

# The First Order

## Chapter 3: A palace

Ren Xiaosu had already fallen asleep. After waiting out in the wilderness for such a long time, all he managed to catch was one sparrow. Although he spent a majority of the time lying on the ground and keeping still, anyone with experience would know that staying alert in such a position was actually very tiring.

Before sleeping, he instructed Yan Liuyuan again, "Stay away from those people if you see them. It can't be that they don't know how dangerous the Jing Mountains are. Most people would choose to avoid passing through there, yet they insist on taking that route. My instincts tell me that this isn't a simple matter."

"OK." Yan Liuyuan nodded obediently. "Got it."

As a matter of fact, Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan were quite the odd team. A few years ago, they did not know each other at all. Later on, Ren Xiaosu decided to protect the young Yan Liuyuan as he unintentionally discovered Yan Liuyuan's secret. On top of that, his headache had been troubling him for a very long time, so he needed someone to keep watch for him at night.

Back then, Ren Xiaosu told Yan Liuyuan in no uncertain terms that they were only a team because of mutual benefit. But over the years, it soon became unclear whether their partnership had any feelings involved or if it was still for mutual benefit.

Yan Liuyuan had always been a very clever person when outside. He only behaved like an obedient lamb in front of Ren Xiaosu.

Sometimes, Yan Liuyuan would say that he was only alive because Ren Xiaosu had risked his own life to save him. However, Ren Xiaosu had never acknowledged it.

At present, Ren Xiaosu only wanted to find out what kinds of changes his mind had gone through. He waited a very long time tonight as he wanted to see if this "sickness" that had been troubling him would recur. In the end, that chaotic "confusion" did not set in.

It seemed like the palace had always stayed hidden when he was in a confused state. But now, that black mist of confusion finally dispersed.

Ren Xiaosu wanted to see exactly what was inside the palace.

When Yan Liuyuan saw Ren Xiaosu lie down next to him, he silently picked up the bone knife and sat at the entrance of the shack where the curtain door was. As it was almost fall, it felt a little cold.

At this moment, the rain stopped.

Footsteps came from outside the shack's curtain door. The shoes that were stepping on the muddy road after the rain made a unique slippery sound.

Someone lifted a corner of the curtain door. However, before the visitor could lift the curtain door aside, Yan Liuyuan's bone knife was pressed against the person's neck.

It was a pretty face; a beautiful woman stood outside.

Yan Liuyuan frowned when he saw the woman. It was not a stranger. She lived nearby.

The woman smiled. "Liuyuan, you're still awake? Where is Xiaosu? I heard that he got back."

"He's already asleep, Big Sister Xiaoyu." Yan Liuyuan smiled. "If you have anything to say, just tell me."

Xiaoyu's face looked a little unnatural. "Did he get hurt when he went out this time?"

"His hand was nipped by a sparrow. But Big Sister Xiaoyu, you don't have to be so concerned about my brother, do you? After all, you're eight years older than him." After Ren Xiaosu had fallen asleep, Yan Liuyuan adopted a maturity beyond his years when dealing with outsiders. No matter whether he knew the person or whatever they might say, he didn't move the bone knife away from her neck.

Xiaoyu took out a cigarette and lighter from her bag that she carried around. It was a rolled cigarette that was only distributed at the coal mines, power plants, and other properties under the control of the stronghold.

A lot of the able-bodied laborers went there to work not only for the money and food, but also for the cigarettes. They would receive a cigarette for each day of work they put in.

As such, at night after work, a large group of people could be regularly seen gathering together and smoking. Ren Xiaosu once explained to Yan Liuyuan that the cigarettes were likely mixed with something highly addictive.

However, it was obvious that Xiaoyu did not get her cigarette from working at those places.

Xiaoyu lit the cigarette and took two puffs from it. She seemed to be thinking of something. "You cheeky imp, I consider you two my little brothers."

“Oh.” Yan Liuyuan suddenly asked, “Did you catch a cold?”

Xiaoyu was stunned. “Yes, does my voice sound a little hoarse?”

“No.” Yan Liuyuan shook his head and laughed. “I saw that the smoke was not coming out from one of your nostrils after you took a puff.”

Xiaoyu was speechless.

For some reason, Xiaoyu felt that Yan Liuyuan did not like her very much.

“Then I’ll head back first.” Xiaoyu said, “When your brother wakes up, tell him that I came over.”

“OK.” Yan Liuyuan smiled. “I’ll pass the message along.”

After Xiaoyu left, Ren Xiaosu suddenly spoke from behind Yan Liuyuan. “Don’t bully Big Sister Xiaoyu in the future. It’s not easy for her either.”

“Bro, she’s not decent.” Yan Liuyuan said, “Besides, she’s only sticking close to you because she knows you always succeed when hunting.”

“Who’s decent around here? Ren Xiaosu said calmly, “No decent person can survive in this world. Everyone’s hand is forced by their living conditions. We can only distance ourselves from her. Don’t make fun of her.”

A chaste woman who was too decent would not be able to survive in this town.

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while and said, “She didn’t even mention that she likes me. Besides, are you sure that she’s only getting close to me because I’m successful at hunting? And not because I’m handsome?”

“Bro, everyone has not washed their faces for months. Everyone here looks basically the same.” Yan Liuyuan was speechless as he looked at Ren Xiaosu. “Bro, didn’t you fall asleep? Why are you still awake?”

“I was just thinking,” Ren Xiaosu said as a brief explanation.

Ren Xiaosu was not asleep because he had been exploring the secrets of the palace in his mind.

In the circular palace, the walls were lined with old wooden cabinets, making it look like a huge showroom of sorts. However, he could not see what was on the display cabinets in the showroom as they were covered in black mist.

In the middle of the room, there was only one table with a brass typewriter on top of it. It was an obsolete typewriter that would make loud clacking sounds when typed on and hadn't existed for a very long time since The Cataclysm.

There were only 24 brass keys on this typewriter. Each of them was engraved with a character: fair, positive, honest, real, friendly, kind, rich, strong, etc.

It was full of positive energy, in a manner of speaking.

But it seemed that the typewriter was supplied with an unlimited amount of leather parchment and would move by itself without anyone typing on the brass keys. Currently on it were two small lines of words that had appeared during the afternoon: "Quest: Gift your catch to someone else. Quest complete. Awarded Basic Skill Duplication Scroll. You may use it to learn another person's skills."

He could not tell if he was imagining this or if there was some other explanation for it. According to legend, some people could create a memory palace and build a fantasy world based on the level of their spiritual will.

But Ren Xiaosu felt that his palace... looked a little different from the description of a memory palace.

Why would it get him to gift his catch to someone else? Did this typewriter want him to be a good person?

To be a good person in a world where ethics came at a premium?

No way in hell!

At this moment, his consciousness was standing in the center of the vast palace as he looked at the "display cabinets" around him. It looked like items were floating within the display cabinets, but they were hidden by the darkness. That black mist didn't allow Ren Xiaosu to see what was floating inside.

These display cabinets were connected to the dome of the palace, making it look like a huge museum. Ren Xiaosu walked up to one of the cabinets and tried touching the item floating in the black mist. But no matter how hard he tried, he could not penetrate the resistance of the black mist.

It was a power that he could not pry into right now.

If Ren Xiaosu wanted to know whether the palace was real, he would have to use actions to prove its existence.