

Chapter 5511

When Charlie and Maria landed at Interlocken Airport, a sleek private jet had just soared into the skies, bound for Eastcliff.

Each day, a multitude of private and business jets, courtesy of leasing firms, ferried passengers from provincial capitals to Eastcliff, the bustling capital. This particular flight drew no special attention.

The Wade family's Gulfstream had been waiting here for a while. Once Charlie and Maria cleared security and boarded the plane, the captain promptly secured clearance from the tower for takeoff, and they were on their way to Aurous Hill.

During the ascent, Charlie continued to twist a bracelet carved from agarwood. Amid the quiet hum of the engines, he suddenly turned to Maria.

"Ms. Clark," he began, "that teacher you met today, aside from trying to dissuade me, did she mention when I might return to the Eternal Mountains?"

Maria shook her head and replied, "The Master only emphasized the perilous nature of the Mountains and strongly advised against your return. She didn't specify a timeframe. It's possible you may never return there, for safety's sake."

Charlie furrowed his brow. "But why?" he pondered aloud. "She mentioned danger, but there's always a level of risk, and risk has its limits. While I may not be powerful enough now, that place feels like a daunting challenge. As my strength grows, it might become as manageable as a walk in the park."

Maria asserted firmly, "Young Master, I believe it's best to steer clear of the Mountains for the foreseeable future. Rather than fixate on returning there, it might be wiser to focus on finding a way to unlock your Soul Palace completely."

Charlie queried, "Once my Soul Palace is open, can I go back to the Mountains?"

Maria shook her head once more. "I think even if your Soul Palace is unlocked, you won't be able to return. To return, you must surpass Morgana, who has already opened her Soul Palace. The odds of defeating her are extremely slim. If you wish to revisit the Mountains, you must surpass Morgana first."

In Maria's view, the mysterious teacher's words, even if spoken through a surrogate, carried weight.

Charlie couldn't return to Shiwan. Morvel Bazin likely harbored a centuries-old conspiracy, patiently biding his time. Perhaps he had discovered a path to evade death, much like the Mother of Pu'er, awaiting an opportunity for rebirth.

Or, perhaps, the key to his rebirth resided in Charlie.

However, unlike the Mother of Pu'er, whose rebirth depended on Charlie's Heavenly Thunder, Morvel Bazin would never be as passive. Having lived a thousand years, he sought an opportunity to turn the tables, potentially seizing Charlie's body, as the legend suggested.

Reflecting on Charlie's earlier conversation with his father about the Divine Dragon and the five hundred years before Morvel Bazin's Taoist practice, Maria interjected, "Young Master, I believe both warriors and monks inevitably face cultivation bottlenecks."

Charlie looked intrigued. "What do you mean?"

Maria explained, "When you reach an impasse in your current environment, you must seek new surroundings to break through. It's akin to a gold rush. Prospectors continuously migrate until they discover gold. Staying in a stagnant environment is detrimental to your growth because you eventually exhaust its resources. You must venture elsewhere to explore new frontiers."

Charlie contemplated this idea and its implications. Maria continued, "Finding opportunities often involves leaving familiar territory. In unfamiliar environments, you encounter fresh variables and must systematically solve them to achieve your goals."

She likened it to an analogy, adding, "It's like opening blind boxes. After all the possibilities in your immediate vicinity have been explored and exhausted, you seek uncharted territory and crack open new boxes until you discover the treasure you desire."

Charlie nodded in agreement, recalling how his encounters beyond Aurous Hill had yielded opportunities. "I met Mrs. Treadway, acquired the Phoenix Vine, crossed paths with you, and obtained that ring—all outside of Aurous Hill."

Maria concurred, "In that case, Young Master, it might be beneficial to explore new horizons from time to time."

Chapter 5512

In Charlie's heart, unlocking the Soul Palace had become his paramount mission. The enigma of the Eternal Mountains concealed not only savage beasts but also the looming specter of Morgana, a formidable foe who had already left him feeling powerless.

Morgana's temporary withdrawal offered no solace; he knew she might resurface at any moment. Their sworn enmity meant that, even if she never set foot in China again, he would relentlessly pursue vengeance. Thus, the urgency of opening the Soul Palace gripped him.

Turning to Maria by his side, Charlie declared, "Once I've settled matters in Aurous Hill, I'll seek opportunities beyond."

Curious, Maria inquired, "Do you have a specific destination in mind, Young Master?"

Charlie shook his head, replying, "Since we're chasing opportunities, we should be spontaneous, go wherever the wind takes us."

With a hint of exasperation, Charlie continued, "But the more I think about it, the less clear the starting point becomes. I have family and business ties in Aurous Hill, not to mention its vastness. With only a handful of followers, vanishing from the world isn't an option. The only practical plan is to tackle one place at a time, returning to Aurous Hill in between for the next venture."

Sighing, Maria concurred, "Indeed, Young Master. Destiny is a mysterious force, beyond even my divinations. Your choices must be yours alone."

Charlie's fingers brushed his bracelet, sparking an idea. "I think I'll head to Eastcliff first."

Maria questioned, "To seek opportunities in Eastcliff?"

Charlie clarified, "Not exactly. My parents rushed me out of Eastcliff in haste, leaving behind many personal belongings. I intend to revisit the old Wade family residence, sift through my parents' possessions, and trace their journeys. If there are uncharted territories they explored, I'll follow their path. Who knows, perhaps their spirits in heaven will offer guidance?"

Maria nodded, "Your parents likely had extraordinary experiences. By following in their footsteps, you may uncover valuable insights."

Charlie added, "It's been nearly twenty years since my parents' accident. During my previous return to the old Wade family house, I didn't have the chance to sort through their belongings. At that time, I never considered the connection between my parents, cultivation, and the 'Apocalyptic Book.' Now, it seems these mysteries might have originated with them. I'll return and explore, hoping to unearth something significant."

Decades earlier, the Wade family had inhabited a grand old house near the imperial city. It was a sprawling courtyard residence, hidden amidst the city's bustling life yet possessing an unusual serenity.

Recalling his childhood home, Charlie felt a surge of nostalgia and excitement. "I'll notify the pilot that, after dropping you off in Aurous Hill, we'll fly directly to Eastcliff."

Maria suggested, "If you're in a hurry, Young Master, you could request the pilot to adjust the route and fly straight to Eastcliff."

She quickly added, "If you find it inconvenient for me to accompany you, I can reach Eastcliff first and return independently to Aurous Hill. You have pressing matters to attend to there; I wouldn't want to hinder your progress."

Charlie asked, "Are you eager to return to Aurous Hill?"

Maria shook her head, "Not at all. The primary link that keeps me anchored in Aurous Hill is the tea business. However, I watered the plants before leaving, and Aurous Hill had rain yesterday, so I expect they require no extra care."

Without hesitation, Charlie decided, "Then please accompany me to Eastcliff, Miss Clark."

Maria was elated by the invitation and swiftly responded, "I shall follow the Master's orders in all things!"

Ten minutes later, Charlie and Maria's plane received clearance for a route adjustment.

The aircraft veered thirty degrees northward in flight, en route to Eastcliff.

Charlie also made a call on the satellite phone to Stephen Thompson, the Wade family's butler.

Stephen answered, "Hello, who is this?"

"Butler Thompson, it's me." Charlie confirmed.

Stephen Thompson noted, "I believe this call is coming from the Wade family plane. Are you on board, Master?"

Charlie replied, "Yes, I'm en route to Eastcliff. We'll be landing in about two hours. Could you arrange for transportation from the airport?"

"Of course, Young Master," Stephen Thompson replied respectfully, "I'll organize a motorcade and personally meet you at the airport. I'll also notify the master and others."

Charlie interjected, "No need to make a fuss. You're the Wade family's chief steward. Arriving in person is too conspicuous. Simply arrange for a car to be waiting at the airport for me. I intend to visit the Wade family's old house and let the old man know. There's no need to inform anyone else."

Stephen Thompson agreed promptly, "Very well, Young Master. I'll see to it. Will you be staying overnight in the old house or returning to the manor?"

Charlie deliberated, "I'll stay at the old house and prepare two guest rooms. I have a companion with me."

Stephen Thompson acknowledged, "Understood, Master. Any other instructions?"

Charlie concluded, "That's all."

Stephen Thompson affirmed, "Very well, Master. I'll await your arrival at the old house."

...

Meanwhile, on another plane.

The aircraft that had taken off earlier had now landed at Eastcliff Airport.

As the wheels touched down, Ms. Turk, the fake head nun, reported to the elegant middle-aged woman, "Madam, their plane changed course mid-flight. According to air traffic control, they've redirected to Eastcliff."

"Eastcliff?" The woman furrowed her brow, murmuring, "Why the sudden change in mid-air?"

Ms. Turk questioned anxiously, "Could we have been exposed?"

The woman pondered briefly before stating firmly, "That's unlikely. We managed to evade all surveillance on the return trip. No one should be able to trace our route from Greenwood Temple to Interlocken Airport."

Suddenly, a thought struck her, and she asked, "Is Stephen Thompson in Eastcliff?"

Ms. Turk responded, "I haven't been in touch with Butler Thompson recently. Madam, please wait a moment while I reach out to him for confirmation."

Ms. Turk promptly dialed Stephen Thompson's number.

When the call connected, Stephen Thompson answered cautiously, "Sister Turk, why the sudden call?"

Ms. Turk inquired, "Are you currently in Eastcliff?"

"Yes, I am here," Stephen Thompson affirmed hurriedly. "How may I assist, Madam?"

Ms. Turk requested, "Butler Thompson, please hold for a moment."

Turning to the middle-aged woman, she relayed, "Butler Thompson is in Eastcliff, Madam."

The woman nodded, realizing, "I believe we're heading for the Wade family's old house."

She continued, "Let's alter our plans. Today, we will skip Aurous Hill and head straight to Wade Residence once we arrive. Please inform Butler Thompson that I would like to meet him there in one hour."

Ms. Turk complied, "Of course, Madam. Your command is my priority."

She put the phone back to her ear and asked, "Did you hear that?"

Stephen Thompson confirmed, "Yes I heard it."

After a brief pause, he lowered his voice and added, "Sister Turk, please inform Madam that the Young Master is already en route to Eastcliff."

Chapter 5513

Ms. Turk remained unfazed by Stephen Thompson's words and replied, "Steward Thompson, Madam has already anticipated your message. That's why she's asked you to meet her at Lama Temple for a discussion. Can you adjust the timing?"

"Of course," Stephen Thompson hurriedly responded. "The Young Master prefers to keep a low profile and won't allow me to pick him up at the airport. I'll wait for him at the old house. It's conveniently close to Lama Temple, and I've got plenty of time."

"Very well," Ms. Turk replied casually. "I'll meet you at Lama Temple in an hour."

Stephen Thompson replied respectfully, "I'll follow your instructions."

After the call, Ms. Turk reported to the lady, "Madam, Butler Thompson informed us that the Young Master will be visiting the old house tonight."

The middle-aged woman was taken aback for a moment, her beautifully lined eyes misting over slightly. She quickly wiped away the tears and smiled with joy, saying, "Charlie has been away for so many years; it's about time he goes back for a visit. It's just that I, as his mother, have been separated from him for two decades, and I still haven't had the chance to meet him."

This middle-aged woman was Lily Evans, the legendary Chinese businesswoman. For the past twenty years, only her closest confidants knew she still existed in this world. Not even Charlie, her closest kin, or anyone in the Evans family, was aware of her survival.

Seeing her melancholy, Ms. Turk quickly comforted her, saying, "Madam, although you haven't seen the Young Master for so many years, you've always been deeply concerned about him. When the time comes, when you meet the Young Master and explain everything, he will understand that it was never your fault."

Lily managed a wry smile and murmured, "Ever since Bruce died, I've been longing to avenge him and to see Charlie. But I never imagined that everything Bruce and I worked so hard for would almost push Charlie into the abyss of eternal destruction. To this day, I don't know if Bruce's and my efforts over the past twenty years were right or wrong."

Ms. Turk spoke firmly, "Madam, forgive me for speaking out of turn. Although the Young Master has faced many challenges and disappointments over the past twenty years, Master Bruce was always far-sighted and strategic in his lifetime. His decisions were undoubtedly well-considered. Even if some unforeseen events occurred, Master Bruce's choices at the time were undoubtedly the best for you and the Young Master."

Lily nodded gently and stated resolutely, "You're right. Bruce sacrificed himself to protect Charlie and me. He paved the way for Charlie with his own life. Charlie will surely live up to his expectations."

As she said this, Lily stared out the window, her thoughts flashing back through the events of the past two decades.

Meanwhile, the plane had already taxied to a closed hangar near the remote stand at Eastcliff Airport.

As the aircraft approached the hangar, the massive doors swung open to reveal three identical private jets parked inside, along with several inconspicuous Hongqi H9 cars. Maintenance crew members in uniform were waiting patiently.

Originally, Lily had planned to switch aircraft here before heading south to Aurous Hill. However, because Charlie had suddenly altered his flight schedule and come to Eastcliff, Lily changed her plans on the fly. Upon disembarking from the plane, she immediately climbed into one of the luxury cars. The motorcade exited the hangar, bypassed the airport via the VIP route, and set a course straight for Lama Temple.

Lama Temple was steeped in history and stood as Eastcliff's most renowned temple. It was also where Lily had a private courtyard.

Lily had asked Stephen Thompson to meet her at Lama Temple, referring to this residence.

There's an old saying, a small fry hides in the wilderness, while a big fish hides in the city. It was unexpected that Lily's residence in Eastcliff was nestled in the temple with the highest footfall in the city center.

Upon reaching the residence, Stephen Thompson had already arrived early and was waiting in the central hall of the courtyard.

Seeing Lily and Ms. Turk entering together, he quickly rushed to the door, bowing respectfully. "Madam, Sister Turk!"

Lily nodded slightly and gestured towards the chairs in the hall. "Take a seat, Stephen."

Stephen Thompson bowed once more and thanked her. "Thank you, Madam."

Lily waved her hand and settled into the central hall, with Ms. Turk, disguised with a hat, standing by her side.

Although Ms. Turk still wore a hat, Stephen Thompson could discern that she had shaved her head and asked in astonishment, "Sister Turk, what's this about?"

Ms. Turk offered a slight smile and removed her hat, stepping down as she replied, "Today, I played the role of a Nun at Shivan Mountain."

Stephen Thompson hurriedly inquired, "Sister Turk, did you meet the Young Master? Does he recognize you? Please don't alarm the Young Master if you did!"

Ms. Turk shook her head and reassured him, "Don't worry, I didn't encounter the Young Master directly."

"That's a relief," Stephen sighed. "Madam, Sister Turk, you have been gone for a long time. Now that you're back in Eastcliff, you've chosen to be where the Young Master is. May I ask what prompted this change?"

Lily explained calmly, "I asked Sister Turk to intercept Charlie at Shiwan. Originally, I planned to stop in Eastcliff before heading to Aurous Hill for some matters. But Charlie suddenly altered his flight and came to Eastcliff, so I adjusted my plans accordingly."

Stephen Thompson was surprised, "Madam, have you seen the Young Master? What is he like now?"

Lily shook her head and stated, "When Charlie and I were at our closest, we were just a couple of miles apart. But now he's become so powerful that I wouldn't dare to approach him even from a distance."

Stephen Thompson pressed further, "Madam, do you not plan to meet the Young Master yet?"

Lily's expression turned serious as she replied firmly, "Not yet. Morgana made two attempts to exterminate the Evans family recently. She must have suspected that I'm still alive and wanted to use this to test my existence. If she confirmed my survival, she would use it to force me out. If it weren't for Charlie's timely assistance and intervention on both occasions, I might not have been able to evade detection any longer. I've survived these tests, and I can't act recklessly now."

Stephen probed, "Madam, the Young Master's sudden change of plans and arrival in Eastcliff, along with his desire to visit the old house, could it be that he's sensed something?"

Lily shook her head and replied, "Unlikely. I believe Charlie is currently feeling somewhat perplexed. His visit to Eastcliff and the old house is likely an attempt to seek guidance."

Stephen asked, "Madam, what are your plans during your stay in Eastcliff this time?"

Lily said, "I have no specific plans, but I do have something for you. Before Charlie arrives in Eastcliff, I need you to place this item back in the Wade family's old house. Tomorrow morning, I'll head to Aurous Hill."

Lily nodded to Ms. Turk, who promptly retrieved an old-fashioned 16-page photo album from her purse and handed it to Stephen.

Stephen hesitated to open it directly and sought clarification, "Madam, you want me to return this photo album to the old house?"

"Yes," Lily affirmed, sighing, "It's been twenty years, and it's time for Charlie to gradually learn about some long-buried past events."

Chapter 5514

As Charlie and Maria cruised from Eastcliff Airport to the Wade family's ancestral home, a rendezvous awaited them. Waiting at the old house was none other than Lord Wade himself, flanked by a faithful companion, Stephen Thompson.

Lord Wade had entrusted his affairs to Stephen Thompson and upon returning from the Lama Temple, he hastened to the Wade Family estate to retrieve the Old Lord Wade and bring him back to his cherished home.

Lord Wade had always yearned for more opportunities to strengthen the bond with his grandson, Charlie, who had taken up the mantle of the Wade family's stewardship. However, despite his newfound responsibilities, Charlie had seldom visited Eastcliff in recent years. For the old man, the chance to see Charlie a few times a year was a rare and cherished privilege.

So, when Lord Wade received news of Charlie's impending arrival, his heart brimmed with joy. In anticipation, he had the estate chef prepare a sumptuous family dinner for Charlie, even before his arrival.

As Charlie stepped out of the car at the old estate, both Lord Wade and Stephen Thompson were there to greet him. Lord Wade's eyes sparkled with excitement as he exclaimed, "Charlie, what brings you to Eastcliff today?"

Charlie replied truthfully, "Grandpa, I've returned to the old house to reminisce and sort through my parents belongings left behind."

Lord Wade nodded in understanding and replied without hesitation, "Your parents room remains untouched, just as it was."

As they conversed, the car's passenger door opened, revealing a young woman who appeared no older than seventeen or eighteen.

Maria, the epitome of classic beauty, emerged gracefully from the vehicle and addressed Lord Wade with respect, "Hello, Grandpa. My name is Cathy Clark."

Lord Wade couldn't conceal his surprise upon seeing Maria. He hadn't expected Charlie to bring a young woman with him on this visit. Moreover, this young lady was neither Claire, Charlie's wife, nor Stefanie, who was engaged to him. What baffled him even more was Maria's age. Charlie was nearing thirty, while Maria appeared to be only sixteen or seventeen, presenting quite an age gap.

The identity of this young lady intrigued him further. As Charlie's grandfather, he was well aware of Charlie's many female acquaintances, yet Maria was the first to be brought to the old estate.

Curiosity piqued, Lord Wade inquired about Maria's identity and her relationship with Charlie. Charlie, sensing his grandfather's curiosity, explained, "Grandpa, Cathy is a friend I met in Aurous Hill. She had some free time, so she decided to accompany me here."

Lord Wade, though not entirely clear about the situation, smiled warmly at Maria and said, "Miss Clark, consider this place your home. No need for formalities."

Maria nodded graciously, replying, "Thank you, Grandpa."

Lord Wade glanced at Maria and asked cautiously, "Miss Clark, you appear quite young. Are you twenty years old?"

Maria replied, "I turned eighteen this year."

Lord Wade breathed a sigh of relief. He understood that society had two significant age thresholds for women, the legal age of fourteen and the moral age of eighteen. While legality varied, respectability demanded crossing the moral threshold.

Lord Wade had been concerned that Maria might be under eighteen, which could have adverse consequences for Charlie and the Wade family. However, when Maria confirmed her age as eighteen, he felt a weight lift off his shoulders.

Stephen Thompson, who had been silent until then, stepped forward and respectfully stated, "Master, I've prepared a family banquet. I suggest that Miss Clark and the others dine first."

Lord Wade quickly concurred, saying, "Indeed, Charlie, you seldom visit Eastcliff. Upon hearing of your sudden arrival, I immediately arranged for some food and wine. We can enjoy a couple of drinks later."

Charlie agreed, "Very well. Let's go in and dine and catch up."

As Charlie stepped into the old house, memories flooded his mind. The house remained unchanged from his childhood, but it felt both familiar and foreign.

During his time here, the house had bustled with activity. Back then, his father, Bruce, had held great sway in the Wade Family, unofficially steering its course. Though Lord Wade had yet to pass on the official family headship, Bruce had effectively become the family's steward.

Under Bruce's leadership, the Wade family had thrived, achieving unprecedented unity. Corran and Cynthia Wade were content to support Bruce, recognizing that standing beside him was more profitable than taking the lead themselves.

However, Bruce's untimely death had disrupted this harmony. The family had lost its anchor and each member had started pursuing their own interests. Corran desired the family headship, while Cynthia and others sought to secure their own interests by splitting the family's assets.

The Wade family had never been as united and prosperous since Bruce's passing.

In recent years, with the completion of the new family manor, the Wade family had largely abandoned the old house. Only a few servants remained to maintain it, lending the place an air of solitude.

Upon reaching the dining room, the table was already adorned with a lavish spread of food and wine. Lord Wade invited Charlie and Maria to take their seats and Stephen Thompson, standing nearby, promptly poured wine for the grandfather and grandson.

Charlie gestured to Thompson and said, "Steward Thompson, please join us for the meal."

Stephen Thompson hesitated but eventually accepted, saying, "Thank you, Young Master. We haven't seen each other in a long time, so I thought we could have a drink and chat. I won't impose further. Besides, it's against protocol for a servant to dine at the same table as the Master and the Young Master."

Charlie waved off his concerns, insisting, "Butler Thompson, there's no need to be so formal. I recall my father often inviting you to share a drink with us. You played a

crucial role in my life and I've been wanting to express my gratitude for the past twenty years. Please accept this gesture."

Stephen Thompson spoke with genuine emotion, "Young Master, you're too kind. Back when I helped transport you to the Aurous Hill Orphanage twenty years ago, it was all arranged by your father, Master Bruce. I was merely following his orders."

Charlie sighed, reflecting, "It seems my father foresaw that one day, the Warriors Den would come knocking on our door."

Charlie motioned to the empty seat beside him, addressing Stephen Thompson, "Steward Thompson, please, join us. I want to share a drink with you."

Lord Wade chimed in, encouraging, "Stephen, there are no outsiders here. You need not be so reserved. Charlie grew up under your watchful eye and your dedication deserves his appreciation."

With the support of both the Young Master and the old lord, Stephen Thompson finally took a seat beside Charlie.

As they conversed, Charlie detected a subtle fragrance in the air. He turned to Stephen Thompson and casually inquired, "Did you visit the temple today, Butler Thompson?"

Chapter 5515

When Charlie inquired about his visit to the temple, Stephen Thompson couldn't help but be taken aback. He couldn't quite fathom what Charlie was getting at with his questions about his whereabouts and who he might be meeting. Stephen, however, was no slouch. Since he was surprised, he decided not to conceal it. Instead, he responded with an astonished tone, "Young Master, how do you know?"

Charlie responded nonchalantly, "You smell like incense."

Suddenly, it clicked for Stephen and a sense of relief washed over him. But he didn't dare reveal his relief just yet. He smiled and explained, "I visited Lama Temple this afternoon. I had some free time, so I went to pay my respects."

Charlie nodded, without a trace of doubt in his mind. Stephen Thompson held a high position within the Wade family and his role as the housekeeper afforded him a fair degree of freedom. It was entirely reasonable for him to take some time to burn incense and worship Buddha. As for the deeper reasons for his visit, Charlie didn't

dwell on it. After all, visiting temples was a routine practice for Chinese people, akin to how Europeans and Americans frequented churches.

Maria, on the other hand, stole a few more glances at Stephen Thompson. While she couldn't quite pinpoint anything unusual, she couldn't help but feel that Stephen's demeanor and overall impression didn't align with someone who held strong utilitarian beliefs, often associated with Tibetan Buddhism. Most adherents sought wealth and power, a trait particularly common among celebrities who followed this faith. In Maria's eyes, Stephen didn't quite fit that mold, which raised some questions.

However, Maria was human, not omniscient, so she dismissed her curiosity as mere speculation, as there wasn't enough evidence to draw conclusions from a few exchanged words.

Meanwhile, Lord Wade interjected, addressing Charlie, "Charlie, how long do you plan to stay in Eastcliff this time?"

Charlie replied candidly, "I haven't decided yet. The earliest I can leave is tomorrow afternoon. I'm thinking of visiting Wade Mountain in the morning to pay my respects to my parents."

Surprised, Lord Wade questioned, "So soon? It's not often you come here. Why not stay a few more days?"

Charlie waved his hand dismissively, "I can't, really. I won't hide it from you. The main reason for my visit this time was to explore any clues or insights left behind by my parents. I plan to walk the paths they trod in their youth, record their experiences and visit all the places they frequented."

Lord Wade nodded thoughtfully and sighed, "Your parents were always shrouded in mystery and I never quite grasped everything. Since you're determined to uncover the truth, Grandpa supports your quest. Your parents rooms and study have been preserved exactly as they were twenty years ago. No one has touched their belongings. Stephen has been responsible for their maintenance. After dinner, feel free to explore. If you have any questions, just ask Stephen."

...

Meanwhile, at the Lama Temple, this popular temple was currently off-limits to visitors. Lily stood in the courtyard, inhaling the rich aroma of incense, her gaze fixed on the bright moon in the night sky. Her emotions were a swirling mix.

In her heart, there was but one thought, her son Charlie, whom she hadn't seen for two decades.

Just a short distance away, Lama Temple and the Wade family's old residence were separated by a mere kilometer or two. It would take a ten-minute drive to reach the Wade family's door.

Yet, Lily continually reminded herself that now was not the right time to reunite with her son.

Observing Lily's melancholy in the courtyard, Ms. Turk approached her with respect and asked, "Madam, the Young Master is only a few streets away right now. You must be yearning to see him, aren't you?"

Lily nodded, "Yes, we've been apart for twenty years. How could I not yearn for him? But I know it's not the right moment to meet Charlie yet. Moreover, today isn't the closest we've been in these past twenty years. During Stefanie's concert in New York, I sat in the stands, while Charlie and Claire were in the box above me. That was the closest we've been in decades."

Ms. Turk couldn't help but sigh, "I remember that time very well. Your parents and siblings were all there. Any misstep could have been disastrous..."

Lily smiled gently and asked, "Were you there at the time? Were you concerned that Charlie might not act?"

After a moment of contemplation, Ms. Turk nodded, "I was indeed worried at the time. You mentioned that the Young Master seemed to have some reservations about your parents. Plus, he had only given Miss Sun the elixir to save your father, not the one that could cure him. So, we were concerned that if the Young Master hesitated even briefly, it might have been too late. We would've had to act swiftly within the time limit, potentially resulting in casualties."

Lily replied solemnly, "Although Bruce created a secure environment for Charlie, they didn't grant him any privileges. Charlie had to toil in the mud of Aurous Hill for nearly two decades, which occasionally made him headstrong and defiant. His methods of dealing with wrongdoers were often harsher than those of the actual villains. Yet, I understand his character very well. In matters like these, no matter how many misunderstandings or grievances he might harbor, he'd act promptly."

With a contented smile, she continued, "Actually, I appreciate Charlie's headstrong nature. He's decisive, values loyalty and isn't easily swayed by others. Bruce, on the other hand, was somewhat lacking in assertiveness. He always sought to guide

people with virtue. In contrast, Charlie has a different approach. He'll repay kindness with kindness, but if someone crosses him, he'll retaliate with three times the force."

Ms. Turk nodded approvingly, "Master Bruce aimed to persuade through virtue, while Young Master Wade believed in 'an eye for an eye.' I understand your admiration for Charlie's approach."

Lily nodded and stated, "Charlie's qualities are what I admire most. Bruce made tremendous sacrifices for the Wade family back then and he was the most qualified to lead. But my father-in-law was reluctant to relinquish control early on and Bruce didn't want to usurp his elder brother Corran's inheritance rights. So, without saying anything, without my interference, he couldn't ascend as the head of the Wade family."

She shifted the conversation, lamenting, "Unfortunately, my father-in-law felt he was still strong and didn't want to pass the torch. Moreover, Bruce didn't want to wrest the inheritance from his elder brother Corran. In contrast, Charlie has fewer qualms. Corran, what about him? If he must kneel at Wade Mountain, he will. Even if Cynthia Wade is his aunt, if she needs to be confined in Aurous Hill City Village, he won't hesitate and if my father-in-law refuses to delegate power? It's not his decision. Charlie can secure his own position. What Charlie did in this matter won my heart! Who stipulates that the previous head of the family must agree to be the head of the family? Another way of thinking. As long as he doesn't dare to object, isn't that enough?"

webcilo

Chapter 5516

Once upon a time, Lily had been deeply concerned about how Charlie's personality, character and life perspective would take shape as he grew up. As a mother, she naturally aspired to provide Charlie with the finest education, a nurturing environment, and impeccable guidance. However, reality dictated that she could only silently observe as Charlie grew up alongside other children in the orphanage. She could only watch in silence as Charlie, having graduated from high school, decided to work at a construction site, and she had no power to intervene.

In those early days, Lily had also fretted about whether the environment would warp Charlie's views, whether he would become overly materialistic, or if he'd become excessively driven by profit. Fortunately, somewhere between Charlie's affluent upbringing as a Young Master and his later life as a destitute orphan, he seemed to find a balance that aligned with Lily's own values.

This balance not only allowed him to maintain a healthy perspective on life and a strong sense of justice but also spared him from the excessively rigid moral standards imposed by his father, Bruce. To some extent, it mended the gaps in Bruce's character.

Much like the traditional succession process of the Wade family's patriarchal role, the passing of the torch should wait until the elder Lord Wade chose to retire. Then, the elder Lord Wade would personally designate the heir. If other children disagreed, they would need to find a way to sway the elder Lord Wade's decision, even if it meant resorting to ruthless measures. Maybe they'd even plot to eliminate the original heir first and then seize the throne themselves.

Such was the way of today's wealthy families and the ancient princes and generals, but Charlie opted for an entirely different path. He didn't follow the Wade family's conventional procedures, nor did he extend any courtesies to them when he claimed his position.

With a casual demeanor in front of the Wade family and Wesley Drake, Charlie declared that he had taken over the Wade family's affairs and needed more loyal individuals on his side. He made it clear that if Wesley desired to pledge allegiance, loyalty to him was non-negotiable.

In a single sentence, he not only won over the entire Dragon Temple but also unequivocally stated that he was the new head of the Wade family. He left no room for the Wade family to react, deliberate, or even inform them of his decision personally. He chose to relay the outcome through a third party. This audacious, uncompromising approach allowed Charlie to secure the position of Wade family head without opposition. If Lord Wade resisted, he would have no choice but to step aside and yield to someone else.

When Stephen Thompson shared this news with Lily, it filled her with excitement to the point of sleeplessness. Lily had never cared much about the Wade family's modest assets, but the position of Wade family head had always been a thorn in her side.

Everyone knew that her late husband had been the most suitable candidate for this position, yet the Wade family pretended to be oblivious. Even in death, her husband had been denied the chance to lead the Wade family. Lily had long harbored resentment over this matter, and after two decades, Charlie had effortlessly unraveled this knot, bringing her immense joy and heightened expectations for Charlie's future.

...

Meanwhile, in the old Wade family residence, after sharing a meal with the elder Lord Wade, Charlie couldn't contain his eagerness any longer. He addressed the elder Lord and Stephen Thompson, saying, "Grandfather, Butler Thompson, please go ahead and eat. I'd like to visit my parents room."

Respectfully, Stephen Thompson inquired, "Young Master, what is your purpose? Would you like one of your attendants to accompany you?"

Charlie waved his hand dismissively, asserting, "There's no need. Maria and I will be going to my parents room. You needn't worry about us."

Maria rose from her seat and politely added, "Grandfather Wade, Butler Thompson, please enjoy your meal."

Maria followed Charlie as they made their way to the courtyard where Charlie's parents had lived. This courtyard featured four connected rooms for Charlie's parents, including a main hall, a bedroom, a study and Charlie's own room. In simpler terms, it was a three-bedroom apartment with a living room.

Charlie had spent several years in this residence and was quite familiar with its layout. Additionally, there hadn't been significant changes since his departure, making it easy for him to identify.

Upon entering the main hall, he couldn't help but reminisce about the days when he lived here with his parents. It stirred a whirlwind of emotions within him. Charlie then proceeded to explore the other rooms, including the main hall and bedroom. There, he noticed some new bedding and pillows, indicating a recent update. Consequently, these areas held no potential clues.

Charlie decided to focus his attention on the study, a room converted from a wing of the courtyard. Though not expansive, it housed three walls of bookshelves laden with an extensive collection of books. Even twenty years later, many books on these shelves had been left untouched by Bruce and Lily, their glasses-wearing owners.

Charlie took a quick survey and realized that the books could be categorized into three distinct groups. The first group comprised works on finance and management, primarily written by renowned economists and financial practitioners. The second group encompassed history and biographies, while the third group was dedicated to the Book of Changes and Gossip.

During his youth, Charlie hadn't been particularly interested in these books, primarily focusing on history while neglecting the rest. Today, he discovered his parents' long-standing fascination with Feng Shui.

Maria also scanned the books, noting, "Young Master, your parents have assembled some of the world's finest literature on Feng Shui secrets. Some of these books are centuries old and out of print. It's evident they had a deep involvement and research interest in Feng Shui and Changes."

Charlie nodded, his thoughts already focused on how to systematically review these books for any concealed information. As he examined the bookshelf with care, he mentioned to Maria, "With this many books, sorting through them will take days, at the very least."

Maria smiled, responding, "Time isn't an issue. We can sift through them methodically. If it pleases the Young Master, I'll assist in cataloging."

Charlie agreed, "Let's start with the books on Changes. Given my parents involvement in Taoism, there might be notes hidden within them."

Maria eagerly accepted, inquiring, "Young Master, I want to share this responsibility, but I'd like to know if you're comfortable with it."

Charlie assured her, "Miss Clark, please assist me. If you spot anything unusual, alert me immediately."

"Of course," Maria agreed with enthusiasm. They resumed their search, one book at a time. However, it wasn't until they reached a black book, roughly the size of a standard volume, that Maria's excitement bubbled to the surface. She flipped it open and exclaimed, "Young Master, there's a photo album here!"

Chapter 5517

Upon hearing Maria's words, Charlie instinctively turned his gaze to the worn black photo album she held.

At a glance, it was obvious that this photo album had some age to it.

Over the past decade or so, with the rapid evolution of smartphones, everyday people have unknowingly digitized their entire image collections. The days of buying various-sized photo albums and meticulously converting each image, as they had done two decades ago, were long gone. Photographs were now neatly tucked into digital folders.

Charlie remained clueless about the album's contents, so he accepted it from Maria and delicately opened the first page.

The initial image that leaped from the page featured two youthful figures standing in front of the Statue of Liberty in the United States.

The man in the photograph bore an uncanny resemblance to Charlie himself, yet his attire belonged to a bygone era, featuring a knitted sweater and white jeans unique to that time.

This was none other than Charlie's father, Bruce. The woman by his side, in her twenties, exuded a slender grace, her light beige trench coat billowing stylishly. Her curly perm, all the rage back then, retained its timeless allure. The wind tousled both her clothing and hair simultaneously, lending her an air of elegance, beauty and a dash of rustic charm.

Unable to contain herself, Maria sighed, "The Young Master's mother was truly exquisite..."

Charlie nodded subtly and couldn't resist teasing, "Have you never seen my mother before? She was quite a sensation in her day."

Maria shook her head and continued, "I once delved into Young Master's mother's life story. It's truly remarkable. She enjoyed unparalleled popularity in the realms of technology, finance and venture capital twenty or thirty years ago..."

As she spoke, Maria's voice softened and she added, "In fact, my life trajectory is the polar opposite of the Young Master's mother. She soared to fame in Silicon Valley and the internet era, becoming a trendsetter, while I emerged after the internet's rise. I was concerned that Morgana's ability to acquire information would skyrocket due to this widespread trend, distancing her from the outside world and the timing couldn't have been more mismatched."

Charlie nodded in understanding before flipping to the album's second page.

On this page, a photograph captured the Young Master's parents, still against the backdrop of the Statue of Liberty. Bruce stood tall and proud, while Lily nestled beside him, her arms outstretched for an affectionate embrace. Bruce reciprocates the gesture, wrapping an arm around Lily.

The left and right quadrants of the page held four group photos, each featuring the couple in various poses, graceful, playful, or amusing. Yet, in every frame, their affection for one another radiated palpably.

Maria couldn't help but sigh, "The Young Master's parents must have had an incredible bond. It's truly enviable."

Charlie nodded and shared, "These must be images capturing their love story. In fact, their affection remained undiminished from what I can remember. They never had a quarrel and even when disagreements arose, one of them would yield before things escalated."

Curious, Maria inquired, "So, who usually caved in first?"

Charlie pondered briefly before answering, "It wasn't particularly one-sided. They shared an unspoken understanding in life and could always gauge the other's resolve accurately. If they sensed that the other was more steadfast on a matter, they'd yield appropriately. It was a balanced dance."

Maria sighed, "Such a harmonious relationship, balancing each other at all times, is genuinely rare."

Charlie agreed with a nod, turning the album's pages to reveal the third.

This time, the upper left corner of the left page featured a photo of a quaint antique shop. Its design carried a touch of nostalgia, with a somewhat British-style door and a circular sign board. Emblazoned on the signboard in Chinese characters was the word 'ancient.'

Maria gestured toward a placard beside the shop's entrance and said, "Young Master, this store is located in Queens, New York."

"Really?" Charlie responded with curiosity. "I can't quite make out those details at this resolution. The text is a bit unclear to me."

Maria explained, "My family resided in Queens. The size, color and placement of this placard resemble the early styles in Queens. I'm not certain if they still use this design today."

She paused for a moment and added, "New York..."

Charlie's memory jogged, recalling something his uncle had mentioned a few days prior. His parents had purchased a set of antique books in a New York antique store. Among them was the 'Preface to the Apocalyptic Book.'

Piecing together the information, Charlie excitedly declared to Maria, "This must be the antique shop where my father acquired the 'Preface to the Apocalyptic Book!'"

Maria shared his enthusiasm, remarking, " 'The Apocalyptic Book' and 'Preface to the Apocalyptic Book' must share more than just a coincidence. The Young Master stumbled upon the Apocalyptic Book in an Aurous Hill antique shop, while your

father found it in a New York antique store. There's certainly a deeper connection between the two!"

Charlie nodded and mused, "In this vast world, it's highly improbable for two profoundly mysterious scriptures to land in the hands of a father and son with only two individuals in between them, spanning ten years and half the globe..."

Having said that, Charlie refocused on the album, turning to the lower left corner of the page.

There, a photograph portrayed Bruce alongside a younger man in front of the same antique shop. In the picture, they stood back-to-back, each offering a thumbs-up to the camera.

Maria pointed to the man beside Charlie's father and asked, "Does the Young Master recognize this person?"

Charlie shook his head and replied, "No."

Maria then surmised, "He must have had a close relationship with the Young Master's father. You were quite young at the time, so maybe you didn't notice him?"

"No," Charlie asserted firmly. "I have no recollection of this person from my childhood. At least not before my parents and I left Eastcliff. I'd definitely remember someone like him, but... there's something oddly familiar about his face. I just can't put my finger on it."

Deep in thought, Maria suggested, "Familiarity usually doesn't stem from nothing. Perhaps you've seen his relatives, which could explain the sense of recognition. Or it's possible that the person in the photo has undergone significant changes compared to when you last saw him, such as weight gain, balding, aging, or maturation."

Charlie concurred, "What you say makes sense, but I'm drawing a blank on any concrete clues."

Pursing her lips, Maria inquired, "Could the Young Master permit me to retrieve the photos? There might be something written on the back. In the past, people often inscribed notes on the reverse side of photos as mementos."

Charlie nodded and said, "Of course, please go ahead."

With utmost care, Maria extracted the photo and examined its reverse side. She exclaimed in surprise, "Young Master, there is indeed writing on the back of this photo paper!"

Charlie accepted the photograph, his eyes scanning the Kodak-branded white paper bearing a handwritten line, 'In Queens with Cole, 12.11.'

Chapter 5518

Upon seeing the cryptic text, Maria wasted no time chiming in, her voice laced with curiosity, "Maria, I'm pretty sure the borough in question here is Queens, New York. That photo? Yep, definitely Queens. Now, this guy "Cole", is obviously a last name. And I can tell by his look that he has Chinese descent. The catch? We don't have a clue what his first name is."

"You're spot on," Charlie concurred, his brow furrowing in deep thought.

He mused, "There's something oddly familiar about this Cole fellow. But, try as I might, I can't put my finger on where I've seen him before."

Maria reassured him, "Don't rush it, Master. That sense of familiarity might stem from a fleeting memory. It's there, just beneath the surface. All you need is to give it some time, let it simmer. Trust me, the answer will come to you."

She probed further, "Besides the familiarity, anything else about this whole scenario that strikes you as odd or strangely familiar?"

Charlie, still massaging his temples, replied, "You know, Maria, there's more to it than just the familiarity. Looking at this picture, I sense something deeper, something profoundly familiar. But the specifics, they elude me."

Maria breathed a sigh of relief, "Master, don't fret. Let's piece this puzzle together. First, let's talk about the attire of your dad and this Cole character. Anything noteworthy there?"

Charlie scrutinized the photo and replied, "Dad's sporting late 20th-century gear, a bomber jacket—pretty trendy back then. Cole, on the other hand, has on a regular woolen windbreaker, typical attire for the time."

Maria probed further, "And what about Queens? Your parents lived in the States for years. Did Queens ever come up in your conversations or visits?"

Charlie pondered for a moment before responding, "In my recollection, the States trips with my folks or visits to relatives with Mom usually centered around Long Island. Apart from that, we were Manhattan regulars. Queens? It's all a bit fuzzy."

Then, he added, "Even this antique shop—I only learned about it from my uncle a few days back. Never heard a peep about it from my parents."

At this point, Charlie's expression froze suddenly.

Unaware of his abrupt change, Maria remained focused on the photo and suggested, "Perhaps we could contact your father's former colleagues. They might recognize this person."

But Charlie, deep in thought, didn't respond.

Perplexed, Maria prodded, "Master?"

Charlie snapped back to reality at Maria's query.

Cold sweat began to bead on his brow and cheeks as he stammered, "...I think I know why this man seems familiar."

Maria was taken aback and pressed, "Young master, do you remember?"

Charlie nodded fervently and explained, "You mentioned his last name is Cole, and I had this strange sense of déjà vu. And then, there's that antique shop in the background..."

Gazing at Maria, his eyes still wide with shock, Charlie continued, "Remember I told you my father-in-law had no idea what he was doing, insisted on visiting an antique shop to 'broaden his horizons,' and accidentally knocked over that jade pot and spring vase?"

Maria responded instantly, "Of course! The Young Master got the 'Apocalyptic Book' from the remains of that very vase. How could I forget something so significant?"

Charlie nodded and pointed to the man beside his father in the photo, muttering, "He was the manager of that antique store!"

"What?!" Maria's eyes widened, her voice trembling as she exclaimed, "Young master, are you saying that the man in this photo from over 20 years ago, taken with your father in New York, later worked at an antique shop in Aurous Hill, and he's the one who handed your father-in-law the jade pot and spring vase containing the 'Apocalyptic Book'?"

"Yes," Charlie affirmed firmly. "I'm sure of it. This person's name is Felix Cole, and the antique shop in Aurous Hill was Vintage Deluxe, owned by the Moore family. At the time, it wasn't a prominent part of the Moore family's business empire. Jasmine Moore, the current head of the Moore family, was responsible for Vintage Deluxe, and Felix Cole managed it."

Charlie felt his spine tingling.

Before, he'd believed his acquisition of the 'Apocalyptic Book' was purely luck. Then, his uncle mentioned that his parents had found the Preface to the Apocalyptic Book, hinting at a connection between the two texts. But now, he stumbled upon a revelation—Felix Cole, the antique shop manager from over two decades ago, was a friend of his father.

It was Felix Cole who had handed the jade pot and spring vase to his father-in-law, Jacob.

Charlie swiftly grabbed his phone and dialed Jasmine's number. If anyone could shed light on Felix Cole, it would be her.

She picked up quickly, her voice lighthearted, "Why the late-night call, Master Wade?"

Charlie suppressed his anxiety and inquired, "Jasmine, can you tell me if Felix Cole, the former manager of Vintage Deluxe, still works for the Moore family?"

"Absolutely not," Jasmine responded without hesitation. "After that incident, he was utterly rude to you and your father-in-law, and he utterly failed to recognize the true value of the jade pot and spring vase you repaired. His professional ethics were sorely lacking, so I let him go."

"Let him go?" Charlie probed further. "Do you have any idea where he went afterward?"

"I have no idea," Jasmine admitted. "I never saw him again after that day."

Charlie followed up with another question, "And when did he start working at Vintage Deluxe?"

"He didn't last long," Jasmine recalled. "He was there for just over a month, maybe less than two."

Charlie's excitement surged. This timeline felt deliberate, like Felix Cole had joined Vintage Deluxe for a reason.

"Were you the one who hired him?" Charlie asked.

"Yes," Jasmine confirmed. "At the time, the Moore family didn't take me seriously, and I had my share of issues with my uncle and cousin. So they handed me Vintage Deluxe. It was struggling, and internal problems ran rampant. I fired everyone and brought in a fresh team. That's when Felix Cole applied."

Charlie probed further, "Why did you hire him?"

Jasmine paused to reflect. "He made quite an impression during the interview. Knowledgeable about both Eastern and Western antiques, humble, well-educated—the guy had a compelling demeanor. His answers during the interview were smooth, eloquent, and he didn't demand an astronomical salary. It seemed like a solid hire."

She added with some frustration, "Little did I know he'd turn out so ill-tempered, insulting your father-in-law and failing to recognize your incredible restoration skills. My judgment clearly failed me. Please forgive me!"

Charlie, deep in thought, pondered, "Now that you mention it, Jasmine, this guy who appeared so knowledgeable, humble, and well-educated is likely Felix Cole's true identity. The rude, jade-vase-dropping Felix Cole was likely a façade."

Jasmine's voice floated through the phone, "Charlie, what sparked your sudden interest in Felix Cole?"

Trying to be casual, Charlie replied, "Just reminiscing with some friends. Got curious about him out of nowhere." He continued, "By the way, Jasmine, could you pull up any information on him for me?"

Jasmine thought for a moment. "I'll have to ask Antique Deluxe's manager. The records from then weren't merged with the Moore Group's. It was all less official back then."

Charlie responded, "Thank you for the effort, Jasmine. Send it over when you have it."

"Of course, Charlie!"

Ending the call, he told Maria. "Once I get that info, Miss Clark, please forward it to Mr. Myers for verification."

She nodded, "Don't worry, I'll make sure he gets it as soon as possible."

Charlie and Maria waited anxiously for Jasmine's reply. True to her ultra efficient nature, she had a word document sent to him within a few minutes.

Charlie opened the document. Under the nationality column for Felix Cole, it read "China", and his place of origin was listed as "Aurous Hill." Charlie suspected this information was inaccurate.

Perusing further, the credibility of Felix Cole's resume appeared questionable.

According to the resume, Felix Cole had spent much of his career in the antique industry within China. He claimed to have established an antique stall in Panjiayuan, Eastcliff over two decades ago. Following that, he had relocated to different parts of the country, functioning as an antique vendor and later owning an antique shop. For a significant period, he also claimed to have worked in a factory that manufactured low-end toys.

Strikingly, the resume made no reference to Cole ever leaving China.

Yet, a photo clearly showed him and his father in Queens, USA.

Adding to the inconsistencies, under the language proficiency section, Felix Cole listed only Chinese, omitting English. Considering he had purportedly lived abroad, especially over 20 years ago, it would be plausible to assume he had a decent command of English. Knowing English would be an asset in job applications. Thus, the omission could only suggest he might be hiding his time abroad.

In the education section, he had merely written "high school." From the narrative painted by this resume, he appeared to be someone who didn't pursue education beyond high school, choosing instead to dive into the antique trade. Even though he might not have had an academic flair, his extensive experience suggested that he was skilled in his field.

After reviewing, Charlie voiced his skepticism to Maria, "Based on this resume, I believe much of it is fabricated."

Maria responded with a wry smile, "Perhaps the only truth in this document is his surname, Cole. After all, the name 'Cole' is also written on the back of the photograph."

Pondering, Charlie inquired, "Do you think his first name could be accurate?"

Maria shrugged and replied, "It seems highly improbable." Pointing at the resume, she added with a hint of irony, "Look here, his name is Felix Cole. In English, Felix translates to 'good luck.' Isn't that amusing? Although the name Felix is not rare, why would it be this particular individual? The very man who presented the jade pot, allowing the master to acquire the 'Apocalyptic Book' and, by extension, leading the master to transformative experiences to become the dragon. To me, it feels as though this name was intentionally chosen for its symbolism to speak directly to you."

Chapter 5519

Charlie's mind felt like it had short-circuited at this very moment.

Now, it seemed highly likely that Felix Cole would make his presence felt in Aurous Hill, courtesy of some well-laid plans. The orchestrator behind this move was most likely none other than his father, who had passed away two decades ago.

This revelation weighed heavily on Charlie, shrouding him in a mysterious tension and unease. What had truly happened to his parents all those years ago? It wasn't just their untimely demise that gnawed at him; it was the intricate web of preparations leading up to that fateful accident.

Back in those days, when trouble had come knocking at his parents' door, Stephen Thompson had promptly sought refuge in the orphanage. It had been a contingency plan set in motion by his father long ago. Yet, surprisingly, this enigmatic figure named Cole had been tucked away in the orphanage for nearly two decades by his father's design. He embarked on a journey to Aurous Hill, driven by the desire to create an extraordinary scenario...

With these thoughts gripping him, Charlie reached for his phone once more and dialed Jasmine's number. He had another pressing question that demanded immediate answers.

As the call connected, Jasmine's respectful voice came through, "Master Wade, have you had a chance to review the information I sent you? Any questions?"

Charlie replied, "Yes, I've gone through it. But there's one more thing I need to clarify with you."

Jasmine responded swiftly, "Please go ahead, Master Wade."

Charlie inquired, "It's about that jade pot and spring vase that my father-in-law accidentally broke. Do you happen to know how it ended up in Vintage Deluxe's possession? Did it come from the Moore family? Did Vintage Deluxe himself retrieve it, or was it consigned by someone else to Vintage Deluxe?"

Jasmine contemplated for a moment and replied, "That jade pot and spring vase... If my memory serves me right, Manager Cole was the one who secured it. Shortly after I joined the company, I assisted Vintage Deluxe in recovering several antiques, but most of them were rather unremarkable. They lacked the spotlight and profit potential. However, the Spring Vase was undoubtedly the finest antique he managed to recover."

Charlie mused, "So, it was him who recovered it... But did he disclose where he found it?"

Jasmine pondered and then said, "At the time, he mentioned that a friend of his, who dabbled in antiques, decided to part with it due to financial constraints, and the price was indeed quite reasonable. It could have fetched around four to five million on the market, and possibly even more—around five to six million. However, that individual's asking price hadn't even reached four million at the time. It still promised a decent profit, so I suggested he acquire it."

"I see," Charlie murmured, nodding to himself. This outcome didn't surprise him. It appeared that Felix Cole had specifically journeyed to Aurous Hill to seek employment at Vintage Deluxe and had even offered the jade pot and spring vase at a discounted rate. It was all part of a grand plan to acquire the "Apocalyptic Book."

This begged the question, had his father bequeathed the "Apocalyptic Book" to him?

If his father had indeed obtained the "Apocalyptic Book" back then, why hadn't he delved into its teachings?

Pondering this, Charlie couldn't help but feel ensnared by the mystery.

At that moment, Jasmine on the other end of the line voiced her concern, "Master Wade, what has prompted your sudden interest in that jade pot and spring vase? Is something amiss?"

Charlie responded quickly, "No, nothing's wrong. It just crossed my mind, and I felt the need to inquire about it."

Having said that, Charlie added, "Jasmine, I have some other matters to attend to right now, so I won't keep you on the line. We'll touch base once I return to Aurous Hill."

Jasmine, sensing Charlie's quest for answers, refrained from probing further. She respectfully said, "Master Wade, should you require any assistance or have further questions, please don't hesitate to reach out."

"Thank you," Charlie acknowledged Jasmine and disconnected the call.

Surveying his perplexed countenance, Maria couldn't resist asking, "What's bothering you now, Young Master?"

Charlie replied calmly, "I suddenly recalled something. The so-called 'Apocalyptic Book' didn't appear to be an actual book. After I picked it up, it disintegrated quite swiftly, yet its contents inexplicably imprinted themselves in my mind..."

After a pause, Charlie continued, "So, could it be that the 'Apocalyptic Book' is inherently meant for just one recipient, and that's why only I could access its contents?"

Maria nodded in agreement. "It certainly seems plausible," she said.

Charlie pressed on, "If that's the case, then when I stumbled upon it, the spring vase had only just shattered, but it hadn't disintegrated. Does this imply that no one else had read its contents before me?"

Maria pondered for a moment before responding, "I believe it's possible. Others may have desired to read it but couldn't."

She then added, "According to what the Young Master's uncle mentioned, the Young Master's father obtained the 'Nineteenth Edition' in the past. Upon reading the 'Preface to the Apocalyptic Book,' he regarded it as a treasure and dedicated himself to unraveling its mysteries. Therefore, I speculate that, having delved into the 'Preface to the Apocalyptic Book,' he might not have felt the need to explore the 'Apocalyptic Book' any further. He likely opted to leave it for you."

Charlie concurred, "Indeed, by regular standards, one would read such a book first, and then pass it on to their offspring, or at least teach its contents to them. There's no reason to keep it locked away for over two decades before passing it on."

Maria chimed in, "So, it's probable that the 'Apocalyptic Book' itself imposes certain restrictions, allowing only a chosen recipient to access its contents."

Charlie countered, "They call me 'Dragon,' but does that guarantee I was destined to receive it?"

"Of course," Maria replied without hesitation. "Destiny is sealed at birth. The Young Master was destined to be 'Dragon' from the very beginning."

Charlie probed further, "If I was indeed destined as a 'Dragon' from birth, why did my father arrange for me to receive the 'Apocalyptic Book' only at the age of twenty-seven?"

Maria deliberated for a moment before offering, "Could it be that, as the Young Master mentioned earlier, you were 'Dragon' before but somehow stuck in a pattern? It was only thanks to the Exeor Family heirs' intervention that you were freed from this predicament. Perhaps, your father had been waiting for you to break free from this pattern all along."

Charlie sighed, "But Felix Cole didn't linger in Aurous Hill all those years, waiting for me to break free. He arrived in Aurous Hill over a month ago, which implies that when he came here, he already knew what would transpire."

"But my father has been gone for two decades... He wasn't a seer like you. How could he have predicted, twenty years ago, that I would be twenty-seven when I finally broke free?"

Maria frowned, unable to offer a clear solution.

She ruminated for a while before conceding, "The Young Master speaks the truth. While I don't mean to question it, your father couldn't have foreseen these events with such precision twenty years in advance."

Charlie continued, "I also met Mr. Exeor, and he claimed he had selected the auspicious location for the Wade family in Eastcliff at my grandfather's request. I corroborated this with my grandfather and other sources. When the Wade family faced difficulties, my grandfather indeed sought help from various quarters, eventually turning to Mr. Exeor for assistance. So, the credit for my escape from the Dragon Trapped Shoal shouldn't be attributed to any prior arrangements made by my father."

Maria inquired, "What about the Exeor Family heir? Did he inform the Young Master when the Dragon Trapped Shoal situation emerged?"

Charlie pondered briefly and responded, "According to him, it came about when I got married."

Maria expressed her confusion, "That's even more puzzling. The Young Master is twenty-eight this year, and up until the age of twenty-three, he was free from the

Dragon Trapped Shoal. So why didn't Felix Cole give you the 'Apocalyptic Book' before you turned twenty-three?"

Charlie sighed again, "I can't fathom it either. What's more baffling is that Felix Cole didn't make an appearance until I turned twenty-three. And even after my marriage and subsequent entrapment in the Dragon Trapped Shoal, he only showed up four years later. How did he seize the opportunity with such precision?"

Maria exclaimed, "It appears he's been keeping a close eye on the Wade family and you, Young Master. He's been monitoring your every move and Mr. Exeor's as well."

Charlie couldn't help but sigh once more, "It seems that if I want answers to all these questions, I'll need to locate Felix Cole. He must hold the key to unraveling this mystery."

Maria concurred, "Finding him is essential. However, there's another aspect. I suggest confirming with your father-in-law."

Charlie inquired, "My father-in-law? What would I need to confirm with him?"

Maria stated seriously, "We should verify how the spring vase broke when you were at Vintage Deluxe."

Charlie responded, "It slipped from his grasp, or so he says."

Maria pressed, "But you never witnessed his 'slippery hand,' correct?"

Charlie nodded, "That's correct. That's what he told me."

Maria explained, "Now it seems that the shattered spring vase played a pivotal role in your eventual acquisition of the 'Apocalyptic Book.' It was the sole trigger for detonating the explosives, so to speak. Thus, it's vital to determine whether your father-in-law's clumsiness was indeed the cause or if Felix Cole had a hand in it."

Chapter 5520

Maria's question sent a shockwave through Charlie, leaving him deep in thought. Her words resonated with him, how could such a meticulously planned scheme spanning over two decades hinge on someone as unreliable as Jacob?

Charlie knew Jacob better than anyone else. Though he was his father-in-law, Charlie could attest to his irresponsible nature. Entrusting the success or failure of such a significant plan to Jacob was a recipe for disaster.

Without wasting any time, Charlie dialed Jacob's number. At that moment, Jacob lounged in Thompson First's room, engrossed in his mobile phone. His life had lost its spark ever since Matilda and Mr. Riley had gotten together. Plus, the presence of Elaine at home was nothing but an irritant. His preferred escape was to seclude himself in his room, spending his days scrolling through his phone.

So when Charlie's call came in, Jacob felt a tinge of surprise. After all, Charlie had been out, working with clients, as he had mentioned earlier. They hadn't spoken in days. Why the sudden call now? He answered the phone, curiosity lacing his voice. "Hello there, dear son-in-law. What's the occasion for calling me this late?"

Charlie quickly replied, "Dad, I've been out of town for a while now and I might be away for a bit longer. I may not be able to come home, so I thought I'd check on how you and Mom are holding up at home."

Jacob grumbled, "What's there to say? She and I have little in common, so we mostly ignore each other's quirks."

Charlie then asked, "By the way, Dad, do you remember Felix Cole from Vintage Deluxe?"

"Felix Cole?" Jacob's surprise was evident. "I do. Why do you suddenly bring him up? Is he coming?"

Charlie explained, "I'm currently working with a client who's interested in antiques. During our conversation, Vintage Deluxe came up and it turns out he knows Felix Cole as well. I wanted to hear from you how you met him."

Jacob responded with irritation, "I met him at Vintage Deluxe back when I was interested in antique calligraphy and paintings. I frequented Vintage Deluxe during my free time, hoping to find some treasures on Antique Street. You know, you find a lot of knowledge there. When Felix Cole first started as the manager at Vintage Deluxe, he was polite and attentive to me. Every time I went there, he'd personally assist me and even added me on WeChat. But soon enough, that guy turned against me quicker than flipping a page. It happened when I accidentally broke the jade spring vase and he had his men rough me up. A real about-face."

Charlie seized upon this mention of the jade spring vase and delved deeper, asking, "Dad, about that day when the jade spring vase broke, I never really asked for details. You mentioned it just slipped from your hand, but you're not the type to be careless. You've always been cautious, especially with antiques. So, what happened that day?"

Jacob grumbled, "You know our financial situation, Charlie. Elaine manages all the money in the household, so I have to be careful. Even eight thousand dollars is a lot for me. I handle it all. So, whether I'm looking at antiques or not, I'm very cautious. I'm afraid of dropping, touching, or damaging anything. But that day, it was as if the jade spring vase had a mind of its own. As soon as I touched it, it slipped from my grasp like it had been oiled. It fell to the ground with a crash. Maybe that Felix Cole had put oil on it, deliberately, even."

Charlie pressed on, "Dad, I remember fixing the jade spring vase with egg whites afterward. It didn't seem oily to me and its surface wasn't particularly smooth. Given that it's a Tang Dynasty artifact, the glaze should have been a bit rough, with a matte texture when touched. It has good shock absorption properties. How could it slip from your hand?"

Jacob hesitated on the other end of the line, unable to offer an explanation.

Charlie guided him gently, saying, "Dad, don't worry. The matter was resolved and you don't need to feel burdened by it. We're just having a chat. I'm curious, that's all. Tell me what happened that day."

Jacob sighed, "Charlie, to be honest, I was afraid you wouldn't believe me if I told you the truth. I thought you'd think I was making up stories."

Charlie assured him, "Dad, we're just chatting here. Even if you tell me the bottle sprouted wings and flew away, I'd believe you."

Jacob grumbled, "Well, I suppose... I'll tell you, Charlie and you probably won't believe me. At the time, it was entirely different from what I said before. That damn bottle, it felt like someone had installed a vibration motor inside it. The moment I picked it up, my hands were jolted and they went numb. I couldn't hold onto it anymore and it fell. I tried to reason with Felix Cole, saying there must be something wrong with it, that it had given me a shock. But he accused me of being reckless, making up excuses. At that point, I didn't have much of an argument left, so I thought I'd better get out of there and ask for your help."

Jacob hastened to clarify, "Charlie, please don't misunderstand me. Back then, I didn't want you to take the blame for me. I wanted you to help me out initially and then I'd find a way to repay you later. But you turned out to be so capable that you repaired the jade spring vase."

Charlie didn't take offense and kept the conversation flowing. "Dad, you mentioned that the jade spring vase vibrated in your hand. Can you tell me more about it? Did Felix Cole personally hand you the jade pot and spring vase?"

Jacob replied, "No, it was that guy named Crator who opened the package containing the jade spring vase. He gave me a pair of white gloves and asked me to take it out and have a look myself. I didn't think much of it at the time, so I reached in and took it out. I was about to snap a photo for WeChat, but then he suddenly touched it in my hand. That's when it vibrated and slipped."

As he spoke, Jacob added, "Now that I think about it, it was most likely a trap set by that Crator guy. Perhaps the vibration was his doing too."

Charlie registered this information and said with a smile, "Alright, Dad, it's been a while and we have nothing to lose by talking about this now. By the way, Dad, I have some other business to attend to right now, so I won't keep you on the phone."

Jacob eagerly asked, "When are you coming back, good son-in-law? I'm getting bored to death without you around."

Charlie reassured him, "I'll be back soon, just a day or two."

"Great," Jacob said. "When you're back, let's go out for a drink."

Charlie agreed and after some more pleasantries, they ended the call.

Turning to Maria, Charlie asked for her thoughts. Maria responded, "I don't think your father-in-law is lying, Young Master. His account aligns with our suspicions. I believe that your father may have been preparing for you to obtain the 'Apocalyptic Book' more than 20 years ago. Your father-in-law's account of the jade spring vase breaking on its own is highly suggestive. It's possible that the vibrations he mentioned were coming from the 'Apocalyptic Book' itself."

Maria continued, "So, our speculation is that it's not just anyone who can obtain the 'Apocalyptic Book' by possessing the jade spring vase. Instead, that person must meet certain criteria defined by the 'Apocalyptic Book.' Only when those criteria are met can the 'Apocalyptic Book' be activated."

Charlie sighed, "Your analysis makes sense. It seems like my father might have paved the way for me, but it doesn't entirely boil down to fate. It's possible that only I can trigger the 'Apocalyptic Book.' Even without my father's intervention, I might have encountered a jade spring vase at the right moment."

Maria nodded and remarked, "Precisely, Young Master. Perhaps you are the only one in the world who can awaken the 'Apocalyptic Book'. Your father's arrangements might have been to ensure you were in the right place at the right time."

Charlie acknowledged her words and said resolutely, "We must find Felix Cole. I plan to do so shortly, starting with a visit to that antique shop in the United States."

Maria suggested, "Before you go to the United States, should we have a thorough conversation with Butler Thompson First? Since he was arranged by your father, he might also know Felix Cole."

Charlie considered her advice and said, "You're right. I should talk to Stephen before heading to the United States. They might have crossed paths."



webcilo