lieutenant’s orders. As a result, those people remained silent.

When the two reached the edge of the big hole, Zhang Haixia poured a bucket of disinfectant water down first. Based on the sound, they figured the bottom wasn’t particularly deep. They then proceeded to wipe the disinfectant water on their masks and bodies, before looking at each other and jumping down.

## Chapter 8 – Mortal Enemy

In the compartment of the ship called Rusheng, the blood-soaked officer suddenly trembled and opened his eyes. The severe pain made him want to groan, but even the slightest movement was painful. The blood that had pooled under his body had slowly dried. For some reason, a large blood scab had formed over the wound on the back of his head.

He got up and opened a nearby cabinet door, where a mirror had been placed. He wanted to look at the back of his head but found that he couldn't see it. He touched it with his hand and found that it was a terrifying wound. He knew he wouldn't survive.

He looked out the window and happened to see Zhang Haiyan walking towards the center of the reef, carrying a bucket of disinfectant water. Based on the onlookers and the dust flying through the air, he already knew what was going on. After thinking about it, he took out a sealed steel tank from the cabinet and walked calmly towards the deck.

The people on the deck were all focused on the reef, so he blew a whistle to get their attention. Several sentries noticed him coming up and found that he had been seriously injured.

“Lieutenant, did Zhang Haiyan do this to you?” The sentry from before asked.

When the lieutenant only squinted at him, the sentry added, “Your mortal enemy?”

The lieutenant tried to make a sound. “Zhang Haiyan?” He looked to where the reef was and tried to keep himself from falling. “Get the boat ready, we're going to leave.”

When the sentry nodded, the lieutenant added, “All the people here are already infected, so go and take some antibiotics. We'll leave these laborers here. There's no time to deal with them. Don't attract their attention. Have

twenty people bring submachine guns and dynamite. They'll be following me to get the plague water. Sink all the ships except for ours."

The sentries went to grab their guns, and soon, twenty people were lined up. As they went down to the reef, the lieutenant felt that the wound on the back of his head was bleeding again.

*I won't fail you. I will bring it back to you no matter what happens!* He swore silently through clenched his teeth. He didn't know where the strength came from, but he managed to walk faster than usual.

When everyone saw the blood-covered lieutenant coming, they quickly got out of the way and stood on both sides. His blood dripped steadily on the ground as he walked forward, and soon, the group of people reached the entrance of the hole.

"I'll go down and get the plague water. Everyone else, arrange the explosives." The lieutenant ordered calmly.

Some of the workers saw the explosives in their hands and started retreating.

Meanwhile, Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia had reached the bottom of the plague shipwreck. As they investigated, they made sure to sprinkle the disinfectant water everywhere.

The ship had been completely calcified, and the coral reefs had grown in from the holes to cover the inside. The ship's hold was totally deformed, but hundreds of sacks could be seen hanging from the beams of the original ship.

These sacks used to hold the corpses back then, but now the corpses should have completely decomposed. Due to the rapid influx of outside air and oxidation, the sacks quickly turned black.



There was a pool of coal-black, fungus-like threads under each sack, which was actually caused by liquid dripping from the rotten corpses. It had all flowed to the low-lying part of the ship and pooled in the center.

These black ink stains were like a huge solar radiation map, and the pool was the sun in the center.

They walked up to the edge of the pool, and Zhang Haiyan said quietly, "This is the essence of the entire ship, the concentrated liquid of all those who died from the illness."

The water in the pool was surprisingly clear, and they could see their reflections along with the light from their lanterns.

Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia looked at each other and silently agreed to pour the disinfectant water into the pool.

Suddenly, there came the sound of a gun cocking behind them. The two immediately dodged and rolled into the darkness, finding that the place where they had just been standing was riddled with holes.

They turned their heads and saw that the lieutenant from before had brought a group of people with him. They were all basically firing indiscriminately into the darkness. Zhang Haiyan immediately dropped to the ground, but just when he was about to fight back, the other side fired two or three rounds at the same time. He rolled over, stepped on the coral reef, and climbed up one of the beams, but the bullets followed him all the way to the top.

The lieutenant had already walked to the edge of the pool, squatted down, and filled a jar with corpse water. He then sealed the jar, turned around, and left.

His subordinates gave up attacking Zhang Haiyan and immediately lit all the bundles of dynamite before tossing them everywhere. There were a few professionals highly skilled at setting up explosives, who put the heaviest

bundles beneath the keel's crucial point. Once they were done igniting all the dynamite, they quickly evacuated.

Zhang Haiyan knew that the situation was bad. He thought about cutting off all the fuses with his blades, but when he looked around, he realized there were hundreds of sparks. He shouted, "Shrimp, let's go!"

The two rushed to the exit together, but were met with a heavy barrage of bullets and had to retreat. They heard more gunshots ring out, indicating that someone had hit the scaffolding outside the hole. It fell with a loud crash, making it impossible for them to climb up. The fuses behind them were still hissing as the sparks got closer and closer to their target.

"I should have hit that bastard one more time to make sure he was dead!" Zhang Haiyan fumed. "That was so stupid of me!"

He immediately turned around, picked up a few of the explosives nearest to them, and then threw them into the depths of the ship. Once a small space had been cleared, he grabbed a few sacks and handed them to Zhang Haixia. "Use these to protect yourself from the explosion. Our fate is in God's hands now."

Zhang Haixia looked at the sacks, shook his head, and then asked, "Do you want to return to Xiamen?"

"I do!"

Zhang Haixia grabbed all the sacks and put them on his back as protection. He then pushed Zhang Haiyan into the corner before he opened his arms to cover him. "That's good."

"What are you doing?"

"Zhang Haiyan, I don't want to go back to Xiamen. I don't miss anything about it. You'll go back for me."

Before he had finished speaking, there was a loud noise and a huge blast of air pushed Zhang Haixia onto Zhang Haiyan. Zhang Haiyan's head seemed to slam against something, and he knew nothing more.

## Chapter 9 – Case Closed

The lieutenant sat on the side of the ship, watching the reef explode and the other ships sink into the sea one by one. He was sitting ramrod straight as he clung to the airtight jar.

Since they were heading home, all of the soldiers were very happy, and no one had noticed that the seated lieutenant had actually died.

Everyone was destined to meet someone, and their lives would change because of it. After completing his mission, no one knew what the lieutenant had been thinking as he sat there dying.

Zhang Haiyan pushed the rubble away and climbed onto the reef, finding that the ships around him had already been sunk. There were only a few hundred laborers left on the reef, and they were all huddled together like penguins.

He coughed violently and pulled the unconscious Zhang Haixia up. He couldn't hear a thing at all and knew there was blood trickling out of his ears and nose. He felt as if his chest had been hit by a pile driver more than a dozen times, and thought that his internal organs had probably become something like mushy watermelon. Despite all this, he still desperately shouted Zhang Haixia's name several times.

His hands suddenly started to feel unbearably itchy, and he pulled his clothes up to find that his body was covered in a layer of blood blisters.

But they weren't burns from the explosion. He turned to look at the other laborers and saw that they had also discovered they had blood blisters on their bodies and were starting to scratch them.

Zhang Haiyan felt cold all over. He knew this was the result of the disease infecting their bodies after the explosion.

On such a small reef, the next few months would be a real hell on earth without any boats or food. To him, plague and hunger always seemed to follow him wherever he went.<sup>(1)</sup>

Even though the Flower Reef case was closed, there were still some unsolved mysteries. But even to this day, Zhang Haiyan never revealed the details.

Six months later, Chen Libiao's family took a fishing boat out to look for them. They found Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia on the reef, but no one else was with them. They took the two back to Malacca.

No one knew where the other people on the reef had gone, except for those who read the confidential telegram from the Southern Archives.

In the end, the Flower Reef case was marked as unresolved. The so-called "unresolved case" meant that there was a result, but they couldn't publish it.

A single piece of information entered the archive room in the basement of the Southern Archives, while all the other files were destroyed.

The Southern Archives' Southern Xinjian branch had taken over the investigation as to why a Guixi warlord wanted to look for a plague ship in the South Sea and obtain the source of the wudou disease that was inside. Whether they found the answer or not, Zhang Haiyan would never know.

Three years later. The Southern Archives.

It was dusk, and Zhang Haixia was sitting on a wicker chair as Zhang Haiyan silently washed his feet. Zhang Haixia looked towards the sea and saw a bunch of children running up and down the beach.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Zhang Haiyan had the nickname "Plague God", and it was mostly because he was famous for killing people when he was in the South Sea area.

“Just let me lie on the bed. Why bother moving me around every day?” He was still a little embarrassed to see Zhang Haiyan washing his feet with so much care.

“A person who is paralyzed will develop bedsores if they don’t turn their body.”

“I don’t feel any pain.” Zhang Haixia said.

“Whether you feel pain or not, the bedsores are still there.” Zhang Haiyan took the water that had been used to wash feet and poured it downstairs.

The official residence of the Southern Archives in Malacca was actually a two-story Indian building with a small courtyard and an arched door that looked quite spectacular.

The buildings at the back were very simple but had been built like small European-style villas. There were many kinds of these buildings in Gulangyu<sup>(2)</sup>, so Zhang Haiyan was quite familiar with them.

Since both of their rooms were on the second floor, they could view the sea from the corridor. There was also a large room on the second floor that acted as a conference room, but it had never actually seated more than three people. Telegraph instruments and a large sea map had been placed inside, but the sea map had become moldy and curled after so long, rendering it as more of a decoration.

There were three rooms with the same structure on the first floor, but one was an archive room, and the other two were filled with groceries.

Since they had a spectacular arched door, people who came and went thought that foreigners were living inside, so they didn’t dare make too much noise.

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<sup>(2)</sup> The Gulangyu, Gulang Island or Kulangsu is a pedestrian-only island off the coast of Xiamen. Wiki link [here](#)

Zhang Haiyan had set up a stall to sell some imported products. His English was very good, so his stall was often visited by foreigners.

The sign of the Southern Archives still hung on the arched door, but the locals had no idea what it meant.

“There’s still no news from the Archives?”

Zhang Haiyan massaged Zhang Haixia’s feet and shook his head. “Not only is there no news, but the payment hasn’t been issued either. If it weren’t for the fact that we’ve been saving money since a few years ago, we would’ve already been begging for food by now.”

“What about the telegram?”

“There’s no response.” Zhang Haiyan stood up and stretched his waist. “I heard that the Cantonese fraction<sup>(3)</sup> has full control of Xiamen now. Will the Archives be implicated? Or did they withdraw or disband?”

“What are you going to do if they disband?”

“We don’t know anything besides being spies. With all those wars going on, I don’t believe spies like us can’t find jobs.” Zhang Haiyan said. “We’ll go back to Xiamen, find godmother, find a new boss, and continue to mess around.”

Zhang Haixia smiled. “If it weren’t for me, you would have been promoted and gone back to Xiamen by now.”

“Stop it. I’m the reason you signed your life away. Since we came here together, we’ll go back together.” Zhang Haiyan leaned on the railing and saw black smoke rising up in several places along the distant coast. He didn’t know if it was because of a fire or something else.

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<sup>(3)</sup> This refers to Cantonese warlords.

“What did that Maleficium<sup>(4)</sup> master on East Street say about your legs when he was doing fortune telling? Can he treat them?”

“He said that he can’t treat my legs. He also said that I’m dying, and I won’t be able to rest in peace because I’ll become a monster.” Zhang Haixia said. “I won’t die because of my legs, but I’ll die because of other things.”

Zhang Haiyan was angry upon hearing this. “That stupid guy doesn’t know what he’s talking about. I’ll burn his house later and see if he dares talk nonsense.”

Zhang Haixia interrupted him, “He said I’ll die for what I should have died for before.”

Zhang Haiyan was silent for a while and then sighed. He knew that Zhang Haixia was upset about what happened on the reef, but he didn’t want to talk about what happened back then.

“Oh yeah.” Zhang Haixia took a newspaper clipping from his shirt pocket, “Look at this and see if it’s what I think it is.”

Zhang Haiyan took it and found that it was a simple article. There was a strange disease in Penang and its nearby villages that was spreading very fast. It was suspected to be an infectious disease brought by foreigners, much like how syphilis had been brought over back then.

But the newspaper clipping described the patients as having many tiny blood blisters in the early stages of the disease.

Zhang Haiyan frowned. “Wudou disease?”

“Although there’s no payment from the Southern Archives anymore, we still have a duty to warn the locals. It’s convenient to travel by boat in the South Sea now, so thousands of people end up traveling between Xiamen and

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<sup>(4)</sup> Just think of him as a witch doctor. If you don’t remember, Maleficium is an act of witchcraft performed with the intention of causing damage or injury. In general, the term applies to any magical act intended to cause harm or death to people or property.



Malacca every day. If it really is wudou disease, then it can easily spread all over the world. Shouldn't you go and check it out?"

Zhang Haiyan lit a cigarette, which was a brand Zhang Haixia had recommended to him. He took a puff and faced the wind, vaguely feeling like something was wrong.

If it really was wudou disease, then the unresolved case from that year would have to be reopened. What kind of conspiracy was behind it?

Zhang Haiyan said, "Penang... isn't it that guy's territory?"

Zhang Haixia nodded. "Yes, exactly. It's that guy, so you have to be careful when you go there. In Penang, people are rewarded with a thousand dollars if they can kill someone from the Southern Archives. You'd better change your appearance before you go—oh, and by the way, take a proper shower."

## **Chapter 10 – Listening to the Spring Rain All Night in the Small Building. How Many Years Have Passed Since Becoming a Wandering Hero in Xianyang?**

The person they were talking about was named Zhang Ruipu.

When Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia arrived in Penang, their first mission was to assassinate this Chinese man living in the South Sea.

Zhang Ruipu managed two huge rubber plantations in Penang and possessed vast amounts of land and wealth. His territory was so large, in fact, that after they got lost in one of the rubber plantations, they discovered that local indigenous tribes were living there.

The indigenous natives of Perak at that time still had the custom of headhunting. It was said that Zhang Ruipu had a good relationship with them, and had been buying corpses to feed them in order to gain their protection. This matter couldn't be verified, because Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia couldn't be sure if the natives were chasing them because they wanted to protect Zhang Ruipu, or if they were just hungry.

During that time, they were almost trapped to death because they had to avoid the natives while looking for food. By the time they found Zhang Ruipu's mansion, they were completely exhausted and were immediately discovered. The guards chased them all the way to the outskirts of Perak.

After that, Zhang Ruipu offered a reward in Penang. It didn't matter if it was the police or gangs, they would be rewarded with a thousand coins if they saw either Zhang Haiyan or Zhang Haixia, alive or dead.

Now it wasn't as easy to enter Penang like it was before. Even though they had been in the South Sea for a long time, their skin color was still different from the locals', and their facial features were different from the biracial

Chinese here. Coupled with years of wanted posters being put up, even children in Penang would probably recognize them.

To enter Penang, not only did he need to change his skin color, but he would also need a face that looked like a local.

In the Southern Archives' basic training, there was a training course about human skin masks, which both Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia passed with flying colors. Moreover, Zhang Haiyan was famous for pretending to be a woman, so it wasn't difficult for them to change their appearances.

But to do so, they needed a high-temperature steamed environment. In the past, they used to sneak into the hot water bath at the Ipoh governor-general's house.

Ipoh was the capital of Perak, and also the place where the British government stationed a governor-general. Governor-generals were the highest law enforcement officers of the military regime. They had luxurious mansions and Indian guards, and even a local army right outside.

There was a hot bath in the governor-general's house that people here would never understand. Malacca was hot all year round, so taking a bath was just a matter of rolling in a roadside pool. But the British still retained the tradition of taking hot baths.

After Zhang Haixia had been paralyzed, they had hardly been there.

After being mocked by Zhang Haixia, Zhang Haiyan smelled himself. Sure enough, it had been too hot these days. He looked at Zhang Haixia and asked "How about we both go and take a hot bath?"

Zhang Haixia shook his head. "I'm not going to Penang. Plus, I can't walk. We can't go there like we did before. Go by yourself. I'll look after the house and sell some of the goods."

Zhang Haiyan pulled Zhang Haixia onto his back and started walking. “We’re already familiar with the governor-general’s house, and I have to change my appearance. I can’t do it alone.”

Zhang Haixia was unable to fight against him and smiled helplessly as he was carried away.

Of course, this was a reckless decision, but Zhang Haiyan’s long-cherished wish was to try his best to help his friend live like he used to before he was paralyzed.

To make a long story short, Zhang Haiyan already looked different by the time he came out of the governor-general’s bathroom. Afterward, Zhang Haixia stayed in Perak, and Zhang Haiyan went to Penang alone.

It normally took two weeks to walk to Penang, but it just so happened to be the rainy season and he needed to travel through primitive jungle. When Zhang Haiyan arrived, it was already three weeks later.

Malacca didn’t have a convenient way to communicate with the outside world, so when he arrived in Penang, he realized that the situation was much more serious than he had expected.

Uncollected corpses littered the roadside.

Generally, when a plague had reached this extent, people’s fear of the disease far surpassed their responsibilities to their loved ones.

Since the weather was hot and humid, the corpses were bloated and gave off an unbearable stench. There was a team of people wearing monks’ robes that were burning the corpses, and Zhang Haiyan realized that many of them were Zhang Ruipu’s workers.

After looking at the corpses’ states, Zhang Haiyan was completely certain that this strange disease was wudou disease.

There was no medicine to treat this disease, and those infected could only rely on their own self-healing ability. It had a ten percent survival rate, but those who survived would never be infected with it again, even if they were soaked in a pile of the diseased corpses.

Zhang Haiyan was the only person on the road who was walking fearlessly, and the passers-by looked at his calmness with both surprise and admiration.

He went around investigating and discovered that the plague didn't start from one place, but three. Those three villages had all been outside of Penang.

The three villages were important villages for tin processing. Many Xiamen, Turkey, and Indian businessmen had workshops there. It was the first week in July when the people in the villages started to get sick at the same time.

Zhang Haiyan visited these three villages to find out if something similar had happened in them during that first week.

The situation in the villages was even worse than in the city. Rotting and swollen corpses could be seen lying everywhere in the puddles.

It was inconvenient to make fires here during the rainy season, and the soaked corpses were difficult to burn, so they had been thrown into the puddles. It rained every day, so the corpses were all green and yellow, and a layer of grease floated on the water's surface.

He soon discovered that all three villages had people who had returned from Xiamen during that first week of July. Three people arrived in Malacca on the same ship.

The ship was called the Nan'an. It was a four-hundred-seat passenger ship belonging to the Dong family in Xiamen and could be said to be the largest passenger ship Xiamen had.

Of course, the three people died and their corpses were burned, so Zhang Haiyan couldn't learn any details from them.

At the village entrance, Zhang Haiyan saw a dull-eyed little girl hugging a boy who looked to be about three years old. Zhang Haiyan lit a cigarette. He didn't need to ask where the little girl's parents were. He knew they had all died of illness.

When he came back from Penang, he brought the little girl and her brother with him. Zhang Haixia was running the stall by the spectacular arched door and looked dumbfounded when he saw two children standing on either side of Zhang Haiyan, holding his hands.

"Don't worry, I waited outside the city for three days. They're not sick. They should be safe. They've been disinfected and bathed repeatedly. You and I are familiar with this disease. As long as someone's infected, they'll definitely get sick within three days," Zhang Haiyan said. After speaking, he looked at the older girl, who was Chinese.

"Zhang Haijiao, call him Uncle Shrimp."

"Uncle Shrimp," The girl said in Cantonese.

Zhang Haixia looked at Zhang Haiyan. "You're naming people who are younger than us with our generation name?"<sup>(1)</sup>

"Godmother said that those who live overseas all carry the word "hai"<sup>(2)</sup> in their names to show their distant and wandering lifestyle," Zhang Haiyan said.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Zhang Haixia was talking about "generation name", the custom of naming kids from the same generation with the same characters in them. They may be the first or second character in a given name. In this case, it was the "hai" in their names. Zhang Haixia and Zhang Haiyan were from the same generation, so he found it strange to also name the girl with "Hai" in her name since they weren't from the same generation.

<sup>(2)</sup> "Hai" means "Sea" in Chinese. Their godmother meant that Foreign Zhangs have the word "hai" in their names so people would know they were the overseas branch of the Zhang family.

Zhang Haixia looked at the children and sighed. “My name is Zhang Haixia. “Xia” means “hero”. His name is Zhang Hailou. “Lou” means “building” Listening to the spring rain all night in the small building. How many years have passed since becoming a wandering hero in Xianyang?”

“Are you making a fucking poem?” Zhang Haiyan lifted Zhang Haixia up and said, “Are you still brooding over what happened on the reef? You’ve always been like this. When I saw these children, I knew I couldn’t leave them alone.”

Zhang Haixia looked at the children who followed them and felt as if the haze in his heart was swept away all at once.

Once the kids were settled down, the Southern Archives immediately felt different. With more people around, it didn’t seem so empty and cold anymore.

As the children leaned on the railing and watched the sea, Zhang Haiyan lit a cigarette and showed Zhang Haixia his notes.

“Nan’an?”

Zhang Haiyan nodded. “There’s no wudou disease outbreak in Xiamen, so that means the people were infected on the ship. In addition, you can see that the locations of these three villages happened to be at three strategic points in Penang. Someone picked these three people on the ship on purpose. They wanted these three people to get sick at the same time in these three villages so that the plague would spread at the fastest rate. Based on my calculations, the disease will reach Ipoh in two weeks at most.”

As Zhang Haixia thought it over, his face looked very puzzled. “Why? If this plague was caused artificially, then why Penang? If it’s a result of the confrontation between the British and the Dutch, it should be in Singapore,

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For example, Zhang Haikē lol. (To avoid confusion, I feel that I should clarify that Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia didn’t know this at the time, because they were adopted.)

or even in Ipoh at worst. Why Penang? There's nothing but rubber trees there."

He looked up at Zhang Haiyan. "Have you asked about Zhang Ruipu's current situation? I have a hunch that the plague this time is directed at him."



## Chapter 11 – Zhang Ruipu

Zhang Haiyan really didn't care about Zhang Ruipu and didn't think Zhang Haixia's hunch was all that accurate.

Penang was indeed Zhang Ruipu's territory, and the plague this time must have caused a lot of damage to him, but using the plague to deal with a specific person was really a little too overdramatic.

Moreover, assassinating Zhang Ruipu was their first mission when they first arrived in Perak, and they had investigated the Flower Reef case several years later. The two missions were set far apart in time and weren't related to each other at all. To insist that they were connected was really too far-fetched.

Zhang Haiyan had his own theory that all the conspiracies and tricks in the world had to be full of flaws because the people behind them were unreliable. As to why so many conspiracies weren't discovered, it was because people didn't know where the conspiracies led to. Most conspiracies were crude, but this crudeness was obscured by the enemies' carelessness and lack of awareness.

Zhang Haiyan shook his head to show that he disagreed. The two were silent for a while, and then Zhang Haixia asked, "Why'd you stop talking? Are you afraid sensitive topics will come up and it won't end well?"

"Hmm." Zhang Haiyan nodded.

"Since the clues lead to Nan'an, why not get on the ship and investigate? When will the ship reach land again?" Zhang Haixia asked.

Zhang Haiyan took a big puff of his cigarette, "Next week."

"Nan'an is heading to Xiamen, so if you board the ship and investigate the case, you'll have to stay on board for the entire journey and disembark in Xiamen." Zhang Haixia said. "The ticket is very expensive, so even if we get

the cheapest cabin, we can only afford a one-way ticket at most. In other words, if you arrive in Xiamen, it may be more than a year before you can come back.”

“Exactly. It doesn’t make sense for me to leave.”

“I think it’s a good idea. You can go back and check why we haven’t received our pay, and also meet our godmother. You’re going back to Xiamen to investigate a case, so it doesn’t count as a violation, right? If the Southern Archives is gone, then don’t come back. Just send me a telegram and we won’t have to see each other again.”

“We made a promise that we’ll go back together. It’s weird if I go back alone. Besides, the money belongs to the both of us.”

Zhang Haixia rubbed his legs. “This is the South Sea. I won’t freeze to death even if I sleep on the streets. I’m familiar with the things in the sea and the fruits in the woods. If I go back to Xiamen, I won’t live a better life. I made my decision a long time ago. I’m not going back. You go back to Xiamen for me. There’s no need to waste your life here because of me.”

Zhang Haiyan shook his head. “Forget it. I’ll check on Zhang Ruipu. Maybe your hunch is right and there won’t be a need to go back to Xiamen.”

Zhang Haixia didn’t say anything more, and they sat there for a while before Zhang Haiyan helped Zhang Haixia back to his room.

That night, neither man slept well. When Zhang Haiyan got up in the morning, he found that his military uniform and a neat stack of money had been placed by his bed.

Zhang Haiyan’s first reaction was, *the idiot’s legs are cured?* But when he got up, he found Zhang Haijiao packing. It turned out that she was the one who had folded the clothes and placed the money there, obviously following Zhang Haixia’s instructions.

Zhang Haiyan picked up his military cap. They had been trained to maintain their military uniforms, so his always looked immaculate.

He sighed and looked at the little girl, “You switched sides already? Have you even thought about who rescued you and brought you back?”

“Uncle Shrimp said that you really want to go back to Xiamen. It’s not easy to have something you want to do, and he envies you very much.”

“So? You guys are forcing me to leave?”

“Didn’t you say that you brought us back because you wanted us to be Uncle Shrimp’s pets? I’ll take care of Uncle Shrimp. You can leave without worrying.”

Zhang Haiyan squinted and reared his head back, looking at Zhang Haijiao as if she were a monster. *Women...no, this isn’t even a woman, she’s just a girl. Girls are really terrifying creatures. She found the fastest way to improve her status in this family.*

“Did Zhang Haixia teach you to say that?”

“It’s also my own idea. From now on, we and Uncle Shrimp will depend on each other and live together. We’ll work hard and save enough money to come to Xiamen so that we can reunite with you. You can leave without worrying. We won’t die without you.”

Zhang Haiyan’s head reared back even more as if he had been slapped. He slowly stood up, collected the money, and yelled, “Zhang Haixia, what the—” He rushed to Zhang Haixia’s room and suddenly found that there was more than one person inside.

In other words, Zhang Haixia wasn’t alone but had a lot of people standing in his room.

These people stood tall and straight without any expressions on their faces. Most of them appeared to be about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old.

Their leader was a middle-aged man, who appeared to be checking Zhang Haixia's legs.

Zhang Haiyan wasn't afraid of the crowd and stepped forward immediately. He flicked the blades onto his tongue, and said to the middle-aged man, "If you like playing with cripples, you'll have to get in line."

Zhang Haixia immediately stopped him and shouted, "Don't be reckless, Hailou. This is Mr. Zhang Ruipu."

Almost at the same time, all the young people present bent over backward to avoid the blades, and Zhang Haiyan immediately stopped what he was doing.

The middle-aged man tapped Zhang Haixia's legs, shook his head, and got up.

He was a very strong middle-aged man. So strong, in fact, that there was a dazzling light in his eyes that showed he clearly wasn't an ordinary man. When he looked at you, it was as if needles were piercing your body.

"I heard that you're investigating things regarding the plague." Zhang Ruipu said. "I'm here to help."

## Chapter 12 – Killers in Poverty

Zhang Haiyan had seen many particularly intense scenes.

Anyone who had combat training knew that if you had learned the basics, you would look at ordinary people differently.

Even if your opponents were much taller than you, the difference in behaviors would make them seem like three-year-olds in front of people who knew how to fight. This sense of difference would bring you considerable confidence.

For the first time in a long time, Zhang Haiyan's confidence disappeared in the face of these people. Although they seemed relaxed, their gestures didn't reveal any flaws like ordinary people's would.

Zhang Haiyan knew he wouldn't stand a chance if he got within three feet of someone like this and they raised their hand. And the room was now full of these kinds of people, which was why he didn't attack.

As soon as he hesitated, Zhang Haijiao, who had followed behind him, was pulled away by a young man who took her out and closed the door behind them.

Zhang Ruipu sat down by Zhang Haixia's bed and motioned to his men to give Zhang Haiyan a rattan chair. He then looked at the simple room. "Killers in poverty, huh?"

"Mr. Zhang, if you want to kill or fight, just do it. Why bother mocking us?" Zhang Haixia said.

"I just think that your spirits are commendable. You're already living in poverty but still choose to be killers." Zhang Ruipu paused briefly, and the young man next to him took out a large paper bag and placed it next to Zhang Haixia's pillow. "To make a long story short. I already checked into your backgrounds when you tried to kill me the first time. But with your

abilities, I didn't think the two of you would be able to kill me in this lifetime, so I didn't bother killing you. If I did, the Southern Archives might actually send some reliable ones to kill me, and then I wouldn't find any peace in Penang. In the end, you've lived up to my expectations. You're even more incompetent than I predicted."

"Actually, our main job in the Southern Archives is investigating cases. The killings are just incidental." Zhang Haiyan explained. "We're not professional in that regard."

"What do you know about this plague?" Zhang Ruipu sat on the bed cross-legged. "Don't waste my time, Zhang Haiyan. When you came to Penang, you acted like it was nothing to walk among the dead. As far as I know, only people who have had wudou disease and survived it were able to do such a thing. And wudou disease had disappeared for hundreds of years. How did you get infected with it?" With that said, his subordinates turned Zhang Haixia over and revealed his back.

His back had a huge wound that looked like a butterfly. It was a pattern that had been formed by countless burns and blast marks. Zhang Ruipu accurately touched his spine in the middle of his scapula. The vertebrae below had almost been completely shattered by the explosion.

"I know the Southern Archives doesn't allow you to reveal any information, but your friend became disabled because of you. You've been taking care of him until now, but if there's an accident—say for example, if I help you kill him—will your life be easier?" Zhang Ruipu looked at Zhang Haiyan's expression as he spoke.

Zhang Haiyan slowly fiddled with the blades on his tongue, trying not to reveal any expression. Or so he thought.

Zhang Ruipu looked at him for a moment and then laughed. "How touching!" He said to Zhang Haixia. "Your friend does care about you. Then I can force a confession out of him." With that said, he touched Haixia's spine. "Make it short. You'll answer my questions, or I'll start to crush his spine all

the way up. If you answer even a minute late, I'll crush an extra piece. He can feel his hands right now, but seven minutes later... he won't be able to move except for his head—"

"There's no need. I'll tell you. It was a cold, dark night—" Zhang Haiyan lit a cigarette, and quickly revealed everything that had happened on Flower Reef before Zhang Ruipu could even react.

Zhang Ruipu was a little surprised and started frowning after listening to the story. "You didn't put up a struggle."

"Well, killers in poverty have very flexible principles."

"So, the plague in Penang really is man-made?"

"You're the only one worth attacking in Penang. It's not worth it to attack anyone else there. You might as well think about it. Have you offended anyone?"

"What you know is only one aspect of it. After the wudou disease outbreak in those three villages you investigated, there was an outbreak in fifteen villages throughout Malacca one right after another. I was already being careful at that time and had arranged people in each village. Those who were infected have been taken care of. The villages have also been disinfected several times, so there's no outbreak in those areas."

Zhang Haiyan sat up straight and looked at Zhang Haixia, who was lying on his stomach. "You mean to say this attack was aimed at the whole of Malacca, but Penang was chosen first by accident?" Zhang Haixia asked.

"The outbreak occurred in Penang first because it was the closest to the port, but fortunately, I'm in Penang. I have people stationed in the villages and junctions around it. That's why you're all fine in Perak. But I find something odd. You say that the people who spread the disease are warlords from Guixi, but what's their purpose?"

“We don’t know.” Zhang Haiyan said. “If you already know so much about it, then you should also know about the Nan’an ship. We haven’t had the opportunity to investigate it. Mr. Zhang Ruipu might as well concentrate on fighting the plague. Give us a few days. We’ll have someone send a telegram to you when we find out what’s going on.”

“This is precisely why I’m here.” Zhang Ruipu picked up the paper bag next to Zhang Haixia’s pillow and threw it to Zhang Haiyan. “My clansmen and I have vowed to never set foot in China again, but someone has to help me investigate this matter. Seeing how you’ve even had to set up a stall to make up for the money you haven’t made from killing people, I bet you’re not able to get onto Nan’an. Here’s the remuneration, as well as a ferry ticket. Go and investigate the case, and I’ll help take care of your friend. If you can’t find anything within half a year, your friend will become fertilizer for my rubber trees.”

Zhang Haiyan opened the paper bag, which contained a letter of invitation, a ferry ticket, and a stack of money.

Zhang Haixia looked at Zhang Haiyan, who put away the paper bag and glanced at him.

Zhang Haiyan said to Zhang Ruipu, “I know it’s easy for you to kill us, so what you said should be true, but I have additional conditions.”

“Like what?”

“My friend needs to rinse his mouth with shark fin soup in the morning. During lunch, he’ll have eight dishes and a bowl of soup. In the evening, he can eat something that is a little under-seasoned, so he’ll have five dishes and white porridge, but the porridge must contain cordyceps flowers and Jinhua ham slices. You need to massage his legs three times in the morning and at noon. He’s afraid to sleep alone at night, so it’s best to have three or five girls with him. Also, you have to tell me why the Southern Archives wants to kill you. Who are you exactly?”

Zhang Ruipu smiled, stood up, and walked to Zhang Haiyan.



“Were you brought up by a woman named Zhang Haiqi?”

Zhang Haiyan was stunned. Zhang Haiqi was his godmother’s name. How did this old scoundrel know?

Zhang Ruipu said, “I’ll take care of your friend better than you can imagine. If you want to know who I am, you can ask Zhang Haiqi.”

He then looked at the serious young man beside him, who clapped his hands.

The door opened, and someone came in carrying a military uniform. It seemed that Zhang Haiyan needed to leave now.

“The ship won’t arrive until next week.”

“The ship’s reached land ahead of time. It’s in Malacca now. There’s a plague in Penang, so the ship won’t stop there this time. That means you only have a day to catch up with it.” Zhang Ruipu said. “Go, Zhang Hailou. My people will take you to the dock.”

Zhang Haiyan didn’t want to leave at all, and couldn’t help but worry about Zhang Haixia. Zhang Haixia’s eyes were also full of very complicated emotions, but he didn’t speak.

“I’ll come back.” Zhang Haiyan put on his military uniform and cap and turned to leave, escorted by two young men.

## Chapter 13 – He Jianxi, A Man Who Can't Be Beaten to Death

Zhang Ruipu watched as Zhang Haiyan walked down the corridor without looking back, and then said to the young man beside him, "Look at him. Once this young man makes up his mind, he won't let any emotions get the best of him. But he's sentimental and loyal, which is rare to see."

The young man beside him asked, "Will he obediently board the ship and investigate the case?"

"It's hard to predict what he'll do since his friend's life is in our hands. Schemers always try and come up with ways to solve practical problems, so he'll find an opportunity to rescue his friend. He won't necessarily comply with the rules we've set." Zhang Ruipu looked at his pocket watch. "But it should be difficult for him to escape with our people escorting him to the dock."

"Master, don't you think he's uncontrollable? What if he never comes back, or can't solve the case and decides to come back?"

Zhang Ruipu smiled. "While he's on his way to the dock, those people will tell him clearly what his best option is."

With that said, Zhang Ruipu looked up and saw Zhang Haijiao staring at them from the other side of the corridor. The little girl didn't look afraid at all, as if the plague had made her numb to life and death.

Meanwhile, Zhang Haiyan was being escorted by two people. His mind was very clear as walked along the streets.

The two men escorting him had already explained how things would go as soon as he had walked out the door. Zhang Haixia and the others would be taken away from the Southern Archives' Malacca branch, and all traces of them would be removed. If Zhang Haiyan boarded the ship and then snuck off, he would only see an empty house when he returned.

Zhang Haiyan knew how big the rubber plantations in Penang were. Moreover, Zhang Ruipu's informants were on the ship. If Zhang Haiyan didn't board and Zhang Ruipu received a telegram about it, Zhang Haixia would be fed to the indigenous headhunters.

That meant that the time he could act was very short. He would have to kill the two people behind him when he reached the next crossroad, and then immediately go back and rescue everyone.

But just as he saw the crossroad and was preparing to do something, the young man next to him spoke up, "I know what you're thinking, but they'll already be gone by the time you make it back. Not only is the master watching you, but we also have eyes and ears on this street. Once you pass this crossroad, behave and focus on investigating the case."

Zhang Haiyan let out a long sigh, straightened his military cap, and quickly dropped the idea.

He wasn't the type of person who would be torn between things. As long as there was a way out, he would choose the most reasonable method as quickly as possible. But Zhang Haixia was a fastidious person, and it was impossible to say whose way of thinking was right. Over the past few years, both sides had been right and wrong, but now both of them could only rely on whatever Zhang Haiyan could come up with.

"If I die during the investigation, will you let Shrimp go?" Zhang Haiyan asked the young men beside him. When they remained silent and didn't answer, Zhang Haiyan smiled bitterly.

There was a sudden commotion on the nearby street corner, and he stopped. The two people beside him were very nervous and immediately inched closer to him. Zhang Haiyan didn't even get the chance to see what had happened clearly before they pushed him forward.

He frowned, thinking that something was wrong if these extraordinary young people were afraid of something on the street.

He looked over but found that everything was the same as usual.

The scariest thing in this world wasn't the tiger coming towards you, but the tiger coming towards you and then retreating when it looked behind you. Zhang Haiyan suddenly felt that he was in this kind of situation, but when he looked around, he didn't see anything.

When He Jianxi was pushed onto the street, he knocked over several pedestrians and caused a commotion.

He stood up, patted his clothes, and picked up the account book before walking back into the shop and getting thrown out again.

He moved to go inside again but was unsuccessful because the other party came out and beat him directly.

When the other party spoke in Malay, He Jianxi scolded them in English.

Those who knew what was going on knew that He Jianxi was here to collect money, but those who didn't might think he was an adulterer who got caught.

He Jianxi was an accountant in a British pub that was on the corner of the street. British accounting wasn't easy to learn, and Malacca only had its first Chinese accountant sixteen years ago.

In fact, there were smugglers training Chinese accountants in Malacca during the era of the East India Company. This group of accountants understood stocks, dividends, and positive and negative balances.

He Jianxi's master belonged to this group of accountants who helped with smuggling. His master had been hanged, but He Jianxi was acquitted because he was too young. The main product that was smuggled back then was bootleg wine, which was what this British pub specialized in. He Jianxi knew all about the smuggling trade, so he went to work as an accountant there.

This tavern also supplied wine to other smuggling spots. Some of the smuggled wines ended up getting intercepted at customs, so some people didn't want to pay and the tavern would have problems collecting their money.

But He Jianxi could always get the money back. He knew that as a Chinese, the only way for him to survive was to work in places like private wineries, where there was a big flow of money and the owners couldn't hire foreigners. But if an accountant only knew how to count money and didn't know how to get the money back, then the owners would lose money and the accountant would soon be fired.

*I won't give in!* He Jianxi thought to himself as he was knocked down again.

He was only a little over 1.7 meters tall and also very thin.

If he didn't get the money, he would be fired when he went back. An accountant who helped with smuggling would die sooner or later if he was out of a job, so he couldn't give in.

He Jianxi stood up again. At this time, he couldn't see the people in front of him clearly, but he said loudly in English, "If you don't want to be hanged, just settle the account."

When he was knocked down again, he bumped into a kind of vehicle that was comprised of a wicker chair with wheels. Someone was sitting in it, and there were a lot of people around him. There was a strong, middle-aged man leading the procession, and a little girl standing beside the wicker chair.

The group of people picked him up, and the disoriented He Jianxi quickly apologized to them.

But just as he was apologizing, the people from before came over and kicked him so hard that he went flying towards the little girl.

The young man in the wicker chair pulled the little girl away so she wouldn't be knocked over.

He Jianxi found that he was having trouble getting up this time as his aggressors bypassed the group and continued beating him. He Jianxi held the account book and curled up into a ball as the fists rained down on him.

The little girl looked at the scene and asked the young man in the wicker chair, "Uncle Shrimp, will he be beaten to death?"

Zhang Haixia looked at Zhang Ruipu. He could tell that these people had lost control. Those who had never really beaten someone before were often prone to accidentally killing them because they didn't know how fierce they were, or how fragile the human body was.

Zhang Ruipu didn't want to interfere and said, "When you look at someone, look at their appearance. He's got a strong body that's special. This kind of person can't be beaten to death." With that said, he started to walk away.

Zhang Haixia frowned and said to the group of people in Malay, "Stop it. I'll help you pay the bill." Then he handed Zhang Haijiao a stack of money.

The group of people were stunned and slowly lowered their hands. When Zhang Haijiao looked at Zhang Haixia with a puzzled expression, Zhang Haixia said, "If the plantation owner is willing to let us go, he'll return the money to us. It's not much. If we can't go back, the money will be of no use to us. It's better to save this little brother."

Zhang Haijiao walked over and handed the money to He Jianxi, who looked up at Zhang Haixia. He then stood up and shook his head. "You're not the one who owes the money. That's not how it works. I don't want it."

He really didn't look like he was seriously injured.

Zhang Haijiao looked back at Zhang Haixia, obviously not expecting the other party to say something like this.

Zhang Haixia said, "Young man, no matter how good you are at enduring the beating, you'll die if this goes on."

He Jianxi shook his head and looked at the people who had been beating him. "It's time for you to pay. Xiguo Winery has a total of forty-seven yuan to collect. Today, you have to balance the account. You can either pay with money or goods."

Those people immediately stepped forward to continue beating him again, but Zhang Haijiao grabbed one of the thug's hands, placed the money in it, and then moved the thug's hand towards He Jianxi.

"Why even bother? The money's been given to him, and he'll give it to you. Is the account settled?" Zhang Haijiao asked him softly.

He Jianxi thought it over. His whole body hurt and he knew he couldn't persist anymore, so he took the money, opened the crumpled account book, and then marked a line out on it.

Zhang Haijiao returned to Zhang Haixia, who was a little surprised at how clever the girl was.

He Jianxi looked at Zhang Haixia and nodded. But just as he wanted to ask him something, Zhang Haixia and the others had already moved forward.

He Jianxi wanted to chase after them but found that after taking a few steps, he couldn't move anymore. He squatted on the side of the road and watched them walk away, unable to do anything.

At that time, He Jianxi didn't know that something was hidden in the money, or how his life would change because of it.

## Chapter 14 – The Nan’an

As we get to this part of the story, some things that happened later need to be mentioned first.

We all know that Zhang Haiyan definitely went through a series of adventures after he boarded the Nan’an, and it would inevitably be some time before he and Zhang Haixia were reunited.

Since it would take at least a few months to travel between Malacca and Xiamen, he wouldn’t get any news from Zhang Haixia during that time. As a result, he would have to try his best. Although these superfluous thoughts were comforting to the heart, the results were disastrous.

In fact, just when Zhang Haiyan gave up resisting and was about to board the ship to comply with the contract, Zhang Haixia was sent downstairs and out to the streets.

At that moment, two things happened almost simultaneously.

During those ten minutes just before they met He Jianxi, we can infer that Zhang Haixia had discovered some “abnormalities” from which he perceived a certain danger.

It’s important to know that Zhang Haixia graduated as the most outstanding crucial talent in the Southern Archives. If it weren’t for Zhang Haiyan, he would have entered the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office as a chief officer and might have been in charge of a confidential department by now.

But during the time he hung out with Zhang Haiyan, he seldom encountered strong opponents, so he didn’t get the chance to show off. Even Zhang Haiyan had almost forgotten how smart this little brother was. He was so smart, in fact, that he could be considered a monster.



Due to his current position, the situation, and other reasons, he didn't warn Zhang Ruipu about the danger but obviously thought that it was very serious.

In those few minutes, he wrote something down and hid all the information in the stack of money. He placed it among the pile of banknotes and handed it to He Jianxi. He hoped that the message could be delivered to Zhang Haiyan even if there was only a slight chance.

Later, after Zhang Haiyan learned about the theory Zhang Haixia had come up with in those few minutes, he compared it with what he had discovered and found that they were almost the same. That was when Zhang Haiyan truly realized what kind of effect Zhang Haixia had on his life, and how he had always been there to protect him. He had also realized that Zhang Haixia must have felt that they would never meet each other again.

The process of how this farewell banknote arrived in Zhang Haiyan's hands was very legendary, but we won't talk about it for the time being.

Meanwhile, Zhang Haiyan, who was waiting in line to get on the ship, also officially started boarding. At that moment, the Nan'an entered the berth from the outer harbor.

The dock was crowded with people and all kinds of goods. A huge heat wave engulfed everyone, causing the smell of human sweat to fill the space. The most terrifying thing was the noisy voices, which made it impossible to hear anything.

The sea breeze fluctuated between strong and weak. Zhang Haiyan's military uniform was soaked and he was fanning himself with his cap. Zhang Ruipu had been very generous to give him a ship ticket and a letter of invitation. Even though it meant that he was able to stay in the best guest room, he still couldn't skip waiting on the dock that was looking more and more like a battlefield.

When the huge Nan'an appeared in Zhang Haiyan's field of vision, he couldn't help but be amazed at the behemoth. He looked up at the black

hull and the four large chimneys above, and began to realize that this world was completely different from when they had first arrived at the South Sea.

Xiamen used to be a distant shore that Zhang Haiyan couldn't reach and dearly missed. But with this kind of huge ship, Xiamen didn't seem so far away anymore.

Zhang Ruipu's entourage didn't follow him on board but watched him go silently. Zhang Haiyan pretended that they were there to send him off and waved vigorously as if he was bidding farewell to his relatives, but the two young men almost immediately disappeared into the crowd.

Zhang Haiyan breathed a sigh of relief. He turned his head and saw a sailor walking toward him. The sailor nodded to him and said, "Nice to meet you, Mr. Zhang. You are Mr. Zhang Ruipu's nephew, right? I'm here to serve you exclusively."

Zhang Haiyan looked at the sailor, who looked back at him with a crafty gleam in his eyes. *It's so nice to be rich. You can have informants working for you everywhere.*

He took the VIP passage, where the sailor checked his ticket repeatedly before letting him through. The civilian passage below was very crowded. He looked down and realized that it would be impossible to be idle on the Nan'an this time around. The investigation would be more difficult than he had initially thought.

"The ship is like a small society. You're now walking to heaven, while the area down below is the mortal realm," the sailor said.

*No. I don't think I'll get to enjoy living in heaven.* Zhang Haiyan was well aware that he couldn't enjoy anything during these first three days before the ship departed. He couldn't even get a good night's sleep.

"Tell me about the ship so I can finish what Mr. Zhang Ruipu has asked of me."

The sailor's job included working as a guide and giving introductions about the ship, so he was familiar with the process. While looking for passages for Zhang Haiyan to pass through faster, he said, "The Nan'an is a huge ship. It's the biggest ship on this route, which means that it has larger steam engine boilers and can sail very fast.

"Like all ships, it has three types of cabins: first-class, second-class, and third-class. In essence, there are passages connecting the first-class and second-class cabins so personnel can walk through. Many people in the second-class cabins are those who wanted to book rooms in the first-class cabins but couldn't get tickets. The third-class cabins are relatively independent with isolated activity areas. The conditions of the third-class cabins are way below those of the second-class cabins." The sailor smiled at Zhang Haiyan. "But you can have some fun in the third-class cabins, so some guests may not necessarily choose to stay in the first-class cabins."

"Oh?" Zhang Haiyan sort of knew what he was talking about.

"It's lonely living on the sea, after all. Moreover, the sea changes people. Good people become cruel, and good women become sluts. This is what living on the sea is like." The sailor said softly. "Trust me, it's different." With that said, he pointed at the third-class cabin area where some women were dressed in bright colors. "They work on the shore and go back to Xiamen once a year. They don't stay idle on the ship. Their husbands tacitly approve of it."

Zhang Haiyan looked at them from a distance. Those women were pretty, but the man with luggage beside them had a rickety body and dark eyes.

"Because the ship has structural problems, the stability of the bow and stern is worse. The third-class cabins are distributed among these areas. There's a four-story building on the ship's deck with cabins that are basically the first-class activity areas. The ballroom, swimming pool, salon, and all kinds of facilities are located there. There are bridges, observation decks, and a reporting room at the top. There are dressing rooms, restaurants, terrace bars, and indoor courts below." The sailor said as he described the first-class

area. "I don't like these places anyway. The people in the first-class cabin may be more interested in them."

Zhang Haiyan looked up and saw that the first-class cabin had a coat of white paint on it that made it look much cleaner.

If he were investigating the case with Zhang Haixia, he would definitely enjoy it all and let himself go. But now the sailor's words were merely a way to help paint a clear picture of the ship in his mind.

He began to form a simple plan.

The last time the Nan'an had docked at a port was when it sailed from Xiamen to France. The ship went to four ports along the Malacca route and stayed in Malaysia for a whole month while it waited for cargo from all over Malaysia to fill the ship. The crew members even had a chance to take a vacation, so anyone who disembarked from the ship spread the plague all over Malacca.

Judging from the situation on the ship, there hadn't been an outbreak on the ship itself. So why did the Nan'an keep spreading the plague, but nothing happened to her?

There were two possibilities:

1. Those people were infected on the ship, but someone controlled the situation so they didn't get sick until they got off the ship.
2. Whoever spread the plague had the ability to make people get sick when they disembarked and left.

Those who got sick lived in villages that were in different areas, so that meant they had been carefully selected. These people were low-level businessmen, so they all stayed on the lower deck. That meant that the person spreading the plague should be hiding in the lower compartments, and should be someone who was good at talking and becoming familiar with others.

It was a simple deduction. Even if there wasn't a plague on this kind of ship, the spread of diarrhea and dysentery in the bottom compartments was also a common occurrence.

The ship's doctor would regularly give the guests pills and concoctions, which could easily control the time at which they would get sick. In addition, a ship's doctor would glean a lot of information from them because people respected them. Based on all this, the ship's doctor was the first suspect, so Zhang Haiyan had to go to the infirmary as quickly as possible.

But he only had three days!

"Who are those people in front of us?" Zhang Haiyan noticed that the way was blocked, and there was a long line in front of them.

The sailor followed his gaze.

There was a group of white people in front of them, who seemed to be Americans. Their clothes were very dirty, and there was only one young white man among them wearing a suit and glasses. He seemed like the type who specialized in paperwork.

Many local porters were walking up with their luggage. The group of white men was already very large, and the ship's passage became extremely crowded with the addition of the porters and luggage.

The pile of luggage was very huge, and Zhang Haiyan wondered what was in them. The young white people checked them over carefully and told the porters not to be careless with them.

The white people were very relaxed as they talked and laughed amongst themselves.

"These are valuable guests of some valuable guests. They're all Mr. Warner's entourage." The sailor said. "He was inspecting relics in Malacca, but now they're going to Xiamen. They have an entire floor of first-class cabins booked for themselves. Look at their luggage." The sailor whispered. "We all

know that there are muskets, rifles, and submachine guns inside. It's been said that they're going to South China to do research. These Americans are all veterans. Look at the foreigner with glasses. He's afraid that the gunpowder inside will accidentally light itself."

"I'm talking about that woman." Zhang Haiyan stared at a Chinese woman standing among the group of foreigners.

She was a petite Chinese woman who was curvy and slim, but not tall. A sari was wrapped around her face and hair and seemed to be used for sun protection.

When the sailor finally noticed the woman, his expression changed a little. "Why is she only getting on the ship now? We thought she was already on."

"Who is she?"

The sailor's tone changed. "This is the shipowner's daughter, Miss Dong. She's our young boss. This time, she arrived in Malacca from other places, so she's taking her family's ship back to Xiamen. Thanks to her, the food on the ship is European wine and cured meat from the Malacca shipping warehouse, so we don't have to eat food coming from the plague areas."

Zhang Haiyan squinted. "Is she friends with Warner?"

"If they're not friends, how can he board the ship with firearms?" The sailor said. "Don't mess with her. She's a Datuk<sup>(1)</sup> in Malacca. Even Mr. Zhang Ruipu has to get customs clearance orders from her."

Zhang Haiyan squinted his eyes even more. "You all have to listen to her?"

"Of course. All the ships on half the route listen to her."

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<sup>(1)</sup> Datuk (or its variant Dato or Datu) is a Malay title commonly used in Brunei and Malaysia. Wiki [link](#).

Zhang Haiyan patted the sailor on the shoulder. He already had a bold idea in his head.

They waited in line for about an hour before they finally reached the waiting area under the ship deck's open awning. As all the first-class guests rested there, the sailors gave them some welcome tea. They also had them take a disinfectant while they disinfected the carry-on luggage.

Miss Dong didn't take advantage of her special privileges, but also took a break and had tea in this area.

The Americans were all sitting at one table while she had a table all to herself. She was staring out at Perak's tropical scenery with her beautiful eyes.

When Zhang Haiyan made a move to go up, the sailor motioned for him to rest. He told him that there was no possibility of cutting the line, so he had to wait patiently here. The sailor then left to go and receive the next batch of guests.

As soon as Zhang Haiyan saw the sailor leave, he immediately stood up, walked to Miss Dong's table, and sat down next to her.

Everyone was shocked. Zhang Haiyan immediately saw that all the Americans beside him were looking at him and had put their hands in their pockets. He could hear the sounds of guns being cocked.

*Oh, Zhang Haiyan found it interesting. Rich people. Miss Dong should be an extremely wealthy person. She has a lot of bodyguards.*

Zhang Haiyan looked at Miss Dong's eyes. She didn't look at him at all but continued looking out at the tropical scenery in the distance. A big white man stood up and walked towards them.

"Friend, are you sitting in the wrong place?" The big guy asked.

Zhang Haiyan ignored the big man, and said to the woman in front of him, "Miss Dong, I'm here to save you. You're in great danger."

Miss Dong turned her head and looked at Zhang Haiyan just as the big white man grabbed Zhang Haiyan's neck.

"Miss Dong, do you want me to throw him out?"

Zhang Haiyan felt the man's grip strength and knew he could break his neck in three seconds. All he would need to do was grab the man's wrist, turn around, and twist the wrist directly up behind the man. Then, he would reach around with his other hand and hook his neck. When he pulled the man's wrist in one direction and his neck in another direction, the man's neck would snap.

But he couldn't do this, because he would immediately be shot to pieces by those around him.

Miss Dong looked at Zhang Haiyan and shook her head, "You may not be able to get him off the boat, Mr. Hudson. And he's a first-class guest." As she said this, Miss Dong leaned back in her chair. "Please explain what you just said."

"I'm from Penang, Miss Dong. I see you're trying to keep a low profile, but you're heavily guarded." Zhang Haiyan looked at the Americans nearby. "If I've guessed right, you must have a particularly valuable item with you that has to be transported back to Xiamen. That's why you've taken your own ship and secretly prepared so many people to guard it."

Miss Dong didn't speak, so Zhang Haiyan continued to spin his tale, "It's true that this news has been leaked out long ago. I came from Penang, and when I was there, I happened to hear a group of people in a pub say they were coming to hijack this thing. I'm the kind of person who's enthusiastic to help others, so I'm careful to eavesdrop and watch out for things. I memorized what all those people look like."



Miss Dong was still looking at him and seemed to show a glimmer of amusement at the corner of her eyes. “And then?”

“Then, I thought about it for a long time. I can’t let these people succeed, Miss Dong. I’m a first-class guest, as well as an officer. I have an obligation to protect the safety of Chinese people. So, for your safety, I have a proposal. Lend me a few people to walk around the ship and help me widen the search area. I’ll definitely find those people for you. Before the ship leaves, let’s get rid of the hidden dangers.”

Zhang Haiyan patted the big man behind him, “I think this one is good.”

Zhang Haiyan was confident. First of all, he had analyzed Miss Dong’s situation. There were more than ten foreigners around her that were personally protecting her, and they had all responded very quickly. Miss Dong was just a rich second generation, so it was unlikely that she was afraid of a vendetta. That meant she probably had a very special thing on her body, which was extremely valuable. The defensive measures weren’t set up for revenge, but for a robbery. So, even though his statement appeared to be abrupt, Miss Dong would take it seriously if the piece of property was really valuable. In this way, he could use her privileges to investigate the ship as much as he wanted without having to sneak around.

To be honest, if he wanted to detect the plague in three days, he had to get assistance from the ship.

Miss Dong turned her head and looked out at the scenery again. If Zhang Haiyan could see her face, he would realize that she was impatient, but she still acted just as Zhang Haiyan had expected. She thought for a while, and then said, “You’re sure? You talk a big talk. If you can’t find those people, how will this gentleman explain this matter?”

“Hahaha, if I can’t find it, then we’ll just say it was a bunch of drunks talking nonsense. I’ll punish myself with three cups of wine, and Miss Dong can just treat me as being wrong and diligent.”

“This kind of statement makes it sound like you want to use this excuse to investigate what you want to investigate while on board, hoping to defraud the privileges I give you. It’s quite convenient.” Miss Dong looked at Zhang Haiyan, who was shocked and embarrassed.

This was a little too accurate.

Zhang Haiyan was biased when it came to wealthy daughters. He was willing to admit that he never thought Miss Dong would humiliate him without hesitation. While he sat there not knowing how to answer, Miss Dong beckoned to one side. The white man with glasses who had been checking over the goods when he was queuing up before came over.

“Steven.”

When the white man named Steven approached, Miss Dong whispered a few words to him and then said to Zhang Haiyan, “No matter what your purpose is, sir, I don’t have the time to play games with you. But adhering to the principle of transportation safety first, I’ll give you three days to enjoy this privilege. If you can’t find the people you’ve mentioned before the boat leaves in three days, then I’ll use the shipowner’s power to arrest you and send you to jail in Xiamen. If you resist arrest, I’ll have my people kill you on the spot. Do you agree?”

Zhang Haiyan was shocked.

At this time Miss Dong’s room was ready. She took the key, stood up, and then looked at Zhang Haiyan, “You have ten seconds. Answer me.”

The situation was originally under Zhang Haiyan’s control, but now Miss Dong had taken control of everything.

Zhang Haiyan didn’t have time to think about it as he saw Miss Dong turn around and move to leave. He immediately stood up and said, “I’m confident. What if I find those people?” At this time, he was willing to put up a strong front.

“We’ll talk about it then. If you can even find them. Steven will follow you and help smooth things over.” Miss Dong drifted away, and the Americans followed close behind. Once they were gone, only the white man with glasses was left looking at him coldly.

Zhang Haiyan waited until he couldn’t see Miss Dong anymore before relaxing. He then said to Steven, “Wealthy daughters have become clever recently.”

“Your last name,” Steven asked in very fluent Chinese.

“My last name is Zhang.”

“Mr. Zhang, I’m going back to my room to clean up now. We’ll meet back here in an hour. That’s when I’ll officially start timing. You have to find that group of thugs you mentioned within those 72 hours.” Steven grabbed his luggage, saluted, and then walked into the first-class cabin.

Zhang Haiyan sighed and looked out at the scenery. Seagulls were flying, the sun was beating down, and the third-class guests were still getting on the ship. “Well, bad-guy-spreading-the-plague. I’m here.”

Room 345 was the first-class room on the third floor. It was only when he entered the room that he truly realized what first-class entailed.

The room was too luxurious.

It was a suite that had a separate dining room in addition to the living room. This was very luxurious for a ship with limited space. A waiter’s room was located opposite his room, which made it very convenient for communication. If the rooms were all the same style, then based on the size of his room, there could only be one on each floor.

The sailor from before knocked on the door and brought in another package. “These are some daily necessities that come when the room is booked. Mr. Zhang Ruipu asked me to give it to you when you boarded the ship.”

Zhang Haiyan opened the package and saw a design drawing of the ship inside. There was also a telegram address and two packages of cigarettes, which were the foul-smelling ones he liked best before switching to the ones Zhang Haixia recommended.

A note was attached: We look forward to your good news. Feel free to contact us by telegram. I'll take care of them.

Zhang Haiyan lay down on the spring bed, opened one of the cigarette packs, and put one in his mouth while he looked at the ceiling.

What Zhang Ruipu said was right. He knew his every move, so everything Zhang Haiyan did on the ship wouldn't escape his eyes.

He got up and took a shower, then washed his clothes and fixed his hair. For Zhang Haixia, he had to be a model detective.

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Steven also put on a military uniform, making it obvious that he was a soldier. He didn't want to give off the impression of a clerk when he and Zhang Haiyan were standing next to each other.

The two went to the sailor's cabin first.

The sailors were very busy and scattered across several locations on the ship, so there weren't many people in the cabin. Zhang Haiyan wasn't afraid to use this time to run around and familiarize himself with the environment. As usual, his first step was to try his luck. In an enclosed space like this, there would definitely be a lot of gossip. Sometimes there were hidden clues in these tidbits of gossip, so you couldn't go wrong listening to it first whenever you went to a place.

His behavior was completely inconsistent with what he had said before, but Steven remained patient. Zhang Haiyan originally prepared another set of excuses, but later found that he didn't need to use them at all. Steven merely introduced him and then asked the others to cooperate with him.

In addition to the kind of strange stories that all ships had, there were three stories about the third-class cabins. But Zhang Haiyan only cared about one of those stories, because it was mentioned a lot and everyone said it had happened not that long ago. These two factors meant that it had happened very recently.

There was a sailor named Song Chai who suddenly disappeared.

Song Chai was a Vietnamese, who disappeared the second week after arriving in Malacca. At that time, the ship was sailing from one port to another. He was there when the ship had set off from the previous port, but then he suddenly disappeared after that. (After the Nan'an arrived in Malacca, it docked for a month. But it didn't always stay moored at the dock during this time. Sometimes it had to sail to other shallow water ports on the mainland to receive bulk cargo. After sailing here, it wasn't immediately going to Xiamen, but bypassing Singapore's deep-water port and loading heavy goods for the last time.)

(At that time, the status of Singapore's deep-water port had begun to threaten Malacca. Those familiar with this history may know it well, so I'll just mention it here for the time being.)

Many people said that Song Chai had been at sea for too long and jumped into the water. It was understandable that he would do that if he was depressed, but when they were tidying up his room, they found a rattan box under the bed. There was a wide-mouth bottle full of flies inside this rattan box.

Most of the flies were alive and had been caught by Song Chai on the ship. It was easy for rats and flies to survive on this kind of big ship, so there were many different types.

This behavior was very strange, and many people thought it had something to do with witchcraft since it was a Malacca ship. At that time, his roommate told others that Song Chai had been a little weird since the third week after arriving in Malacca. He often went out in the middle of the night, but no one

knew what he was doing. It was only a speculation, but they guessed that Song Chai was out in the middle of the night catching these flies.

The later development was a bit outrageous and rumors started spreading that Song Chai had caught the flies to eat himself. Someone had put a spell on him, and he was going to become a lizard.

It was also said that Song Chai thought he was seriously ill and had planted maggots on his body to eat the sarcoma. There was a ghost in that sarcoma that would grow into a person if the maggots didn't eat the sarcoma.

The most bizarre thing in all that gossip was the box of flies. And based on the information in the archives, the flies in that box were real.

This matter appeared to be true.

He didn't know if it was a psychological effect, but after Zhang Haiyan heard this, he felt as if there were more flies on this ship than any other ship he had taken before.

## Chapter 15 – Flies

Zhang Haiyan wasn't sure if this story was related to what he wanted to investigate. But compared to not knowing where to start, this thread at least gave him a direction to go in.

Flies also had something to do with the plague.

The timing of the sailor catching flies in the middle of the night coincided with the time the plague started to spread as the ship arrived in Malacca.

Could Song Chai be the one who spread the plague? Instead of jumping into the sea, did he get off the ship with flies that carried the virus and spread it everywhere?

No, it couldn't be that coincidental. In all the places where the plague had occurred, the first people who started to show symptoms all happened to be passengers on the Nan'an. If the flies had been the ones to spread the plague, then the results wouldn't be so precise and the plague would probably be everywhere.

The plague must have been spread by people.

With the help of Steven's forcible privilege, Zhang Haiyan entered Song Chai's cabin and lay on his bed, hoping to get some inspiration from his perspective.

But it was fruitless. The bed was very clean. There weren't any flies, bloodstains, or any signs of graffiti. He had no way to interpret whether Song Chai's last moments were full of pain, depression, or worry.

While he was lying on Song Chai's bed and staring into space, Steven was sitting on the other bed looking at him. Zhang Haiyan focused all of his attention on the case.

*I can't be distracted. It's all a waste of time if I start to worry about Zhang Haixia, or what I stand to gain or lose.*

*Not even a single minute can be wasted.*

He got up and realized that it was wrong to look into Song Chai, because he could see two faint letters engraved on the plank in front of him while he was lying on the bed. (They were bunkbeds so that four people could sleep in a room.)

The two letters were: NP.

There were a lot of possible meanings behind these two letters, but there was only one if they were related to flies.

Nepenthes pharmakon.

It was a potion that the Queen of Egypt gave to Helen. “Ne” meant forgetting and “penthes” meant sorrow. This potion could make people forget their sorrows.

In Malaysia, these two letters represented a plant called Nepenthes.

Song Chai was smuggling Nepenthes, and the flies were food for it. This plant was abundant in Penang, so Song Chai must have encountered the plague when he got off the ship and went there. As a result, he had probably died there.

If he was smuggling plants, then he probably couldn't remember the Latin spellings based on his academic qualifications. The letters NP may have been written on the bedboard when he packed it at night so as not to forget it.

Zhang Haiyan looked at his watch. He had wasted four hours. The other stories had happened too long ago, so he didn't think those were worth looking into.

He lit his sixth cigarette and glanced at Steven, who was looking at him patiently.

“Brother, during these three days, you'll help me with anything, right?”



Steven sat up straight and seemed to press the pistol at his waist. Zhang Haiyan didn't know what he was going to do.

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Meanwhile, He Jianxi had just gotten on a boat called the Baoen, which was anchored at the outermost part of the port. The Baoen was a small barge heading to San Francisco.

The plague in Malacca meant that these kinds of ships would check the passengers before taking them on. They would even stop at the outermost reefs by the port, where small boats would pick up and drop off the passengers.

At that time, small barges leaving from Malacca to San Francisco were called coffin ships. The conditions on the ships were extremely poor, so many people fell ill and died, or went missing because of fighting, robbery, or pirates. The ship owners were known for extortion, human trafficking, and restricting the freedom of the boat passengers. People would also be thrown into the sea whenever shipwrecks occurred. As a result, various tragedies happened one after another.

The purpose of founding the South Sea Archives was mainly to investigate these mysterious maritime cases. When dealing with the ship owners and sailors who killed Chinese people, Zhang Haiyan and the others would resolutely put them to death.

Since they were very good at swimming, they liked to get on the ship in the middle of the sea, and then jump into the water after killing people. That was how they came to be called the "plague gods of the sea". Even to this day, many South Sea legends mentioned a water ghost with blades in its mouth, which was actually Zhang Haiyan.

As one of the last passengers, He Jianxi was feeling a little overwhelmed.

When he had returned to the winery yesterday, the account room was closed.

He was a little sulky because it meant that the accounts he had collected during the day couldn't be settled that same day. This made him feel frustrated since he placed importance on making plans in advance.

He dragged his bruised body back to his room—a small attic on the second floor of the building across the street—and began to sort out the accounts.

He counted the money and flattened the banknotes with a book clip. That was when he found a fly stuck between the stack of banknotes.

The fly had been crushed to death by two banknotes and was all dried out because of the hot weather. He carefully scraped it off with a knife and discovered that a pattern had been drawn on the paper currency with nails. It was a simple sketch of a plague god mask with a blade in its mouth.

The plague god had the body of a snake and was coiled around an unknown flower. The fly just so happened to be on that flower.

He Jianxi didn't understand what it meant and didn't care. Not only was it normal for money to get dirty, but it was also common that some people scribbled on it. As long as it was money, it was valuable no matter what.

He was about to take a shower and go to sleep when someone knocked on his door. He Jianxi looked out the window and saw the winery owner standing down below. He was holding some wine and asking He Jianxi to open the door.

He Jianxi was a little surprised. Although the boss often asked him to drink with him, he would usually tell him about it in advance. Why did he come here all of a sudden?

He Jianxi opened the door to let the boss in. The boss was an Englishman, and he was covered in blood when he came in. The door was closed immediately.

Just as He Jianxi wanted to ask something, the boss took a sip of his wine and pushed He Jianxi into the corner. He leaned against the door and said, "It's all over, He."

He Jianxi was puzzled as he watched the blood drip down from the boss' body.

"You're hurt?"

"This isn't my blood." The boss said. "This is Baixi and the others' blood."

Baixi was his colleague and another Chinese accountant who was older than him.

"What happened to Baixi?" He Jianxi was suddenly a little frightened. The boss looked at the money on the table and He Jianxi explained, "It's today's accounts that I've collected."

The boss laughed. "You can even collect this kind of account. He, you never let me down."

He Jianxi was still leaning against the wall, and the boss' smile made him feel even more frightened. The boss looked around. There was nothing in He Jianxi's place, but whatever he had looked very tidy.

For some reason, the boss was a little touched. This Chinese was different from everyone else. His soul was pure.

The boss pointed to the money on the table. "That's your severance pay. Our winery is gone."

He Jianxi was so shocked that he couldn't immediately take in the information. "Boss, what's going on?" He asked. "Where are Baixi and the others?"

His boss suddenly pulled out a pistol from behind, put it in his mouth, and fired.

The huge destructive power blew the back of the boss's head off, and all the brain matter and shrapnel sprayed on He Jianxi's door.

He Jianxi's face was pale, and he was so shocked that he collapsed to the ground.

What He Jianxi didn't know was that on that day, the British bootleg ban had been lifted, so smuggling alcohol wouldn't bring in huge profits anymore. British loan sharks wanted full payment of the loans they had given to the bootleg dealers. A British businessman's private tavern in Malacca went bankrupt. After learning the news, his Chinese accountants notified the Malacca authorities of his accounts.

The announcement of the bootleg ban being lifted officially arrived in Malacca one month later. The British businessman had all of his property confiscated within a month of learning that the decree came into effect. He killed his Chinese accountants and their families with a gun, and then went to another accountant's place and committed suicide by putting a gun in his mouth.

He Jianxi didn't know why the boss didn't kill him. Maybe it was because he didn't participate in Baixi's betrayal, or maybe it was because he had collected the last accounts.

But everything disappeared.

All he could think about was what he was going to do with his life. He eventually decided to go to San Francisco to find his cousin who was panning for gold. That was probably the only place where foreign firms needed Chinese accountants.

Fortunately, he was able to buy a ticket for the Baoen.

He Jianxi hurriedly embarked on his journey after sunrise. The time for boarding the boat was tight, so he didn't even have time to take a good look at the street where he had lived before getting on the Baoen.

## Chapter 16 – Zhang Haiyan Flying Above Shit

Steven was wearing a robe that had been modified from pajamas, and Zhang Haiyan had written a lot of small English words on his face. Steven was holding a sign in his hand that had a big English word painted on it: Psychic.

They were in Zhang Haiyan's room, where he had just finished putting makeup on Steven. He circled around Steven twice and decided that he looked rather convincing as someone who had some kind of European magic.

"What are you trying to do? I'm a man of science. I don't believe in this kind of stuff," Steven said. Even though he was extremely mad, he still cooperated politely. He seemed like a very rule-abiding person.

"Foreign monks are good at reciting scriptures<sup>(1)</sup>," Zhang Haiyan said.

In Malacca, those ship doctors with advanced western medical skills made people form the notion that western doctors could treat illnesses better. Witchcraft and Taoism were also popular, so a lot of people pretended to engage in it. On the ship, superstition and science were different things, so a western warlock who looked like a doctor and a magician could generate a lot of stories.

"I don't understand."

"You don't need to understand. You just need to know that you have to read the Bible to me for the rest of the day." Zhang Haiyan went to the toilet and started putting makeup on his own hands.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Foreign monks are better than local monks. It means that people don't trust those they are familiar with, and often feel that foreign people's ideas are more fascinating.

He painted the Wudou disease measles on his arms. He had seen many people infected with the disease, so he was able to draw the measles vividly. He covered them up before wandering outside with Steven.

Zhang Haiyan wandered around until it was dark out, and deliberately greeted a lot of people along the way. He was very conspicuous in his military uniform, and a lot of people were impressed by him. He asked Steven to follow behind him where others could see him, but not to walk with him.

Steven looked grim as everyone pointed at him and whispered to each other, but he didn't get angry. He even became a little curious since he didn't know what Zhang Haiyan was trying to do.

Around eight o'clock that evening, Zhang Haiyan arrived at the third-class cabin's activity area. Some goods had been piled up there. It was said that a part of the cargo hold was changed into the third-class cabin, so the cargo had been piled on the deck. Even so, there were still a lot of people in the activity area looking out at the sea and chatting with each other.

Steven was really tired by this point and ended up leaning against the ship's railing. He had to admit that he couldn't keep up with Zhang Haiyan, who was still full of energy and didn't look like he had been walking around all day.

Steven was looking into the distance when he was suddenly attracted by an Asian woman next to him. She was a girl with a wonderful figure who was walking past him.

Steven looked at the girl's legs and found that they were very long. He rubbed the bridge of his nose, feeling a little sleepy. When he turned his head again, he saw that Zhang Haiyan was gone.

He hurriedly walked over to where Zhang Haiyan had been before and saw everyone walking in the same direction. After taking a few more steps, he saw Zhang Haiyan lying on the ground, constantly twitching.

Steven walked over, completely puzzled. He saw that Zhang Haiyan's arms were exposed, and his hands were full of rashes. When everyone saw them as well, they didn't dare step forward. One person screamed, "Plague!"

This person obviously had seen people infected with Wudou disease. After the person screamed, a few people moved forward to get a closer look. Once they did, they immediately retreated and shouted, "Plague! He has the symptoms! Don't get close to him."

All the onlookers began to retreat, but Steven didn't. In fact, Steven was now standing at the forefront of the crowd in his psychic clothes.

Zhang Haiyan looked at Steven in pain and stretched out his hand, "Master. Save me, Master."

Steven looked around, puzzled. He saw Zhang Haiyan wink at him and sighed in his heart before walking over and squatting down.

"Read the Bible to me. Hurry up," Zhang Haiyan said.

Steven looked at the people around them. He was very embarrassed, but he still read the Bible perfunctorily.

Zhang Haiyan worked hard to perform. He tried to put his head in Steven's arms so that he could wipe off the makeup on his hands in an instant.

Then he lay flat on the ground and began to gasp. With everyone watching, he stood up and looked at his hands in surprise.

Everyone saw that there was nothing left on his hands and that they now looked very smooth.

The onlookers looked at Steven in surprise. Zhang Haiyan got up and hugged Steven's thigh. "Thank you, Master! Thank you!"

Steven helped Zhang Haiyan up and said softly, "What are you trying to do?"

Zhang Haiyan said, "You only gave me these few days, so I have to use a special method. Smile."

The two people smiled at those around them, and Zhang Haiyan continued, "I'm going to kiss your hand. You have to look like you have supernatural powers."

"No. I refuse."

"You're breaking your promise."

Steven sighed. When Zhang Haiyan kissed his hand, Steven patted him on the head.

Steven was so exhausted when they returned to the room that he immediately collapsed on the sofa and took off the psychic clothes. Zhang Haiyan poured him a glass of wine.

He could tell by the looks on those people's faces that their performance was effective. Although the scam was rough, it was a white man saving an Asian man.

In this world, no one thought that white people and Asian people would work together to deceive others.

But the scam wasn't over yet. Steven would go back to his room soon, so Zhang Haiyan gave him the psychic clothes.

"Please take these. I'll go to your room tomorrow. There will be a lot of people coming to find you."

"Why?"

Zhang Haiyan nodded. "If we're lucky, we can catch the bad people tomorrow. Please?"

Steven gave Zhang Haiyan a long look before grabbing the clothes and leaving.



That night, Zhang Haiyan didn't sleep at all. He went into the third-, second-, and first-class cabins and randomly painted the Wudou disease measles on the passengers' bodies.

When he went to Steven's room around nine o'clock the next morning, some people were already there kowtowing to Steven. They were the people in the first-class cabin. Those in the third-class cabin had all been stopped by sailors at the hatch to the first-class cabin, and the conflict between the two sides was very intense.

Steven looked at Zhang Haiyan, obviously having no idea what to do. Zhang Haiyan made a chanting motion and then waited by the side with some alcohol. After Steven chanted for a while, Zhang Haiyan wiped the measles off.

Zhang Haiyan looked at everyone's faces. He remembered all the people he had painted last night, and they were appearing one by one. Since there were too many guests in the third-class cabin who couldn't enter the first-class cabin, they could only run a psychic treatment facility in the salon.

Zhang Haiyan watched it all silently. He knew that everyone on the ship would soon know about this incident. Moreover, the criminals who spread the plague would soon know that there was an American psychic who could cure the plague in no time.

He remembered all the people he had put makeup on. Most of them were children, old people, and foreigners. He was basically certain that the group of soldiers on Flower Reef had something to do with this. That group had all been Chinese, so he mostly avoided the Chinese sailors.

He believed that no matter what kind of criminals they were, they would definitely look into and try to understand what was going on once they heard the news. If the plague could be cured, then their actions would soon be meaningless.

He only needed to pay attention to two kinds of people: the ones he painted but didn't show up, and the ones he didn't paint but showed up anyway.

The treatments lasted until the evening. Steven was about to faint, but Zhang Haiyan didn't gain any specific clues.

Those who showed up were the ones he'd painted.

As Steven went back to his room that night, he clutched his sore back and said to Zhang Haiyan, "I will arrest you the morning after tomorrow. You can do whatever you want before that."

Zhang Haiyan was still confident that night, but the situation remained the same the next day. Steven stopped talking, and Zhang Haiyan realized for the first time that he had been too optimistic.

These murderers were very patient.

He didn't fall asleep all night but walked around the ship instead. His mind was a mess, but it was too late to change the strategy now. He couldn't understand why the murderers weren't interested in this matter.

Were the measles not realistic enough? Or had the murderers seen the measles and known that it was a scam?

Zhang Haiyan was very confident about his makeup skills. Ordinary people couldn't tell that they were fake, nor could they be wiped off with other concoctions. He was the only one who knew how to do it, so there basically shouldn't be any problems with the scam.

*Why aren't they coming?*

At dawn, Zhang Haiyan realized that his plan with Miss Dong was going to fail. The ship would sail today, and time was running out. Maybe what he should be considering right now was how to avoid Steven instead of investigating the case.

At that moment, Zhang Haiyan suddenly thought of something.

Even though the murderers weren't interested in this matter, someone who should be interested in this matter didn't show up.

Zhang Haiyan sat up from the bed. "The ship's doctors."

The ship's doctors were able to give the guests pills, which meant that they could easily control the time at which the guests would get sick if they mixed the diseased pills in with the other pills.

If there was someone on the ship who could cure the disease, common sense dictated that the patients would go to the ship's doctors first. When the ship's doctors learned that there was a plague outbreak, they would normally stop the ship from leaving port. That also meant that Zhang Haiyan could continue his investigation, which should have been the side effect of his plan.

But the ship's doctors didn't do anything.

They didn't want the ship to stay here any longer.

Zhang Haiyan checked his watch, went to the salon first, and asked the waiter, "Did any of the ship's doctors show up when we were seeing the patients?"

The waiter told him that the ship's doctors had been resting in the salon and looking at them. Four ship doctors in total had appeared in the salon.

Zhang Haiyan slapped his thigh and moved to rush to the infirmary. As soon as he left the salon, however, he saw Steven walking over and looking at his watch. "Mr. Zhang, you are under arrest."

Zhang Haiyan looked at Steven, clutched his chest, and suddenly fell to the ground. "Infirmary. You can arrest me after sending me to the infirmary first."

Zhang Haiyan put his best efforts into his performance and even worked up a sweat on his neck. Even the sailor standing beside them couldn't stand

looking at the scene anymore and said, “Mr. Steven, your friend isn’t feeling well. You’re a doctor. Do you think he should be sent to your room or the infirmary?”

Steven looked at Zhang Haiyan, annoyed. It was as if he was trying to help an old woman cross the road, and the old woman turned out to be a swindler. But he still checked Zhang Haiyan’s pupils and counted his heartbeats with a strange expression.

“Get him to my room.” Steven sighed.

Zhang Haiyan knew the situation wasn’t good. He didn’t expect this accommodating white man to be a doctor.

He wanted to immediately stand up and say he was fine, but felt like that would look too deliberate, so he decided to recover gradually on his way to Steven’s room. Once he entered the room and sat down, he would act like he was completely recovered, show his gratitude, and then leave.

But as soon as they entered the cabin, they turned a corner and reached Steven’s room. He was just about to act like he had made a quick recovery, but was completely shocked when he saw the room.

Steven’s room was very large and could be considered the VIP of VIP rooms. It even had a balcony, where the sun was shining in from the outside. The interior had been completely done in a European style. His suitcases seemed to have been sent up earlier, for they were all open and looked to be stuffed full of books and papers.

Zhang Haiyan was still clutching his chest as he was placed on the green velvet sofa. When he sat down, the springs made a soft creaking sound. The velvet cushions molded to his body, making him feel as if the devil himself was embracing him.

He had been in and out of the rainforests and sea for years, sleeping on tree branches and ships’ decks. He didn’t know how long it had been since he’d slept in a soft bed with springs, and involuntarily let out a groan.

When Steven had the sailor leave, Zhang Haiyan reacted immediately and started to act as if he had recovered. In the end, Steven poured a glass of whiskey, took a sip, and said directly, “Stop pretending. Don’t you know your heart is on the other side?”

Zhang Haiyan froze for a moment and then looked down at his hand. It was only then that he remembered he was different from others, and his heart was on the opposite side. A doctor had told him about it during their adult physical examinations, but he hadn’t cared at the time.

Why didn’t he care? Because all the children like them had hearts on their right side. It even seemed to be the reason why they had been chosen.

“Dextrocardia isn’t an illness. You don’t need to be afraid.” Steven said. “But what are you trying to do? Friend, I thought you were just attracted to Miss Dong and wanted to get her attention by using special methods. But now it seems that you do have an ulterior motive for getting on this ship.”

Zhang Haiyan was still clutching his chest and realized that he had really made a mistake this time. He sighed and told himself he was getting rusty. If he had known this would happen, he would’ve pretended to have a stomachache.

He looked at Steven, thinking that the whole thing was troublesome. If others knew about his investigation, that would double the difficulty. Not to mention the fact that the Southern Archives was an obscure department. Even if these foreigners believed that he was here on business to investigate the plague, the news that the person responsible for spreading it was still on the ship would be enough to cause mass panic and ruin their journey.

He had to make up a story.

Zhang Haiyan’s mind was racing as he thought, *I was fine when I boarded the ship alone. My ticket was real. But why did I pretend to be sick?*

*Got it!*

“The person I like works as a doctor on this ship. I miss her very much.” Zhang Haiyan said. “I’m sorry that I bothered you. I’m a little too childish.”

“In the past, ships usually only had one or two general practitioners on board. But because of the plague in Malacca, the Nan’an has three doctors and four nurses. As far as I know, the doctors are all men. The person you like is a man?” Steven frowned.

*How do you know everything?!* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

He didn’t dare spout any more nonsense for a while and was still wondering how best to keep lying, when Steven said, “Stop pretending. You got on the ship because of Miss Dong, right? Where did you learn about us?”

Zhang Haiyan was still perfecting his next lie, so when Steven suddenly said something like this, he was dumbfounded. *Huh? What? What’s going on with you?*

Steven turned around, opened his suitcase, and said, “Although Miss Dong asked me to arrest you, I think it’s a bit too much. So, how much money will it take for you to get off the ship?”

Zhang Haiyan reared back and thought to himself, *weird. Is this a gift from heaven, or the awakening of the earth?*

He wanted to make more excuses when he suddenly found that there was something wrong with Steven’s hand movements. But just when he wanted to get a closer look, Steven suddenly turned around with a revolver in his hand.

He raised the gun and fired, but Zhang Haiyan immediately dodged it. The bullet hit the sofa behind him, sending the springs and cotton flying.

Zhang Haiyan kept moving around as Steven unhesitatingly fired all the bullets at once. They hit the mahogany furniture and bedding in the room, causing sawdust and cotton to fill the air.

Normal people wouldn't shoot so frequently, but Steven's hand was very steady as he fired all seven rounds in an instant. He spun the revolver's chamber, dropped the spent casings onto the ground, and already started reloading.

Zhang Haiyan wanted to approach him, but before he could even take two steps, Steven had already raised the gun again and fired. Zhang Haiyan dodged again, fully understanding how strong this opponent was.

This guy was clearly an expert gunman.

Zhang Haiyan rolled to dodge the second shot and jumped out onto the balcony, where he stepped onto the ship's railing and leaped into the sea. Steven shot the remaining bullets into the sea, returned to the room, and then picked up the phone. "Notify Mr. Warner that the whole ship is under martial law. That strange man is a liar. He jumped into the water on the left side of the ship. He must be captured."

Meanwhile, Zhang Haiyan's head popped out of the water. When he saw his cap floating next to him, he grabbed it and looked towards the shore. The police had gotten onto a boat and were rowing towards him.

The sea waves by the port became so big that they were almost like floating hills. Not only was the view poor, but there was some distance between Zhang Haiyan and the boats. The snipers were also blocked by the waves, so they had to stop their pursuit.

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As soon as He Jianxi got on the Baoen, he heard the sound of firecrackers coming from the huge ship behind him. He looked back in surprise, thinking that there was some kind of religious ceremony going on.

He was suddenly pushed to the ground from behind by the people who had just gotten on the boat.

The Baoen was a small barge heading to San Francisco. It had two masts, the sails were in tatters, and the deck was now full of cargo. The crew also raised chickens and ducks, so the feces and urine were everywhere and the smell was horrific. Both of He Jianxi's hands had landed in chicken shit, which felt greasy and moist.

He Jianxi quickly got up and checked whether there was any dirt on him. He was wearing his more decent casual clothes, which were far more suitable for life on a boat. He didn't want to get them dirty as soon as he had gotten on the boat.

A nearby sailor came to collect his ticket and said to him, "If you add a silver dollar<sup>(2)</sup>, you can have a woman accompany you at night." He pointed to a woman standing nearby. She seemed to be in a daze and was leaning against the cargo. "This woman is one silver dollar short, so she doesn't have enough money to buy a ticket. Brother, do her a favor. Pay her silver dollar, and she'll accompany you to San Francisco. I'm also a good person. She'll definitely die if she stays in Malacca."

He Jianxi looked at the woman, who seemed to notice his gaze. It appeared she had been rejected many times and had lost all hope. There was only despair in her eyes.

He Jianxi thought about it and went to grab the money in his pocket. He had one silver dollar since the owner of the winery had given him a lot of money. But things were expensive in San Francisco, and the money had to be spent very carefully. He thought it over and walked up to the woman.

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<sup>(2)</sup> It's called Da Yang in the Chinese text, and one Da Yang equals 1,000 pennies back then. They are silver coins that looked like this:





“Do you have any relatives in San Francisco?”

The woman instantly came to her senses, stood up straight, and said, “Yes, a little brother. My brother is there.”

“I don’t do perverted things. My mother said that I shouldn’t help people indiscriminately when I’m out and about, but if you’re willing to return this silver dollar to me in the future, I’ll lend it to you,” He Jianxi said.

It took the woman a while to realize that someone was willing to help her. She couldn’t believe her eyes and immediately nodded. “I, I’ll definitely pay you back. Thank you, little brother.”

He Jianxi took out the silver dollar, held it out half an inch, but didn’t let go. “You need to write me an IOU and press a fingerprint on it.”

The woman froze for a moment. “Little brother, such things are so troublesome! I don’t have anything. In fact, I was married, and my husband is dead. If you want me to accompany you, I won’t care since I’m experienced and not so young anymore.”

He Jianxi shook his head. “You have to promise to pay me back, or I won’t lend you the money.”

For some reason, the woman was perplexed. She looked to the sailor, who came over and said, “Come on. How can she possibly pay you back? It’ll be a very lonely journey. You two can look after each other. Moreover, don’t you know that a widow’s butt is rounder than beautiful girls’?”

When He Jianxi still shook his head, the sailor lit a cigarette and pushed him. “Go away. You two had a fateful meeting, but it didn’t work out.” The nearby sailors roared with laughter. He Jianxi didn’t know what they were laughing about. The sailor seemed to be embarrassed and pushed He Jianxi again, “Go and wash the chicken shit off. Are you saving it for dinner?” When he pushed him this time, his hand pressed onto He Jianxi’s pocket, which contained the silver dollars.

His banknotes were hidden in his waistband, but the silver dollars had been sewn into the inner pocket of his clothes. With this push, everyone heard the sound of coins clinking together, and could tell that the amount was quite large.

The people standing around suddenly became very quiet, and everyone turned to look at He Jianxi.

He was startled by the change in atmosphere. The sailor stopped pushing him and patted his pocket again. The clinking sound of coins became even clearer.

The sailor wasn't being polite and even looked down inside his pocket. The other sailors looked at him with interest, and even the woman was looking at him.

He Jianxi grabbed his luggage and looked into the other's eyes, but didn't know what they meant. He immediately closed his pocket and walked away. When he looked back, he found that the sailor was watching him, but didn't follow.

After taking a few steps, he looked at the chicken feces on his hands and started searching for the ship's toilet. At this time, all the sailors behind him stood up and slowly followed.

The toilets on the ship were usually on the side at the tail end of the deck. They were basically wooden boards with several holes in them. There was a bucket attached to the rope on the side that could be put into the sea to draw water up, which people could use for washing. And they could pee or take a dump by sitting above the holes since the sea was right below.

All the toilets on the ship were relatively clean. He Jianxi went in, looked behind him, and decided to pick a hole where he could conveniently sit down, and then fetch water to wash his hands.

He thought about which hole to choose for a long time. There were four of them, and he chose the second one from the left because it looked the

cleanest. He had just taken off his pants and was about to turn around and sit down when he saw a person's head poking out of the hole.

"Brother, hold it." Zhang Haiyan poked his head out and then climbed out of the hole with difficulty.

"Who are you? A stowaway?" He Jianxi asked in shock. It was a serious crime back then, and he might be thrown into the sea if he was incriminated.

"How can you think that?" Zhang Haiyan was completely soaked. He looked around and tossed his hair back. "When I was in the toilet just now, I suddenly took a nap and fell off. I'm sorry, so sorry. I get sleepy whenever I'm taking a dump. I even feel sleepy whenever I smell shit."

There was no way He Jianxi would believe this nonsense. But just as he was about to leave, the toilet door opened and a group of sailors walked.

They were all carrying daggers and went right up to He Jianxi. They grabbed his hair, had him kneel on the ground, and then someone immediately grabbed his arms. He Jianxi's mouth opened because of the pain, but someone quickly covered it.

His pocket was instantly torn open, and the silver dollars scattered all over the floor. Everyone panicked as they rolled towards the crevices on the side since the sea was right below. Someone immediately stepped on them, and the scene became chaotic.

"Quickly. Let's get his money before the boatswain finds out about it." The sailors' leader said. "Don't mess up."

They obviously didn't think there was another man in the toilet and froze when they looked up and saw Zhang Haiyan.

Zhang Haiyan looked down at the silver dollar under his foot, picked it up, and said a little awkwardly, "I'll buy a ticket with this."

## Chapter 17 – Despicable Plague God

The sailor looked back at his accomplices, winked, and they all moved to surround Zhang Haiyan with their daggers raised.

Zhang Haiyan counted the number of sailors and found that there were seven of them. For this kind of small barge, seven was a large number.

*I can't kill them. I can't cause a panic again. In addition, if I kill them all, this boat will never set off, and then I might affect a lot of people's lives.*

But the other party obviously didn't want to let him go and started surrounding him in a half-circle.

"Killing Chinese passengers on a ship. Aren't you afraid of being pestered by the plague god?" Zhang Haiyan asked with a smile.

Back then, they killed the sailors who killed Chinese people at sea. For a long time, the Chinese on this route gained some sort of respect. But as the murders decreased, their missions had also decreased, so their reputations seemed to have gradually faded.

"The plague god isn't that well informed and this person doesn't have any companions. In this corner, no one will see him getting killed." The leading sailor was a man with an Indian-style cloth wrapped around his head. Zhang Haiyan listened as he continued, "I'm afraid it's the same for you. Since you've witnessed the scene, I guess we'll have to kill you, too."

Now Zhang Haiyan understood why there were so many sailors. *They're obviously in a group and even came to the toilet to kill someone. It seems that my reputation is still lingering here. This young man should be on the boat alone without relatives, so they targeted him.*

He looked at the silver coins and thought to himself, *he's quite rich despite being so young.*

The sailors surrounding him were getting closer and closer. These people had been working on the water for a long time, so they were quite observant. They saw that this young man looked calm even though he was drenched and seemed a little absent-minded. As a result, they didn't dare move forward rashly.

Zhang Haiyan calculated the time. After a while, the police would definitely board the boat to investigate. To be on the safe side, he couldn't let things get any more out of control, so he decided to solve the problem quickly. He sneered before suddenly stepping forward, falling to his knees, and saying to the sailors, "Masters, please have mercy on us."

The sailors were startled and took a step back. Zhang Haiyan took out a roll of money from his pocket and offered it up with both hands. "This person is my cousin, and there are only two of us left in our family. If we both die, our family will have no descendants. Take the silver coins and the money. We promise not to tell a soul about it. Please have mercy on our cheap lives."

When the sailors looked at each other, Zhang Haiyan continued, "It's not robbery. We're giving you the money out of respect. You don't need to be afraid that the plague god will find out about it. Now that the plague is running rampant, you don't want to be condemned by the heavens, right?! We're all just trying to make a living."

Zhang Haiyan's eyes became red and watery as he spoke. The leading sailor frowned, took the money, and flipped through it. It wasn't a small amount, so he smiled and said, "Little brother, you're quite talented. You're not like those who want money but don't want their lives. You know that you have to worship a mountain when you see one."

As Zhang Haiyan nodded flatteringly, the leading sailor winked at the people behind him. They didn't want to kill people and cause trouble, either. They released their hold on He Jianxi, who started coughing after being painfully strangled.

The sailor patted Zhang Haiyan. "My name is Er Erlong. You can call me Brother Long. I will protect you on this boat. The money will be handed over to the brothers." With that said, he turned around. "Give them a single room. Our ladies are theirs. They can pick whoever they want."

The sailors were anxious to get out of the toilet and hurriedly picked the silver coins up. It seemed that they wanted to go and divide the huge amount of money.

Zhang Haiyan breathed a sigh of relief and then turned to help He Jianxi up with a grim look on his face. "They're pathetic," he said. "These people don't even know that they barely saved themselves just now. If they had been tougher, their lives would've ended—"

He Jianxi punched Zhang Haiyan in the face. "Those silver coins are mine. How could you give them my stuff? We can't give in to these kinds of people!" As soon as he finished speaking, he moved to chase after the sailors.

Zhang Haiyan grabbed him and gently moved his head to the side. He Jianxi's head hit the boat's wooden wall quite heavily, and he immediately passed out.

Zhang Haiyan touched his face. "This guy has quite a temper."

He Jianxi was young and still looked childish, almost like a teenager. Zhang Haiyan picked him up with one hand and put him on his back.

When He Jianxi woke up again, he was already in a single room.

The single room was actually a small space that had been separated from the passenger cabin. It had a little privacy, but there was only a curtain instead of a door. Two door panels laid out on the ground were their beds.

Bedding had already been spread out on He Jianxi's bed. Zhang Haiyan was sitting on the other bed without his shirt on. He was smoking a cigarette and

looking at him. Zhang Haiyan's bed didn't appear to have any bedding on it and looked completely bare.

Of course there was nothing. All the special treatment he could get was on the Nan'an, which was a kilometer away. Zhang Haiyan suspected that it was his fate to never get to sleep on a bed with springs.

He Jianxi sat up and found that he was still very dizzy. After a while, he remembered what had happened before he passed out.

"You—"

"Shut up." Zhang Haiyan looked at him coldly.

"I don't even know you. I'm going to get my money back. Ouch!" He had a terrible headache and felt the area where his head had been hit.

"You're a passenger on this boat. You want to get justice, and then what? Are you going to get off the boat? If you fight them, they won't let you stay on the boat," Zhang Haiyan said.

"I worked hard for that money. They can't just easily take someone's hard-earned money."

Zhang Haiyan pulled He Jianxi's waistband and dug out the banknotes. He flipped through them and found that a lot of words had been written on them. "Isn't there a lot of money? To the people on this boat, you're like someone who helped put their shoes on. Don't plan on dying if you can survive. Human life is so precious."

He Jianxi instantly panicked and quickly grabbed his waistband. "Give it back to me!"

Zhang Haiyan released his waistband and threw the money back to him. "Stay on the boat and hide your money. This ferry ticket is for entering the ghost gate, but your silver coins can at least give you a better chance at getting out. It's worth it."

He Jianxi immediately put the money back into his waistband and adjusted it.

“Let me ask you a question. Where’s this boat going?”

Since Zhang Haiyan gave the money back to him just now, He Jianxi calmed down and lowered his guard a bit. “To San Francisco.”

“San Francisco? Can this kind of small boat make it that far? As far as I can tell, the sailors on this kind of small boat will kill you all and throw you into the sea. It happens a lot.”

“After the legend of the plague god surfaced, there’s no such thing.” He Jianxi said. “It’s how my brother got to San Francisco successfully. Of course, it will be a difficult journey, but I’m used to it.”

“All your quilts have been infused with Chinese medicine. You’ve obviously made a lot of preparations.” Zhang Haiyan took a puff of his cigarette, and He Jianxi covered his nose with a very pained expression. “What’s wrong?”

“Your cigarette smells really bad.”

The sailors had given him these cigarettes, which just so happened to be the kind he liked to smoke back in the day. Since Zhang Haixia found them unpleasant, he had switched to another brand. It was rare that Zhang Haixia wasn’t around, so he could finally let himself go, but he didn’t expect he’d be judged again.

Zhang Haiyan couldn’t help but smile bitterly and think to himself, *I’ll stink you to death*. He deliberately took another puff. “Cousin, let’s discuss something and make a deal, ok?”

“I don’t want to make a deal with you. You gave my money to someone else. Can I do business with someone like you?”

“Ah, it has something to do with your money. If I can get your money back before I get off the ship, will you do me a favor?” Zhang Haiyan asked.



He Jianxi was stunned for a moment, unsure what Zhang Haiyan was planning.

“Look outside.” Zhang Haiyan said.

He Jianxi looked outside the curtain and saw that there were a lot of police officers in the cabin that were interrogating the guests. As he was looking, Zhang Haiyan crawled over and hid under his quilt.

“Hey, hey, hey, hey. What are you doing?” He Jianxi was furious. He hated it when others got under his quilt. He was very sensitive to smells, and couldn’t fall asleep on a bed that others had slept in.

Zhang Haiyan covered his head with the quilt. “Remember, I’m your wife. You just had sex with me. We aren’t dressed properly.” With that said, Zhang Haiyan immediately opened He Jianxi’s collar, quickly messed up his hair, and then shrank back under the quilt. He took a few gold needles out of his pocket.

Before He Jianxi could figure out what was going on, Zhang Haiyan whispered, “Help me with this, and I’ll help you get the money back. Otherwise, I’ll say you’re my accomplice and we’ll die together.”

Just as He Jianxi finally understood what was going on, the curtain was suddenly opened. The police came in to take a look and asked He Jianxi, “Who are you talking to? Get up. We need to see your faces.”

There was no way He Jianxi could improvise, so he started to panic. Just as his face flushed, he suddenly heard a female voice that sounded like silver bells coming from under his quilt. “Oh, who is it? I’m not wearing any clothes.”

## Chapter 18 – An Intersex Person

The policemen looked at each other and then laughed. “Why so anxious? Doing obscene activities during the daytime?”

He Jianxi’s face was flushed, but it was because he was angry and frightened.

When did he have a woman in his bed?

He was positive that there definitely wasn’t anyone else under the quilt just now. Zhang Haiyan was the one who got under it. He saw it with his very own eyes. How did he suddenly become a woman?

Could it be that Zhang Haiyan was a man disguised as a woman? Wait, that couldn’t be right. Wasn’t he half-naked just now?

He Jianxi was utterly perplexed. Moreover, what did he say to him just now? He would claim he was his accomplice? There was too much information, which almost made He Jianxi break out in a cold sweat.

The policemen just thought that the kid was being shy, and they ended up laughing even harder. Then, they heard the woman under the quilt say, “It’s not daytime. There’s no such thing as daytime in the world.”

“You even dared touch a woman on this kind of boat. Watch out, or you might get syphilis.” The police lowered the curtain and continued their investigation.

He Jianxi listened to the sound of the policemen walking away. He wanted to flip the quilt over immediately to see what was going on, but when he turned around, Zhang Haiyan had already returned to his previous position. Not even his cigarette had been extinguished.

Zhang Haiyan looked at him coldly. “You don’t know how to lie to people. How have you even survived up until now?” He was still talking in that sultry female voice.

He Jianxi looked at Zhang Haiyan's chest. Well, he had never seen a woman's chest since he had started to learn the ways of the world, but in his mind, a woman's chest was bound to have something. Zhang Haiyan's chest, however, had nothing but pectoral muscles.

Zhang Haiyan looked like all of the men he had seen before.

*Is it possible that he's one of those intersex people<sup>(1)</sup> I've heard about before?*

He Jianxi's mind was blown. At that time, he didn't understand the concepts of gender equality. His first reaction was that an intersex person had slept in his bed. He didn't know if it was because his head had been hit earlier, or because he couldn't handle the situation before him, but he started to feel dizzy.

Zhang Haiyan touched his bed and said, "How am I supposed to sleep on this? I found that your bed was very comfortable as I lay on it just now. Can we sleep together? I'll only be staying here for a few days anyways."

His voice sounded beautiful and charming, as if he was the only orchid in an empty valley.

He Jianxi tilted his head and fainted on the bed.

Zhang Haiyan sat there stunned for a while. It was his first time seeing someone faint while he was still talking to them.

He sighed.

At this time, he heard the sound of the Nan'an's horn. He looked out from a crack in the boat's planking and saw the Nan'an's chimneys emitting smoke. It seemed like the ship was about to set sail.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Can also be called androgynous, hermaphrodite, or a whole slew of other politically and not politically correct terms. Here's more [info](#)

*Damn it.* Zhang Haiyan knocked on the boat planks. There were police officers outside, so he couldn't leave yet. And it was still bright out, so he couldn't get into the water again, either.

In any case, he'd have to wait until evening to find a way. Moreover, the barge couldn't keep up with the iron ship's speed, even if he hijacked it to chase after the Nan'an.

He didn't know if Zhang Ruipu's men had seen him diving into the water just now. If they did, he was worried that Haixia would be in danger.

He closed his eyes and began to recall the old sea map from the conference room that contained information on the various sea routes. His mind raced through it quickly and it only took him a short amount of time to find that he still had one more chance.

If the Nan'an departed now, it would go to the deep-water port in Singapore and then turn back.

The route to San Francisco and the route to Xiamen were headed in the same direction. Brother Long had told him that the Baoen would set off at dusk, so based on his calculations, they would enter the open sea earlier than the Nan'an.

As long as he dove into the area where the coastal water met the open sea, he could float on the Nan'an's route. If he was lucky, the Nan'an would arrive an hour after that. Although it was impossible to estimate the distance between the two ships accurately at that point, it wouldn't be more than four kilometers.

In addition, it might happen tomorrow at midnight when the surrounding sea was dark and the lights on the Nan'an would be bright. He could swim toward it.

The iron ship moved very fast, so he had only one chance to swim right in front of it and wait for it to come. The Nan'an had very steep sides, so he'd

have to find a way to climb up. All of this could only be done if there weren't any accidents.

This was what happened when playing a dangerous game. From the moment Zhang Haiyan talked to Miss Dong, he understood that this may be the result.

Before, he could always manage to make a narrow escape. But he was alone this time and had failed at the last moment.

He had to react faster and think more comprehensively. He was on his own now.

## Chapter 19 – The Plague God’s Kiss

When He Jianxi woke up again at dusk, Zhang Haiyan was no longer across from him. There were various sounds outside that were noisy, but they were different from before. Moreover, the ship was shaking badly. He immediately checked his waistband and felt relieved when he found that the money was still there.

He left the small cabin and understood why the sounds had changed. It was because they had already set off. The voices on the shore were no longer audible, the sea breeze was stronger, and the half-sail had been lowered to full-sail.

The people on the ship had become quiet as they tried to adapt to their new life at sea. Whether it was comfortable or not, this broken ship would be their home for the next few months.

The sea at dusk was very beautiful. The waves were neither big nor small, and the ship looked strangely beautiful under the soft light.

*Where is that intersex person? Was it just a dream? No. My silver coins are still gone.*

He Jianxi was captivated by the dusk and the setting sun in the distance. At this moment, he suddenly didn’t want to think about anything else. *I’ll just appreciate the beautiful scenery first, even though I know I’ll face this same scene every day for the next few months.*

As he was thinking this, he suddenly heard a clacking sound coming from off to the side. He turned and saw the intersex person playing mahjong with a few passengers.

*Fuck, it wasn’t a dream after all.*

Zhang Haiyan had just won. He flipped the tiles and waited for the passengers to give him the money. There were a lot of silver coins sitting in front of him, and the sailors were all watching him very closely.

He Jianxi walked over. Once Zhang Haiyan saw him, he counted out a pile of silver coins and handed them to him. "Take them. I've returned the money to you." With that said, he counted out another pile of silver coins for Brother Long. "Brother Long, here. Give them to your brothers."

Brother Long had obviously been rewarded more than once, for he took them and said, "How generous of you!"

Zhang Haiyan put a cigarette between his lips. "My cousin isn't sophisticated, so he'll definitely bring some trouble to Brother Long. Please take care of him."

Brother Long immediately took out a match and lit the cigarette for Zhang Haiyan. "Don't worry, Brother Yan, I didn't know you were such a great man before. If I had known you were Mr. Ruipu's apprentice, I wouldn't have been so presumptuous."

"Remember to keep the things that I've written. When my cousin arrives in San Francisco, you can take the slip and go to Mr. Zhang Ruipu to get the money. It's a simple errand. Don't mess it up."

Brother Long nodded. His behavior was so flattering that it was almost sickening.

He Jianxi was puzzled as he looked at the silver coins. "You won these. I want my own money back."

"You and your money are already that familiar with each other? Do you have feelings for it?" Zhang Haiyan laughed. "Brother Long. Look at this kid. He's Mr. Zhang Ruipu's accountant. He'll never do anything wrong. He's a piece of work, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is. He's a piece of work."

Zhang Haiyan handed the silver coins to Brother Long and asked him to pass them to He Jianxi, who finally accepted them. He immediately gripped the coins tightly before he turned around to leave.

Zhang Haiyan won again this time.

The passenger on the side was covered in a cold sweat and going crazy. He glanced at the other passengers. A middle-aged woman came up to pull him away. "Stop it, old man. You'll lose everything if you keep going."

The passenger shook the woman off. "Go away. I'm losing because you can't fucking stop talking." With that said, he took out another silver coin and looked at Zhang Haiyan.

He Jianxi felt like something was wrong. He raised his hands and sniffed them, and found the faint smell of turmeric. He turned around, looked at Zhang Haiyan's hands, and instantly became furious when realized what was going on.

When he went back again and saw that Zhang Haiyan had a set of good tiles in his hands, he immediately asked him, "You're cheating?"

Zhang Haiyan was stunned. He Jianxi grabbed his hands and smelled them. *That's right. It's the smell of turmeric.*

"He has turmeric," he said to everyone. "He's cheating by marking these tiles with it. Whose money here isn't hard-earned? If you cheat and steal their money like this, they'll die. You're treating these people improperly. Are you not afraid of the plague god coming after you?!"

Everyone looked at Zhang Haiyan, who was dumbfounded in the face of He Jianxi's accusations. But before he got the chance to answer, the passenger on the side grabbed Zhang Haiyan's collar and cried, "You're cheating?!"

Zhang Haiyan was knocked over by a punch. He Jianxi also fell since Zhang Haiyan bumped into him. Then he saw the other three mahjong players get up and surround Zhang Haiyan.



Brother Long immediately came to help Zhang Haiyan up, but the other passengers gathered around to watch the scene. The sailors and the passengers were suddenly divided into two factions.

“You sailors are working with this liar to cheat and steal our money while we’re on the boat. You better give us an explanation today, and return our money to us!” The leading gambler yelled.

The other people on the boat had been bullied by the sailors before and were already very angry, so they immediately agreed.

He Jianxi was overjoyed as he saw everyone unite. He stood up and said, “They also rob and kill people. We’re passengers who have paid for our tickets. We want our rights!”

Everyone shouted.

There were more guests on the boat, which meant more people surrounded the sailors.

The sailor immediately panicked and looked at Zhang Haiyan, “Brother Yan, you’re in the wrong because you cheated.”

“I didn’t cheat.” Zhang Haiyan said with a smile, “The three of them are the ones who used turmeric. My hands just happened to touch it. Cousin, if you don’t believe me, you can sniff them and see who has the strongest smell of turmeric on them. Is it me, or them? They’re professional scammers who have scammed enough money in Malacca. Now they’re ready to go to San Francisco and cheat more people. They’re clever and have sufficient capital. If you keep them on board, you’ll all be unlucky.”

While he was speaking, He Jianxi had found that something was off. Since the two factions had separated, he clearly smelled the strong scent of turmeric on his side.

He moved his nose and was just about to say something when the passenger punched He Jianxi’s nose and knocked him to the ground. “How can you

believe his nonsense? Don't be polite to them. From now on, we're the bosses of this boat. There are more of us! Look, who has most of our money? Do we look like liars?"

Everyone looked at Zhang Haiyan. To be honest, he was the one who looked like a liar the most.

One of the passengers who was there to watch the show said, "This person has a compartment to live in, while we all have to sleep on a wide bed together. He's young and rich enough to live in a compartment. He must have swindled the money." Everyone started clamoring all at once.

The leader of the passengers sneered, looked at Zhang Haiyan, and then shouted, "That's right. It's all dirty money. You must still have a lot of money on you!"

Brother Long saw that the situation wasn't good and immediately pushed Zhang Haiyan out. "Don't act rashly. Solve your own grievances by yourselves. Don't disturb the boatswain. Otherwise, no one will get to San Francisco."

"Brother Long, you have no loyalty." Zhang Haiyan took a big puff of his cigarette and looked at the crowd. He was surrounded by a lot of people, but they all stayed on the sidelines, unwilling to attack first. They were professional scammers, after all. They weren't good at inciting others, so they didn't know how to end it.

There was a stalemate for a while, before the woman from earlier suddenly said, "You wicked person, let the plague god of the sea take care of you."

It was as if the leading passenger had a sudden epiphany, and he immediately agreed. "Yes. We'll take the money back and throw him into the sea. The plague god of the sea will take him. There are blades in the plague god's mouth. Let him cut off your lying, stinky mouth!"

*What a weak bastard! If I have to deal with these kinds of people all day long, it's no wonder I'll get rusty.* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

When the leading passenger saw that no one was willing to make a move, he winked at the other two mahjong players. The three people pulled out daggers and moved to surround Zhang Haiyan on all three sides.

The first one rushed behind Zhang Haiyan, who dodged slightly and smashed the man's nose in with his elbow. As the person went flying, Zhang Haiyan swiftly moved to face the second one, patted his head directly, and knocked him to the ground.

He moved so fast that no one could see him clearly. By the time the leading passenger showed up in front of him, Zhang Haiyan had already squeezed his neck, lifted him up, and kissed him.

Everyone was extremely shocked. The passenger was kissed to the point that his hands were flailing, but he couldn't break free.

When Zhang Haiyan finally let go of him, the person dropped to the ground, covered his throat, and started heaving.

The woman rushed towards him, "You bastard! You've harassed my man!"

The leading passenger pushed the woman away, grabbed his neck, and started vomiting. He spat out copious amounts of blood, along with two or three blades. When the blades fell onto the deck, all those gathered took a step back.

"Didn't you want to see the plague god?" Zhang Haiyan turned his back to the setting sun, put his hands in his pockets, and opened his mouth. The blades in his mouth reflected the light. "It's been a long time, everyone."

*Alas, Zhang Haixia is not by my side. I'm being a bit reckless, but it feels so good. Being reckless truly makes people happy, after all.* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

As He Jianxi fell to the ground, his last thought was: the hero he admired, the plague god of the sea, the hero who protected the Chinese on this sea route, was an intersex person.

## Chapter 20 – Changing Ships

He Jianxi was patted awake by Zhang Haiyan. It was already dark out and he was in a cabin in the ship's hold. Instead of the previous compartment, he found that he was in a large cabin.

He and Zhang Haiyan looked at each other. There were medical herbs on his nose, which smelled very pungent. He Jianxi wanted to peel them off.

As soon as he sat up, he saw that all the crew members and sailors were on the other side of the cabin. They were squeezed into a corner and watching the two of them.

“What...what's going on?” He Jianxi asked. Zhan Haiyan looked at the crowd that was watching them from a distance and said, “You've been in a coma for a day. Isn't this the treatment that the plague god should have?”

“Are you really the plague god of the sea?” He Jianxi asked. He touched his nose and hissed in pain.

“Your nose is precious, so protect it if you can. You could even smell the subtle scent of turmeric that those scammers worked really hard on.” As Zhang Haiyan spoke, he threw He Jianxi a package. He Jianxi found out that it was his own luggage.

“Check your things. I've already packed everything for you except the bedding. Is there anything missing?”

He Jianxi flipped through his luggage. His things were very simple. Except for the necessities, there wasn't anything extraneous, so he could see everything clearly at a glance. “Why did you pack my luggage?”

“Because we're leaving.” Zhang Haiyan looked at the distant crowd. “Do you think we can still stay on this boat?”

“What do you mean, ‘we’?” He Jianxi was confused and thought to himself, *if someone has to leave, shouldn’t you be the only one who can’t stay on this boat any longer?*

“I’m the plague god of the sea, and you’re the plague god’s cousin. Do you know how many people will come after you? You’ll be arrested when you reach shore. They’ll dig out your little friend and force you to tell them where I am,” Zhang Haiyan said.

“But I’m not your cousin.”

“Do you think others will believe it?” Zhang Haiyan sat down and looked at the dark sea outside.

“You’re a hero who protects ordinary passengers. Why are they hiding from you? Why are they afraid of you?” He Jianxi was a little surprised.

Zhang Haiyan turned around and looked at the people on the opposite side indifferently. “A hero? I’m not a hero. I kill those who feel guilty. It’s inevitable that ordinary people will feel guilty.” Zhang Haiyan looked at He Jianxi with interest. “Are you not afraid of me? Do you have a clear conscience?”

“My conscience is clear.” He Jianxi felt as if his wound was hurting more and more, but he still tried to endure it.

“Those who have a clear conscience are either extremely kind, extremely evil, or extremely stupid. Which one are you?”

“None of those.” He Jianxi said. “Is it so difficult not to do bad things?”

Zhang Haiyan pointed to the people on the opposite side, who all flinched back. “You ask them.”

He Jianxi certainly wasn’t stupid enough to go and ask them, but he didn’t understand why Zhang Haiyan said that they were leaving. This was the

place where the outer sea met the coastal waters. The blue sea was endless, and there wasn't even a reef. Where could they possibly go?

Zhang Haiyan got closer to He Jianxi and said, "Let me ask you a question. Have you been so upright since you were young? How have you lived until now?"

"I'm an accountant," He Jianxi said. "An accountant should always be persistent. My job requires me to be honest. If you encounter something that needs to be negotiated, there will naturally be other people to take care of it. I think I can survive because accounting jobs have been around since ancient times."

"Chivalry." Zhang Haiyan was somewhat surprised. Some white people cared about this, but no one in Malacca did. But there were a lot of British people in Malacca, and they might like this kid's attitude. But when he arrived in San Francisco, Zhang Haiyan figured he'd probably only be able to work on building railways.

He Jianxi wouldn't do well on this boat, either.

Zhang Haiyan reached a decision. He could have left He Jianxi here and gone off by himself since Zhang Haiqi had also taught them how to be heartless. He had seen several stubborn people over the years who weren't worthy of sympathy, but for some reason, he felt that He Jianxi was different.

It was difficult to describe what it was. If Zhang Haiyan was forced to describe it, he could only say that He Jianxi was very lucky. But why was that the case? After He Jianxi got on the boat, he did countless things that were considered taboo while being out and about, but he still came out unscathed. Moreover, he had always had this kind of attitude but was still alive even after all these years. Did this mean that he was an extremely lucky person?

Zhang Haiyan needed as much luck as he could get right now. Moreover, he didn't want his mistakes to affect innocent people's lives. Zhang Haiyan was

fine with sacrificing others for profit, but he couldn't accept that others were paying for his mistakes.

He looked at his watch and found that it was almost time. Zhang Haiyan did a few stretches before saying to the people on the opposite side, "Good times always pass so fast. I'll remember your faces, and come back at any time. I'll know if you dare say a single bad word about me. Every bad thing that you do will be relayed to me. Tell others what you've seen. Everyone has to tell ten of their friends about it. Otherwise, you'll see me every time."

With that said, he handed He Jianxi his luggage. He Jianxi still didn't react, so Zhang Haiyan grabbed him and threw him over the side of the boat. As He Jianxi fell directly into the sea, everyone on board screamed.

Zhang Haiyan stood on the side of the boat, flipped over backward, and jumped into the sea.

When He Jianxi popped his head out of the water, he saw Zhang Haiyan falling down as well. "What are you doing?!" He scolded. "Why do you, the plague god, always have to do unexpected things? We're going to drown!"

Zhang Haiyan floated along the waves and looked into the distance. There was a small spot of light on the distant sea. It was the Nan'an. This was exactly what he had calculated.

"We're not going to drown."

"I'm going to San Francisco! I don't want to die here!"

"You aren't going to die here."

Zhang Haiyan threw out a rope, and He Jianxi grabbed it. "My bedding!"

Zhang Haiyan pulled the rope and started swimming towards that spot of light, telling himself that he only needed one more day. Just one more day. After he got on the ship, he could get the evidence, catch the criminals, and

learn the truth behind the plague. Then he could steal a lifeboat and go back to save Zhang Haixia.

For He Jianxi, the four hours in the sea were like hell. The sea was cold at night, and although it wasn't the kind of bitter cold that could take people's lives, his feet were still spasming.

But it was as if this plague god could breathe underwater. When he couldn't swim anymore, Zhang Haiyan would swim with one hand and pull him forward with the other without decreasing his speed at all. When he was having cramps, Zhang Haiyan would hold his chin above the water so that he could take a break.

Even so, four hours was still too long. He Jianxi's consciousness immediately became blurred and he couldn't remember how he got on the Nan'an. He only remembered that a huge palace was sailing towards them on the sea. It was so huge, and the lights were so beautiful that it was just like a fairyland. He even thought that he was dead and had sunk into the Crystal Palace<sup>(1)</sup>.

After that, his back met a solid deck. This was the first time he had felt at ease lying against a hard surface. And the most amazing thing was that the deck was still warm.

Since the water was too cold, even the deck felt warm.

It was only when Zhang Haiyan dragged him to a corner and made him drink from a finger-sized bottle of spirits that He Jianxi slowly recovered.

His whole body was weak, and it felt as if all of his bones had been removed. Even his muscles hurt like they'd been pricked with needles.

"Where are we?" He asked weakly.

"We're on the Nan'an. It's a steamship heading to Xiamen."

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<sup>(1)</sup> A cast iron and plate glass structure, originally built in Hyde Park, London, to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. More info [here](#)



“Why Xiamen? I’m going to San Francisco. Big Brother, what are you doing exactly?”

“I’m saving your life.”

Zhang Haiyan felt that this kid was truly lucky if such a difficult plan had succeeded so smoothly. “Kid, there may be a reason why you’ve been able to survive even though you’re so stubborn. Your ancestors must have saved a lot of people in their previous lives.”

*Would I have encountered you if my ancestors had done so many good things?* He Jianxi thought dazedly.

The ship was very quiet. The Nan’an wasn’t a warship, so no one was patrolling on deck. Zhang Haiyan was extremely tired and also drank a bottle of spirits as he began to observe their surroundings.

He Jianxi slowly came back to his senses and suddenly understood what Zhang Haiyan had said. He grabbed Zhang Haiyan, “You bastard. I’m going to San Francisco. I don’t want to go to Xiamen as a stowaway. My cousin is still waiting for me.”

Zhang Haiyan covered his mouth. “Shut up, or you can swim back.”

He Jianxi became enraged. “I’m going to report you. I’m going to report you!”

Zhang Haiyan patted him. “Don’t worry. No one believes that anyone can sneak aboard a ship in this area. There aren’t any bad sailors or crooks on this ship, so don’t be afraid. After arriving in Xiamen, I’ll let you go to San Francisco. You’re just taking a detour. That’s it. You can go to my room first while I go handle something else. I’ll explain it to you in detail when I come back. Just behave for now.” With that said, he helped He Jianxi up and gave him the key to his room.

But He Jianxi didn't have the strength to stand up at all. He tried for a few seconds but ended up collapsing on the ground. He looked up at Zhang Haiyan and asked, "Who are you exactly?"

Zhang Haiyan calculated the time. If he was going to use the lifeboat to return to Malacca, he couldn't wait any longer. When the ship got into the outer ocean currents, he might end up in Borneo if his hands slipped while he was heading for shore.

He looked around and realized that he couldn't just leave He Jianxi on the deck, so he helped him up and said, "Alright. I'll take you to the restaurant first."

The two of them walked towards the passage below the first-class cabin. It was already very late, so the restaurant was closed. The room was dark as Zhang Haiyan pushed the door open and went inside.

The ship's infirmary was just below the corridor at the other end of the restaurant, so he could reach it within three minutes.

*I'll find a booth and put him there, Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. If anyone discovers him, they'll just think he's drunk.*

They walked into the pitch-black restaurant, where Zhang Haiyan put He Jianxi down. Once he was settled, Zhang Haiyan tried to make himself walk calmly towards the infirmary.

The medical staff consisted of ten people—three doctors and seven nurses—and whoever was spreading the plague on the ship was among them. At least four people were involved in this matter, and they all slept in the infirmary's cabin. But based on the current time, they hadn't fallen asleep just yet.

Their equipment had to be in the infirmary because it was the only place where people wouldn't be suspicious upon seeing those kinds of things.

“Take one and kill the other three,” Zhang Haiyan showed a vicious smile. He planned to grab someone and then take some bread and wine from the restaurant’s bread box and head straight for the deck where he would lower a lifeboat down to the sea. If everything went well, he would see the shore by this time tomorrow.

The lights in the infirmary’s corridor were very dim, so Zhang Haiyan moved very lightly and cautiously.

He found that the infirmary was completely dark, which didn’t make any sense since hospitals never turned off their lights.

He opened the door and swiftly moved into the infirmary. He had only taken two steps before he noticed that the chairs and beds looked very strange under the light shining in from the doorway.

He took a closer look and felt his heart thump. There were people sitting on the chairs or lying on the infirmary beds.

They were all motionless, but he couldn’t see what was going on since the lights weren’t turned on.

Zhang Haiyan immediately calmed himself down and tried to listen for the sound of heartbeats, but didn’t hear anything.

*Shit*, he thought to himself. He carefully approached and saw that there were more than a dozen corpses piled up further in the room. They were all the ship’s medics. Their throats had been pierced, their mouths were wide open, and they were all lying in the dark.

At that moment, Zhang Haiyan saw a corpse among them that wasn’t a ship’s medic. It was the sailor who had shown him around the ship before. His mouth was also wide open, and there was an envelope placed on his body.

Zhang Haiyan looked around the area and realized that this was a trap.

He immediately turned around to leave, but suddenly heard a hissing sound as poison gas started pouring out of the corpses' mouths.

Zhang Haiyan immediately covered his mouth and rushed back to the door. He looked through the door's small glass window and saw three men wearing gas masks standing outside. They waved at him under the dim light.

As those men continued to watch him, he slammed the door with all his strength, but it remained motionless.

Zhang Haiyan rushed back to the medical room and checked the ventilation ducts, but found that they were all locked. There were no windows, and anything that could provide a way out had been blocked.

He rushed back to the door and looked at those people, suddenly understanding what was going on. All the strange things he had felt during his investigation were answered at this moment.

But it was too late. He was going to die.

He let out a yell and used all his strength to slam against the door, but the lock held firm. As the people outside looked at him amusedly, all his anger exploded. He shattered the small window with a punch and then grabbed one of the men's clothes.

The man didn't struggle, but looked at Zhang Haiyan with a sneer and slowly grabbed his hand. Zhang Haiyan realized that he couldn't use any of his strength at all.

At this time, they heard footsteps at the entrance of the corridor, and then He Jianxi shouted, "That's him!"

The man with the gas mask immediately turned around and saw several police officers rushing down from the entrance. The police officers immediately drew their guns upon seeing the scene, "What are you doing?!"

At this moment, Zhang Haiyan took advantage of that quarter of a second when the man who grabbed him wasn't paying attention. With the last bit of his strength, he immediately grabbed the person's neck.

The person also reacted very quickly and inserted his fingers between Zhang Haiyan's palm and his own throat as Zhang Haiyan tried to snap his neck.

At almost the exact same time, the other two men rushed towards He Jianxi and the police officers.

Zhang Haiyan grinned evilly and flexed, crushing both the man's fingers and his throat. He then pulled the man's head toward the window so that he could take the gas mask and put it on himself.

On the other side, the two men immediately launched their attack. They threw daggers at the policemen, killing them before they even had time to react.

He Jianxi was pressed up against the wall and watching it all in surprise when he suddenly saw the two people coming right at him.

Zhang Haiyan put on the mask and took a few deep breaths before he finally felt better. He then dislocated his shoulder and elbow joints before sticking his hand out of the window again. His outstretched hand reached the door handle but found that an iron rod had been jammed through it. He pulled the iron rod away and finally opened the door.

Zhang Haiyan rushed out of the infirmary full of poison gas and tore off the gas mask.

The two killers were just about to reach He Jianxi when they heard someone behind them say coldly, "Come to daddy. Daddy will love you properly."

## Chapter 21 – Nepenthes

Zhang Haiyan's attack lasted for seven minutes. Based on his previous experience, the battle should have been over in an instant, but he didn't expect that the two assassins were able to ward him off. Even though it was absolutely clear that Zhang Haiyan had the upper hand, the two killers didn't panic at all.

For ordinary people, two fists, two feet, two elbows, and two knees were just a few of the parts that could be used to kill their opponents. But Zhang Haiyan also had blades under his tongue.

When Zhang Haiyan completely focused on attacking, he was like an animal. Not only would the blades suddenly shoot out from his mouth, but they would also slash the opponents' throats and wrists. It was impossible to fight him using ordinary people's reaction speed. But seven minutes later, the two killers already had more than a dozen injuries and still weren't panicking.

Because he had inhaled the poison gas, Zhang Haiyan's attack soon came to a halt. His lungs started to burn, and his movements gradually slowed down. The two assassins finally found a chance and threw their daggers. As soon as Zhang Haiyan dodged, the two immediately rushed out of the corridor, ran to the restaurant, and started clapping their hands.

Zhang Haiyan chased after them. There were numerous doors to the restaurant, so the two killers had quickly separated and rushed into the darkness.

Zhang Haiyan picked one of them and moved to give chase, but his lungs suddenly hurt and he knelt down. He took a few deep breaths, coughed a few times, and instantly calmed down.

His opponents were too well-organized.

*I shouldn't chase them. Since they clapped their hands just now, there may be a second trap. Moreover, I've been exposed and my internal organs are hurt.*

Zhang Haiyan immediately returned and helped He Jianxi up. He Jianxi leaned against the wall, looked at the policemen's bodies, and started to throw up.

"You really went and reported me, cousin," Zhang Haiyan said.

"They found me when they were patrolling. Stowaways are going to be incarcerated. I don't want to be incriminated because of you. I'm going to San Francisco. I don't have the money to buy another ticket."

"You should realize that *you* are the stowaway on this ship. I have a ticket." Zhang Haiyan pulled the ticket stub from his pocket and looked down at the policemen's bodies. They had all been killed in an instant. "You had no intention of killing them, but they died because of you."

He Jianxi was obviously shocked and sad and didn't know what else to say.

"What happened on this ship?" He Jianxi asked him. "What the hell is going on? Who are you?"

"I already said that I would tell you. These people might be pirates. We have to put aside our personal grievances for now. Otherwise, the money on the ship will be stolen, and the women will be ruined."

"The women won't be ruined," He Jianxi said. "Those people were women."

"Women?" Zhang Haiyan froze for a second. The fight was so intense just now that he didn't even notice.

"I can tell that they're women by their smell."

Zhang Haiyan clutched his chest as he looked at He Jianxi and asked, "What do women smell like?" He had no idea what kind of life people with a good sense of smell were living every day.

He Jianxi stayed silent as he watched Zhang Haiyan pick up the gas mask and drag the policemen's bodies into the infirmary.

"If they're pirates, we have to warn the people on the ship. What are you doing?"

"Keep dreaming, cousin." Zhang Haiyan said. "We may die before we get the chance to warn anybody."

He Jianxi was shocked. He pulled himself up, stood against the wall, and took a deep breath.

Zhang Haiyan put the bodies down and stood right outside the infirmary, watching the poison gas dissipate. He could tell that it was a trap as soon as he saw the sailor's corpse. The people who set up this trap knew about his relationship with Zhang Ruipu's sailor and had their eyes on him ever since he stepped foot on the ship to investigate the plague.

If it hadn't been for the fact that Steven wanted to kill him, which resulted in him jumping into the sea to escape, then he would've been anxious to go to the infirmary before the ship set off. He could've been dead by now. The gods had blessed him by having Steven interrupt his investigation. As a result, he was nearly two days late when he reached the trap those people had set up for him.

This was a difference between heaven and earth. The assassins knew that he would fall for the trap at that time and were ready. But after he jumped into the sea, the assassins waited for a long time and didn't see him. The situation became one where they didn't know when the prey would show up.

They had been hyper-aware during the initial situation but would start to lose focus and gradually slack off during the latter situation.



The biggest difference was that when he returned to the ship, he brought back stubborn He Jianxi who insisted on reporting him.

If this series of coincidences didn't occur, he would be dead right now.

But what surprised him the most was that all the ship's doctors were dead.

During his previous investigation, he suspected that three of the ship's doctors were spreading the plague. But now these people were all dead. In other words, in addition to the ship's doctors, there were people on the ship who also participated in spreading the plague. These people had very strong combat skills and were very ruthless. It was possible the ship's doctors may have just been taken advantage of, but either way, they had all been killed.

As the poisonous gas in the infirmary gradually dissipated, he put on the gas mask and told He Jianxi not to go in. He then went in himself and opened one of the ship doctor's mouths, which had a gas cylinder stuffed inside. The cylinder's pin had been punched through the back of the corpse's head and was connected to a steel wire that led from the foot of the chair to the door.

When he first came in, the people outside pulled the steel wire, and the poison gas poured out of the corpses' mouths.

He reached a hand into the corpse's throat and pulled the gas cylinder out. There were German words written on it, and he could tell that it was military-grade poison gas produced in Germany.

He looked at the gas cylinders and thought for a while before he finally had a flash of inspiration. He started searching everywhere and finally found a lot of these gas cylinders in the room's medicine cabinets. There were fifty or sixty of them, and they had all been placed in various corner cabinets.

Zhang Haiyan understood what was going on.

When he walked out of the infirmary carrying the gas cylinder, He Jianxi asked, "Tell me, can I still go to San Francisco?"

Zhang Haiyan showed him the gas cylinder. “This is a military-grade gas cylinder. It’s very difficult to come by and is worth a lot of money.”

If the murderers noticed him investigating the plague on the ship and wanted to kill him, then they would shoot him or poison his food at most. Why would they use professional gas cylinders?

He could tell that these cylinders had been specially prepared in advance. It meant that the murderers targeted him and wanted to kill him from the beginning because they knew he had excellent skills. That was why they had planned to kill him like this.

But why? Zhang Haiyan couldn’t figure it out. He hadn’t been thinking in that direction at all. Could it be that Zhang Ruipu and the other party agreed to kill him? But if it was the case, Zhang Ruipu could have killed him before he got on the ship.

If it wasn’t Zhang Ruipu, then—

When Zhang Haiyan saw that there were more gas cylinders in the cabinets, he had a sudden epiphany and finally understood the logic behind everything.

What if he wasn’t the only person that the killers were after?

What if the killers wanted to kill all of those who were investigating the plague on the Nan’an?

If so, the obvious clue he had found wasn’t accidentally left by the murderers. Instead, it was a honey-coated thread that was deliberately placed (Nepenthes secrete a sweet thread in order to hunt insects. Ants will follow this thread and enter the Nepenthes’ cage).

So those who investigated the plague would eventually board the Nan’an, find this clue, and then enter their poison gas trap.

If that were true, then he had an even more terrifying thought.

He ignored He Jianxi and the corpses and said, "Find a place to hide."

He rushed all the way to the sailors' duty room that was opposite his room. The sailors inside had already gone out to patrol the buildings, so he found the list of their names and began to flip through it.

*Song Chai. Song Chai. Song Chai.*

He found the name Song Chai. There was a note saying that he was of Chinese and Vietnamese descent. His Chinese name was Zhang Haiyun.

This was the naming rule the Southern Archives used. Their last name was Zhang and the character in the middle was "hai". The last character would come from a poem.

The Nan'an was a Nepenthes! Song Chai had been warning the spies who showed up after him that the entire plague incident was a Nepenthes thread used to lure the spies sent by the Southern Archives and hunt them down.

## Chapter 22 – Where To?

*Song Chai was a Southern Archives field agent. He was just like me. But he went missing while he was working and investigating the plague on this ship.*

Zhang Haiyan searched for the full roster of passengers and started to read through it once he found it. He deliberately looked for the rooms where guests didn't consume any drinks when the waiters went to replenish them because this meant that there weren't any passengers in them.

He found nineteen rooms where the guests didn't need the waiters to replenish their drinks for a long time. Zhang Haiyan's heart was filled with numerous doubts, but there were goosebumps all over his body. At least half of the passengers in the nineteen rooms had the surname Zhang.

He copied the room numbers, took the keys hanging in the sailors' room, walked past those sailors who were making their rounds, and went directly into several of the rooms he had copied down. No one was in the rooms and they were very tidy as if nobody had ever stayed there.

He stood inside one of the rooms and saw a fly buzzing by. When it stopped on a piece of felt, he walked over and touched the material.

There was blood on it.

This was why Song Chai was catching flies. He had been looking for bloodstains. There had been a fierce fight in the room, and someone was seriously injured.

Zhang Ruipu's surname was also Zhang. People from the Southern Archives had been trying to kill him, which meant that he had some connection to them. As a result, he had Zhang Haiyan get on the ship instead of doing it himself. The Nan'an was a battlefield.

Spreading the plague was a way to attack all the Southern Archives' field agents in Malacca. There were nineteen agents in the first-class cabin, but it was difficult to say how many were in the third-class cabin.

He had investigated the Flower Reef, plague ship, and Wudou disease case under the Southern Archives' supervision. Between the plague in Penang and the Nepenthes Nan'an, most of the Southern Archives' field agents who lived in Malacca had probably been killed. Was this revenge for destroying Flower Reef?

Who was behind this? Who would use such a serious plague to avenge an organization?

Zhang Haiyan sat on the sofa in the empty room, his mind a mess. *Zhang Ruipu knew that this was a trap, but he still made me get on the ship. Was it simply because he wanted me to investigate the case?*

*Impossible. His purpose was to make these killers think that I'm him because everyone from the Southern Archives used a pseudonym when boarding the ship. In other words, that bastard Zhang Ruipu wanted me to get on the ship and die for him. He had no intention of letting me get off the ship.*

*What about the deal? What about Zhang Haixia, who's still a hostage? If there's no transaction at all, what will happen to him?*

"I'm going to make this ship turn around." Zhang Haiyan said as he looked at the vast ocean outside.

He Jianxi didn't even try to hide at all. He squatted on the ground for a long time and looked at the corpse whose neck had been crushed. He thought of numerous possibilities, but none of them could explain why he appeared on the ship, and why there were so many corpses when he showed up.

Zhang Haiyan returned. The bodies in the infirmary would soon be discovered, and there was no way they would be able to explain what was going on. Moreover, the ship's security would tighten if people found out about the murders, which would make his plan even more difficult.

He carried the doctors' and policemen's corpses on his back and then threw them into the sea, along with all the gas cylinders. Then, he picked up the body of the last killer and said, "Follow me, He Jianxi."

"Where to?"

"The situation has changed." Zhang Haiyan lit a cigarette. Now he had two goals: kill the nepenthes killers and hijack the ship so he could return to Malacca.

"Let's catch the bad guys," Zhang Haiyan said, while silently adding, *and then we'll hijack the ship.*

## Chapter 23 – Three People, One Bathtub

Zhang Haiyan wanted to carry the assassin's corpse, grab He Jianxi's hand, and go to the third-class cabin.

Zhang Haiyan was very sensitive to people's microexpressions, so if he did something unexpected while in the same space as the hidden killers, then he should be able to find them. This was because sudden actions made people's minute emotions immediately appear on their faces.

He was thinking that the killers definitely wouldn't expect him to carry the body and show up alone in the third-class cabin after their failed assassination attempt.

But he couldn't carry the corpse himself. He had to hide among the crowd; otherwise, he would suffer a lot since the corpse would get in the way if there were any conflicts. Moreover, there would be blind spots if he carried the corpse on his back. Zhang Haiyan was coming up with specific strategies while also making up lies to tell He Jianxi.

"There are a lot of pirates here. We're going to the third-class cabin to expose them."

"But the police weren't on par with them at all. We should find more police officers right now."

"It's too late. They'll get rid of the evidence soon. But don't worry, there are too many people in the third-class cabin, so they won't dare do anything. We can go to the third-class cabin and intercept them. That way, they won't have the opportunity to throw the evidence into the sea."

He Jianxi was noncommittal. He felt that what Zhang Haiyan said seemed to make sense, but he also felt like something was wrong.

There were two parts to the third-class cabin area: one was the steerage<sup>(1)</sup> area and the other was the private cabin area. There were four people to a private cabin, while the steerage area was actually the cargo hold.

Many people slept on big beds in the cargo hold because it created more space to accommodate as many people as possible.

When they first arrived at the steerage area, Zhang Haiyan looked around and saw that there were shoddily-dressed civilians and vendors. He pulled the corpse from his back and directly passed it to the startled He Jianxi.

As He Jianxi started to struggle, Zhang Haiyan held him still and said, “Now, just walk in. Don’t worry. Those pirates don’t know the real situation, so they won’t act rashly. It’ll keep them from destroying the evidence.”

“Wh—why?”

“Because they don’t know who you are. They’ll definitely think this is a provocation. If I stay in the dark, they won’t dare do anything for fear of being discovered. They’ll only observe you.”

*And I will observe them*, Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. He patted He Jianxi’s ass and then pinched it. Just as He Jianxi screamed and stepped forward to dodge, Zhang Haiyan moved to blend into the crowd.

Everyone in the steerage area heard He Jianxi’s scream and looked at him. He stared back at them and then reflexively walked into the crowd in a daze.

Someone immediately discovered that the person he was carrying was dead. Everyone exclaimed and started retreating when they saw that the corpse’s throat had been crushed.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Basically like an open-space dormitory in the cargo hold



Zhang Haiyan's tongue pressed against the blades in his mouth as he hid amongst the crowd. He observed He Jianxi's surroundings with a swift gaze, scanning as many faces as possible.

The most conspicuous person in the crowd was Hudson. Not only was he an American with a long beard, but he was also a member of Miss Dong's weapons team. Zhang Haiyan had met him when he was on the ship before.

Based on the look on his face, Zhang Haiyan knew he was looking for prostitutes in the third-class cabin.

There was a girl with long hair beside him, who seemed to be having a conversation with him. There was another girl with short hair standing close to them with her arms crossed in front of her chest and looking around warily.

When He Jianxi walked over, the two women were taken aback. Their reactions were obviously different compared to everyone else.

Zhang Haiyan narrowed his eyes. He tried to carefully recall the gestures and movements of the two opponents he'd fought just now.

The two women had almost completely erased their femininity when they fought him. These two girls in front of him had obvious feminine characteristics, so it was hard to associate them with the killers. But people's postures and habits couldn't be changed.

It was them.

Zhang Haiyan looked around, but couldn't see anyone else who was suspicious. *Is it possible that there are only two people?*

If there were only two people, then he could directly take care of them. But there were still too many blind spots that kept him from seeing things clearly.

Zhang Haiyan kept his distance from He Jianxi and slowly approached the two girls by wading through the distracted crowd. While one of the young women wasn't looking, he passed by and stole a handkerchief from her waist.

Hudson was also looking at He Jianxi. The three people had stopped talking and were curiously waiting to see what would happen next.

He Jianxi was still walking through the middle of the crowd. He wanted to find out where Little Brother Zhang had gone, but he had already lost sight of him.

The short-haired girl had already discovered Zhang Haiyan by this point but didn't do anything. Zhang Haiyan also pretended not to notice her. He walked behind her and grabbed her left wrist before she had time to react, "Elder sister, I've been looking for you for a long time!"

For a brief moment, the girl's right hand subconsciously started to make a defensive movement, but then she abruptly retracted her hand. The muscles of her captured left arm bulged slightly. Zhang Haiyan remained silent as he watched everything, ensuring that nothing went unnoticed. The foreigner and the long-haired girl also looked back.

Zhang Haiyan smiled gently at them and even bowed slightly. "I was walking behind you and saw that you dropped your handkerchief. I thought I should return it to you quickly." With that said, he took the handkerchief from his pocket.

The short-haired girl looked at it and smiled. When she raised her hand and brushed her hair back, Zhang Haiyan stared at the calluses on her pullicue<sup>(2)</sup> and fingers.

"This isn't mine. I think you've misunderstood, Mister."

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<sup>(2)</sup> The web between your thumb and forefinger

Zhang Haiyan looked at the handkerchief confused, and then looked at her. "It's not yours... Well, it seems like it won't reunite with its original owner now. Since I've met you, I'll give it to you."

"Thank you, Mister, but I've never used sandalwood-scented handkerchiefs. I'm afraid I'll have to decline."

"What do you mean you won't use it? Ah, what's that? There's a bloodstain on your back!" As soon as Zhang Haiyan finished his sentence, the short-haired girl's expression immediately changed.

Zhang Haiyan smiled. "Hey, everyone, look! Isn't there a bloodstain on this girl's back?"

Zhang Haiyan called everyone's attention over and quickly wiped his finger against his lips while they weren't looking. He cut his finger with the blades in his mouth and then touched the short-haired girl's back.

The people around them immediately saw that there was indeed a bloodstain on her back. The girl with slightly longer hair, who had been talking to Hudson, frowned imperceptibly and then laughed. "Bai Zhu, look at you. When we were in the kitchen just now, I told you to be careful or your clothes might get stained. See? Your clothes got dirty."

The girl named Bai Zhu also laughed. "I wasn't being careful. Mister, thank you for pointing this out."

Zhang Haiyan nodded. "The bloodstain is rather fresh. You might want to wash it off now so it won't set. Your clothes are beautiful and shouldn't be ruined." With that said, Zhang Haiyan winked at Hudson and gave him an ambiguous look.

Hudson instantly understood and immediately said, "Miss Bai Zhu, I have very good washing equipment in my room. Just go to my place to take care of it. I guarantee you'll have clean clothes afterwards."

After hearing his words, Zhang Haiyan laughed and grabbed Bai Zhu's hand before she could refuse. "I'll take this lady to your room...Your room is—"

Zhang Haiyan pulled Bai Zhu and started to walk away, but the long-haired girl also pulled Bai Zhu's hand at the same time. Bai Zhu didn't move, and the two sides were in a deadlock.

All of a sudden, more than a dozen people who had been watching He Jianxi among the crowd stopped what they were doing and turned their eyes to where Zhang Haiyan was. As they looked over warily, Zhang Haiyan moved his eyes and quickly identified them all.

*1,2,3,4,5.... There are so many people.* He froze for a moment. The number was much higher than he had expected.

While he was counting how many people there were, he noticed that some of them had secretly drawn their weapons.

At this time, Zhang Haiyan saw the long-haired girl next to him move her fingers slightly and make a gesture.

Everyone started to gather towards them once she made the gesture.

*Uh-oh,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. *Things aren't looking good.*

The long-haired girl looked at Zhang Haiyan and said in Chinese, "Mister, we're with our foreign friend. This has nothing to do with you, right? Or do you want to join us, too?"

Zhang Haiyan looked at Hudson and said, "No. I'm just enthusiastic to help since I'm worried that our foreign friend won't be able to enjoy your company. After all, your foreign language skills aren't good."

The long-haired girl laughed and said, "It's a shame you won't live much longer." She put her arms around Hudson. "Let's go. Bai Zhu, since this gentleman wants to pursue you, you should try to get along with him." She

winked at Bai Zhu before she said to Hudson, "I have clothes to wash, too. I'll wash them for my sister. Is that ok?"

Zhang Haiyan wanted to follow them, but Bai Zhu stopped him.

At this time, He Jianxi suddenly smelled something familiar. He followed the scent and saw Zhang Haiyan and the two girls. He walked towards them with the corpse on his back and asked Zhang Haiyan, "What do we do now? Have you found them? Well, I can smell them."

He Jianxi looked at Bai Zhu, got a whiff of her scent, and immediately said, "That's her. She was the one who fought you. She smells the same as the killer."

Zhang Haiyan turned to look at He Jianxi. "Do you know how embarrassing it is right now?" With that said, he patted the corpse on He Jianxi's back. When the corpse fell to the ground, they noticed all the killers gathering around them.

Zhang Haiyan counted the number of people and knew he couldn't defeat them. Moreover, there were too many of them. As long as they surrounded the two of them and said it was a brawl, those on the outside wouldn't even be able to see what was going on inside.

Without an ounce of hesitation, Zhang Haiyan grabbed He Jianxi and started running wildly towards the cargo hold's exit.

Since he wasn't far away from it, he managed to rush out in an instant and make it to the corridor. It was really dark, and there weren't any people around. There was a ladder there that would lead to the upper deck, but at almost the exact same moment he jumped onto it, he saw Bai Zhu appear out of the corner of his eye.

Bai Zhu had spikes in each hand and used them to pierce Zhang Haiyan right on the ass. Zhang Haiyan immediately released his hold on He Jianxi, who lost his balance and landed directly on the girl's face. With her vision

blocked by He Jianxi's ass, the spikes pierced the ladder, causing sparks to fly.

The girl felt embarrassed and immediately became furious. Zhang Haiyan grabbed He Jianxi's neck and pulled him back, but the girl started stabbing at whatever was in front of her. When the spikes pierced He Jianxi's pants, the girl immediately twisted them and hooked the pants directly.

Zhang Haiyan was up there pulling He Jianxi's neck while the girl was down there pulling his pants. He Jianxi's whole body was stretched straight as an arrow.

Desperate, Zhang Haiyan unfastened He Jianxi's belt, and the pants were immediately ripped off.

Zhang Haiyan saw that the belt was about to be pulled off along with the pants, so he immediately stepped forward, grabbed it, and hauled He Jianxi up.

As Bai Zhu fell over, more people came out and chased them. Zhang Haiyan pulled the now pantless He Jianxi onto his back and leaped onto the deck as if he were flying. Without looking back, he jumped directly onto the outer wall of the first-class cabin and climbed up level by level like a monkey.

There were balconies on both sides.

His room number was 345, which should have been on the third floor. *But where's the third floor? Screw it!*

Zhang Haiyan picked a random balcony that looked pleasing to the eye and then jumped to it directly.

The balcony lights were still on, so he rolled into the room. That was when he saw a naked Steven coming out of the bathroom while shaving his beard.

*What a coincidence!* Zhang Haiyan looked around. *It's Steven's room. No wonder the balcony looks so familiar.*

He had unexpectedly come back again.

The two men were stunned. Steven looked at the topless man carrying a pantless man while standing in front of his naked body.

“It’s you!”

Zhang Haiyan didn’t give Steven a chance to yell and immediately threw He Jianxi at him. Although He Jianxi wasn’t heavy, this throwing method still managed to knock Steven back into the bathtub.

Steven was very strong. Although he looked like a gentleman, he had a surprising amount of strength and was able to stand back up almost immediately.

Zhang Haiyan charged at him without warning and pressed him back into the bathtub. As all three of them fell into the tub, Zhang Haiyan headbutted Steven and knocked him out.

Everything happened so fast.

He Jianxi seemed to come to his senses a little and saw that he and two other men were squeezed into a bathtub full of foam.

He didn’t speak but looked as if he was on the verge of tears.

## Chapter 24 – He Jianxi Cried

He Jianxi thought that he had his own philosophy of survival. For so many years, he had a clear conscience. Although the world was full of unhappiness and unfairness, the little world in his heart had never been invaded or shaken. In addition, his greatest confidence was that he had never met any bad guys doing bad things that he didn't see coming.

As a result, this world couldn't scare him.

Unfortunately, this confidence was destroyed in a single moment. Ever since he had met Zhang Haiyan, he had been unable to foresee any of this series of illogical incidents. Plus, the way things were developing kept getting more and more absurd. He didn't know what he would see the next time he opened his eyes.

His grievances and fear rushed at him like water breaking a dam, and he started to cry. He wasn't wailing, but crying in a low voice because he was so scared.

Zhang Haiyan was exhausted, so he lay in the bathtub and rested for a while. Then, he slowly stood up and turned on the hot water so the sound would mask He Jianxi's sobbing.

Zhang Haiyan stepped out of the bathtub, grabbed a clean towel, and wiped himself clean.

Steven's dinner had been placed on the side of the sofa, untouched. There was borscht soup and bread, which Zhang Haiyan used to dip into the soup. He took a few bites and thought for a while before drinking the rest of the soup. He left only two slices of bread for He Jianxi, but after thinking about it again, he ate another slice, leaving only one left.

This was a very well-planned operation. The other party definitely wasn't full of amateurs, and he didn't expect them to have so many people.



Those killers must have seen him escape to the first-class cabin and knew he was hiding there, but they probably didn't know which room he was in, let alone that he was in Steven's room.

They wouldn't risk starting an attack in the first-class cabin, but it wasn't because they couldn't kill the passengers. If it were him, he would set up secret sentries at all the passages in the first-class cabin to wait for the target to come out, which meant that he was already trapped.

There were killers among the waiters, so they would definitely check each room.

*What to do?* If it were him, he would act immediately and kill the target tonight.

The only good news was that he was on the third floor and the shipowner's daughter was staying on the fourth floor.

*Miss Dong. She's also difficult to deal with, but she has lots of firearms.*

Zhang Haiyan originally wanted to kill the assassins before he abducted Miss Dong to make the ship turn around so that he could save Zhang Haixia. But based on the situation now, he couldn't kill the assassins by himself.

He thought for a while. Since he was alone and didn't have any backup, he could only rely on his shamelessness.

He dragged Steven out of the bathtub, tore off his bath towel, and tied him to a chair. Then he walked back over to the bathtub and pulled He Jianxi out of it before finding a lamp and ripping the chord out.

When Steven woke up, he found himself tied to a chair with both feet in the bathtub.

Zhang Haiyan was holding the lamp cord, which was resting on the edge of the bathtub and cushioned with a towel. The end of the cord was wrapped around a glass with whiskey in it.

The edge of the bathtub wasn't flat, so the whiskey glass could slip into the water at any time.

"If you dare scream for help, I'll kick the bathtub as soon as you make the first sound," Zhang Haiyan said.

"Mr. Zhang." Steven was very calm. "You're still on the ship. Have you found the bad guys that you mentioned?"

Ever since he was a child, Steven had a mental state that almost seemed like an illness. It was extremely difficult for him to be nervous. No matter what happened, it was hard for him to feel scared or anxious. This made him a very good surgeon, but it also made it difficult for him to develop bad habits such as drinking, smoking, and being a racist. He didn't need those habits.

He had been pursuing a sense of nervousness all his life, so he went to the battlefield. He then met Warner, followed him on expeditions in East India and Southwest China, participated in the Tusi<sup>(1)</sup> riots in southern China, and sold firearms.

Having no anxiety meant that he was free of good and evil, faith and morality. He easily succeeded at everything he did. At a young age, he became Warner's most promising student.

But Zhang Haiyan didn't care about that at all. He flipped through the passport and documents that he had found in Steven's luggage.

"Let's keep things short. I know you and Miss Dong don't trust me, but I've really found the culprits. They chased me here."

Steven looked down at himself. "Can you let me go so we can go and investigate together?"

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<sup>(1)</sup> Tusi, often translated as "headmen" or "chieftains", were hereditary tribal leaders recognized as imperial officials. They ruled certain ethnic minorities in southwest China on behalf of the central government. Wiki link [here](#)

Zhang Haiyan laughed “Do you think I’ll believe you?” With that said, he read what was on the passport. “Steven. American. Professor Landon Warner’s student. You’re funded by the Fogg Museum of the United States and are going to China to purchase ancient documents and murals. You serve as the expedition team’s doctor and secretary,” Zhang Haiyan continued flipping through the passport. “You’re the shipowner’s VIP guest.” Zhang Haiyan kicked the suitcase on one side and opened it. There were bullets and guns inside, as well as various surgical instruments and field equipment.

“You’re accompanying Ms. Dong to protect her. I read through your luggage list. There are more than thirty people in your team, with eighteen machine guns and tens of thousands of bullets that you had to pass through special customs. It seems that Miss Dong has a large number of enemies, and the firepower is very fierce. Will a team doctor suddenly start shooting people as soon as a deadly attempt is made?”

Steven seemed to be plotting something and remained silent.

“I don’t care if you’re a doctor or not, but you must have ulterior motives for going to China. Whether it’s smuggling or really protecting Miss Dong, I’m not interested. I’m telling you that this ship is in extreme danger right now. There’s no way the marine police can handle it. I need your help.”

“We’ll help you. Well, I’ll at least help you negotiate. But not like this.” Steven looked down at himself again.

“Steven, that Miss Dong won’t help me.” Zhang Haiyan said. “I only trust myself. You have to find a way to get her to your room. I want to communicate with her in person.”

“Get her to my room?” Steven laughed heartily as if he had suddenly heard a funny joke. “No, Miss Dong won’t go anywhere. She’ll only stay in her room.”

“You’re her person. You should know her well. There’s always a way.” Zhang Haiyan flicked the whiskey glass and smiled as it started sliding towards the

bathtub. Steven froze for a moment. He seemed to notice the blades in Zhang Haiyan's mouth.

"Wait a minute," He said. "Are you the plague god of the sea?" Zhang Haiyan didn't have time to talk nonsense with him. As the whiskey glass fell closer to the bathtub, Steven continued, "Mr. Plague God, I think you've misunderstood. Up to now, no one knows anything about that woman. We've never seen her real face. No one can tell her to do anything."

"What do you mean?"

Steven told Zhang Haiyan a brief story.

When Steven first met Miss Dong, he was digging up Buddha statues in Johor<sup>(2)</sup>. The British had been interested in the center of Malacca's tropical rainforest for the past ten years. Although they didn't understand what was inside of it, his teacher Warner still fought for the funds to compete with the British.

Johor was even poorer than Perak. The excavation site was a rebuilt site of a Buddhist temple. A lot of sixteenth-century Buddha statues had been discovered while the foundation was being excavated. Since they didn't know what the British were looking for, Warner had no choice but to find some decent monuments so that he could report to the top.

The ancient temple was actually a day away from the town and three hours away from the nearest village.

Usually, no one came to the excavation site except for the local porters. They cut down the rainforest and built a small workstation that consisted of four wooden houses, two dormitories, a warehouse, and an office.

One night at dusk, that woman appeared at the construction site without any warning. When she appeared, there were a dozen hands hanging from

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<sup>(2)</sup> Johor is a state of Malaysia in the south of the Malay Peninsula. It has land borders with the Malaysian states of Pahang to the north. Wiki link [here](#)

her body. The woman's petite body was wrapped in an Indian sari, and her face was also wrapped. She came out of the rainforest and passed by the ruins of this ancient temple.

At that time, all the workers stopped what they were doing. Since the plague was running rampant, the smell of those rotting hands on the woman scared everyone.

The woman saw the unearthed Buddha statues and stopped. She could tell from the details that they had been carved by Chinese craftsmen who must have come here sometime during the sixteenth century. The woman put the hands down in front of the Buddha statues and chanted sutras so that the dead would be blessed in the afterlife.

Then she went to a fireplace on the construction site where workers could dry their bodies and threw the severed hands in it.

It was dusk at that time. The light of the setting sun shone through the gaps of the rainforest and illuminated this horrible sight. The woman's enchanting and exquisite curves presented a great sense of story. Steven was leaning against the door of the dormitory with a beer in hand, completely dumbfounded.

At that moment, the woman saw the Americans who had heard the news and gathered around to watch her. She glanced at their guns and walked towards them.

The Americans had heard the rumors about sorcerers before. When the terrified locals started shouting, "Witchcraft! Witchcraft!" and scattered and retreated, the Americans also raised their guns, fearing that there was some aboriginal witchcraft on the woman.

They didn't expect the woman to speak to them in fluent English. "I want to make a deal with the person in charge here."

Warner was a very dedicated person with far-reaching ambitions and execution capabilities. He was absorbed in his own research, so it was

usually very difficult for him to be interrupted and persuaded. But it only took the woman twenty minutes to make him completely change his ideas.

Since this wasn't normal storytelling, Steven didn't tell Zhang Haiyan what Miss Dong said to Warner, since he didn't know what their conversation was about.

He was a secretary, so he was only there afterward when the woman unreservedly made it very clear that she needed people to protect her on her way back to China. Otherwise, she would be killed halfway during the journey. She hoped everyone involved would be made aware of this.

Those who wanted to kill her were very skilled. She needed plenty of weapons and foreign faces because those who wanted to kill her were able to steal other people's appearances and pretend to be those close to her. But it was more difficult for them to imitate foreign faces.

That woman also told them that she was the shipowner's daughter, and the Nan'an was hers. As long as she arrived in Xiamen safely, she could provide Warner with something as payment.

At that time, Warner wanted something from China. They discussed it for three hours before Warner finally believed the woman and agreed to the deal.

As a result, they used the remaining funds to buy arms, abandoned the construction site and Buddha statues, took the woman, and boarded the Nan'an. But so far, the woman seemed to have never taken off her mask and rarely communicated with them except in front of Warner.

Of course, they still obeyed Warner's orders. Warner hoped that their only job was to protect the woman. Since the condition was limited to protection only, the price would need to be increased if the woman had any other ideas. As a result, the relationship between the two parties was also very delicate.

After Zhang Haiyan listened to Steven's words, he looked down at his hands and thought to himself, *a Bodhisattva who chopped hands off. What does it mean? This Miss Dong isn't ordinary. She's really different from others.*

"Are you sure she's the owner's daughter?"

"How do you think we could get on the ship with so many weapons?" Steven asked. "All the crew know her and she arranged all the customs procedures."

Zhang Haiyan was deep in thought. "If it's as you said, then this woman isn't all that difficult to cooperate with. Didn't she reach an agreement with your boss? Moreover, she's so persistent in going back to Xiamen. I just need to tell her that accidents are occurring on this ship that will prevent her plan from going through. She should pay attention to them."

At least it would be like how she took his words seriously when they first got on the ship.

"I already told you that she won't come to my room," Steven said. "You can go and find her. Even if you perform a show or make any moves, she won't open the door for you. You can't see her at all, so how can you talk to her about cooperation? You need me to be the messenger."

Once Steven finished his words, he looked at the notes sitting nearby.

Telephones on ships hadn't yet become popular, so there were small notes that could be sent between the cabins to transmit messages.

"I can pass through the guard post on the fourth floor, put the note between the newspaper, and get it to her room. This is her only way to communicate with the outside world now. Asian people can't walk past the guard post."

Zhang Haiyan looked at Steven, who had a cunning look in his eyes. *Foreigners really can't hide anything*, he thought to himself

“She actually doesn’t trust us, either. In order to prevent people from poisoning her food, she prepares it all herself. She’s kept enough food in her room.” Steven continued, “Mr. Plague God, I don’t think you can verify if what I’ve said is true no matter how hard you try. You can only trust me and take a risk. The result will basically be the same to you anyways, right?”

Zhang Haiyan looked at Steven and laughed. “I’m sorry, but I actually can verify if what you’ve said is true. Which room is Miss Dong in?”

“444, but—” Steven hadn’t finished speaking before Zhang Haiyan pinched him, making him pass out. Zhang Haiyan then put a hand towel in Steven’s mouth.

Ordinary people were capable of spitting out hand towels, but Zhang Haiyan was very experienced. He pressed the towel firmly to Steven’s throat and tongue, and then tied a bath towel around his face so that he could only make a noise that sounded like a mosquito.

He Jianxi watched it all silently.

Zhang Haiyan walked over and threw Steven’s pants to him before leaning against the wall and peeking out the window.

It was pitch black outside, and nothing could be seen. He didn’t know where the killers were.

Zhang Haiyan closed the window and turned off the light before tying the lamp cord to the window handle and putting a chair against the door.

He Jianxi had just put on the pants when he saw a bath towel lying nearby. He silently took off his shirt, wrung out the water, and then set it aside. After he had dried his body with the towel, Zhang Haiyan came up and pinched his neck, causing him to pass out in an instant. Zhang Haiyan caught him and then threw him onto the bed.

“How come I’ve unknowingly picked up so many things?” Zhang Haiyan looked at the two people and sighed.



Under the lamplight, Zhang Haiyan spread out his personal package that contained a set of special equipment.

This kind of equipment was used to make different faces. Human skin masks were the core technology of the Southern Archive's secret service, after all.

Zhang Haiyan began to measure Steven's face carefully. He had different models that could quickly be revised, but it was indeed more difficult to imitate foreigners' faces. As a result, he gradually became absorbed.

When he was in Xiamen, he had learned the basics of making masks and putting on disguises, which was essentially just drawing.

"Zhang Hailou, what is this?"

"Godmother, this is a Chinese Huamei<sup>(3)</sup>. I drew it for you."

"Why did you draw a Chinese Huamei?"

"Because it's beautiful?"

"Zhang Haixia, what happened to your eyebrows?"

"Zhang Hailou did this."

"Godmother, since I was drawing a Chinese Huamei, of course I had to paint the eyebrows. I painted his for practice."

"Zhang Haixia, go and wash your eyebrows."

"Ok," Zhang Haixia said. As he turned around to wash his face, their godmother quickly drew a giant snake beside the Chinese Huamei.

Zhang Haiyan asked, "What's this?"

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<sup>(3)</sup> The Chinese hwamei or melodious laughingthrush is a passerine bird of eastern Asia. The name "hwamei" comes from the Chinese 画眉 (huà-méi) and means "painted eyebrow", which refers to the distinctive marking around the bird's eyes. Wiki link [here](#)

“This is your true form,” his godmother said. “You have to overcome it.”

## Chapter 25 – The Moon Casts on the Waters a Reflection of a Heavenly Mirage. In the Sky at Dawn, Clouds Gather to Build a Castle in the Air

The drawing that day was still fresh in Zhang Haiyan's memory. There was a giant snake beside the bird that was staring at it as if it wanted to swallow it whole.

His godmother had met many people, so she must've had a reason for saying those words to him. From what he could remember, his godmother had never been wrong about people. But she never explained in detail why she said things like that, and she often only gave a general statement. She said that it was because reasoning with others was pointless.

But the hidden meaning in that picture kept flashing in his mind throughout all stages of his life. The most profound moment was when he discovered that Zhang Haixia couldn't walk anymore.

*Is the Chinese Huamei Zhang Haixia?* He often wondered whether his godmother had foreseen that this day would come and knew that his character would end up hurting the people around him.

Even if the person next to him was agile and had amazing skills, the slightest negligence would result in that person dying because of him.

If Zhang Haiyan had talked less nonsense with Zhang Haixia and acted more cautiously, the situation might not have been so tricky.

Zhang Haixia actually had a better understanding of what life was about. He would tell Zhang Haiyan that the things people had been through would grow seeds in their hearts. Zhang Haiyan's childhood was full of pain that ordinary people couldn't endure. His experiences were what made him do all those strange and illogical things when he grew up. In addition, the hell

on earth he saw not only gave him pain but also gave him various desires that tempted him in his heart.

It took Zhang Haiyan a long time to understand that he would eventually need to face the snake in his heart. It also took him a long time to realize that He Jianxi felt an incredible fear when standing beside him, as if he was lying in a snake cave.

It didn't take long for He Jianxi to pass out. It was still very important to take a break, but after he woke up, his whole body felt paralyzed and sore. When he breathed, he felt as if he could smell blood in his lungs. Fortunately, he was resilient and no longer felt frightened after he had calmed himself down.

The sun rose early at sea, so it was a little bright out already.

Zhang Haiyan had already finished making the mask and put it on, and was now drawing by the window. It was easy to see that his sketching ability was excellent. Since he had to make human skin masks all year round, he had to ensure that he could remember people's details quickly.

All his drawings were pasted on the wall and turned out to be various kinds of faces. These were the Nepenthes killers he had identified when he was patrolling the steerage area in the third-class cabin.

He had drawn all the features he could remember with just that one glance.

These were the notes he wanted to give Miss Dong.

Miss Dong was very cautious. She had given him three days even though he was lying to her, so she would definitely look into it if he gave her these clues. One killer may be able to hide their identity, but she would definitely find something as long as she investigated more people.

He was already very curious about her. The first time they met, she had shown that she wasn't an ordinary person. Now he could only believe in his own judgment that she was capable of doing this.

*Zhang Haixia, ah, Zhang Haixia. It seems like it will take me a while before I return to Malacca. You have to rely on your own ingenuity to keep yourself alive.*

The room's curtain had been drawn so that only a gap was revealed. The sun was rising above the sea outside, shining in on the foreigner that he had knocked out last night. The man hadn't woken up and even looked like he was dead.

He Jianxi tried to remember everything that had happened. The bootleg business had been legalized, so he lost his job and planned to take the severance pay to go to San Francisco to find his cousin. He bought a ferry ticket, got on the Baoen, fell down on the deck, and then went to wash himself in the toilet.

*Well, I can't remember what happened after that. I really shouldn't have gone to the toilet.*

Zhang Haiyan heard He Jianxi's snores soften and knew that he was awake. When he looked at him, He Jianxi was stunned.

When Zhang Haiyan turned around, He Jianxi found that his face wasn't Zhang Haiyan's face, but the foreigner's.

He looked at Steven again and saw that he was still tied to the chair.

He Jianxi froze for a moment as he tried to figure out what was going on. He had a sudden thought: Zhang Haiyan was gone. There were two foreigners in the room, and they looked exactly the same.

Suddenly, He Jianxi couldn't tell which incident was more outrageous: coming to his senses and finding that he was with two naked men in the bathtub, or waking up and finding that there were two foreigners who looked exactly the same.

But he was sure of one thing—he must never close his eyes. If he closed his eyes and opened them again, his worldview would collapse all over again.

“By the way, what’s your name?” The foreigner by the window asked him in fluent Chinese. He had the same voice as the plague god from before.

*Ah, the general logic of things hasn’t collapsed. The plague god is behind this.*

*Can this plague god become anyone at will?*

“My name is He Jianxi. The idea of my name comes from a line in a poem, ‘When can we trim wicks again by the west window and talk all night?’<sup>(1)</sup>” He Jianxi once again proved that he was a resilient man. He sat up and decided to accept everything so that things could get back on track.

Zhang Haiyan saw that He Jianxi kept looking at his face, so he explained, “This is magic. Don’t worry. My name is Zhang Hailou. You can call me Zhang Haiyan. The idea of my name also comes from a line in a poem, ‘The moon casts on the waters a reflection of a heavenly mirage; In the sky at dawn, clouds gather to build a castle in the air.’<sup>(2)</sup> Malaysians call me Haiyan.” Zhang Haiyan stood up. “We’ve met each other by chance. I believe you already know what I do. It definitely wasn’t my intention to bring you here, but I really had no choice. Now, if you want to get off the ship safely and go to San Francisco, I need your help.”

He Jianxi silently looked at Zhang Haiyan without answering. He figured Zhang Haiyan didn’t care whether he would agree or not. *He’s really just issuing an order. If I don’t agree, he’ll throw me into the sea.*

Sure enough, Zhang Haiyan immediately started to give him a task. “First of all, what I need you to do is to keep an eye on this person. There’s a knife here. If he tries to escape, kill him from this position. Remember, you must stab him from this place. You have to insert the knife directly and reach this

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<sup>(1)</sup> He Jianxi’s name comes from a poem in the Tang Dynasty. “He” means “when”. “Jian” means “trim”. “Xi” means “west”. The link to the English translation of the poem is [here](#)

<sup>(2)</sup> Zhang Hailou’s name also comes from a poem in the Tang Dynasty. His name is in the sentence ‘Clouds gather to build a castle in the air.’ The “castle in the air” in the poem is pronounced as “Hailou” in Chinese. It also means “mirage” in the poem. The link to the English translation of the poem is [here](#)

depth. I already made a mark. You can only penetrate the heart by reaching this depth. That way, he'll die immediately."

Steven's eyelids twitched.

As He Jianxi sat there shocked, Zhang Haiyan looked at him, "You have to remember one thing, if you don't kill him, he'll regain his freedom and kill you. I have to go somewhere else on this ship." With that said, Zhang Haiyan slashed Steven's calf with a knife. Steven immediately opened his eyes in pain and struggled for a while, but Zhang Haiyan ignored him and continued to speak to He Jianxi, "Also, he's been awake for a long time. He's just been pretending to be asleep. Remember to keep some distance from him."

## Chapter 26 – Deduction

In the sky at dawn, clouds gathered to build a castle in the air. The castle referred to a mirage, and Hailou meant “mirage”.

Later on, Zhang Haiyan was very grateful for his salty nickname. Otherwise, his life may not be what he wanted if it was like a mirage.

Zhang Haiyan walked out the door, thinking that the killers shouldn't have arrived on this floor yet so he should still have some time.

He had no confidence that He Jianxi could guard Steven properly. Steven was a shrewd man and He Jianxi definitely wasn't on par with him. But he believed that He Jianxi could hold out for at least an hour. It wouldn't be a big problem. Zhang Haiyan only needed an hour.

He moved his feet in the direction of the fourth floor. Since he was now disguised as Steven, he shouldn't be stopped by any guards.

He arrived at the fourth floor's stairwell and looked around, realizing what Steven had been trying to say before he'd knocked him out. They had gotten rid of the room numbers.

*How ruthless!*

But he found it funny that he could immediately tell which room Miss Dong was in without having to look at the room numbers. There were more than twenty American guards sitting at the door with submachine guns. They all had their eyes closed and were resting. He could tell at a glance that they had excellent skills.

When he walked over to the guards, someone immediately picked up their gun. “Steven, answer this question. Why did the white swan's father disappear after swimming in the Mississippi?”



Zhang Haiyan was taken aback for a moment, and the other party said, "You have to answer immediately. Otherwise, we'll have to shoot you." With that said, he pulled the gun's bolt back. "Three, two, one."

## Chapter 27 – Miss Dong

This kind of ciphering method was called the cutting path method, which was used in ancient military camps.

The lights in ancient barracks weren't very bright, and the soldiers were mostly dressed the same way. With so many people unfamiliar with each other, they would have to say the password whenever they met. There were many kinds of passwords, and they were different each time, which made it difficult for the enemy to launch a raid.

It was unlikely that foreigners would use the cutting path method, so that meant Miss Dong must have been the one who taught them how to do it.

Zhang Haiyan judged how far he could retreat as he looked at the opponents' submachine guns.

It was impossible for him to escape under such firepower no matter how good his physical skills were. And looking at the other people's behavior, he knew that they would shoot without hesitation if he couldn't answer the question.

He hadn't yet thought of a way before the guard pretended to fire his gun. "Bang. Bang. Bang." All the surrounding guards started laughing.

That was when Zhang Haiyan realized that they were just joking.

"That woman's approach is quite the bluff. Steven, do you have any other thoughts about her?"

Zhang Haiyan didn't know what to say, so he smiled. "Newspaper and notes."

"Are you still writing love letters?" The guards laughed uproariously again. "Let me tell you, they're all just rumors. Asian women aren't as conservative as you think."

Zhang Haiyan froze for a moment. Steven looked like a gentleman, so why were these guards discussing these things with him?

He had no choice but to smile as he walked up to the door they were guarding and stuffed the newspaper and notes through the crack under the door.

Because there were so many drawings inside, he had to separate them into two stacks and push them in.

*Ok. This means that what Steven said was right.* He was just about to leave when the door that he had just pushed the notes through suddenly opened. A big bulky white man walked out of the door and looked down at the newspaper on the floor.

“Steven, what are you doing?”

Zhang Haiyan was stunned for a moment and heard the guards roaring with laughter again, “This kid is so shy and nervous that he even picked the wrong door, Mr. Warner.”

Zhang Haiyan froze and started to break out in cold sweat. *Aren't they guarding Miss Dong's door?*

Mr. Warner didn't laugh but picked up the newspaper and the sketches of the faces. His expression changed as he flipped through them. “What are these?” He asked. “Steven would never pick the wrong room.”

Zhang Haiyan had already started walking away quickly when he heard everyone stop laughing. It was only a moment before he heard the sound of the guards raising their guns.

Zhang Haiyan had no choice but to stop. “Steven, don't leave just yet.” He heard Warner say. “Why did the white swan's father disappear after swimming in the Mississippi?”

*Shit. My cover's blown.*

Zhang Haiyan only had a second, so he made the best decision under the current circumstances. He scratched his own tongue with the blades in his mouth, and then forcefully squeezed out the blood. He coughed and spit out both the blades and the blood.

He then staggered and fell to the ground, letting the blood flow out along the corners of his mouth as he acted like he was having a seizure.

The group of guards was taken aback and looked at each other for a while before they realized what had happened. Then, some of them started walking towards him.

Everyone was shocked upon seeing the blades he had spit out. "What's this technique?"

Warner pushed through the crowd and then looked down the stairs with a serious look on his face. "Call everyone over. Shoot anyone who comes within ten meters of us."

Everyone began moving to their own defensive positions. The lead guard opened Steven's mouth and took a good look. Warner then had him bring Steven to his own room.

Zhang Haiyan was picked up and sent to Warner's room, where he was placed on the sofa. Zhang Haiyan peeked around and found that the room was full of old drawings. Warner was very cunning and didn't approach him at all; otherwise, Zhang Haiyan could suddenly get up and subdue him.

He squeezed his tongue so hard that the blood kept flowing. Anyone who saw it would think he was seriously injured.

Warner's gaze was piercing as he lit a cigar and sat down opposite Zhang Haiyan.

The lead guard came over to inspect the wound and used tweezers to pull the blades out of his mouth. Zhang Haiyan pretended to be in a coma since

he would have to tell them why the swan's father had disappeared if he was awake.

"He won't die, but it may take a few days before he's able to talk." The lead guard said.

Both Warner and the lead guard looked at Zhang Haiyan. Warner continued flipping through the notes.

In addition to the face sketches, the notes also said, "These are the robbers on your ship. You can see if what I've said is true once you investigate them."

"Hudson, did that strange man Steven couldn't catch say there were robbers on the ship?" It appeared Warner could read Chinese.

The lead guard, whose name was Hudson, nodded. "That's what the strange man said."

Warner looked at Zhang Haiyan again. "It seems that Steven was coerced by that person to deliver this letter."

"But I've never seen such a coercion method."

The two men looked at each other before Warner said, "That woman said that those who want to kill her might change faces. Check him out."

Hudson swallowed and came to stand beside Zhang Haiyan. He began tugging on Zhang Haiyan's face while Warner raised the machine gun on the other side and pointed it at Zhang Haiyan's head.

Zhang Haiyan broke out in a cold sweat and tried to suppress his surprise. It wasn't that this foreigner was too smart that was so surprising, but that he knew there were such things as human skin masks in the world.

But they couldn't tear the mask off because Zhang Haiyan's masks had to be torn off from his collarbone. This was a decision he had made after hearing what Steven had said.

Hudson tugged on his face for a long time but didn't succeed.

Warner looked at Zhang Haiyan for a long time before suddenly touching his face and scolding, "Ridiculous. It's really ridiculous. I can't believe that I fell for that woman's nonsense. How could anyone in this world be able to change faces? That woman is really good at bewitching people."

"Do you think she's lying to scare us?" Hudson asked

"Asian people like to lie and act all mysterious," Warner said. "We represent the advanced party. Most of these silly things are all smokescreens. The only thing I believe in now is that she can help me smuggle those ancient works of art. I don't know what else she's planning."

## Chapter 28 – The Building from Three Thousand Years Ago

Zhang Haiyan still pretended to be in a coma. He knew that he could wake up now that Warner had dismissed the thought that he wasn't Steven. But it would seem too suspicious if he immediately woke up.

"What do we do now?" Hudson asked. "That woman's been hoping we'd agree to a bigger deal. Why didn't you agree, Mr. Warner? I heard that she promised to take us to look at an ancient underground building from three thousand years ago. Isn't that our purpose?"

"She only promised to help us enter, but we couldn't take anything out. What's the point of that?"

Warner continued smoking his cigar. "At this stage, we can't easily agree to anything she offers. We have to wait for her patience to run out, and then she'll show us some sincerity. At that point, it'll be easier for us to get more generous terms. We can't think about what she can give. We need to think about what we want so that we can move forward without any obstacles. Before she can agree to our additional requirements, we're only responsible for bringing her to Xiamen alive. We absolutely won't take another step before that."

Hudson nodded.

"Find a doctor to wake Steven up. Ask him what exactly happened." Warner thought for a while before he handed the newspaper, notes, and sketches to Hudson. "Give these to her and see what she'll do next."

Hudson nodded again. "As you've said, Mr. Warner, this woman is a monster. I can't help but feel that she'll definitely do something."

Warner touched his pistol. "Even monsters can't rule the world now."

Hudson wrote down a note and sent someone to find a ship's doctor.

*Something will go wrong if this continues. Since the ship's doctors are all dead, a disguised killer might show up instead.*

Zhang Haiyan immediately took this opportunity to groan, trying to act as if he was about to wake up. "The person who jumped into the sea did this to me." He muttered. "He's still on the ship." He coughed violently.

Hudson immediately poured a glass of water so that Zhang Haiyan could rinse his mouth. "What exactly is going on?" Warner asked.

"The man who said there were robbers on the ship made me swallow a bag of something." Zhang Haiyan said with difficulty. "He said that if I didn't do as I was told, he would cast a spell and break the bag so that the blades inside would penetrate my stomach. It's sorcery. He wanted me to deliver the notes."

Hudson and Warner looked at each other, and Hudson said, "Indeed, it seems like there's something off about this man. Maybe we should look into it?"

"Absolutely not. Otherwise, we may fall for that woman's trap. We'll give the information to her. Whether it's true or not, she'll feel greater pressure, which will force her to negotiate the terms with us." Warner leaned back in his chair and looked at the sea outside.

"Can I go find the ship's doctor myself?" Zhang Haiyan was really lucky this time, and Warner let him go.



## Chapter 29 – Steven’s Plan

When he returned to the room, Zhang Haiyan was limp. *She got the message, right? Now it all depends on her response.*

“Do you have any cigarettes?” Zhang Haiyan asked Steven while ignoring He Jianxi’s cold look.

Steven looked at Zhang Haiyan’s face and said, “It’s so amazing. I knew what that woman said was true.”

“Do you have any cigarettes?”

When Steven looked at a corner of the room, Zhang Haiyan walked over, found a pack of cigarettes, and lit one. “Where did the swan’s father go?” Zhang Haiyan asked him.

Steven laughed. “That’s a joke. Miss Dong asked us to use this method, but we refused. The joke at that time was this puzzle. In fact, I’m the only one who believes most of what she said.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that all of the room numbers are gone?”

Steven shook his hand. “You were too anxious and wouldn’t let me finish speaking. We need to communicate more.”

Zhang Haiyan looked at He Jianxi. “He didn’t act rashly, did he?” He Jianxi shook his head.

Zhang Haiyan wanted to cover Steven’s mouth again, but Steven obviously didn’t want that anymore and immediately said, “Did you send the slip of paper to her?”

Zhang Haiyan nodded, and Steven said, “You should continue to send the second one now.”

Zhang Haiyan looked out the window and began to play with Steven's guns and explosives.

As he was waiting for Miss Dong's feedback, the killers were getting closer and closer. At this time, their best bet was to go to the fourth floor and stay next to Miss Dong.

So far, these Americans couldn't tell who was who. As long as they made any kind of move on the fourth floor, the Americans would kill everyone.

He was about to sacrifice Steven since the man wanted to kill him any chance he got. *Why don't I let him try to defend himself?*

Steven could feel that Zhang Haiyan wanted to kill him, so he continued talking, "When pursuing women, you have to express your feelings again and again. You can't stop."

Zhang Haiyan raised his hand and hit the back of Steven's head, knocking him out for the third time.

"Will he die if you keep doing that?" He Jianxi asked.

"He won't die like this," Zhang Haiyan said. He was about to say more when the doorbell suddenly rang.

Zhang Haiyan was taken aback and quickly dragged Steven to the blind spot behind the door while signaling He Jianxi to hide behind the curtain.

He held the table knife in a reverse grip as he stood behind the closed door and asked in English, "Who is it?"

The sailor on the other side said, "I'm here to deliver an invitation card."

"I don't need it."

"It doesn't matter. You only need to take one look at it and sign it."

Zhang Haiyan lay down on the ground and saw a pair of leather shoes through the door crack.

“I’m taking a shower,” He said. “You may slide the invitation card through the door crack.”

“Yes, sir.” A piece of paper was slid into the room. Zhang Haiyan picked it up and the sailor left.

Based on the sound of his footsteps, he seemed like an ordinary person. Zhang Haiyan breathed a sigh of relief and opened the card, which turned out to be an invitation to a ball.

And the host of the ball was Miss Dong.

The line of ink appeared a little smeared when the card was opened, indicating that the ink hadn’t dried yet. The invitation had just been written.

Miss Dong, who had stayed behind closed doors, was about to hold a ball immediately after receiving a letter from him.

Zhang Haiyan smiled. This Miss Dong certainly moved very fast. He had written in his note that Miss Dong should respond to him by holding a banquet. It seemed that she had believed in the sincerity of his note.

He and Miss Dong would be at the banquet, where they would look for opportunities to meet each other.

He opened Steven’s wardrobe and started looking for an evening suit.

## Chapter 30 – Mo Yungao In Southern China

Let's turn our attention back to China. Beihai Port in southern China was one of the most important ports for people traveling from the Gulf of Tonkin to Southeast Asia.

The weather there was very hot and humid. Mo Yungao had a very large mansion there that used to belong to the businessman, Ma Youbao, after the British opened the port<sup>(1)</sup>. There were large manors, palm trees, and bananas, and the main building alone had more than sixty rooms.

The Ma residence hadn't been repaired for a long time. After the warlords' melees, the Guangxi factions had fought each other many times in Beihai, causing the ships to stop sailing there. All the ships were turning to Xiamen, so fewer foreigners came, which meant that there were fewer monks who could repair such houses.

This kind of European-style Catholic mansion was very rare in Guixi. Mo Yungao had seen it when he first entered Beihai and chose it as his headquarters. He hadn't left since.

After a long time, a lot of the mansion keys had been lost. The housekeeper complained about it several times, which led Mo Yungao to think of Chen Xifeng. When he had taken over here, Chen Xifeng was the one archiving everything. If Chen Xifeng was still around, it wouldn't have been so troublesome.

Chen Xifeng was an important person who helped him conquer Beihai and later planned out Beihai's defense. As his lieutenant, Chen Xifeng helped him accumulate a very solid ruling foundation when he was still alive.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Treaty ports were port cities in China that were opened to foreign trade mainly by the "unequal treaties" with the Western powers. Wiki link [here](#)

Unfortunately, he died on the ship that was heading back to Malacca three years ago. Although Chen Xifeng had kept his promise and brought back what Mo Yungao wanted, his body was already swollen when he returned.

Mo Yungao used to think that people like Chen Xifeng would never die, so when he saw Chen Xifeng's corpse, he couldn't believe it for a long time.

The violent stench made him unable to open his eyes.

There was no doubt that Chen Xifeng was a very capable person, but his smell after death was just as unbearable as the other idiots who worked and died for him.

The airtight jar was in Chen Xifeng's hands at that time. It was said that the lieutenant was holding the jar so tightly that the others couldn't pry his hands open. He had said that he needed to personally hand it over to his superior.

For a few seconds, Mo Yungao was a little touched and felt as if he had lost something. But his interest in that jar soon surpassed all that Chen Xifeng had done. He covered his nose, ordered the people to cut off Chen Xifeng's fingers, and then retrieved the jar.

As Chen Xifeng's body fell to the ground, Mo Yungao evaded the body fluids and ordered the others to quickly burn the corpse. At that time, those who were close to the lieutenant asked if he was going to be given a military funeral, but Mo Yungao had already left. He never asked about Chen Xifeng again.

The body was hastily burned in the yard.

In addition to the jar, there was also a letter that Chen Xifeng had written. He had placed it at the bottom of the jar and wrote down detailed information about Zhang Haiyan and the Malacca branch of the Southern Archives.

Chen Xifeng had been killed by a man named Zhang Haiyan.

*His surname is Zhang?*

For some reason, Mo Yungao was particularly sensitive to this surname. As a result, he became extremely interested in the Southern Archives.

This incident was a huge reflection of the workings of fate. Zhang Haiyan's naughty words were carefully recorded by Chen Xifeng and passed to Mo Yungao.

The series of events piled up, revealing a magnificent picture.

## Chapter 31 – Fear

Zhang Haiyan didn't expect things to go so smoothly.

He thought Miss Dong would at least check it before giving him any kind of response. She had probably already known some of the information, which was why she had reacted so quickly.

When he went to the ballroom and saw that the preparations were already under way, he couldn't help thinking that Miss Dong's orders were very efficient.

He looked at his watch. The ball would begin this afternoon. All the posters had already been put up and the first-class guests could attend the ball for free.

The most conspicuous spot on the posters read: Miss Dong will personally award the best dressed at the ball.

*Miss Dong.*

Her image on the poster had been replaced with a black silhouette. Since no one knew what she looked like, it made her seem especially mysterious.

The ballroom was actually the restaurant, so there were booths upstairs, a dance floor downstairs, and a lot of dining tables placed all around. There was even a singing stage and a place for a band to sit on the side. Zhang Haiyan carefully looked at the structure and realized that this place only had two exits, which wasn't suitable for their meeting.

Miss Dong would be surrounded by those gunmen. If he approached her rashly and didn't handle the situation well, she might use this opportunity to arrest him or even have him killed immediately.

*I have to think of a particularly ingenious way for me to communicate with Miss Dong on even ground. It's best if we can be alone.*

Zhang Haiyan was a killer, so he thought the whole thing was similar to plotting a murder.

The second floor of the restaurant here was directly connected to the fourth floor of the first-class cabin, so it would only take Miss Dong about a minute to reach the ballroom after leaving her room. The possibility of her being ambushed on the way was very slim, so if the killers wanted to do something, they had to do it in the ballroom.

He couldn't pretend to be a crew member, service staff, or some other guest from the first-class cabin since Warner's gunmen on the fourth floor would stop those kinds of people. In addition to that, the second floor was full of booths, so those people could only enter from the dance floor on the first floor. The whole setup was just like a jar. If there were any accidents, they wouldn't be able to get out.

His best chance was when she came down to dance. But this was something that everyone would think of. Whether she came down to dance or not, he wasn't even sure if she would dance with him since he was pretending to be Steven.

He needed an accident that would plunge the entire ball into chaos. When that happened, he could go up to Miss Dong and look for a chance to be alone with her.

He thought it over for a while and finally had a flash of inspiration.

The plague.

Zhang Haiyan had walked up and down the stairs twice when he suddenly saw a girl walking past him. The way she walked was familiar. He took a closer look and realized that she was one of the killers from that time.

He didn't know why, but when he saw her walking, he felt a sense of fear surge up in his heart. It had nothing to do with the murder that was about to take place but felt more like a different kind of fear that he didn't understand.



Why didn't he care that this girl was a killer? Why did he care more about the way she walked instead?

This sudden thought made Zhang Haiyan very anxious as he looked at the girl's back. He wanted to go up and push her into a corner so that he could study her carefully in order to figure out what he was so afraid of.

But he held himself back.

He quickly left the ballroom and returned to his room, where he found the poison gas cylinders that he had emptied. There was only one of them that still had a little gas left in it, so he put it in his bag.

Zhang Haiyan entered the ballroom early that afternoon and put the bag on his seat. The ball had started about half an hour ago, and the relaxing music in the beginning had changed into a more joyous and cheerful melody.

He had been to upper-class balls before. The foreign ladies were flamboyant as they looked for dance partners among all kinds of well-dressed men. There were some rich Chinese people, but they rarely danced. In principle, no matter how rich the Chinese were, it was more difficult for them to find a dance partner on this occasion.

People were showing up one right after another, and the corridor leading to the ballroom was packed. Many people were watching the sea and chatting while they waited for the fireworks that would be set off from both sides of the ship at the climax of the ball.

The environment was very complicated and he was feeling a great deal of pressure. He habitually turned his head again and saw a beautiful young woman behind him.

She walked over when he smiled at her. Zhang Haiyan nodded, and the two of them started to dance. It was Zhang Haiyan's first dance of the night.

While spinning on the dance floor, Zhang Haiyan looked at the second floor from time to time.

The young woman laughed, “Sir, are you curious about the mysterious Miss Dong? I heard that all the men from the first-class cabin are talking about her.”

“Yes. It’s said that no one has seen this Miss Dong, and her bodyguards take things very seriously. She must be really ugly if she’s so afraid of meeting people,” Zhang Haiyan said in fluent English.

The young woman laughed again, “In your men’s eyes, are women only ugly and beautiful?”

“Then maybe she’s extremely beautiful, but she’s so proud that she feels like her face can’t be easily shown, which is also very annoying.”

It didn’t matter what he said. At that moment, there was a commotion in the ballroom, which immediately drew Zhang Haiyan’s attention. He turned his head and saw a beautiful but indifferent Chinese woman appearing on the stairs to the second floor.

Ms. Dong was wearing a satin cheongsam, and her shoulders were covered with a small gold silk openwork shawl<sup>(1)</sup>. She looked very gorgeous. The close-fitting skirt showed her good figure, and the legs where the skirt didn’t cover were straight and slender. Her expression was cold and majestic as her eyes swept across the entire ballroom indifferently. Her aura was so strong that many people looked up at her for a while.

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<sup>(1)</sup> It’s a kind of shawl that looks like this (could maybe loosely be considered a vest):



## Chapter 32 – Miss Dong 2

*Is she the mysterious Miss Dong? Well, she doesn't look that special.* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself as he looked at the crowd. Several of the killers he had identified in the third-class cabin were in the ballroom pretending to be waiters and musicians.

If he had shown up with his real face, he probably would've been targeted by now. He remained silent as he watched Miss Dong come downstairs and nod to the people below.

The gunmen had all come to the railing on the second floor. He could see that the hands in their pockets were all pointing downstairs. These people must have been the best marksmen. This Miss Dong really took her own safety seriously.

When Zhang Haiyan looked up, the gunmen greeted him since they all knew him. He responded back out of politeness.

“Miss Dong is the shipowner's daughter and she just so happened to be on the ship this time. The Dong family is the wealthiest family in Xiamen. They have good relationships with various leaders. Both the Revolutionary Army<sup>(1)</sup> and the rulers from the Qing Dynasty would also give them face,” someone said.

Zhang Haiyan's dance partner was a little jealous. “See? She's not ugly. She's a good-looking girl. All you men have the same expressions on your faces when looking at her.”

Zhang Haiyan politely let go of her hands. “I'm just stunned by Miss Dong's entourage. I'm sorry if I upset you. I apologize, but I have to serve my teacher now.”

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<sup>(1)</sup> The National Revolutionary Army was the military arm of the Kuomintang (KMT, or the Chinese Nationalist Party) from 1925 until 1947 in the Republic of China. Wiki link [here](#)

“Steven, where have you been these past few days?” Warner called out to him after following Miss Dong down.

Zhang Haiyan cleared his throat and walked up to him. “Teacher, my throat hasn’t been feeling well recently.”

“It’s not like you’re dancing with your throat,” Warner said. “Come sit with me. Let’s eat quickly and then we can come back down to have some fun with the ladies.”

Zhang Haiyan nodded. This was a banquet and a ball, after all. The two politely greeted everyone on the first floor before going back to the second floor.

Zhang Haiyan looked at the second floor and saw that the gunmen hadn’t relaxed at all. Both the first floor and the stairs were within the range of their firepower, so Zhang Haiyan had no choice but to follow Warner obediently and go to one of the booths on the second floor.

The door of the booth wasn’t closed, and it was easy to see some exquisite appetizers inside. Miss Dong and Warner sat down, and then the three of them decided what drinks they should order.

“I heard that there’s a special wine for the ball,” Warner said. “Give us a glass of it.”

When Zhang Haiyan looked around and didn’t see any attendants, he knew that Warner was talking to him.

He cursed secretly in his heart and stood up. It turned out that he was sitting with them so that he could act as their waiter. He approached the wine cabinet in the booth and saw that a bottle of wine had already been opened. There was also a box next to it. Zhang Haiyan was a little puzzled and glanced back at Warner, who winked.

Zhang Haiyan took the box and wine to the table.

“Miss Dong, what do you think about the matter I mentioned last time?” Warner asked as he put his napkin in his lap.

“I already told you. The deal we made when we got on the ship is the final version. I can’t satisfy any of your extra requests.” Miss Dong lit a cigarette and looked at Steven a bit contemptuously.

Zhang Haiyan was still looking at the two gunmen outside the open door. He could just knock Warner down and abduct Miss Dong, but he knew those skilled marksmen could still hit him directly even if he kept Miss Dong close.

He really didn’t want to kill Miss Dong. He just hoped that she could help him fight against the killers.

He had to find a way to close the door.

“It’s not an extra request. It’s an additional transaction.” Warner opened the box, revealing a piece of jade inside. “I know that money is of no use to your family. This is a piece of jade found in Central Asia. The Arabs imported it from Myanmar through China at the time. I know that your family has been collecting this kind of stuff. Your father will definitely like it. This kind of stone is the most difficult one to come by. I hope this can make you rethink our terms.”

As Zhang Haiyan listened to his words, he couldn’t help thinking that foreigners were really straightforward. The dishes hadn’t even been served yet and he had already cut to the chase.

Miss Dong looked at Warner. “It is indeed very expensive. But using this in exchange for the smuggling channel is basically making our family exchange a stone for people’s lives. I think it may be difficult for my father to agree. Plus, I haven’t arrived in Xiamen yet. Our first deal hasn’t even been completed yet. Why so anxious?”

“When you arrive in Xiamen, I’m afraid that one stone won’t be enough,” Warner said. “What I want you to do is accept this stone now and send a telegram to your father. Open the smuggling channel for us before we arrive

in Xiamen. Once you've arrived, the channel can be closed again. I only need this short amount of time."

Miss Dong laughed. "This feels like you're using me to threaten my father."

Warner shook his head. "It's business, Miss Dong, just business. The ship is yours, but I'm the one with the most firepower on it. Moreover, you're the one who allowed us to get on the ship. Everything happens for a reason. Why don't you think about what's scaring you enough to get you to ask me for protection?"

Miss Dong seemed to be touched by Warner's words. She thought for a while and then said, "Mr. Warner, you've said that the people on your team are the kind of devils who kill without batting an eye. Is that right?"

Warner nodded. "Yes. Those who listen to my orders are devils who kill without batting an eye. Am I right, Steven?"

Zhang Haiyan nodded.

Zhang Haiyan poured wine for the two of them and also poured a little for himself. He secretly leaned towards the door, preparing to close it.

Warner looked at Miss Dong, "You've been stalling for a long time. You have to give me the answer today. Otherwise, we may all be frightened today."

Miss Dong laughed. "Oh, you'll definitely be frightened." She then turned to Zhang Haiyan—who had managed to close the door halfway—and said to him in Chinese, "Mr. Fake Face, even if you close the door, what you want to do won't succeed."

Zhang Haiyan was stunned, but he didn't stop trying to close the door. Warner didn't have time to react before Miss Dong suddenly put one hand on the table, jumped up, and kicked the box on the table. The box went flying through the crack in the door and over the railing, dropping to the first floor below. As a result, Zhang Haiyan didn't get to close the door.

Zhang Haiyan didn't expect Miss Dong to be this fierce. He had just turned around when he saw that Miss Dong was about to dropkick him. He opened the door wide and did a backflip.

Miss Dong wasn't any slower than him and followed him out. The gunmen still hadn't figured out what was going on before Miss Dong was already in front of Zhang Haiyan.

Zhang Haiyan thought to himself, *she's very ruthless. How is she the shipowner's daughter? She might as well be my daughter.* He immediately said in Chinese, "I'm here to discuss business. I'm the one who passed you the notes."

Miss Dong didn't care at all and just moved to poke his eyes out. Zhang Haiyan turned over and jumped down from the second floor. But before he had even landed, Miss Dong had almost jumped down right next to him.

*You're definitely not a rich second generation,* Zhang Haiyan said in his heart. *Is it popular among shipowners to send their daughters to Shaolin Temple<sup>(2)</sup>?*

As Zhang Haiyan rolled on the floor, the dance floor below descended into chaos. Zhang Haiyan had a chance to look up and saw the chandelier above his head. He dodged as Miss Dong moved to poke his eyes out again. This time, she came very close. He managed to lift his head and shoot a blade at the ceiling, directly cutting the chandelier's wire.

The chandelier didn't fall, but sparks flew everywhere and the lights went out in an instant. The dance floor immediately became dark and everyone fled.

Zhang Haiyan went to a corner, immediately took his coat off, tore his mask off, and threw it to the middle of the dance floor.

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<sup>(2)</sup> Shaolin Kung Fu is one of the oldest, largest, and most famous styles of kung fu. It originated and was developed in the Shaolin temple in China. Wiki link [here](#)

At almost the exact same time, the artificial lights on the dance floor came on. They were very bright and everyone seemed to come to their senses.

Zhang Haiyan saw that Miss Dong had stopped giving chase. She walked up to where the mask was, picked it up, and then stuffed it into her skirt. She then lifted the box that had the jade in it.

Warner ran downstairs and looked at Miss Dong. "What happened to Steven? Where's my jade?"

"Steven stole your jade."

"What's the matter with Steven? He was just like a monkey," The gunmen asked from the back.

Warner grabbed the skin mask and threw it to the gunmen behind him. "Miss Dong, I've lost something on your ship. You need to take responsibility."

Miss Dong lit another cigarette. "That doesn't sound right. Didn't your subordinate steal your thing?"

Warner became angry and drew his pistol, aiming it directly at Miss Dong. "Did you fucking set up a trap? That wasn't Steven. If Steven can run after jumping down like that, I'll lick your feet."

Miss Dong watched him coldly and then took a single step forward. The pistol in Warner's hand suddenly disappeared. He was stunned, but Miss Dong had already put the pistol back in his holster.

"Since his purpose is the jade and we're on a ship, the jade will still be here before we dock. What are you worried about?" Miss Dong continued, "Start the investigation now. Inform everyone of the news. All passengers have to stay in their rooms and wait for Mr. Warner's inspection."

Zhang Haiyan was in the corner, looking at Miss Dong and wondering what the woman was going to do.



## Chapter 33 – Lose Control

Zhang Haiyan soon got an answer.

There were about eight hundred people on the ship. If four people shared a room, then that meant that there were about two hundred rooms. In the event of an emergency, the captain of the ship had the right to impose a curfew and require all passengers to stay in their cabins in order to control the situation.

As the ship began to broadcast the news non-stop, Zhang Haiyan could already feel that this matter had become very troublesome.

Everyone rushed to their rooms, and Zhang Haiyan mixed in with the crowd and walked out. He saw Warner directing Hudson to check the fourth floor of the first-class cabin.

This meant that they were going to check Steven's room, which He Jianxi and Steven were still in. During the ship-wide curfew, everyone had to stay in their own rooms. Otherwise, they would be arrested and possibly shot on the spot, whether they were suspects or not. (It was wartime after all.)

Everyone had to have a legal room to stay in. Even if he immediately brought He Jianxi and Steven back to his own room, Warner would definitely come to check. All he could do now was break Steven's neck and throw him into the sea. He Jianxi had to return to the third-class cabin immediately, or they would all suffer.

But Warner and the others moved very fast, and he didn't dare run for fear of arousing suspicion. There might not be any way to do it so seamlessly.

*He Jianxi, ah, He Jianxi. If it were Zhang Haixia, he would definitely react and do something. But He Jianxi can't be counted on.*

As Zhang Haiyan followed the crowd, he passed by a killer who was disguised as a waiter. They both looked at each other, but neither took action.

When Zhang Haiyan made it to the corridor, he suddenly realized something. He looked back and saw Miss Dong walking out of the ballroom with the gunmen. They had submachine guns in their hands and were pulling the bolts back.

Warner followed her. "If Miss Dong can't find what I've lost, we might not go to Xiamen. Miss Dong, your father will have to pay more to get the boat back to shore."

"You used the Egyptian Museum's collection to make a deal with me. You're such a scoundrel. Do they know you're doing this?"

"To exchange one Central Asian national treasure for the smuggling rights to China's ten national treasures is certainly a suitable deal. But it's not appropriate if the jade is lost."

"Then you can't go to Central Asia anymore. You'll be a wanted criminal in the United States. Your academic status will be destroyed," Miss Dong said. "Which means you're doomed if you lose the jade."

"We will be doomed, Miss Dong."

Miss Dong took out a stack of notes from her clothes, which turned out to be the notes Zhang Haiyan had given her. She looked at them and said, "Well, since we'll have the same fate, Mr. Warner, please give me the right to command the gunmen. I'll help you get the jade back tonight and we'll talk about our new deal afterwards."

When Warner looked at the people behind them and nodded, Miss Dong said to the gunmen, "Gentlemen, there are no rules. Whether they are children, adults, old people, or women, as long as I give the command, you will shoot immediately. Otherwise, I cannot guarantee your safety."

The gunmen looked at each other and Miss Down moved forward quickly. Zhang Haiyan decided to take a break and lit a cigarette. He noticed that all the killers were looking at him from among the crowd, but they didn't dare attack him.

This was a truly interesting situation.

Zhang Haiyan had confirmed a few things after this most recent series of events. First, Miss Dong had been in a state of house arrest before tonight, but she gained control of the gunmen because of his actions. Second, she knew a lot of things that happened on this ship. Third—and most importantly—was that whether he wanted to cooperate with her or abduct her to control the ship, he didn't want to hurt her. But Miss Dong was the complete opposite. For her, Zhang Haiyan and all those who might kill her needed to be eradicated tonight.

There was nothing wrong with her line of thinking. He would do the same if it were him.

But he didn't know why Miss Dong would think someone on the ship wanted to kill her. She had taken advantage of the gunmen's strong firepower and the killers' weakness to make this move. It was very risky, but also very clever.

If the killers assembled and fought against the gunmen on the deck, they would be wiped out by a barrage of bullets in an instant.

That was why the gunmen hadn't separated since they got on the ship. It had always been a fixed concentrated firepower advantage. Until now, this group of people still had all their guns together.

As a result, separating the gunmen and slowly consuming their firepower wouldn't work.

Since they couldn't do it the hard way, the killers now had two options.

One was to stay outside and get caught because of the ship-wide curfew. If they resisted, they would be shot on the spot.

The other was to go back to their rooms, where they would be divided into groups of two or three because of the room limitations. With the firepower of dozens of submachine guns, they were basically waiting for Miss Dong to go from room to room and kill them.

*The second one will work as long as she knows who the killers are, and she knows who they are because I told her.*

Zhang Haiyan felt very conflicted about this. His plan of abducting Miss Dong and using her to deal with the killers couldn't be executed anymore because she was already on it. Her plan was more well-rounded than his, and with her skills, it would be very difficult for the killers to fight back. They would definitely be killed this time.

Another problem was that Zhang Haiyan was also seen as a killer. And based on the direction they were walking in, he was likely to be the first one killed.

Zhang Haiyan rushed back to his own room. He had already figured out a general plan. *Steven. I have to deal with Steven first.*

He didn't want to kill Steven, but if he didn't, the three of them would have to go on an adventure and stay away from the ship for several hours.

"Cousin, pack your things. We've got to jump into the sea." Zhang Haiyan walked into the room and found that Steven and He Jianxi were gone.

He froze for a moment and discovered that the lamp cord that had been wrapped around Steven had been cut by a knife.

He recalled that when he left the room, He Jianxi didn't say much but Steven kept talking. He didn't think there was a problem at the time, but now that he thought about it carefully...

*He Jianxi, this idiot. Is it possible that he was fooled by Steven and let him go?*

Zhang Haiyan suddenly felt like he was Wu Dalang<sup>(1)</sup>. *These two adulterers.*

Just as he was thinking this, he heard He Jianxi's screams coming from the balcony. He went up to the window, looked around, and saw Steven and He Jianxi.

The both of them had been knocked to the ground and Warner was tugging on Steven's face. Off to the side, Hudson drew his gun and put it to the back of He Jianxi's head.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Wu Dalang, also translated as Wu the Elder, is a major character in the classic Chinese novel "[The Plum in the Golden Vase](#)", and a minor character in the "[Water Margin](#)", another classic. In both novels, he is murdered by his adulterous wife Pan Jinlian. Wiki link on him [here](#)

## Chapter 34 – Killing Spree

In the records of the Southern Archives later on, this was what happened on the Nan'an that night:

Miss Dong took Warner's gunmen with her and launched a total of fourteen attacks. The sporadic fights won't be mentioned here. The biggest one was in the cabin that had the wide beds.

The wide-bed cabin was the area where the cargo hold had been converted into a passenger cabin. Many people stayed in this cabin, and small vendors slept on the floor there.

Even the Nan'an had such a cargo hold in order to expand the number of passengers they carried.

The killers initially didn't know that Miss Dong had their information. The materials Zhang Haiyan had provided weren't comprehensive, but Miss Dong went through the crowd, catching one killer after another like an eagle catching a chicken. They only realized something was off when she asked them to kneel down and face the wall.

In many cases, as long as people won fifty percent of the fight, the remaining fifty percent would follow. This was the case on the Nan'an that night. The remaining assassins thought that Miss Dong had the entire list, so they desperately rushed at her, hoping to take hostages to protect themselves.

It had seemed like Miss Dong's actions were risky at the time, but she was actually the one who was most likely to win. If someone had informed the other killers of Miss Dong's performance at the ball, then those who rushed towards her wouldn't have been so surprised to find that she wasn't someone who could be subdued so easily.

Miss Dong merely took a few steps backward, preventing those poor people from grasping her clothes. She then grabbed the first person's wrist, twisted it, and blocked the hidden weapon that was shot out from behind.

The gunmen raised their submachine guns, and a bloody mist bloomed like lotus flowers as the four people rushing over were instantly blasted full of holes.

The remaining ones grabbed some women and children from the side to use as hostages, but they grossly underestimated the skills of Warner's gunmen. Those gunmen had trained the speed and accuracy of their short-range shooting skills during the Westward Expansion as they fought the Native Americans.

They found gaps in the hostages' shoulders, armpits, and sides and shot the killers without any hindrance.

The Southern Archives didn't have any records on whether manslaughter or accidental injuries occurred during the whole process.

Based on the result, about thirty-four assassins had been killed on the ship by the time dawn came. Seven assassins jumped into the sea to escape and one lifeboat was missing.

Only one killer was captured, and his name was He Jianxi. It was determined after the trial that he had been coerced, so he was eventually acquitted.

Five of the gunmen died.

After the ship arrived in Malacca, the plague began to spread. A total of nineteen passengers were missing, thirty-four assassins and five gunmen had died, and seven assassins had jumped into the sea to escape.

At that time, it was a major criminal case that took place on the sea, so the newspaper extravagantly reported on it. All the southern countries were shocked.

Another thing that should be mentioned is that Zhang Haiyan was neither on the list of missing people nor on the list of those who were killed.

So where did Zhang Haiyan go? Why didn't He Jianxi die?

At that time, Steven briefly explained everything that had happened as Miss Dong looked at He Jianxi. Warner looked at Miss Dong in challenge, wanting to know if this woman was bluffing.

But she didn't hesitate at all.

"Kill him." With that said, Miss Dong moved forward with the team.

He Jianxi watched in horror as Hudson pulled out his pistol. "Turn your head. Don't look at the person shooting you."

At this moment, Steven pressed Hudson's hand down. "Keep a few people alive. What if this woman staged the whole thing herself and is killing people in order to shut them up?"

By this time, Zhang Haiyan had come out onto the balcony and climbed onto the pipes above the corridor. As long as Hudson fired, he would immediately shoot the blades from his mouth and drag He Jianxi into the sea with him.

But Hudson thought it over for a while and then put his gun away. He let Steven tie He Jianxi up and then moved to follow after Miss Dong.

Zhang Haiyan breathed a sigh of relief and then moved along the pipes as he followed the people who had abducted He Jianxi. When they arrived at a corner where no one was around, he shot the chandelier down. He then grabbed He Jianxi's neck from above and pulled him onto the pipes.

As the two of them ran wildly along the pipes and reached an inner cabin, they heard gunshots. Miss Dong wasn't joking. She had really gone on a killing spree. Zhang Haiyan thought of how he wanted to kill people whenever he was in a bad mood and suddenly realized that he was an



absolutely kind person. This woman was truly an example of a person of action.

“Cousin, you sold me out,” Zhang Haiyan said. “I’ve been so good to you, you Pan Jinlian<sup>(1)</sup>.”

“He suddenly had a heart attack. I was afraid he was going to die. I didn’t know he was faking it,” He Jianxi said anxiously. He was still terrified over what had happened earlier. He had already seen his boss’ brain matter and the thought that his own brain was almost smeared across the ground made him break out in goosebumps.

“Now the whole ship is searching for you. Can you listen to me for once?”

“They are searching for you!” He Jianxi said angrily. “I’m just someone you hired to catch flies.”

Zhang Haiyan did some quick calculations. They were on an enclosed ship and Miss Dong was especially fierce. She certainly wouldn’t let him off the hook.

At this time, he saw a lifeboat on the distant deck.

Amid the vast sea, he certainly wouldn’t think of going to Xiamen by lifeboat. But now that he knew exactly what Zhang Ruipu’s plan was, he had to return to Perak as soon as possible to check on Haixia’s safety.

He couldn’t care too much about anything else right now. He had to come up with a plan.

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<sup>(1)</sup> In the last chapter, Zhang Haiyan felt that he was like Wu Dalang, a character in a classic novel who was killed by his adulterous wife Pan Jinlian. Therefore, Zhang Haiyan was basically saying, “You’re my wife, and I’ve been so good to you. How can you cheat on me?” lol

## Chapter 35 – The Apple Scam

Zhang Haiqi put seven apples on the table across from where Zhang Haixia and Zhang Haiyan were sitting.

She wasn't wearing many clothes since Xiamen was very hot in the summer. If it wasn't for the fact that Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia had reached puberty, Zhang Haiyan thought that their godmother would have definitely stripped all of her clothes off by now.

Yes, he remembered that his godmother used to go around naked in front of them when they were little.

Zhang Haiqi was eating the eighth apple by herself. Her words were slurred, her face was red, and she seemed to have drunk a lot of alcohol. "I only made a meal for one person," she said to the two of them. "Now, I'll ask you a question. Whoever answers it first gets to eat." She hiccupped and Zhang Haiyan got a whiff of chicken soup.

He looked at what was on the other side of the table and knew very well that the "meal" consisted of a piece of flatbread and a fried egg.

When he and Zhang Haixia looked at each other, Zhang Haiqi became angry and immediately threw the apple at Zhang Haiyan's face. "You're grown men now. Stop making eyes at each other!"

Zhang Haiyan immediately sat up straight and Zhang Haiqi continued, "Alright. These apples on the table are mine. You're going to steal them away from this room. Both of you are going to do it, but you must find a way to prevent me from being suspicious of you. This is an independent task, so you can't collude with each other."

Zhang Haiyan gave an affirmative response, but he didn't even understand the question.

He reflexively wanted to turn and look at Zhang Haixia, but when he thought of how he was hit by the apple earlier, he immediately stopped himself.

Zhang Haiqi looked at him and lit a cigarette. "I'll say it again. The apples on the table are mine. You're going to steal them away from this room. Both of you are going to do it, but you must find a way to prevent me from being suspicious of you. This is an independent task, so you can't collude with each other."

Zhang Haiyan understood the question this time and his mind raced as he thought about it carefully. He soon came up with a rough idea of how to do it.

But just as he was getting ready to plan out more details, Zhang Haixia spoke up from beside him, "I'll give six apples to Zhang Haiyan and let him run out first. I'll stay here and take the last apple. When you come back, I'll tell you that Zhang Haiyan took all seven apples."

Zhang Haiqi looked at Zhang Haixia.

"For Zhang Haiyan, it doesn't matter whether he takes six or seven apples because you'll already be angry enough. And he won't bother clarifying how many apples he's taken since he'll definitely be beaten either way," Zhang Haixia continued.

Zhang Haiyan turned his head to look at Zhang Haixia. "You monster, how can you come up with this method? I was going to say it was the kid next door who stole the apples."

Zhang Haiqi motioned Zhang Haixia to eat the meal before saying to Zhang Haiyan, "While you're hungry, think over this issue very carefully. When you need to get out of a sticky situation in the future, you have to know how to get yourself acquitted."

Zhang Haiyan clutched his belly while he watched Zhang Haixia eat the flatbread. Zhang Haiqi headed upstairs. A few seconds after she was gone,

Zhang Haixia immediately tore the flatbread in half and tossed it to Zhang Haiyan.

The situation right now was the same. The number of bodies and crewmen on the ship was fixed, so if he wasn't among either of them, then he had to be on the ship.

He needed everyone to see that a lifeboat had fallen into the sea so that people would think that some of the killers had used it to escape. That way, he could continue staying on the ship. When the ship arrived in Xiamen, he could return to Malacca as quickly as possible.

But an empty lifeboat was useless. In other words, he wouldn't be helping Miss Dong in this situation. He was going to help one or two killers escape.

*It's going to be difficult, but I'm not backing down.* He looked at He Jianxi, "Can you hold on and hide for twenty minutes?"

"What are you doing now?"

"I don't have time to explain. Go hide in the lifeboat. The two of us have to survive that crazy woman." Zhang Haiyan stuffed He Jianxi into the lifeboat and then followed the sounds of gunfire all the way to the cargo hold.

When he snuck close, he heard the gunmen running past and falling to the ground in the distance. It was obvious that the killers had started fighting back.

"Three people have retreated into the cargo hold," one of the gunmen said. "We were blocked at the door. They have hidden weapons, so Miss Dong wouldn't let us in. She went in to handle it herself."

Being in a dark place wasn't good for a group of people with heavy firepower, since they could easily be targeted and separated. This Miss Dong was really bold if she thought she wouldn't have any problems dealing with three killers by herself. It was easier for one person to hide in the dark

compared to three, so Miss Dong must have been very confident in her stealth abilities.

*Shaolin Temple doesn't teach this, either. I wonder where Miss Dong comes from?*

Zhang Haiyan climbed like a gecko to the vicinity of the cargo hold and saw that the door was full of gunmen. It was basically positional warfare at this point. Not only were all of the guns facing the inside of the door, but they were all submachine guns, too. Those inside couldn't rush out and those outside couldn't rush in.

Zhang Haiyan looked around and saw that someone else was hiding on the same pipe as him. The two looked at each other very awkwardly.

The killer froze for a moment, and then suddenly moved and raised his hand, shooting a nail from his sleeve. When Zhang Haiyan turned his head to avoid it, the nail hit the metal wall with a clang. The gunmen immediately looked back.

Zhang Haiyan motioned for him to stop making any noise and then mouthed, "Brother, let's fight hand-to-hand."

The killer climbed towards him like a gecko, and then he and Zhang Haiyan began grabbing each other's throats in the small space.

They clawed at each other a few times before they stopped and pulled back. Zhang Haiyan motioned for him to wait and then mouthed, "Brother, if you grab me, I'll definitely scream, and we'll be killed by the gunmen. If I grab you, you'll definitely scream, and we'll be killed by the gunmen. There's no need for that. We're both fools now. We have to work together."

The other party couldn't read lips and was frowning in confusion. Zhang Haiyan suddenly spat out a blade and watched it slice through the killer's throat. He had controlled the strength well, so only a third of the blade came out of the back of the killer's neck. But even though the blade didn't go through completely, the killer had still died instantly.

Zhang Haiyan crawled forward and quickly caught the dripping blood as the gunmen passed by below them. He then took off the killer's shirt and wrapped it around his neck to absorb the blood.

## Chapter 36 – Bai Zhu

He Jianxi hid in the lifeboat. The place was very cold as he huddled in the corner next to the seat.

He had been an accountant for a private winery. Every day, he had to withstand other people's negative emotions whenever he collected the accounts. Then, his boss suddenly committed suicide. After getting on a barge, he was quickly robbed and then thrown off the ship. He floated on the sea for a long time with no island in sight. He then climbed onto an iron ship and became a stowaway. Ten minutes after that, he witnessed mass murder and then turned into an abductor.

He had been cautious all his life. There were some flaws with working in the bootleg business, but he was frank and had a clear conscience. But in the span of three or four days, he had committed a lot of serious crimes.

No matter how honest he was, he didn't have the confidence to explain everything clearly.

He couldn't even imagine how this kind of situation would end anymore. He could still blame Zhang Haiyan in the beginning, but now that he was in a daze, he understood it all clearly. He had encountered this kind of change because he was unlucky.

What else would happen? Would he be shot dead? He thought of his boss. Death wasn't unusual in this kind of world, right? Or could he get away and act as if everything had been a dream?

At this moment, he suddenly heard a noise outside. He secretly opened a gap in the canvas covering the lifeboat and saw Steven walking outside. He was dragging a young girl behind him.

The girl had been shot and was tied up with a belt, but she wasn't dead yet.

He Jianxi recognized her. He had met her when Zhang Haiyan asked him to smell the people in the third-class cabin's steerage area.

She was one of the two girls who had attacked Zhang Haiyan after the two of them had climbed onto the ship. At that time, he remembered one girl had shoulder-length hair and the other girl had hair that reached her ears. This girl had shorter hair, so her name should be Bai Zhu.

Bai Zhu gritted her teeth through the pain as Steven pointed a gun at her head and furtively looked around. When he saw that no one was around, he took a deep breath and said to Bai Zhu, "You're my first Asian woman. I hope we'll both feel impressed at the end of the day." With that said, he pushed Bai Zhu's upper body against the lifeboat that He Jianxi was in and started to take off her pants.

Bai Zhu's figure was very good, and people could tell at a glance that she was good at swimming since she had long legs.

Bai Zhu clenched her teeth as Steven began to take off his pants. The pain made her break out in cold sweat and He Jianxi wondered if she even had the strength to sense what was about to happen next. He then heard Bai Zhu say, "Kill me first."

"I heard that Native American women used to say things like this as well." Steven was so excited that he was panting. "My uncle told me that I can't cut the scalp first. I have to grab the woman by the hair while I fuck her. Otherwise, the flies will soon show up." As he lifted Bai Zhu's shirt up, her blood began to flow down the side of the ship. When Steven saw the blood, he decided to put Bai Zhu's upper body into the lifeboat.

Bai Zhu saw He Jianxi inside the lifeboat. He Jianxi looked at her but didn't know what to do.

Steven was still trying to take off his pants. When he finally succeeded, he spit in his hands, looked around again, and then put the gun on the edge of the lifeboat. From He Jianxi's position, all he had to do was raise his hand and he could reach it.



Bai Zhu didn't know who He Jianxi was, but she didn't scream. Instead, she looked at him calmly and said, "Kill me."

"I'll shoot you in the back of the head the moment I feel comfortable," Steven said from outside the lifeboat. "I heard you'll squeeze tightly if I do that."

He Jianxi looked at Bai Zhu's face. *What a beautiful girl! Although she killed without batting an eye, now she's no different from all the other girls who are bullied in Malacca.*

"Kill me." Bai Zhu repeated with watery eyes.

He Jianxi suddenly made up his mind. He quickly grabbed the gun, flipped open the canvas, and aimed the gun at Steven.

Steven was just about to take the first step when he was startled by He Jianxi's sudden appearance. He tripped over his pants and almost fell.

"Everyone has the right to a trial," He Jianxi said.

Steven immediately turned around and pulled up his pants, using the opportunity to grab the dagger on his belt with one hand. But at that moment, he saw a flash of white light as Bai Zhu's two slender legs came up and clamped around his neck. With a twist and a snap, Steven's neck immediately broke. Bai Zhu twisted forcefully and threw his body directly off the ship and into the sea.

Bai Zhu fell to the ground and curled up in pain. She clenched her teeth and looked up at He Jianxi, who was still pointing the gun at where Steven had been just a moment ago. After he realized Steven was dead, he immediately pointed the gun at Bai Zhu.

Bai Zhu gritted her teeth and moved to get up, but closed her legs when she remembered that she wasn't wearing any pants. After several more attempts, she finally passed out.

He Jianxi was so stunned that it took him a moment before he cautiously crawled out of the lifeboat. He found that Bai Zhu's shirt was stained with blood, but the blood had stopped flowing.

"We're going to the cargo hold. We're going to kill that woman. We can win this." Bai Zhu was delirious as she looked at He Jianxi, seemingly mistaking him for someone else. "Don't let others know about us. Everyone on the ship needs to die." She said intermittently.

He Jianxi looked at the gun in his hand. It was absolutely impossible for him to kill people. But if he left her lying here, she would be found by the gunmen sooner or later. At that time, she would be either raped or killed. There was no chance that she would be interrogated.

For some reason, He Jianxi didn't want this girl to die. He didn't know many girls, after all. Maybe it was because he didn't have much experience in this world, but he had an inexplicable affection for beautiful girls.

*Where's the plague god? He seems like someone people can negotiate with.* He Jianxi put the pistol in his back pocket, helped Bai Zhu put on her pants, and then placed her in the lifeboat. He took out the bottle of spirits Zhang Haiyan had given him earlier and poured it on the wound. Bai Zhu didn't react at all.

He had to find the plague god. And since the plague god had followed the sound of gunshots, He Jianxi would follow them as well.

When he reached the corridor, it happened to be the moment Zhang Haiyan killed the assassin.

The gunmen walked by, not realizing that there were people on the pipes. As Zhang Haiyan breathed a sigh of relief, he noticed that the assassin's eyes were wide open, seemingly glaring at him. Zhang Haiyan shook his head and thought to himself, *you were even fooled at such a critical moment. You deserve to be short-lived.*

At this time, he suddenly realized that something was wrong. It wasn't the gunmen who were walking by. It was He Jianxi.

The bastard was leaning against the wall and moving forward with trembling limbs. He was just a few steps away from the entrance of the cargo hold. If he reached it, the gunmen would riddle his body full of holes.

Zhang Haiyan immediately hung down from the pipe, grabbed He Jianxi by the neck, and quickly pulled him up.

He Jianxi was startled and wanted to scream, but quickly realized that it was Zhang Haiyan.

"Can't you listen to me for once?" Zhang Haiyan scolded him.

"Something happened while I was hiding in the lifeboat," He Jianxi said. "That Bai Zhu girl was captured. Steven wanted to rape her, but I stopped him. But before I could do anything, Bai Zhu killed him. Then she passed out, so I pulled her into the lifeboat. If I stayed with her, I was afraid that she would kill me. If I left her on the deck, I was afraid that someone would rape her. I... I didn't know what to do, so I came to find you."

"Just throw her into the sea," Zhang Haiyan said. A little girl like Bai Zhu, who had killed too many people, didn't need mercy. She needed a quick death.

"I can't kill people," He Jianxi said.

Zhang Haiyan sighed. He never expected He Jianxi to kill people, either.

He Jianxi finally noticed the gunmen up ahead, "What are they doing? Stop looking at them. You should go back quickly and figure out what to do."

"This is the cargo hold. The killers fled and went in there, so Miss Dong followed after them. I'm trying to find a way to put a few corpses on the lifeboat, so good job. If that Bai Zhu woman dies in there, then that's one

less person for me to kill,” Zhang Haiyan said while pointing to the corpse nearby.

He Jianxi was no longer surprised, but at this moment, he suddenly thought of something. “Wait a minute, cargo hold?”

He wanted to say, “The cargo hold is a trap,” but just as he was about to speak, he suddenly smelled something strange. He became tongue-tied and ended up blurting out, “There’s a burnt smell.”

“What?”

He Jianxi looked above Zhang Haiyan’s head and asked, “What’s burning in there?”

Zhang Haiyan looked back and found that there was an iron cover above the area where he was lying. He also smelled something at this time and immediately opened the cover. There was a fuse box inside, on top of which was a string of earthenware pots with sparks coming out of them.

It was a string of six or seven old-fashioned grenades. They were used by warlords to attack watchtowers during melees.

Zhang Haiyan was shocked when he realized that the killer hadn’t been hiding here. He was planning on blowing up the fuse box instead.

*Fuck.* By the time he realized what was going on, the sparks had almost burned out. Zhang Haiyan grabbed He Jianxi and the corpse and then flipped over. He used his back to cover He Jianxi while he raised the corpse up to cover his front.

The first pot exploded, riddling the corpse full of holes. The nearby gunmen were immediately alarmed. Zhang Haiyan got up and saw the gunmen coming, but he couldn’t care about them right now. He grabbed He Jianxi and rushed towards the gunmen, but the second pot exploded just as they raised their guns.

A huge explosion rushed out from behind. Zhang Haiyan hugged He Jianxi and grabbed his head before doing a barrel roll. The gunmen fired, but at that moment, the cabin lights went out.

The rain-like bullets shone in the dark, sending sparks everywhere. As the pots exploded one right after another, the gunmen immediately dropped to the floor. After six more explosions, all the circuits on the floor had been blown up. The gunmen got up and turned on their lanterns, finding that the place where they had been shooting was now full of body parts.

“Weren’t there two people just now? Shouldn’t there be more traces of them?” A gunman asked surprised.

Meanwhile, Zhang Haiyan had rushed into the cargo hold.

It was so dark inside that it could almost be considered pitch black. The only sources of light were the light coming in through the door and the moonlight streaming in through the big, ball-sized windows.

With He Jianxi on his back, he flipped and landed in the gap between the two boxes of goods. He covered He Jianxi’s mouth tightly and hid, feeling a burning sensation on his back. He must have been injured by the pots just now.

Unlike his previous speculations, Miss Dong’s counterattack didn’t seem to disturb the killers. Instead, they were still resisting.

He was using so much strength to cover He Jianxi’s mouth that He Jianxi almost suffocated to death. When He Jianxi patted his hand lightly, Zhang Haiyan let go of him. He realized that He Jianxi was breathing heavily and looked terrified, but he wasn’t as frightened as before.

*This guy is probably used to it.*

He grabbed He Jianxi’s hand and wrote in English: “Don’t make any noise. There are killers.”

When He Jianxi nodded, Zhang Haiyan turned to listen to their surroundings. There was nothing but silence in the warehouse. He couldn't hear any sounds from Miss Dong or the killers. It was so dark that he wouldn't even know whether someone was standing right in front of him. If he couldn't hear anything, then that meant that both parties were hiding.

Zhang Haiyan understood that bombing the fuse boxes had been planned, which meant that plunging the cargo hold into darkness had also been planned. In other words, these killers had originally planned to resolve the battle in the cargo hold. If Miss Dong hadn't come in alone and brought all the gunmen in with her, then the killers would have won by now. The darkness was way too suitable for ambushes.

But now the situation was very awkward because only the clever Miss Dong came in. Since she wasn't moving, the killers didn't know where she was. And since the killers wouldn't move, Miss Dong didn't know where they were, either. They were all sly foxes.

*I'm in an even more awkward situation. I was only going to find a few corpses, but not only am I injured now, I'm also trapped in the final round.*

The blood on his back began to drip to his waist and then flowed along his waistline to his butt. Zhang Haiyan exhausted all his strength as he strained his ears to the limit.

Even though the ship was shaking, the goods were strapped down. As the ship swayed, the wooden boxes were pulled in various directions, making a faint sound of wood rubbing together.

These people must have eased their breathing and slowed their heartbeats, hiding the noises they made among the sounds of wood rubbing together.

Only four or five minutes had passed, but the absolute quiet made Zhang Haiyan feel as if fifteen minutes had passed.

He tried to move and inch upward very slowly. He wanted to reach the top of the stack of goods. He had just climbed past two boxes when his hand

suddenly touched something hanging above the goods close to where he was hiding.

He almost instinctively stopped moving but forced himself to touch it again very lightly.

It was hair.

He held his breath but didn't hear any sounds of a heartbeat. He felt something drip onto his hands as he was wondering why there was hair in this kind of place.

He knew as soon as he touched it that it was blood.

When he reached his hand out, he touched a corpse that was still warm. It was a man who had died here quietly. His jaw had been torn off.

Miss Dong had come in alone, so that meant that this man was a killer.

*Impressive. She's already killed one person.*

Zhang Haiyan wiped the blood off and was just about to move on, when He Jianxi suddenly stopped him and wrote some words in English on his palm, "Left. Smell. Men."

Zhang Haiyan looked to the left, but it was completely dark.

He Jianxi continued to write, "There are at least a dozen people in the cargo hold."

Zhang Haiyan replied with a question mark.

He Jianxi wrote, "There are a lot of smells."

## Chapter 37 – Farewell

Zhang Haiyan retreated to the original gap.

He tried to breathe calmly as he took off his military uniform and pants. He was left only in his shorts since his other clothes were soaked in blood.

The pottery fragments were embedded in his flesh and he wouldn't be able to get them out for a while. He moved a little and found that it hurt a lot, but it wouldn't affect his movements.

He believed what He Jianxi had said. Even though the man had caused all kinds of trouble, the past few incidents made Zhang Haiyan feel that He Jianxi was really lucky. He even began to suspect that He Jianxi was a walking bodhisattva sent by the heavens. When this whole thing was resolved, he would probably turn into a plume of smoke, laughing as he disappeared.

If there were more than a dozen people in this cargo hold, then that proved a few things.

First, there were more killers on the ship than he had expected. The killers he had found in the steerage area and third-class cabins were only some of them.

Second, this cargo hold was a trap so that they could launch their counterattack.

He wouldn't be worried about Miss Dong if it was one on three, but no one could deal with more than a dozen people by themselves. He was the only one in history who could do it.

But Zhang Haixia hadn't been very impressed with him when he did it. It was the concept of winning small in the casino a dozen times in a row. There was a chance that it would happen, but it would never happen a second time.



That was why Miss Dong had erased her presence. She had stepped into a trap now, so she needed to protect herself instead of hunting the killers.

Of course, he had to help Miss Dong. It didn't matter whether he wanted to hijack the ship or leave by lifeboat, he couldn't let the people who killed his Southern Archives colleagues win. Otherwise, the entire ship might be blown up to hide the evidence of the plague.

But he wasn't completely sure that he would win. In fact, he was considered an interloper to both the killers' and Miss Dong's plans. But even if he and Miss Dong had a tacit understanding, the two of them wouldn't make a big difference in this cargo hold.

But He Jianxi's existence changed things.

If Zhang Haixia had been around, he would have been able to smell a lot of things. He and Zhang Haiyan would have definitely been moving slowly by now, approaching those people who were emitting an odor. The two of them would kill their opponents one by one until they had killed them all.

But He Jianxi didn't have that kind of tactic understanding with him. To be honest, those killers were very skilled. Although many opponents couldn't get used to the fact that Zhang Haiyan attacked half a second earlier than they expected, it was difficult to kill them instantly if he couldn't manage the same thing in the dark.

And since this was a trap, the other party must've had a way to communicate with each other in the dark. If he couldn't kill the opponents quickly, then they would surround him after his third or fourth try.

Zhang Haiyan's mind raced. When a person named Wu Xie talked with him many years later, he would always point out that Zhang Haiyan could use more subtle tricks on such occasions. But Zhang Haiyan's behavior at the time was more in line with his own heroism.

Zhang Haiyan decided to go all out. He counted the blades in his mouth with his tongue and walked towards the area He Jianxi had pointed out.

The fine hair on the human body could sense objects, including other people's temperature, heartbeat, and breathing. As long as the distance was close enough, the hair could feel something even if the consciousness didn't sense it.

It may sound ridiculous, but after Zhang Haiyan took off his clothes, he used the hair on his body to sense the airflow around him.

He soon felt the first killer in the dark and used all his strength to spit a blade in that direction

But at that moment, something embarrassing happened. Just as he rushed forward, lights suddenly came on in all four directions.

They weren't the artificial lights in the cargo hold, but spotlights. But they weren't the kind of lights that cameras had, either. Instead, they were spotlights that were used to send signals at sea and could stay lit for twenty seconds.

The sudden bright lights almost made Zhang Haiyan go blind.

The killer on the opposite side had been ready for this and kept his eyes closed. But when he opened his eyes, he suddenly saw a naked man rushing towards him.

The two people immediately clashed. After exchanging three blows, the lights went out again.

The flashing lights almost made Zhang Haiyan go blind and he didn't know what was going on. But when the lights immediately came on again, Zhang Haiyan realized that this was their tactic. They were controlling the lights in this dark space.

When the lights turned on again, Zhang Haiyan could no longer see, but the killer could. He walked around Zhang Haiyan and stood behind him.

Zhang Haiyan quickly tried to hide, but he couldn't see the cargo box that was off to the side. He slammed into it directly, scattering the goods inside across the ground and feeling as if he had injured his internal organs.

The lights went out again.

Zhang Haiyan's eyes immediately felt more comfortable. He quickly closed them and ran to go hide, but he had already lost his sense of direction. He slammed into a box of goods again. It was so heavy that it shattered when it hit the ground and he was also sent rolling.

The lights came on again.

He squinted and took off his glasses, smearing his blood on the lenses so it wasn't as bright as before. When the killer didn't immediately come at him, Zhang Haiyan looked around and suddenly realized that the goods he had slammed into weren't actually goods. They were corpses. Their faces had turned blue and they appeared to have undergone antiseptic treatment.

There was a familiar smell of disinfectant, which was the same kind they had smelled on Flower Reef.

*Is this the place where they hid the missing South Sea spies?*

Zhang Haiyan steadied himself first and then blended in among the cargo boxes. He could see human shadows everywhere. He didn't know how things were on Miss Dong's end. As the lights went out again, Zhang Haiyan pushed more boxes to the ground. Whether they could see or not, he would make it difficult for the killers to walk around.

When the lights came on again, Zhang Haiyan had pushed more than a dozen boxes to the ground. Not all of them contained corpses, but there were six or seven of them.

The corner of the cargo hold was now a complete mess. The killers stepped on the goods and rushed towards him from all sides, but Zhang Haiyan had

finally adapted to the lights. He licked the blades under his tongue and decided to risk it all.

At this moment, he suddenly saw a corpse in front of him.

He was stunned. He recognized the face of that corpse. It was Zhang Ruipu. *Why is he on the ship? And why is he dead?*

Then he saw another corpse next to Zhang Ruipu.

He didn't recognize the face at first glance, but then he took another look at the corpse.

His blood ran cold and his brain buzzed. "Zhang Haixia!" He shouted.

## **Chapter 38 – The Wind Blows in The Spring. Looking at The Small Building, The Wandering Hero Finally Returned to His Hometown**

The time turned back to when they were in Malacca.

Zhang Haiyan didn't look back as Zhang Ruipu watched him leave from the balcony.

Zhang Haixia was put in a wheelchair and brought down to the street. They headed in the opposite direction Zhang Haiyan had gone in. Everything seemed normal, but Zhang Haixia was actually aware that Zhang Haijiao—the girl who had been helping him personally—smelled different now.

Everyone had their own individual smells, and this Zhang Haijiao wasn't the same Zhang Haijiao whom Zhang Haiyan had brought back.

At first, Zhang Haixia thought Zhang Ruipu planned to switch them in case their deal went wrong. But he soon realized that wasn't the case, because when he paid special attention to Zhang Haijiao, he discovered that she didn't belong to either party.

Zhang Ruipu had threatened him and Zhang Haiyan, but now there seemed to be a third party involved in this. Who was it? Why did they know about the human skin mask technique?

The more he thought about it, the more terrifying it was.

But Zhang Haiyan was about to board the Nan'an at that time, and this girl was about to accompany him and be locked up by Zhang Ruipu.

Since the situation was unclear, Zhang Haixia didn't expose her. He thought that at least Zhang Haiyan would be free of Zhang Ruipu's control once he was on the Nan'an.

When they reached the street, Zhang Ruipu's young entourage surrounded him on all sides. Malacca's streets were usually very safe, so Zhang Haixia, like Zhang Haiyan, immediately felt that something was wrong.

Zhang Ruipu believed that there was a major threat on the street. At this moment, Zhang Haixia smelled blood. It was an ordinary street, but he was smelling blood that he didn't usually smell. And it was coming from hidden weapons.

That was when he saw He Jianxi.

He Jianxi was being beaten by a group of people, but Zhang Haixia still noticed that his nasal cavity looked the same as his.

This young man's nose was probably like his, which meant that it was more developed than others'.

This was a sign from God. It was a miracle.

He used his nails to write hints on the stack of money and then handed it to Zhang Haijiao so that she could give it to He Jianxi.

Zhang Haijiao's smell was mixed in with the money, and the hints he wanted to give Zhang Haiyan had also been written on the money.

Zhang Haixia actually inferred a lot of things at that time, all of which had been hidden in the hints. (For the convenience of narration, those things won't be mentioned for the time being since they're related to relatively major clues). It was just that Zhang Haixia already knew that the streets would be full of ambushes, and Zhang Haijiao would be the first one to attack.

If that was the case, Zhang Ruipu could hardly protect himself. There had to be something more if he was insisting on investigating the plague. But the killers whom he feared were already by his side.

Zhang Haixia had a strong feeling that although his parting with Zhang Haiyan had been very casual, it would be the last time they ever saw each other.

He couldn't move his legs and the street wasn't very long. When Zhang Haiyan was waiting in line to board the Nan'an, the scene in the street had reached its climax.

At this time, Zhang Haixia called out and stopped the entourage. He then said to Zhang Ruipu, "They're going to make a move."

When Zhang Haijiao turned around to look at him, he looked right back at her. The sun was bright and the noises were loud. Zhang Haixia closed his eyes and raised his head.

*In the end, it's you going back alone, Zhang Hailou.*

\*\*

This is what the Southern Archives recorded about the final outcome of the Nan'an incident:

Zhang Haiyan killed all of the assassins in the cargo hold.

There weren't any more details. Under the flashing lights, Zhang Haiyan understood that there was no passing Bodhisattva, no good luck, and no particular fate like he had imagined.

Everything had already been decided since the beginning.

Under the flashing lights, a blood-soaked Miss Dong killed her own opponents. When she walked out of the shipping container, ready for the next wave of attack, all she saw were corpses all over the floor and a motionless man holding a corpse.

Miss Dong watched it all silently from behind him.

She then quietly walked over and pulled Steven's mask out of her clothes. She squatted in front of the man and put the mask back on his face before turning and walking towards the exit.

He Jianxi was holding the revolver he took from Steven as he hid in the gap between the boxes by the door. Miss Dong glanced at him but ultimately ignored him.

She went to the door, lit a cigarette, took out the Central Asian jade from her clothes, and said to the gunmen, "It's all over."



## Chapter 39 – Return Home

Zhang Haixia and other corpses were properly arranged in the cargo hold and embalmed (the specific details won't be stated here). All in all, everything went on as usual.

Zhang Haiyan stayed in Steven's room afterwards. Arrangements were made so that He Jianxi would be in the same room as him.

It was as if the plague god had lost his soul. He didn't eat or drink and just sat by the window, watching the sea.

Whether he ate or not, He Jianxi still took care of him for the rest of the journey. He Jianxi could no longer feel the plague god's former happiness. He didn't know what had happened, but pain was something that was simple and universal.

For some reason, Miss Dong let them go and even treated them courteously. But nothing mattered to Zhang Haiyan anymore, so he had no idea what happened during that period of time.

The lifeboat that Bai Zhu was in was missing. There was a chance some killers were still on the ship, but there shouldn't have been many of them left.

The storm gradually died down after Miss Dong launched several investigations. The details of what happened between Warner and Miss Dong afterward are also unknown.

Zhang Haiyan started eating again when the ship was near Xiamen, but he was already too thin by that point. He dreamed of Flower Reef and Zhang Haixia every night. When he lit a cigarette again, he realized that things weren't over yet.

Many of the weapons used to kill people on board were used by the military. Moreover, some warlords excavated the plague ship on Flower

Reef several years ago. The plague was running rampant in Malacca now, and people were hunting the Southern Archives' secret agents on the Nan'an. There had to be a mastermind behind this.

Since the truth behind the plague was still unclear, the Flower Reef case wasn't closed.

And he couldn't let Zhang Haixia die in vain.

Zhang Haiyan's throat was dry after not eating for a long time, but he forced himself to eat all kinds of foods in order to restore his strength.

He tried to communicate with Miss Dong, but she never gave him the time of day.

Miss Dong never showed up again, but she had someone deliver a note and Zhang Haixia's body to him before he got off the ship in Xiamen. The note contained the Dong's address and the following content: The rules in this word are difficult. We shouldn't see each other again, but if you find your thoughts still overwhelming and incomprehensible, you can go here and discuss them with me. Remember, it's best not to see each other. There's been nothing to say from the start.

The content of the note was very interesting, but Zhang Haiyan didn't have time to play charades with her. He ironed both his and Zhang Haixia's military uniforms and then dressed them both neatly. He carried Zhang Haixia's body on his back as he got off the ship with He Jianxi.

After so many years, he had finally set foot on Xiamen again. "See? You were wrong. We came back together," Zhang Haiyan said to Zhang Haixia.

After they left the port, he realized that everything had changed. There were cars, carriages, and rickshaws going up and down the road. Even the people's clothes were very different from when he had left here.

The air in Xiamen was moist and clean, but it wasn't as hot as it was in Malacca. The weather here made people feel refreshed and comfortable.

Since Zhang Haiyan was carrying a corpse on his back, he couldn't go to the roadside vendor stands to have his childhood snacks. He and He Jianxi looked at each other as they stood by the side of the road.

Zhang Haiyan took out some money from his pocket and counted it before giving it to He Jianxi. "He Jianxi, you were in danger on that barge, so I took the liberty of bringing you with me. Here's the money for all the pain that I've caused. We're even now. The money is enough for you to find a bigger ship to go to San Francisco. We won't see each other again."

He Jianxi looked at the corpse on Zhang Haiyan's back.

"Now that we've spent some time together, don't you want me to help you send your friend off?" He Jianxi could kind of guess what had happened to Zhang Haiyan. As long as there were emotional reasons, it was always easy to figure out why people did what they did.

"I don't." Zhang Haiyan carried Zhang Haixia as he moved towards the streets from his memories.

He Jianxi stood on the roadside, looking between the sky in Xiamen and the money in his hands. He suddenly felt a bit dazed.

He had planned on going to San Francisco, but it felt so good to be stepping on real land again.

After walking for a while, Zhang Haiyan soon came to an old street. It was still the same as his memories, and nothing had changed. He could vaguely recognize a few people around the neighborhood.

He came to Zhang Haiqi's residence and found that it had become a lozenges shop. The owner of the shop was a newcomer whom Zhang Haiyan didn't recognize.

Zhang Haiyan went up to ask where the previous residents had gone. The owner's face turned blue and he was a little scared when he saw Zhang Haiyan carrying a corpse on his back. He said that the place had been sold

several times. No one knew where the previous residents had gone after such a long time had passed.

Zhang Haiyan knew his godmother's temper, so it wasn't surprising that she had moved away without notifying anyone. But he couldn't find a hotel to stay in since he was carrying a corpse on his back. In the end, he went to the South Sea Archives where they had undergone training several years ago.

The South Sea Archives was on public lease on the east side of the South Sea Maritime Affairs office. When he went there, he discovered that it had become a bank called "Haili". He figured the owner must have been a foreigner.

Zhang Haiyan carried the corpse and entered the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office. He put the corpse aside on the waiting bench, tidied his military uniform, and then asked the clerk at the door, "Excuse me, where has the South Sea Archives moved to?"

There were more than a dozen clerks filling in forms by the windows who all looked up and stared at him. "Pardon?"

"The South Sea Archives. I can see that it's already moved. Where has it moved to? I'm a field agent. I haven't returned for a long time."

"The South Sea Archives?" Two of the clerks looked at each other and then shook their heads. "I haven't heard of it. What archives? This is the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office."

"Here's the thing. The South Sea Archives is an institution under the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office. You and I are colleagues. I'm a field agent who has returned to the country. It seems that the institution has already been moved, so that's why I'm here asking about it. Can you check it for me?"

His military uniform was very particular, so the clerk didn't dare offend the officer. He stood up and walked upstairs. After a while, the clerk came down with a stack of documents and said to Zhang Haiyan, "Sir, I asked more than twenty supervisors who have worked here for a long time. They said that

since the establishment of the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office, there has never been an institution called the South Sea Archives. Did you make a mistake?"

## Chapter 40 – Hermit Crab

Zhang Haiyan ran to the second floor of the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office and sat in front of an old supervisor who stated the facts three times. Each time, Zhang Haiyan shook his head.

“That’s absolutely impossible. I underwent training at the South Sea Archives and have been a maritime supervisor for a long time.” Zhang Haiyan pushed his ID card towards the old supervisor.

The man turned the card over and shook his head. “We’ve never issued such an ID card. Moreover, we’re in charge of shipping. We don’t do any investigations.”

When the old supervisor looked at him again, Zhang Haiyan continued, “The person who trained us is called Zhang Haiqi. She raised us.”

“It’s obvious that this person who raised you has lied to you.” The old supervisor took out a key and handed it to a clerk. “Sir, I don’t know what you’ve been through. This is the key to our archive room. You can check all the information. I can guarantee that you won’t see any paper with the words ‘The South Sea Archives’ written on it.” Zhang Haiyan looked at the old supervisor and then took the key.

“When you’re finished, please put the documents back where they belong,” the old supervisor said to him. “We’ve been kind to you, so don’t cause us any trouble.”

The clerk accompanied Zhang Haiyan to the archive room, where he stayed until dusk.

There wasn’t a single piece of paper with the words “The South Sea Archives” written on it. There weren’t even any records of the Maritime Affairs Office having any subordinate agencies since its establishment.

Zhang Haiyan quietly thanked the clerk and then put Zhang Haixia on his back and left. The sky was a bloody red and his mind was blank as he wandered to the Haili bank's entrance.

The bank was closing, but he walked in anyways. Under the watchful eyes of the employees, he found that all the decorations had changed and even the structure itself was completely different.

If it hadn't been for the fact that some of the details outside still looked the same, he would've really wondered if he had gone to the wrong place.

When the security guard asked him to leave, he walked to the corner of the street opposite the bank and sat down. As he and Zhang Haixia leaned against the wall, he looked at the bank and started to recall his childhood.

The South Sea Archives was a direct subordinate of the Maritime Affairs Office, so he only needed to report to his godmother.

Since they were little, their salaries, benefits, clothing, and education had all been provided by the South Sea Archives. They never doubted that they might not be working for an official agency of the Maritime Affairs Office.

"Is it possible that Godmother lied to me?" Zhang Haiyan couldn't understand it.

*Why would she lie to me? If I never worked for the government and I killed all those people over the years, does that mean I'm just a killer like those assassins on the ship?*

*No way. A giant entity must have completely erased the South Sea Archives. Are they also the ones behind the plague?*

*That old supervisor seems like a good man, and I've checked all the information myself. But can the South Sea Archives really be erased so thoroughly?*

Zhang Haiyan looked at Zhang Haixia.

*I must be really stupid*, he thought to himself. He went to light a cigarette and suddenly saw the note in his pocket.

Miss Dong's note.

Miss Dong wasn't an ordinary person. She must have known that there were killers on the ship. Otherwise, she wouldn't have killed without an ounce of hesitation. She even took advantage of his presence to directly take over Warner's gunmen and clear the ship.

When this woman got on the ship, she didn't have any helpers by her side. She waited patiently for an opportunity and then used Warner's greed to achieve her goal.

But this matter originally had nothing to do with her. The assassins wanted to kill people from the South Sea Archives, so why did she take such a big risk to kill them all?

Could it be that she was also related to the South Sea Archives, just like Zhang Ruipu?

Zhang Haiyan looked at the note. Since the bank was closed, there was nowhere else for him to check right now. But if someone really was trying to erase traces of the South Sea Archives, then surely the bank wouldn't have anything there. There wasn't even a single clue in the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office to begin with.

Zhang Haiyan felt as if he had been abandoned as he looked at the note again. This was something he really hadn't expected.

Just as he was thinking he needed to figure out what to do next, he saw a simple sketch drawn at the corner of the note. It was very abstract but easy to identify. It was a hermit crab.

He looked at his watch, which also had a hermit crab on it. This was the South Sea Archives' logo.



## Chapter 41 – Low-Level Agent Zhang Haiyan

The Dong residence was a large manor in Xiamen that had a mixture of Western and Chinese-style buildings.

There was a Western-style building at the front gate where the concession's provisional government was located. A wealthy businessman surnamed Ma had the idea of making it look like a small-scale copy of Buckingham Palace, but it wasn't very successful. It only roughly looked like it, and now it was covered in vines.

There were three houses in the back that had been renovated, which missionaries had originally bought to be used as orphanages. Since the two sides were connected, the buildings spanned a large area and looked like a haphazard mixture of Chinese and Western styles.

The Western-style building at the front gate had a huge front yard, where giant trees had been planted. There was a fountain outside the front gate, which people could park their cars around.

It was said that Ship King Dong liked the quiet, so there weren't many servants in the mansion. He also didn't like to move around much, so unless banquets were going to be held, only the lights in the left and right wings of the Western-style building were on most of the time.

The renovated left and right wings were specially made to resemble the Nan'an, with balconies protruding from them. Zhang Haiyan was now in one of the rooms that had the lights on and Miss Dong was making coffee for him.

The decor in the room was almost the exact same as that of Nan'an. *Don't they get tired of it?* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. *After getting off the ship and returning home, normal people would definitely hope that their homes would be completely different. This mansion makes people feel as if they've returned to the ship again.*

“Your father really likes that ship,” Zhang Haiyan said. He didn’t like drinking coffee because he was already very active and didn’t need the caffeine to catalyze himself.

“Shipowners are always particular when it comes to feng shui. The Nan’an is the head ship of the Dong family fleet, and the Dong mansion is also the leader of all shipping businesses in Xiamen. They were designed by the same feng shui master, so both places look similar.” Miss Dong was in her pajamas. When she handed a bunch of melons and fruits to Zhang Haiyan, he began to eat. He hadn’t eaten anything all day, so the sweets helped calm him.

“I thought you would stay outside for a few weeks before coming to find me. I didn’t expect you to come so soon. I haven’t even sorted out my luggage.” Miss Dong sat on the sofa opposite him. “Are your wounds healed?”

“All your ship’s doctors are dead, so I had to treat the wounds myself. I don’t think they’ll heal very well.” Zhang Haiyan stared into Miss Dong’s eyes, not at all distracted by her calves and collarbone, which weren’t covered by her pajamas. “I just don’t understand why you weren’t willing to communicate with me on the ship. You waited until we disembarked before inviting me, and—” he handed over the note. “Since you know how to draw this hermit crab, does that mean you’re a friend of mine?”

“I know you have many questions, which I’m ready to answer since I let you come here. You don’t have to be subtle.”

Zhang Haiyan nodded. Miss Dong didn’t seem like a difficult person to talk to. He was just about to start asking his questions, when Miss Dong said, “You’re right. I work for the South Sea Archives.”

Zhang Haiyan hadn’t even closed his mouth when Miss Dong continued, “The South Sea Archives is gone. During your last year in Malacca, it was wiped out. The perpetrator was a southwest warlord named Mo Yungao. He

also planned the tragedy on the Nan'an in order to eliminate the South Sea Archives' overseas influence."

*You're so straightforward that I didn't even get the chance to ask my questions,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

Miss Dong continued, "For the time being, the two of us are the only agents left in the South Sea Archives. According to the rules, the Archives can be rebuilt as long as there are two high-level agents. But unfortunately, you're a low-level agent, so in essence, the South Sea Archives no longer exists."

## Chapter 42 – The Zhang Family in The Northeast

Zhang Haiyan ate a cookie and laughed. His military rank was so much lower than Zhang Haixia's, so if Zhang Haixia was considered a small character, then he was afraid he was even less important. But he had never paid attention to this kind of thing before. Compared to everything that had happened, weren't ranks and levels all a joke now?

"Miss Dong, to be honest, I have a lot of questions," He said. "My first question is: Did the South Sea Archives really exist?"

Miss Dong moved to speak, but Zhang Haiyan interrupted her, "Do you know that the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office told me that they've never had any affiliated institutions called the South Sea Archives and they've never even heard of it? I checked through all their information, and there's really no record of it. Do you know what's going on?"

Miss Dong lit a cigarette, "That's why I said you're a low-level agent."

Zhang Haiyan looked at her and said to himself, *are you going to use rank to evade the question? Even if I'm not qualified to know the truth, it seems ridiculous to use such a big scam to lie to their own low-level employees.*

"The South Sea Archives never had anything to do with the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office. We only said that because the South Sea Archives' origin was too complicated for you people to understand. It's just easier to tell you that it's a government-run agency." Miss Dong pushed the ashtray over, indicating that Zhang Haiyan could smoke if he wanted to. "In fact, the origin of the South Sea Archives is very complicated. The fact that it wasn't an official agency doesn't mean that it didn't exist."

“If it wasn’t run by the government, was it a privately-owned agency?” Zhang Haiyan asked. “Was it a gang? Did we belong to a subordinate organization of the Green Gang<sup>(1)</sup>?”

“I’ll have to tell you a story.” Miss Dong stood up and opened the cabinet behind her, revealing a passage inside. When she motioned for Zhang Haiyan to follow her, he lit a cigarette and walked over,

Miss Dong continued, “Next, I want to show you the truth about the South Sea Archives. You’re still an ordinary person, so you can choose to leave now. These things aren’t easy to take in. After you know of them, many things will change.”

Zhang Haiyan laughed. He had been on the reef full of plague-infected patients and had survived without food and fresh water. He swam thirty kilometers and scaled ships to kill people before jumping into the sea and leaving. He had cut the flesh under his tongue so that he could put blades in his mouth. All these things had long made him someone who wasn’t ordinary.

Moreover, if the South Sea Archives was gone, then what did that make him? Did it even matter whether he was ordinary or not?

He had to know the truth.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Miss Dong said. “When ordinary people do some extraordinary things, they always think that they’re out of this world. I’ve seen too many people like you over the years. Let’s go.” Miss Dong walked in first, with Zhang Haiyan following close behind her.

The first thing he saw was a lot of human skin masks on both sides of the passage that had various beasts tattooed on them. “What is this?”

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<sup>(1)</sup> The Green Gang was a Chinese secret society and criminal organization. They were prominent in criminal, social, and political activity in Shanghai during the early to mid-20th century. Wiki link [here](#)

“Do you know why most people in the South Sea Archives have the surname Zhang?” Miss Dong asked.

Zhang Haiyan shook his head. He only knew why those who had the surname Zhang had the character “hai” in their names<sup>(2)</sup>, but he had never been interested in why their surname was Zhang. In his opinion, the higher-ups didn’t want their surname to attract attention, so they chose a common surname like Zhang. It was a lot better than having a surname like “Baili”<sup>(3)</sup>, which people would naturally know had a story behind it.

“There’s a Zhang family in northeastern China, who live in Baishan. They do a special kind of business.” Miss Dong stopped in front of a human skin mask. Her eyes seemed to go distant, as if she was dreaming of something that happened a long time ago.

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<sup>(2)</sup> “Hai” means “sea” in Chinese. Foreign/overseas Zhangs would have “hai” in their names.

<sup>(3)</sup> Baili (百里) is an ancient Chinese compound surname that was rarely found in modern times.

## Chapter 43 – Those Who Are Favored by Gods

The human skin mask that Miss Dong looked at was obviously much older than the other human skin masks. It had started to turn black in the glass cabinet and had cracks all over it. There was a very simple ancient tattoo on it that was monochromatic.

“This mask has several thousand years’ worth of history. Everyone in the Zhang family has tattoos, but the locations vary. This family has been around for many generations,” Miss Dong said. “They established the Western Archives more than a thousand years ago to investigate strange events that took place in Tibet and established archives everywhere after that. The South Sea Archives was the last one established and has only been around for sixty years.”

“Why is the Zhang family in so many people’s business? Wouldn’t Empress Dowager Cixi stop them?<sup>(1)</sup> Is there no farm work in the northeast villages or something?” Zhang Haiyan asked.

“No one knows why the Zhang family does these things. Some people say that they have something to do with grave robbing. Since they go tomb-robbing all year round, they need to know about the legends and news surrounding the tombs. That’s why they set up the archives. In the beginning, the people in the archives were all from the main branch of the Zhang family. But ever since the last century, the number of people in the Zhang family has decreased. They started to adopt orphans from the remote parts of Southeast Asia,” Miss Dong said.

Zhang Haiyan was silent as Miss Dong kept walking. “In fact, the people like us who work for them only know that there are tons of records sent to the northeast every year. In addition to helping the Zhang family collect

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<sup>(1)</sup> Empress Dowager Cixi was a Chinese empress dowager and regent who was the de facto supreme ruler of China in the late Qing dynasty for 47 years, from 1861 until her death in 1908. Wiki link [here](#). Basically, Zhang Haiyan thought that the authorities would’ve stopped the Zhang family if they were doing things on such a large scale.

information from various places, we also adopt orphans, train them, and then have them hunt down the traitors of the Zhang family. Zhang Ruipu was one such traitor. All of these traitors are difficult to deal with, which I believe you have experience with since you've dealt with him."

*It sounds just like a gang, Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. The Zhang family in the northeast is just a northeastern gang. They sound like an organization of hereditary "bandits" with a long history. It's a bit like Elder Brothers Society<sup>(2)</sup>. There may even be mysterious religious customs, so that's why the archives were set up everywhere. They're worshiping Huang-Lao<sup>(3)</sup> and catching ghosts while recruiting members at the same time.*

Zhang Haiyan continued following her, and they soon reached a dark room. Zhang Haiyan glanced at the décor and saw that it was all archive cabinets. They were the same ones that were used by the South Sea Archives.

"This place was originally a part of the South Sea Archives' expansion plan, but these are the only things left now," Miss Dong said. She pulled at a white cloth that was in the middle of the room, revealing Zhang Ruipu's body lying on a table.

Miss Dong hung an incandescent lamp over the corpse and took the corpse's hand before showing it to Zhang Haiyan. He saw that the corpse had three fingers that were very long, and there was a hint of deformity.

"One of the characteristics of the Zhang family is that they have some fingers that are long. Zhang Ruipu had three, so he was considered relatively mediocre among the Zhangs. The fingers are said to be used to break mechanisms when they rob tombs. Their fingers can reach smaller places

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<sup>(2)</sup> Gelaohui, usually translated as Elder Brothers Society, was a secret society and underground resistance movement against the Qing Dynasty. Every member allegedly carried a small hatchet inside their sleeve. Wiki link [here](#).

<sup>(3)</sup> Huang-Lao was the most influential Chinese school of thought in the early 2nd-century BCE Han dynasty, having its origins in a broader political-philosophical drive looking for solutions to strengthen the feudal order as depicted in Zhou propaganda. It is generally interpreted as a school of syncretism, developing into a major religion – the beginnings of religious Taoism. Wiki link [here](#).



that way.” With that said, she grabbed a file that was sitting off to the side. “This is Zhang Ruipu’s file.” She flipped through a few pages until she reached a photo.

An official from the Qing dynasty and Zhang Ruipu were both in the photo. “This was taken in the twenty-fourth year of Daoguang<sup>(4)</sup>. Qiyong was the governor of Guangdong and Guangxi and the Minister of Trade and Industry. The photo was taken in Macau during Qiyong’s negotiation with France<sup>(5)</sup>. This person is Zhang Ruipu, and this person is Qiyong.”

Zhang Haiyan could tell that Zhang Ruipu was in his fifties in the picture, and he looked almost the same as he was now. Zhang Haiyan took the photo and compared it with the corpse. The picture was taken almost seventy years ago, so even if Zhang Ruipu was only twenty at that time, he should have been ninety by now. But Zhang Ruipu’s corpse still looked like he was in his fifties.

“Why didn’t he grow old?” Zhang Haiyan asked.

“People in the Zhang family almost never grow old.” Miss Dong took off Zhang Ruipu’s clothes, grabbed a bottle of brandy from nearby, soaked the clothes in the alcohol, and then lit them on fire. She put them on the corpse’s shoulder and patted them more than a dozen times before the fire went out. Zhang Haiyan saw a Qilin tattoo appear on Zhang Ruipu’s body.

Miss Dong then turned a page in the file, revealing a sketch of a Qilin tattoo.

“They all have tattoos on their bodies that are made from a special mixture of herbal medicine and poultry blood. The tattoos will only appear when the body temperature rises. Since everyone’s tattoos are different, this is the rubbing of his tattoo to verify that he is indeed Zhang Ruipu from the Zhang family.”

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<sup>(4)</sup> The 24th year of Daoguang = 1844 AD.

<sup>(5)</sup> Keying, also known by his Chinese name Qiyong, was a Manchu statesman during the Qing dynasty of China. He concluded the Treaty of Whampoa (1844) with France. Wiki link [here](#).

When Miss Dong held the document up to Zhang Ruipu's body, Zhang Haiyan realized that the details of the tattoo were exactly the same as those in the document. The person in the picture was really the same person that was lying right before his eyes.

"You mean to say people in the Zhang family are immortal? It's... a group of monsters?"

"There are rumors that they rob ancient tombs and set up archives to find the immortality elixir in ancient tombs," Miss Dong said. "They're all rumors, of course. It isn't a good thing to be immortal. What's the point of living if everyone you care about is dead?"

Zhang Haiyan remained silent. If he had heard this before he got on the Nan'an, he might have been extremely excited, thinking that his superiors were a group of gods and he was their apprentice. But he only learned that people were able to be immortals after Zhang Haixia was dead, so now he had doubts and found the whole thing ridiculous.

*What's so good about being immortal? Zhang Ruipu was immortal and he ended up dead anyway.*

"There aren't any immortals in the world," Zhang Haiyan said. "I've seen many sorcerers in the South Sea. They all said that they had survived the Portuguese era<sup>(6)</sup> and wouldn't die even if they were buried in the ground. But after they were buried, I didn't see them come out of the ground at all. The rice grew very well, though. There's a possibility that this photo is forged."

Miss Dong flipped through the file. All the photos were taken during the negotiation that Qiyang conducted at that time. Zhang Ruipu was circled with a red pen in each photo. "Zhang Ruipu participated in this negotiation and obtained the exclusive right to manage all the rubber businesses. These

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<sup>(6)</sup> Portuguese India Afonso de Albuquerque conquered the city of Malacca in 1511. Wiki link [here](#).

photos are all from the French archives at that time. They wouldn't help him deceive people."

Zhang Haiyan shook his head. He wished he could believe these things, but all the mysterious things he had encountered in the South Sea over the years were scams. He had become a realist.

"You have to have more direct evidence," Zhang Haiyan said. "If it were me, I could make a fake face based on the photo and you wouldn't even be able to tell."

Miss Dong smiled, "Of course there's direct evidence." With that said, she started walking again.

"Then what do you think?" Zhang Haiyan asked. "If you had to come up with a theory, what do you think the Zhang family set up the South Sea Archives for? Is it really for immortality? Do you really believe that?"

"They're waiting for something to happen. Something major. I guess they knew more than a thousand years ago that this thing would happen, and have been waiting ever since. They also must have known that there might be various clues in various places before it happened. Those clues were rumored to be incredible events, so they set up archives to monitor the possibility of large-scale unexplainable phenomena."

This was how Mo Yungao took advantage of the characteristics of the South Sea Archives and spread the plague.

Zhang Haiyan shook his head, but Miss Dong said, "You told me to come up with a theory, and that's what I did. I already told you that no one really knows what the Zhang family is trying to do."

"Since the Zhang family is so mysterious, will I be in any danger now that you've told me about them?"

Miss Dong didn't answer.

The two of them continued walking, passing by numerous rooms that were all empty. By the time they reached the end of the passage and saw an iron door, they had gone deep.

Zhang Haiyan suddenly thought of a question and asked, "You said that the both of us are the only people left in the South Sea Archives. Do you know where a person named Zhang Haiqi is?"

"When you were in Malacca, Mo Yungao led troops to raid the archives. No one besides me survived," Miss Dong said. "She should be dead."

Zhang Haiyan shook his head again. "Impossible. My godmother is the most formidable woman I've ever seen. She wouldn't die so easily."

"Isn't your good friend also dead?" Miss Dong sneered as she looked back at him. "Why would you think that the people you know are those favored by gods?"

Zhang Haiyan felt very uncomfortable. He knew that he would still deny everything, no matter how convincing the things behind the iron door were. This was because he knew that if he believed Miss Dong's words, then he was really alone in this world.

## Chapter 44 – Zhang Haiqi

When the iron door was opened, it was completely dark inside.

He wasn't afraid that Miss Dong was plotting against him since she could've killed him a hundred times over on the ship, but this dark room looked as if it was underground. Even though he was reckless sometimes, he should still be more cautious now that he had entered such a dark place.

*She let me see the corpse, so could there be beasts in this room? Are there more corpses or the remains of the Archives?*

Although Miss Dong didn't kill him, it wouldn't be a good thing if she closed the iron door when he entered the room. Then he would be locked up and that wasn't any fun.

Zhang Haiyan thought about it and decided he wanted Miss Dong to go in first so that he could walk in behind her. As a result, he slowed down.

Miss Dong walked in without hesitation and said to him, "Close the door."

*It's fine,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. *Everything's fine.*

Miss Dong always acted before he had time to think as if she knew him very well. He kept feeling like his various thoughts were inadvertently being seen through.

The room was very warm, and he could hear the pleasant sound of running water. There was an echo in the space that made him feel as if a girl was breathing ethereally.

Zhang Haiyan came in and closed the door, but he didn't close it all the way in case something happened and he needed to make a run for it.

He noticed that there were stone stairs leading down. He took a few steps and found that the stairs actually led to warm water.

It was a hot spring.

Miss Dong was still walking up front, but now it sounded like she was wading through water. She soon lit a candle holder in the depths of the space, and their surroundings lit up.

It was a big candle, so the light was very bright.

He could see that they were in a small stone room with a hot spring flowing in from the wall, forming a pool. There was a stone table in the middle of the pool that had corners covered in sulfur, which had converged and turned into something like stalactites. The table had obviously been placed here for a long time.

There were numerous tools on the table that were wrapped in linen, but other than that, there was nothing else in the room.

“Where’s the evidence?” Zhang Haiyan asked. “Isn’t this just a bathhouse?”

Miss Dong’s pajamas were now soaked as the hot spring’s steaming water flowed along the absorbent material. Zhang Haiyan watched her approach the table and start fiddling with the tools. As the heat engulfed them, tattooed patterns started to appear on the exposed parts of her body.

Since the heat went from the bottom up, all the tattooed patterns appeared to grow from Miss Dong’s arms like flowers. Her tattoo was very colorful, and Zhang Haiyan was stunned by the sight of it.

He soon discovered that it wasn’t a flower, but a Qilin.

The pajamas were now molded to Miss Dong’s body, showing off her figure. The two of them looked at each other.

“So, this is the evidence you mentioned. You’re from the Zhang family,” Zhang Haiyan said. “I don’t believe it. You don’t seem like you’ve lived that long at all. Plus, isn’t your surname Dong?”

“People in the Zhang family use a pseudonym if they’re over a hundred years old. They also use Dong as their surname. My pseudonym is Dong Zhuohua,” Miss Dong said. “You don’t seem all that curious about why I’m the Ship King’s daughter even though I’m also an agent of the Southern Archives.”

“I’m guessing the Ship King doesn’t know that his daughter isn’t his daughter anymore. This probably isn’t your original face.” At this time, Zhang Haiyan was already feeling like something was wrong. Miss Dong looked like she was only in her early twenties, but the way she talked both here and on the ship made people feel like she was older than that.

Moreover, Miss Dong was too patient and talkative even though he had discredited her words the whole way. It made no sense for her to keep lying to him patiently after she decided not to kill him on the ship.

Plus, the calmness in her eyes wasn’t something that could be faked.

It would be easier to explain the whole thing if she was wearing a mask. Moreover, her figure looked like a woman in her thirties. It was possible that she was so calm because of everything she had been through before.

*She must be lying to me because she wants something from me. I hope she can be more direct about it. Zhang Haiyan was now like someone who had lost his family. If some girl is willing to be kind to me in this way, it would be foolish for me not to listen to what she has to say. Otherwise, I might end up wandering around and really turn into a beggar.*

So, Zhang Haiyan said to her, “Since Sister Zhang didn’t kill me on the ship, if there is anything you need me to do, you can just say it directly. You don’t need to force me to believe this story. I just need to know that the Southern Archives actually meant something so that Zhang Haixia didn’t die in vain. It’s fate that he’s gone now, but I’m afraid that everything we’ve done is all just a pipe dream and no one even remembers us.”

Miss Dong flipped open the linen wrapping that was on the table, revealing some things that looked like pens inside. “Zhang Hailou, how many times

have I told you that you need to hide your motives whenever you do things? Zhang Haixia was so much better than you when it came to hiding his motives,” she said.

Zhang Haiyan froze, and Miss Dong continued, “I thought that you and Zhang Haixia could have a good life after you went to Malacca. Before you left, I told you that only those who remember my words are able to survive. You keep saying that you miss me, but you didn’t even follow my rules. You broke your promise and came back before the thirty years were up. Everything happens for a reason. You chose to be a coward after all.”

She straightened her hair, pulled at her chin, and tore a human skin mask off her face.

As Zhang Haiyan naturally retreated, he saw an extremely young face appear in front of him. He was stunned for a long time before he managed to say, “Mother?”

The young woman looked at him so calmly that he couldn’t tell what she was thinking behind those eyes.

“You have chosen your path. There is no chance for you to leave this matter now, so you should just accept your fate directly.” Zhang Haiqi threw the mask aside.

Zhang Haiyan looked at her in surprise. This woman—his master, his godmother, his superior—looked exactly the same as she did when he had left Xiamen. Even her skin was still like that of a young girl.

It was his godmother, Zhang Haiqi.

His heart warmed, and then he felt panicked and stunned as his mind came to a screeching halt. He wanted to say something, but he suddenly felt dizzy and Zhang Haiqi’s image in front of him became blurred. He saw Zhang Haiqi open an earthen jar on the table, which seemed to contain paint. Zhang Haiyan staggered, a little unstable.



“Mother, it’s great that you’re alive. What happened to me? I—I didn’t get to save Haixia. What happened to me?”

No matter how tough a man was, he would immediately return to that young boy when he saw the woman who raised him. All the countless grievances, loneliness, pain, and the memory of having to deal with it all on his own surged up in Zhang Haiyan’s heart before rushing away.

But he couldn’t even say a word. He didn’t know if it was because of the excitement or the water here was too hot. Maybe it was because he felt that the Zhang Haiqi in front of him was a little strange and different compared to what he remembered from his childhood memories.

“The hot spring here has been infused with medicinal drugs. People with ordinary blood won’t last long.”

Zhang Haiyan suddenly fell to his knees in the hot spring. Zhang Haiqi came to stand behind him and began tattooing him. “From now on, you feed your body with blood, and the tattoo will appear when your body temperature rises. Starting now, you’ll be surrounded by chaos, and you’ll stand by and let it happen.”

Zhang Haiyan felt confused as he lost consciousness.

## Chapter 45 – Reunion

Zhang Haixia's corpse sat silently in the Dong's living room. He was no longer alive. His life had broken away from the world and was heading towards reincarnation.

Zhang Haiqi wiped the paint from her hands and came to stand in front of Zhang Haixia. She squatted down and touched his cheek. He looked as if he was merely sleeping.

Time. She couldn't count the number of times she had sent her children off.

"Let's go home, Shrimp," she whispered to Zhang Haixia.

This child had been quiet and obedient since he was little. Other than spoiling Zhang Haiyan, he had never caused any trouble. He always looked at Zhang Haiqi's eyes during class or when he was about to fall asleep. He never fought to be her favorite child. He only observed and recognized what his mother needed.

The flowers by the bed had never withered and the children she brought with her had never been lost. The neighbors had never complained and they had never burnt food.

When Zhang Haixia was around, everything worked precisely like clockwork.

Zhang Haixia was afraid of losing that kind of peace and happiness, so he guarded everything firmly.

Zhang Haiqi placed her forehead against his. Her child's forehead was as cold as a northern winter and not at all warm like a Xiamen summer.

She picked Zhang Haixia up and walked towards the backyard. She buried him in the cemetery amidst the numerous tombstones. Each one was another farewell. There were countless times when she thought she had gotten used to it.

Truth was, she never liked this kind of moment, no matter how long she had lived.

Zhang Haiqi stood in the cemetery for a long time that night, listening as the wind blew past the tombstones. It almost sounded like people were crying all around her.

When Zhang Haiyan woke up, he was lying naked and face down on a bed.

He tried to think about what happened earlier. Most people's imaginations would run wild if they were in his position, but he immediately thought of Zhang Haiqi.

"Mother." He muttered to himself in a daze. He saw Zhang Haiqi reading the newspaper on the sofa opposite the bed, ignoring him.

Zhang Haiyan felt pain on his back and arms, but when he looked back, he found that there was nothing there.

"Mother, what happened to me? What did you do to me?" With that said, he pulled the nearby blanket over to cover himself.

"I helped re-treat the wounds on your back," Zhang Haiqi said.

Zhang Haiyan had just breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that the door was open and a servant was bringing breakfast in. Since Zhang Haiqi wasn't wearing a human skin mask, Zhang Haiyan reflexively wanted to spit out a blade, but he found that there weren't any blades in his mouth.

The servant left quickly, and Zhang Haiqi said, "Stop it. I can use both mine and Miss Dong's faces here. I'm Miss Dong's friend now."

Zhang Haiyan wrapped himself in a bedsheet and got out of the bed to look for his clothes. There was a set of pajamas by the bed, so he hid in the corner to put them on and then said, "Mother, what's going on? How can you be Miss Dong? Why didn't you reunite with me on the ship? Are all the things you've told me yesterday true?"

Zhang Haiqi flipped through the newspaper. "If I'm not Miss Dong, do you think I can be Mrs. Dong? How could I be sure you didn't become a traitor like Zhang Ruipu while you were in Malacca? You were mixed up with his people, so I highly suspected that you had become disloyal. Of course I had to observe you for a while."

"You have so little confidence in me. Would I really be disloyal to you, my mother?" Zhang Haiyan said.

"Of course I wouldn't have confidence in you when you show up alone." Zhang Haiqi put down the newspaper.

Zhang Haiyan's eyes dimmed, "I didn't get to save Haixia."

"That's enough. Eat." Zhang Haiqi sat at the dining table. "Didn't I tell you a story when you were little? I told you that it's essential to look at how things will turn out in the long run. Do you still remember that?"

Zhang Haiyan shook his head. He was familiar with his godmother's routine. When she usually said something like this, she must've never told the story before, and would make it up on the spot.

"You'll eventually die in a hundred years. Long-term regrets and repeated sorrows don't mean much to later generations. Those things will ultimately disappear, so you can get over them now. You just need to know that nothing can change the fact that the two of you once existed at the same time and in the same space," Zhang Haiqi said.

Zhang Haiyan thought for a while. As usual, he didn't understand her words whenever she said something for the first time. Zhang Haiqi handed him a stack of materials. "Give yourself a deadline to be sad. During this period of time, you can be as sad as you want. But after that, you'll have to get down to business."

Zhang Haiyan looked through the materials. They contained the same information about Zhang Ruipu that he had read yesterday, but there was also information about Mo Yungao. There were even photos of him wearing

a military uniform, which made him look like a very capable person. The words “the platoon leader of the Southwest Phnom Penh Army<sup>(1)</sup>” were written in the materials.

“This is before he got promoted. He was quickly promoted to division commander and took control of Beihai later. Now he is a warlord under the jurisdiction of the coalition military government, but he still autonomously controls the army. His relationship with the government is very delicate.”

“So what you said yesterday is true?” Zhang Haiyan still didn’t believe her.

“Do you think I look any older?” Zhang Haiqi retorted.

Zhang Haiyan took a closer look. Not only did Zhang Haiqi not grow old, but she also looked younger for some reason. Maybe it was because she never went outside when she was on the ship?

But such a thing was impossible. She had been out and about for so long that there was no way there wouldn’t be any signs of her aging.

“You’re over a hundred years old?” That would put her at like a great-grandmother’s age. He didn’t believe her one bit.

Zhang Haiqi obviously didn’t expect him to believe her, so she didn’t bother explaining it. “It’s fine. You’ll believe it someday.”

“If the Zhang family is so powerful, wouldn’t they send people from other archives to seek revenge after the South Sea Archives was wiped out?”

“We haven’t been able to contact the Zhang family in two years,” Zhang Haiqi said. “But there have been several times in history when we’ve only contacted each other again after more than ten years. The Zhang family will enter a state of silence from time to time. You can’t count on them.”

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<sup>(1)</sup> Phnom Penh is the capital and most populous city in Cambodia. Wiki link [here](#).

“Argh, the bosses are really capricious.” Zhang Haiyan ate some bread, feeling uncomfortable eating without blades in his mouth. “For me, Mother is the South Sea Archives, so you’re the boss. What are you planning to do, Mother? Should we avenge Haixia?”

“Mo Yungao has been managing his forces in Beihai for many years. The way he does things is very mature. He isn’t like ordinary warlords who just want to collect taxes for a few years and then leave after occupying a place. That’s why the coalition military government is so focused on appeasement and won’t specifically stimulate him. Since there’s only the two of us, it’ll be very difficult for us to deal with a city full of soldiers. Besides, there are many ethnic minority masters around him,” Zhang Haiqi said. “But he spread the plague in the South Sea, so no matter how I look at it, I feel like he’s doing some experiments. What he really wants to do hasn’t been revealed yet, but I’m worried he’ll—”

“You’re worried he’ll spread the plague in China?”

Zhang Haiqi nodded. “His purpose is unknown, but this Mo Yungao is behaving pervertedly. If we don’t investigate this matter, I’m afraid it won’t be a simple matter of revenge.”

“When we reported the Flower Reef case to the top, didn’t the Archives continue investigating it at the time?” Zhang Haiyan had been thinking about this question for a long time.

Zhang Haiqi looked out the window. “The Zhang family shut the case down.”

*“Why?” Since the Zhang Family monitors strange occurrences, why stop investigating such a strange thing? This northeastern gang is too willful.*

Zhang Haiqi didn’t speak. She actually knew that there was only one possibility for the Zhang family’s interference with the investigation: the case was shut down because it had something to do with the Zhang family’s patriarch.

“We have to rebuild the Archives and get rid of Mo Yungao. He already knows of the South Sea Archives’ existence, so logically, he can’t be left alive anyways. But the two of us aren’t strong enough right now. We must go to Changsha first and find someone to help us.”

## Chapter 46 – Running Accounts and a Thousand Years Between the Mountain and The Sea

A few events will be briefly mentioned here. In fact, many things had happened in Xiamen. There were still some interactions between Zhang Haiyan, Zhang Haiqi, and He Jianxi, but these incidents will be skipped.

After Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haiqi rested for a while, they set off immediately.

For Zhang Haiyan, reuniting with Zhang Haiqi was like a dream that ignited a new hope in his heart.

The train to Changsha was traveling through the southeastern mountainous areas in rainy weather. Even though vast mountains were covered in mist and the inside of the carriages felt cold and humid, Zhang Haiyan felt a warmth in his heart.

He looked outside the window, watching the frequent rain bursts and lightning strikes as he thought of Zhang Haixia. He had always assumed that Haixia would've been here with them.

Both Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haiqi's feelings were complicated, so neither spoke.

Zhang Haiyan carefully considered how he should interact with Zhang Haiqi. The easiest way to communicate normally was to talk about work. When he first saw her again, he was surprised and had too many questions, so the communication had initially been very smooth.

But once they had settled down, he realized that their relationship was a little distant. The mother and son hadn't seen each other for many years and it had been a long time since they lived together. His mother was the



type of person who wasn't nostalgic and was unwilling to talk about family life. It wasn't easy for Zhang Haiyan to get along with her well.

If it were other people, Zhang Haiyan would normally go with the flow and not worry about it. But he couldn't do that when it came to Zhang Haiqi.

When they were little, every child who faced Zhang Haiqi wanted her love and attention. They would all use different approaches, but Zhang Haiyan was the one who was responsible for not letting the situation become awkward.

Zhang Haiqi had been reading over the materials again. The person they were going to visit this time was called Zhang Qishan.

Zhang Qishan was the head of the Mystic Nine, which referred to the nine tomb-robbing families in Changsha (the Mystic Nine's specific background is very complicated, so there's no need to know much about them here).

Zhang Qishan was also Changsha's defense officer. Not long after he took office, the Japanese activities in the southwest ramped up, so his transfer must've been related to confining the Japanese spies' activities.

They weren't looking for him because Zhang Haiqi knew him personally, but because Zhang Haiyan had recorded in the Flower Reef case report that the lieutenant had mentioned him. This was what had prompted Zhang Haiqi to investigate Zhang Qishan and learn something about him.

At that time, everyone already knew the name "Zhang Da Fo Ye". But for Zhang Haiqi, a person whose surname was Zhang and had the word "shan"<sup>(1)</sup> in their name was someone she would definitely pay attention to in other aspects.

But Changsha was full of Zhang Qishan's informants, and all the spies who went there to investigate were all tied up and sent out of the city the very next day. After this had happened twice, Zhang Haiqi received the Ningxiang's specialty Weishan Maojian tea that was sent from Changsha to

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<sup>(1)</sup> "Shan" means "mountain". "Hai" means "sea" in Chinese.

the Dong residence. There was a note saying: I won't allow it to happen a third time.

As a result, she had stopped investigating him. Zhang Haiqi didn't know how Zhang Qishan had learned of her existence, but it was kind of futile to conduct more investigations on him since he was the incumbent defense officer and someone who the criminals in the Flower Reef case were wary of. Plus, she might ruin whatever he had planned by doing so. As a result, she also sent a gift back to him that consisted of candied olives from Xiamen.

Her going to Changsha to visit him showed that she was desperate. If she had guessed right, then Zhang Qishan must have also been related to the Zhang family.

But if the other party really was related to the Zhang family, then their generation name must have been "shan".

"There are a thousand years between the mountain and the sea. They are related, but they must not see each other."

In the Zhang family's proverb, the mountain and the sea were two groups of people who could never meet each other for the rest of their lives. When the mountain and the sea met each other, it meant that the Zhang family was certainly going extinct. This was a saying that she had heard a long time ago.

She didn't know what unpredictable consequences would occur if she met Zhang Qishan. In fact, she was far away from the core force of the Zhang family and had lost power as one of the few people with the generation name "hai". She didn't understand much about the Zhang family, so she was both nervous and a little expectant about their meeting this time.

Meanwhile, He Jianxi had already stayed in a small hotel by the dock for three days. He watched people coming and going every day and quietly settled down. He eventually decided to stay in Xiamen.

He didn't want to wander around anymore, but Xiamen's development had far exceeded his expectations. An accountant like him wasn't uncommon in concession regions, so it wasn't easy for him to find a job. Moreover, foreign banks in Xiamen didn't particularly trust Chinese people to be their accountants.

His money could last him for a while, but the prices in concession regions like Xiamen were very high. If he returned to his hometown, he knew that he could only do physical labor instead of something he was good at, which made him a little anxious.

As he spent the money, he habitually began to sort it so that he could count it and see how much he had left. That was when he saw the sketches on the money again.

At this time, he was surprised to find that the sketch of the plague god with blades in his mouth was Zhang Haiyan.

He had put these two things together a long time ago, but the things that had happened on the ship were so tragic that he only reacted now.

He felt strange all of a sudden. *Why did this happen? Could it be that the person who prevented me from being beaten up knew the plague god?*

He Jianxi thought about it carefully afterwards. He was grateful for what Zhang Haiyan had done. If it weren't for Zhang Haiyan, he might've died a long time ago and wouldn't have been alive to complain to him about what had happened. But Zhang Haixia was actually the first person to save him, because the money he had received from him may have been the key to his boss not killing him.

This seemed to indicate that He Jianxi might not have recognized Zhang Haixia's body since the details of a corpse were so different from the demeanor of the living. But none of that mattered now.

He Jianxi thought of Zhang Haixia's eyes at that time.

*What does this sketch mean? Did he draw this randomly? Did he draw his friend's face?*

He Jianxi began to look at all the money carefully and soon found that there were sketches on almost all of it. It looked like Zhang Haixia had drawn it all in haste, so the sketches weren't as obvious as the one of the plague god. There were even English words on one of the sketches that read: Pls deliver letters.

He Jianxi sat up and realized that this was the information the man in the wheelchair wanted him to help deliver. *But deliver to whom? Deliver them to the plague god?*

He looked at the money and saw that the pictures were all different. Some had English words, while others only had patterns. He found one that had a lot of English words on it that read: Killers are not ordinary people.

*Killers are not ordinary people.*

*What does this mean?*

*Did he mean those killers?*

For He Jianxi, anyone who was able to kill people was definitely not an ordinary person.

There was also a picture beside the words on the money. It was a child with an adult on his back, and there was a bigger person on the adult's back. A strange face had been drawn on the child's hand. No, it was actually a human face in the child's palm.

*Children carrying adults? Adults carrying giants on their backs? Or is it a small person carrying an adult, and a very small person carrying a small person? What kind of symbol is this?*

*What is the human face on the hand supposed to mean?*

He Jianxi was puzzled. He thought for a while and then started copying all the patterns that were on the money. He was going to find Zhang Haiyan.

The money he received from Zhang Haixia wasn't charity but a delivery fee, so he had to be sure to give the letters to Zhang Haiyan.

In this way, He Jianxi opened the riddle box Zhang Haixia had left before he died. No one knew how rich the information inside this box was. He Jianxi had just started to analyze and guess what it was, but the information he analyzed would change the course of this story many days later.

## Chapter 47 – Good Fortune in Changsha

The inland city of Changsha wasn't like Xiamen. It was humid, there was no breeze, and the smell of stinky tofu and spices from various stands filled the air. Something like oil fumes, fog, or firewood smoke floated up in the air.

There were peddlers, merchants with their mules, and ethnic minorities in western Hunan garb. Among the monks and beggars with unkempt hair, wealthy people sat on three-wheeled rickshaws. It was difficult to describe Changsha in one word.

After they got off the train at Changsha Station, they ate a bowl of spicy rice noodles. Zhang Haiyan had also eaten spicy food in Malacca, but it was never this spicy. As he tried to finish it all, his head ended up drenched in sweat

Changsha's bustling main street was hardly any different from the concession regions. The alleys were laid with bluestones and there were many overcrowded teahouses.

The sounds of Xiang Opera, Huagu Opera, and Tanci<sup>(1)</sup> were flooding into the streets. At that time, there were more than fifty theaters in Changsha with various operas performing around the clock. Lanterns were lit everywhere, showing an atmosphere full of joy and merriment that was unique to the Hunan people.

This environment was very different from the one Zhang Haiyan had grown up in, so he was feeling a sense of freedom and freshness. He felt that everything was so different, vibrant, and energetic.

Zhang Haiqi seemed to have been to Changsha before and was a bit emotional, as if she was revisiting an old place. Zhang Haiyan wondered if it had been half a century since she had last visited here.

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<sup>(1)</sup> [Xiang Opera](#) is a major local opera in Changsha. [Huagu Opera](#) is basically Flower-Drum Opera. [Tanci](#) is a narrative form of song in China that alternates between verse and prose.

The two of them finished their meal and took a walk to digest their food. Before they came here, they had sent telegrams warning that they were coming since they were worried that they would be mistaken for spies when they arrived.

The hotel they stayed at was called Good Fortune Hotel, which was one of the best in Changsha. Now that it was the off-season, there weren't any prostitutes coming and going, so it was very quiet.

While they walked along the streets, Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haiqi discussed what to do when they met Zhang Qishan. Since he was a special figure, they had to achieve their goals while avoiding any possible changes.

"Mother, under this kind of situation, what mentality should we have in order to deal with it?" Zhang Haiyan asked. In fact, this question was actually very difficult to answer.

"If we make an analogy, it's like we're the poor relatives from the country who are coming to gain favor from our wealthy relatives," Zhang Haiqi said. It was rare that they were all surnamed Zhang, so they had to take advantage of it.

"So, we're going to kiss his ass." Zhang Haiyan lit a cigarette.

"No," Zhang Haiqi said. "You're going to kiss his ass."

"Should we take action first in case there are any problems?" Zhang Haiyan asked.

"Zhang Qishan has been merciful several times. I've already informed him that we're coming, so I don't think he'll change his behavior so suddenly," Zhang Haiqi said. "But we can only come to a conclusion after we meet him. Then we'll act as we see fit."

To their surprise, Zhang Qishan's lieutenant was already waiting for them at the hotel door when they arrived. As soon as they entered, they saw an

officer in a military uniform looking at a horizontal calligraphy painting on the wall in the hotel lobby. He seemed to be contemplating something.

*The way they do things is really efficient,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

As Zhang Haiqi and Zhang Haiyan walked towards him, servants came to take their coats. Then, the guards outside closed the doors and windows and started lighting the lamps in the room.

*This person must be Zhang Qishan,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

As Zhang Haiqi walked to the sofa in the lobby, she saw that the western-style fireplace on one side had also been lit.

Zhang Qishan looked back, eyeing the two of them.

Zhang Haiyan knew how to read people. When he looked at Zhang Qishan, he knew that this man was the embodiment of his name. His aura was just like an unshakeable mountain<sup>(2)</sup>.

“Generally speaking, I’m not fond of people from the Zhang family<sup>(3)</sup>. But since you’re already here, it’s impolite to make you leave right away. Are we going to talk about the past or discuss business first?” Zhang Qishan asked as he sat on the sofa and motioned for them to sit down. “Miss Zhang must have a lot to discuss with me, but I’m busy with official duties so it’s better to make it short.”

Zhang Haiqi also looked at Zhang Qishan. *Nothing major has happened considering the so-called “mountains and seas must not see each other”. Are we really meeting just like that?*

“Are you also from the Zhang family?”

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<sup>(2)</sup> Remember, “Shan” means “mountain” in Chinese.

<sup>(3)</sup> Although Fo Ye’s surname is Zhang, he wants nothing to do with the Zhang family that Poker-face is from (i.e., the main branch).



“Actually, I don’t want to reminisce about the past. I used to be from the Zhang family, but now I’m not.”

“Is it really possible to choose not to be one of them?”

“I’ve tried it and it’s possible,” Zhang Qishan said. “If you’re here to tell me I can’t do that, then I suggest you not speak.”

Zhang Haiyan observed the hotel carefully, noting that it was probably full of Zhang Qishan’s people. It was abundantly clear that Zhang Qishan was wary of them. Zhang Haiyan felt as if the other man was giving off the same kind of vibes as Zhang Ruipu, but this was his first time being surrounded by a regular army.

Zhang Haiqi sensed the tense atmosphere and also looked around. “I don’t know about your relationship with the Zhang family or your past, but they definitely have nothing to do with me. Hailou, you can tell him why we’re here.”

Zhang Haiyan glanced at her and said to himself, *I wanted to see how Mother would reveal our purpose without embarrassing herself. I didn’t expect that she would make me do it.*

Zhang Haiyan coughed as Zhang Qishan looked at them coldly.

“Well, we’re all surnamed Zhang,” Zhang Haiyan said. “We’re actually here to seek shelter from our relatives. We’ve encountered a tricky matter in Xiamen and are short of people. We were hoping you could lend us a few military divisions since we’re all relatives.”

Zhang Qishan looked at Zhang Haiyan and then at Zhang Haiqi at the door. He put his hands together, moved his fingers, and said to the lieutenant, “If this person is still joking when he opens his mouth again, take both of them away.”

The lieutenant nodded and put his hand on the gun at his waist.

Zhang Haiyan immediately felt distressed when he realized that this was a serious person. They had actually heard about Zhang Qishan's style of doing things on their way here, but he didn't expect him to be so direct.

Zhang Haiqi spoke up at this time, "What's the relationship between you and Mo Yungao?"

Zhang Qishan tilted his head and looked at Zhang Haiqi, obviously a little surprised. As he thought about it, Zhang Haiqi continued, "I know you're investigating him. I'll tell you what we know, and you'll tell us what you know. Our goals are the same. There's no need to waste time." With that said, she glanced at Zhang Haiyan.

Then, Zhang Haiyan told Zhang Qishan everything that had happened.

His account was very brief, but Zhang Qishan listened very carefully. He fell silent after listening to their story and then tilted his head and looked out the window. "The Southern Archives was destroyed by a southwestern warlord, and you think he might continue to spread the plague. This Mo Yungao has no clear purpose and acts strangely."

As Zhang Haiyan nodded, Zhang Qishan sat up and said, "It's true that I'm investigating Mo Yungao. Too many people have gone missing in Beihai, so the people up top want me to investigate him in a low-key manner. But I haven't made any progress. If you can provide actual evidence of what you said, I can forcibly seize his right to command the troops and stop what they're doing. At that point, you can deal with him however you want. But if there's no evidence, I'm afraid the people up top won't want anything to happen. The current political situation is chaotic enough as is. This means that it'll be impossible for me to mobilize Changsha's defense troops to attack Beihai."

Zhang Haiyan realized at this time that although their dialogue was very awkward, it was still effective. This Zhang Qishan was a person who didn't pay attention to the atmosphere but placed an emphasis on direct communication.

“If you’re willing to work with us, we’ll provide you with evidence,” Zhang Haiqi said. “But you must give us Mo Yungao in the end.”

Zhang Qishan stood up and nodded, “I actually met Mo Yungao many years ago. His behavior was very strange. He said that he admired my surname and then told me a story. It was during a fight between southeastern warlords when the plague was running rampant through the southeastern regions. He was still a platoon leader back then and entered a plague-infected area. All of his troops died because of the plague. As he was hiding in a plague-ravaged village, a young man surnamed Zhang used his blood to save Mo Yungao. From then on, Mo Yungao believed that he had met an extraordinary person.”

“An extraordinary person?”

“Combined with your statement, I believe he might have met a person from the Zhang family. He saw that the person had special abilities, so he spread the plague in order to see people from the Zhang family again.” Zhang Qishan took the military cap that the lieutenant handed him. “I don’t know much about it, but since I already told you what I know, it’s safe to say we’ve reached an agreement. I’ll wait for your evidence. When the mountain and the sea meet each other, it means that things are chaotic in the northeast. Since we have the same ancestors, Changsha can take you in if you’re willing to serve the country. In addition—” Zhang Qishan paused for a moment before adding, “Mo Yungao is on his way to Nanjing now. Officers from all over the country are going to Nanjing to report to the people up top. I can assist you in Nanjing with whatever you’re planning to do.”

With that said, Zhang Qishan left the hotel and got in a car. As it drove away, the lieutenant told the hotel staff to treat them with hospitality, good food, and to let them rest. He also informed them that there were guards outside who would protect them.

*Why are they so busy? Is this what they do when poor relatives visit them?* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. He was just about to speak up, when Zhang Haiqi said, “Mo Yungao has met the patriarch.”

“The patriarch?”

“He thought that the patriarch was an extraordinary person,” Zhang Haiqi said. “This either means that Mo Yungao knows of the Zhang family’s existence, or he at least knows something about it. He’s done so many things because he wants to know more about the Zhang family.”

That was why the killers on the Nan’an were bringing all the bodies back.

## Chapter 48 – Nanjing

Zhang Haiqi knew that Zhang Qishan's inference was correct, and it wasn't just based on his own thoughts. He must've had other evidence, but he didn't want to say more, so he only revealed some details to them.

If so, this Mo Yungao was really a formidable person.

Zhang Haiyan lay on the bed and looked up at the ceiling, unable to sleep because of how humid Changsha was.

He had felt strange all day after Zhang Haiqi had said the word "patriarch".

Ever since he was a child, Zhang Haiyan's sense of the world had withered, and he had never experienced being a mediocre person in a crowd. But the word patriarch suddenly made him realize that this was a big and complicated family, and a lot of the family affairs were unexpectedly rushing toward him.

*I have a patriarch, which means that I have a big family.*

In this long-standing human world, this was a feeling that made people feel inexplicably safe.

*Although the wealthy relatives treat me badly when I visit them, they're still my relatives.*

*Patriarch... I wonder what he's like? He's clearly the type of person who can inspire someone to spread a huge plague and risk hundreds of thousands of lives just to see him again.*

Zhang Haiyan sat up in bed. He couldn't sleep, so he went out onto the balcony. He saw that Zhang Haiqi was standing on the adjacent room's balcony in her pajamas, smoking a cigarette.

The moon was very big and the Xiang River was visible to the naked eye, with little dots of light scattered across it.

“So, is Zhang Qishan helping us or not?” Zhang Haiyan asked.

Finding evidence was certainly easier than killing Mo Yungao—especially considering how they were spies in the first place—but when he thought about it carefully, the evidence for such a meticulous plan should be in Mo Yungao’s mansion. This meant that they would still have to go to Beihai and sneak into his headquarters without being seen.

It wasn’t much different from killing Mo Yungao directly.

“What Zhang Qishan meant was that Mo Yungao was heading to Nanjing, so we should directly capture him there. We should interrogate him about where the evidence of the plague is and then send a telegram to Zhang Qishan’s people in Beihai so that they can arrest his people and shut his headquarters down.”

“We’re going to capture him in Nanjing?”

“He’ll help us get close to Mo Yungao,” Zhang Haiqi said.

Zhang Haiyan stayed silent. He had to admit that this was an ingenious plan only a soldier would come up with.

It could be inferred that Zhang Qishan wanted to completely compromise Mo Yungao’s defense areas and allow the coalition forces to enter Beihai. By doing so, he could prevent Mo Yungao’s capture from creating a power vacuum that would divide the country.

But if they tried to capture Mo Yungao when he was in Beihai, then those in the system he had managed for so many years might not immediately surrender. It was possible that they and Mo Yungao would be trapped in Beihai together with no way out.

Since ancient times, it was necessary to capture vassals in the capital.

“Can we trust him?”

“If we manage to capture Mo Yungao, we can take care of him however we want as long as we finish interrogating him. Zhang Qishan doesn’t trust us, either. With his plan, he can take over Beihai, and Commander Mo’s life will be in our hands.” Zhang Haiqi took a puff of her cigarette.

“If this is such a perfect plan, then why can’t you sleep?” Zhang Haiyan asked.

“I’ll test you. What do you think?”

“I’m thinking about why Mo Yungao is going to Nanjing,” Zhang Haiyan said.

This person had been laying low among the southwestern warlords while completely destroying the South Sea Archives. Not only should his plan be in full swing now, but he had such a delicate relationship with the coalition army. Why would he be going to Nanjing? If it were Zhang Haiyan, he would go as far as breaking his legs to get out of going anywhere.

*What’s in it for him to go to Nanjing?*

“Beihai and Nanjing are quite distant from each other. Maybe it isn’t Nanjing that he’s aiming for, but a certain place on the road?” Zhang Haiqi speculated.

Zhang Haiyan jumped from his balcony to Zhang Haiqi’s balcony. She looked at him and then continued, “If he sets off from Beihai, he must first go to Guangzhou by boat before taking a train through Changsha, Wuhan, and finally Nanjing.”

Zhang Haiyan’s mind raced and he suddenly thought of something. He entered Zhang Haiqi’s room to get a pen and a piece of paper and started drawing.

“These are the locations of the villages where the plague broke out in Malacca, and this is what the shape looks like when I draw lines between them. These are the locations of Guangzhou, Changsha, Wuhan, and Nanjing.”

After the lines were drawn, the shape created by the Malaccan villages was exactly the same as the shape created by the four cities of Guangzhou, Changsha, Wuhan, and Nanjing.

Zhang Haiyan fell silent. Mo Yungao really had been doing experiments in those Malaccan villages.

Mo Yungao had specifically found villages that were at a similar distance from each other to release the plague so that he could study the transmission efficiency. And now he was going to play the real game in China.

“The plague in these Malaccan villages broke out at the same time. In other words, the epidemics in these four cities will also break out at the same time,” Zhang Haiyan said. “It’s important to know when Mo Yungao will arrive in Nanjing since that’s where he’ll send the signal from. Once the signal is sent, the plague will break out in these cities at the same time.”

Zhang Haiqi nodded in agreement. At this moment, they saw a car arrive downstairs.

“Who is that?” Zhang Haiyan asked.

“They’re picking us up. I had the same idea as you, so I already had the guards relay it to Zhang Qishan.” As Zhang Haiqi put her cigarette out, Zhang Haiyan noticed that her luggage hadn’t been unpacked at all. “Let’s go to Nanjing.”

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Mo Yungao sat in the train’s dining car, looking at a small bottle in front of him.

There was a beetle in the small bottle that was a kind of seven-spotted ladybug from the southwest.

A young man stood beside him, looking bewildered.



Mo Yungao held a needle in his hand and pricked the young man's index finger very carefully. He pushed the needle in so slowly and deeply that the young man felt as if it was coming out from the other side. The young man was in pain, but there were soldiers behind him, so he couldn't move.

Then, Mo Yungao pulled the needle out. As the blood dripped from the wound, Mo Yungao squeezed it out very seriously and then dripped it into the small bottle.

The beetle inside wasn't affected at all.

Mo Yungao put the needle down and looked at the young girl sitting in front of him. "It's not working."

A mountainous area flashed by outside as they passed through the hilly areas between Changsha and Wuhan. In the distance, the setting sun was shrouded by fog.

"You need to be patient."

"I am patient," Mo Yungao said to her. "Do I look impatient?" He tipped the beetle out of the bottle and put it on his finger, watching as it seemed to flounder.

He then squished it.

"I don't like it when others define me casually." Mo Yungao looked at the young girl again. "Have you found your sister?"

The young girl shook her head.

"I've sent some people to ask around at the major piers, which is embarrassing me a lot. In return, I hope you can find what I'm looking for as soon as possible."

Mo Yungao stood up and gestured to a soldier, silently telling him to take care of things. The soldier came up behind the young man and snapped his neck, dropping him to the ground.

When Mo Yungao returned to his room, he carefully took off his military uniform, pants, and cap. After arranging them neatly, he lay on the bed like a corpse.

When he closed his eyes, he saw that young man. Was he a young boy or a young man? Mo Yungao couldn't tell.

It had been so long ago, but every time he closed his eyes, he could see the young man looking at him with eyes as deep as a pool.

"I'm going to die," Mo Yungao, who had still been a young man at the time, told the young man weakly. "You'd better not stay in this place for a long time, or you'll die as well."

"I won't die," the young man said to him. "I need to go into the mountain quickly. Do you know how to get there?"

"I also used to think that I wouldn't die." Mo Yungao smiled. "What are you going to do on that mountain?" He looked around. He was lying on a dirt slope where the fighting had just ended. All of his soldiers were dead.

"Something is coming out of the mountain," the young man said to him.

## Chapter 49 – A Quick Plan

Mo Yungao looked to where the young man was looking. Shiwan Mountain and several other mountains next to it rose up behind the big mountain.

A glimmer of hope suddenly surged up and he clutched the gunshot wound on his shoulder. “If you carry me on your back, I’ll show you the way.”

The people in the village here were simple and honest. Although this man seemed to come from the north, it should be possible to deceive him since he was young.

As long as Mo Yungao left this battlefield and threw away his military uniform, he should be able to survive.

The young man ignored him and focused on sorting out his equipment instead. He had a wound on his left hand that he wrapped with a bandage he had taken from a corpse. “It’s not too late for you to leave,” he said before continuing to move forward.

As the young man left, Mo Yungao’s hope slowly turned into despair. He sneered when he saw that the young man was walking toward a crevice in the mountain where they had been ambushed by bandits before.

“If you were a good person, you should’ve saved me. Now you deserve to die.” He started laughing as he grabbed a grenade. There was a chance it could save him from being tortured after he was captured. He knew the bandits would skin him alive and hang his body at the entrance of the village to scare the villagers.

He waited on the hillside until dark, and by the time dawn came, only a wild boar had come to gnaw on the corpses.

No bandits came to clean up the battlefield.

Mo Yungao was somewhat surprised. Once he noticed that his wound had stopped bleeding, he got up. His energy was somewhat restored, so he

busied himself taking dry food and water from the corpses. He took off his military uniform and planned to run for his life.

But Mo Yungao was a bit different from ordinary people. He took a few steps to leave the mountain but suddenly thought about why the bandits didn't come down the mountain.

It was obvious that he and his soldiers had all been defeated. In the past, the bandits would never show mercy when they ambushed the soldiers who were trying to capture them.

He thought of the young man.

That kid who was unwilling to save him was probably dead.

As he kept walking, he inadvertently started to turn back and head towards the crevice in the mountain. He wanted to see what was going on.

The sun had just come out, the sky was incredibly blue, and Mo Yun could clearly remember how crisp the air was that day.

As he walked into the crevice and his surroundings became very dark, the blue sky stretched out endlessly overhead. The scenery was truly wonderful.

Not long ago, the blue sky here had been blocked by rifles. The bandits had been stationed at the top of the mountain and were shooting down into the crevice. Mo Yungao and his men could only rely on the protruding rocks as cover. They raised their heads to shoot at the targets overhead, but it was very difficult to aim.

Afterwards, the bandits dropped grenades on them. They couldn't hold out anymore and had no choice but to flee.

Now the crevice was eerily quiet.

The more he walked forward, the quieter it became. When he finally reached the other end of the crevice about three hours later, he saw all the

bandits' corpses lying in a radial shape right at the exit. It looked as if they had suddenly fallen to the ground and died after rushing out of the gap.

What was even more bizarre was that there were flies all over the corpses in a much greater quantity than those on his own soldiers' corpses.

He looked closely and found that most of the bodies were highly decomposed. It didn't seem like they had just died.

He was a little surprised but suddenly realized that he had slept for a few days.

He didn't see the young man's body.

The locals knew that the other side of the crevice was controlled by bandits, so no one knew what was on the other side except for the women who had been abducted into the mountain. And now him.

As Mo Yungao continued to walk forward, he smelled a terrible stench. After taking a few more steps, he saw that there was a village behind the crevice. It was practically covered in flies and there were corpses everywhere.

The bandit village behind the crevice was completely rotten.

More flies had gathered in the village, and there were maggots and corpse fluid everywhere.

Mo Yungao didn't know what was going on, but he walked towards the back of the village anyways. There he saw most of the bandits' bodies piled up in a big pit with flies swarming over them like clouds.

As he approached slowly, the flies kept hitting his face.

He suddenly found something among the flies that wasn't a fly. But just as he was about to take a look at it, someone unexpectedly grabbed the back of his neck and lifted him directly onto a nearby tree.

That person carried him like a sack all the way to the highest branch. He took a look and saw that it was the young man he had met before.

“What happened here?” Mo Yungao raised his head and asked him. “Did you kill them all?”

The young man looked at the pile of corpses below and said, “Stop talking. That thing is coming out soon.”

As soon as he finished speaking, Mo Yungao saw something amidst the pile of corpses move.

The train shook, and Mo Yungao woke up. He opened his eyes and looked at the panel overhead.

After a long time, he eventually sat up. “Where are we?” he asked.

The guard outside immediately opened the door and replied, “We’ve just passed Changsha. While the train was stopped, Zhang Qishan asked some people to bring you gifts.”

“Don’t bother showing me useless gifts like food and drink,” Mo Yungao said. “Has Zhang Qishan set off?”

“I heard that he won’t set off for two or three days,” the guard said. “He didn’t send food. He said that it’s something the commander has been dreaming of.” The guard lowered his voice, “It’s a woman surnamed Zhang.”

Mo Yungao paused before slowly putting on his military uniform and following the guard out.

This was a special train that Mo Yungao had reserved. It normally had ten cars in the station, and they would rent the engine car before they got on the train from Guangzhou. At that time, Zhang Zuolin’s<sup>(1)</sup> special train had

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<sup>(1)</sup> Zhang Zuolin was an influential Chinese bandit, soldier, and warlord during the Warlord Era in China. Wiki link [here](#)

twenty-eight cars, so Mo Yungao's pomp was that of a relatively small local warlord.

Even so, Mo Yungao's office and bedroom were still quite spacious, and his guards and entourage had rooms on both sides of his room.

When Mo Yungao came to his office, he saw Zhang Haiqi tied up on his sofa.

He didn't approach her immediately but took Zhang Qishan's note that the guard handed him.

"This person came to my house and asked me to help her find evidence of your misconduct in Beihai. We're colleagues, so I don't want to disturb you. I'll let you handle it. In addition, this woman has a Qilin tattoo on her body that will appear when her body temperature rises. I heard that you've been looking for someone like this for a long time. Now you can get what you want."

Mo Yungao sat in his office chair and asked the guards to close both the front and rear doors.

As he stared out the window, the guard asked him, "Commander, what do you think?"

"Zhang Qishan seems polite on the surface, but he's actually been investigating me. Why would he kindly send someone from the Zhang family to me? Was he afraid that I'd suspect he's from the Zhang family, so he did this to clear up any suspicion?" Mo Yungao didn't care. What he had been looking for was never simple power or something like it.

He looked at Zhang Haiqi, took out a report from his desk drawer, and then flipped through it. "You're from the South Sea Archives, right?"

There was a needle placed among the report's pages, which he set aside as he took out a small bottle from another drawer that held a ladybug.

## Chapter 50 – The Hints on The Money

When Mo Yungao sat next to Zhang Haiqi, she looked at him coldly. The legendary man behind the conspiracy had apparently been suffering from insomnia for a long time. He appeared very weak, but his eyes seemed to flash with multi-colored lights like colored glaze, full of all kinds of changes.

You couldn't see through this kind of person because they had no fixed form.

Mo Yungao stroked Zhang Haiqi's ear before grabbing her earlobe and piercing it with the needle. He squeezed the blood out and dripped it into the bottle.

As the blood fell into the bottle, the ladybug inside began to frantically run around.

Mo Yungao couldn't believe his eyes and shook the bottle. The ladybug fell, got up, and started flying around in the confined space. It constantly hit the wall in an attempt to get out.

Mo Yungao looked at Zhang Haiqi. "You really are from the Zhang family."

He dropped to the ground in front of the sofa where Zhang Haiqi sat, covered his face, and remained silent for a while. Then, he knelt down and kowtowed respectfully to her.

Zhang Haiqi didn't expect things to develop like this and stared at Mo Yungao, who didn't get up for a long time. He seemed very pious, as if he had seen a deity performing a miracle.

But he didn't untie Zhang Haiqi.

*This person is a psychopath. He loves putting on a show.*

After he sat back on the sofa, he said, "I've read a lot of ancient books. The last time an ordinary person caught a person from the Zhang family was



during the Ming Dynasty. I don't know if the novelist fabricated it, but it's said that a great genius would pose a threat to the Zhang family every once in a while."

"There's no such genius in this era," Zhang Haiqi said. "The only reason you can even pose a threat to the Zhang family is because there's something wrong with the family itself."

"I heard that you people are immortal?" Mo Yungao looked at Zhang Haiqi's face.

"Nothing can live forever." Even people in the Zhang family had their own lifespan. Nothing in the world was eternal.

Mo Yungao nodded. "You're right. But why did Zhang Qishan give you to me? What do you have planned with him?" Mo Yungao asked as he suddenly took out a pistol and pointed it at Zhang Haiqi. "It's easy for people in your family to untie ropes and handcuffs, right?"

The rope and handcuffs on Zhang Haiqi's body were still tight and locked.

She didn't move. "You should be asking him this question instead. Maybe he's sending you gifts because he wants to make a deal with you."

Mo Yungao took out a note from the side, wrote a telegram, and asked the guard to send it to Zhang Qishan.

"You've caught a person from the Zhang family, so can you not release the plague in those other places? We can talk to each other properly. What do you want to know?"

Mo Yungao laughed. "You can predict what I'm going to do, eh?" He looked out the window, "You're wrong. I'm not looking for some random person from the Zhang family. You guys aren't qualified to discuss those things with me. I want to meet *that* particular person."

Zhang Haiqi looked at him. "How can you be sure he'll even show up?"

“Because everyone else that shows up disappears. He’ll know that I’m looking for him. As long as your people disappear one by one, I can force him to come out and see me.”

The image of that pile of corpses flashed before Mo Yungao’s eyes. They arched up as if something was about to come out of them.

He was dazed for a moment. “Don’t be mistaken. You’re not the first person from the Zhang family I’ve found. In fact, I’ve met three of you. But I have a lot of respect for your people, so your body won’t be wasted.”

As Zhang Haiqi looked at him coldly, Mo Yungao continued, “Why hasn’t my guard come back yet? Do you think he got lost because it’s his first time being my guard?”

Zhang Haiqi frowned, finally noticing that the closed doors on both sides of the carriage had electric-powered locks.

“You’re here to distract me. Someone changed his face and pretended to be my personal guard in order to find evidence of my plan, yes?” Mo Yungao said, “Zhang Qishan has always liked these kinds of parlor tricks.”

Zhang Haiqi moved her wrists, pulling the chain on the handcuffs to the limit. If she pulled any harder, it would break.

Mo Yungao continued, “Since I can fight against the Zhang family, do you think you can use ordinary people’s methods against me? You can’t get what you want.”

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Zhang Haiyan, who was posing as a guard, took the telegraph and pushed open the door to the next train car. It was very dark inside and there weren’t any guards. The telegraph room was just behind this car.

He lit a flare and found that the train car was full of bottles and jars that had various organs soaking in them like wine.

He took a closer look and saw that there were hands in many of the bottles and jars. Some of the hands had very long fingers.

Then he saw a huge jar that had half of a person's body in it. Considering how pale the soaked corpse looked, this person must've been dead for a long time. He didn't know what method was used, but he could see that the person had a Qilin tattoo.

They had died from an explosion.

Zhang Haiyan looked around. When he saw that the coast was clear, he lit a cigarette.

The flare went out, so he lit another one and glanced at the reflection in the jar. There was a girl standing behind him.

He turned around. He didn't know when the girl had shown up behind him, but she was slender and tall and looked exactly the same as the one he had seen on the Nan'an.

He was stunned for a moment before he realized that something wasn't quite right. They didn't look exactly the same but were very similar. They were twins.

"I'm here to send a telegram," Zhang Haiyan said quietly.

"Can I have you?" The girl suddenly asked him.

"Hmm?" Zhang Haiyan said. *Is the guard having an affair with this little girl? Are we doing it now?* He asked himself.

"The commander is still waiting," Zhang Haiyan said. "Give me a moment."

"I want you now," the girl said.

Zhang Haiyan touched the girl's hair. *Oh, my!* He thought to himself. *She's so young. She shouldn't mess around like this.*

Suddenly, the little girl grabbed his hand.

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He Jianxi took the money out and looked at it under the sun. He saw a smaller person carrying a bigger person who was carrying an even bigger person.

What did it mean?

In this sequence, the smaller the person, the greater the weight they carried, which in turn made them stronger.

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Zhang Haiyan felt an immense pressure coming from the girl's hand. This kind of strength wasn't like that of a human but more like some kind of animal.

Zhang Haiyan had engaged in too many fights and knew things weren't looking good as soon as he felt the signs of her strength.

He immediately opened his mouth wide, exposing the blades under his tongue. When the girl was distracted by the blades, Zhang Haiyan ripped his sleeve off and flipped over backward.

The girl was already in front of him by the time he landed, fully prepared to grab hold of his hand again.

"I'll have your hand first," she said.

Zhang Haiyan suddenly felt a pressure on his hand and looked down to see that his wrist was now deformed.

He immediately felt pain and used his elbow to hit the girl with all his strength. She dodged a little to the side and then quickly grabbed his other hand.

## Chapter 51 – The Hai Generation

Ever since Zhang Haiyan became an adult, he didn't know how long it had been since he'd met such an incredibly strong opponent.

He knew how to defeat those weaker than him, but when it came to those stronger than him, he instantly knew why he couldn't defeat them. But despite the unfavorable circumstances, he would immediately start thinking of ways to try and win.

The problem with these so-called "incredibly strong" opponents was that he had no idea what happened.

In other words, no matter how many times he fought with them, he would never understand what transpired. It basically meant that the difference in strength between the two sides was too great.

Although it wasn't that difficult to understand what was going on with this girl, he was almost unable to figure it out.

It wasn't a matter of moves.

To be honest, this girl's moves didn't matter since she was so strong that she only needed to rely on her ligaments to deliver the blows. And not only was she strong, but she was fast, too.

Zhang Haiyan quickly tore off his other sleeve, knowing that he couldn't underestimate his opponent. He shot the blades directly at the young girl's throat at close range.

Twelve blades shot out in a row, covering almost every position the young girl might dodge to.

It was essentially impossible to dodge at such close range, so the girl didn't even bother. Instead, she directly slapped Zhang Haiyan's face.

Zhang Haiyan's neck almost snapped from the force of it. All the blades hit the jars on one side, instantly breaking them.

But this brief moment gave Zhang Haiyan the chance to free one of his hands. He reached into the antiseptic liquid and directly flung it at her.

The young girl let go of his other hand so she could protect her eyes, enabling Zhang Haiyan to completely free himself from her grasp. After he rolled away, he didn't dare pause for a second and took more than a dozen steps back.

The young girl took the handkerchief that was sitting nearby and wiped the liquid off her body.

It was said that Mo Yungao had many ethnic minority masters around him. Based on what He Jianxi had said, this girl should be the twin sister of that girl on the ship whose surname was Bai.

*This isn't an ethnic minority master, but an ethnic minority goddess.*

"What did you eat to grow up like this?" Zhang Haiyan held his wrist. One of his wrist bones was broken and his hand was already starting to swell.

"I eat people like you." The young girl licked the liquid from her hand and Zhang Haiyan realized that it wasn't antiseptic. It was alcohol.

What he had seen just now wasn't liquid for preserving specimens, but medicated liquor? Were they drinking wine that had been infused with the flesh of people from the Zhang family?

*Do people from the Zhang family have Tang Sanzang's flesh?<sup>(1)</sup>*

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<sup>(1)</sup> Remember, Tang Sanzang is a central character in "Journey to the West". In the novel, it is said that people can be immortal once they eat his flesh, so all monsters crave it.

He was stunned for a moment, but the girl didn't even give him a chance to catch his breath as she rushed at him again. The train shook, and Zhang Haiyan saw her stagger a little.

*She has no basic skills. She's just fast and strong.*

Zhang Haiyan immediately decided to engage in psychological warfare. He retreated first and counted the distance, quickly reaching the wall by the next train car. "Miss Bai," he said, "Bai Zhu was actually the one who asked me to come here."

The young girl was visibly shocked, so Zhang Haiyan quickly added, "She said that she misses you very much and hopes to see you as soon as possible. If you kill me, you won't get to see each other."

The young girl approached him, looking at him coldly. As Zhang Haiyan watched her, he suddenly heard someone knocking on the door to the telegraph room. "Bai Yu, what's the matter?"

"Something broke," she immediately said. "I'm cleaning it up."

Suddenly, the door to the telegraph room started opening. Bai Yu quickly came over to Zhang Haiyan's side, took off his coat, and wrapped it around his hand.

A guard came in and looked between Bai Yu, the guard standing next to her, and the mess on the ground. "Are you two alright?"

Zhang Haiyan glanced at Bai Yu before handing the note to the guard. "Send a telegram to Zhang Qishan."

The guard took the note and left. Zhang Haiyan looked at Bai Yu and was just about to speak when she grabbed his other hand again. "Where's my sister?"

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Zhang Haiqi and Mo Yungao stood in the train car that had been converted into an office. Mo Yungao didn't appear to be afraid of Zhang Haiqi at all.

"You locked the two of us in here. You do know I can kill you directly, right?" Zhang Haiqi asked him.

"Can you not kill me now?" Mo Yungao asked. "It may put everyone at risk."

She saw snakes slithering out of every corner of Mo Yungao's office.

They were all green and flicking their tongues out, and each one was about as thick as an arm.

"The owner of these snakes is next door. He has a way of controlling them to protect me," Mo Yun Gao said. "I don't understand these Southern Xinjiang tricks, but Chen Xifeng found them all for me. You should've already heard that there are many capable and extraordinary people around me. You know that I definitely wouldn't dare find ordinary people to fight against you."

Zhang Haiqi looked out of the corner of her eye at all the snakes in the room. They were everywhere, including all the most inconspicuous places. She hadn't even noticed them until now.

"Snakes have a good sense of smell. It's useless to use masks around me."

"So, you've known for quite a while that he isn't your guard."

"It's said that this kind of snake is called a letter snake. It can alert you to other people's presence, but I don't know if I remember that correctly." Mo Yungao looked behind him. "Wait for my people. Tell your friend to come back and we'll discuss what to do next."

*Don't let me down, son,* Zhang Haiqi thought to herself.

"Of course, if you can throw something over and hit my throat directly like your Zhang Haiyan..." Mo Yungao looked at Zhang Haiqi. "The snakes aren't



that fast. So—” He pulled a box out from under the sofa that was slowly emitting a gas.

“This is a kind of nerve gas. It was placed under your sofa cushion. When I sat down on the sofa, my weight pressed on the mechanism below, triggering the gas to start releasing. I had a cup of coffee with a neutralizing serum in it before coming here, but you’re in trouble. You may not even be able to raise your hand now.” Mo Yungao motioned for Zhang Haiqi to raise her hand. “Aren’t you a little unsteady?”

Zhang Haiqi moved her hands without any difficulty. She thought about it for a while and then said to him, “Too bad. My generation name is “hai”<sup>(2)</sup>. One of our special skills is to take very small breaths. We can dive in water for a long time after taking a single breath. We usually don’t need to take deep breaths like ordinary people.”

With that said, Zhang Haiqi grabbed the sofa with one hand and pulled it to the side. It was fixed to the floor, but she pulled it so hard that all the nails were ripped out. Once the sofa was shoved aside, the hidden gas cylinder below was finally revealed.

Mo Yungao immediately ran away.

An image flashed through his mind of that young man jumping from the tree like an elf and falling onto the shadowy figure that was coming out of the pile of corpses.

Mo Yungao couldn’t see what it was. A bear? Or was it a zombie? But either way, it was too big. He was so frightened that he pissed his pants.

The young man landed on the black shadow’s neck and pressed both of his knees down. As soon as the black shadow knelt to the ground due to the pressure, the man twisted his waist.

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<sup>(2)</sup> “Hai” means “sea” in Chinese.

The black shadow's head twisted at an unnatural one-hundred-and-eighty-degree angle. Then, the young man drew the knife from his waist and pierced the black shadow's throat. He moved it around the black shadow's neck until he could pull the head off directly.

The young man gripped the head and looked at his twisted and bent knife. He threw the knife into the pile of corpses and then raised his head to look up at Mo Yungao.

Mo Yungao discovered that the insects in the air actually weren't flies, and they were starting to approach him. These insects were actually flying from where the black shadow was.

The young man raised his hand and opened his palm. Fresh blood spilled from the open wound. All the flies and cicada-like insects on the pile of corpses frantically fled, making the entire area look as if it was being attacked by a storm.

Then, everything suddenly became quiet.

## Chapter 52 – I Am Your Mother. I Am Also Your Grandfather.

Zhang Haiyan looked at Bai Yu. The girl's feelings for her sister were sincere, but based on her behavior just now, both sisters appeared to be murderous monsters.

Zhang Haiyan had never been biased when it came to beautiful girls, nor did he agree with the saying that minors shouldn't die for committing major crimes.

The girl's childish expression and worry in her eyes as she waited for news of her sister would normally make people feel pity for her. But in Zhang Haiyan's eyes, she was a venomous snake with its head lowered. He couldn't afford to take his eyes off the snake's heart now.

"Your sister is still in Xiamen. Her life is in our hands," Zhang Haiyan lied without hesitation. "Don't worry, she's well taken care of. But you've killed so many of us. If I can't go back alive this time, your sister will die a miserable death."

"How do I know if what you've said is true?"

Bai Zhu had probably died at sea. She might've escaped from the ship using the lifeboat, but the probability of her being able to go ashore and arrive in Xiamen was too low.

"You can trust me because I got off the Nan'an alive. It's impossible anyone else would know of her whereabouts," Zhang Haiyan said.

Bai Yu looked at him resentfully. "I can let you go. What should I do to get my sister back?"

"You won't come to a good end if you betray Mo Yungao," Zhang Haiyan said. Even though she had such strong skills, it was still very easy to manipulate her since she was so young.

“He won’t know. I’ll say that you jumped off the train.”

Zhang Haiyan laughed and looked at the alarm bell beside him. “I won’t leave until I achieve my goal.”

*I’m just like a good-looking playboy, he thought to himself. If I keep pushing for what I want, this little girl won’t be able to think carefully.*

People who killed their opponents without hesitation definitely weren’t good at handling real pressure, after all. And no matter what the occasion, the pressure of letting their opponent survive was surely greater than killing them once and for all.

Bai Yu looked at him, “What do you want?”

“I want to know where you plan on releasing the plague in each city,” Zhang Haiyan said. “If you let the plague break out in these cities, I guarantee that your sister will be infected as well. Do you see, Bai Yu? I’m doing something good. I’m a good person who’s trying to help you reunite with your sister.”

*If your sister is still alive, Zhang Haiyan thought to himself, I’ll kill you both so that you can reunite with each other.*

Bai Yu continued looking at him. After they stood in this deadlock for a while, she finally asked, “You want to prevent the plague from breaking out?”

“Correct.”

“Our team is going to bring the plague water and pour it into each city’s main water source. The people in our team are free to move around, so the division will send them a telegram when it’s time to act. They’ll wait a day after they receive the telegram before starting the process.”

“What if they don’t receive the telegram?”

“They’ll release the plague next Monday at noon. I’m to lead the team in Nanjing,” Bai Yu said. “But it certainly won’t happen then.”

“Why?”

“You just handed the telegraph room the telegram that will release the plague.”

“What?!” Zhang Haiyan was stunned.

“The telegram you just gave the guard was a secret order,” Bai Yu said. “Since the commander gave it to you, he wanted you to be the one to deliver it. That’s the kind of person he is.”

Zhang Haiyan turned around and rushed to the door. The wind blew in as soon as he opened it and he immediately pushed the door to the telegraph room open, only to find Zhang Haiqi there. She had snapped the transmitter’s neck.

“Mother, what are you doing here?”

“Mo Yungao ran away,” Zhang Haiqi said.

She went to chase after him as soon as he ran, but the snakes were very fast and attacked her. By the time Zhang Haiqi ran out of the door, Mo Yungao was long gone. Her next thought had been to kill the transmitter.

Zhang Haiyan rushed over to see if the telegram had been sent and was relieved to find that the telegraph hadn’t been turned on yet.

Zhang Haiqi asked him what was wrong, so Zhang Haiyan quickly explained the whole thing while Bai Yu looked at them from the door of the other train car.

Zhang Haiqi looked at Bai Yu and then said to Zhang Haiyan, “It’s better to get rid of her.”

Bai Yu immediately retreated into the darkness and Zhang Haiyan said, "I still have things I'd like to ask her."

"She's a little liar," Zhang Haiqi said.

Zhang Haiyan froze for a moment and Zhang Haiqi continued, "Trust me, a woman knows these things at a glance. There's nothing to say to her."

Zhang Haiqi picked up the corpse with one hand and threw it off the train, but she suddenly heard the guards' voices. Mo Yungao must've notified them of the situation, which meant that their surprise attack had failed.

"Hold them off for three minutes," Zhang Haiqi said to Zhang Haiyan before immediately sitting in front of the telegraph and starting to send a telegram to Zhang Qishan.

Zhang Haiyan stepped out and closed the door to the telegraph room, noticing that the lights in the opposite car were on. The car was full of guards armed with Browning M1910 pistols, which were called Flowery Little Guns at the time. This kind of gun looked elegant but packed a lot of power.

Zhang Haiyan immediately ducked his head, avoiding the four or five bullets that hit behind where he had been standing just now. He flipped under the train and unscrewed the coupling that connected the train cars together.

The two cars immediately separated, but the inertia kept them from quickly breaking away from each other.

Zhang Haiyan turned over, aware that his feet were almost touching the railway ties. A guard moved to jump to the telegraph car, but Zhang Haiyan grabbed his feet and caused him to fall directly onto the rails.

The sound of bones being crushed made everyone shiver.

The people behind him didn't dare make any more attempts to jump and focused on firing at the bottom of the train car instead. Zhang Haiyan used

his deformed and aching hands to climb to the bottom of the Zhang family liquor car.

A guard stuck his head down and shot at him, but was instantly blinded when Zhang Haiyan shot a blade out. He died right on the train car's coupling, while Zhang Haiyan almost fell off himself.

The engine car was on the other side of the liquor car, so the two cars moved further and further away.

Zhang Haiyan flipped over and climbed to the top of the car. He wanted to take a running jump onto the top of the telegraph car, but the distance was too great. Seeing that he was about to fall onto the rails and be crushed to death by the incoming telegraph car, Zhang Haiqi opened the door and came out. She had the telegraph wire in her hand and quickly threw it to him.

As soon as Zhang Haiyan caught it in mid-air, Zhang Haiqi jumped off the train. The train was traveling over a tall wooden bridge that had a lake below it. Zhang Haiqi reached out her hand and pulled Zhang Haiyan into her arms, hugging him as they fell headfirst into the lake.

The guard above fired at the lake, but pistols had a limited range and lost power in the water. The guard yelled for the train to stop.

The two people floated to the lake's surface and immediately swam to shore. They had excellent swimming skills, so they reached the shore quickly.

"So that girl was lying to me?" Zhang Haiyan asked Zhang Haiqi.

"Yes. She had a face that looked like she'd been lying since she was a child." Zhang Haiqi took out her cigarettes, but they were all wet. "She wasn't going to tell you the truth. She just wanted to know the information about her sister."

"Fortunately, I'm also a liar. What did you send to Zhang Qishan?"

“I didn’t send anything. I just rigged and adjusted the frequency of the telegraph stations,” Zhang Haiqi said as she looked at the train.

Back on the train, the two disconnected sections came to a halt. Mo Yungao went to the telegraph car and told a guard to send a telegram. “The situation has changed. Inform all our people in the cities that the time and method for executing the plan are adjusted as follows....”

As the guard began to send the telegram, all the telegraphers in the telegraph room of Zhang Qishan’s residence began to copy Mo Yungao’s orders.

“It’s been confirmed that the telegram was sent from Mo Yungao’s military frequency,” the lieutenant said. “All plans and personnel information are available to us.”

Zhang Qishan looked at the telegram. “Notify those in Nanjing that I won’t be going. Let’s go to Beihai. Before dawn tomorrow, we need to capture Mo Yungao’s people in Guangzhou, Changsha, and Wuhan in one fell swoop. Before we reach Beihai, we’ll spread false news of a strange disease.”



## Chapter 53 – A Man on a Lone Boat

Zhang Haiqi and Zhang Haiyan had landed in the South Lake of Yueyang. They headed towards the lights in the distance, walking along the river bank until they saw Yueyang City. But it was still far away, so they boarded one of the many fishing boats that were in the area. The fisherman took them all the way to Yueyang Tower, and once they disembarked, they realized they were in the downtown area.

Lights were hanging from Yueyang Tower, but they didn't know what festival it was for. Since the two of them were soaked, they found a tailor shop on the street and bought some ready-made clothes. Once they changed, they finally got to walk around in Changsha-style clothes.

Zhang Haiyan's mind was full of thoughts, but he didn't voice them. He wasn't sure if Zhang Haiqi was really quick-witted, or if she had made a backup plan with Zhang Qishan a long time ago. If it was the latter, didn't that mean she had already expected him to mess things up?

But Mo Yungao was much more difficult to deal with compared to whatever was happening in Malacca. Zhang Haiyan somewhat suspected that Zhang Haiqi had sent him to Malacca because she knew there was no way he could survive in China with his intelligence.

It was only a day's journey from Yueyang to Changsha, but the two of them had suffered injuries from the previous fight. Zhang Haiqi began to cough after she got on the boat and Zhang Haiyan's hands were very swollen, so they went to find a doctor. The doctor set Zhang Haiyan's bones, but couldn't find anything wrong with Zhang Haiqi. He hesitated and looked like he wanted to say something, but stopped himself for some reason.

Zhang Haiyan was a little worried, but Zhang Haiqi shook her head. That kind of poison gas would definitely have an effect on her, but the doctor didn't have a cure for foreign nerve gas. It must not have been particularly terrifying if Mo Yungao dared to stay in the room with it, so they could only wait until after they saw Zhang Qishan tomorrow to ask the military doctor.

The doctor gave Zhang Haiqi some licorice to put under her tongue, and then she and Zhang Haiyan went to find a restaurant. They ordered some side dishes and started eating.

Zhang Haiyan asked for an extra pair of chopsticks and set them aside. He was a little annoyed because he didn't get to avenge Zhang Haixia this time.

Zhang Haiqi put the extra pair of chopsticks back and said, "Don't always make yourself so obvious. It might feel good when you're doing something special, but you don't know what trouble it might cause in the end."

"Did all this happen because I said my name on Flower Reef?" Zhang Haiyan asked. This was the question that had always been on his mind.

"While I was spending some quality time with Mo Yungao, I had the feeling that he had lost his mind." Zhang Haiqi shook her head. "You had every right to give out your name. Even if you hadn't done that, Mo Yungao still would've fought against us. We know his conspiracy, after all."

"But—"

"Let's drop this topic. I was patient enough to comfort you once, so shut up and eat," Zhang Haiqi said.

Zhang Haiyan sighed. He had no choice but to swallow the next ten thousand sentences.

He looked at Zhang Haiqi and suddenly felt that her state wasn't quite right. Was she also unsatisfied with the result?

The two of them ate silently. The Yangtze River and Yueyang Tower were outside, while countless people were coming and going. Zhang Haiyan felt a little distant from them all. They didn't even know what had happened just now.

After dinner, the two of them took a walk and asked some people for ways to get to Changsha. They boarded a night boat that would take them from

the Yangtze River to Dongting Lake. After that, they transferred to the Xiangjiang River at Laogang and took the waterway the rest of the way to Changsha.

After they got on the boat, Zhang Haiqi suddenly became very tired and fell asleep. Zhang Haiyan couldn't sleep, so he watched the fishing lights on the dark river.

Those who lived on the river knew that the river breeze, fishing lights, and boats were going to another shore. Even though there were so many wonderful things, no one was waiting for you on the other side. Those people knew the kind of freedom, loneliness, unlimited possibilities, and anxiety that was brought about by wandering.

They didn't talk that night. Zhang Haiyan leaned against the side of the boat and fell asleep. When he woke up at dawn, Zhang Haiqi was already awake. She leaned against the fishing boat's shack as they approached Changsha's port.

At this time, the sun was bright and all the shops were open for business.

As the two helped each other ashore, Zhang Haiyan felt as if Zhang Haiqi was a little different.

They walked onto the dock and Zhang Haiyan suddenly stopped. He looked at Zhang Haiqi and saw that she suddenly had several gray hairs.

"Mother, what's got you so stressed that your hair is turning gray overnight? Why do you have gray hair?"

Zhang Haiqi froze, "Where?"

Zhang Haiyan pulled a strand out and Zhang Haiqi looked at it with a very strange expression on her face.

She clutched her chest and coughed a few times as they stopped a passing rickshaw. Zhang Haiqi had never had gray hair before, so she quickly

calculated her age. Although people in the Zhang family still grew old, she hadn't lived long enough to start thinking about this problem.

She wasn't too worried about it and asked Zhang Haiyan, "Would you believe me if I told you I'm over a hundred years old?"

"But Zhang Haixia also had gray hair? He pulled it out every day." Zhang Haiyan said as the two made their way to Zhang Qishan's defense headquarters.

Knowing that Zhang Qishan had left for Guangzhou overnight, Zhang Haiqi knew she had succeeded.

In the next series of chain reactions, countless changes would take place, but the two of them were unable to keep up with them. They went back to the hotel and waited for news from Zhang Qishan. The military doctor gave them both checkups, and they also received food and lodging as a free courtesy.

When Zhang Haiyan recalled this period later, he found that these were the happiest days. Although he couldn't really get used to the weather in Changsha, the lard noodles and various kinds of spicy pressed duck, fish head, and chicken dishes were so delicious that he felt as if he might take flight.

The newspapers had a lot of sporadic reports every day, and the various discussions and gossip about Beihai headquarters had also begun to increase. For them, this news meant that there were intense undercurrents beneath it all.

But Zhang Haiyan was a little confused at this time. In his memory, Zhang Haiqi had always been energetic and never looked tired. Over the past few days, however, she kept sleeping longer and longer.

At first, he just thought that his godmother wanted to sleep longer.

But the amount of time she spent sleeping was getting longer and longer, and started to exceed the reasonable amount of time ordinary people would sleep.

Zhang Haiqi began to sleep ten hours a day, then fifteen, and the time just kept increasing.

Zhang Haiqi herself also found it very strange, because she would feel incredibly sleepy after only having been awake for a short period of time. She couldn't fight the drowsiness at all.

Finally, one day, Zhang Haiqi fell asleep and didn't wake up. Zhang Haiyan waited a whole day, but she still wasn't awake by the time afternoon came. When he knocked on her door and didn't get a response, he jumped to her balcony to check on her.

With all the fierceness gone from her face, the sleeping Zhang Haiqi looked like a child. Zhang Haiyan sat on the bed and held her hand, finding that her pulse was still strong at this time. It was at this moment that Zhang Haiyan finally realized that he was already an adult.

Holding Zhang Haiqi's hand on such occasions no longer felt like a child holding his mother's hand. Instead, it was more like a father holding his daughter's hand.

The sunlight shone in and happened to cast the shadow of the window frame on them. That was when Zhang Haiyan realized that there were too many gray hairs on Zhang Haiqi's head to explain it away as stress-related. Although she didn't have a head full of gray hair, it was definitely impossible to try and pull them all out.

Moreover, he saw a few looming wrinkles at the corner of Zhang Haiqi's eyes for the first time.

He suddenly understood the truth.

His godmother was getting old?

## Chapter 54 – Case Closed

When Zhang Qishan returned, the Flower Reef case was closed.

Mo Yungao was on the verge of death when he met an extraordinary person. This person didn't seem ordinary and even used his own blood to save Mo Yungao.

Afterwards, Mo Yungao set up his headquarters in Beihai and life went on. The years passed by, but he still couldn't forget about that extraordinary man.

At that time, he asked the extraordinary man if his remarkable abilities were congenital or acquired. When the young man told him they were acquired, Mo Yungao felt that it was unfair. After he gained power, he had obtained many things that he was afraid of losing. As a result, he hoped to meet that extraordinary man again and ask how he had acquired those abilities. It was for this reason that he spread the plague and did whatever it took to force the extraordinary man to appear again.

In order to obtain the same plague that had broken out that year, he studied various materials and hijacked ships in the South Sea in order to dig up a sunken ship by the reef. In the end, he managed to obtain a strain of the Wudou disease.

But the South Sea Archives obstructed his efforts, so he planned the Nan'an incident to test the spread of the disease and slaughter the Archives' agents.

Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haiqi were the lucky survivors, and they obtained evidence of Mo Yungao's actions on the train that year.

Changsha defense officer Zhang Qishan went to Beihai, took over Mo Yungao's territory, replaced the soldiers with his own men at lightning speed, and killed the ones Mo Yungao trusted.

After Mo Yungao returned to Beihai from Nanjing, he found that Beihai had undergone a change in leadership. When Zhang Qishan surrounded him at the dock, Mo Yungao fled into the depths of the Guangxi mountains. No one knew what became of him after that.

Mo Yungao was keen on researching nerve gas, which meant that many unnamed corpses were found in his mansion. Several of the corpses were believed to be people from the Zhang family, but their hands were cut off and they were so decomposed that they were unrecognizable.

Now that the story has developed like this, we can breathe a sigh of relief.

Zhang Qishan returned to Changsha, hoping to incorporate Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haiqi into his defense force and help them rebuild the South Sea Archives. But Zhang Haiyan didn't feel that he could be a soldier. He couldn't bear the weight of the real military uniform, so he rejected the job offer. But he did gain a somewhat formal uniform, so he could be considered a law enforcement officer.

They didn't get to avenge Zhang Haixia since Mo Yungao escaped capture and went deep into the mountains, but there would be a series of follow-up events to wrap it up.

Despite all this, the threat was ultimately lifted. All the plague teams and disease strains were confiscated and burned.

Meanwhile, He Jianxi was looking for Zhang Haiyan in Xiamen. As he was searching, he happened to find Haili Bank and got hired as an assistant there. He was still trying to crack the mystery sketches that Zhang Haixia had left on the money. He Jianxi's story has just begun, and these sketches play a very important role in the follow-up story.

But I have to emphasize again that this isn't the time to tell this story.

If this is truly the end of the story, then it's too perfect. There are always painful moments here and there throughout life.

Zhang Haiqi slept for seven days and seven nights. The military doctor gave Zhang Haiqi nutrient solutions to prevent her from becoming dehydrated. He also told Zhang Haiyan that she was in a deep coma.

Zhang Qishan brought back all the information Mo Yungao had left in Beihai, which was how they discovered what was causing Zhang Haiqi's condition. But because the records were missing some volumes, they couldn't identify the specific information they needed. They could only come up with a general guess about what had happened, but there was a chance the facts were more complicated.

It turned out that what they thought was German nerve gas wasn't produced in Germany at all. They didn't know where it came from, but it seemed to specifically target the Zhang family's blood. Mo Yungao only briefly mentioned in the records that he acquired this by accident, and he only found one cylinder of it. They could only figure out what the specific situation was if Mo Yungao was captured.

The way Zhang Haiqi was aging at an alarming rate was just like those mysterious and strange folktales. Based on the military doctors' estimations, she only had two months to live.

It was difficult to figure out where the Zhang family came from and why they could live so long. Even people from the Zhang family probably didn't know the truth.

Zhang Qishan reminded Zhang Haiqi and Zang Haiyan that they had lost contact with the Zhang family in the northeast. The only way they could turn this thing around was to find the patriarch, and luckily, they knew where he was.

Zhang Haiqi didn't want to go to Southern Xinjiang anymore. She had lived a long and wonderful life, and now that she was suddenly facing death, she felt calm and expectant.

Long-term youth was an endless enjoyment. In fact, longevity wasn't that disturbing. But when you had lived long enough to see lots of people leave



you, you would more or less look forward to the time when you would be able to meet them again on the other side. You wouldn't fear death at all by that point.

But Zhang Haiyan couldn't accept it. He had just come to terms with the fact that his godmother would stay young forever, but now this miracle was going to end in two months.

Zhang Haiqi hoped to be buried in a cemetery in Xiamen with those she had sent off. She also hoped that she could help Zhang Haiyan rebuild the South Sea Archives before her death so that he had a place to return to.

Zhang Haiyan was devastated. He had been all alone before he met Zhang Haiqi. Many people had come and gone in his life, but only one or two had a special place in his heart. Now they were drifting away from him like duckweeds. He stared at the Xiang River blankly, unable to understand it all.

At this time, a fortune-teller friend of Zhang Qishan's made a prediction about this matter.

Those familiar with him know that his name is Qi Tiezui.

Qi Tiezui told the two people that the north, east, and west were places of death, and the south was a dangerous place. They should go to Southern Xinjiang. There was no chance of finding resurrection in the places of death, but there was a chance of survival in a dangerous place.

The hexagram said: The old woman blooms. As the fallen leaves meet the spring, the branches come alive. You gain something as you lose something. All the grievances and love return to the sea. The dead branches fall under the tree and roll three times. This journey is full of gains and losses.

This was the most mystical hexagram in Qimen's Eight Calculations. Qi Tiezui had seen this no more than three times in his life. This hexagram meant that Zhang Haiqi's best and worst states of her life would reach their peaks at the same time.

If you have an understanding of people, fate, and life, you can probably infer what this kind of state was. But Qi Tiezui also knew that people who could have such a life must not be ordinary. It was like killing the one you loved the most in order to get what you wanted most.

When Qi Tiezui checked Zhang Haiyan's fortune, all he saw was an unpredictable situation.

Qi Tiezui advised Zhang Haiqi that it was fine if she wanted to die, but she wouldn't have asked him to make a prediction if she really wanted to. Those who asked for their fortune to be told usually still had a desire to live. She wanted a reason to live no matter what that may be, and since she knew what she was looking for, she should go to Southern Xinjiang. People and things changed, so if she suddenly didn't want to die, it was best that she was already on her way to trying to save herself.

In the end, Zhang Haiqi agreed to go to Southern Xinjiang with Zhang Haiyan. They agreed not to talk about her illness as they made their way there. They would treat it like they were going on a trip. Zhang Haiqi had no choice but to comply.

Southern Xinjiang covered a vast territory and there were hundreds of thousands of mountains, so it wouldn't be easy to find the patriarch.

If Mo Yungao had to release the plague across the country in order to feel just a glimmer of hope, Zhang Haiyan could only take it one step at a time.

The two prepared enough dry food and money for the journey while Zhang Qishan gave them the customs clearance documents so others could help them along the way. The last two agents of the Southern Archives embarked on the road to find their boss.

At this point, the Flower Reef case was closed and the Southern Xinjiang Potluck case had officially begun.

If we look closely at Qi Tiezui's hexagram, there are still many oddities that can be analyzed.

How would Mo Yungao, He Jianxi, and everyone else interact with each other under fate's arrangement?

What was it about the tusi<sup>(1)</sup>, the bride, and the Yi village? What was the real purpose of the mysterious Zhang family? Would they be able to find the patriarch? Why was the truth about Potluck Capital hidden for hundreds of years?

We will slowly watch the events unfold.

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End of The First Case—Flower Reef

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<sup>(1)</sup> Tusi, often translated as “headmen” or “chieftains”, were hereditary tribal leaders recognized as imperial officials by the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties of China. Wiki link [here](#).

## **Southern Xinjiang Volume: Potluck Case**

[Aka: 2018 Chinese New Year Special]

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

Menglembu<sup>(1)</sup>, the pearl of Perak.

At that time, Zhang Haiyan didn't have the nickname "Little Brother Zhang". He was called Ahmad Zapuwan Ismail Bin Puasa in Perak, and everyone called him Bin. He was the only one who knew that the pronunciation of the word "bin" sounded like "illness"<sup>(2)</sup> in Chinese.

Zhang Haiyan came to Perak twenty years ago. At that time, Zhang Hailou's childhood bib was written with the words, "Zhang Hailou. The moon casts on the waters a reflection of a heavenly mirage; In the sky at dawn, clouds gather to build a castle in the air."<sup>(3)</sup>

It was said that there was a Malay who couldn't tell the difference between the words "yan" and "lou", so he called him Zhang Haiyan.

Later in southern China, someone called him Perak Zhang, probably because they knew he had been to Perak. At that time, Zhang Haiyan—who was called A Bin—had a partner with him who went by the name A Kun. These were probably the names they used when doing business with the Vietnamese.

Zhang Haiyan didn't have much of an opinion no matter what name it was.

This is the story of how A Bin and A Kun met each other.

But before the story begins, there is one person that needs to be introduced first.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Menglembu is a small township in the Ipoh City Area, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia. Wiki link [here](#).

<sup>(2)</sup> The Chinese character “病” is pronounced as “bing” in pinyin.

<sup>(3)</sup> Zhang Hailou's name comes from a Tang Dynasty poem. His name is in the sentence 'Clouds gather to build a castle in the air.' The "castle in the air" in the poem is pronounced as "Hailou" in Chinese. It also means "mirage" in the poem.

This person's name was Ali Kan. He was a Manchu whose Chinese name was He Jianxi. He got on a ship in Menglembu, Malacca that was bound for Xiamen. He bore witness to the incident that occurred on that ship. He was one of Zhang Haiyan's short-term best friends before Zhang Haiyan went to the mountainous areas of southern China.

He Jianxi was a Manchu whose household was placed under the Plain White Banner<sup>(4)</sup>. He wore glasses and was a handsome accountant. He and Zhang Haiyan lived in a galvanized steel cabin on the ship at that time, which was a very expensive cabin.

He Jianxi's first opinion of Zhang Haiyan was that he was a dirty man.

They encountered big waves after the ship departed from Malacca, so it took them thirty days to arrive in Xiamen.

Zhang Haiyan didn't take a bath at all during those first twenty days, and that wasn't even mentioning the fact that the ship environment was already very dirty. On the twentieth day, Zhang Haiyan's hair was greasy and knotted in clumps.

Zhang Haiyan hardly got out of bed during those twenty days and slept under the quilt amidst the wind and the waves. It was as if he hadn't slept for a long time.

Twenty days later, he sat up like a zombie and the first thing out of his mouth was to ask He Jianxi, "Did you hear that?"

They were in the midst of a big storm at that time. Although He Jianxi was mostly used to the wind and waves by that point and was no longer dizzy and vomiting, his mind was muddled and things weren't looking good.

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<sup>(4)</sup> Plain White Banner was one of the Eight Banners of Manchu military and society during the Later Jin and Qing Dynasties of China. It was one of the three "upper" banners (Plain Yellow Banner, Bordered Yellow Banner, and Plain White Banner) directly controlled by the emperor. Wiki link [here](#).

People who had ridden a ship through westerlies<sup>(5)</sup> would understand this feeling very well. When the waves hit the ship, the entire structure would make a distorted sound that was very noisy for those in the cabin.

As a result, He Jianxi obviously didn't hear a thing.

Zhang Haiyan didn't relax but listened carefully to the sounds coming from various places on the ship. Then, he suddenly took out the shaving equipment and started to shave his beard off. As the ship jolted violently, he shaved his beard off and washed his hair very carefully.

He Jianxi recalled that Zhang Haiyan's hair was so greasy that it had taken four basins of water before it was washed completely clean. After that, Zhang Haiyan put one of his bags on his back and went to the deck.

Although He Jianxi was dissatisfied with his traveling companion, he still started to worry about this strange behavior. He Jianxi was a kind person. His mother believed in Buddhism and he had been influenced by her. He began to worry that Zhang Haiyan was counting his days and wanted to commit suicide, so he also followed him onto the deck.

The wind was strong and the waves were huge. Zhang Haiyan grabbed the deck railing and looked at the gap between the huge waves.

He Jianxi saw that there was a larger passenger ship in that place. Its lights flickered in and out of sight as it passed between the gaps in the waves. That ship was also trapped here like them, and it looked to be about three miles away from them.

It was later confirmed that it was a passenger ship called the "Jinzhou", which was heading from India to San Francisco. It passed through Malacca on the way back and would stop in Xiamen.

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<sup>(5)</sup> Prevailing winds that blow from the west toward the east

He Jianxi saw Zhang Haiyan look back at him, shout something, and then jump into the sea. He was shocked and immediately rushed to the side of the ship, but he couldn't see Zhang Haiyan because of the big waves.

He Jianxi immediately explained the situation to the shipowner. That thrilling jump scared him so much that he stared at the greasy quilt all night, unable to stop trembling.

He Jianxi stayed up for a day and a half, but he eventually became so tired that he fell asleep sometime during the night. He was suddenly awakened by strange movements before dawn, and when he opened his eyes, he saw a naked man standing at the head of his bed. The man was completely naked and drenched in seawater as if he had just come out of the sea.



## Chapter 2 – The Man Who Waited For Arrows

A Taoist priest from Lingqiong visited the capital. He was able to summon spirits with a focused mind.

The emperor asked the priest to search for her soul. The priest was moved by the emperor's anguish and attachment for his lover.

He ran like lightning as he parted the skies and rode high through the air. He ascended to the heavens and dove down to the earth, looking for her everywhere.

He searched thoroughly in the blue beyond, and down in the Yellow Springs below the earth, but didn't spot her in the vastness of either place.

—A Taoist Prepares<sup>(1)</sup>

The man who waited for arrows.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma was only four years old when he entered the mountains. His master told him that his only task in life was to wait for cloud-piercing arrows, and he was to comply with any request those who shot the arrows made.<sup>(2)</sup>

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<sup>(1)</sup> These are actually sentences from the poem, *The Song of Everlasting Regret* (or Sorrow). It was composed by Bai Juyi in the year 806 and details the events surrounding the death of the lady Yang Guifei during the Anshi Rebellion in 755. Yang Guifei was the beloved concubine of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang. Link [here](#). Note: This chapter is heavily influenced by [Chiau Sing Chi's](#) movies. In *King of Comedy*, the main character is an aspiring actor who keeps talking about how he diligently studies a book named *An Actor Prepares*. It has since become a famous running joke. So, the sentence "A Taoist Prepares" is the author's way of paying tribute to it. (There isn't a book called *A Taoist Prepares* at all.)

<sup>(2)</sup> Qianjun Wanma means "Thousands of soldiers and tens of thousands of horses" in Chinese. The name Qianjun Wanma and this paragraph are influenced by the movie *Kung Fu Hustle*, another Chiau Sing Chi's movie. There is a famous quote from the movie, "When an arrow shoots through the clouds, thousands of soldiers and tens of thousands of horses (Qianjun Wanma) will come to help you."

His master was a Taoist priest who only ever saw two cloud-piercing arrows shoot out from the depths of the mountains. His master became very energetic when he talked about the arrows and didn't look like an extremely old man who was about to die.

When his master turned a hundred and ten, Zhang Qianjun didn't think he would be able to make it through the year, since he no longer got out of bed and didn't drink alcohol anymore. All he would do was sit at the door of the Taoist temple every day, looking at the white snow outside as if he was waiting for someone to pick him up. His master ate and spoke very little that year, and they often passed the evenings in silence.

When his master turned a hundred and fifteen, he was still the same. The winter of that year was extremely cold and the mountains were very cold and wet. Zhang Qianjun Wanma had a high fever for a month and felt as if his master just might outlive him. He was too weak to get food, but his master didn't seem to need food at all.

That night, there was a bowl of plain noodles with a few bitter radishes placed at the head of his bed. His master had made them. That was when he realized that not only could his master get out of bed, but he could also cook noodles.

He used to wonder why his master would want to live like this, but he immediately understood after thinking about it carefully.

At this stage in life, his master was in a very awkward position. Death could come at any time, so his time was running out. It was too late to do big things since he had no more strength left in him, but doing things that didn't matter was too annoying.

The most terrifying thing was that at this age, everyone—including himself and others—wouldn't make any demands of him. It was already a fortunate thing that he didn't bring trouble to others.

The hundred-and-fifteen-year-old man was definitely experienced, so his noodles tasted delicious.

Zhang Qianjun miraculously recovered in the spring, but his master finally died. Before he died, his master looked outside the door and said to Zhang Qianjun, “It turns out she’s not coming back after all.”

Zhang Qianjun knew who “she” was.

As the people from the subsidiary branch of the Zhang family, they were the main branch’s reinforcements in the mountains.

When the first cloud-piercing arrow appeared in the sky, his master knew that a team from the main branch was in trouble and was asking for help. His master went alone and only managed to rescue one person, a girl surnamed Zhang. She stayed in the Taoist temple to recover and left four months later.

At that time, his master was fifty years old. The old man was in love, but he fell in love with a formidable girl. She told him that when she returned, she would shoot a cloud-piercing arrow to let him know.

In the five years after that, his master left signal arrows under every stone in the mountain. He would look up at the sky over the valley every day like a goose, which smoothed out the wrinkles on his neck. Even the whites of his eyes that were as muddy as old phlegm cleared up and looked as bright as amber.

Every time Zhang Qianjun found his master acting differently, his master would always laugh at himself, “All my cultivation has gone to waste<sup>(3)</sup>.” But there wasn’t an ounce of regret in his voice.

The girl didn’t shoot the second piercing arrow. That person was irrelevant and the master didn’t mention the incident too much.

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<sup>(3)</sup> As a Taoist priest, it is important to try to get rid of any desires. It’s considered one of things that they need to cultivate.

Zhang Qianjun asked his master how he could stay in the depths of the mountains his whole life just for something that may or may not happen.

His master told him that the arrows weren't what he had been waiting for his entire life, but he wouldn't say anything more.

Zhang Qianjun recalled being chosen to wait for the arrows and figured it was probably because he had looked pretty silly since he was a child.

Zhang Qianjun still couldn't learn to speak by the age of seven. His master had said that he was so stupid, he wouldn't be able to find a job when he grew up and that it was a good thing he had been practicing to become a monk.

After his master's death, Zhang Qianjun suddenly realized that something was off. When his master adopted him back then, could it be that he was ready to run away and wanted him to be his replacement? But just when his master was ready to leave, he met that girl.

It was true he wasn't waiting for arrows his whole life.

After his master died, Zhang Qianjun decided to think carefully about how he would spend his life.

His master seemed to have gained a lot of benefits from the main family back then, but after Zhang Qianjun started to wait for arrows, he never heard from them. He slowly felt that his life was like a self-entertaining story. He would replace the hidden arrows with new ones and scrape off the moss that covered the Zhang family's marks every two weeks.

Then he would imagine the main family's teams walking through the mountains every day, summoning him once they encountered difficulties.

There were two worlds outside the Taoist temple.

In one world, he was the family's watchman. There was an undercurrent surging deep in the mountains and the endless people passing through all

felt safe because they knew Zhang Qianjun Wanma was secretly watching and waiting for them to call at any time.

In another world, he was the only person in the mountains. No one would pass by here and no one would use these cloud-piercing arrows. He was the only person in this world.

It took him fourteen years to gradually accept the latter explanation. At that point, he finally allowed himself to pack his bags, put a bamboo basket<sup>(4)</sup> on his back, and prepare to leave here.

He decided not to wait for others to send fireworks to call on him. He wanted to become the firework himself.

That day, when he arrived at the foot of the mountain, a cloud-piercing arrow shot into the air and exploded in the scorching sky. The sunlight was so intense that no fireworks or sparks could be seen.

He was frightened, but his body immediately reacted. He moved like a monkey as he went along the bamboo forest and swung down the cliff to where the cloud-piercing arrow had been shot from.

That was the first time he saw Little Brother Zhang and Zhang Haiqi.

Zhang Haiqi looked disgusted when she saw Qianjun Wanma, “Why are you here? Where’s your master?”

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<sup>(4)</sup> The bamboo basket was used to carry stuff. It looked like this:



## Chapter 3 – The Woman Who Broke Her Word

Zhang Qianjun Wanma folded his arms and sat in front of Little Brother Zhang and Zhang Haiqi. After a long time, he finally said to Zhang Haiqi, “So, you’re the woman my master waited for all his life.”

Zhang Haiqi used a tree branch to fiddle with Zhang Qianjun’s clothes. They had once been worn by his master and the color had faded after too many washings. Zhang Haiqi looked unhappy and muttered, “You guys are still so poor.”

“Then why are you here now?” Zhang Qianjun Wanma felt extremely aggrieved. It wasn’t because his master had spent all his life waiting in vain, but because the matter of waiting for someone instantly changed from a bleak and beautiful thing to something so utterly stupid.

“Who the hell would remember to come?” Zhang Haiqi looked at the mountains in the distance a little resentfully. “Urgh, you’re so annoying. Let’s talk business.”

“Fuck your business! He waited for you up until the day he died. I thought you couldn’t come either because you died outside of the mountains or because you were a femme fatale who was just fucking playing with him. These two possibilities are loads better than the fact that you simply forgot about it!” Zhang Qianjun Wanma was extremely angry, but his face remained expressionless because he still deeply remembered his master’s teachings that he had to comply with any request the people who shot the cloud-piercing arrows made.

As the three of them remained silent for a while, Zhang Qianjun noticed that Little Brother Zhang and Zhang Haiqi looked a little awkward.

Little Brother Zhang was leaning against a tree, his tongue fiddling with something in his mouth. He looked at Zhang Haiqi, “Let me ask you this, just how many random promises have you made to people? Can you stop doing

that? The lives of ordinary people are very difficult. They're not there for you to toy with."

"Keeping my word isn't exactly my strong suit." Zhang Haiqi lit a cigarette. "Plus, he's the one that died early. Isn't it true that I'm here right now?"

"That's not right," Zhang Qianjun Wanma said. "My master met that girl when he was in his fifties. He died when he was a hundred and sixteen. Even if you were that girl, you should be in your seventies now. How come you still look like a young girl? You're lying to me."

"Didn't your master tell you that I'm an immortal who cultivates a youthful appearance?" Zhang Haiqi looked at Little Brother Zhang. "This is my son. You can ask him if you don't believe me."

Zhang Qianjun Wanma looked at Little Brother Zhang.

"I'm adopted," Little Brother Zhang said reluctantly.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma suddenly felt that his master was really stupid. He immediately decided to help them, and once the two of them left, he would leave here right away.

"Which one of you shot the cloud-piercing arrow?" Zhang Qianjun Wanma asked them. "I only listen to those who shoot the arrows."

Little Brother Zhang and Zhang Haiqi exchanged a look before both pointed at themselves. "Me."

Zhang Haiqi immediately became angry, "Why are you lying?"

"How am I lying? You're even willing to compete with me for this kind of thing? Can't you be even a little more motherly since you're my mom?" Little Brother Zhang narrowed his eyes as he enunciated each word clearly.

"That's enough!" Zhang Qianjun Wanma interrupted them. "Your argument won't bring out any results. I'll only listen to him." He pointed at Little

Brother Zhang. "You're a woman who doesn't keep her word, so I won't listen to you. Now, talk. What do you want?"

Little Brother Zhang pulled a map out of his pocket. "We want to go to Bone Washing Cave. We need a guide who's familiar with the road."

"Han Chinese can't go to that place," Zhang Qianjun Wanma said.

"Then we won't go there as Han Chinese, yeah?" Little Brother Zhang said.

"Then you have to have a reason to go in there. Bone Washing Cave is the place where the Abi people wash bones. People here think that human bones, flesh, and skin are three different things. The lifespan of the flesh is the shortest, so people can live the same amount of time as their flesh. But the lifespan of bones and skin is much longer than that of flesh, with the lifespan of bones being the longest. As a result, they believe people aren't really dead when they pass away. Forty-nine days after someone has passed, their skin will die. Thirty years after their death, their bones will die. All of the bones with rotten skin and flesh will be taken to Bone Washing Cave to be cleaned and washed before their relatives take the bones home. This place is very sacred to the Abi people. People can't enter the cave if they aren't there to wash bones."

The three were silent for a while.

Zhang Haiqi stood up and suddenly asked Zhang Qianjun Wanma, "Where's your master's grave?"

"What do you want to do?"

"Didn't he want to see me?"



## Chapter 4 – The Things People Say Behind Your Back

“Master, I’m sorry.” Zhang Qianjun Wanma took the hoe to his master’s grave. He couldn’t understand how things had turned out like this.

Zhang Haiqi stood in the shade under a tree, watching Zhang Qianjun’s tears falling as he dug up his master’s grave. She really couldn’t remember what she had going on with this old Taoist priest back then.

Maybe it was an unintentional promise under the circumstances that made this ordinary person wait for her for a lifetime?

It was a bit unfortunate. Many people made vows that they truly meant in the heat of the moment. At a certain point, if you wanted a man to die for you, he would really do it. But without exception, there would always come a time when the man came to his senses. At that time, he may not be willing to die for you even if you asked him to.

Was it possible that this was an exception? Was he a man who spent his whole life thinking about the promise they had made in a single moment?

If so, she really wanted to see what those love-struck bones looked like.

Zhang Haiqi had known the ways of the world very early. The “Archives” was essentially an organization that worked for the truth. The South Sea Archives was actually a department that collected the truth, whether it included the truth of matters or the truth between people.

What was the truth? It was such a general term, but when summed up, it was merely what people were really thinking about.

In this world, human minds and history had a unifying characteristic—they were infinitely close to the truth, but they could never reach it.

There were many good historians in the world, but they couldn't escape the limitations of the old paper they had found. No historian or archaeologist dared tell anyone, "This is exactly what happened back then."

There were many sensitive people in the world, but even if they could roughly figure out what others were thinking, they would never dare conclude that someone was thinking such and such. But how close you could get to the truth was something that could be trained.

In Zhang Haiqi's view, the Archives was a system that was infinitely close to human hearts. This kind of closeness also forced her to become the type of person who broke her word.

"Not everyone can bear to know what other people say behind your back."

When people talked to each other, no matter how ugly the words were on the surface, they could always get through it even if they had to clench their teeth. But the volumes from the Archives often told a totally different story regarding those same people.

She soon discovered that people tended to be full of contempt whenever they talked behind others' backs. Even if they were a lover who was completely infatuated with you, their words may be so condescending when they talked about you to their friends that it would be too difficult to digest.

This was true for friends and lovers, and it was also true for siblings and parents.

"This is often the case when people talk about you behind your back. Whether it's a gentleman, a villain, a lady, or a vixen, it's difficult to criticize them with words. They're scornful and arrogant when talking behind your back, but once they turn to you, their faces are filled with hatred. If everyone's like this, why make any promises? Why even keep any promises?"

At this moment, she thought of Hu Biting. He was the son of a wealthy silk factory owner in Quanzhou, who returned from overseas and didn't want to

inherit the family business. He kept telling his family that he wanted to run a school. He read a lot of books, loved freely, married his own female student, and created a lot of gossip. In the end, the female student hanged herself.

Hu Biting went to Japan and did the same thing all over again. He married a Japanese woman who eventually hanged herself in a park in Nagano. When Hu Biting returned to China, he was nearly forty years old. He ran into Zhang Haiqi on the dock. That day, Zhang Haiqi was wearing a cheongsam. With her short hair fluttering in the sea breeze, she looked as beautiful as an elf.

Hu Biting pursued her like crazy. Everything seemed to indicate that he was madly in love with her.

This was the kind of love that made Zhang Haiqi feel a deep chill in her heart. Two of his loved ones had already died, yet he could still love a third person so passionately. It was as if there were no scars left on his heart. This kind of love was very strange. Did such an infatuated man have any trace of fear in his mind when he told her those romantic words?

There was something wrong with him.

That winter, after a long conversation with Zhang Haiqi, Hu Biting hanged himself in his apartment.

Zhang Haiqi didn't tell anyone what had happened, nor did she attend his funeral.

Little Brother Zhang only knew that the first female student who died was also Zhang Haiqi's student. When Hu Biting first pursued this female student, Zhang Haiqi looked at them from afar and felt that this man had a daunting persona. She went to see him at the dock because she wanted to listen to what he had to say about her female student.

Based on Hu Biting's ending, he didn't say anything good.

As Zhang Haiqi was thinking these things, Zhang Qianjun Wanma finally dug up his master's body. A centenarian didn't have much to begin with, and now there weren't many bones left either.

They wouldn't know what it was that made the old man wait for her for so long.

Zhang Haiqi took the old Taoist priest's skull out of the coffin and said to Little Brother Zhang, "From now on, this is our father and I'm your sister. Let's set out now to find some clothes before we enter Bone Washing Cave."

## Chapter 5 – Potluck Capital

When they returned to the Taoist temple, they saw that the walls were covered in weeds. Zhang Qianjun Wanma told them that there were more than thirty Taoist temples like this in the deep mountains. They were all large in scale, so the locals called the area Hundred Heaped Temples.

There was a fire at one point, so only a few temples were left and the local religious activities gradually decreased. After that, the bandits moved into the temple ruins. They often wore Taoist robes, so Zhang Qianjun was able to mix in among them.

But the temples hadn't been repaired in a long time. After his master passed away, the bandits' business wasn't doing good. The young bandits in the mountains went to work in the army, while the elder bandits got old and died one right after another. Among the ruins, this Taoist temple was the only one left that could still accommodate people.

The Abi people belonged to a regional ethnic group that arose after the local Miao and Yao settlements mixed together. In fact, there were four or five ethnic groups living together, and they built their villages along the mountains.

There were six large villages and more than three thousand households in the outer village. This outer village was called Gold Tooth Village but was also known as Potluck Capital. It was the only place where people lived together with Han Chinese. The villagers there thought that gold teeth were beautiful, and they would use gold powder during the holidays to paint their teeth before going to the streets to gather.

There was a river by Potluck Capital that directly connected to the Hongshui River and led to Shanxi. It was a small canal on the southern Silk Road that led to the Central Plains.

As a result of this, Potluck Capital was very developed and people from various industries stayed in the relay stations there every day. There were so

many, in fact, that the number of people far exceeded the three thousand households. At night, the streets were so full of lights that it looked like the Milky Way was in the mountains from a distance. Because there were many ethnic groups there, all kinds of ancestral halls, costumes, snacks, and bathhouses could be seen. Everything was so lively.

It was difficult for Han Chinese to enter the depths of the mountains behind Potluck Capital. Zhang Qianjun only knew that there were five big villages inside. In addition to Bone Washing Cave, there was also a village in the deepest part of the valley, but no one even knew its name. All they knew was that people in that village sold a kind of spring water that seemed to have a special use. As a result, they took to calling it Ghost Water Village.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma was a Han Chinese, but he managed to sneak into the villages behind Potluck Capital. He only went as far as the second village, where he bought a special kind of opium. As to the other villages, he had heard nothing but countless legends from others.

Zhang Haiqi looked at the Taoist temple and sighed before asking if it was necessary for monks to stay in this kind of shabby place. "It's not like that," Zhang Qianjun Wanma said. "The monks don't need much. A straw mat is enough."

That night, Zhang Qianjun chopped wood, boiled water for baths, cooked three dishes, and opened a jar of wine. The Zhang Family Office in Xiangxi was officially open again.

The three of them didn't talk after finishing their meal, since they had already agreed to enter Potluck Capital tomorrow.

The bathing area was a square brick pool behind the kitchen. Zhang Qianjun had taken the clay bricks from various temples and stuck them together using cow dung, but he didn't tell Zhang Haiqi that.

Zhang Haiqi closed the doors of the surrounding rooms and blew out the oil lamps. There was only one bathing pool in the whole hall, with a giant hole overhead that let in the moonlight. Under the moon's ethereal glow, there

wasn't a trace of redness on the naked white skin that looked so very delicate.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma was trying to fall asleep on the beams in the room, but the sound of water was keeping him up. He stared at the eaves above him before suddenly sitting up, finding his master's guqin, and playing it casually. He had basic skills, but he didn't know which song it was.

Little Brother Zhang lay alone at the top of the huge locust tree outside with a strange smile on his face, "Monks."

To be honest, he was feeling a little jealous today, so now he could only look up at the moon. The old Taoist's skull had been placed on the opposite side of his tree trunk, and he looked at the dark eye sockets.

"What do you think we like about her?" Little Brother Zhang asked in confusion.

The sun was bright the next morning and the fog in the depths of the mountains quickly dissipated. It was obvious that Zhang Qianjun didn't sleep well last night, but Little Brother Zhang dragged him up anyways. He ate some coarse grain rice cakes while explaining the locations and geographical differences of the several villages. Zhang Qianjun looked at Little Brother Zhang and said, "The problem is that only a few people in the previous village know how to enter the next village. The mountain and canyon roads in the middle are as chaotic as a maze. We won't be able to get in there if we just rely on luck. We have to find the right people and get them to take us there."

"Who should we look for? Can we bribe them?"

Zhang Qianjun Wanma shook his head, "Based on your backgrounds, I'm afraid you'll end up coming back after staying in Potluck Capital for only three or four days. These people are Tusi chiefs and prestigious officials. All the nearby mountains belong to them, so I'm afraid money won't solve the problem."

Zhang Haiqi looked at Little Brother Zhang, who said to her, "If the patriarch is in this village, it means that a Han Chinese has entered the six great villages. If this isn't the norm, then a big change must've occurred in the villages. A Han Chinese has entered the political center of the Abi clan, so I'm afraid the relationships between the village Tusi chiefs aren't what we've been expecting. If I've guessed right, we'll notice something right away once we've entered Potluck Capital."



## Chapter 6 – Entering Potluck Capital

The three people entered Potluck Capital in the evening. There were colorful lights everywhere and some people were setting off firecrackers. They asked around and learned that someone was getting married.

Potluck Capital could be regarded as the epitome of the splendid prosperity of the local area. It wasn't uncommon for people to see someone getting married as soon as they entered the village.

When a Han Chinese married a village girl, it was called "Taking Over the Village". The girl's brothers and sisters would stand on the various bridges in the village and wouldn't let the groom pass unless he handed out a plate of gold-wrapped opium.

This kind of raw opium was wrapped in gold leaves and there could be six or seven plates of it once it was mixed into a white paste. It was truly top-notch stuff.

There were a total of more than sixty large and small bridges in Potluck Capital. The people in the village were shouting and rushing around, and they must have been on at least thirty or forty of them.

Brides from the local landlords' families insisted on having weddings on a larger scale, so the grooms needed to step on all of the bridges in the village. For those local Han Chinese, it was a huge sum of money.

There were a lot of beautiful girls in Potluck Capital, so those who were able to marry outside the village were very gorgeous. These girls also had different craftsmanship because of the different clans they were from, but nearly all of them knew how to use swords.

Almost all the successful outlander merchants had wives who were from Potluck Capital. Their wives rode horses, carried silver blades on their backs, and wore strings of ringing bells on their hands. Their husbands usually followed behind, wearing changshan and holding an abacus in their hands.

Zhang Haiqi seemed a little happier when she entered the city and saw the girls being so energetic. Little Brother Zhang's attention also shifted away from her.

The girls here weren't shy at all. Whenever Little Zhang Brother looked at any of them, they would all look back daringly. The more he looked, the more interested he became.

Everything was full of life and a different kind of energy. Little Brother Zhang could smell firewood, rice, sour oil from the sour fish soup, gunpowder from the fireworks, and frying oil all mixed in the air.

The children and adults were wearing all kinds of colorful costumes and silver crowns and there were colorful lights everywhere. There was also plenty of wine and opium.

*The patriarch sure knows how to live a good life.*

He thought of his life in the South Sea, back when he used to fish and cut swim bladders<sup>(1)</sup>. The girls there didn't clean up very well at all.

*The South Sea also has the word "south" in it, but Southern Xinjiang is so much better.*

When Little Brother Zhang came to his senses, he discovered that Zhang Haiqi was gone.

He turned his head and saw her picking up something at a stall selling silver jewelry.

"What are you doing?" Little Brother Zhang asked. He suddenly felt a little relieved that Zhang Haiqi was actually acting like a woman.

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<sup>(1)</sup> The swim bladder is an internal gas-filled organ that contributes to the ability of many bony fish to control their buoyancy, and thus to stay at their current water depth without having to waste energy in swimming. Wiki link [here](#).

“The girls here aren’t like the other girls we’ve seen. Their faces show what they’re thinking in their hearts. Look at them. Their eyes show what they want and what they’re thinking. I bet they’ll buy as many personal ornaments as they want. I really like how they act because they’re just like me,” Zhang Haiqi said with emotion.

“This one is great, and this one isn’t expensive, either. I think these three make the face look thinner.” Little Brother Zhang squatted down and picked out three items before handing them to Zhang Haiqi.

At this time, the procession was crossing the bridge ahead of them. They could see the dragon lanterns swaying and the vendors on the side began making way for them.

Zhang Haiqi smiled and glanced at him, “It’s useless to try to gain my favor. I’m your mother. Don’t even think about it.”

“These aren’t for you.” Little Brother Zhang put the silver ornaments on his forehead and fiddled with his hair a little bit. A coy smile appeared on his face that was a clear imitation of the ones the girls had been wearing just now. “I also like this place. I want to experience what it’s like living here as well.”

Zhang Haiqi looked at those silver ornaments that were pressed against Little Brother Zhang’s face and realized that they really did fit him quite well. He really had picked those ornaments out for himself.

“I’ve taught you well. Too bad I can’t beat my son in front of a crowd,” she said as she suppressed her anger.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma dazedly stared at the wedding procession from his position on the side of the road. He was just starting to relax when the bride riding by on a horse suddenly looked at him. He turned around and saw Little Brother Zhang wearing silver ornaments. The stall owners were all gathered around and laughing heartily as they looked at him.

“You stayed in the South Sea too long,” Zhang Haiqi said with a very serious expression on her face. “You even smell like fish. There’s no way you can be like the girls here.”

Little Brother Zhang was looking at the bells in his hand with interest, but when he raised his head, he met the eyes of the bride who was passing by. The bride was stunned for a moment before she immediately stopped her horse. Everyone in the wedding procession behind her stopped as well.

The street suddenly became quiet as everyone stopped what they were doing to watch.

The bride got off her horse and quickly walked towards Little Brother Zhang. He was still wearing the ornaments and awkwardly maintaining his flirtatious pose as she came to stand in front of him. Just as he was wondering what to do, she pulled his clothes apart and saw the tattoo at the base of his neck.

“I hope you and the groom can stay together forever and can have a child as soon as possible,” Little Brother Zhang said. “Girl, my mother’s right here. She’ll misunderstand our relationship if you keep this up.”

The girl suddenly bit Little Brother Zhang’s shoulder and he shouted in pain.

“Save me!” The girl whispered.

But before she could finish speaking, Little Brother Zhang reflexively used his shoulder to hit her. She flew four or five meters away from him before her head hit the bluestone ground and she passed out.

Little Brother Zhang felt puzzled as he looked at everyone around him. No one else seemed to realize what had happened just yet. Zhang Qianjun Wanma came over, grabbed his hand, and then started running wildly towards the narrow alley.

At this moment, all the girls and boys in the wedding procession pulled out their silver blades, got off their horses, and chased after them.

“What did you do?!” Zhang Qianjun Wanma scolded. “It hasn’t even been thirty minutes since we got here!”

“I didn’t do anything, I was just—” Little Brother Zhang lowered his head to dodge a blade coming from behind him, “—being sexy!”

## Chapter 7 – Wedding Crashers

The two of them were running for their lives as they passed through the various streets and alleys of Potluck Capital. Fortunately, Zhang Qianjun Wanma was quite familiar with the roads.

They rushed through tea houses, dye houses, and other people's homes until they ran across a stone bridge. The people who were chasing them suddenly stopped, but the two of them didn't dare slow down. They kept squeezing through the crowd until they found themselves at a place where animals were slaughtered. There was nothing on the other side of the bridge, but there were a lot of slaughterhouses on this side of the riverbank.

There were all kinds of skinned animals hanging on the porches by the river. The smell of flesh and blood permeated the air as the blood flowed directly into the water under the bridge. The dirty water full of grease and internal organs was quickly swept away.

"It seems taboo for people in the wedding procession to be here, so nobody chased us here." Little Brother Zhang stopped in front of a meat stall and looked at the people standing on the other side of the bridge in the distance. Those people were still looking at them.

"What about your mom?" Zhang Qianjun Wanma suddenly remembered Zhang Haiqi.

Little Brother Zhang looked at the meat stalls around him, feeling a little uneasy. Why did those people stop chasing them?

He saw people coming and going on the bridge, and the stalls here were open for business. It didn't seem like a forbidden place. "She definitely got out of there quicker than us," he said before grabbing Zhang Qianjun Wanma's hand. "Do you know why they won't dare come over here?"

"This side of the bridge is called Baliangjie. The dignitaries on both sides don't get along well and it's inappropriate for a group of people to come

here with blades drawn. But they'll soon notify the dignitaries of Baliangjie, so we have to leave as soon as possible." Zhang Qianjun Wanma pointed to the front. "The river is flowing in this direction today. Wuliangjie is just downstream. It's where all the poor people live. They put out their nets to catch the animal organs in the river so they can eat them. The river often changes direction, so the people there run around a lot and there aren't any dignitaries to keep them in line."

In the end, the two of them followed the river and soon passed a not-so-prosperous bridge. Numerous old stilt houses began to appear and the simple lights weren't as gorgeous as those in Potluck Capital.

What looked like hundreds of horizontal nets were fixed to various tree branches in the river. People with wooden barrels and oil lamps were also scattered across the river.

The two found a cooking stall by the water that had all kinds of food stewing in a big pot.

When they sat down, Zhang Qianjun Wanma immediately slapped the table, "What exactly is going on?"

Little Brother Zhang looked around and took a deep breath. "You're also from the Zhang family. What have you heard about the patriarch?"

Zhang Qianjun Wanma looked at Little Brother Zhang's expression, "This is a mess of your own making. What does it have to do with the patriarch?"

"That woman only stopped her horse after she saw my tattoo. She wanted me to save her. My tattoo isn't ordinary, but she recognized its position at a glance and asked us for help. She seemed to know who we are," Little Brother Zhang said. "This is our first time here, so if she knows about the tattoos, she must have learned about them from the patriarch. If the patriarch told others about his tattoo, it means that he has a special relationship with them. Otherwise, it means he told her about it after she saw it. If so, their relationship is even more extraordinary. How can his tattoo be seen by ordinary people? It must be—" Little Brother Zhang made

a gesture, “—when they were making love. But—I heard that the patriarch is the type of person who doesn’t have many desires. He isn’t interested in falling in love and he doesn’t even eat much food. He has a perverse temperament, so I can’t believe he would talk to others about his tattoo after living in seclusion in southern Xinjiang. In this prosperous place, a girl has finally entered his heart. And she’s extremely gorgeous, too. The patriarch is truly a wild man if he got together with such a wonderful girl.”

Zhang Qianjun Wanma took a deep breath. He didn’t even know how to begin responding to all that.

Little Brother Zhang continued, “What’s even more outrageous is that this girl is asking us for help right as she’s getting married. That means she isn’t marrying the patriarch. Maybe her family doesn’t like him.”

Zhang Qianjun Wanma suddenly seemed thoughtful, as if he had remembered something. He had a distant look in his eyes as he murmured, “It turns out that the patriarch is just like me.”

“What was that?” Little Brother Zhang asked.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma immediately shook his head, “Nothing. I just feel that the patriarch must feel really sad.”

Little Brother Zhang suddenly stood up, took off the silver ornaments, and said to Zhang Qianjun Wanma, “Let’s go.”

“Where are we going?”

“To crash a wedding. This girl must have clues about the patriarch. And since she’s the patriarch’s woman, we have to save her first,” Little Brother Zhang said.



## Chapter 8 – Excuse me

There was a beach located right outside the west entrance to the village, where large trees grew from the shore to the water. There were stone slabs connected under the trees so that people could keep out of the water as they walked. It was the only way to go to the western part of the river.

The two people stood on the tree branches above, watching the wedding procession pass by below. All the various colored lights looked like a colorful dragon winding through the trees.

A few moments ago, they had used the darkness to hide among the caravans leaving the village. The family of the person getting married appeared to be wealthy since every guest who left the village received a bowl of wine.

After the two of them drank the wine and wiped their mouths, Zhang Qianjun Wanma said to Little Brother Zhang, “We were chased by the girl’s family and friends for a long time. Now that it’s just the two of us, how can we crash the wedding?”

“We had so much trouble just now because they could see us. But now that we can hide in the dark, we can figure out a plan as we try and catch up with them.”

They knocked out the people who were handing out wine, stole their mules, and rushed all the way to the front. Even though most of the procession had passed by now, Little Brother Zhang still didn’t say anything.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma had doubts about crashing the wedding, but he stopped himself from asking any questions. Instead, he looked at Little Brother Zhang, who seemed to feel that something was wrong.

He couldn’t see the bride.

The colorful lights below were arranged in a disorderly manner and the band was traveling alongside the entire procession, but the bride who should've been at the front of the procession wasn't there. She didn't appear to be in the middle or at the rear of the procession, either.

Although Little Brother Zhang had hit her out of reflex earlier, he didn't hit her that hard. The bride should have woken up after they poured a little cold water on her. Otherwise, the wedding procession wouldn't have been back on the road.

"Is it possible I killed her?" Little Brother Zhang touched his chin.

"Impossible. There's no need for a marriage send-off if she's dead."

If this was the case, then the bride was hidden among the wedding procession. Could it be that someone already knew they would crash the wedding?

"Am I that easy to see through? Maybe it's because the bride's behavior on the street gave people some ideas."

She had suddenly bit a passerby on the street, after all. If the passerby hadn't knocked the bride to the ground, there would've been a huge misunderstanding. But the passerby's own actions were a resolute expression of his complete ignorance of the situation. That was why Little Brother Zhang didn't think that they would know of his plan to crash the wedding.

Suddenly, Little Brother Zhang had a thought. He felt as if he understood what was going on and said to Zhang Qianjun Wanma, "No. Here's what happened. I have a little theory that can combine some of the facts. This is the patriarch's woman. She and the patriarch love each other deeply. The patriarch has always been elusive, so no one knows where he is. His enemies haven't been able to find him for ten years, but they found out about his woman while looking for him. So, they used a trick to force the patriarch's woman to marry an old Han Chinese with sores all over his face who is also the boss of the caravan. His real purpose is to lure the patriarch out because

he knows that the patriarch will never let the woman he loves marry such a rough man. But the patriarch is formidable, so they know that he'll definitely choose to crash the wedding right as they're getting married. They made the preparations a long time ago. They hid the bride among the wedding procession and are waiting for the patriarch to come out. It's a trap down there, which means the patriarch must be around as well!" With that said, he looked into the darkness around him.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma looked at Little Brother Zhang, completely dumbfounded. "What did you just say?" He finally managed to ask after a while.

Little Brother Zhang couldn't see anything in the darkness. He turned his head, took a deep breath, and said the same thing to Zhang Qianjun Wanma all over again. "I have a little theory that can combine some of the facts. This is the patriarch's woman. She and the patriarch love each other deeply. The patriarch has always been elusive, so no one knows where he is. His enemies haven't been able to find him for ten years, but they found out about his woman while looking for him. So, they used a trick to force the patriarch's woman to marry an old Han Chinese with sores all over his face who is also the boss of the caravan. His real purpose is to lure the patriarch out because he knows that the patriarch will never let the woman he loves marry such a rough man. But the patriarch is formidable, so they know that he'll definitely choose to crash the wedding right as they're getting married. They made the preparations a long time ago. They hid the bride among the wedding procession and are waiting for the patriarch to come out. It's a trap down there, which means the patriarch must be around as well!"

Zhang Qianjun finally understood this time and looked at him, "How is this a little theory? It sounds like you've completely imagined the whole thing."

"My instincts are telling me this is what happened," Little Brother Zhang said. "Our top priority right now is to find the bride."

Zhang Qianjun Wanma suddenly saw something in Little Brother Zhang's mouth reflect off the lights, but he couldn't tell what the other man's tongue was fiddling with.

"Let's find a way to get into the procession first and observe closely!"

## Chapter 9 – We All Live Differently

After Little Brother Zhang finished speaking, he didn't move from the tree at all. Instead, he continued watching the wedding procession pass by below them.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma looked at Little Brother Zhang. Time flew by, and soon, the people at the end of the wedding procession were passing by. Zhang Qianjun Wanma noticed that Little Brother Zhang was sweating profusely, but he still didn't make any move.

At first, Zhang Qianjun Wanma thought that Little Brother Zhang was concentrating on what he was about to do. But when he saw that the entire wedding procession had passed them by, he suddenly came to a realization, "So... is it that you haven't come up with a plan yet? Didn't you say you can always come up with something at any time?"

"I already came up with a plan. I'm just not sure if I can count on you. That's why I haven't done anything." Little Brother Zhang pointed in a direction, "These groups are all wearing colorful costumes, so we'll be spotted easily no matter where we approach them. The only place we can start is from the back of the procession. I had originally thought that the people at the end of the procession would be more relaxed, but take a look at them."

The people at the end of the line were all young men riding horses. Their heads were wrapped in white turbans and they all had short guns at their waists.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma nodded his head, "They've come prepared."

He wiped the sweat off his face and looked back at Little Brother Zhang, who gave him a fierce look. "It's too late, Qianjun Wanma. Let's take a gamble."

"Gamble on what?" Zhang Qianjun Wanma shrank back timidly.

Little Brother Zhang immediately moved to untie Qianjun Wanma's belt. Qianjun Wanma was completely shocked, but Little Brother Zhang seemed to be very skilled at untying belts and had it pulled off in an instant. He put his hands behind his back and quickly wrapped the belt around them.

It was difficult for ordinary people to work their fingers with their hands behind their back, but Little Brother Zhang's wrist joints were so flexible that he could almost bend his hands backward.

"What are you doing?" Zhang Qianjun Wanma held onto his pants as he looked at the other man in shock.

Little Brother Zhang ordered in a low voice, "Carry me on your back!" With that said, he jumped onto Zhang Qianjun's back. "Go down!"

Before Zhang Qianjun Wanma could react, Little Brother Zhang kicked the branch and the two of them jumped directly from the tree. Zhang Qianjun Wanma staggered and almost fell to his knees when he landed.

Little Brother Zhang began to shout, "Let me go!"

The people in the wedding procession turned their heads, completely dumbfounded when they saw the two of them.

Little Brother Zhang whispered in Zhang Qianjun's ear, "Quick. Say that you've captured the man who hit the bride earlier."

Zhang Qianjun Wanma looked bewildered, but when he saw the people in front of him start drawing their knives, he immediately shouted, "Wait! I've captured the man who hit the bride earlier!"

The people began to look at each other, not knowing what to do.

Little Brother Zhang continued to whisper in his ear, "Say 'I want to see the leader. Is there any reward?'"

Zhang Qianjun Wanma shouted to the wedding procession, "Is there any reward? I want to see the leader!"

The people continued looking at each other uncertainly.

Little Brother Zhang suddenly began to cry loudly, "The bride and I love each other! My father is the former governor of Guangdong and Guangxi, and now the president confides in him! I work for the Americans! Don't you dare mess with me!"

The people in the procession stopped one by one, and soon, the whole group had stopped. The men at the back with the white turbans started to surround them.

After a short while, the leader rode over on his horse and brought a relative with him. They urged the procession to move on as the leader dismounted and came to stand in front of Zhang Qianjun Wanma.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma was sweating profusely and didn't know what to do as the leader stood in front of him and stared. Then, the leader grabbed Little Brother Zhang's hair and yanked his head up so that his relative could take a look at his face.

The relative immediately nodded and said a sentence in a language that Little Brother Zhang didn't understand. Then, the relative pointed at Zhang Qianjun Wanma.

The leader looked at him, "I recognize you. You're a beggar living in the mountains."

"I'm a Taoist priest. I practice in the mountains." Zhang Qianjun Wanma immediately became angry.

"Didn't you drag him away and escape earlier? Why are you bringing him back now?"

Zhang Qianjun Wanma froze for a moment, instantly persuaded by the other party's logic.

Little Brother Zhang whispered from his back, "Say that I hired you as a bodyguard earlier. Your job was to protect me, but I refused to pay afterwards, so you became angry. That's why you captured me."

The leader looked at Little Brother Zhang.

Just as Zhang Qianjun Wanma got ready to repeat his words, the leader stopped him, "Do you two think I'm deaf? Are you a comedy duo? Break their hamstrings and take them to the groom's house."



## Chapter 10 – Embarrassed

After the leader gave the order, all the people pulled their short guns out. Three people off to the side got off their horses and drew their knives, instantly surrounding the two men without any hesitation.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma only had enough time to take two steps back and there wasn't any time to ask Little Brother Zhang what to do.

A man came straight over and moved to pull his hair bun, but Zhang Qianjun Wanma dodged, threw Little Brother Zhang to the ground, and then immediately formed a hand sign, "May the master help and give me the most spirited fire of the five heavenly fires!"

Zhang Qianjun Wanma's hands instantly caught fire. He shook them directly at the person in front of him and threw out a line of fire.

The person turned over, dodged, and shouted in a language the two men didn't understand, as if he were cursing the use of sorcery.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma quickly changed his hand signs and then crossed his arms in front of his chest. "May the spirits possess me!" His Taoist robes immediately burst into flames.

Little Brother Zhang lay seductively on the ground and exclaimed, "Not bad."

At this time, no one dared take a step forward. Zhang Qianjun Wanma slapped the wooden box on his back and a sword wreathed in flames appeared in his hands. He turned around and kicked the flaming sword into the air, sending it spinning straight for a white-turbaned person who barely escaped. Zhang Qianjun Wanma's body followed behind it almost instantly. The moment the flaming sword fell, Zhang Qianjun grabbed it and stuffed it into the box on his back. He then rolled over until the flames on his body were instantly extinguished by the muddy ground and ran wildly towards the woods.

After he completely disappeared into the darkness, his opponent came to his senses. "Playing tricks?" The leader sneered. "Did he just leave his companion to fend for himself?"

He turned his head and looked at Little Brother Zhang, who had already untied the belt from around his hands and was standing there stretching his hands, neck, and jaw. "He's so embarrassing," Little Brother Zhang said as he looked in the direction Zhang Qianjun Wanma had run in. He then glanced between the leader and the procession that had gone out of sight before saying, "The time for sending the bride off is fixed. You've already delayed for a while since you were so busy chasing us. You can't afford to delay any longer, right?"

When the leader didn't say anything, Little Brother Zhang's expression became excited and he looked at them, "You immediately ordered people to break our hamstrings as soon as you met us. It seems that making people disabled is a common occurrence for you. It's not classy at all."

After experiencing the scene just now, the white-turbaned people didn't dare make any rash moves. The leader took a short gun from a man standing nearby and immediately shot at Little Brother Zhang.

Little Brother Zhang twisted his waist at a speed ordinary people wouldn't be able to reach, dodging all the bullets. He then bounced back up and flung his head back. His mouth made a "pop" sound and a blade shot out, piercing the leader's eye like a bullet.

The leader screamed and fell to the ground, but before the others could see what happened clearly, they all heard the continuous "pop" sound. Within a second, everyone—including the leader's relative—fell off their horses.

Little Brother Zhang rubbed his neck and looked around. No one was dead, but they were all covering their eyes tightly and cursing at him as their blood flowed to the ground. One managed to raise his gun, but Little Brother Zhang flung his head back and shot the blade in his mouth directly into the muzzle. The gun instantly exploded, taking the man's entire arm with it.

“The other person just now is engaged in logistics. I represent the regular army,” Little Brother Zhang said as he squatted in front of the leader.

The leader immediately understood who the formidable one was and shouted at the others, “Nobody move!”

There were a few people who had endured the pain and drawn their knives, but they didn’t move again after hearing the leader’s words. Everyone clenched their teeth and looked at Little Brother Zhang, who opened his mouth to show the leader just how many blades were left in his mouth. As they glinted off the nearby lights, he used his tongue to push a blade out of his mouth.

“Sir,” the leader said. “Have mercy on us. We’re just trying to make a living.”

Little Brother Zhang looked at the leader’s belt and immediately started to unfasten it.

The leader was terrified. “Sir, don’t do this to me in front of my people.”

Little Brother Zhang approached the leader’s head and stepped on his hands with both feet before squatting down and pulling the blade from his eye. The leader immediately started squirming in pain.

Little Brother Zhang took the bag from his waist and asked, “What’s your name?”

“My name is Wulang. I’m from Huamiao Huazha Village in Bali Mountain, so people called me Wulang Huazha. These are my brothers. Sir, we didn’t know you were someone who can’t be messed with. Please let them go.”

Little Brother Zhang pressed his knees to the leader’s face, opened the leader’s eyelid, and started stitching his eyeball. Wulang Huazha’s whole face twisted in pain. When he was done, Little Brother Zhang released him and gave him some water to rinse his eyeball.

The leader rinsed his eye for a long time, and when he finally opened them again, he saw that Little Brother Zhang had used his belt to tie himself up again and was now lying on the back of his horse. Little Brother Zhang waved to him, "Come on. Hurry up, hurry up."

## Chapter 11- The Southern Faction

Wulang Huazha rode on the horse with Little Brother Zhang slung over its back like luggage.

After they caught up with the procession, many people looked at Wulang Huazha's eye, which was now bandaged with a turban. They marched slowly among the procession so that Little Brother Zhang could observe everyone closely.

Wulang Huazha hadn't dared make any moves before, but now he suddenly had the urge to kill Little Brother Zhang. He immediately turned around but stopped when he caught sight of Little Brother Zhang's movements. Little Brother Zhang's whole body was twitching like some kind of monster.

At that moment, the leader realized that the man hanging behind him on the horse was laughing.

It was that ferocious smiling face amid such high-speed movement that made the leader realize that he had no chance of winning. Little Brother Zhang's behavior was a clear indicator of the disparity between the two men's strength. The leader had thought he was at an absolute advantage, but the other party merely seemed to be using small tricks to deal with him.

"Do you really have no idea where the bride is hiding?" Little Brother Zhang asked after looking around.

Wulang Huazha shook his head, "Sir, we're the security team. We serve as guards for the rich people and spend most of our time hunting. The details for sending off the bride are all planned by the bride's family."

"They didn't warn you to pay special attention to anything?"

"No. The line is so long. People at the front think the bride is at the back, and people at the back think the bride is at the front. I didn't realize the

bride had disappeared until you mentioned it.” Wulang Huazha’s eye hurt so much that he kept squirming in pain.

Little Brother Zhang changed to a more comfortable position on the horse’s back. As he lay on his back and looked at the darkness above him, he suddenly remembered something. He quickly sat up and looked at the darkness around him.

“Go to the side,” Little Brother Zhang said. “Put out the torch.”

“What’s wrong, sir?”

“There’s another group,” Little Brother Zhang said. “Out of all the people who were chasing us, there’s a group of people I still haven’t seen.”

The best way to hide wasn’t by hiding in the crowd, but by creating another procession that was walking in the dark parallel to the main procession with its colorful lights, gongs, and drums. This procession didn’t have any torches and the sounds of their footsteps were muffled by the gongs and drums of the main procession. They hid in the shadows where the long rows of colorful lights couldn’t illuminate them.

Wulang Huazha slowly left the procession, put out his torch in the mud, and plunged into the darkness at a diagonal angle. As the horse walked into the depths of the forest, they gradually heard the faint sound of horses’ hooves.

Wulang Huazha slowly approached and saw a group of Abi people dressed in straw hats and cloaks who were walking silently in the dark. The horses’ mouths were sealed and their hooves were covered with straw mats. There was a shadow of a girl with a crown on her head sitting among the group of riders.

It should be the bride.

The area was extremely dark here, but the leader of that procession seemed to be very familiar with the road, so the people and horses all stuck together.

With the help of the moonlight, Little Brother Zhang saw vague shadows before his eyes. No one spoke or made any sudden movements, which made him feel like they were sending off a corpse.

Wulang Huazha's equestrian skills were very good, so his horse barely made a sound as it approached them. It was completely dark as they got closer and closer to the procession.

Little Brother Zhang pulled the belt off his hands and said softly to Wulang Huazha, "Wait for me here." With that said, he rolled over and dismounted from the horse.

In an almost completely dark environment, he relied on his instincts as he made his way into the procession. After a few turns, he came up beside the bride's horse.

Everyone was walking forward stiffly, so he took the opportunity to jump onto the bride's horse and cover her mouth. He pressed her arms down as he said in a very soft voice, "I'm here to rescue you."

He was very thorough when it came to observing human bodies, so he clearly remembered the bride's height and figure. Even though he had only met her for a short time on the street, he was able to remember all the details very clearly.

After he wrapped his hands around her arms, he found that his hands weren't pressed on her waist like he had expected. Instead, they came to rest on her two exquisite, plump breasts. He froze for a moment as he wondered why this girl was suddenly shorter. Then, he touched them again.

When he had met the bride earlier, her breasts were barely visible because of her clothes. This bride's breasts, however, felt very good to touch. They were like the big steamed buns in Xiamen that bounced and had cute shapes.

"Are you done groping me?" The bride whispered.

Little Brother Zhang was stunned for a moment. He was just wondering why her voice sounded so familiar when he suddenly realized what was going on. “Zhang Haiqi.”

“Let go of me. You’re an adult now. There’s no need to touch your mother’s breast. I’m still fucking young,” Zhang Haiqi whispered.

“Why are you here? Where’s the bride?”

“I’ve switched with the bride. What, am I supposed to wait for you while I go about my business?” Zhang Haiqi said in the Sichuan dialect, “Now *I’m* the bride. Get off the horse. If I’m going to remarry, there’s no way I can even enter the door with you getting in the way.”



## Chapter 12

One time, Zhang Haiqi took a bath with Little Brother Zhang. He couldn't remember what year it was, but he did remember that he was already 1.7 meters tall by that point, which was taller than Zhang Haiqi.

Zhang Haiqi walked in naked as if no one else was around, the curve of her waist like that of a crescent moon. She shook her head and let her long hair flow down her back.

Her hair was draped over her snow-white shoulders, her petite body was very well-proportioned, and she was a young girl as pretty as an elf, but her gaze was extremely mature and enchanting.

Zhang Haiqi's body had been specially trained so that her well-developed muscles were hidden under her soft skin. Her bones were also small, so she looked petite despite her plump figure.

When she was walking, the parts on her body that should shake would shake, and her movements wouldn't give off the impression that they were rigid.

That day, Little Brother Zhang felt that Zhang Haiqi's body was a little dazzling. He hadn't thought her body was special that morning, the day before, or even a week before that, but at this moment, he suddenly felt different. He began to breathe rapidly.

*Is this what women look like?*

For the first time in Little Brother Zhang's life, the word "woman" had a special meaning in his mind.

Ever since he hit puberty, Zhang Haiqi's actions brought him closer to having some sort of nervous breakdown.

The summers in Xiamen were very hot, so she would wear a dudou<sup>(1)</sup> which left her arms exposed, or cook naked with only an apron on. Zhang Haiqi had an extremely attractive body like an elf, but she had the same living habits as men. It was like the rainbow in Little Brother Zhang's mind was being covered by a mudslide.

For a long time, Little Brother Zhang would react the same as other men whenever he saw a petite woman.

He also remembered that there was one time when Zhang Haiqi was so devastated that she started crying. It was when she thought Little Brother Zhang had died.

Little Brother Zhang dragged his wounded body out of the mountain he was training in and walked for three days before he returned to Zhang Haiqi's side.

That was the first time he ever saw Zhang Haiqi cry. Although she recovered and didn't show her emotions the next day, it was her tears that day that supported Little Brother Zhang until now.

Before that, no one had ever cried for him.

That night, Zhang Haiqi held the injured Little Brother Zhang tightly without letting go. She slept soundly, but Little Brother Zhang leaned against her plump chest with his eyes wide open until dawn.

The sea breeze in Xiamen at night blew in through the window and ruffled the straw curtains. He remembered every detail, from the insects chirping, to the sounds of the waves, to what the moonlight looked like. He also remembered Zhang Haiqi's long eyelashes, the curve of her neck, and the fullness of her arms.

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<sup>(1)</sup> A dudou is a traditional Chinese form of the bodice, originally worn as an undershirt with medicinal properties. With the opening of China, it is sometimes encountered in Western and modern Chinese fashion as a sleeveless shirt and backless halter-top blouse. Wiki link [here](#)

The most terrifying thing was that they had both felt hot as they slept together that night. The tears and redness on Zhang Haiqi's face made him feel that even her exhaled breath smelled fragrant.

All these incidents from their past rushed into Little Brother Zhang's mind as soon as he realized he was holding Zhang Haiqi.

Zhang Haiqi didn't forcibly take his hands away, but said softly, "Behave. I'll find you a wife after we get back. You can be intimate with her however you want."

Little Brother Zhang finally released his hold and looked around.

The gongs and drums from the other procession were noisy, and no one seemed to have heard their conversation and movements just now.

He stretched his hand out and Zhang Haiqi wrote something on his palm, "Follow us from a distance. Watch everything silently and see what happens. Don't make any trouble."

Little Brother Zhang stealthily got off the horse and returned to where Wulang Huazha's horse was. As soon as he climbed up, Wulang Huazha asked him, "What's the situation?"

"The bride is my mother. What kind of situation do you think it is? If it's going to rain, it's going to rain. If my mother wants to get married, my mother is going to get married. Let her be."

Little Brother Zhang put his arms around Wulang Huazha's waist and absentmindedly groped him a few times. He gave a long sigh, "Ah, why am I so obedient? I should've touched her more."

Wulang Huazha's face and ears turned red, "Sir, I'm a serious hunter."

Little Brother Zhang looked into the darkness and said, "Let's go. We need to find that Taoist priest."

## Chapter 13

He Jianxi covered his nose and looked at the person in front of him.

It had been a week since Little Brother Zhang and Zhang Haiqi went to Southern Xinjiang, and he had finally met the person whom Zhang Haiqi had asked him to wait for.

He was a middle-aged man in his thirties who was carrying a large basket on his back. There was a straw mat in the basket, which he pulled out and placed on the large rectangular tea table in front of He Jianxi.

This was File No. 001 after the South Sea Archives had been rebuilt. He Jianxi poured the other man a glass of water and checked his train ticket. He really was from Southern Xinjiang.

Something must have happened in Southern Xinjiang, so Zhang Haiqi paid special attention to it. The money she had saved was used to purchase files and she tried her best to collect anything related to what had happened there.

The straw mat seemed to have been buried in the ground for it gave off a strong musty odor that smelled of soil. He Jianxi saw that the thirty-year-old man was neatly dressed, but his skin was dark and he seemed to be in the sun all year round. His eyes were cloudy but piercing.

He Jianxi swallowed and tried to say calmly, "Let's start."

The middle-aged man took three sips of water before putting down his teacup and saying in Northwestern Mandarin, "Mawei Mountain is on the edge of Gongbang. Four years ago, the hunters there captured the first wild boar. This thing came out of its stomach after it was opened." The middle-aged man pulled a strange thing out of his breast pocket and handed it to He Jianxi.

He Jianxi took it and saw that it was a strange bone that was covered in strange, dark red bumps. The moment he took it, he realized that it was very heavy.

“Those hunters go hunting all the time and have captured many things, but they had never seen this kind of bone before. No animals have this kind of bone.” The middle-aged man continued, “Mawei Mountain is inland and there aren’t any lakes or rivers around it. There’s only spring water. They put the bone aside until one day, a foreigner went there to build a church on Mawei Mountain. He saw this bone and told us that it was a Long Human bone. He said that there was a Long Human in the mountain, and the wild boar must have eaten the Long Human’s body.”

He Jianxi had never heard of “Long Human” before and figured that it was probably the phrase the missionary had come up with when he was trying to translate what he knew into Chinese.

“Over the next few years, the hunters captured wild boars and wolves and found these kinds of bones in their stomachs one right after another. Each bone looked stranger than the last,” the middle-aged man said. “The hunters were very scared and took the bones they had collected and began connecting them together. They wanted to know what was living in the mountain. But the more they put all the bones together, the more frightened they became.”

The middle-aged man spread the straw mat out on the table. He Jianxi saw that the straw mat had been wrapped around some broken bones, which had all been glued together with mud to form a strange shape.

It was a spinal column, but the vertebrae joints were much longer than that of any animal he had ever seen. The middle-aged man put seven or eight broken vertebrae together to form a complete spine that was more than three meters long.

He Jianxi took a few steps back. He initially thought that it was a giant snake, but the middle-aged man connected some other bones together and a leg

appeared. This leg bone was longer than any creature He Jianxi had ever seen before.

This was a humanoid creature with a very long body and extremely long hands and feet. It looked like a giant stick insect.

“Is this a Long Human?” He Jianxi took a shuddering breath.

The middle-aged man said, “The people in Mawei Mountain are very scared right now and many of them are starting to leave. Even the hunters dare not go deep into the mountain anymore. I came out to buy guns. I’m about to enter the depths of the mountain with a few men to see what’s going on and find out where this thing came from.”

He Jianxi felt cold all over as he looked at the bones. He noticed that the middle-aged man kept staring at him, so he gave him the money and thought to himself, *are the two Zhangs dealing with this kind of strange thing every day?*

## Chapter 14

Wulang Huazha kept looking for the Taoist priest in the woods. In the darkness, blood kept flowing down his face from his wound.

He wasn't worried that his eye would go blind. He was more worried about the fact that he didn't know his fate.

The person behind him was leaning against his back, fast asleep. This person's behavior was unpredictable and it was very possible that he would kill him afterwards, but Wulang Huazha didn't dare act rashly. Since this person's abilities were extraordinary, he had no confidence that he could really plot against him.

"Your heart is beating very fast." Just as Wulang Huazha's killing intent suddenly rose up and he wanted to fight the other party, a lazy voice came from behind him. It made him feel as if he had been dropped into an ice cellar and all his killing intent disappeared in an instant.

Little Brother Zhang felt that things were getting weirder. When he was in Potluck Capital just now, everything was still normal. So why did this normal wedding procession suddenly become so strange and creepy? Was it normal for the people here to behave so strangely?

Little Brother Zhang only liked it when people couldn't read him. He didn't like it when he couldn't see through others.

He didn't believe in coincidences. When he was walking with Zhang Haiqi on the streets, he got distracted and was a little overexcited. Now that he had calmed down, he wondered whether it was a coincidence that the bride had gotten off the horse and bit him.

He was the only one who was acting strangely on the streets after all, so it might have attracted the bride's attention. Maybe her choosing him wasn't destiny, but an accident.

The bride was very desperate, so maybe she found a random person to rescue her.

But how did he look like someone who could save people? What he had done on the streets only made him look like a total pervert.

If that wasn't the case, then things were getting outrageous. He didn't believe that he would just randomly meet a bride who would react upon seeing his tattoo. If he thought about it in reverse, the only way for this to make sense was that everyone in Potluck Capital recognized this kind of tattoo, which meant the patriarch had great influence here.

As he finished this thought, he said to Wulang Huazha, "Hey." He then leaned forward under Wulang Huazha's armpit, pulled his clothes open, and lit a flare to illuminate his exposed chest. "Does everyone here recognize these kinds of tattoos?"

Wulang Huazha glanced at Little Brother Zhang's chest, his face instantly turning pale when he saw the tattoo. Little Brother Zhang immediately knew the answer.

Wulang Huazha stopped his horse and knelt down. "I didn't know you're such a formidable figure. Since you're so extraordinary, I should've known you work for Fei Kun Balu."

"Fei Kun Balu?" Little Zhang thought for a moment. "Balu" was a mythological title that meant "warrior".

Little Brother Zhang got off the horse and fixed his clothes. "Everyone here knows our Master Fei Kun?"

"People in many of the surrounding villages here worship Fei Kun Balu. The believers all have tattoos like this on their chests. You can go to them if there's an injustice and there's a possibility that Fei Kun Balu himself will come out and help," Wu Lang Huazha said as he lowered his head.

"What?"



Little Brother Zhang touched his chin. “Religious leader?” His eyes lit up. “Not only has the patriarch established a clan here, but he also has a religious community. No wonder he’s the patriarch.”

Everything made sense now. Little Brother Zhang touched the back of his neck. “Are there shrines for Fei Kun Balu here?”

“There are temples. There are many temples.”

Little Brother Zhang almost laughed. “I thought the Zhang family was screwed, but it turns out they even have temples.”

He looked at the wedding procession in the distance. He wanted to leave it all behind and go to the temples immediately, but Zhang Haiqi was still among the procession.

He frowned. “Then the wedding procession really is just sending off the bride.”

Wulang Huazha suddenly spoke up, “By the way, this bride is going to spend the night in a Fei Kun temple tonight.”

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End of Southern Xinjiang Volume: Potluck Case

## **Spin-Off Case: The Map In The Dream**

# Introduction

This is the spin-off case of the “Southern Archives”. It was one of the cases that Zhang Haiyan completed independently.

This case belongs to the Southern Archives Malacca Volume, File No. 013.

Those who are familiar with the Southern Archives and the Daomu Biji system can start reading the next chapter.

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This is a story that may cause intense discomfort. Reader discretion is advised.

During the middle and end of the 1870s—specifically from 1877 to 1878—China experienced catastrophic famines. There were more than thirty types of associated disasters within a year and nearly half the population—almost two hundred million people—were affected.

Mothers and children ate each other, human flesh became a commodity in circulation, and corpses covered the ground for thousands of miles.

More than ten million people were dead. Some starved to death, some were killed, and others died of illness. Refugees everywhere murdered and ate people, and the plague ran rampant.

It was hell on earth.

This disaster was called Dingwu Qihuang<sup>(1)</sup>.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Also called “The Northern Chinese Famine of 1876–1879”. It occurred during the late Qing dynasty in China. Wiki link [here](#). “Dingwu” means “**Ding** Chou Year” (1877), and “**Wu** Yin Year” (1878) since the drought conditions were the worst during 1877 and 1878. “Qihuang” means “great disaster”.

Our protagonist, Zhang Hailou, (people called him Zhang Haiyan later in the South Sea) became an orphan during this disaster.

This story involves a lot of people and places, including the Mystic Nine in Changsha, Malacca in the south, and the southwestern border between Myanmar and China.

(In case some people aren't familiar with the stories, I'm going to briefly introduce the history of the old Mystic Nine in Changsha.)

The old Mystic Nine were nine tomb-robbing families in Changsha. They were called the Mystic Nine Leaders by the people because they controlled Changsha's underground tomb-robbing business. Any underground business had to go through one of the nine families before they could leave Changsha.

The southern Xinjiang part of this story is related to one of the nine families and the Crescent Hotel's origins.

(The entire relationship between the Mystic Nine and the Crescent Hotel is very complicated, but you don't need to study it deeply before reading this story since it won't affect your understanding. When I get to that part of the story, I will naturally explain this in detail.)

The story begins in the tropical rain forests of Southeast Asia.

I'll write quickly. According to the existing records of the Southern Archives, the story will consist of four parts.

The incidents occurred in the southern jungle of Perak (located in Malaysia), on the Nan'an ship sailing from Malacca to Xiamen, and in the villages deep in the mountains of China's southern Xinjiang. Eventually, these stories will converge to reveal the truth about Dingwu Qihuang.

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The Author's Notes:

I haven't written a novel for a long time. In recent years, scriptwriting has hurt my use of language and my writing isn't as good as before. I'm a little sorry about that.

Every chapter will be published in three thousand words. This story will be very unrestrained and free. I'll write whatever I want, thus returning to the original state of online writing.

I'm going to write stories based on my original intention. When I first started writing, I wanted people to praise me. After fame and fortune came to me, I didn't really have a sense of enlightenment.

As I'm writing now, I begin to have a concept of why I'm writing and what I'm writing for. There are really too few good stories in the world.

There aren't many differences between all the stories that have been passed down from ancient times. If there's a new way of writing stories, I won't feel so bored before falling asleep at midnight.

Exploring new story types and character types, and exploring creative ways of writing are my purposes for writing this book.

I was an online writer twelve years ago, after all. It's hard to say whether I can still keep up with the ideas of contemporary writers. If I fail, please criticize me.

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The following poems are for the characters in this book:

He Jianxi:

A young child is holding a melon under the willow, a dog is chasing butterflies in a narrow alley. The world is prosperous and full of laughter, yet I am the only one who is alone.

Zhang Haiyan:

The leaves of the willow tree in Jiangnan are too small to form a proper shade. The leaves are simply so new that people cannot bear breaking them. The branches are so soft that birds cannot bear stepping on them when they sing. They wait until the spring comes.

She is now fourteen or fifteen, playing the flute in her free time. When she was little, she used to play games on the steps. I was fond of her back then and adore her even now.

Zhang Haiqi:

There aren't any birds in the mountains, there aren't any people in sight. A fisherman is on a lone boat, fishing alone in the cold snowy river.

Zhang Qianjun Wanma:

Flowers are blooming, leaves and branches are all over the steps. The birds are singing, yet they sound so sad! We have just met, but now we are parting again. The bird that flies alone lives alone.

When are we going to meet again? Who knows if we will ever meet again? Will it be difficult for us to meet again? How can I possibly express my feelings for you? I can only give you love words and a love poem.

The rain falls on the flowers, the door is tightly closed. Our youth is forgotten, our youth is gone. Who is there to talk and share happiness with? My soul is lost as I stand next to the flowers, my soul is lost as I stand under the moon.

Sorrow gathers every day, making me frown. I have shed a thousand tears; I have shed tens of thousands of tears. I look at the sky at dawn, I look at the clouds at sunset. I think of you when I walk, I think of you when I sit.

# Chapter 1 – The Most Despicable Man In The South Sea

This story is about two people and a corpse.

As usual, I won't cut to the chase. I'll start with something minor.

There were thousands of Malay aboriginal tribes scattered in the southern jungles of Perak. These southern jungles covered a wide expanse, including areas around Johor. The vast expanse of primitive rainforests gave birth to several fleeting civilizations.

Among these thousands of tribes, the natives in one tribe had a special tattoo. The extremely complex pattern had lasted for more than two thousand years. Western explorers who researched tattoos and local customs couldn't deduce the origin of this pattern. It wasn't a symbol of productive activity, a mythological story, or an obscure spell or symbol.

In the seventeenth century, a piece of human skin with this tattoo on it was sold to England and accidentally seen by a priest in the Cardinal's Court. This priest had been a cartographer before he decided to follow God. He was surprised to see the traces of advanced map-drawing skills on this tattoo that had been passed down generation by generation for two thousand years.

That's right. The tattoo pattern was actually a two-thousand-year-old map that showed the entire archipelago around Borneo before the sea level rose.

At the end of the seventeenth century, research on ice ages appeared in Europe. During the third ice age, the water level was much lower than it was now and the shapes of all the islands at that time were different from the current ones. This information was enough to prove that this map was drawn very early.

In the native language of the local people, this tattoo was called “gonka”. Gonka was actually a psychedelic drug there. After taking it, the native people would rush into the fire and dance in it until they died.

Gonka was highly addictive and most people would commit suicide after taking it for three consecutive years. It was said that if those who tried to kill themselves were saved in the end, this map would appear in their minds. As a result, there was a saying that this picture came from the underworld.

The gonka basically went extinct eight hundred years ago and was rarely seen in the rainforests. Maybe there were still some in the depths of the rainforests, but no one had confirmed it. Few people remembered the process for preparing and consuming it. The question of whether they could see this map in a hallucination had also become a mystery that could never be verified.

What made people very concerned was that there was a strange mark on this human skin map.

The person who drew this map two thousand years ago made a mark at a certain location that was in the depths of the rainforests. What was there?

Since the seventeenth century, a total of five expedition teams had entered the rainforests in southern Perak to find this location. Three expedition teams didn't reach their target destination before the rainy season. The other two teams didn't reappear after entering the rainforests, so the final result was unknown. After that, people called the location “ghost spot”, and the expeditions stopped ever since.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the western countries rekindled their interest in the gonka map after gonka was re-discovered in western Perak. The Westerners took the gonka powder and saw the map when they were dying. Moreover, it was said that they even saw some images that had never been passed down in the world.

In order to reach the “ghost spot” on the gonka map and verify whether those images were true, gonka rewards were established.



In the end, the rewards were exchanged for two thousand photos. The rewards were then cancelled and these photos were sealed in the archives.

That's it. Our story has an inextricable link with the gonka rewards.

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At the end of the twentieth century, Malacca, Perak.

Zhang Haiyan, who was known as the most despicable man in Southeast Asia's history, was perverted, spoke before thinking, and had no credibility at all.

His famous pet phrase was: I'm so shameless that I can carry a tree on my face and there's big shit under men's knees.<sup>(1)</sup>

He wasn't like other Chinese people after he went to the South Sea. He didn't start a family or run a business. He lived in the city, but no one knew what he was doing every day. Sometimes, he didn't show up for three or four months, but once he did, he often shocked everyone with his actions.

Zhang Haiyan had done countless notorious deeds, but they were all undignified or disgusting. The most infamous incident was him robbing the dung truck. He robbed the dung trucks for six consecutive weeks, but no one knew what his purpose was.

Some said that he was actually very decent in private. Others had seen him looking at the sea from a big tree. China was on the other side of the sea in that direction, but no one knew who he was thinking about.

In physiognomy<sup>(2)</sup> terms, Zhang Haiyan's eyebrows were curved like willow leaves, which made him look charming instead of frivolous. His eyes were as

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<sup>(1)</sup> There is a Chinese idiom, "There is gold under men's knees", which means that men have dignity and shouldn't beg others easily. I suppose Haiyan tweaked the idiom because he didn't care about any of that.

<sup>(2)</sup> Physiognomy is the practice of assessing a person's character or personality from their outer appearance—especially the face. Wiki link [here](#).

deep as bottomless pools, remaining smooth so long as it didn't rain. If he felt touched, the ripples would go straight to the bottom of the pools.

In layman's terms, you would see waves of emotions in his eyes, but his eyebrows rose and sank in a provocative way. As a result, his face gave off a sinister appearance.

Hua Qingzi, a Chinese fortune-teller who built the first Taoist center in the South Sea, said that Zhang Haiyan's face seemed like he was someone who carried a huge secret but didn't reveal it.

A Chinese medicine doctor named Lao Ka, who was from Fragrant Herb Hall and lived next to Hua Qingzi, said that Zhang Haiyan's face showed he had shenkui<sup>(3)</sup>. He thought a lot and was often anxious, which damaged his heart and spleen. This became an illness that inhibited the blood flow in his veins.

This all implied that although he looked handsome, he had a dysfunction down there.

These rumors and criticisms weren't important anymore because Zhang Haiyan was looking at the onlookers from the execution stage. He was naked and had his butt sticking in the air because his head was stuck in the guillotine. This guillotine had been used for a long time and was actually a soil slope in a market square. It was said that a wooden base guillotine would be built here in a few years.

You've guessed it. He was about to die.

The executioner hadn't arrived yet. According to Zhang Haiyan's previous experiences of watching people get beheaded, the executioner would arrive about an hour late since the sun was too bright today.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Shenkui was an idiopathic form of anxiety seen in China, which is accompanied by backache, fatigability, insomnia, vertigo and weakness; it is attributed to excess loss of semen or passage of whitish urine, sexual dysfunction, excess masturbation, intercourse, and nocturnal emissions. Link to dictionary definition [here](#).

By the time the executioner showed up, most of the prisoners would be dehydrated and exhausted because of the sun. They would all be confused and unaware of what was happening the second before they died, so they wouldn't make too many desperate moves. The audience would feel bored and leave quickly, which meant that the executioner could head back sooner.

There was a broken basket below him, which his head would fall into after it was chopped off. Without this basket, his head would roll all the way into the crowd.

The guillotine was surrounded by flies. Although the blood sprayed forward and the guillotine would be washed after that, there was always old blood stuck in the cracks of the wooden boards after years of use. It attracted a mass of flies, which were constantly buzzing next to Zhang Haiyan's ears.

*There are lots of flies today. Several people must've already been executed this month,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. He knew why he was here.

Three months ago, some Chinese people were arrested for smuggling foreign wine. The four accomplices were released two weeks later and continued smuggling foreign wine.

Zhang Haiyan knew that they must have shared a cut of the smuggling money with the white people in prison. Later, high-ranking officials somehow learned about this situation, and the four people were arrested again. They were to be beheaded, but only three people were actually executed.

It was apparent that one of them had bribed the sheriff. Since it was a gang of four, they simply needed to cut off four heads. It wasn't like the white people at the top could tell the differences between Chinese faces.

As a result, Zhang Haiyan, an accomplice who had shipped foreign wine to the gang several times, was arrested. He could make up for the lack of the fourth person.

Zhang Haiyan usually behaved pervertedly, so now he was reaping what he sowed. He had no way to ask for help and could only silently accept his death.

Just as Zhang Haiyan was feeling uncomfortable under the scorching sun, the executioner finally arrived. There was a commotion among the crowd.

Zhang Haiyan saw the girl who lived next door to him standing there in the crowd and greeted her. A Bu was a girl who walked with a limp. She didn't respond to him, but turned and hid in the crowd instead.

Watching someone's head get cut off was exciting, but seeing your neighbor's head get cut off was a bit too exciting.

"A Bin, remember to talk before you think when you get to the other side. Otherwise, they won't allow you to have a good reincarnation. You might reincarnate as a pig and deal with shit again in your next life," someone shouted from below, causing the crowd to erupt in laughter.

Zhang Haiyan was unpopular and infamous, so everyone was here to watch him get executed. His execution had become a kind of entertainment for them.

Zhang Haiyan even saw that a turnover pancake apam balik<sup>(4)</sup> stall that he used to frequent had been moved to the side of the guillotine. The stall's owner was an old man who watched Zhang Haiyan while he sold the pancakes.

Zhang Haiyan laughed and looked at the old man. "It's a long way home for me. I'll have to pass the Dragon King's<sup>(5)</sup> territory when I go to the netherworld from the South Sea. Since I'm so handsome, the Dragon King might take a liking to me and I'll become his son-in-law. You'll need to watch

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<sup>(4)</sup> Apam balik is a dessert common in many varieties at specialist roadside stalls throughout Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Wiki link [here](#).

<sup>(5)</sup> The Dragon King, also known as the Dragon God, is a Chinese water and weather god. Wiki link [here](#).

out when you go back to your hometown because I might climb onto your ships and drag you into the sea to be my guests.”

Everyone was shocked when they heard him say such an unlucky thing.

The other party had been mocked and wanted to scold him some more when Zhang Haiyan said, “I’m about to die. I’m so thirsty. I know some of you often do despicable and unlawful things. Perhaps it’s time for me to reveal what you’ve done since no one can verify your deeds after I’m dead. If you don’t want me to talk, go and get me some water.”

The expressions of many people in the crowd immediately changed and some looked at the execution officer, hoping that Zhang Haiyan would die soon.

The execution officer was a Malay who was checking the documents. It was obvious that he was still sleepy, so he ignored the confrontation.

Zhang Haiyan continued, “Where’s the water? Where’s water?”

The old man finally came back to his senses. He had probably thought of all his misdeeds and felt that Zhang Haiyan wouldn’t know them, so he regained his confidence and scolded, “Bullshit. Say whatever you want. You even talk shit before you die. The Dragon King will cut your head off again.”

Zhang Haiyan felt absolutely delighted and laughed as he scanned the crowd. That was when he saw someone he didn’t recognize standing there.

They looked at each other. The other party was a white man in a monastic robe, which meant he probably worked in the monastery here.

Zhang Haiyan looked at the man and shouted, “Hey, you! Who are you, friend?”

The white man ignored him and just kept staring at him.

At this time, the executioner's attention was finally pulled back by all the noise. He squinted and looked around before he shouted a few times in Malay and walked to the guillotine with a machete in his hand. This machete was used to chop off the rope attached to the guillotine. With one swift cut, the blade of the guillotine would fall. After the blood was drained, they would bury the corpses with the soil on the side and that would be the end of it.

Zhang Haiyan had no choice but to turn his attention back to the final moment of his life. He took a deep breath and continued to look over the crowd. He discovered that the white man had disappeared and all the others were silent.

As the executioner came to stand next to the rope, Zhang Haiyan's heart started beating faster and both of his hands held onto the wooden posts on both sides of the guillotine.

Now he understood what it was like to be executed. Now he realized that the last few seconds were the longest.

The execution officer obviously didn't want to waste time, so he read through the death penalty statement quickly, his words slurring.

Zhang Haiyan stared at the crowd, looking at each individual face. Then, the machete swung and the guillotine's blade fell in an instant. Almost at the same time, a man jumped onto the stage and caught the rope in mid-air.

The blade stopped right before it was about to cut through Zhang Haiyan's neck. If it had been a quarter of a second later, the blade would've hit him.

At the same time, he heard a voice say, "How much is this person?"

Zhang Haiyan looked up with much difficulty.

Because of the backlighting, he could only see the silhouette of the person who was pulling on the rope that could end him.

Despite this, he was still able to recognize that it was the white man in the monastic clothes just now. He had long hair and a slender figure.

In Malacca, if the death row prisoners didn't commit very serious crimes, they could be redeemed with money. The charges against them were clearly marked with prices, but the price of death penalty crimes like selling illegal alcohol was very high.

The price to redeem Zhang Haiyan was twenty-one shillings, which was about the price of two pints of rum. The white man obviously thought it was a high price since he began bargaining with the executioner.

The white man spoke very horribly about Zhang Haiyan and found countless reasons to belittle the "merchandise". The most outrageous reason he came up with was that Zhang Haiyan had shenkui.

Throughout the whole process, he had been pulling on the rope. As long as the transaction failed, he would probably let it go immediately.

Finally, Zhang Haiyan was sold for ten shillings. As the crowd dejectedly dispersed, the white man flipped open the lock of the guillotine and released Zhang Haiyan.

Zhang Haiyan sat back against the guillotine. His neck was red and his entire back was sunburned and peeling. The white man smiled at him.

Zhang Haiyan's first thought was to run before the other party started explaining why he wanted to buy him and why he wanted to save him. That way, the whole thing could be over. But when he looked at the shackles around his feet, he felt that he could wait until the other person started talking and uncuffed the shackles before he ran away.

The white man came to stand in front of him and introduced himself, "I'm Madison. I'm a missionary. Are you Mr. A Bin?"

“Can you uncuff me first?” Zhang Haiyan smiled at him, appearing very gentle and harmless. There was a dazed look in his eyes as if he couldn’t believe he got to survive this.

“No. The shackles are worth six shillings. You’re only worth four shillings. Breaking these means that it’s a failed transaction. You have to carry them with you until we reach an agreement,” Father Madison said as he squatted down and looked at the places where Zhang Haiyan’s hands had been gripping. The wooden posts were completely cracked.

Father Madison said, “It seems that Mr. A Bin didn’t need our help since he could have saved himself. You’ve got some skills. I shouldn’t have thought you’re only worth ten shillings. I should have agreed to buy you at twelve shillings just now.”

Zhang Haiyan squinted his eyes. Indeed, as Madison had said, he did have ulterior motives for doing this. It was risky to try and dodge the guillotine’s blade with his ability, but it wasn’t as risky as playing with fire.

But the people here had regarded him as a perverted madman for a long time. How did the white man know that he was actually an incredibly amazing boy?

“What do you want?” Zhang Haiyan asked.

Father Madison continued, “Mr. A Bin, I’ll cut to the chase. I bought you because I hope that you can give birth to a child for me.”

Zhang Haiyan had originally come up with a hundred possibilities of what this man would say, such as taking him to the rainforests to be his bodyguard or guide. This was because Zhang Haiyan had gathered a lot of information before, which could be useful should he choose to divulge it.

But when he heard such a request, he was still stunned.

“Huh? What? What do you mean?”



## Chapter 2 – The Angel Who Attracts the Plague God

In the pub, Zhang Haiyan ordered some bread and dipped it in his beer before slowly eating it.

There were a lot of Chinese people both inside and outside the pub who were unwilling to leave. They obviously wanted to know how things would develop.

The long-haired priest Madison had his chin in his hand as he looked at Zhang Haiyan. It was making Zhang Haiyan increasingly uncomfortable.

As he ate, Zhang Haiyan felt his appetite slowly disappear.

His shackles hadn't been removed yet, and many people around them were pointing at them. It didn't matter to Zhang Haiyan since he had always lived like this, but Madison's gaze was making him feel unsettled for the first time.

"You're a precious gem in this world," Madison exclaimed after he had stared at Zhang Haiyan for a while. He then pinched the bridge of his nose and continued, "You're really a precious gem in this world. It's fortunate that I rescued you; otherwise, there would've been one less gem in the world."

As Zhang Haiyan chewed on the bread, the sound of the others around them became more irritable.

"I'm a despicable man, Father Ma<sup>(1)</sup>. If you're a collector of despicable people, then you've reached the peak of your achievements today. Otherwise, I'm useless to you," Zhang Haiyan said.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Madison had been talking to Zhang Haiyan in Chinese. To Zhang Haiyan, Madison sounded like "Ma Dison". That's why he called him Father Ma.

Madison ordered another glass of beer and pushed it over to Zhang Haiyan before saying, "Mr. A Bin was almost beheaded just now. But now when you're drinking beer, every sip you take is the same amount. Although I've been watching you for a long time, every sip you take is the same. Deep down, Mr. A Bin is an extremely cautious person. That critical moment between life and death had no effect on you."

Zhang Haiyan looked down at his beer glass and thought to himself, *is that so?*

He didn't show any reaction in front of Madison, but he immediately knew that the other man was right. He was drinking his beer like this because he planned to make a run for it later. He didn't want to drink too fast in case he messed things up. Moreover, his mouth wasn't like that of others. He couldn't drink in gulps.

He had developed this habit of eating steadily when he was in Xiamen.

A thought suddenly flashed through his mind, *maybe I shouldn't make a run for it. I can just kill this foreigner instead.*

Madison had no idea that the other person was planning to kill him and kept on talking, "Many people can't see that. A Bin, I'm the only one who knows you aren't an ordinary person. You must have made many stories in China before you came to the South Sea."

*I didn't even want to come here in the first place,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

Madison ordered another beer and pushed it over to Zhang Haiyan. "Have you made a decision? Do you want to give birth to a child?"

Zhang Haiyan looked at the Chinese people around him and whispered, “Let me repeat it again. That word is pronounced ‘interrogate’, not ‘give birth’. They mean totally different things.”<sup>(2)</sup>

Zhang Haiyan was almost frightened to death when Madison asked him to give birth to a child earlier. He thought he had some supernatural constitution that enabled him to get pregnant. Or that Madison wanted him to have a baby with a woman in order to practice some kind of western sorcery. He had heard a lot of these western legends before. Similar to some Chinese herbal medicines, the key to this kind of sorcery was goat horns or the skin of five-legged lizard skins, which were things that you couldn’t come by at all. Maybe Madison needed a biracial child descended from an Asian man and an island woman.

Zhang Haiyan later discovered that Madison meant “interrogate”.

Zhang Haiyan had an unfortunate childhood and didn’t like to force children to do things, so he didn’t plan on helping Madison.

But Madison had been keeping his eyes on him as he waited for an answer.

Zhang Haiyan saw that there were still a few pieces of bread and a glass of beer left, so he didn’t want to run away immediately. As a result, he asked Madison, “Why do you want to interrogate this child? Just give them something to eat, and they’ll tell you everything.”

“No, she can’t.” Madison looked at Zhang Haiyan before taking a black and white photo from his pocket.

The photo showed a beautiful little Chinese girl who was about ten years old. Madison was holding her in his arms while more than a dozen Chinese children stood around him. There were both boys and girls of varying ages. The youngest ones seemed to be only three or four years old, while the

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<sup>(2)</sup> Madison didn’t pronounce the Chinese words correctly. The Chinese word for “giving birth” is pronounced as “shēng”, and the word for “interrogate” is pronounced as “shěn”.

oldest ones were fifteen or sixteen. In the photo, Madison was smiling happily in front of a simple church, which must have been his church.

“I was a messenger when I was in England. One day, I had a dream that I was ill and an old man with a white beard was praying for me. I went to the hospital later and found that I had a tumor in my left lung. Because it was discovered early, I was cured. I saw that old man in the hospital.” Madison pointed at his cross, “He was on the cross and looked to be in more pain than I was, so I became a priest and came here.”

He pointed at the church in the photo. “It’s very small, but it took me three years to build it. There are houses in the back, which can accommodate more than twenty people. When I first came here, these children were still very little. I heard that there was a high rate of people abandoning babies here, so I told the people in the village that if they didn’t want children, they could bring them to the church instead of putting them in the river. I adopted all of these children. This girl was called Nanre. She was the most sensible and beautiful child. The other children had some disabilities, but her illness was cured, so she was very grateful to God.”

Madison looked at the photo and continued, “She called me Dad. I was going to go back to England after a year here, but Nanre called me Dad. I ended up staying. She was a really good girl and the crepes she made were delicious. If I had brought her back to England with me, she definitely would’ve been able to support herself by making crepes.

“You want me to interrogate this child? What happened to her? Is she possessed by the devil?”

“She’s dead.” Madison looked at Zhang Haiyan. “She died two weeks ago.”

He took out another photo, which showed a group of white people.

“This is my friend, Mr. Herman, and his friends. He’s the consul of Malacca. These are his English friends. There are twelve people in total. This is a cobbler, this is a brewer, and this is an actor. They’re going to the depths of the southern rainforest to find a strange place. It’s said that Mr. Herman got

a strange map from an old English library. This map enabled him to get funding from the Royal Academy of Sciences. Two weeks ago, they passed by my church before entering the rainforest. They came to visit me and drank the beer I brewed. They saw Nanre. There was a birthmark on Nanre's scalp behind her ear that looked like an angel. They thought Nanre could bring them good luck, so I asked her to pray for them. But they drank too much at that time and gang-raped her in front of me. Then, the cobbler cut the birthmark from her scalp and sewed it on his saddle."

Madison looked at Zhang Haiyan with a smile.

"My children heard Nanre's crying from outside the door and attacked Herman with manure forks. Herman and his friends—twelve people in total—killed my children with guns. Now all my children are dead."

"After that, Herman gave me a hundred shillings to keep my mouth shut. They took Nanre's scalp and went into the rainforest." Madison was still smiling, but Zhang Haiyan slowly lowered the bread in his hand.

"Guess what? Nanre loved white people very much. She thought that all white people were kind-hearted, just like her father. As a result, she didn't know what was going on before her scalp was cut off. She was very scared, but she didn't resist at all."

Zhang Haiyan looked into Madison's eyes. For the first time, he realized that the long-haired foreigner's eyes weren't turbid. Instead, there was a bitter hatred in his eyes.

"It took me twenty shillings to get here, ten shillings to redeem you, and thirty shillings for this meal. I still have forty shillings left, which is enough for us to go back to my church. Mr. A Bin, I hope you can interrogate my poor Nanre's corpse and find out where my friend and those white people are going. After that, I hope you and I can go to the rainforest and kill these twelve white people. We'll kill them all and bring their scalps back with us."

Zhang Haiyan frowned. He wasn't good at handling these kinds of scenes.

“I hope you remember that the ten shillings that saved your life today were exchanged for a girl’s scalp. The least you can do is go and see Nanre. Once you see her beautiful hair, you’ll agree to help me.”

Zhang Haiyan looked at Nanre in the photo. She was truly a very beautiful girl. She had short black hair and looked like a typical Chinese person. He returned the photo to Madison. “I can agree to your terms, but you have to tell me in detail about how you found me and where you learned of my existence.”

When Zhang Haiyan lived in Penang for a period of time, the locals called him A Bin. He speculated that Madison learned about him from Penang.

In Perak, Zhang Haiyan’s nickname was “the most despicable man in the South Sea”. But in Penang, Zhang Haiyan was sometimes called the Yellow Plague. Yellow Plague referred to the plague spread by the Chinese, but could also refer to the mass population of Chinese immigrants. Either way, it was a very derogatory term. Zhang Haiyan had this name because he did a unique job there.

He interrogated corpses.

In other words, Zhang Haiyan could hear the sounds of corpses.

Of course, this was total nonsense. He couldn’t hear the sounds of corpses at all. But it didn’t matter. As Madison had speculated, Zhang Haiyan always had his own ideas.

Zhang Haiyan didn’t know what his job was exactly. How he came to be in the South Sea and what he did there could be written and made into a lengthy tome.

He had summed it up once: he was actually a spy.

He didn’t work for any authorities and no one had hired him. But someone would give him some missions every month and he would complete them. Then he would send the results and the information he found back to China

via a large ship. But the things he investigated had nothing to do with political interests. What he investigated were all strange phenomena and rumors in various places.

The organization he worked for was called the Southern Archives. It wasn't clear as to who established it or what its background was.

He was only a few years old when the Archives took him in. He only remembered that the person who had trained him told him that the Archives contained all the "facts" in southern China.

There was a very simple purpose for collecting these facts: the creator of the Archives believed that there were big conspirators in the world, so there had to be treacherous actions, strange phenomena, and legends that came about because of them. If someone was trying to hide and commit big conspiracies, then investigating all the strange phenomena was the best way to expose them.

When he thought of his experiences back then, Zhang Haiyan still felt sad. He hadn't returned to his homeland for many years. He would stand by the sea and stare off into space for a long time, not knowing when he could return. But he had to admit that there were indeed too many unbelievable things happening in the South Sea.

When he first came here, most of what happened were rumors and some folk conspiracies. But in recent years, countless strange things had happened explosively. It seemed that "the thing" the Southern Archives was waiting for was about to happen.

A group of white people suddenly entered the southern jungles of Perak, looking for a place on an ancient map. As a member of the Southern Archives, he had to look into it.

It took the two of them three days to return to Madison's church, where Zhang Haiyan saw Nanre's body. The little girl's eyes were closed and her body was covered in bloodstains.

Madison looked at Zhang Haiyan. "Can you hear her?"

Zhang Haiyan nodded. "She said, 'Dad, thank you.'" Zhang Haiyan picked the stiff corpse up and then walked towards the house. "Don't follow me. Let me ask her questions alone," Zhang Haiyan said, but Madison was already squatting on the ground with tears streaming down his face.

Zhang Haiyan looked at Nanre's face. The little girl had been beaten violently and the bruises on her wrists had turned black. A large piece of her scalp had been stripped off.

"An angel who brings good luck. But the scalp of this angel will attract the plague god." Zhang Haiyan put the little girl's body on the ground and opened his bag that contained a set of special instruments. He then began to calmly measure the little girl's facial features.



## Chapter 3 – Two People and a Corpse

Zhang Haiyan put makeup on Nanre's face. This was probably the first time this little girl had ever worn makeup. He added some blush to her childish face, almost making it look as if she were breathing again. He used special leather to make a new scalp for her and put a wig on her, all while recording the details of her face.

After about an hour, the wounds on Nanre's body were completely covered.

After that, he applied an antiseptic and deodorant potion on her and then walked out of the room with her in his arms.

"Do you already know where they're going?" Madison asked him.

Zhang Haiyan nodded. "She'll take us there."

Herman and his companions had been in the jungle for two weeks, so it wouldn't be easy to catch up with them. But it wasn't currently the rainy season, so traces of their march would be very obvious for people like Zhang Haiyan.

Madison looked at Nanre in surprise and started trembling a little bit. It almost looked as if she were asleep.

"What happened to her? What did you do to her?"

"This is Chinese sorcery." Zhang Haiyan put the corpse on his back. The little girl's face leaned against his shoulder. "Let's go. She's urging us to go."

Madison looked at them incredulously and stood there for a while. It was only when Zhang Haiyan looked back at him that he started to follow.

The two of them prepared luggage, pickled all the food in the church, and then packed it.

Madison took out all the iron tools in the house. Zhang Haiyan looked them over and found that they were all iron machetes that weren't particularly good. The jungles here grew very fast and machetes were often needed to clear out hardy bananas, wildly growing vines, and thick bushes. But these machetes were chipped and would definitely shatter if they were used in a fight against the Englishmen's sabers.

After Zhang Haiyan looked through the various tools for a long time, he noticed a pen hanging from Madison's shirt. He took the pen and weighed it in his hand. "This is it."

"This one?"

"Yes. If the weapon in your hand is too long, you'll depend on it too much. If the opponents' weapons are stronger than yours, you'll be at a disadvantage. When the weapon in your hands is short and difficult to use, you'll have to use something else. In other words, your brain." Zhang Haiyan continued, "When we want to kill someone, the more powerful the opponents are, the less importance we place on physical weapons." He handed a short knife to Madison. "There are twelve people, and they all have sabers and guns. We have to get close to them before we kill them. So, we can't directly reveal our purpose when we meet them."

The two people put the other children's bodies in the church and then burned it down.

It was almost as if the cross in the fire had a special meaning.

The huge flames evaporated in Perak's humid air. The dry, humid heat scorched the pores on Zhang Haiyan's face as the sun started to set. Around them, those who were passing by had stopped to watch the burning church.

Madison knelt down in front of the fire to pray, making the whole scene appear like something out of a poster.

Zhang Haiyan was a little surprised at himself for following Madison so resolutely, and now he was even willing to follow the man again.

Maybe it was because Nanre looked somewhat like her.

Zhang Haiyan suddenly understood.

Nanre looked like his mother from his homeland.

The memories of what his mother was like and the details about her had all disappeared. Now, all he could remember was a rough image and her short hair that was embedded deep in his memory.

*I miss you so much, Mom.*

Zhang Haiyan looked at the burning red clouds in the sky.

One day at the end of the nineteenth century, Zhang Haiyan patted the corpse on his back, turned his feelings of missing home into murderous intent, and left with Madison.

Two people and a corpse embarked on a journey to the depths of southern Perak's rainforests, where giant ancient tropical trees soared into the sky. It was a place that almost no one had ever reached.

## Chapter 4 – The Sorcery Temple

Madison's church was in Wenxiena, so they had to pass through a village called Wubang and a logging station built by the Dutch before they entered the rainforest.

The logging station was now a distribution center where the English were stationed. The center provided supplies for people who were going into the rainforest and was also in charge of transporting mahoganies and fur out of the rainforest. There was even a post office for expedition teams to transport specimens back to their countries.

The two men were silent as they walked. Madison had become quiet and taciturn because of Nanre's body. Zhang Haiyan didn't ask him to help carry the body as they continued moving forward silently. That first day's itinerary didn't require any tracking skills since they just had to focus on getting to Wubang. Once they reached Wubang, it would take another day for them to get to the logging station.

They were staying the night in a temple outside Wubang Village. The local monks had felt very sympathetic towards them when they found that there was a corpse on Zhang Haiyan's back.

They chanted sutras for Nanre all night long while Zhang Haiyan sat on the temple's roof and watched the sun set over the nearby rice fields.

He noticed that there was a very small building across from the temple's door. It was about half a person high and also looked like a temple. The South Sea style's characteristics were more obvious and something was being worshiped in it.

"That's a sorcery temple," Madison said from behind him. "I've been here before. That temple worships a piece of skin from an unknown animal. The whole piece of skin is wrapped in a strange kind of grass that forms a cocoon around it. A sorcerer put it there more than two hundred years ago."

Zhang Haiyan looked back at him. “Do foreigners believe in sorcery as well? Oh, you basically work in the same business.”

There was a kind of mysterious sorcery that was popular in Southeast Asian regions such as Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Africa. There weren't any written records about it and it was very obscure. The legends of this sorcery technique were often incredible, and no one was able to explain what it was or what it could accomplish.

Sorcery was an extremely mysterious profession. In other words, it was so mysterious that the practitioners were often demonized. Most of the time, sorcerers in folklore were more like evil ghosts instead of human beings.

Madison's long blond hair was tied up in a bun as he sat down next to him and said, “It's not like that, A Bin. I'm a registered priest. I serve God and listen to people's confessions, but I don't help people solve practical problems.”

Zhang Haiyan stared at the sorcery temple. It looked like a tomb with multiple mountains around it.

“I know what this sorcery temple's purpose is. The locals told me that the rainforest is right on the edge of this temple. After the Dutch came, they began to cut down the rainforest and turned these places into rice fields. As a result, many strange corpses would flow out of the forest after the rainy season. They carried the plague with them and many people died. So, a sorcerer built this temple here to keep the plague in the forest,” Madison continued.

“Have you ever entered the rainforest?” Zhang Haiyan asked him.

“I have gone into the rainforest, but I didn't go far. I visited some of the tribes there,” Madison said. “I made some notes about it. Would you like to read them? I heard that your English is very good.”

Zhang Haiyan shook his head. Madison was right. He could speak many languages and dialects due to his job, but he didn't need any notes about

the rainforest. He was already aware of the dangers hidden in southern Perak's rainforests.

It was unknown territory. The tropical rainforests grew wildly at a speed that even the human body could perceive. There weren't any paths or landmarks to refer to, and even the path you took a week ago would be completely different a week later.

Madison was silent for a while before he offered his wine to Zhang Haiyan. This was the wine he liked to drink before, but he had stopped drinking a long time ago.

After Nanre's death, he broke his promise and started drinking again. "Since you can make Nanre look like this, are you a sorcerer?"

Zhang Haiyan looked at the wine and almost couldn't conceal his panic. *Oh, no*, he thought to himself. *He wants a closer relationship.*

Zhang tried to smile, "No."

Foreigners were either very unsociable or extremely enthusiastic. Madison obviously belonged to the latter. The enthusiastic foreigner needed to absorb energy from the crowd, which was why he had gone to Perak to help children.

But Zhang Haiyan wasn't that kind of person. He needed to be alone to restore his energy.

Madison looked at the sunset and then at his bottle of wine. It seemed he was ready to have a heart-to-heart with him. Zhang Haiyan quickly jumped off the roof, walked towards the sorcery temple, and came to stand in front of the strange little building. He saw the grass cocoon, which was about the size of a swaddled baby.

When they left the next day, Madison discovered that there was a baby-sized package beside Nanre's body on Zhang Haiyan's back. When the two

reached the edge of the rainforest, the package was moved and Madison realized that it was the grass cocoon from the sorcery temple.

Madison was overwhelmed again and pointed at the cocoon. “You—you—you—”

“Relax. I’ve replaced the cocoon with a stone wrapped in grass. They look exactly the same on the outside, so no one will discover it. Two hundred years have passed. I bet none of them has dared touch it. Who can possibly remember what’s inside of it?”

“You even dared steal the offering from the sorcery temple? Aren’t you afraid of being possessed by evil spirits?”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m the evilest spirit you’ll ever meet in your entire life. No one is more wicked than I am.” Zhang Haiyan patted the grass cocoon behind him with satisfaction. “This thing is very powerful, so you shouldn’t irritate me. Otherwise, I’ll have you eat it.”

“This... this isn’t right.” Madison was so shocked that he lost the ability to speak Chinese.

“Maybe I should send you back. Do you want to seek revenge or not?”

Madison was stunned for a moment. Zhang Haiyan ignored him and walked faster, leaving Madison behind so that he had to chase after him.

“What are you going to do with this kind of thing?”

“Trust me. There’s a special reason as to why this thing is outside the rainforest. It’ll fucking come in handy if we bring it with us.”

“What do you mean?”

It was as if the grass cocoon had pushed Madison to become chattier. He kept talking the whole time, so Zhang Haiyan picked up his pace. As a result, they arrived at the logging station in less than a day.

By this point, Zhang Haiyan was certain that this guy was born to be a priest. Madison talked way too much, but he must've been a great father. Nanre must have been happy during those ten years she was alive.

This was a foreigner with childlike curiosity.

"A Bin, when I asked around about you, I heard that you were a very energetic person in Penang. What have you been through all these years that made you become someone like this?"

"Nothing happened."

"A Bin, I'm a priest. You can confess to me. I won't tell anyone what you've told me."

"We'll see about that."

"A Bin, A Bin, A Bin, A Bin!"

Zhang Haiyan's face was solemn as he walked toward the logging station. He patted Nanre and whispered to her, "Don't be scared, little girl. After we enter the rainforest, I'll send your father to the underworld so he can reunite with you. Then I will avenge you."

"A Bin!"

Zhang Haiyan couldn't help feeling annoyed and looked back at Madison. But just as he was about to get angry, he saw that Madison's expression had changed.

Madison was looking at a pile of goods outside the post office where a fat white man was teasing a little Malay girl. The man was teaching the little girl how to tie knots. The little girl seemed to be only eight or nine years old. The fat man sometimes looked at the girl's ankles and then at her parents who were off to the side. The little girl's parents didn't notice the looks that Madison and Zhang Haiyan were giving them.



“What’s wrong?”

“It’s him,” Madison said. “He’s one of twelve people. His name is Wade. He’s a farrier<sup>(1)</sup>.” Madison put his hand on the knife by his waist. “Why didn’t he enter the rainforest?”

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<sup>(1)</sup> Person who takes care of horses’ hooves (like trimming them) and puts shoes on them.

## Chapter 5 – Dirty Faces

Zhang Haiyan pressed Madison's knife down when saw that Wade's musket had been placed on a branch close to him. In fact, there were a lot of broken logs in the logging yard. "Can he speak Chinese?"

"No," Madison said.

Zhang Haiyan patted Madison. "Put the knife down."

"Why?"

"There are certain rules in this business. This kind of thing is done at night."

Zhang Haiyan winked at Madison.

Wade heard someone talking and turned his head, but Zhang Haiyan blocked Madison in a way that was very natural. Wade figured it was two Chinese people, so he didn't pay them any mind.

Zhang Haiyan pushed Madison into the post office, which was a simple twenty-square-meter house built from local wood. There were transaction counters inside with windows on three sides. Benches and tables had been placed on both sides of the windows for people to drink beer and fill out envelopes.

There was a big canopy outside the post office that was full of packaged goods, including furs, herbs, and other things. Horse-drawn caravans were also coming in and out.

Madison stared at Wade through the window, hardly able to take his eyes off of him as he trembled in rage.

This wasn't good. Any person who wasn't slow would definitely feel this kind of burning gaze. Zhang Haiyan squeezed Madison's shoulders to try and get him to relax, but he found that it was completely useless. In the end, he ran his fingers across Madison's shoulder blades and squeezed his neck.

Madison's body instantly softened and he passed out on the bench by the window.

Zhang Haiyan put the grass cocoon in Madison's arms and then took off his own shirt and covered Madison's face with it.

The topless Zhang Haiyan then poked his head out to look at Wade, who was staring at the little girl's ankles from time to time with a smirk on his face. Wade made himself look like a very kind person, but Zhang Haiyan noticed that his crotch was bulging.

Zhang Haiyan put Nanre's body on the bench outside the house, leaned her head on one side so that she looked like she was napping, and then swaggered towards Wade.

(The following conversation was all conducted in English.)

When Zhang Haiyan sat next to Wade, his body language had become that of the local people. The spirit in his eyes disappeared completely as he whispered in a perverted manner, "Sir, do you have five shillings?"

Wade turned to look at him in disgust, obviously blaming him for interrupting his lustful thoughts.

Zhang Haiyan looked into this person's demented eyes and found that they were a little blank. Zhang Haiyan immediately knew that this person wasn't particularly smart.

"Get lost." The other party was very irritated.

"Do you like girls who are eight years old, ten years old, or thirteen years old? Which age do you prefer?" Zhang Haiyan's fluent English made Wade freeze for a moment.

"What are you talking about?"

Zhang Haiyan moved his body so that Wade could see Nanre's body.

“This is my daughter,” Zhang Haiyan said. “Five shillings for one night.”

“She’s Chinese?”

“Yes.”

Wade laughed, stood up, and hooked his arm around Zhang Haiyan’s shoulders. “Friend, let me tell you something. Little Chinese bitches are only worth two shillings. Little Malay bitches are worth five shillings.” With that said, he patted Zhang Haiyan. “Do you know why?”

“I have no idea, sir.”

“Because you can always bargain with the parents of little Chinese bitches. The parents of Malay ones don’t know the concept of bargaining. As a result, Chinese ones are only worth two shillings because I get to bargain with the parents.” Wade laughed heartily and picked up his gun before getting up and moving to leave. “Come find me again if you can do two shillings.”

“Two shillings, sir. Her voice sounds good when she cries.” Zhang followed him. “You won’t regret it. Don’t be stingy, sir. You won’t find someone better than her after you enter the forest.”

Wade stopped and looked at Zhang Haiyan. “I’m not entering the forest because I’m missing my toenail. You know, the last little bitch caused me to knock my toenail off, so I can’t walk properly until it grows back. Two shillings or get lost.”

The two of them had arrived at the post office while they were talking. Wade pushed Zhang Haiyan away. At this time, he saw Nanre’s face and was taken aback.

Zhang Haiyan looked at him pervertedly. “Five shillings. She’s attractive, sir.”

Wade stared at Nanre for a full two minutes. He seemed to think that she looked familiar, but he couldn’t remember where he had seen her before.

Zhang Haiyan knew very well that a little makeup on Chinese people's faces would make it difficult for white people to identify them.

Wade looked back at Zhang Haiyan. "Five shillings. Tonight."

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Madison was extremely exhausted and didn't wake up until evening. Under the sunset, all the gadflies<sup>(1)</sup> in the rainforest flew out and surrounded the whole logging yard, but none of them approached Madison.

When Madison was awakened by the buzzing sounds the swarming gadflies made, he realized that he was on top of a big tree. When he turned his head, he could see the rice fields and tropical rainforest that had turned a golden color in the sun's dying rays.

He was taken aback when he discovered he was holding the grass cocoon.

Zhang Haiyan was combing Nanre's hair quietly.

"Where's Wade?" Madison asked him.

Zhang Haiyan looked up at him. "Today's your big day."

"My big day?" Madison didn't understand.

Zhang Haiyan continued, "You should pray to God right now. You're going to kill your enemy tonight. Have you ever killed someone?"

Madison understood what was going on, "We're going to do it tonight?"

Zhang Haiyan nodded and looked at the tent in the distance. "He walks too slow because his toenail fell off. Herman didn't let him enter the forest, so he stayed here to help with the supplies.

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<sup>(1)</sup> A fly that bites livestock (think like horseflies, warble flies, or botflies).

“I’ve never killed anyone before, but I’m ready.” Madison looked at that tent. “I’ve killed turkeys before. Is killing turkeys the same as killing people?”

Zhang Haiyan said, “Don’t worry. I’ll teach you step by step. But I have something else that I need to discuss with you first.”

“What is it?”

“Do you know why people call me the plague god?”

Madison shook his head and couldn’t help but sit up straight, surprised that Zhang Haiyan started to sound serious.

“Sometimes, my job requires me to do some very cruel things,” Zhang Haiyan said to him. “As a result, I’m not able to truly believe that I’m a good person. But you know, some people are naturally kind-hearted and born as good as angels. I’m someone like that, but I have to accomplish something that only the plague god can do. This troubles me a lot, so my mother taught me a method.”

“What is it?”

“Dirty faces,” Zhang Haiyan said. “I’ll dress myself up in a different way. That side of me is extremely vicious and can do anything. When I was in Penang, I always used my dirty face to meet people. That’s why you heard those rumors about me. The truth is that I haven’t let him out for a long time. I’ll let my dirty face come out tonight, but you need to know that he may not be willing to go back.”

“Isn’t this...isn’t this a kind of illness?” Madison looked at Zhang Haiyan pityingly.

“No. It’s just a kind of indulgence. Do you know that it’s much easier to be a bad guy than it is to be a good guy? Although you’re aware you’re doing something bad, your body will become addicted to it.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“My dirty face isn’t as good-tempered as I am,” Zhang Haiyan said. “You have to give him what he wants no matter how outrageous his requests are. You must satisfy him. Otherwise, you’ll be miserable. He doesn’t keep his word and has no sympathy. Well, I hope you can show your dirty face tonight. Don’t suddenly regret it just as we’re about to kill him.”

Madison nodded obediently. “Do people really forgive their enemies as they’re about to kill them?”

“You’re the kind of person who might.” Zhang Haiyan turned Nanre’s body over. “This is why I brought her here. She’ll be with us tonight.”

“I’ll listen to your instructions.”

Zhang Haiyan continued, “It’s easy for you to distinguish between my dirty face and my clean face. The tone of my dirty face is different and calls himself ‘Little Brother Zang’<sup>(2)</sup>. Don’t call him by the wrong name.”

When Madison nodded, Zhang Haiyan sighed and thought to himself, *this idiot is so fucking gullible*.

What he said wasn’t all lies. The two sides weren’t actually split personalities. Dirty faces and clean faces were indeed a method his mother had taught him. He could switch between both sides easily and freely. This training was actually related to another skill their family had. With this kind of skill, Zhang Haiyan could easily change his personality and adapt to different groups of people, but I won’t get into the details for the time being.

The two of them climbed down from the tree and walked towards Wade’s tent with Nanre on Zhang Haiyan’s back.

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<sup>(2)</sup> “Zang (脏)” is the Chinese pronunciation of “dirty”, so it would literally translate as ‘Little Brother Dirty. Since his nickname is Little Brother Zhang (张), he deliberately put a different word there. It’s a joke. He was messing with Madison lol.

It was completely dark now and there were more gadflies than before, which was a little abnormal.

At that time, Zhang Haiyan didn't know that he had underestimated Wade. Moreover, he had also underestimated this expedition team's purpose for going to the jungle.

In the tent, Wade took out four or five guns—all loaded—and lit a cigarette. His previous blank expression had disappeared and now there was a strange look in his eyes.



## Chapter 6 – Wade’s Past

When Wade was about sixteen, he realized he was different from other boys.

At that time, he weighed almost a hundred and twenty kilograms, but he was only half his peers’ height.

His younger cousin who was staying at their home already looked like an adult. A poor relative from the country would always have various conflicts living with a cousin who grew up in a relatively good environment.

Wade was proud of the fact that his family was wealthy. But as he stopped growing taller, his pride gradually diminished because of his younger cousin who was tall and handsome.

When puberty hit, Wade started to realize he was ugly. Because of his obesity, his eyes appeared dull and he also had a difficult time concentrating on things. But what he cared about the most was his height.

Year after year, he always hoped that he could grow taller. But his height never changed and the gap between him and his peers continued to get bigger and bigger.

When he was eighteen years old, his cousin left their home and started his life in the city by opening a smithy there.

In order to thank them for taking care of him, the cousin would send some gifts to their family. Over the span of a single year, the cousin’s gifts got better and better. Everyone in the family began to wonder whether the cousin’s business was doing very well or if he was in a relationship with a rich lady.

The truth was that the cousin really was in love, but the other party was a maid who worked in a bakery. Although she was a little older and had a daughter, she was very beautiful and had some savings.

One day, Wade's family had dinner with his cousin. The maid dressed up properly and brought her daughter with her. Even though she wore cheap perfume, the smell had a magical charm to it. Later, Wade thought about it and realized that this perfume made people feel that something so beautiful and cheap could be thrown away after using it.

Wade had a wet dream that night. From that day on, he became aware of sex. At the same time, he also realized that his genitals were like that of a baby. Discovering he wasn't a normal person hurt him more than his height and he broke down completely. He suddenly understood that he had nothing to be proud of from the beginning. In the eyes of his cousin, he had always been a poor disabled person.

Wade began to shut himself off from the world and put away all the mirrors in the house. He hated his appearance whenever he saw it. Several years after that, he started becoming obsessed with books about sorcery in hopes of changing his body.

His family's business, however, was getting worse and worse as his parents grew older. From upstairs, Wade could clearly feel that his cousin's voice whenever he visited them was getting louder and louder while his parents' voices were getting weaker and weaker.

The maid's daughter grew older. She was nine or ten when they first met, but after several years, she was already thirteen or fourteen. These few years were the critical periods where girls grew into women. This particular little girl was full of curiosity and wondered why her uncle had been hiding in the attic and what had happened to him.

One day, the little girl secretly went to the attic while the adults were busy chatting. She opened the door to Wade's room and saw him slashing his arms. He was already covered in wounds that he had made before. The little girl went up to him full of curiosity and silently helped him bandage the wounds.

Wade's room was full of books about black magic and countless materials on sorcery, which attracted the little girl very much. She was obsessed with these strange things and would secretly go upstairs every time Wade's cousin visited them.

This young girl opened a window to Wade's life. He talked about black magic with her and described himself as a magician. He told her he was a prince who had become like this because someone had cast a spell on him.

Of course, the attention of young girls wouldn't last very long. As the little girl gradually grew up, these things no longer attracted her. Her body continued to develop and Wade also slowly discovered that her body began to have a female curve.

The niece visited him less and less frequently. One day, when he was looking out of the attic window, he saw his cousin bring the girl over. He waited happily for his niece to come upstairs, but she ran out of the house instead.

In the twilight, he saw a tall, thin boy holding his niece by the hand and pulling her into the alley. The moment the niece entered the alley, she looked up at the attic.

Wade had a total breakdown. He took the knife that he used to slash himself with, went downstairs for the first time in many years, and entered that alley. When he saw the young couple stealing the forbidden fruit, he went up and killed them.

As the knife was thrust into the little niece's chest, her clothes were cut open. Wade saw the mature female body and began to vomit violently.

*Girls are angels before they grow up. What do you do if they've grown up? Kill them!* A terrifying thought appeared in his head.

Afterwards, Wade went back to his home and killed his parents because he resented them for giving birth to an ugly son. He then killed the maid and his cousin because they made him appear ugly and pathetic. After that, Wade fled to the countryside and worked in a stable as a farrier for three years.

During those three years, Wade's body miraculously started to develop. His desire became stronger and stronger and his body grew taller and taller. His appearance also changed. The police from the city had come to the countryside to look for him, but they ignored him because of his height. That was when he realized that he was safe because he didn't look the same as the little ugly fat man who killed people back then.

But whenever he saw little girls who were going through puberty, he would bear a nightmarish grudge against them. This kind of resentment couldn't be dissolved and ended up torturing him night after night.

At that time, the owner of the stable also had two daughters. The two girls were going through puberty and started to develop female features during the third year he was working there.

As a result, he killed the two little girls and fled. To his surprise, he discovered he would quickly grow taller every time he killed someone. It was as if the black magic he had practiced back then was actually working.

But he wasn't as lucky as the last time. He was arrested in the woods and sent to prison to be hanged.

Herman was the warden at the time. He discovered that the tattoos on Wade's body were black magic totems and that Wade had killed those girls.

Herman thought he was a wizard and took him to Perak, hoping to go into the rainforest with him. Herman knew about sorcery in the South Sea, so he needed his own wizard.

After Wade arrived in Perak, he realized he was in heaven. He was the first person who took a liking to Nanre because the little black-haired girl fascinated him. He told Herman that the little girl had magical powers and he could use black magic to manipulate this kind of magic power to bless them.

Since he was so obsessed with this black-haired girl, how could he not recognize her when he saw her again? He was certain that the girl was dead,

but now she had reappeared and looked as if she was just asleep. *Does this Chinese man know sorcery?*

A man who knew sorcery had found him and even brought Nanre's body with him. His purpose was obvious: he was here for revenge.

So, Wade went back to his tent, took out all the guns he possessed, and started loading them.

He didn't have black magic. He had heard about how formidable South Sea sorcery was, so now he was trembling in fear. But he was also very furious.

He hated Herman for leaving him here and he hated those who wouldn't let him do whatever he wanted.

He was looking at the gun in his hands when he heard movement outside. He didn't want to beat around the bush, so as soon as Zhang Haiyan pulled the flap open, poked his head in, and wanted to talk, Wade fired.

The gun was loaded with iron bullets. Zhang Haiyan could only feel surprised for a quarter of a second before he instantly tilted his head to dodge the first shot.

Wade immediately fired again with his left hand. Even though he had just killed people a few days ago, he seemed to have endless energy. The second shot hit Zhang Haiyan right on the forehead, sending him flying out of the tent where he fell on the ground outside.

Wade rushed out and fired another shot at where Zhang Haiyan had fallen down, but he soon realized that no one was on the ground outside the tent. At that moment, he suddenly heard a girl call out. He turned his head and saw Nanre standing in the darkness, holding a grass cocoon and staring at him.

Wade pointed his gun at her.

Someone said behind him, “When it comes to achieving goals, it’s more effective to make people feel fear than to change them with kindness.”

Wade turned his head and saw Zhang Haiyan lying on his stomach in a nearby tree, his whole face completely damaged. He slowly tore off his face and revealed a sinister face underneath.

It turned out that his face was actually a human skin mask and there was another face behind the mask.

The face was so sinister that it made people feel physically nauseous. It represented his dirty face, which was hidden under his usual mask and had steel plates inside of it.

When Zhang Haiyan revealed his dirty face, he could show the ugly side of his nature however he wanted.

It was a side of him that came to be when everyone ate each other during Dingwu Qihuang.

## Chapter 7 – The Huge Secret In The Rainforest

It was the face of a snake, but its eyes were incredibly long and thin. It didn't look like facial makeup or other masks. It looked like the face of a real snake.

“What is this?” Wade looked at him in horror as Zhang Haiyan slowly climbed down from the tree with a strange, reptilian movement.

“What are you?” Wade raised his gun, but that snake face seemed to have some kind of charm that made it difficult for him to move.

“What do you think I am?” When Zhang Haiyan stood up, his figure was very slender. He began to circle Wade with a creepy smile on his face.

“Are you a devil? Are you the devil who made that deal with me?” Wade suddenly realized that he was seeing a real demon. This was the demon who made him grow taller and become a man, the master of black magic who let him escape punishment time after time.

Zhang Haiyan had no idea what Wade was talking about, but he took great pleasure in other people's fear. And the fear that was spreading all over Wade was so amazing that it made Zhang Haiyan feel really excited. “You've got the wrong person.”

The first time he got addicted to fear was when he ate people for the first time. At that time, the famine had reached a stage where there was no hope. Zhang Haiyan's father cooked a neighbor's youngest daughter who had died of starvation.

That was the first time his father had cooked a human, so he wasn't skilled. The pot was full of hair, which got stuck to Zhang Haiyan's teeth when he ate. But Zhang Haiyan was very happy while eating.

There were two groups of people in the village at that time: those who had eaten humans and those who had never eaten humans. Zhang Haiyan

switched to another group after eating a human. Whenever he walked the streets, uncles and aunts who usually doted on him gave him weird looks.

It took him a long time to realize that it was fear.

Those who had eaten humans and those who hadn't eaten humans were two kinds of creatures. Those who had eaten people didn't belong to the human world anymore.

But he found that it was actually thrilling to have everyone fear him, especially when he wanted to do something that people couldn't usually do. At that time, no one would come out and stop him and he seemed to be absolutely free. For the first time, he dominated his whole world without restrictions.

Wade looked at him. "Then what are you exactly?"

Zhang Haiyan turned his head and looked behind him. Wade immediately turned his head and saw Madison standing behind him with a knife.

Wade immediately realized who he was. "It's you. Why are you here?"

He went to draw his gun out of reflex, but when he raised his hands, he found that all of his fingers were missing. As he lowered his head to find them, he saw Zhang Haiyan circle around and lean forward under his armpit, holding Wade's fingers right in front of him.

Wade's fear reached its limit. He wanted to run but found that he couldn't move at all.

A pen had been inserted into his cervical joint, damaging all the nerves. He could only sit there, probably unable to sit properly anytime soon.

According to Madison's memoirs, he never saw how Zhang Haiyan did these things. But it was so amazing that it was like a magic show.

Zhang Haiyan looked back at Madison before stepping aside.



Madison trembled as he came to stand in front of Wade.

Wade looked at him and grinned. "I get it now. You're here for revenge. Is an Asian child worthy of you doing this? You can always adopt a large group of children again. You need to remember that you're a priest who can't kill people. And if I confess to you, God will forgive me."

Madison grabbed the cross in front of his chest, tore it off, and moved to throw it away.

Zhang Haiyan came up to stand behind Madison, gripped his hand, and then put the cross in Madison's pocket.

"Don't be so serious," Zhang Haiyan whispered as he grabbed Madison's wrist and placed the knife against Wade's throat. "Human skin is very tough. If the knife isn't fast enough, the skin can't be cut. The trick is to sequentially use the strength in your wrists, elbows, shoulders, waists, and ankles. You have to imagine yourself as a whip. When you apply your strength, start from the ankles. Your strength must be increased as you make your way up. When it comes to applying strength to your wrist, you need to point the knife at the neck, slash it, and cut through both the trachea and artery."

Madison nodded as he kept his eyes on Wade.

Wade started to feel scared. "You're a priest. You can't kill people. You'll go to hell."

"It's fine. He'll confess to other priests and God will forgive him," Zhang Haiyan said.

Zhang Haiyan found that Madison's body was stiff and he couldn't move his knife. He adjusted his vocal cords and said "Dad" in a girl's voice right next to Madison's ear.

Madison's eyes immediately turned red with rage. Zhang Haiyan held his wrist as Madison's whole body turned and he swung the knife, cutting through Wade's artery directly.

Blood spurting out very far and countless gadflies flew over in an instant, hovering over Wade.

“The trachea... the trachea isn’t cut!” Madison shouted.

Zhang Haiyan sighed. “It’s not bad for your first time.” He walked over to where Wade had collapsed in the mud. Wade’s body was covered in gadflies and his blood was constantly spurting out of the artery.

“Who are you exactly?” Wade stared at Zhang Haiyan.

Zhang Haiyan pulled the pen out of the back of Wade’s neck and pointed it at his heart. “You’re so annoying. Why should I tell you who I am?”

“Don’t kill me and I’ll tell you a secret,” Wade said with his last bit of strength. “There’s a huge secret in the rainforest. Herman told us not to reveal it. Don’t kill me and I’ll tell you about it.”

## Chapter 8 – Gadflies

The air was filled with the sound of buzzing gadflies, the edge of the rainforest was very wet, and the ground was full of mud puddles that would never dry up.

The trees here were all perennial yellow eucalyptus and banyan trees with huge trunks. Wade's tent had been erected next to one of the huge banyan trees.

Wade was now sitting against that very same tree after Zhang Haiyan had temporarily stopped the bleeding. He was already extremely weak and his face looked pale.

Next to Wade, Nanre's body and the grass cocoon sat side by side. This grass cocoon seemed to have some kind of magic power, for all the gadflies didn't dare fly near it. Instead, they focused on sucking up the pool of blood that had spurted out of Wade just now. Even the locusts were rushing out of the mud and straight into the pool.

It was still very hot and humid at night, so Little Brother Zhang tore off his dirty face. He even started to fan himself with it right in front of Wade's widened eyes.

Madison was leaning on the other side with his head lowered and his long hair covering his face. He was trying to recover from what had just happened.

"How do you feel?" Zhang Haiyan asked him.

"I feel very bad," Madison said slowly.

"Guilt, shock, and the collapse of your faith?" Zhang Haiyan asked.

"Too many things have happened recently. My daughter and children were all killed, I burned down my church, and now I'm going to kill someone."

“Don’t do this to yourself. If you think this matter is very serious, then it’s very serious to you. But if I beat you so hard that you become dumb, then you can still live to ninety-five while drooling.”

“That’s easy for you to say.”

“I have a way to temporarily relieve you of this self-pressuring emotion.”

“What is it?”

“You can get yourself off while watching this fat man called Wade. That way, you can make the serious and logical self-hatred become something ridiculous. Then, you’ll be able to let go of it.”

Wade’s eyes went even wider and he turned his head.

Madison raised his head, completely puzzled. “What did you just say?”

“Get yourself off. Play with the snake. Play with the whip. How do you say it?”

“No! I’m not doing that.” Madison covered his head with his hands.

Zhang Haiyan sighed and looked at Wade, who immediately shook his head, “No, please.”

“Come on. Tell me. What is this huge secret in the rainforest?”

“Will you let me go if I tell you? And one more thing, who are you exactly?”

“Ah, you’re so annoying.” Zhang Haiyan was running out of patience and looked at Madison. “Forget it. I don’t want to know about the secret. Let’s continue practicing. He still has an artery. Don’t waste the opportunity.”

“Alright, alright. I’ll stop asking. But you need to let me go if I tell you the secret.”

“You’re basically paralyzed. How about you tell me the secret and I’ll give you a swift death?”

“No, I want to live. You get that, right? I don’t want to die.” Wade started to cry.

Zhang Haiyan looked at Nanre’s body and felt disgusted. He could recognize bad people who treated every life the same way. If you felt that people’s lives weren’t worthy of anything, then you’d better feel that your own life wasn’t worth a thing, either. But if you felt that your life was worth something and other people’s lives weren’t, then Zhang Haiyan felt that this mindset was too disgusting.

This fat man was an undeveloped evil, just like a child who didn’t know how to properly treat others’ lives. Humans were like beasts. When their consciousness began to develop, they used killing to determine their place in the food chain. But this kind of desire would quickly be restrained by human consciousness. It seemed that Wade, however, didn’t go through this because of his body’s deformity.

This man was broken.

“Fine. I won’t kill you. Talk.”

Wade looked at Zhang Haiyan, “You’re lying to me, right?”

“I’m not lying. We sorcerers place the utmost importance on honesty. I can swear to God.”

Wade looked into Zhang Haiyan’s eyes.

“If you keep waiting, I won’t be interested in the secret anymore,” Zhang Haiyan said.

“I’ll talk, I’ll talk.” Wade coughed a few times. “They entered the rainforest to look for a valley. There’s a tribe in that valley whose people blink vertically.”

## Chapter 9 – Gonka

Zhang Haiyan looked at Wade. Only creatures like lizards blinked vertically. It was absolutely impossible for humans to blink vertically.

“Why do you want to find these kinds of people? Are they valuable?”

The Europeans’ appetite had long been enlarged by the diamond mines in the Borneo rainforests. Even though the cost of funding expedition teams was high, it was unlikely that the Royal Academy of Sciences would take part in projects where they captured a few strange people and made them join the circus.

Wade laughed. “Do you think those people blink vertically because of eyelid deformities? Have you ever seen such a deformity?”

“Explain it properly. What’s your reason?” Zhang Haiyan asked.

Wade coughed a few times and said, “It’s just a piece of skin. They’re not the ones who blink vertically, it’s the things in their skin that blink vertically.”

Zhang Haiyan frowned and Wade continued, “We aren’t an expedition team seeking truth or treasures. We’re a suicide squad. We’re all murderers and scumbags. That tribe is parasitized by devils. We’re going to destroy those devils.”

“Why didn’t you follow them?” Zhang Haiyan looked at Wade.

Wade laughed. “Because I’m a coward. I tore off my toenail and made myself unable to walk so that I could stay here. I’m not going to give up my life.”

Wade looked at Madison. “Now you understand. They’ll do anything along the way to reward themselves because they’re going to fight the devils and most won’t come back alive.”

Madison looked at Wade coldly, but Zhang Haiyan's eyes lit up. His instincts told him that although the information Wade had told him wasn't necessarily true, it certainly wasn't without reason. There had to be real information hidden in this legend of devils.

He straightened Wade's body and looked at him. "Come on. Tell me more."

"You want to know more?" Wade laughed. "Then you have to fix me since I can't move my hands or feet. After that, you're going to send me back to Perak."

Zhang Haiyan immediately slapped Wade's face, but Wade continued to laugh. "Now that I have a bargaining chip, no matter how you torture me, I'll force you to fulfill your promise. I can read the messages that your eyes are conveying. This information is very important to you, so you have to cooperate with me."

Zhang Haiyan looked at Wade's expression. He had honestly never seen such an annoying person before. He stared at Wade for a while, his expression slowly turning cold and indifferent.

Wade's smile slowly disappeared as he realized that this person had lost interest in the story he was about to tell. In other words, Zhang Haiyan's disgust in having to communicate with him had exceeded his desire to know the truth.

Wade immediately said, "I'm sorry. I understand now. I'll talk."

Zhang Haiyan said coldly, "Start from the beginning and finish the whole story in one go."

Wade's eyes glazed over as he seemed to recall everything that had happened before he came here. Eventually, he started telling the whole story.

Contrary to what Madison had heard, the thing Herman obtained from the old library wasn't an ancient map.

A few years ago, Herman returned to his country and was honored for his outstanding performance in Borneo. He stayed in the UK for six months before he was transferred to Perak. The diamond trade in Borneo had made his family rich, so his next target was the precious woods in the Perak rainforests.

Herman was a very cautious and meticulous person. Everyone who knew him thought that he was decent and reserved. Everything he did was carefully planned and almost foolproof. This was also how he got along with people. He would smile politely at everyone while keeping a comfortable and friendly distance from them.

Before going to Perak, Herman visited all the old libraries in London to find research reports that the first generation of explorers had written about the distribution of plants in Perak. It was in these books that he saw the record of the magic drug called gonka for the first time.

He was very curious about this drug, but he also knew that gonka was completely extinct. It was possible that there were strains in the depths of the rainforests even though it couldn't be obtained elsewhere.

At that time, the opium trade profits made him unable to forget about this miraculous drug. On that day, he found a small description in a library report.

In addition to ingesting it, gonka had a wide range of functions. The local natives used it to dye leather and other things. It was at this time that Herman discovered that the cover of the book that had recorded these things had a strange red color to it.

Herman had a sudden flash of inspiration and cut off the strange cover. He then scraped the red off of it, poured it into his red wine, and drank it.

Half an hour later, his vision began to distort. Then, he saw an illusion that changed everything he had ever believed in.



## Chapter 10 – The Desire To Eat People

After seeing these hallucinations, Herman drew the map himself and then let the people from the Royal Academy of Sciences take gonka.

For a total of seven days, there were about twenty people who reported the incident to their superiors. Everyone was terrified of what they saw in the illusion. After that, the Royal Academy of Sciences couldn't decide what to do about this absurd, but frightening fact.

First of all, it was an illusion. Everyone knew that this was just a reaction to the drug, but why did everyone have the same reaction? Plus, the things they saw were so real that people couldn't convince themselves that such things came from their own brains.

In the end, the Royal Academy of Sciences issued a small sum of money to Herman and let him take his team to the location on the map that appeared in the illusion. They wanted Herman to see what was there first. If there really was something, then they would destroy it.

They saw this as a compromise, but for Herman, it was a golden opportunity. The treasured wood in the rainforest, the gonka drug, the support of the Royal Academy of Sciences, and the opportunity to remove those devils for God were all the makings of a legendary story.

From the beginning of the story to the end, Wade never said what was in the hallucinations. When Zhang Haiyan asked him about it, Wade looked down at his jacket pocket.

Zhang Haiyan took out a small leather bag and opened it. The inside was filled with red powder.

“Try it.” Wade looked at Zhang Haiyan and smiled. “Just a little bit is enough since it's your first time.”

Zhang Haiyan laughed, “You think I would be so stupid as to take a strange drug you’ve carried with you just because you told me some story?”

“You can let me take it. It’ll start working within half an hour. The hallucinations come very quickly. Although you may only hallucinate for a few minutes, you still see everything.”

Zhang Haiyan thought it over for a while. He looked at Madison and then squeezed Wade’s mouth open and poured some of the powder in.

Wade kept coughing and panting before he looked at Zhang Haiyan and smiled. “You’re going to thank me.”

*You’re so fucking annoying,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself as he smiled back at Wade.

Wade’s face gradually started to turn red, as if all of his blood was rushing to his head. Then, his eyes rolled into the back of his head and the whites began twitching back and forth constantly. Saliva kept flowing from the corner of his mouth and down to his neck.

Zhang Haiyan put a hand to his pulse point. Although Wade’s heartbeat was very fast, it was stable and showed no signs of failing.

Slowly, after about three or four minutes, his heartbeat gradually returned to normal and he started to regain consciousness.

After the drug kicked in, he was slow to respond and had a mouth full of saliva. He couldn’t speak as he looked at Zhang Haiyan, but his eyes were full of anticipation.

Zhang Haiyan used his pinky finger to touch a little bit of the red powder and then put it under his tongue.

It was only a small taste, but he immediately realized that this wasn’t a drug extracted from plants.

He was extremely familiar with this taste.

It was the taste of human flesh.

The powder melted the instant it touched his tongue and then quickly dissolved.

Zhang Haiyan wanted to spit it out, but it was too late. He put a hand over his throat. This kind of taste was something he wanted to forget for many years, but now his mouth was filled with it.

*It tastes so good.*

Because of the extreme hunger at that time, tastes were infinitely amplified, which led to the desire to eat people.

And now, that desire had reappeared in Zhang Haiyan's heart.

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End of Spin-Off Case: The Map In The Dream

## **Southern Archives Extras**

# Chapter 1 – The Profile Of The Members In Perak

(This is Wu Xie's POV)

People in the Zhang family always acted in a secretive manner. It was rare for them to have someone like Little Brother Zhang who had his own legends in the South Sea. It was because of how he acted in the South Sea that many legends about the plague god were all related to his behaviors.

According to his own personal account, Zhang Haiyan had worked on sixty-eight cases during his thirty years in the South Sea. At that time, his only partner in Malacca was another man named Zhang Haixia. All sixty-eight cases had been solved perfectly and became known in history as the "Sixty-Eight Winning Streak".

Little Brother Zhang was clearly much more reliable back then compared to how he was now.

Based on his performance when acting alone, I couldn't imagine what kind of change would enable him to have such a steady output given his unpredictable character.

Later, I focused on finding information about his partner, Zhang Haixia. He was an unknown figure, but he played a very important role.

I carefully collected any information about that person. Even though things had happened a long time ago, I was able to piece together the scattered information and figure out that the person behind Zhang Haiyan had a huge mysterious charm.

Zhang Haiyan acted like a completely different person when he was with Zhang Haixia.

Later, I suspected that the hidden key to the Sixty-Eight Winning Streak was Zhang Haixia.

According to the remaining volume records, I've collected eleven major cases, four of which were related to Dingwu Qihuang. They were called the "Four Cases of Qihuang". The other cases were relatively independent.

The time it took to close these eleven cases varied. The shortest time was about ten days, while the longest one lasted for more than five years.

Most of these cases were interesting, but I prefer to talk about a smaller, more South-Sea-style case first. This one had a cheesy name called "Perak Stilt Houses".

The incident took place in Perak and the beginning of the story is very interesting. The corpse of an eleven-year-old girl named Nuruhuda was cut into pieces. The murderer was considered a lunatic because her body parts were repeatedly thrown away sixty times after he cut her corpse up.

I need to clarify that the little girl was cut into fourteen parts. Theoretically, the body parts could be thrown away fourteen times at most. But according to witnesses and the murderer's own confession, there were sixty places where he dumped the body parts. This didn't add up. What had he been throwing away those other forty-six times?

Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia searched the places where the body parts had been thrown away. In addition to the human limbs, they found that there were many house components packed into the same sacks.

At that time, the stilted houses in Malaysia were very simple thatched houses that used roughly processed tree branches to elevate the houses.

The sacks they found were filled with thatch, wooden boards, and parts of wooden pillars. Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia found it very strange.

When they asked the murderer about it, he insisted that the house components and the little girl were the same thing, so when he mutilated the little girl, he also mutilated parts of the house.

Everyone thought he was crazy, but when Zhang Haixia was sorting out the house components, he found that the cracks were leaking grease.

Zhang Haixia put all of the components together and found that they formed a quarter section of a house. It was a corner of a thatched house near the roof. In the process of doing this, he noticed that there was a lot of hair in the thatch of this house. The hair and the thatch appeared to have grown together.

He thought about it carefully and realized that the house components weren't fixed with ropes or nesting structures, but completely merged. The hair was growing in the folds of these wooden structures. The hair was yellow, which was the same color as that of the little girl's hair.

There were countless pieces of evidence and various speculations.

Zhang Haiyan believed that the final possibility was that parts of the thatched house grew out of the little girl's body. For unknown reasons, parts of the house grew out of the little girl's body, which corroded the original house's components and replaced parts of the house.

But after Zhang Haixia studied and thought about it, he felt that things might be the opposite. This little girl grew out of the house like some kind of mimicry of evil.

The two people argued for three days.

If that was the case, the location of that house was very important.

According to the murderer, the house was in a very large village instead of in the depths of the rainforest like we might have thought. But the murderer couldn't remember where the house was, nor could he remember why he suddenly cut the girl into pieces.

After Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia reconciled, the two people began to look for that thatched house in Perak.

I don't know if this story has been exaggerated, and the way they dealt with this incident later is unclear, but I can always write about it in detail later.

The stories that took place in the South Sea were very strange, unusual, and very interesting.

I don't know where Zhang Haixia went since there weren't any records of him in the end. When I asked Zhang Haiyan about it, he seemed to be at a total loss. He only said that the incidents happened a long time ago, so he couldn't remember them clearly.

Zhang Haixia is like a black hole, and the only person who can help me understand things about him is Zhang Haiyan.

For some reason, I feel that Zhang Haixia and I have some things in common. What happened to him in the end?

I'm very curious about whether his ending has any reference to my own ending.



## Chapter 2 – The Research About The Southern Archives

The archives system is a special system that was called “volumes” in ancient times and “archives” later. The names are different, but the function is the same.

If there’s such a thing as the Southern Archives, then there’s definitely going to be the Central, Eastern, Western, and Northern Archives.

The emergence of the archives system surfaced when the Zhang family was sorting out their system.

The appearance of Little Brother Zhang and the gradual development of his past deeds made the division of labor between the Southern Archives and the entire archives system gradually clear.

To give a simple example, the Western Archives was set up in Motuo, mainly to deal with matters in Nepal and Kangbaro. It was essentially the Zhang family’s monitoring and collection agency for local information.

The Central Archives was eventually rebuilt by Zhang Qishan, mainly to monitor the Mystic Nine.

The later generations named it the volume system. It was unknown how these systems were named within the Zhang family, but let’s just call it “volumes” for now. The Zhang family used this system to live on the dark side of Chinese history.

In addition, Little Brother Zhang contacted the remaining forces of the Zhang family and built the latest archives in Hangzhou. They called it the Hangzhou Archives.

They were ready to start business and wanted to build a Fei Kun Balu<sup>(1)</sup> Temple first, but this behavior was successfully banned by West Lake District Urban Management.

I actually always wondered where the Zhang family's income came from. Although they didn't spend much money, it was really annoying for me to raise this big family.

This may be the biggest mystery in the Southern Archives research.

——The words are written on the first page of Wu Xie's research notebook about the Southern Archives.

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<sup>(1)</sup> It's a Poker-Face temple. Mentioned in Chapter 14 of the Potluck Case

## Chapter 3 – Notes About Our Leisure Time

I helped organize the Zhang family's annual party. Since we would have to pass through Shanghai after departing from Yangcheng Lake on our return trip, I had the sudden idea of taking the Zhang family members to Disneyland.

I had been thinking about how to be a good event organizer the whole time and was at wit's end. We didn't have a good time while eating at the crab restaurant I had selected<sup>(1)</sup>. Moreover, they ate way too fast, so this activity didn't really feel like an activity. But it was also difficult for me to explain how long it should take for people to eat crabs or what kind of mood they should be in when eating crabs.

After they finished eating, they were waiting to hear what the next activity would be. The atmosphere was very heavy, which made me feel like they were actually a group of leaders who were testing my ability to receive people. So, I decided to take them to Disneyland.

After I brought them into the theme park, I left them to their own devices. I went and squatted down near the shady jungle restaurant where all the exhausted rough guys had also gathered.

*My mentality at the time was: I've brought the fresh-out-of-the-jungle Tarzan to the human world. I've brought the T-Rex to Columbia City. I have to see what happens and let myself have some fun.*

But the truth was that people from the Zhang family understood the ways of the world. Disneyland may have been a relatively unfamiliar place to them, but it didn't mean that they didn't know what to do here.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Yangcheng Lake is famous for having crabs.

I knew that I would definitely be rejected if I offered to show them around. I also knew that I definitely wouldn't have to organize next year's annual party unless they still didn't have any income by then.

I hoped they could either make enough money to organize annual parties themselves or make enough money to leave Hangzhou.

After a long time, I fell asleep in that cool, shady place. When I woke up, the fireworks display had just begun and Qianjun Wanma's clothes were draped over me.

I stood up and found that there was already a different group of people around me. Many children were already asleep at this time and various strollers had been lined up next to me. I cautiously left the area to go and watch the fireworks display.

I saw the people from the Zhang family in the crowd. Little Brother Zhang and Zhang Qianjun Wanma were wearing Mickey Mouse headbands and talking to each other. There was a little girl next to them who was also wearing a headband, but hers was the kind that glowed.

I turned my head to look for their patriarch in the crowd, but couldn't find him amid the flashing fireworks going off above us.

The end of the Hangzhou Archives' first annual party was marked by the sound of the theme park's paging system announcing a missing person.

## Chapter 4 – Ways To Make A Living

Zhang Haike and I were sitting in the corner of a Starbucks. He came to Hangzhou on a business trip, so he was quite busy.

The overseas Zhang family's properties in Hong Kong had been preserved to this day. The story of how they became wealthy was like something we'd only see in a TV show. The Zhang family didn't invest in real estate with any specific purpose in mind, but after many years and several financial crises, anyone who invested in real estate in Hong Kong became incredibly wealthy decades later.

The overseas Zhang family had no obligation to financially support the main branch, but the Zhang family's power system wasn't maintained by money anyway.

But during this time, if someone were to provide the living expenses of these people, the overseas Zhang family should have priority over me.

Zhang Haike and I were starting to look different. It was obvious that he hadn't been trying hard to look like "me" for the past few years, but we still looked like brothers when we were together. He even looked a little younger than me.

"I can make some investments in Hangzhou. It'll save us some trouble if they can support themselves. Meanwhile, you can rest assured that people from the Zhang family won't be so poor as to have to beg for food."

*Bullshit. Look at how your patriarch is doing now,* I thought to myself.

I knew that they all had abilities to make some quick money, but times had changed. The rural mountainous areas and ancient forests were gone and antique trading was very strict now. If they didn't go down to the tombs and find goods, then they would have to deal in general antique trading, which wasn't as easy as before.

Moreover, the post-90s generation had gradually taken the lead, so old-school social networking methods had been replaced by WeChat internet merchants. Even those who sold stinky tofu in physical stores would find it difficult to survive, let alone selling antiques in physical stores.

“Your thinking makes sense.” Zhang Haike nodded after listening to my thoughts. “Then, how about I invest in an online store?”

“Can’t you invest in something that I won’t need to worry about so much?”

Zhang Haike thought for a while. His phone kept ringing with notifications and I wondered who he was talking to. He glanced at it and his expression turned somewhat sweet.

“Are you in love? If you don’t solve my problems, I’ll have your patriarch order everyone in your clan to castrate themselves.”

Zhang Haike put away his phone, his expression turning serious again. “The Zhang family’s ancestral teachings don’t allow anyone to fail,” he said to me. “They’ll surely fail if we ask them to run a business. Plus, I heard that they insisted on building a temple and receiving incense money<sup>(1)</sup> before, which shows that they have a strong sense of autonomy. They prioritize whatever they want to do because it’s important to them. How about this? I’ll go back and think about it for two weeks and then give you an answer.” With that said, Zhang Haike stood up and walked away. He seemed to be in a hurry to meet someone.

I found it strange. People said that when old men were in love, they loved fiercely. But his behavior was just too extreme.

I wondered what was going on. I took out my phone and looked at his WeChat moments, but he had set his account so that people could only see his posts for the past three days. As a result, anything before that was gone.

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<sup>(1)</sup> When people go to temples, they put money in an offering box to show respect to the gods.

*Well...*

But he was right about something. These people did whatever they wanted to do.

I texted him and asked, “How about we set up an online temple for them?”

## About the Western Archives

We have ascertained that the Zhang family has several factions. The core faction is the Zhang family in the northeast, where the main branch and side branch of the family live together. But there are strict barriers and strict class divisions that separate the family. There are also many branches located outside the country. Among them is the South Sea Archives, which is a typical foreign organization managed by the family. Since the South Sea Archives is more well-known, people have traditionally considered there to be four archives: the central one, the northern one, the western one, and the eastern one. But these archives weren't given names. The north was where the Zhang family was located, the east was managed by the overseas Zhang family, the south was the South Sea Archives, and the west was the Chama Sect, which was operated by a group of lamas and those outside of the family. In fact, the Central Archives didn't exist. The Old Nine Gates essentially took care of the duties the Central Archives would have taken on.

For the convenience of understanding, we can think that the Western Archives mainly manages two things: the Tibetan sea flowers and the patriarch's memory.

The Chama Sect carried out a lot of activities in Nepal, India, Bhutan, and Tibet. Due to its religious characteristics, it was still a system of inheritance, and it also maintained a relationship with the Kangbaluo people.

The Western Archives basically played a non-offensive role. It was generally believed that the Western Archives was originally the first place where the Zhang family studied the meteorites. The Western Archives was obviously very important to Poker-Face, but it was difficult to express what role it played in the Zhang family.

I knew that the western assets included a temple, a group of Chama businesses, and three sugar factories in Bhutan and Nepal. The Kangbaluo people were very capable, but they were not from the Zhang family.



Even so, the Western Archives' disposable property made for an astronomical figure. I had seen tons of old gold in their cellars and hundreds of priceless Buddha statues, each of which was a national treasure-level masterpiece that could shake the market. The income of the three sugar factories over the past few hundred years was also amazing. The Chama businesses probably owned hundreds of properties and pieces of land.

Every time I saw those lamas, I wanted to call them sugar daddies.

Although there were no legal attributes, logically, these properties belonged to Poker-Face.

Of course, the lamas didn't sell any of them. Instead, they just continued to hoard them. For them, Buddha statues were just Buddha statues and gold was a gift to Buddha, not property.

Most of the Western Archives' cash was used to support local animal husbandry and education. Even though the Chama businesses and temple belonged to the same system, they actually had nothing to do with each other and didn't communicate with each other at all.

Compared with the South Sea Archives' bankruptcy, poverty, and existence in name only, the Western Archives was the glory of the Zhang family's industry.

In the various temple records, there were also some of the previous patriarchs' experiences, which were one of the main sources I used when I was conducting research on the Zhang family. I still remember the quiet atmosphere as I checked files in the meditation room on the snow-covered plateau, but that was so long ago. I probably won't get such an opportunity again.

## The Yueshang Thirteen

With regards to “Yueshang”<sup>(1)</sup> and “Rotating Moon”, these words frequently appeared in the Western Archives’ records after 1920. According to Zhang Haike, these documents expressed the Western Archives’ vigilance and concern regarding a large number of strange events that occurred in southern China at that time.

It was not uncommon for there to be an overlap of this kind of information between archives, but at that time, the Southern Archives was already swamped and the Western Archives had also encountered very complicated problems. As a result, these strange events were eventually swallowed in the long river of history.

Out of all the other archives in China, only the Western Archives is still currently in operation. Based on a previous agreement I made with them, documents would be sent to me on a regular basis. Poker-Face would also read them, but it didn’t seem to be a big deal. The situation in the west was also coming to an end and the old people were passing away one by one. Although the south was ambitious to rebuild, it appeared nothing had come of it yet.

This was a kind of helpless desolation. All that history was about to disappear into the void of time and space, which would make it impossible to trace back. As a result, I worked harder to organize all the files I could get my hands on.

There were too many people worth remembering in these small pockets of time and space, but like a curse, it seemed that the fate of this family was to forget.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Yueshang (月上) can mean something like “on the moon”. Baidu says it’s usually a name or nickname for a girl.

So, when I saw the words “Yueshang” again, I finally became interested. This was because it was probably an organization related to the Zhang family.

I had very few clues to go on. All I knew was that Yueshang was founded around 1920, its members were all women, and there were thirteen of them in total so they were called the Yueshang Thirteen. Zhang Haiqi was probably one of the leaders, which was the earliest clue I had.

I also knew that not all of its members were from the Zhang family. The latest clue I found said that a woman with a phoenix tattoo appeared among the Yueshang Thirteen. I was completely shocked when I read about the description of her appearance because I thought I might know this woman.

She was a long-lost friend.

Yueshang’s plan from the very beginning was called “Rotating Moon”, but no one knows what the specific plan entailed.

Whatever it was, I instinctively felt that this plan was very important. This was because I had detailed records of Little Brother Zhang’s experience but Zhang Haiqi didn’t reveal anything about “Rotating Moon” to him during that time.

They experienced thrilling adventures in which they faced death countless times but Zhang Haiqi didn’t reveal anything at all.

It’s difficult for me to understand why Zhang Haiqi didn’t disclose anything—did she think that it was unnecessary to talk about it, did she just not want to talk about it, or maybe she couldn’t talk about it?

Then, one night, I suddenly had a flash of inspiration.

Maybe this plan had nothing to do with men.

Maybe this was a top-secret plan only related to women that had been going on for so many years.

Moreover, judging from various clues I had found, it seemed that someone had been investigating Yueshang. The reason I thought this was because based on my experience, the information the Western Archives sent to me this time looked like it had been deliberately released by someone in the hopes that I would see it.

Naturally, I wouldn't respond. If they wanted to spy on me so badly, I hoped that they would give me more sincere clues that would attract my attention. In other words, I was tired of these spies and their desire to exploit my capabilities at investigating and revealing the mysteries behind large conspiracies.

These thirteen women paid particular attention to a respected old Shanghai gang. The context behind their scrutiny was probably the first batch of people from Anhui's Grain Boat Gang, which accounted for a large proportion of Shanghai's underground culture in the last century.<sup>(2)</sup> It appeared these women were implementing a plan.

“Rotating Moon”...what was it?

We all know the laws regarding the moon's rotation—since its rotation and revolution speed are matched, that means that we can only see its front side forever.

In other words, its back is always facing away from us. If we hadn't been able to launch moon-orbiting satellites, we would have never been able to see it.

But the so-called concepts of front and back are just wishful thinking on our part. It's only natural that we regard the side that humans have seen for tens of thousands of years as the front while the opposite side is regarded as the back.

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<sup>(2)</sup> I think “Grain Boat Gang” was another name for Shanghai's infamous “[Green Gang](#)”, which was prominent in criminal, social, and political activities in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. They mostly focused on opium, extortion, gambling, and prostitution.

“Rotating Moon”, which I feel carries the meaning that people will never be able to figure out what the secrets are, is an extremely confident plan with a strange amount of certainty that absolutely no one knows about.

Just like the Zhang family in its heyday.

But it has nothing to do with me. This is the legend of another group of people.

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End of Southern Archives Extras

**Bonus: The First Case—Flower Reef 1<sup>st</sup> Draft**  
**Chapters**

## Chapter 14 – Nan’an

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*[Please note: Tiffany and I accidentally started working on the author’s first draft instead of the final version, so chapters 14-28 have 2 versions. The draft chapters are here in case you’re interested in reading them.]*

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As we get to this part of the story, some things that happened later need to be mentioned first.

We all know that Zhang Haiyan definitely went through a series of adventures after he boarded the Nan’an, and it would inevitably be some time before he and Zhang Haixia were reunited.

Since it would take at least a few months to travel between Malacca and Xiamen, he wouldn’t get any news from Zhang Haixia during that time.

In fact, just when Zhang Haiyan gave up resisting and was about to board the ship to comply with the contract, Zhang Haixia was sent downstairs and out to the streets.

At that moment, two things happened almost simultaneously.

During that ten-minute period of time just before they met He Jianxi, we can infer that Zhang Haixia had discovered some “abnormalities” from which he perceived a certain danger.

It’s important to know that Zhang Haixia graduated as the most outstanding crucial talent in the Southern Archives. If it weren’t for Zhang Haiyan, he would have entered the South Sea Maritime Affairs Office as a chief officer and might have been in charge of a confidential department by now.

But during the time he hung out with Zhang Haiyan, he seldom encountered strong opponents, so he didn’t get the chance to show off. Even Zhang

Haiyan had almost forgotten how smart this little brother was. He was so smart, in fact, that he could be considered a monster.

Due to his current position, the situation, and other reasons, he didn't warn Zhang Ruipu about the danger but obviously thought that it was very serious.

In those few minutes, he wrote something down and hid all the information in the stack of money. He placed it among the pile of banknotes and handed it to He Jianxi. At that time, he had no other way to convey the information.

Later, after Zhang Haiyan learned about the theory Zhang Haixia had come up with in those few minutes, he compared it with what he had discovered and found that they were almost consistent. That was when Zhang Haiyan truly realized what kind of effect Zhang Haixia had on his life, and how he had always been there to protect him.

Coincidentally, when He Jianxi settled the accounts, he heard the news that the ban on alcohol had been lifted. As a result, there wasn't a huge profit in smuggling alcohol anymore. His tavern closed, and the severance pay he received contained that stack of money.

It actually took a while for He Jianxi to notice that there was something wrong with the money since he kept thinking about what he was going to do with his life.

He eventually decided to go to San Francisco to find his cousin who was panning for gold. That was probably the only place where foreign firms needed Chinese accountants.

At that time, small barges leaving from Malacca to San Francisco were called coffin ships. The conditions on the ships were extremely poor, so many people fell ill and died, or went missing because of fighting, robbery, or pirates. The ship owners were known for extortion, human trafficking, and restricting the freedom of the boat passengers. People would also be thrown into the sea whenever shipwrecks occurred. As a result, various tragedies happened one after another.



The purpose of founding the South Sea Archives was mainly to investigate these mysterious maritime cases. When dealing with the ship owners and sailors who killed Chinese people, Zhang Haiyan and the others would resolutely put them to death.

Since they were very good at swimming, they liked to get on the ship in the middle of the sea, and then jump into the water after killing people. That was how they came to be called the “plague gods of the sea”. Even to this day, many South Sea legends mentioned a water ghost with blades in its mouth, which was actually Zhang Haiyan.

In the end, He Jianxi bought a ticket that could get him onto a barge called Baoen. The ship was very old, and there were so many passengers that the word “crowded” couldn’t even begin to describe it.

The plague in Malacca meant that these kinds of ships would check the passengers before taking them on. They would even stop at the outermost reefs by the port, where small boats would pick up and drop off the passengers.

He Jianxi arrived at the dock to board the ship the day after he met Zhang Haixia.

Zhang Haiyan, who had been queuing up all night to board the Nan’an, also began boarding.

The dock was crowded with people and all kinds of goods. A huge heat wave engulfed everyone, causing the smell of human sweat to fill the space. The most terrifying thing was the noisy voices, which made it impossible to hear anything.

The sea breeze fluctuated between strong and weak. Zhang Haiyan’s military uniform was soaked and he was fanning himself with his cap. Zhang Ruipu had been very generous to give him a boat ticket and a letter of invitation, which meant that he was able to stay in the best guest room.

When the huge Nan'an appeared in Zhang Haiyan's field of vision, he couldn't help but be amazed at the behemoth. He looked up at the black hull and the four large chimneys above, and began to realize that this world was completely different from when they had first arrived at the South Sea.

Xiamen used to be a distant shore that Zhang Haiyan couldn't reach and dearly missed. But with this kind of huge ship, Xiamen didn't seem so far away anymore.

Zhang Ruipu's entourage didn't follow him on board but watched him go silently. Zhang Haiyan pretended that they were there to send him off and waved vigorously as if he was bidding farewell to his relatives, but the two young men almost immediately disappeared into the crowd.

Neglected, Zhang Haiyan felt bored and had no other choice but to board the ship alone.

He took the VIP passage, where the sailor checked his ticket repeatedly before letting him through. The civilian passage below was very crowded. He looked down and realized that it would be impossible to be idle on the Nan'an this time around. The investigation would be more difficult than he had initially thought.

He looked around calmly and saw a group of white people in front of him, who seemed to be Americans. Their clothes were very dirty, and there was only one young white man among them wearing a suit and glasses. He seemed like the type who specialized in paperwork.

There were many local porters walking up with their luggage. The group of white men was already very large, and the ship's passage became extremely crowded with the addition of the porters and luggage.

The pile of luggage was very huge, and Zhang Haiyan wondered what was in them. The young white people checked them over carefully and told the porters not to be careless with them.

The white people were very relaxed as they talked and laughed amongst themselves. Some of them were even saying that the pieces of luggage that would be brought up later were even bigger than theirs.

Zhang Haiyan followed their gazes and saw a lot of huge, wooden boxes in the warehouse's loading area that would be pulled onto the ship with slings.

Zhang Haiyan habitually wanted to lean back and discuss this with Zhang Haixia but was a little disappointed when he realized that Zhang Haixia wasn't behind him.

When he glanced back, however, he saw that the sailor who had checked his ticket just now was talking with several police officers on the dock, and they kept looking at him.

Zhang Haiyan narrowed his eyes and cursed silently. His outfit had apparently attracted too much attention. Since he was going to stay in the first-class cabin, the sailor probably thought he had stolen the ticket.

He pressed his military cap further down on his head. He knew evading would make things worse, so he decided to head down there and explain to the sailor and the police. But as soon as he moved to leave, someone unexpectedly put their hand on his shoulder.

He turned his head and saw that the blonde American with glasses was shaking his head at him. He looked at the sailor below, who looked back at him in surprise.

"Your country is still developing. There will be people who don't trust the Chinese. Don't be offended." The blonde American youth said in fluent Chinese. "If you go down and explain, it will be considered a provocation, and may make things worse."

When Zhang Haiyan looked at him, the young American hooked his arm around his shoulders and greeted the sailor below. "Please let our team pass. My friend and I are in a hurry for tea. Can we get on board first?"

The young American obviously had a high status, since the sailor knew him and immediately came up to apologize. "I'm sorry, Mr. Steven." The sailor looked at Zhang Haiyan, a little surprised. "Is this your friend? You guys—"

"Yes, we have to go up quickly." Steven nodded.

The sailor immediately notified the people above, who stopped the queue and had the people stand aside.

Steven winked at Zhang Haiyan, and then said to the sailor, "No worries."

With this special treatment, the two bypassed everyone waiting to get on the ship. Zhang Haiyan looked down and saw that the crowd was still quite large. As soon as Steven went up, someone brought tea over.

He patted Zhang Haiyan and took a sip of the tea. "We can always talk in our free time, Chinese man. We have a lot of time on this ship." With that said, he walked away.

Zhang Haiyan leaned against the ship's high railing, a little puzzled. Why did this white man help him all of a sudden? Was it possible that the white people in the first-class rooms were well-educated? He thought for a while and eventually decided to be more careful, and act as soon as possible.

He lit a cigarette and saw a lonely barge out at sea. It was the Baoen, but he didn't know that yet.

His cigarette butt suddenly dropped to the ground as he clutched his chest and fell. The sailor beside him immediately came over to help, and Zhang Haiyan said in fluent English, "I need to go to the infirmary. I don't feel very well. It's my heart. Can you take me there?"

## Chapter 15 – Doctor Steven

The sailor was obviously very annoyed. It was extremely busy when there were a lot of guests on the deck, and then this Chinese man got sick within three seconds of getting on the ship. It wasn't a good sign. Moreover, they all knew that a plague was running rampant in Malacca.

The word "disease" put a lot of pressure on the ship's crew, but due to his relationship with Steven and the professionalism of the first-class service, the sailor still held Zhang Haiyan up.

This was exactly what Zhang Haiyan wanted. It would take a while for the ship to leave port, so if he moved fast now, it might be possible to complete the investigation before the ship officially entered open waters.

Zhang Haixia had been taken away by others, and no matter how Zhang Haiyan thought about it, he felt that things might go wrong if he left Malacca and then returned in a few months.

The last time Nan'an had docked at a port was when it sailed from Xiamen to France. The ship went to four ports along the Malacca route. People who disembarked from the ship carried the plague and spread it all over Malacca. It was just that the areas outside Penang were controlled by Zhang Ruipu so that the plague didn't spread any further.

Judging from the situation on the ship, there hadn't been an outbreak on the ship itself. If someone on board had contracted the disease, something would've gone wrong on the ship a long time ago. So why did the Nan'an keep spreading the plague, but nothing happened to her?

This meant that the people who spread the plague were on the ship. They must've had the means to control the plague, and the development of things was nothing more than the following:

1. Those people were infected on the ship, but someone controlled the situation so they didn't get sick until they got off the ship.

2. Whoever spread the plague had the ability to make people get sick when they disembarked and left.

Those who got sick lived in villages that were in different areas, so that meant they had been carefully selected. These people were low-level businessmen, so they all stayed on the lower deck. That meant that the person spreading the plague should be hiding in the lower compartments, and should be someone who was good at talking and becoming familiar with others.

It was a simple deduction. Even if there wasn't a plague on this kind of ship, the spread of diarrhea and dysentery in the bottom compartments was also a common occurrence.

The ship's doctor would regularly give the guests pills and concoctions, which could easily control the time at which they would get sick. In addition, a ship's doctor would glean a lot of information from them because people respected them. Based on all this, the ship's doctor was the first suspect, so Zhang Haiyan had to go to the infirmary as quickly as possible.

But the sailor didn't immediately send him to the infirmary. Zhang Haiyan put his best efforts into his performance and even worked up a sweat on his neck, but the sailor looked to the other side instead. Just as Zhang Haiyan was feeling puzzled, he looked up and saw Steven walking back.

The sailor said, "Mr. Steven, your friend isn't feeling well. You're a doctor. Do you think he should be sent to your room or to the infirmary?"

Steven looked at Zhang Haiyan, annoyed. It was as if he was trying to help an old woman cross the road, and the old woman turned out to be a swindler. But he still checked Zhang Haiyan's pupils and counted his heartbeats with a strange expression.

"Get him to my room." Steven sighed.

Zhang Haiyan knew the situation wasn't good. He didn't expect this accommodating white man to be a doctor.

He wanted to immediately stand up and say he was fine, but felt like that would look too deliberate, so he decided to recover gradually on his way to Steven's room. Once he entered the room and sat down, he would act like he was completely recovered, show his gratitude, and then leave.

But as soon as they entered the ship's hull, they turned a corner and reached Steven's room. He was just about to act like he had made a quick recovery, but was completely shocked when he saw the room.

Steven's room was very large and could be considered the VIP of VIP rooms. It even had a balcony, where the sun shone in from the outside. The interior had been completely done in a European style. His suitcases seemed to have been sent up earlier, for they were all open and looked to be stuffed full of books and papers.

Zhang Haiyan was still clutching his chest as he was placed on the green velvet sofa. When he sat down, the springs made a soft creaking sound. The velvet cushions molded to his body, making him feel as if the devil himself was embracing him.

He had been in and out of the rainforests and sea for years, sleeping on tree branches and ships' decks. He didn't know how long it had been since he'd slept in a soft bed with springs, and involuntarily let out a groan.

When Steven had the sailor leave, Zhang Haiyan reacted immediately and started to act as if he had recovered. In the end, Steven poured a glass of whiskey, took a sip, and said directly, "Stop pretending. Don't you know your heart is on the other side?"

Zhang Haiyan froze for a moment and then looked down at his hand. It was only then that he remembered he was different from others, and his heart was on the opposite side. A doctor had told him about it during their adult physical examinations, but he hadn't cared.

Why didn't he care? Because all the children like them had hearts on their right side. It even seemed to be the reason why they had been chosen.

“Dextrocardia isn’t an illness. You don’t need to be afraid.” Steven said. “But what are you trying to do? Friend, I thought you were just dressed frugally and looked down upon by others, but now it seems that you do have an ulterior motive for getting on this ship.”

Zhang Haiyan was still clutching his chest and realized that he had really made a mistake this time. He sighed and told himself that he was getting rusty. If he had known this would happen, he would’ve pretended to have a stomachache.

He looked at Steven and thought that the whole thing was troublesome. If others knew about his investigation, that would double the difficulty. Not to mention the fact that the Southern Archives was an obscure department. Even if these foreigners believed that he was here on business to investigate the plague, the news that the person responsible for spreading it was still on the ship would be enough to cause mass panic and ruin their journey.

He had to make up a story.

Zhang Haiyan’s mind was racing as he thought, *I was fine when I boarded the ship alone. My ticket was real. But why did I pretend to be sick?*

*Got it!*

“The person I like works as a doctor on this ship. I miss her very much.” Zhang Haiyan said. “I’m sorry that I bothered you. I’m a little too childish.”

“In the past, ships usually only had one or two general practitioners on board. But because of the plague in Malacca, Nan’an has three doctors and four nurses. As far as I know, the doctors are all men. The person you like is a man?” Steven frowned.

*How do you know everything?!* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

He didn’t dare spout any more nonsense for a while and was still wondering how best to keep lying, when Steven said, “Stop pretending. You got on the ship because of me, right? Where did you learn about us?”



Zhang Haiyan was still perfecting his next lie, so when Steven suddenly said something like this, he was dumbfounded. *Huh? What? What's going on with you?* He thought to himself.

Steven turned around, opened his suitcase, and said, "Say it. How much money will it take for you to get off the ship?"

Zhang Haiyan reared back and thought to himself, *weird. Is this a gift from heaven, or the awakening of the earth? It seems this ship is full of stories.* He was so touched, he shed a few tears in his heart.

This Steven had some sort of secret, and he thought Zhang Haiyan was here to reveal it.

Zhang Haiyan tried to speak up twice but didn't know how to explain it. He suddenly found that there was something wrong with Steven's hand movements, but just when he wanted to get a closer look, Steven suddenly turned around with a revolver in his hand.

He raised the gun and fired, but Zhang Haiyan immediately dodged it. The bullet hit the sofa behind him, sending the springs and cotton flying.

Zhang Haiyan kept moving around as Steven unhesitatingly fired all the bullets at once. They hit the mahogany furniture and bedding in the room, causing sawdust and cotton to fill the air.

Normal people wouldn't shoot so frequently, but Steven's hand was very steady as he fired all seven rounds in an instant. He spun the revolver's chamber, dropped the spent casings onto the ground, and already started reloading.

Zhang Haiyan wanted to approach him, but before he could even take two steps, Steven had already raised the gun again and fired. Zhang Haiyan dodged again, fully understanding how strong this opponent was.

This guy was clearly an expert gunman.

Zhang Haiyan rolled to dodge the second shot and jumped out onto the balcony, where he stepped onto the ship's railing and leaped into the sea. Steven shot the remaining bullets into the sea, returned to the room, and then picked up the phone. "Notify Mr. Warner that the whole ship is under martial law. Someone jumped into the water on the left side of the ship. He must be captured."

Meanwhile, Zhang Haiyan's head popped out of the water. When he saw his cap floating next to him, he grabbed it and looked towards the shore. The police had gotten onto a boat and were rowing towards him.

## Chapter 16 – Baoen

One evening in Malacca, Zhang Haiyan and Zhang Haixia had a big fight on the beach at dusk.

He had forgotten the reason, but he still remembered that Zhang Haixia had told him he shouldn't handle dangerous situations with a cheeky attitude.

If the opponent wasn't strong, he would be fine no matter what he did. But if he encountered situations that went against common sense—like skilled masters hiding among low-level civilians—then he would be putting himself in danger.

The Americans were simply radical and straightforward, but there could be some experts among them who had established themselves in China.

Now Zhang Haiyan had finally learned his lesson.

The ship's side was too high for him to climb back up, and there were a lot of people on shore watching the scene, so he had even less of a chance of getting close to it. But the boat that was trying to capture him was quickly approaching.

It would've been fine if he had just gone back to his room and thought things through earlier. It was only now that Zhang Haiyan deeply regretted his actions.

The rules Zhang Haiqi had taught him back then suddenly came to mind. For many years, he had forgotten the rules that his godmother had instilled in him when she cut the skin under his tongue with scissors so that he could remember better.

When you made a mistake, the most important thing was to make the right choice afterwards and not regret your past mistakes or missed opportunities.

What happened had happened.

Zhang Haiyan dove down and quickly swam towards the open sea. There were a lot of ships outside the port relying on small boats for supplies since they didn't dare stop by the dock.

He swam very fast and quickly made it far away from those boats trying to capture him. When the people on the boats began to shoot at him, Zhang Haiyan dove for a long time before he surfaced again. As soon as his head breached the surface, he had only taken two or three breaths before the bullets arrived, and he had to dive again.

The sea waves by the port became so big that they were almost like floating hills. Not only was the view poor, but there was some distance between Zhang Haiyan and the boats. The snipers were also blocked by the waves, so they had to stop their pursuit.

As soon as He Jianxi got on the Baoen, he heard the sound of firecrackers coming from the huge ship behind him. He looked back in surprise, thinking that there was some kind of religious ceremony going on.

He was suddenly pushed to the ground from behind by the people who had just gotten on the boat.

The Baoen was a small barge heading to San Francisco. It had two masts, the sails were in tatters, and the deck was now full of cargo. The crew also raised chickens and ducks, so the feces and urine were everywhere and the smell was horrific. Both of He Jianxi's hands had landed in chicken shit, which felt greasy and moist.

He Jianxi quickly got up and checked whether there was any dirt on him. He was wearing his more decent casual clothes, which were far more suitable for life on a boat. He didn't want to get them dirty as soon as he had gotten on the boat.

A nearby sailor came to collect his ticket and said to him, “If you add a silver dollar<sup>(1)</sup>, you can have a woman accompany you at night.” He pointed to a woman standing nearby. She seemed to be in a daze and was leaning against the cargo. “This woman is one silver dollar short, so she doesn’t have enough money to buy a ticket. Brother, do her a favor. Pay her silver dollar, and she’ll accompany you to San Francisco. I’m also a good person. She’ll definitely die if she stays in Malacca.”

He Jianxi looked at the woman, who seemed to notice his gaze. It appeared she had been rejected many times and had lost all hope. There was only despair in her eyes.

He Jianxi thought about it and went to grab the money in his pocket. He had one silver dollar since the owner of the winery had given him a lot of money. But things were expensive in San Francisco, and the money had to be spent very carefully. He thought it over and walked up to the woman.

“Do you have any relatives in San Francisco?”

The woman instantly came to her senses, stood up straight, and said, “Yes, a little brother. My brother is there.”

“I don’t do perverted things. My mother said that I shouldn’t help people indiscriminately when I’m out and about, but if you’re willing to return this silver dollar to me in the future, I’ll lend it to you,” He Jianxi said.

It took the woman a while to realize that someone was willing to help her. She couldn’t believe her eyes and immediately nodded. “I, I’ll definitely pay you back. Thank you, little brother.”

He Jianxi took out the silver dollar, held it out half an inch, but didn’t let go. “You need to write me an IOU and press a fingerprint on it.”

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<sup>(1)</sup> It’s called Da Yang in the Chinese text, and one Da Yang equals 1,000 pennies back then. They are silver coins that looked like [this](#).

The woman froze for a moment. "Little brother, such things are so troublesome! I don't have anything. In fact, I was married, and my husband is dead. If you want me to accompany you, I won't care since I'm experienced and not so young anymore."

He Jianxi shook his head. "You have to promise to pay me back, or I won't lend you the money."

For some reason, the woman was perplexed. She looked to the sailor, who came over and said, "Come on. How can she possibly pay you back? It'll be a very lonely journey. You two can look after each other. Moreover, don't you know that a widow's butt is rounder than beautiful girls'?"

When He Jianxi still shook his head, the sailor lit a cigarette and pushed him. "Go away. You two had a fateful meeting, but it didn't work out." The nearby sailors roared with laughter. He Jianxi didn't know what they were laughing about. The sailor seemed to be embarrassed and pushed He Jianxi again, "Go and wash the chicken shit off. Are you saving it for dinner?" When he pushed him this time, his hand pressed onto He Jianxi's pocket, which contained the silver dollars.

His banknotes were hidden in his waistband, but the silver dollars had been sewn into the inner pocket of his clothes. With this push, everyone heard the sound of coins clinking together, and could tell the amount was quite large.

The people standing around suddenly became very quiet, and everyone turned to look at He Jianxi.

He was startled by the change in atmosphere. The sailor stopped pushing him and patted his pocket again. The clinking sound of coins became even clearer.

The sailor wasn't being polite and even looked down inside his pocket. The other sailors looked at him with interest, and even the woman was looking at him.

He Jianxi grabbed his luggage and looked into the other's eyes, but didn't know what they meant. He immediately closed his pocket and walked away. When he looked back, he found that the sailor was watching him, but didn't follow him.

After taking a few steps, he looked at the chicken feces on his hands and started searching for the ship's toilet. At this time, all the sailors behind him stood up and slowly followed.

The toilets on the ship were usually on the side at the tail end of the deck. They were basically wooden boards with several holes in them. There was a bucket attached to the rope on the side that could be put into the sea to draw water up, which people could use for washing. And they could pee or take a dump by sitting above the holes since the sea was right below.

All the toilets on the ship were relatively clean. He Jianxi went in, looked behind him, and decided to pick a hole where he could conveniently sit down, and then fetch water to wash his hands.

He thought about which hole to choose for a long time. There were four of them, and he chose the second one from the left because it looked the cleanest. He had just taken off his pants and was about to turn around and sit down when he saw a person's head poking out of the hole.

"Brother, hold it." Zhang Haiyan poked his head out and then climbed out of the hole with difficulty.

"Who are you? A stowaway?" He Jianxi asked in shock. It was a serious crime back then, and he might be thrown into the sea if he was incriminated.

"How can you think that?" Zhang Haiyan was completely soaked. He looked around and tossed his hair back. "When I was in the toilet just now, I suddenly took a nap and fell off. I'm sorry, so sorry. I get sleepy whenever I'm taking a dump. I even feel sleepy whenever I smell shit."

There was no way He Jianxi would believe this nonsense. But just as he was about to leave, the toilet door opened and a group of sailors walked.

They were all carrying daggers and went right up to He Jianxi. They grabbed his hair, had him kneel on the ground, and then someone immediately grabbed his arms. He Jianxi's mouth opened because of the pain, but someone quickly covered it.

His pocket was instantly torn open, and the silver dollars scattered all over the floor. They rolled towards the crevices on the side, which caused everyone to panic since the sea was right below. Someone immediately stepped on them, and the scene became chaotic.

"Quickly. Let's get his money before the boatswain finds out about it." The sailors' leader said. "Don't mess up."

They obviously didn't think there was another man in the toilet and froze when they looked up and saw Zhang Haiyan.

Zhang Haiyan looked down at the silver dollar under his foot, picked it up, and said a little awkwardly, "I'll buy a ticket with this."



## Chapter 17 – Despicable Plague God

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**Merebear Note: This didn't change from the author's first draft.**

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The sailor looked back at his accomplices, winked, and they all moved to surround Zhang Haiyan with their daggers raised.

Zhang Haiyan counted the number of sailors and found that there were seven of them. For this kind of small barge, seven was a large number.

*I can't kill them. I can't cause a panic again. In addition, if I kill them all, this boat will never set off, and then I might affect a lot of people's lives.*

But the other party obviously didn't want to let him go and started surrounding him in a half-circle.

"Killing Chinese passengers on a ship. Aren't you afraid of being pestered by the plague god?" Zhang Haiyan asked with a smile.

Back then, they killed the sailors who killed Chinese people at sea. For a long time, the Chinese on this route gained some sort of respect. But as the murders decreased, their missions had also decreased, so their reputations seemed to have gradually faded.

"The plague god isn't that well informed and this person doesn't have any companions. In this corner, no one will see him getting killed." The leading sailor was a man with an Indian-style cloth wrapped around his head. Zhang Haiyan listened as he continued, "I'm afraid it's the same for you. Since you've witnessed the scene, I guess we'll have to kill you, too."

Now Zhang Haiyan understood why there were so many sailors. *They're obviously in a group and even came to the toilet to kill someone. It seems*

*that my reputation is still lingering here. This young man should be on the boat alone without relatives, so they targeted him.*

He looked at the silver coins and thought to himself, *he's quite rich despite being so young.*

The sailors surrounding him were getting closer and closer. These people had been working on the water for a long time, so they were quite observant. They saw that this young man looked calm even though he was drenched and seemed a little absent-minded. As a result, they didn't dare move forward rashly.

Zhang Haiyan calculated the time. After a while, the police would definitely board the boat to investigate. To be on the safe side, he couldn't let things get any more out of control, so he decided to solve the problem quickly. He sneered before suddenly stepping forward, falling to his knees, and saying to the sailors, "Masters, please have mercy on us."

The sailors were startled and took a step back. Zhang Haiyan took out a roll of money from his pocket and offered it up with both hands. "This person is my cousin, and there are only two of us left in our family. If we both die, our family will have no descendants. Take the silver coins and the money. We promise not to tell a soul about it. Please have mercy on our cheap lives."

When the sailors looked at each other, Zhang Haiyan continued, "It's not robbery. We're giving you the money out of respect. You don't need to be afraid that the plague god will find out about it. Now that the plague is running rampant, you don't want to be condemned by the heavens, right?! We're all just trying to make a living."

Zhang Haiyan's eyes became red and watery as he spoke. The leading sailor frowned, took the money, and flipped through it. It wasn't a small amount, so he smiled and said, "Little brother, you're quite talented. You're not like those who want money but don't want their lives. You know that you have to worship a mountain when you see one."

As Zhang Haiyan nodded flatteringly, the leading sailor winked at the people behind him. They didn't want to kill people and cause trouble, either. They released their hold on He Jianxi, who started coughing after being painfully strangled.

The sailor patted Zhang Haiyan. "My name is Er Erlong. You can call me Brother Long. I will protect you on this boat. The money will be handed over to the brothers." With that said, he turned around. "Give them a single room. Our ladies are theirs. They can pick whoever they want."

The sailors were anxious to get out of the toilet and hurriedly picked the silver coins up. It seemed that they wanted to go and divide the huge amount of money.

Zhang Haiyan breathed a sigh of relief and then turned to help He Jianxi up with a grim look on his face. "They're pathetic." He said. "These people don't even know that they barely saved themselves just now. If they had been tougher, their lives would've ended—"

He Jianxi punched Zhang Haiyan in the face. "Those silver coins are mine. How could you give them my stuff? We can't give in to these kinds of people!" As soon as he finished speaking, he moved to chase after the sailors.

Zhang Haiyan grabbed him and gently moved his head to the side. He Jianxi's head hit the boat's wooden wall quite heavily, and he immediately passed out.

Zhang Haiyan touched his face. "This guy has quite a temper."

He Jianxi was young and still looked childish, almost like a teenager. Zhang Haiyan picked him up with one hand and put him on his back.

When He Jianxi woke up again, he was already in a single room.

The single room was actually a small space that had been separated from the passenger cabin. It had a little privacy, but there was only a curtain instead of a door. Two door panels laid out on the ground were their beds.

Bedding had already been spread out on He Jianxi's bed. Zhang Haiyan was sitting on the other bed without his shirt on. He was smoking a cigarette and looking at him. Zhang Haiyan's bed didn't appear to have any bedding on it and looked completely bare.

Of course there was nothing. All the special treatment he could get was on the Nan'an, which was a kilometer away. Zhang Haiyan suspected that it was his fate to never get to sleep on a bed with springs.

He Jianxi sat up and found that he was still very dizzy. After a while, he remembered what had happened before he passed out.

"You—"

"Shut up." Zhang Haiyan looked at him coldly.

"I don't even know you. I'm going to get my money back. Ouch!" He had a terrible headache and felt the area where his head had been hit.

"You're a passenger on this boat. You want to get justice, and then what? Are you going to get off the boat? If you fight them, they won't let you stay on the boat," Zhang Haiyan said.

"I worked hard for that money. They can't just easily take someone's hard-earned money."

Zhang Haiyan pulled He Jianxi's waistband and dug out the banknotes. He flipped through them and found that a lot of words had been written on them. "Isn't there a lot of money? To the people on this boat, you're like someone who helped put their shoes on. Don't plan on dying if you can survive. Human life is so precious."

He Jianxi instantly panicked and quickly grabbed his waistband. "Give it back to me!"

Zhang Haiyan released his waistband and threw the money back to him. "Stay on the boat and hide your money. This ferry ticket is for entering the ghost gate, but your silver coins can at least give you a better chance at getting out. It's worth it."

He Jianxi immediately put the money back into his waistband and adjusted it.

"Let me ask you a question. Where's this boat going?"

Since Zhang Haiyan gave the money back to him just now, He Jianxi calmed down and lowered his guard a bit. "To San Francisco."

"San Francisco? Can this kind of small boat make it that far? As far as I can tell, the sailors on this kind of small boat will kill you all and throw you into the sea. It happens a lot."

"After the legend of the plague god surfaced, there's no such thing." He Jianxi said. "It's how my brother got to San Francisco successfully. Of course, it will be a difficult journey, but I'm used to it."

"All your quilts have been infused with Chinese medicine. You've obviously made a lot of preparations." Zhang Haiyan took a puff of his cigarette, and He Jianxi covered his nose with a very pained expression. "What's wrong?"

"Your cigarette smells really bad."

The sailors had given him these cigarettes, which just so happened to be the kind he liked to smoke back in the day. Since Zhang Haixia found them unpleasant, he had switched to another brand. It was rare that Zhang Haixia wasn't around, so he could finally let himself go, but he didn't expect he'd be judged again.

Zhang Haiyan couldn't help but smile bitterly and think to himself, *I'll stink you to death*. He deliberately took another puff. "Cousin, let's discuss something and make a deal, ok?"

"I don't want to make a deal with you. You gave my money to someone else. Can I do business with someone like you?"

"Ah, it has something to do with your money. If I can get your money back before I get off the ship, will you do me a favor?" Zhang Haiyan asked.

He Jianxi was stunned for a moment, unsure what Zhang Haiyan was planning.

"Look outside." Zhang Haiyan said.

He Jianxi looked outside the curtain and saw that there were a lot of police officers in the cabin that were interrogating the guests. As he was looking, Zhang Haiyan crawled over and hid under his quilt.

"Hey, hey, hey, hey. What are you doing?" He Jianxi was furious. He hated it when others got under his quilt. He was very sensitive to smells, and couldn't fall asleep on a bed that others had slept in.

Zhang Haiyan covered his head with the quilt. "Remember, I'm your wife. You just had sex with me. We aren't dressed properly." With that said, Zhang Haiyan immediately opened He Jianxi's collar, quickly messed up his hair, and then shrank back under the quilt. He took a few gold needles out of his pocket.

Before He Jianxi could figure out what was going on, Zhang Haiyan whispered, "Help me with this, and I'll help you get the money back. Otherwise, I'll say you're my accomplice and we'll die together."

Just as He Jianxi finally understood what was going on, the curtain was suddenly opened. The police came in to take a look and asked He Jianxi, "Who are you talking to? Get up. We need to see your faces."

There was no way He Jianxi could improvise, so he started to panic. Just as his face flushed, he suddenly heard a female voice that sounded like silver bells coming from under his quilt. “Oh, who is it? I’m not wearing any clothes.”

## Chapter 18 – The Plague God’s Kiss

The policemen looked at each other and then laughed. “Why so anxious? Doing obscene activities during the daytime?”

He Jianxi’s face was flushed, but it was because he was angry and frightened.

When did he have a woman in his bed?

He was positive that there definitely wasn’t anyone else under the quilt just now. Zhang Haiyan was the one who got under it. He saw it with his very own eyes. How did he suddenly become a woman?

Could it be that Zhang Haiyan was a man disguised as a woman? Wait, that couldn’t be right. Wasn’t he half-naked just now?

He Jianxi was utterly perplexed. Moreover, what did he say to him just now? He would claim he was his accomplice? There was too much information, which almost made He Jianxi break out in a cold sweat.

The policemen just thought that the kid was being shy, and they ended up laughing even harder. Then, they heard the woman under the quilt say, “It’s not daytime. There’s no such thing as daytime in the world.”

“You even dared touch a woman on this kind of boat. Watch out, or you might get syphilis.” The police lowered the curtain and continued their investigation.

He Jianxi listened to the sound of the policemen walking away. He wanted to flip the quilt over immediately to see what was going on, but when he turned around, Zhang Haiyan had already returned to his previous position. Not even his cigarette had been extinguished.

Zhang Haiyan looked at him coldly. “You don’t know how to lie to people. How have you even survived up until now?” He was still talking in that sultry female voice.



He Jianxi looked at Zhang Haiyan's chest. Well, he had never seen a woman's chest since he had started to learn the ways of the world, but in his mind, a woman's chest was bound to have something. Zhang Haiyan's chest, however, had nothing but pectoral muscles.

Zhang Haiya looked like all of the men he had seen before.

*Is it possible that he's one of those intersex people<sup>(1)</sup> I've heard about before?*

He Jianxi's mind was blown. At that time, he didn't understand the concepts of gender equality. His first reaction was that an intersex person had slept in his bed. He didn't know if it was because his head had been hit earlier, or because he couldn't handle the situation before him, but he started to feel dizzy.

Zhang Haiyan touched his bed and said, "How am I supposed to sleep on this? I found that your bed was very comfortable as I lay on it just now. Can we sleep together? I'll only be staying here for a few days anyways."

His voice sounded beautiful and charming, as if he was the only orchid in an empty valley.

He Jianxi tilted his head and fainted on the bed.

Zhang Haiyan sat there stunned for a while. It was his first time seeing someone faint while he was still talking to them.

He sighed.

At this time, he heard the sound of the Nan'an's horn. He looked out from a crack in the boat's planking and saw the Nan'an's chimneys emitting smoke. It seemed like the ship was about to set sail.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Can also be called androgynous, hermaphrodite, or a whole slew of other politically and not politically correct terms. Here's more [info](#)

*Damn it.* Zhang Haiyan knocked on the boat planks. There were police officers outside, so he couldn't leave yet. And it was still bright out, so he couldn't get into the water again, either.

In any case, he'd have to wait until evening to find a way. Moreover, it was impossible for the barge to keep up with the iron ship's speed, even if he hijacked it to chase after the Nan'an.

He didn't know if Zhang Ruipu's men had seen him diving into the water just now. If they did, he was worried that Haixia would be in danger.

He closed his eyes and began to recall the old sea map from the conference room that contained information on the various sea routes. His mind raced through it quickly and it only took him a short amount of time to find that he still had one more chance.

If the Nan'an departed now, it would go to the deep-water port in Singapore and then turn back.

The route to San Francisco and the route to Xiamen were headed in the same direction. Brother Long had told him that the Baoen would set off at dusk, so based on his calculations, they would enter the open sea earlier than the Nan'an.

As long as he dove into the area where the coastal water met the open sea, he could float on the Nan'an's route. If he was lucky, the Nan'an would arrive an hour after that. Although it was impossible to estimate the distance between the two ships accurately at that point, it wouldn't be more than four kilometers.

In addition, it might happen tomorrow at midnight when the surrounding sea was dark and the lights on the Na'an would be bright. He could swim toward it.

The iron ship moved very fast, so he had only one chance to swim right in front of it and wait for it to come. The Nan'an had very steep sides, so he'd

have to find a way to climb up. All of this could only be done if there weren't any accidents.

Zhang Haiyan really regretted his reckless behavior and swore secretly that if the gods had mercy on him this time, he would be extra cautious in the future.

When He Jianxi woke up again at dusk, Zhang Haiyan was no longer across from him. There were various sounds outside that were noisy, but they were different from before. Moreover, the ship was shaking badly. He immediately checked his waistband and felt relieved when he found that the money was still there.

He left the small cabin and understood why the sounds had changed. It was because they had already set off. The voices on the shore were no longer audible, the sea breeze was stronger, and the half-sail had been lowered to full-sail.

The people on the ship had become quiet as they tried to adapt to their new life at sea. Whether it was comfortable or not, this broken ship would be their home for the next few months.

The sea at dusk was very beautiful. The waves were neither big nor small, and the ship looked strangely beautiful under the soft light.

*Where is that intersex person? Was it just a dream? No. My silver coins are still gone.*

He Jianxi was captivated by the dusk and the setting sun in the distance. At this moment, he suddenly didn't want to think about anything else. *I'll just appreciate the beautiful scenery first, even though I know I'll face this same scene every day for the next few months.*

As he was thinking this, he suddenly heard a clacking sound coming from off to the side. He turned and saw the intersex person playing mahjong with a few passengers.

*Fuck, it wasn't a dream after all.*

Zhang Haiyan had just won. He flipped the tiles and waited for the passengers to give him the money. There were a lot of silver coins sitting in front of him, and the sailors were all watching him very closely.

He Jianxi walked over. Once Zhang Haiyan saw him, he counted out a pile of silver coins and handed them to him. "Take them. I've returned the money to you." With that said, he counted out another pile of silver coins for Brother Long. "Brother Long, here. Give them to your brothers."

Brother Long had obviously been rewarded more than once, for he took them and said, "How generous of you!"

Zhang Haiyan put a cigarette between his lips. "My cousin isn't sophisticated, so he'll definitely bring some trouble to Brother Long. Please take care of him."

Brother Long immediately took out a match and lit the cigarette for Zhang Haiyan. "Don't worry, Brother Yan, I didn't know you were such a great man before. If I had known you were Mr. Ruipu's apprentice, I wouldn't have been so presumptuous."

"Remember to keep the things that I've written. When my cousin arrives in San Francisco, you can take the slip and go to Mr. Zhang Ruipu to get the money. It's a simple errand. Don't mess it up."

Brother Long nodded. His behavior was so flattering that it was almost sickening.

He Jianxi was puzzled as he looked at the silver coins. "You won these. I want my own money back."

"You and your money are already that familiar with each other? Do you have feelings for it?" Zhang Haiyan laughed. "Brother Long. Look at this kid. He's Mr. Zhang Ruipu's accountant. He'll never do anything wrong. He's a piece of work, isn't he?"

“Yes, he is. He’s a piece of work.”

Zhang Haiyan handed the silver coins to Brother Long and asked him to pass them to He Jianxi, who finally accepted them. He immediately gripped the coins tightly before he turned around to leave.

Zhang Haiyan won again this time.

The passenger on the side was covered in a cold sweat and going crazy. He glanced at the other passengers. A middle-aged woman came up to pull him away. “Stop it, old man. You’ll lose everything if you keep going.”

The passenger shook the woman off. “Go away. I’m losing because you can’t fucking stop talking.” With that said, he took out another silver coin and looked at Zhang Haiyan.

He Jianxi felt like something was wrong. He raised his hands and sniffed them, and found the faint smell of turmeric. He turned around, looked at Zhang Haiyan’s hands, and instantly became furious when realized what was going on.

When he went back again and saw that Zhang Haiyan had a set of good tiles in his hands, he immediately asked him, “You’re cheating?”

Zhang Haiyan was stunned. He Jianxi grabbed his hands and smelled them. *That’s right. It’s the smell of turmeric.*

“He has turmeric,” he said to everyone. “He’s cheating by marking these tiles with it. Whose money here isn’t hard-earned? If you cheat and steal their money like this, they’ll die. You’re treating these people improperly. Are you not afraid of the plague god coming after you?!”

Everyone looked at Zhang Haiyan, who was dumbfounded in the face of He Jianxi’s accusations. But before he got the chance to answer, the passenger on the side grabbed Zhang Haiyan’s collar and cried, “You’re cheating?!”

Zhang Haiyan was knocked over by a punch. He Jianxi also fell since Zhang Haiyan bumped into him. Then he saw the other three mahjong players get up and surround Zhang Haiyan.

Brother Long immediately came to help Zhang Haiyan up, but the other passengers gathered around to watch the scene. The sailors and the passengers were suddenly divided into two factions.

“You sailors are working with this liar to cheat and steal our money while we’re on the boat. You better give us an explanation today, and return our money to us!” The leading gambler yelled.

The other people on the boat had been bullied by the sailors before and were already very angry, so they immediately agreed.

He Jianxi was overjoyed as he saw everyone unite. He stood up and said, “They also rob and kill people. We’re passengers who have paid for our tickets. We want our rights!”

Everyone shouted.

There were more guests on the ship, which meant more people surrounded the sailors.

The sailor immediately panicked and looked at Zhang Haiyan, “Brother Yan, you’re in the wrong because you cheated.”

“I didn’t cheat.” Zhang Haiyan said with a smile, “The three of them are the ones who used turmeric. My hands just happened to touch it. Cousin, if you don’t believe me, you can sniff them and see who has the strongest smell of turmeric on them. Is it me, or them? They’re professional scammers who have scammed enough money in Malacca. Now they’re ready to go to San Francisco and cheat more people. They’re clever and have sufficient capital. If you keep them on board, you’ll all be unlucky.”

While he was speaking, He Jianxi had found that something was off. Since the two factions had separated, he clearly smelled the strong scent of turmeric on his side.

He moved his nose and was just about to say something when the passenger punched He Jianxi's nose and knocked him to the ground. "How can you believe his nonsense? Don't be polite to them. From now on, we're the bosses of this boat. There are more of us! Look, who has most of our money? Do we look like liars?"

Everyone looked at Zhang Haiyan. To be honest, he was the one who looked the most like a liar.

One of the passengers who was there to watch the show said, "This person has a compartment to live in, while we all have to sleep on a wide bed together. He's young and rich enough to live in a compartment. He must have swindled the money." Everyone started clamoring all at once.

The leader of the passengers sneered, looked at Zhang Haiyan, and then shouted, "That's right. It's all dirty money. You must still have a lot of money with you!"

Brother Long saw that the situation wasn't good and immediately pushed Zhang Haiyan out. "Don't act rashly. Solve your own grievances by yourselves. Don't disturb the boatswain. Otherwise, no one will get to San Francisco."

"Brother Long, you have no loyalty." Zhang Haiyan took a big puff of his cigarette and looked at the crowd. He was surrounded by a lot of people, but they all stayed on the sidelines, unwilling to attack first. They were professional scammers, after all. They weren't good at inciting others, so they didn't know how to end it.

There was a stalemate for a while, before the woman from earlier suddenly said, "You wicked person, let the plague god of the sea take care of you."

It was as if the leading passenger had a sudden epiphany, and he immediately agreed. "Yes. We'll take the money back and throw him into the sea. The plague god of the sea will take him. There are blades in the plague god's mouth. Let him cut off your lying, stinky mouth!"

*What a weak bastard! I deal with these kinds of people all day long, so of course I'll get rusty,* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

When the leading passenger saw that no one was willing to make a move, he winked at the other two mahjong players. The three people pulled out daggers and moved to surround Zhang Haiyan on all three sides.

The first one rushed behind Zhang Haiyan, who dodged slightly and smashed the man's nose in with his elbow. As the person went flying, Zhang Haiyan swiftly moved to face the second one, patted his head directly, and knocked him to the ground.

He moved so fast that no one could see him clearly. By the time the leading passenger showed up in front of him, Zhang Haiyan had already squeezed his neck, lifted him up, and kissed him.

Everyone was extremely shocked. The passenger was kissed to the point that his hands were flailing, but he couldn't break free.

When Zhang Haiyan finally let go of him, the person dropped to the ground, covered his throat, and started heaving.

The woman rushed towards him, "You bastard! You've harassed my man!"

The leading passenger pushed the woman away, grabbed his neck, and started vomiting. He spat out copious amounts of blood, along with two or three blades. When the blades fell onto the deck, all those gathered took a step back.

"Didn't you want to see the plague god?" Zhang Haiyan turned his back to the setting sun, put his hands in his pockets, and opened his mouth. The blades in his mouth reflected the light. "It's been a long time, everyone."



*Alas, Zhang Haixia is not by my side. I'm being a bit reckless, but it feels so good. Being reckless truly makes people happy, after all.* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself.

As He Jianxi dropped to the ground, his last thought was: the hero he admired, the plague god of the sea, the hero who protected the Chinese on this sea route, was an intersex person.

## Chapter 19 – A Man With A Clear Conscience

When He Jianxi woke up for the third time, it was already dark out and he was in a cabin in the ship's hold. Instead of the previous compartment, he found that he was in a large cabin.

He and Zhang Haiyan looked at each other. There were medical herbs on his nose, which smelled very pungent. He Jianxi wanted to peel them off.

As soon as he sat up, he saw that all the crew and sailors were on the other side of the cabin. They were squeezed into a corner and watching the two of them.

It was such a big cabin, but the room was divided into two sides. Two people were on one side, while everyone else was on the other side.

“What...what's going on?” He Jianxi asked. Zhan Haiyan looked at the crowd that was keeping far away from them and said, “You've been in a coma for a day. Isn't this the treatment that the plague god should have?”

“Are you really the plague god of the sea?” He Jianxi asked. He touched his nose and hissed in pain.

“Your nose is precious, so protect it if you can. You could even smell the subtle scent of turmeric that those scammers worked really hard on.” As Zhang Haiyan spoke, he threw He Jianxi a package. He Jianxi found out that it was his own luggage.

“Check your things. I've already packed everything for you except the bedding. Is there anything missing?”

He Jianxi flipped through his luggage. His things were very simple. Except for the necessities, there wasn't anything extraneous, so he could see everything clearly at a glance. “Why did you pack my luggage?”

“Because we're leaving.” Zhang Haiyan looked at the distant crowd. “Do you think we can still stay on this boat?”

“What do you mean, ‘we’?” He Jianxi was confused and thought to himself, *if someone has to leave, shouldn’t you be the only one who can’t stay on this boat any longer?*

“I’m the plague god of the sea, and you’re the plague god’s cousin. Do you know how many people will come after you? You’ll be arrested when you reach shore. They’ll dig out your little friend and force you to tell them where I am,” Zhang Haiyan said.

“But I’m not your cousin.”

“Do you think others will believe it?” Zhang Haiyan sat down and looked at the dark sea outside.

“You’re a hero who protects ordinary passengers. Why are they hiding from you? Why are they afraid of you?” He Jianxi was a little surprised.

Zhang Haiyan turned around and looked at the people on the opposite side without a care. “A hero? I’m not a hero. I kill those who feel guilty. It’s inevitable that ordinary people will feel guilty.” Zhang Haiyan looked at He Jianxi with interest. “Are you not afraid of me? Do you have a clear conscience?”

“My conscience is clear.” He Jianxi felt as if the wound hurt more and more, but he still tried to endure it.

“Those who have a clear conscience are either extremely kind, extremely evil, or extremely stupid. Which kind are you?”

“None of those.” He Jianxi said. “Is it so difficult not to do bad things?”

Zhang Haiyan pointed to the people on the opposite side, who all flinched back. “You ask them.”

He Jianxi certainly wasn’t stupid enough to go and ask them, but he didn’t understand why Zhang Haiyan said they were leaving. This was the place

where the outer sea met the coastal waters. The blue sea was endless, and there wasn't even a reef. Where could they possibly go?

Zhang Haiyan got closer to He Jianxi and asked, "Let me ask you a question. Have you been so upright since you were young? How have you lived until now?"

"I'm an accountant," He Jianxi said. "An accountant should always be persistent. My job requires me to be honest. If you encounter something that needs to be negotiated, there will naturally be other people to take care of it. I think I can survive because accounting jobs have been around since ancient times."

"Chivalry." Zhang Haiyan was somewhat surprised. Some white people cared about this, but no one in Malacca did. But there were a lot of British people in Malacca, and those British people might like this kid's attitude. But when he arrived in San Francisco, Zhang Haiyan figured he'd probably only be able to work on building railways.

He Jianxi wouldn't do well on this boat, either.

Zhang Haiyan reached a decision. He could have left He Jianxi here and gone off by himself since Zhang Haiqi had also taught them how to be heartless. He had seen several stubborn people over the years who weren't worthy of sympathy, but for some reason, he felt that He Jianxi was different.

It was difficult to describe what it was. If Zhang Haiyan was forced to describe it, he could only say that He Jianxi was very lucky. But why was that the case? After He Jianxi got on the boat, he did countless things that were considered taboo while being out and about, but he still came out unscathed. Moreover, he had always had this kind of attitude but was still alive even after all these years. Did this mean that he was an extremely lucky person?

Zhang Haiyan needed as much good luck as he could get right now. Moreover, he didn't want his mistakes to affect innocent people's lives.

Zhang Haiyan was fine with sacrificing others for profit, but he couldn't accept that others were paying for his mistakes.

He looked at his watch and found that it was almost time. Zhang Haiyan did a few stretches before saying to the people on the opposite side, "Good times always pass so fast. I'll remember your faces, and come back at any time. I'll know if you dare say a single bad word about me. Every bad thing that you do will be relayed to me. Tell others what you've seen. Everyone has to tell ten of their friends about it. Otherwise, you'll see me every time."

With that said, he handed He Jianxi his luggage. He Jianxi still didn't react, so Zhang Haiyan grabbed him and threw him over the side of the boat. As He Jianxi fell directly into the sea, everyone on board screamed.

Zhang Haiyan stood on the side of the boat, flipped over backwards, and jumped into the sea.

When He Jianxi popped his head out of the water, he saw Zhang Haiyan falling down as well. "What are you doing?!" He scolded. "Why do you, the plague god, always have to do unexpected things? We're going to drown!"

Zhang Haiyan floated along the waves and looked into the distance. There was a small spot of light on the distant sea. It was the Nan'an. This was exactly what he had calculated.

"We're not going to drown."

"I'm going to San Francisco! I don't want to die here!"

"You aren't going to die here."

Zhang Haiyan threw out a rope, and He Jianxi grabbed it. "My bedding!"

Zhang Haiyan pulled the rope and started swimming towards that spot of light, thinking to himself, *goodbye, door panel bed. Spring bed, here I come.*

## Chapter 20 – Changing Ships

For He Jianxi, the four hours in the sea were like hell. The sea was cold at night, and although it wasn't the kind of bitter cold that could take people's lives, his feet were still spasming.

But it was as if this plague god could breathe underwater. When he couldn't swim anymore, Zhang Haiyan would swim with one hand and pull him forward with the other without decreasing his speed at all. When he was having cramps, Zhang Haiyan would hold his chin above the water so that he could take a break.

Even so, four hours was still too long. He Jianxi's consciousness immediately became blurred and he couldn't remember how he got on the Nan'an. He only remembered that a huge palace was sailing towards them on the sea. It was so huge, and the lights were so beautiful that it was just like a fairyland. He even thought that he was dead and had sunk into the Crystal Palace.<sup>(1)</sup>

After that, his back met a solid deck. This was the first time he had felt at ease lying against a hard surface. And the most amazing thing was that the deck was still warm.

Since the water was too cold, even the deck felt warm.

It was only when Zhang Haiyan dragged him to a corner and made him drink from a finger-sized bottle of spirits that He Jianxi slowly recovered.

His whole body was weak, and it felt as if all of his bones had been removed. Even his muscles hurt like they had been pricked with needles.

"Where are we?" He asked weakly.

"We're on the Nan'an. It's a steamship heading to Xiamen."

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<sup>(1)</sup> A cast iron and plate glass structure, originally built in Hyde Park, London, to house the Great Exhibition of 1851. More info [here](#)

“Why Xiamen? I’m going to San Francisco. Big Brother, what are you doing exactly?”

“I’m saving your life.”

Zhang Haiyan felt that this kid was truly lucky. Such a difficult plan had succeeded so smoothly.

The ship was very quiet. The Nan’an wasn’t a warship, so no one was patrolling on deck. Zhang Haiyan was extremely tired and also drank a bottle of spirits as he began to observe their surroundings.

He Jianxi slowly came back to his senses and suddenly understood what Zhang Haiyan said. He grabbed Zhang Haiyan, “You bastard. I’m going to San Francisco. I don’t want to go to Xiamen as a stowaway. My cousin is still waiting for me.”

Zhang Haiyan covered his mouth. “Shut up, or you can swim back.”

He Jianxi became enraged. “I’m going to report you. I’m going to report you!”

Zhang Haiyan took out his ferry ticket and waved it. “Don’t be silly. *You* are a stowaway on this ship. I’m a valued guest here. You can only report yourself.”

He Jianxi looked at the ticket, clutched his heart, and almost had a heart attack.

As he was feeling utterly aggrieved, Zhang Haiyan patted him. “Don’t worry. No one believes that anyone can sneak aboard a ship in this area. There aren’t any bad sailors or crooks on this ship, so don’t be afraid. After arriving in Xiamen, I’ll let you go to San Francisco. You’re just taking a detour. That’s it. Let’s go back to my room, and I’ll explain it to you in detail. But behave.” With that said, he helped He Jianxi up, recalled the location of the first-class cabin, and then moved forward.

He Jianxi had no physical strength to resist, and could only submit. As he walked, he asked, "Who are you exactly?"

They had only taken two steps when they saw more than a dozen corpses piled up further behind their hiding place. They were all crew members whose throats had been pierced.

The two of them immediately retreated, and He Jianxi looked at Zhang Haiyan, "Didn't you say that there aren't any bad sailors or crooks? What's going on?"

Zhang Haiyan was speechless. As he was thinking, he suddenly heard someone come up on the deck.

A girl's voice said, "Dump all the bodies into the sea. That woman is very shrewd. We mustn't let her become suspicious."

The two people shrank back and hid in the shadows. Zhang Haiyan saw two girls dragging a new corpse towards them.



## Chapter 21 – A Little

The two girls were both quite young. They walked over calmly, dragging the corpse as if they had done it several times before.

Zhang Haiyan and He Jianxi were right on the path where they would dump the corpse, so they had to keep retreating. The girls were approaching quickly, but the corpses lying on the ground made it difficult for the two men to retreat any further. They ended up having to lie down among the piled-up bodies.

He Jianxi's face wound up pressed directly against a cold corpse. He was so frightened that he wanted to get up instantly, but Zhang Haiyan held him down.

It was only after the body was discarded that the girls started talking again, but the sea breeze made it difficult for Zhang Haiyan to hear anything clearly. When the breeze blew, the headlights on the ship's mast moved, and the lights flashed across the area.

Zhang Haiyan saw that the two girls were very similar in shape, and they were wearing tight-fitting shirts and short tops. Their figures and arms were amazingly good and looked very delicate and slender. They had shoulder-length hair and were wearing masks on their faces.

He recognized the masks. When he worked as the plague god of the sea, he used to wear this kind of mask. It only exposed the mouth, so the people on board remembered that the plague god had blades in his mouth whenever they thought of him.

The dragon princess's face<sup>(1)</sup> was painted on the mask in many different patterns. There were a lot of stalls selling them during the coastal worship rituals, and he had bought a lot of them.

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<sup>(1)</sup> The dragon princess is the dragon king's daughter. The dragon king is a Chinese water and weather god. People will worship them for good luck if they go out on ships.

One of the girls started to search the bodies, taking out the identification documents and money before putting them in her pocket.

The lights turned again and illuminated the scene for a brief moment.

Zhang Haiyan's position allowed him to take a peek. The woman who was squatting down had longer hair that was blowing in the sea breeze. That, coupled with her mask, made her look very beautiful.

At this distance, Zhang Haiyan could directly spit out his blades and pierce through that face that might be good-looking. After that, he could raise his head, and the other girl wouldn't even be able to make it further than three meters.

But for some reason, he felt that the girl's standing posture was a bit familiar.

He didn't do anything.

The two girls didn't stay. After putting something beside the corpses, they turned around and walked away.

Zhang Haiyan and He Jianxi sat up. He Jianxi crawled out of the pile of corpses, leaned over the side of the ship, and vomited into the sea. The smell of blood and dead bodies made him feel extremely disgusted. Zhang Haiyan, on the other hand, stood among the pile of corpses feeling awfully puzzled.

"What's going on with this ship?" He Jianxi asked him.

Zhang Haiyan inspected the wounds on the corpses and found that they all had small, but very deep wounds on their necks. The wounds almost penetrated all the way through their necks and hit their brainstems.

He felt that the wounds looked familiar. He had all sorts of questions in his heart, but he couldn't remember what kinds of weapons would cause these kinds of wounds. He just thought that they looked very familiar.

“They might be pirates. These girls are so ruthless but handle things so neatly. I can tell that they’re trained at first glance,” Zhang Haiyan lied.

Unlike pirates in the Caribbean, pirates in the South Sea often didn’t have ships. They would sneak onto merchant ships and pretend to be performers or merchants before hijacking the ships and demanding a ransom from the owners.

Generally, if the communication between the pirates and owners went well, the pirates wouldn’t harm the passengers’ lives. But they would definitely kill all the able-bodied guards without exception. It was very similar to what they had seen just now.

Piracy in this region was a hereditary lifestyle. There were children killing people with knives, so it wasn’t surprising that young girls were doing it as well.

But these two girls didn’t look like pirates at all. Moreover, the Qing dynasty and the warlords carried out several attacks more than a dozen years ago that almost defeated all the pirates in the South Sea. It didn’t make any sense that they would suddenly appear again, and on the Nan’an, no less.

“Pirates?” He Jianxi fell down, wiped his mouth, and said weakly, “Then we have to inform the people on board.”

“Wait a minute. They’ve killed so many people but didn’t throw them into the sea. There must be other reasons.” Zhang Haiyan looked at where they had gone, which was the inner cabin of the ship.

The VIP guests stayed in the buildings on the deck of the ship, while the inner cabins were filled with the workers and lower-class guests. The two young girls had walked down there.

The way one of the girls walked was giving Zhang Haiyan a sense of déjà vu. Where had he seen it before?

## Chapter 22 – The Clothes Don't Fit

Zhang Haiyan looked at the freshly discarded corpse and found that it was still warm. It appeared the person had just recently been killed.

Those girls were very professional.

But there was one thing that immediately caught Zhang Haiyan's attention—the corpse's clothes didn't fit.

Zhang Haiyan pulled the corpse's sleeves and found that the clothes definitely didn't belong to the person. They had been put on forcibly.

But why do this? Were they treating this corpse like a doll?

As Zhang Haiyan examined the other bodies and found that they all had the same problem, he suddenly realized that something wasn't right.

"These people aren't part of the crew," he said to himself.

He Jianxi was still vomiting, so he didn't hear a word Zhang Haiyan said.

*These are passengers, not crew members.* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. *For some reason, the killers put the crew members' clothes on them after they were killed, and then left them here.*

*What exactly is going on?*

Zhang Haiyan listened carefully to the sounds of music and voices coming from inside the ship. Everything seemed completely normal, and there were bright lights everywhere. But there were so many corpses piled up before his very eyes. After thinking about it, he suddenly understood why they didn't throw the corpses into the sea.

The ship was still sailing along the ocean current, so everything would be washed back to the port's beach. If the corpses were thrown into the sea

now and someone discovered that they were from the Nan'an, they might send a telegram to the ship, which would alert everyone on board.

It was a big deal to be killing so many passengers on the ship. And they even dared dump the corpses directly on the deck, which indicated that they were very confident no one would discover them in a short amount of time.

*Did they rob the first-class passengers one by one? Or...* As he was thinking this, two more people dragged another corpse over. But this time, it wasn't those two girls.

Zhang Haiyan once again dragged He Jianxi back to the pile of corpses and hid.

The two men put the corpse down and immediately headed back. One of them stepped in He Jianxi's vomit, but it was so dark on the deck that he didn't realize he had stepped in something.

When Zhang Haiyan stood up again, He Jianxi also got up and started vomiting again. This time, however, there was nothing but bile coming out of his mouth.

Zhang Haiyan thought it over for a while and decided that no matter what their reason was, he would destroy their plan first. He immediately picked up a corpse and threw it into the sea.

He Jianxi was shocked when he saw Zhang Haiyan helping those people destroy the evidence. He wondered whether Zhang Haiyan was doing it for the virtue of being a fellow killer, but he had become numb to Zhang Haiyan's strange behaviors, so he didn't bother questioning him.

After dumping the corpses, Zhang Haiyan pulled He Jianxi onto his back and followed the vomit footprints. He was hungry, cold, sleepy, and tired, but there was no other way to do it. Even if he was allowed to investigate freely after tonight, he wouldn't know who transported the corpses.

Moreover, he was full of curiosity. *What the hell's going on? Is this boat really so lively?* He wanted to know now.

The following story requires you to have a very thorough understanding of the ship's structure. It's difficult to explain the structure here, so you'll have to use your imagination.

This ship was smaller than the Titanic and had a building on the deck with a large chimney above it. This building was where the high-class guest rooms, restaurants, and ballrooms were located.

The best guest rooms were placed on both sides, where they had balconies and views of the sea. Swimming pools and restaurants were located below the first-class cabin's deck. In other words, the upper and lower floors of the middle section of the ship all belonged to the area of the first-class cabin.

The middle section of the ship had passages and cargo holds exclusive to those in the first-class cabin, meaning that the first-class cabin wasn't at the bow of the ship.

What kind of place was the bow of the ship? It was an open activity area for the third-class cabin, so there wasn't a direct passage between it and the first-class cabin area.

Of course, you could climb over the bow's wall and get to the first class-cabin area that way, but that has nothing to do with the structure of the ship.

Although the bow was the third-class open platform, it was now full of goods. In other words, the Nan'an used the third-class open platform to transport overloaded cargo.

Zhang Haiyan and He Jianxi were currently in this open area full of goods.

The people who had dragged the corpses over had gone down a nearby ladder, which was a vertical ladder that could reach the bottom of the ship.

A ladder had been placed on both sides of the deck, and people could use them to enter the space below the deck. That was where the true colors of the ship really showed.

The second-class cabin had four people to a room, while the third-class cabin had a variety of wide beds, boiler rooms, and cargo holds. All of these places were located below the deck.

You can understand how much filth needs to be hidden in order to maintain the luxurious appearance on deck.

The first two floors next to the ladder were the third-class cabin and crew members' quarters, but the doors leading to the corridor were locked. This meant that people couldn't reach the third-class cabin by using the ladder, and those in the third-class cabin couldn't use this ladder, either.

The lower floors were made up of two levels of cargo holds, while the bottom was the fire-fighting passage and pipeline level.

Zhang Haiyan followed the wet and smelly footprints to one of the cargo holds. There weren't any lights on in the hold, so it was pitch black. Before going in, Zhang Haiyan understood what was going on.

The third-class people couldn't use the open deck at the bow of the ship because it was full of goods. As a result, the door next to the ladder that led to the open deck was locked. In this way, no one except for the crew could enter the cargo area (unless there was someone from the first-class cabin who jumped off the building and fell to their death on the bow's deck).

This area was closed off. As he snuck into the pitch-black cargo hold, he heard someone say, "The bodies have been displayed. The fake wounds and clothes have all been set up. As soon as day breaks, the people on the observation deck will see the bodies and alert the ship and that woman about it. That woman will definitely examine the bodies. Our people have taken pills that can fake their deaths, so they won't wake up before they enter the morgue. But once they're moved, the devices in their stomachs will be activated, and the antidote will slowly be released. They'll all wake

up after an hour. As long as the woman enters the morgue by then, it will be her death.”

Zhang Haiyan thought for a while and felt that something was wrong. After thinking about it again, he suddenly showed a horrified expression.

Those people weren't corpses. They were killers who faked their own deaths in order to kill some woman.

*No. Oh, no. All, all of them were thrown into the sea!*



## Chapter 23 – Three People, One Bathtub

Not only had the ship sailed from the area where the outer sea met the coastal waters, but its hold was almost completely enclosed. No one would have thought that someone would climb onto the ship from the sea.

Zhang Haiyan also never would've thought that those corpses turned out to be fake. Moreover, they were all killers who had taken pills to fake their deaths.

More than a dozen people had now become poor ghosts. They were martyrs who were willing to risk their lives. Zhang Haiyan guessed that they had probably drowned before it was time for them to wake up.

He sighed in his heart. Between that woman and this group of killers, he hadn't figured out which side was good and which was bad.

He had drowned more than a dozen people, so now it seemed like he'd have to choose to be on that woman's side. Otherwise, it would really be embarrassing.

But it was disgraceful for killers to pretend to be dead. Killing people should be simple and straightforward, after all. Their method right now was equivalent to performing a big show, which wasn't in line with the principle at all.

Nevertheless, they seemed to be quite professional, so there was only one possibility— it was too hard to kill this person using conventional methods.

Based on their descriptions, the woman they wanted to kill seemed to be giving them a lot of headaches, so much so that it was difficult for them to even see her face.

As the conversation in the ship's hold continued, Zhang Haiyan cautiously found a corner and squatted down. He planned to put He Jianxi down so

that he could keep eavesdropping but quickly discovered that He Jianxi was asleep.

He Jianxi's long eyelashes almost made him look like a woman as he lay there asleep. Zhang Haiyan thought that he had died from exhaustion so he quickly checked his pulse.

*He's not dead. He sighed inwardly. Mortals.*

He continued to eavesdrop and heard another person say, "How can you be sure that woman will examine the bodies herself? We've boarded the ship from various places and have been here for so long, but she hasn't taken a single step out of the room. Don't you think she's definitely aware that something is off?"

"Don't you know that's just how she is? Moreover, the American named Warner escorted her to the ship, and there's a team with submachine guns patrolling outside her room. She must have expected there would be risks and made considerable preparations. She doesn't leave the room because she's a cautious person. This Warner is probably her concubine. She's very good at seducing men, so there's no shortage of manpower around her." Zhang Haiyan heard the first person say.

"Now that you mention it, what's this Warner's background? You two, find a way to check him out."

A girl's voice answered, "Why do we need to know so much about them? Aren't things finished as long as we kill her? You've been after her for four years, and she's still unscathed. How many of you have showed up to kill her, and how many are still left? Don't you think she can predict all your moves? In my opinion, your method won't work. Those fake corpses outside will become real corpses sooner or later."

Zhang Haiyan rubbed his forehead and thought to himself, *girl, there's no such thing as "sooner or later". All of them are probably dead by now.*

The first voice was a little unhappy, “Little girl, if we hadn’t spread wudou disease in the South Sea, you wouldn’t have even seen Miss Dong’s shadow just now. You saying things like this makes you sound ungrateful. Our two families have agreed to benefit each other. Even if you want to say something bad, you should hold your tongue.”

Zhang Haiyan shook a little. What did he hear? Plague? The gods truly favored those who worked hard! Sure enough, these people had something to do with the plague.

He immediately tried to listen carefully, afraid that he would miss a word.

But it wasn’t meant to be.

Maybe it was because this girl had said something wrong, but they all suddenly stopped talking. The ensuing silence made the cargo hold seem extremely quiet, eerily so.

Zhang Haiyan held his breath, afraid that his breathing could be heard in the quiet environment. It was completely silent all around when suddenly, he heard a high-pitched snort come from behind him. “Hoo~ shoo. Hoo~ shoo.”

Zhang Haiyan looked back in surprise and saw He Jianxi’s mouth wide open, snoring.

*Fuck you!* Zhang Haiyan felt cold all over. He didn’t hear any whistles and suddenly felt puzzled. Then, he found that everyone had come to a tacit understanding and was moving to outflank them.

Zhang Haiyan couldn’t see clearly in the dark, so he put He Jianxi on his back and started running wildly towards the exit.

Seeing that he wasn’t far from it, he rushed out in an instant. At almost the exact same moment he jumped onto the ladder, he saw one of the masked girls appear out of the corner of his eye.

It was the girl with shorter hair. She had spikes in each hand and used them to pierce Zhang Haiyan right on the ass.

Zhang Haiyan immediately released his hold on He Jianxi, whose body landed directly on the girl's face. With her vision blocked by He Jianxi's ass, the spikes pierced the ladder, causing sparks to fly.

The girl felt embarrassed and immediately became furious. Zhang Haiyan grabbed He Jianxi's neck and pulled him back, but the girl started stabbing at whatever was in front of her. When the spikes pierced He Jianxi's pants, the girl immediately twisted them and hooked the pants directly.

Zhang Haiyan was up there pulling He Jianxi's neck while the girl was down there pulling his pants. He Jianxi's whole body was stretched straight as an arrow.

Desperate, Zhang Haiyan unfastened He Jianxi's belt, and the pants were immediately ripped off.

Zhang Haiyan saw that the belt was about to be pulled off along with the pants, so he immediately stepped forward, grabbed it, and hauled He Jianxi up.

As the girl fell over, Zhang Haiyan pulled the now pantless He Jianxi onto his back and leaped onto the deck as if he were flying.

Without looking back, he jumped directly onto the outer wall of the first-class cabin and climbed up level by level like a monkey.

There were balconies on both sides.

His room number was 345, which should have been on the third floor. *But where's the third floor? Screw it!*

Zhang Haiyan picked a random balcony that looked pleasing to the eye and then jumped to it directly.

The balcony lights were still on, so he rolled into the room. That was when he saw Steven coming out of the bathroom, naked and shaving his beard.

*What a coincidence!* Zhang Haiyan looked around. *It's Steven's room. No wonder the balcony looks so familiar.*

He had unexpectedly come back again.

The two men were stunned. Steven looked at the topless man carrying a pantless man standing in front of his naked body.

“It's you!”

Zhang Haiyan didn't give Steven a chance to yell and immediately threw He Jianxi at him. Although He Jianxi wasn't heavy, this throwing method still managed to knock Steven back into the bathtub.

Steven was very strong. Although he looked like a gentleman, he had a surprising amount of strength and was able to stand back up almost immediately.

Zhang Haiyan charged at him without warning and pressed him back into the bathtub. As all three of them fell into the tub, Zhang Haiyan headbutted Steven and knocked him out.

Everything happened so fast.

He Jianxi seemed to wake up a little at this time and saw that he and two other men were squeezed into a bathtub full of foam.

He didn't speak but looked as if he was on the verge of tears.

## Chapter 24 – Too Sleepy

He Jianxi thought that he had his own philosophy of survival. For so many years, he had a clear conscience. Although the world was full of unhappiness and unfairness, the little world in his heart had never been invaded or shaken. In addition, his greatest confidence was that he had never met any bad guys doing bad things that he didn't see coming.

As a result, this world couldn't scare him.

Unfortunately, this confidence was destroyed in a moment. Ever since he had met Zhang Haiyan, he had been unable to foresee any of this series of illogical incidents. Plus, the way things were developing kept getting more and more absurd. He didn't know what he would see the next time he opened his eyes.

His grievances and fear rushed at him like water breaking a dam, and he started to cry. He wasn't wailing, but crying in a low voice because he was so scared.

Zhang Haiyan was exhausted, so he lay in the bathtub and rested for a while. Then, he slowly stood up and turned on the hot water so the sound would mask He Jianxi's sobbing.

Zhang Haiyan stepped out of the bathtub, grabbed a clean towel, and wiped himself clean.

Steven's dinner had been placed on the side of the sofa, untouched. There was borscht soup and bread, which Zhang Haiyan used to dip into the soup. He took a few bites and thought for a while before drinking the rest of the soup. He left only two slices of bread for He Jianxi, but after thinking about it again, he ate another slice, leaving only one left.

Next, he dragged Steven out of the bathtub, tore off his bath towel, and used it to tie him to a chair. Then, he put a hand towel in Steven's mouth.

Ordinary people were capable of spitting out hand towels, but Zhang Haiyan was very experienced. He pressed the towel firmly to Steven's throat and tongue, and then tied a bath towel around his face so that he could only make a noise that sounded like a mosquito.

He Jianxi watched it all silently. He turned off the faucet when the water was about to overflow and then continued sitting there, staring off into space.

Zhang Haiyan walked over and threw Steven's pants at him before leaning against the wall and peeking out the window.

It was pitch black outside, and nothing could be seen. The group of killers definitely wouldn't dare go to the first-class cabin. In addition, they had probably discovered by now that the trap they had set up had been thrown into the sea, so things might be getting chaotic on their side.

Zhang Haiyan closed the window and turned off the light before tying the lamp cord to the window handle and putting a chair against the door.

He Jianxi had just put on the pants when he saw a bath towel lying nearby. He silently took off his shirt, wrung out the water, and then set it aside. After he had dried his body with the towel, Zhang Haiyan came up and pinched his neck, causing him to pass out in an instant. Zhang Haiyan caught him and then threw him onto the bed.

He wrapped himself in a bathrobe and also lay down. *Spring bed! Oh my god!*

Zhang Haiyan listened to the sound of the waves and thought that the previous day was like a dream. This moment was what the original plan should have been like.

*Zhang Haixia. Ah, Zhang Haixia. It isn't easy trying to save you.*

He slowly fell asleep. In his dream, he returned to his childhood when he was in Xiamen. There he had learned the basics of making masks and putting on disguises, which was essentially drawing.

“Zhang Hailou, what is this?”

“Godmother, this is a Chinese Huamei.<sup>(1)</sup> I drew this for you.”

“Why did you draw a Chinese Huamei?”

“Because it’s beautiful?”

“Zhang Haixia, what happened to your eyebrows?”

“Zhang Hailou did this.”

“Godmother, since I was drawing a Chinese Huamei, of course I had to paint the eyebrows. I painted his for practice.”

“Zhang Haixia, go and wash your eyebrows.”

“Ok,” Zhang Haixia said. As he turned around to wash his face, their godmother quickly drew a giant snake beside the Chinese Huamei.

Zhang Haiyan asked, “What’s this?”

“This is your true form.” His godmother said. “You have to overcome it.”

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<sup>(1)</sup> The Chinese hwamei or melodious laughingthrush is a passerine bird of eastern Asia. The name “hwamei” comes from the Chinese 画眉 (huà-méi) and means “painted eyebrow”, which refers to the distinctive marking around the bird’s eyes. Wiki link [here](#)



## Chapter 25 – The Moon Casts On The Waters A Reflection Of A Heavenly Mirage. In The Sky At Dawn, Clouds Gather To Build A Castle In The Air

The drawing that day was still fresh in Zhang Haiyan's memory. There was a giant snake beside the bird that was staring at it as if it wanted to swallow it whole.

His godmother had met many people, so she must've had a reason for saying those words to him. From what he could remember, his godmother had never been wrong about people. But she never explained in detail why she said things like that, and she often only gave a general statement. She said that it was because reasoning with others was pointless.

But the hidden meaning in that picture kept flashing in his mind throughout all stages of his life. The most profound moment was when he discovered that Zhang Haixia couldn't walk anymore.

*Is the Chinese Huamei Zhang Haixia?* He often wondered whether his godmother had foreseen that this day would come and knew that his personality would end up hurting the people around him.

Even if the person next to him was agile and had amazing skills, the slightest negligence would result in that person dying because of him.

If Zhang Haiyan had talked less nonsense with Zhang Haixia and acted more cautiously, the situation might not have been so tricky.

Zhang Haixia actually had a better understanding of what life was about. He would tell Zhang Haiyan that the things people had been through would grow seeds in their hearts. Zhang Haiyan's childhood was full of pain that ordinary people couldn't endure. His experiences were what made him do all those strange and illogical things when he grew up. In addition, the hell

on earth he saw not only gave him pain but also gave him various desires that tempted him in his heart.

It took Zhang Haiyan a long time to understand that he would need to face the snake in his heart eventually. It also took him a long time to realize that He Jianxi felt an incredible fear when he was lying beside him, as if he was lying in a snake cave.

A good night's sleep was very important to the both of them. After He Jianxi woke up, his whole body felt paralyzed and sore. When he breathed, he felt as if he could smell blood in his lungs. Fortunately, he was resilient and no longer felt frightened after he had calmed himself down.

Zhang Haiyan had long been up and was reading the newspaper by the window. The curtain had been drawn so that only a gap was revealed. The sun was rising above the sea outside, shining in on the foreigner that he had knocked out last night. The man hadn't woken up and even looked like he was dead.

He Jianxi felt relieved. It appeared he hadn't seen anything too absurd when he woke up this time.

He tried to remember everything that had happened. The bootleg business had been legalized, so he lost his job and planned to take the severance pay to go to San Francisco to find his cousin. He bought a ferry ticket, got on the Baoen, fell down on the deck, and then went to wash himself in the toilet.

*Well, I can't remember what happened after that. I really shouldn't have gone to the toilet.*

Zhang Haiyan heard He Jianxi's snores soften and knew that he was awake. When he put down the newspaper and looked at him, He Jianxi was stunned.

When Zhang Haiyan turned around, He Jianxi found that his face wasn't Zhang Haiyan's face, but the foreigner's.

He looked at Steven again and saw that he was still tied to the chair.

He Jianxi froze for a moment as he tried to figure out what was going on. He had a sudden thought: Zhang Haiyan was gone. There were two foreigners in the room, and they looked exactly the same.

Suddenly, He Jianxi couldn't tell which incident was more outrageous, waking up and discovering he was with two naked men in the bathtub, or waking up and finding that there were two foreigners who looked exactly the same.

But he was sure of one thing—he must never close his eyes. If he closed his eyes and opened them again, his worldview would collapse all over again.

“What’s your name?” The foreigner who was reading the newspaper on the sofa asked him in fluent Chinese. He had the same voice as the plague god from before.

*Ah, the general logic of things hasn't collapsed. The plague god is behind this.* He Jianxi breathed a sigh of relief.

*Can this plague god become anyone at will? That's fine. It's easier to take in than seeing twins.*

“My name is He Jianxi. The idea of my name comes from a line in a poem, ‘When can we trim wicks again by the west window and talk all night?’”<sup>(1)</sup> He Jianxi once again proved that he was a resilient man. He sat up and decided to accept everything so that things could get back on track.

Zhang Haiyan saw that He Jianxi kept looking at his face, so he explained, “This is magic. Don’t worry. My name is Zhang Hailou. You can call me Zhang Haiyan. The idea of my name also comes from a line in a poem, ‘The moon casts on the waters a reflection of a heavenly mirage; In the sky at dawn,

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<sup>(1)</sup> He Jianxi’s name comes from a poem in the Tang Dynasty. “He” means “when”. “Jian” means “trim”. “Xi” means “west”. The link to the English translation of the poem is [here](#)

clouds gather to build a castle in the air.’<sup>(2)</sup> Malaysians call me Haiyan.” Zhang Haiyan stood up. “We’ve met each other by chance. I believe you already know what I do. It definitely wasn’t my intention to bring you here, but I really had no choice. Now, if you want to get off the ship safely and go to San Francisco, I need your help.”

He Jianxi silently looked at Zhang Haiyan without answering. He figured Zhang Haiyan didn’t care whether he would agree or not. *He’s just saying those things for fun. If I don’t agree, he’ll throw me into the sea.*

Sure enough, Zhang Haiyan immediately started to give him a task. “First of all, what I need you to do is to keep an eye on this person. There’s a knife here. If he tries to escape, kill him from this position. Remember, you must stab him from this place. You have to insert the knife directly and reach this depth. I already made a mark. You can only penetrate the heart by reaching this depth, and he’ll die immediately.”

Steven’s eyelids moved.

As He Jianxi sat there shocked, Zhang Haiyan looked at him, “You have to remember one thing, if you don’t kill him, he’ll regain his freedom and kill you. I have to go somewhere else on this ship. Do you remember the pirates last night? We have to get rid of evil people in order to protect the innocent people, remember?” With that said, Zhang Haiyan slashed Steven’s calf with a knife, and Steven immediately opened his eyes in pain.

He started to struggle, but Zhang Haiyan ignored him and continued to speak to He Jianxi, “Also, he’s been awake for a long time. He’s just been pretending to be asleep. Remember to keep some distance from him.”

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<sup>(2)</sup> Zhang Hailou’s name also comes from a poem in the Tang Dynasty. His name is in the sentence ‘Clouds gather to build a castle in the air.’ The “castle in the air” in the poem is pronounced as “Hailou” in Chinese. It also means “mirage” in the poem. The link to the English translation of the poem is [here](#)

## Chapter 26 – Deduction

In the sky at dawn, clouds gathered to build a castle in the air. The castle referred to a mirage, and Hailou meant “mirage”.

Later on, Zhang Haiyan was very grateful for his salty nickname. Otherwise, his life may not be what he wanted if it was like a mirage.

Zhang Haiyan walked out the door. It was sunny outside the cabin and there were already children playing on the deck. He could see the sea from the corridor, and the sunlight reflecting off of it was so bright that it was impossible for people to look at it directly.

He could also see the deck from the corridor. If those “corpses” hadn’t been thrown into the water yesterday, they probably would have been discovered by the guests passing by in the corridor, and those people’s plan would have already begun.

There was nothing but some blood-like stains on the deck in front of him. They weren’t very noticeable from this height and looked more like rust.

He was in a good mood as he faced the sea breeze and sorted out his thoughts.

He had no confidence that He Jianxi could guard Steven properly. Steven was a shrewd man and He Jianxi definitely wasn’t on par with him. But he believed that He Jianxi could hold out for at least an hour. It wouldn’t be a big problem. Zhang Haiyan only needed an hour.

First and foremost, his top priority was that woman.

When he was eavesdropping yesterday, the other party had mentioned a causal relationship: if it hadn’t been for someone spreading wudou disease in the South Sea, Miss Dong wouldn’t have appeared.

In other words, the plague was merely a plot to lure this woman out?

It was estimated that thousands of people in the South Sea had died from the plague. If it was just to lure her out, then what was her background?

The second question was why could the plague be used to lure her out? Was she a doctor? Was she someone who wanted to see corpses? Or was she someone who loved plagues?

With regards to the third question, a man named Warner was protecting this woman after she got on the ship, which meant that she had foreseen that there would be killers when she came here. If so, could it be said that she knew there was something off about the plague and knew that it had been spread by people wanting to lure her out? Whatever the case, she still came anyways.

This was a majestic woman who was confident in the fact that others were willing to spread a plague and kill thousands of people in order to lure her out.

This Miss Dong from Xiamen clearly had a lot of power. Zhang Haiyan knew how much effort it took to find the origin of the plague and spread it, so based on this, Miss Dong shouldn't be an ordinary person. He had to meet her.

Of course, after Zhang Haiyan observed the terrain, he remembered what Zhang Haixia had said and didn't act rashly.

He wandered around the first-class cabin area. In the restaurant's waiting area, he saw a model of the Nan'an, along with the Nan'an's design drawing on the wall behind it.

He stopped to look at it carefully and discovered that the first- and second-class cabins shared a post office. On the second floor below the deck, there was a small room where guests could send telegrams through this post office.

The second- and third-class cabins shared a fire escape, which was at the bottom of the ship. It was designed this way because there was always

rainwater and seawater entering the ship. Part of it was directly discharged into the sea through the ship's sewer system, but some of it would slowly accumulate at the bottom of the ship, which could be used to fight fires.

He came to stand in front of room 345 on the third floor of the first-class cabin, which was his original room. But he hadn't claimed the key back then. He looked at his ticket, cleared his throat, and stopped a waiter who was passing by.

"My friend has been sleeping in my room since he got on the ship and hasn't gone back to his original room. He forgot to claim the key. This is his invitation. Can you give me the key? I'll pass it to him."

The waiter looked at the invitation. It was obvious that this was against the rules, but Steven apparently had a special status on the ship.

The waiter thought for a while, "According to the regulations, that person should come and pick up the key himself, but Miss Dong has said that we must satisfy all the needs of Mr. Warner's friends. I'll get the key for you."

"Thank you. I'm sorry for causing you trouble. I'll wait for you here." As soon as Zhang Haiyan nodded, the waiter trotted off and soon returned with the key.

Zhang Haiyan did the math. The key room was at the bow of the ship in the middle of the crew's quarters, which the waiter had to access using the ladder on deck. It had taken about ten minutes for the waiter to run over and come back.

If he was Miss Dong and knew that he had to find someone to protect him, he would definitely live on the fourth floor of the first-class cabin, which was the top floor of the ship.

Since the waiter took ten minutes to get to the key room, it may only take three minutes at most to travel from the third floor to the fourth floor.

The three floors could be reached easily, but those killers just couldn't make it through the last three minutes needed to reach the fourth floor?

Why?

He moved his feet in the direction of the fourth floor. Since he was now disguised as Steven, he shouldn't be stopped by any guards.

When he reached the fourth floor's stairway and didn't see any guards, he turned his head and looked around.

He immediately knew which room was Miss Dong's, because there were more than twenty American guards sitting at the door with submachine guns. They all had their eyes closed and were resting. He could tell at a glance that they had excellent skills.

When he walked over to the guards, someone immediately picked up their gun. "Steven, answer this question. Why did the white swan's father disappear after swimming in the Mississippi?"

Zhang Haiyan was taken aback for a moment, and the other party said, "You have to answer immediately. Otherwise, we'll have to shoot you." With that said, he pulled the gun's bolt back. "Three, two, one."



## Chapter 27 – Miss Dong

This kind of ciphering method was called the cutting path method, which was used in ancient military camps.

The lights in ancient barracks weren't very bright, and the soldiers were mostly dressed the same way. With so many people unfamiliar with each other, they would have to say the password whenever they met. There were many kinds of passwords, and they were different each time, which made it difficult for the enemy to launch a raid.

It was unlikely that foreigners would use the cutting path method, so that meant Miss Dong must have been the one who taught them how to do it.

Zhang Haiyan judged how far he could retreat as he looked at the opponents' submachine guns.

It was impossible for him to escape under such firepower no matter how good his physical skills were. And looking at the other people's behavior, he knew that they would shoot without hesitation if he couldn't answer the question.

It was a simple, but very effective defensive measure. This Miss Dong was truly a ruthless character. It was only the first round, but he had underestimated the enemy once again.

Zhang Haiyan only had a second, so he made the best decision under the current circumstances. He scratched his own tongue with the blades in his mouth, and then forcefully squeezed out the blood. He coughed and spit out both the blades and the blood.

He then staggered and fell to the ground, letting the blood flow out along the corners of his mouth as he acted like he was having a seizure.

The group of guards was taken aback. They looked at each other for a while before they realized what had happened and all stood up.

Everyone was shocked to see that his mouth was full of blades. “What is this technique?” All the guards pulled the bolts on their guns.

The leading guard said, “Notify Mr. Warner.” As his subordinates immediately moved to obey, he continued, “Shoot anyone who approaches us more than ten meters.”

Everyone began moving to their own defensive positions. The leading guard looked serious as he glanced down at Steven. A deputy next to him asked, “Should we call the ship’s doctor over? In this situation, Steven shouldn’t be able to save himself.”

The leading guard touched Zhang Haiyan’s neck and asked softly, “Did you swallow any blades?”

Zhang Haiyan nodded, trying to act like the pain from having his tongue cut and swallowing blades was sending him into shock. Like this, he hoped he could be sent to the infirmary so that he could find a chance to run away.

The guard thought for a while, sighed, and then said, “You can’t call the ship’s doctor. He’s bait. He was sent here after his tongue was cut. If we call a ship’s doctor to come here, their people will definitely be mixed in among them. If we send him over to the infirmary, those escorting him are likely to get ambushed on the way over.”

Zhang Haiyan was stunned for a moment, and said to himself, *big brother, what are you getting at? It’s completely wrong.*

But the others were immediately persuaded and placed their hands on Zhang Haiyan as if they were saying goodbye. The leading guard said to Zhang Haiyan, “Don’t worry, brother. God will bless you. I will personally send you to rest in peace later.”

“Wait—wait a minute, I—”

The guards ignored him and started to move while the so-called “notify Warner” person was knocking on the next door over.

The door opened, and more Americans walked out carrying carbines. Those Americans knocked on more doors, and then the corridor was suddenly full of Americans.

Zhang Haiyan broke out in cold sweat and thought to himself, *I've made a fool of myself. No wonder those killers couldn't make it here. The guards didn't even try to assassinate people. The woman knew that someone was going to kill her, so she dug a trench here.*

He was picked up, sent to a room, and placed on the sofa. Zhang Haiyan peeked around and found that the room was full of old drawings. He wondered what the owner's job was.

He squeezed his tongue so hard that the blood kept flowing. Anyone who saw it would think he was dying. At this moment, he saw a fat white man coming out of the back room.

Even though Zhang Haiyan called him fat, he had seen a lot of people and knew that this wasn't puffiness. If anything, this person was very burly so his little bit of fat made him look very big.

The man had a long beard and was wearing what appeared to be made-to-order suspenders and a suit.

The leading guard lit a cigar for him and said, "Mr. Warner, he's a goner."

*Don't fucking jump to conclusions, dumbass.* Zhang Haiyan thought angrily.

Warner took the cigar with piercing eyes, sat opposite Zhang Haiyan, and then said, "Steven, do you know what you should do now? Tell me what happened."

"Help me." Zhang Haiyan pretended to be weak. "A man with blades in his mouth had godlike skills and attacked me."

Zhang Haiyan originally wanted to say, "He wants me to bring a message to Miss Dong. I'm not allowed to say anything until I get to see her in person."

But he thought about it and felt that it would be too dangerous if he took more risks in the current situation. If he died, Zhang Haixia wouldn't be able to survive, either.

*Get out of this situation first.*

He changed his mind and said, "He wants to negotiate with you guys. I can take you to the designated place. He said he'll find a way to keep me alive as long as I take you there."

"Where is it?"

"Mr. Warner, he said that I must abide by the agreement and take you there. I dare not disobey him." Zhang Haiyan stared at Warner's eyes.

Warner thought for a while and said to the leading guard, "Hudson, did Mr. Steven just say 'negotiate with you guys' in that sentence? Mr. Steven has worked with us for many years. Grammatically, he should've said 'negotiate with us' after all, right?"

Zhang Haiyan broke out in a cold sweat all over and tried to suppress his surprise. It wasn't that this foreigner was too smart, but that his way of thinking was really surprising.

Warner was looking for flaws in Zhang Haiyan's language, but there was something particular about the way he tried to find flaws. People who said things like this knew about human skin masks.

This foreigner knew that there were such things as human skin masks in the world and was wondering if he was really Steven.

"I'm just repeating what the other party said," Zhang Haiyan stalled.

Warner looked at Zhang Haiyan, touched his face suddenly, and then scolded, "Ridiculous. It's really ridiculous. I can't believe that I fell for that woman's nonsense. How could anyone in this world be able to change faces? That woman is really good at bewitching people."

Hudson said, "Do you think she's lying to scare us?"

"Asian people like to lie and act all mysterious," Warner said. "We represent the advanced party. Most of these silly things are all smokescreens. Now I only believe in the thing she's shown us since it validates the research I've conducted over many years. That building is located somewhere underground in Xiamen."

## Chapter 28 – The Building From Three Thousand Years Ago

Zhang Haiyan looked at Warner. The other party hadn't fallen for his trick at all. He thought that as long as he could leave here and reach a narrow area or place where the machine guns couldn't sweep, he could find a way to escape. But that would only work as long as his words could get him out of this situation.

But Warner didn't want to continue the conversation at all, and Zhang Haiyan couldn't rush him, either. As a result, he pretended he was going to pass out.

"What do we do now?" Hudson asked. "Since the other party wants to make a deal with us, do they also know how to enter that building?"

Warner nodded. "It's possible. When I was doing research on that building in China, I spread a lot of news. Maybe some of them recognized us."

"If we also reach an agreement with them, then it wouldn't matter which of the two parties wins because it would all work out for us, right?" Hudson asked.

Warner shook his head. "There's a hidden danger in being prepared for everything in advance. Miss Dong is alone. We have more than thirty people, and she's able to provide us with various firearms. We have eighteen submachine guns, but the other party has a large number of people. If we eventually get the same result from both parties, who do you think I'd like to work with under the circumstances?"

"But you said this woman is a monster. Instead of dealing with monsters, it seems better to work with normal people."

Warner touched his pistol. "Even monsters can't rule the world now."

Zhang Haiyan was lying on the sofa and didn't know if he should stop breathing at this time. *Are you two done talking?* He thought to himself.

Warner finally turned his gaze back to Zhang Haiyan. "If it weren't for her promise to take us to the building, her life and death wouldn't be our main priority. Now, in order for the contract to be executed, we still need to follow her plan and stay here. Tell the gunmen in the other cabins to walk in groups whenever possible." Warner looked at Zhang Haiyan. "Steven, if you don't want to tell us the details, then your journey should end here." With that said, he nodded to Hudson. "After he dies, let the woman take a closer look at him and see if it's a technique that group of people she's mentioned uses. Also, let him die more comfortably."

Hudson picked up a sofa cushion on one side and put it over Zhang Haiyan's nose. Zhang Haiyan raised his hand and touched Hudson's gun, but rethought it and put his hand back down once he heard Warner's words.

*You want to smother me, right?* Zhang Haiyan thought to himself. He was going to act like he was smothered to death, but he didn't see Hudson draw his pistol, put it against the cushion, and shoot.

The bullet hit his nose directly, and the huge impact caused the blood in his mouth to spray out.

"That building has three thousand years' worth of history. It's been mentioned in legends from China's Ming Dynasty. Three of them have interpreted its location, but we haven't found it yet. We're so close now, so such a little sacrifice is worthwhile."

Zhang Haiyan's ears buzzed, and then he was dragged off the sofa.