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Nan Chan I have experienced all the eight sufferings of this world. I do not ask for nirvana, but for you. Wild and hard-to-tame demon (gong) X Cold, ascetic and childish immortal (shou) 1v1, HE. Carp is gong, gong, gong. Gong is older, older, older. The perspective in the story is not fixed; i.e. story is told from both characters' perspectives. (A quarter of the story will be flashback; a quarter...

Nan Chan Synopsis



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(A quarter of the story will be flashback; a quarter will be on casework.)

** Warning: novel may touch on dark and disturbing themes in certain story arcs. **Nan Chan is NOT for everyone** due to some of the heavy themes it

covers. If this isn't your cup of cappuccino, then please move on. Thank you!

** Some of the terms may be inconsistent in some chapters. Once the whole novel has been translated, I'll do another read through and re-edit to weed out typos, clean up sentences, standardize terms, and such.

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**Notes**

- ◆ This is a BL (Yaoi) novel.
- ◆ This is a **completed** novel; translation is still ongoing. [[Raws on JJWXC](#)]
- ◆ Page on [Novel Updates](#)
- ◆ There's an [audio drama \(First Season\)](#) in Chinese!



《南禅》第一季 @猫耳FM

《Nan Chan》Season 1 Audio Drama

Cover: Cang Ji x Jing Lin

我心有所爱。在云端，在瀚海，在心口。

## Footnotes

1. 八苦, the eight sufferings in life – birth, old age, sickness, death, parting (with loved ones), encounter (with hated ones), unfulfillment (of wishes and desires), and inability to let go.

# Nan Chan – Chapter 1: The Past



“What do you see?”

“A mountain of corpses. A sea of blood.”

“Why have you come?”

“To kill.”

“Jing Lin.” The True Buddha lowered his gaze in compassion. “Turn back, and salvation is at hand.”<sup>1</sup>

Jing Lin raised his head and light emanated from his body. His eyes were frosty, and his clothes were soaked in blood. The front of his sword hung down to the ground, scratching it. He was surrounded by a boundless sea of blood, with countless deities and Buddhas overhead.

Jing Lin said softly, “It’s too late.”

Jing Lin set his foot on the stairs, and three thousand armors warriors among the clouds retreated simultaneously. Every step he took, the three thousand warriors took a step back. Everyone was as silent as a cicada in winter<sup>2</sup> when they came face-to-face with him. He was clearly just one man, but the Gods of Heaven and Earth behaved as though they were confronted

with a formidable enemy. He walked slowly as if he was just taking a casual stroll. As if, he was still that same old Lord Lin Song that everyone was familiar with.

The Fan Tan Lotus Pond rippled, turning turbid from the dripping droplets of blood. Li Rong, the commander of the Three Thousand Armored Warriors of Heaven, kneeled on the lotus pond with a long spear in his hand and shouted in a hoarse voice, “Jing Lin, why are you doing this? Once the day ends, you will have nowhere to go. Exactly how much hatred and resentment do you harbor? Even if he was at fault, he should be handed over to the Ninth Heaven for punishment. Why don’t you say something? Why won’t you ever say something? You are always so hell-bent on going your own way, even to the extent of ending up isolated and forsaken by friends and allies. Jing Lin—!”

Li Rong vomited blood. His eyes were red, and he was trembling all over, choking with sobs.

“—Don’t you want to live?”

Jing Lin has already reached the last step of the stairs. It was as if he had pried out all the warm, tender feelings away, leaving behind only a bone-chilling cold. The Fan Tan True Buddha picked up a flower in his hand and faced Jing Lin as the monks behind him chanted sutras in unison. The sky was filled with masses of people, but none of them stood with Jing Lin. The blade of his sword rapped lightly on the ground. He finally halted in his tracks.

A large golden coffin without a lid was laid horizontally in front of Buddha. A man was lying in the coffin under the layers of tripled-sealed Sanskrit chains. His eyes were closed, and his expression was serene as if he was in a deep sleep.



“You’ve committed a heinous crime, and yet you’re still stubborn.” With a merciful expression, the True Buddha gazed upon Jing Lin, “Your Supreme Ruler father is right in front of you, and you are still unwilling to lay down your blade. Do you want to destroy the virtuous merits of your entire life and slay your father and friends before you will stop?”

It was as if Jing Lin did not hear his words. He suddenly swept his sword, Yan Quan<sup>3</sup>, across in a horizontal arch that glowed green. The chanting of the monks came to an abrupt end. Immediately right after, a violent gale blustered out from the green arch. For a moment, the masses shielded their faces as their bodies staggered in the wind; only the True Buddha stood firm.

“Jing Lin.” The True Buddha said with benevolence. “Bow and submit to Fan Tan. Repent, and you will be absolved of your sins.”<sup>4</sup>

Lotus flowers bloomed all around him as the light from Buddha illuminated every corner. The chanting of sutras continued. Among the clouds, the three thousand heavenly warriors bellowed in unison and charged forward. The tolling of the bell on the Ninth Heaven Terrace in the distance sounded far away, and the Goddess Shengyue looked as if she was weeping. Yet, Jing Lin did not retreat. He lunged forward, and a slash of green merged into the expanse of clanking silver armors. Dark red blossoms of blood burst open. The clouds were tinged with a layer of red as Yan Quan flashed around like mercury. The stench of blood threw everyone off balance. Some among the deities covered their mouths and noses as they retreated, glancing at Jing Lin in shock and fear. They did not know how Lord Lin Song<sup>5</sup>, whom they had seldom associated with in the past, had suddenly turned into such a god of carnage.

Blood trickled down the steps where Jing Lin passed through. He could not hear the words of dissuasion spoken by the bystanders; the only thing he could see and think of was that golden coffin. The True Buddha seemed to

sigh, but to Jing Lin, he seemed so far away. When he passed Li Rong, Li Rong held up his arms to block his way, but his fingertips only managed to brush through the hem of Jing Lin's clothes. At the moment the golden ray of light and crimson clouds intersected, they ceased to stand on the same side nor share the same path.

“Jing Lin—!” Grief suddenly welled up in Li Rong's heart. He staggered up and reached out a hand wanting to chase after him. But he was severely wounded, and his armor was crushing down on his body. He watched as Jing Lin's back disappeared into the golden light. The True Buddha lowered a finger as Yan Quan burst into green light. Violent winds raged between Heaven and Earth. Yan Quan had already pierced through the chains made up of Sanskrit characters to remove the head of the man in the coffin. The next moment, an infinite sea of blood surged forth in waves. The Four Lords of the Ninth Heaven cast a seal simultaneously, and the Ninth Heaven shook violently as if the clouds have been dealt a heavy blow.

The stars gathered, and the Sanskrit characters spun around as the golden light transformed into a hurricane. The chanting of monks quickened, and Jing Lin was besieged. He had fulfilled his wish. He threw the head in his hand down the stairs and slowly looked back. Li Rong's face was awash with tears. In that very instant, he saw Jing Lin's reply to him.

*Don't you want to live?*

*The way my life is now, forget it.*

In a flash, Li Rong saw Jing Lin being outflanked and annihilated; even that green fluorescent glow was obliterated. From then on, Lord Lin Song no longer existed on Heaven and Earth. His past was gone and buried in the wind, eventually fading away into nothingness.



## Footnotes

1. From 苦海无边, 回头是岸 literally, the sea of bitterness has no bounds, turn back to see the shore. It's never too late to repent; repent, and salvation is at hand.
2. 噤若寒蝉 literally as silent as a cicada in winter; to keep quiet out of fear.
3. 咽泉剑 Yan Quan Sword; Jing Lin's sword.
4. 放下屠刀, 立地成佛 literally the butcher who lays down his cleaver becomes a Buddha at once. A wrongdoer will achieve salvation as soon as he gives up evil.
5. 临松君; Lord Lin Song is Jing Lin's title.

# Nan Chan – Chapter 2: Brocade Carp



A brocade carp<sup>1</sup> was lounging inside a porcelain jar.

It seemed as if it was bored to death, not wanting to even move. The window in the inner chamber was open, and three or four specks of snowflakes drifted in from outside. Swishing its tail, it swam around in a circle, then touched the snowflake with its mouth. It froze for a moment, then suddenly sank into the water, shaking its head in surprise. It played alone for a while, but it was still lonely, so it floated up again and looked up at the man on the couch<sup>2</sup> who was sleeping with his clothes on.

This brocade carp had never seen another person, so it did not know how to appraise the beauty and ugliness of this world. But it often gazed upon this person in fascination, as if its entire day of fun was all concentrated on this moment. With a wanton gaze, it sized up the man's eyebrows, eyes, mouth, and nose, catching a glimpse of sentimentality and tenderness among that facial features. Yet when this person woke up, his face would take on a very different kind of frostiness, becoming extremely estranged and distant like fragments of burning incense set under a layer of ice. Fortunately, the man seemed to be injured and spent most of his day sleeping.

The brocade carp had been watching him for quite a while when it saw that the snow was getting heavier outside and much of the snow was leaking in

through the window. This man was still oblivious as a snowflake laid down upon his forehead and gradually melted.

The brocade carp watched and felt crossed. It had been with this person for so many months, and it had never gotten this close to him. Yet today, this audacious snowflake had beaten the brocade carp to it. *On what grounds?!*

The brocade carp swatted at the porcelain wall loudly, stirred up the water, and leaped in and out splashing water everywhere. The din it created made the man frowned lightly before he opened his eyes. After a slight moment of delay, the man's gaze turned towards the white porcelain jar. Right at that exact moment, the brocade carp "plopped" into the water, splashing a puddle of water onto the small table.

It thought the man should get up to comfort it now, but who would expect that he would only look askance at it, then raised a finger and pointed at it through the air before he closed his eyes again to sleep. The brocade carp was fixed in position by that single aim; it had not even flicked its tail and could only float stiffly on the water. It opened its mouth wanting to call out, but it could only blow bubbles. It grew angry and thought, *I'm going to ignore him these few days, no matter how he is going to coax and persuade me, I'll ignore him!*

The man slept until the next morning. When he got up to get dressed, he still looked tired and exhausted. The brocade carp had been stuck in position for the whole night, and its *"I don't care about him"* had changed to *"farewell, once and for all. From now on, we are strangers."* Unfortunately, the man could neither hear nor understand it. He placed some food in his palm, and the brocade carp felt its body lightened and it began to move again. As soon as it could move, it forgot everything it had just thought and chased after the food to gobble it up. When it was done, it even rubbed itself against the man's fingertip and pretended to be docile.

The man's complexion was fair. When the brocade carp circled around his fingertip, it felt as if he would melt at a touch. That was because he looked as if his heart was not in the moment, but then again, he seemed like he had no "heart" in the first place. It was like he might never wake up from his sleep one of these days. The brocade carp was afraid that he would really melt, so it nibbled on his fingertip with its mouth, wanting to feel him. Unexpectedly, his flesh was cold to the touch, and yet he also felt soft and moist. The brocade carp was astounded and nibbled a few more times until the man returned to his senses by the slight itch on his fingertip and looked down.

He stirred the water a little and asked, "Haven't you eaten enough?"

As soon as he spoke, the north wind on the veranda came to a momentary rest.

The brocade carp swam around his fingertip, rolled over and looked at him expectantly. The man understood and turned to look out of the window. It was snowing heavily at the moment, and it was not suitable for him to venture outdoors, but instead of conforming to common sense, he stepped out.

A small pile of snow sitting below the steps suddenly shook apart to reveal a small stone figure<sup>3</sup>. Using both its legs and hands, the little stone figure climbed over the threshold of the door, carried the white porcelain jar on the top of its head, then staggered out to chase after the man. The man had already stepped onto the snow. With the porcelain jar on its head, the small stone figure followed after the man. The snow dancing all over the sky avoided falling upon them as if they had some misgivings.

The brocade carp was initially depressed when it saw that the man did not personally carry it in his arms. But at the sight of the sky covered in flying

snow and the garden grounds blanketed in a sea of white, it cast that bit of low mood away and floated up and down excitedly.

It usually lived in the inner chamber and hardly ever saw the scenery outside. It was only when the man was in a good spirit they would venture outdoors. It was the first time today it went out to see the snow; its excitement was palpable. For a moment, it forgot itself and bobbed about so much that the porcelain jar wobbled dangerously. The small stone figure stumbled and struggled to maintain its balance in the snow, but in the end, it still ended up sprawled on the ground, and the porcelain jar slid along the snow. Fortunately, the jar was not smashed and remained intact, but unfortunately, the brocade carp was sent flying out.

The brocade carp broke into a golden red arch in mid-air and plunged head-on into the snow, leaving only its tail flapping violently and slapping at the snow in panic. Less than a moment later, someone picked it up by its tail. It originally meant to put on a meek and aggrieved act, but when a young and handsome face entered its field of vision, it immediately began to struggle in indignation.

Ah Yi revealed a mouthful of sharp teeth. “Jing Lin! Can I have this fish? It’s so fat it will be delectable whether it’s stewed or braised.”

Jing Lin had already stopped in his tracks to look back. He said, “Give it back to me.”

The little stone figure got up. Holding on to the grass crown that had been bent out of shape on its head, it chased after Ah Yi, wanting to get the brocade carp back. Ah Yi deliberately lifted the brocade carp and swung it in mid-air, laughing, “Take it if you can reach it. Jing Lin, you are really boring. You only know how to sleep all day long. Why don’t you descend the mountains and play with me? The lands of Zhongdu are vast and so much



more fun. It is entirely different from Heaven. I guarantee that it will dazzle you and make you forget yourself.”

If there were a person the brocade carp hated the most, that honor would go to this Ah Yi. He was originally a five-colored bird<sup>4</sup> of the Can Li Tree and often transformed into a human to play in the garden. Every time he came, he was sure to drool over the brocade carp and make all sorts of friendly overtures towards Jing Lin. Being swung around in the air only made the brocade carp dizzy, and now it heard Ah Yi trying to lure Jing Lin down the mountain again. It flew into a rage, but it was powerless to do anything to Ah Yi.

The small stone figure kicked Ah Yi in the calf. Ah Yi hugged his leg in pain, and the brocade carp seized the chance to break free. The little stone figure caught hold of it and turned to run. But this brocade carp was so plump that the little stone figure could only move half of it, leaving the remaining half in the snow as it ran like mad. The head of the brocade carp was dragged along in the snow, with accumulated snow hitting it all over its face. It could not even blow bubbles now, and it was knocked around so much that it near about blacked out.

Jing Lin picked it up, but it was still paralyzed and looked particularly pitiful. Jing Lin looked at it for a moment. When it feebly opened its mouth, Jing Lin sent it into his sleeve. As soon as it entered the sleeve, it was instantly full of life and vigor. There was naturally a Qian Kun<sup>5</sup> – a universe – in Jing Lin’s sleeves. Immersed in it, the brocade carp could finally catch its breath with all the abundance of spiritual energy brimming in its surroundings. It stuck close to Jing Lin, feeling indescribably at ease.

This was why it must rely on, cling on to, and dominate Jing Lin. As long as it stayed close to Jing Lin, Jing Lin’s spiritual energy would nourish it. Although it still did not understand what this implied, it was nonetheless

especially enamored with the feeling of being nourished. It felt that this spiritual energy was much more delicious than bait food, and it was always greedy for more. It did not even have its fill; how would it allow others to even get a glimpse of it? Thus, it would automatically classify anyone who got close to Jing Lin as those who were here to steal his spiritual energy, thereby earning them its deep hostility.

As the brocade carp devoured the spiritual energy, it listened to the conversation between Ah Yi and Jing Lin.

“Can’t we leave the mountain? You are always sticking around here. Whether it’s for one hundred years or five hundred years, it’s still all the same. It’s too lonely.” With his hands behind his head, Ah Yi kicked at the snow and asked, “Are you like this too in Heaven?”

*It’s none of your business.*

The brocade carp thought coldly.

Jing Lin’s sash fluttered in the wind. He simply asked, “What do you want from me?”

“Can’t I come without reason? Aren’t you a bit too callous? In your heart, am I that kind of person?” Ah Yi asked in disdain.

“One does not visit a temple without a cause.<sup>6</sup>” Jing Lin’s voice was colder than the wind.

Ah Yi could not shoulder this iciness and wrapped his outer cloak tightly around him like a loser. His chin was buried in the fur, revealing only a pair of dark eyes; it gave him an androgynous appearance. He turned his eyes to gaze at Jing Lin, saying softly, “Jing Lin gege, there is a demon in the East

who bullied me, but I can't win him in a fight. You go down and teach him a lesson. There is no need to kill him, just break his arms and legs and make him listen to my orders from now on. Okay?"

Jing Lin paused in his steps and cast a sidelong glance at Ah Yi.

Ah Yi took a step back under that stare, feeling as if he was not facing a man but a slinking behemoth. He sweated out of fear and could barely maintain his composure, so he gave a light snort and kicked at the snow again as he braced himself to ask, "Will you help me or not?!"

Jing Lin looked at him with indifference for a while and asked, "You want to break others' arms and legs that much?"

There was a chill in Ah Yi's heart, and he was inexplicably afraid. He clenched his cloak tightly and did not dare to answer. Jing Lin paid him no more attention and continued to move forward.

Ah Yi remained where he was and gnashed his teeth. He could not understand which of his words had displeased this man. It was not as if he wanted the other party's life. He only wanted to break the other person's arms and legs. So what did it matter? What had riled him up so much that he would not even give him face?!

Ah Yi had been spoiled and pampered since young. His sister, the deity of Can Li Tree who was in charge of the growth of the vegetation in Zhongdu, doted on him very much. He always got his way, and he was used to running amok in Zhongdu, so where in the world would he know what the word "well-behaved" meant? Now that he was 'bullied', he stopped chasing after Jing Lin to plead with him and simply metamorphosed back into a five-colored bird and flew away through the heavy snow.

It was night, and Jing Lin was asleep while the brocade carp remained motionless against the porcelain wall. There was no light in the inner chamber, and the garden was completely dark. Making just a soft sound, Ah Yi flew into the inner chamber and changed into his human form. He grabbed the porcelain jar and crept out the door with it.

Once out in the garden, Ah Yi started to break into a run. The brocade carp was startled awake by the churning of water. On seeing the oppressive darkness of the night and the incessant gale of snow all around it, it knew that it was in trouble.

“He has always treasured you. I only have to throw you down the mountain, and he will surely follow after you!” Ah Yi pulled at his clothes to cover up the porcelain jar and snorted, “It’s fine even if he doesn’t come. You have slapped me on the cheek more than once with your tail. Since he doesn’t want you, I’ll throw you into the river and feed you to demons!”

The brocade carp’s blood was boiling with anger when it heard Ah Yi speak again.

“Don’t pretend you don’t understand me. Do you think I don’t know? You rely on Jing Lin every day just for the sake of his spiritual energy. You want to swallow him up to enhance your cultivation so you can evolve<sup>7</sup> early.” Ah Yi leaped up, turned his arms into wings, and soared through the clouds. “Do you think Jing Lin doesn’t know? Fool! I’ll see if he comes or not.”

The brocade carp leaped with all its might, but its escape path was completely blocked off by Ah Yi’s clothes. It sensed itself getting farther and farther away from Jing Lin. All it could hear was the sound of the wind howling; Ah Yi had actually flown for the entire night.

The brocade carp gradually calmed down in the cold wind. It buried itself in the water, blowing bubbles as it thought.

*It's always hard to wake Jing Lin up once he sleeps. It's like he's half-dead. Who knows when he would wake up? What if this time he sleeps until Spring, wouldn't I be an utter goner by then?*

It pondered to itself; it had to find a chance to escape.

But although Jing Lin was still in a deep sleep, the little stone figure that was leaning against the snow shook its head and woke up. It rubbed its tiny eyes that were like black beans and started to run as it yawned. It did not pay attention when it was descending the stairs and slipped, skidding down the steps towards the bottom of the mountain with a “bam, bam, bam” until it finally fell flat on its back. Doing a carp kip-up<sup>8</sup>, it got up and adjusted its grass crown before it pulled a dead branch to use as a wooden crutch, limping as it chased after them in the direction where Ah Yi had flown off.



## Footnotes

1. 锦鲤, brocade carp or more commonly known as koi.



2.  
榻, a long and narrow wooden couch that also functions as a bed.



3.  
石头小人 a small stone statue; something like the above picture.
4. 五色鸟 – technically, the words would translate to a barbet bird. But here, it refers to a mythical creature in Chinese mythology. (Ah Yi's real identity will be revealed later in the chapters. For now, I'll stick to the original text and label it a 'five-colored bird').
5. 乾坤 Qian Kun means Heaven and Earth, or a universe. Literally, it's saying there's an interspatial 'universe' in Jing Lin's sleeve. It would be like a different world in there or he could even use it as an interspatial inventory.
6. 无事不登三宝殿 One doesn't visit a temple without a cause. There's always a reason or ulterior motive to look for someone.

7. 化形 to evolve or change form. E.g. when demons and ghosts cultivated enough to transform their appearance and shape. The most common form is usually the human form when they evolve.



8.

鲤鱼打挺 carp kip-up, a martial arts move where one leaps from a supine position into a standing position.

# Nan Chan – Chapter 3: Liveliness



The brocade carp was jolted awake. The cloth cover on the jar had been removed. It swam swiftly to the wall of the jar only to find an unfamiliar scenery in front of its eyes.

Ah Yi was eating grapes as he cocked his chin and said haughtily, “There, look ahead. Do you know where this place is? Fool, I bet you don’t.” He smiled maliciously. “This is a small pool on the coast of the Eastern Sea. It’s unfathomably deep, and an evil sea serpent lurks in its depths. It has not eaten for many years and is so hungry that it would eat anything, even humans. If I throw you in, you wouldn’t even be enough to fill the gap between its fangs.”

The brocade carp considered its figure and felt it was still possible for it to fill the gaps between the sea serpent’s fangs. But it was not born to fill gaps between fangs, so it did not want to become a filler even if it could. Thus, it looked at Ah Yi expressionlessly, thinking if it were to become a human in the future, it would pluck out the feathers on this brat’s tail, hang his real form upside down, and make him wander around the world with his bare ass.

However, Ah Yi could only see it staring blankly at himself, looking extraordinarily silly. He threw a grape at it and leaned forward to scrutinize



it. “Although it is said that all the carps in the world look alike, I don’t believe that Jing Lin would simply just rear one at random. Are you from Heaven? If you are, then you must be a spy! At present, Lord Cheng Tian has drawn clear the boundaries between the Three Realms<sup>1</sup> and established a strict hierarchy of ranks, boosting the Ninth Heaven until it almost exceeds Heaven. He even trampled over our land, Zhongdu, and set up a Demarcation Division to put Zhongdu under surveillance. Anyone who descends to the Mortal Realm at this point of time must be a mole. Are you or are you not?”

The brocard carp let out a snort. Ah Yi smacked at it again.

“Why are you so dumb and silly? You’ve stayed by Jing Lin’s side for so long, and you can’t even speak. It’s obvious that you have no innate talents. You’re really a fool all right.”

*You’re the one who’s the fool. All of your entire family are fools.*

The brocade carp silently cursed him although it continued to put on a naïve and ignorant act as it cluelessly looked at Ah Yi from the water. Ah Yi found it boring. It would not fight back when hit or talk back when scolded; it was no fun at all. Ah Yi sat cross-legged on the stone and waited and waited until he finally ran out of patience. He thought since it was already noon and Jing Lin had yet to come, he must not have cared. Thus, Ah Yi jumped off the stone and raised a leg to push the jar to the edge of the pool.

“You hit me three times.” Ah Yi touched his cheek. “I’ve never forgotten it. In the past, I only endured it to give Jing Lin face, but it annoys me that you have seen him humiliating me. Now you have seen my sorry state, how can I allow you to continue living? Well, he doesn’t care, anyway. All I have to do is ask Ah Jie later. He has to give me face even if he doesn’t want to.”

Ah Yi gave the white porcelain jar a kick, and it toppled over towards the chilly pool. The brocade carp dropped into the water and sank.

Ah Yi felt a little uneasy and muttered to himself with his hands clasped behind his back. “You can’t blame me for this. I gave Jing Lin time, but he was the one who didn’t come. Such is the fate of this fool.”

The moment the brocade carp entered the water, it felt unusually cold. This pool was enclosed all around, and there was no way out. It tried to sink down a little more but was forced back up by the bottomless darkness. Having developed a little spirituality and intelligence, it could sniff out a massive creature looming underneath.

*So much for this fucking fate.*

The brocade carp remained motionless against the rock wall. It had not seen any vegetation where it had passed earlier. The pool was lifeless. But although the brocade carp remained fixed in position, it still had the impression that it was being watched. The area beneath it was all swallowed up by darkness, so it might not detect anything even if something swam up from the bottom. It had never been so unsettled ever since it had gained its own consciousness.

After about four hours, the spot the brocade carp was in dimmed. Its entire body of gold and red was covered up by the shadows, which put it a little more at ease. However, it could not stay here for long. The sea serpent’s aura was faintly oppressing the brocade carp, making it uneasy all over.

The brocade carp made a round trip along the rock wall. There were no other openings on all sides of the rock wall. It was evident that whoever had sealed away the sea serpent had put in effort in selecting the location. The brocade

carp could not leave the water, so it could only wait for a chance to seek an escape route.

The brocade carp looked up at the stars reflected upon the water and grew colder. Only now did it realize the advantage of staying indoors. It was never this cold even though Jing Lin liked to open the window. Its stomach was empty, and it was unbearably hungry. Even waiting had become extremely difficult to bear.

It kept thinking Jing Lin was still not awake. But if Jing Lin woke up, would he really come for it? Jing Lin had never smiled at it, nor had he hugged it to bed. He had only got up occasionally during his naps to play with it. It felt that the small stone figure was probably worth more than itself in Jing Lin's heart.

But it still wanted to remain by Jing Lin's side.

Because it wanted to devour Jing Lin.

It always saw Jing Lin frowning and sweating in his sleep. It had also always seen Jing Lin sitting all alone on an empty porch. It did not know if there was anyone else in this world who was as lonely as Jing Lin. However, it understood that Jing Lin had not recovered from his serious injuries, and he was only using sleep as a cover. As long as it could devour Jing Lin, it could skip those hundred years of painstaking cultivation. It had already developed its own consciousness; thus it was no longer satisfied with remaining in the water. Its desires continually grew as its spiritual energy increased. It wanted to go ashore. It wanted to lean over and gnawed apart that exquisite neck of Jing Lin one of these nights. Possess him. Proclaim itself king. Dominate him.

The brocade carp was so lost in thought it did not notice the silent approach of the shadow beneath it. When it turned around to swim, it was confronted with a pair of golden pupils the size of copper bells staring at it. Its body that was covered in azure scales were only partially showing on the water surface like the tip of the iceberg. The water rippled as those scales glided by slowly, stretching endlessly into the darkness. Trying to guess how long this creature was based on its exposed length was no different from peeping at a leopard through a narrow tube<sup>2</sup>; it was hard to get the measure of it.

The winter night was still, and the surroundings, silent.

The brocade carp was tightly wound up with tension. Fear crushed down on it when it was confronted with this massive body coiling in the water, and yet the fear also aroused a sense of excitement in it. Amidst the tremors in the water, it was unexpectedly tempted by the sea serpent's boundless expense of spiritual energy. Lumps of flesh were protruding from the sea serpent's forehead. It was obviously going to evolve into a Jiao<sup>3</sup>. The brocade carp greedily and conceitedly thought:

*If I devour it...*

The sea serpent was so hungry that it abruptly widened its jaw. It did not even have the mood to tease its prey. The sea serpent had been subdued and suppressed in this place. Other than that bird which was here recently to create a disturbance, it had never seen any other living creature. So the moment it had seen the brocade carp with wisps of spiritual energy emanating from it, the only thought it had was to gulp that carp down into its stomach.

Realizing that it was in danger, the brocade carp turned and fled. Making use of its size, it swiftly swam between the sea serpent's body. It was agile and nimble. There was a loud bang as something collided with the rock wall. The

sea serpent was trapped in this pool with a magic seal pressing down on it from above to restrain it; thus its movements were severely limited. This was also the crucial period of its evolution into a Jiao, and so it could not shrink its size as it pleased. It could only let its body violently steamroll the wall as it slithered past. Cracks appeared at the bottom of the wall with a violent swing of its tail.

The brocade carp dodged the falling rocks and fled for its life. The sea serpent's bulky body was taking up much of the surrounding space, which narrowed down the amount of space the brocade carp could hide. The water current shoved it towards a narrow gap, and the snake serpent curled its body up to trap the brocade carp in between. The instant the sea serpent opened its jaws, the brocade carp darted through the sharp edges of its fangs and dashed towards the surface of the water.

Some scales on the back of the brocade carp were scraped off by the sea serpent's fangs, but it did not look back. It could only go all out and swim its way up. The water current beneath it stirred as the sea serpent catapulted itself forward and caught up with it in a blink of an eye.

The massive jaws spread wide open and sucked pool water in. Everything surged back wildly towards those jaws. The brocade carp swam against the flow with difficulty. The surface was close at hand, but it was swiftly being sucked back into the jaws.

*I'm going to be eaten!*

The brocade carp had already been sucked into the mouth when it saw the sea serpent shutting its jaws. With a burst of energy, it desperately strove towards the closing gap.

Ahead, a hand with white joints suddenly plunged into the jaws of the sea serpent and brutally wrenched it open, revealing the brocade carp inside. The brocade carp crashed right into Jing Lin's bosom, slipped down his loosened collar, and clung close to his skin, refusing to show its head again.

Jing Lin's face was pale as he pointed a finger between the sea serpent's eyes. The sea serpent was startled for a moment, then put on a fearful front as it let Jing Lin turned around. But the moment Jing Lin turned his back, it showed its true colors and pounced on him for a bite. Jing Lin's spiritual energy was only skin-deep. It was just a pretense that could be used to intimidate ordinary spirits, but it was useless in the face of a sea serpent that was going to evolve into a Jiao.

Jing Lin had expected this reaction, so he pushed a foot against the wall to spin himself around. The sea serpent flung its tail up to obstruct him, but Jing Lin dodged it and used the momentum of that tail fling to kick and propel himself out of the water. The sea serpent followed him partially out of the water, its thickset body savage and hideous as it chased and snapped its jaws after him. The seal on the pool glowed and suddenly bore down on the sea serpent, forcing it back into the water. Water splashed all around as Jing Lin came ashore and threw the brocade carp at the little stone figure waiting at a side.

The little stone figure looked up and ran. It caught the brocade carp and tumbled into the snow with it. The brocade carp waited for it to get up, but there was no movement for a long time so it looked askance at it. The small stone figure was covered in frost, and its movements were sluggish.

Jing Lin had not even tied up his hair and his drenched ivory-white clothes stuck to his body. He grabbed and wrapped a dark green wide-sleeved garment over his upper body and loosely tied the sash around his waist. The

water droplets on his white neck dripped slowly down his collarbone and melted into his skin.

Jing Lin covered his mouth and coughed a few times. His body was thin and frail, and he looked even more feeble in the harsh and frozen landscape.

He murmured, "Go."

He felt something off when he turned around so he looked back again. There was no brocade carp. Only a fair and plump little boy sitting in the snow!

The brocade fish lowered its head and turned pale with fright when it saw arms like lotus roots. Without thinking, it ran right at Jing Lin and threw itself into Jing Lin's arms. It tightened its arms around Jing Lin's neck and glued its face to Jing Lin's cheek as it said with imprecise enunciation, "Ji..... Ji Li!"

Jing Lin had not been in contact with anyone for hundreds of years, and he instantly retreated. For a moment, he was at a loss. The brocade carp latched on to Jing Li's neck, its tears pouring down in torrents as it looked at Jing Lin miserably and helplessly. Jing Lin felt a throb in his temples and the headache he had not had for a long time returned.

The brocade carp took advantage of this opportunity to innocently cling on to Jing Lin again. Jing Lin's neck was cold, and so the brocade carp was reluctant to release its hold on Jing Lin.

It was actually so frightened by this encounter that it had evolved and changed its form!<sup>4</sup>

Its — His psyche had yet to fully develop; therefore, he had only learned to more or less imitate an innocent expression. He leaned on Jing Lin like a

warm mass melting against Jing Lin's chest, and that sensation pierced through Jing Lin as if this had been a thing a lifetime ago.

Jing Lin tilted his head and frowned. The brocade carp blinked and tried to figure out his expression. He said softly, "Ji Li... Fat... Home."<sup>5</sup>

He could not articulate clearly, and it was tough for him to speak. He was obviously clumsily imitating "humans". Jing Lin could allow a fish to be with him, but he could not allow a human to be with him. This was because his emotions and worldly desires had been wholly cut off hundreds of years ago. To this day, he had not loved anyone and did not desire to learn how to love someone. "Human" relationships had once tormented him greatly, and he had paid a heavy price for it. If there was an emotion he had ever understood, then that emotion might be "hate".

For "hate", he had not hesitated to take up a blade and start a bloodbath.

Therefore, he could not help but shudder with fear in the face of this lively and warm child's dependency on him.



Credits: Many thanks to saed (@saedee\_) for the correction! ♥



## Footnotes

1. 三界 Three Realms refer to the Heavenly Realm, Mortal Realm and the Netherworld. For more details on the realms, please refer to [Realms Glossary](#).
2. 管中窥豹 looking at a leopard through a narrow tube; have a limited view of something.
3. 蛟 Jiao, or Jiaolong (Jiao dragon) is a mythical, aquatic creature capable of invoking storms and floods; sometimes also known as a flood dragon.
4. 化形 to evolve or change form. E.g., when demons and ghosts cultivated enough to transform their appearance and shape. The most common form is usually the human form when they evolve.
5. Supposedly, he was trying to say “Jing Lin, let’s go home.”

# Nan Chan – Chapter 4: Opportunity



The brocade carp did not know how to put on clothes, so he wrapped himself in Jing Lin's clothes. A good part of the hem was dragged on the floor as he ran bare-footed along the porch. A copper bell under the eaves swayed in the wind. Between each chime of the bell, the brocade carp – with a headful of messy hair – skipped and jumped around.

The small stone figure chased after him and picked up the hem of the clothes trailing behind on the floor. The brocade carp ran to the end of the porch. There was a small pond with a hundred-year-old ginkgo tree planted beside it. He crouched down and cupped the water up with his hands. It was so freezing he shivered from the cold.

“Being a human, feels like this.” The brocade carp mumbled to himself. After a night, he could speak a lot more fluently.

The small stone figure kicked his buttocks. The brocade carp was caught unaware and fell over into a kneeling position on the wooden plank. Instead of being angry, he laughed and raised his palms to examine them over and over again.

“Falling down, hurts this much!” He exclaimed.

He had learned to run only a short while ago. Before that, he always wanted to lie on the ground and swish his tail around. He needed to get used to using his hands, not fins. He sat down with his legs crossed and gathered up his shirt. His white, chubby feet were red from the cold. Lowering his head, he buried it under the shirt to observe his own body. Then he popped his head out and muttered softly to the little stone figure.

“Do humans have other parts besides arms and legs? This is so strange.”

The little stone figure could not speak, so it squeezed its head in beside the brocade carp’s and watched with him for a brief moment. Seeing the brocade carp’s confused face, it did not know how to explain to him either.

The brocade carp grabbed hold of the small stone figure, looked beneath it and asked out of curiosity. “Why don’t you have it?”

The little stone figure was embarrassed. It covered its head and kicked the brocade carp. The brocade carp immediately bared his teeth and threatened, “If you kick me again, I’ll throw you away! You will never see Jing Lin again!”

The small stone figure took several steps back and turned to run indoors. The brocade carp was afraid it would tell on him, so he hurriedly got up to chase after it. His movement was light when he entered the door as Jing Lin was resting. When they returned last night, Jing Lin had coughed for half the night and only fell asleep when it was nearing dawn.

The brocade carp stepped onto a small table and climbed onto a chair before he jumped onto the bed and kneel beside Jing Lin’s pillow. Jing Lin’s face was paler than the night before. He looked like a person with a chronic illness, as if being bedridden was the norm for him. His ink black hair was spread out over the pillow mat. The brocade carp carefully scooped up a handful of his hair, but they flowed through the gaps between his fingers.

The brocade carp mustered up the courage to lean over to listen to Jing Lin's breathing. He extended a finger to touch Jing Lin's cheeks and neck. Astonished, he withdrew his finger. Then he stretched his finger out again to probe him.

He was warm.

Jing Lin was warm. And he felt smooth to the touch.

This differed entirely from what the brocade carp had known before. Did it mean that even his sense of touch would become different when he turned human?

The brocade carp lay down beside Jing Lin. In this way, he sized Jing Lin up and realized something different about him. He had never looked at Jing Lin from this direction before. He never knew that Jing Lin's nose was this straight, Jing Lin's lips were this thin, and Jing Lin's... Jing Lin was this beautiful, as if he was some exquisite porcelain that would shatter with just a grasp.

The brocade carp pinched his own nose and touched his own cheeks. He thought, *I won't look better than Jing Lin in the future, because the world needs only one of him. It'd be better for me to be more powerful and stronger than him.*

As he was thinking about it, he felt a pain in his back. He looked back and saw the small stone figure sitting at the edge looking at him unhappily. With a snort, the brocade carp drew closer to Jing Lin and pushed the little stone figure away with his foot. But the small stone figure held on to his calf, wanting to drag him off the bed. Anxious, the brocade carp turned around to grab onto the front of Jing Lin's shirt and wrapped his arms around Jing Lin's neck, refusing to let go.

The small stone figure stomped his foot in annoyance, but the brocade carp ignored it. The brocade carp was so near to Jing Lin that he subconsciously absorbed his spiritual energy. Jing Lin's spiritual energy now was near-depleted and erratic. He gradually furrowed his brows, vaguely looking as if he could not withstand his spiritual energy being absorbed. For some reason, the small stone figure stopped moving and turned into two pieces of stones rolling around at one side.

Jing Lin did not wake up for a long time. The brocade carp gulped down a mouthful of saliva.

This was a good opportunity to devour Jing Lin.

Jing Lin's consciousness drifted atop an empty stone platform. He walked alone, lost. The restoration of his broken body was slow, and lustrous light was scattered all over, making it hard to form a human figure. His breathing grew labored as if he was being strangled in the throat. His chest felt heavy, and the feeling of being pinned down made him feel exhausted.

Even so, when the wind rose on the porch under the eaves, he opened his eyes instantly. He saw a fluffy head pressed against his cheek. The brocade carp was sleeping soundly while hugging him tightly.

Jing Lin looked at the roof and closed his eyes as he let out a breath of air. When he reopened his eyes, he had regained his composure.

“What is it?” His voice has always been without emotion.

Someone knelt down on the porch and said softly, “My younger brother is willful and has distracted my Lord from your solitary cultivation<sup>1</sup>. He deserved to die for his sins. I'm here to apologize and beg for forgiveness. My Lord, please punish him as you deem fit and do not hold back.”

Jing Lin was silent for a moment before he remembered who was kneeling outside the door.

“I’m not your lord.” Jing Lin said.

The prostrate body of the person outside the door remained still. After a moment, the person said, “I’m under the command of Lord Lin Song of the Ninth Heaven. Everyone knows this. Even if Can Li Tree is now under the control of the Demarcation Division, my heart remains like a rock, firm and unswerving.”

Saying so, she raised her head, straightened up to face the door, and made another bow.

“Don’t call me lord.” Jing Lin paused after each word, his hatred engulfing his frostiness.

The maiden outside was quiet for a long time before she said in a low voice: “...Jiu Ge.”<sup>2</sup>

Jing Lin felt smothered, and his hands and feet grew cold. He raised a hand to cover his eyes as his Adam’s apple bobbed silently. His chest heaved up and down unsteadily as he forced down the urge to choke on his blood.

*Don’t call me.*

His eyes were submerged under the shadow of his hand as if he would never struggle out of the darkness. This “Jiu Ge” was like a bramble of thorns, pricking him until he was drenched all over in blood.

The maiden beyond the door took only a moment to calm her mind. Even when her eyes were red, her voice remained stable. She raised a hand to haul

her younger brother up. Ah Yi was bound and had already changed back into his original form. He thrashed around on the ground.

“Ah Yi has been pampered and spoiled by me at Can Li Tree, that’s why he is now so arrogant and disobedient. Since he has done something wrong, he must bear the consequences on his own. I’m handing him over to Jiu Ge. Whether he lives or dies, I’ll let Jiu Ge decide.”

Having said so, she kowtowed again in obeisance and turned to go. On seeing this, Ah Yi banged his head until it broke and stared at his Ah Jie, looking as if he would cry. When his Ah Jie – Fu Li – was about to descend the stairs, she stopped.

“I know Jiu Ge does not want to see me.” Fu Li’s eyelashes drooped as she gazed into the night. “But I’m content to know that Jiu Ge is still alive. On the day when the True Buddha raised his finger and the Ninth Heaven shook, I was overwhelmed with grief on hearing of Jiu Ge’s death. No matter what the others said, Jiu Ge is still Jiu Ge. Although I don’t know the past feud between you and father, I’m not willing to believe that you are such a bloodthirsty person. Jiu Ge...”

“You’re wrong.” Jing Lin said. “Killing him was a long-cherished wish of mine. It was not because of principles, or for righteousness. I wanted to kill him, so I killed him. It has nothing to do with you. I am not your Jiu Ge. Lord Lin Song died at the Ninth Heaven Terrace, and the person you see now is also but a dead man. Take him away. Scram.”

Ah Yi understood nothing about Lord Lin Song, nor did he know anything about Jiu Ge. The only thing he heard was Jing Lin telling his Ah Jie to scam. This made him burned with anger. When he was born, there was no longer any five-colored bird left in Can Li Tree. Fu Li was his sister, and

could even be considered his mother. Although he was a jerk and a bully, he could not tolerate anyone dissing his sister.

He instantly opened his mouth to rail at him, “Jing Lin! How dare you tell my Ah Jie to ‘scram’?! Who do you think you are?! You’re just an invalid hiding in the mountains. Who’s afraid of you?! Just a mere sea serpent can make you bedridden, so what kind of hero are you pretending to be now?! You are only...”

Fu Li turned around at once and hollered, “Shut up!”

The copper bell under the eaves on the porch rang abruptly as the sound of wind whistling among ten thousand pines in the mountains rose and fell. A strong wind rose from among the trees and sent Ah Yi tumbling down the porch toward the mountains.

Ah Yi was still tied up and could not break free. He could only stubbornly shout into the air. “Just you wait!”

Fu Li still wanted to say something when the door of the inner chamber closed, shutting out her voice. Not getting to say what she wanted to say, she could only stand silently for half a night before she finally left.

Jing Lin waited for her to leave before he gave a muffled cough and spat out blood. The small stone figure stuffed a handkerchief in his palm. Jing Lin covered his mouth and wiped away the bloodstains before he asked, “Still not awake?”

The brocade carp tentatively opened an eye and rubbed it as he pretended to be roused from sleep. He sat up like a ball of soft dough, still clinging on to Jing Lin’s neck. Revealing his little white teeth, the brocade carp flashed Jing Lin an adorable smile.



Jing Lin raised his eyebrows slightly and stared at the brocade carp with an extremely oppressive aura. He said coldly, "To eat someone, you must be fast and ruthless. You keep dallying. What are you hesitating for?"

His lips were stained with blood earlier, giving them a reddish tinge.

The brocade carp innocently withdrew his hand, looking scared. Jing Lin looked up slightly, his chin almost touching the brocade carp's forehead. His eyes were lifeless, as if he was just relating the life and death of someone else, not his own.

"If you miss the chance, you have to wait for a year, a hundred years, or even a thousand years." What was cold was not his skin, but his soul. He drew closer to the brocade carp, like an awakened mammoth beast arising from its sleep. This was a deterrent far more overpowering and daunting than the baring of sharp fangs.

The brocade carp was keenly aware that Jing Lin was not his usual self. He wanted to shrink back. But Jing Lin grabbed him by the arm, planting him under the shadow of the beast. The brocade carp found it getting harder to bear. This was not pain, but the immense pressure of being towered over as he was being scrutinized. The mounting pressure pushed against the vulnerable boundary of his limits, and he trembled involuntarily.

"Jing... Jing Lin..." The brocade carp painfully called out Jing Lin's name. His internal organs felt like they were being crushed by something heavy. Even his breathing grew ragged.

Jing Lin looked at him for a moment and released his grip on him. The brocade carp swung backward and rolled several times on the quilt, feeling as if he had been granted amnesty. Silence descended upon the inner chamber. Inwardly, the brocade carp was gnashing his teeth, but he still put

on a pitiful expression on his face. Teardrops tumbled from his eyes as he pressed down on the back of his hand and sobbed softly.

Jing Lin turned his head and gazed at the snow against the backdrop of the night sky. He sat for a long time looking on with little interest before he looked back at the brocade carp.

“Come here.”

The brocade carp was wary, but he still crawled back like a small animal. The more compliant he looked on the surface, the more composed he was. Hiding in the body of this child, he yearned to dissolve Jing Lin’s guardedness of him. But to his disappointment, Jing Lin seemed to see through him and paid it no mind.

The brocade carp crawled beside Jing Lin. Jing Lin raised his hand to stroke his head but stopped midway and reached over to take a clean handkerchief from the little stone figure instead. He wiped away the brocade carp’s snots and tears. Then he lay down again without saying a word more.

The next day, the sky was clear after an entire night of snow, and the sound of clothes being laundered<sup>3</sup> broke through the morning. Jing Lin had obtained an outfit for the brocade carp. The brocade carp pushed his head against the cuff of a sleeve, but he could not get his head through no matter how hard he pushed. The small stone figure grabbed the clothes, corrected it, and put it on for him. It even wrapped a small velvet cloak around him. A pair of carps were embroidered on his shoes, and the brocade carp could not help but keep touching them when he was putting them on.

Then Jing Lin stood up and went down the stairs. As usual, he was flimsily dressed. He stood at the foot of the steps and looked back. His eyes were cold and empty.

The little stone figure led the brocade carp by the hand down the steps and followed Jing Lin down the mountain. The mountain was enveloped by the morning fog, and the mountain steps were wet and slippery. The little stone figure fell several times. The brocade carp kept a straight face initially, but then he started to run and frolic in the snow with the small stone figure until he had a head full of snow from all the tumbling. Jing Lin never looked back once, his eyes remained half-closed as if he was dreaming.

At the foot of the mountain, the brocade carp ran a few steps ahead. But when he did not see the small stone figure, he turned his head back. He saw the little stone figure sitting on Jing Lin's shoulder, waving its arm at him.

Before he could understand what it meant, he heard Jing Lin say:

“Leave.”



## Footnotes

1. 清修 solitary cultivation, or more literally translated as quiet cultivation. Unlike sects cultivation, it refers to the practice of silence as one cultivates his own morals and innermost being, letting things take their own courses. In Buddhism, it also refers to cultivation at home or self-cultivation.
2. 九哥 literally 'Ninth Brother'.
3. 砧声 the sound of laundering clothes by pounding them with a stick or rod. People in those days wash clothes that way by the river or other water sources.

# Nan Chan – Chapter 5: Deceitful



The brocade carp was stupefied. He tilted his head, wondering if he had misheard. But with a wave of his sleeves, Jing Lin had already begun to ascend the stairs. The mountain fog was an eyesore at this moment, obstructing the brocade carp's view and causing Jing Lin's back to nearly vanish from his sight.

The brocade carp returned to his senses and chased after Jing Lin. Hugging Jing Lin's calf, he cried out, "Jing Lin!"

Jing Lin stopped moving and looked askance at him.

The brocade carp looked up. It was so cold that his body tensed. He said with urgency, "Jing Lin, don't cast me away!"

"You originally weren't mine." Jing Lin flicked his sleeves and moved up the stairs.

"Jing Lin!" The brocade carp grasped the hem of his clothes and sobbed. "Jing Lin... the wild beasts in the mountains want to catch and eat me. I don't want to be separated from you."

Jing Lin remained silent.

The brocade carp refused to let go. Tears poured down his face as he looked up. Jing Lin's entire image was reflected in his eyes. It was as if he always had Jing Lin in his heart, depending totally on him. Jing Lin stared back at him with unfeeling eyes.

"I want to be with you!" The brocade carp choked on his sobs and said emphatically, "You were the one I saw when I opened my eyes. I don't want to go anywhere else."

"You know who I am." Jing Lin replied. "And you still dare to say that?"

"You are Jing Lin!" The brocade carp was dragged along the ground even as he remained in a kneeling position. He held on to the edge of Jing Lin's garment as if this piece of cloth was his lifeline. His vocabulary was limited, so he could only repeat dejectedly, "You are Jing Lin... Jing Lin..." He sobbed, "Don't throw me away."

This time, the brocade carp's tears were real. To him, this was like the dawn of civilization. Looking at the world was like looking at flowers through the fog. He knew nothing about human emotions, and his general knowledge of the world was undeveloped.

His only thought was to eat, but even if he wanted to eat Jing Lin, he had never wanted to leave Jing Lin. Wasn't eating Jing Lin a kind of eternal companionship? This was what he had always thought, and he had never felt that there was anything wrong with this thinking. Many of his memories when he was a fish had long been forgotten. He only remembered Jing Lin, since he was always with Jing Lin. He had never been so sure that if he were to leave Jing Lin this very moment, he would perish, buried all alone in the boundless snow.

He could not let go of Jing Lin. At least, he could not let go of Jing Lin until he had devoured Jing Lin. This was the prey he had been coveting, the meal he had been yearning. His tightly clenched teeth revealed his resolution to persevere. So when Jing Lin pulled his sleeve away, the brocade carp suddenly threw himself on the steps. His forehead knocked heavily against the edge of the stairs, and he toppled over onto the ground. Then he felt warm, dark red blood flowing down his brows, stinging his left eye until it ached.

The brocade carp sprawled on the ground and sobbed silently. He managed with some difficulty to cover his left eye and looked up at Jing Lin. It was as if he had cast everything else aside, wanting nothing except for Jing Lin's embrace. The redness of the young child's frozen fingers could not conceal the blood. He trembled as he timidly called out, "Jing Lin..."

Jing Lin's expression was cold as frost.

Isolated and helpless, the brocade carp crawled on his stomach. He ignored the blood as his hand clutched at the snow. His hand was so red it made one's heart ache. He had sobbed until his breathing was uneven, but all he could see was the diminishing back view of Jing Lin as it receded in the distance. Each of his cries was heart-wrenching, and his childish voice had grown hoarse from all the crying.

"You can't... Jing Lin!" The brocade carp feebly trembled all over. "I beg you... Don't... Don't throw me away."

It was as if he could not maintain his balance on the stairs and tumbled back down. He laid in the snow, his vision blurred, as resentful sobs escaped through his clenched teeth. The blood stuck between his fingers as he clutched at the freezing snow and turned over to stand up. He stood where he was, wiping his eyes and smearing his hands with blood and tears. He

could do nothing except to stand and look at Jing Lin's departing back as he wailed like a mere mortal child.

The crying toppled the snow on the branches of the cedar trees by the side of the steps, and the powdered snow mingled with the dense fog to conceal Jing Lin's silhouette completely from view. Only the sound of crying echoed in the mountains until the spirits and beasts stuck their heads out in curiosity. The brocade carp was tired of crying. Jing Lin was gone.

A wild boar emerged from a cluster of snow and sniffed its way towards the brocade carp. The wild boar was huge and it looked as if a mountain was moving around as it moved. It obviously had cultivated some spiritual energy for itself. Circling around the brocade carp, it asked in a low, muffled voice. "You want to follow him? You have no idea who he is."

The brocade carp stopped crying. With red and swollen eyes, he retorted, "It's none of your business."

The wild boar snorted and pushed the brocade carp down with its snout. "This mountain belongs to me. Why must you pester him? He's the most unfeeling. All the immortals are the same. Don't stay with him. Isn't it better for you to remain on this mountain with the other demons? You were originally a fish, anyway."

"What do you care?" The brocade carp ran a few steps ahead and climbed the steps with difficulty. He thought for a moment, then threw away the cloak that had been wrapped around him that morning, even tearing apart his outer coat until it was all a mess. He shivered uncontrollably in the freezing wind, inhaled deeply, then followed after Jing Lin's footsteps.

"Why did he strip?" A goshawk stuck its head out and uncertainly asked the wild boar beneath it. "Isn't he afraid of the cold?"



“When you become human, you become eccentric too.” The wild boar tugged at the cloak with its mouth. “It’s bizarre.”

As the spirits and wild beasts around chimed in, the brocade carp had already climbed his way into the mountain. He could not walk fast. It had begun to snow, and his legs trudged slowly in the snow, feeling as if his toes had become stones.

Ice was hanging off the cedar trees, and the creek flowed briskly. The more the snow fell, the thicker the fog became.

The brocade carp could not walk that far. He thought, How could Jing Lin be so cruel? He was like a man without a heart. He also thought of leaving for good so that Jing Lin would regret his decision. But no matter what he thought, he never walked away. Soon, he did not even dare to breathe through his mouth, because the wind was so strong and the cold was so cutting that even his mouth and tongue felt like they would freeze. He could also no longer express his emotions as freely as before; a depressed expression had been frozen on his face by the wind and freezing cold, like a carved mask. His limbs were so stiff that he could not even bend his fingers.

After a period of time, there was a sudden, gentle puff of wind in the brocade carp’s ear. The brocade carp slowly turned his eyes and saw a face floating in the snow. The silver hair of the other party fluttered in the wind, with the ends of his hair gradually turning into snow.

“Where are you heading to?” The other party offered patiently. “You can’t enter Zhenchan Garden like this. Jing Lin had hidden the garden in a subtle corner between Heaven and Earth.” He whispered softly in the brocade carp’s ear. “You will never, never find it.”

“It’s none of your business.” The brocade carp could sense an evil aura. His eyelashes and hair were all covered with frost and snow, revealing his feral nature.

Xue Mei<sup>1</sup> let out a mocking chuckle in the snowstorm. His limbs were virtually transparent; his cultivation was inadequate, and so he could not maintain a human appearance. He lay comfortably in the wind as he followed the brocade carp around.

“You have been abandoned by Jing Lin at the foot of the mountain. Are you aware that he had abandoned many fishes before?” Xue Mei whispered. “Do you know who he is? I know all about him. I’ll tell you.”

Unexpectedly, the brocade carp ignored the last part of his words as he swiftly raised his head. “Did he have that many fishes before? That’s not right. You lied to me. I’m clearly the only one he has!”

Xue Mei laughed and spun around in a circle. “You don’t believe it? Do you truly think you’re the only one? You see, he looks cold and distant, terminally ill and bedridden. There is no one else in that garden but himself. Wouldn’t he feel lonely? He would surely be afraid of being alone.”

“..... I don’t believe you.” The brocade carp’s footsteps slowed down. He shook his head vigorously. “I’m the only one Jing Lin has.”

“If you are the only one he has, why would he forsake you?” Xue Mei said sorrowfully. “He discarded you, and never even looked back once. How can he be so heartless? Does he not have a heart? You were companions in the past. Even if you were a fish, does he not even miss you a little? Yet the more fickle and ungrateful he is...” Xue Mei’s tone changed, and he started to laugh devilishly. “The more you want to swallow him, tear him apart, devour

him, and stuff him all into your stomach. You little demon, greedy and cunning.”

Xue Mei was right on the money, and the brocade carp flew into a rage out of shame. “It has nothing to do with you!”

Xue Mei drifted over to the other side of the brocade carp. “What are you afraid of? You must have not dared to let Jing Lin know, because you are afraid he would think that you are just a common demon, and being insatiably avaricious is in your nature.” He chuckled and whispered, “You shouldn’t be afraid. You have no idea how much more ruthless and heartless he is than any other demons in this world. A long time ago, he killed his own sovereign father. He also killed many other people and started a bloodbath in the Ninth Heaven. Have you ever seen a Heaven and Earth awash in red, with burning crimson clouds? That was the sight of the Ninth Heaven Realm when Jing Lin slaughtered those people. He also butchered hundreds of thousands of demons. His sword contains both the bones of demons and the blood of immortals. He is a bloodthirsty immortal whom everyone spurns, hates, and fears...”

But the brocade carp rubbed his frozen cheeks with no traces of surprise or fear. He said impatiently, “You’re making so much noise that I can’t tell the direction. Don’t remain here, go elsewhere.”

Xue Mei floated around the brocade carp. “Aren’t you afraid of him?” Understanding dawned on him right after his question. He continued, “You must have been deceived by his skin. This skin of his is deadlier than any other guise in the world.”

“You think he is good-looking too, huh?” The brocade carp said.

Xue Mei said grudgingly, "... I want to peel his skin off and put it over my face." He said as he stroked his face with the wind. "If I had his skin, there will be no place I can't go in the Three Realms." He abruptly turned sinister. "How hateful of him to imprison me here, leaving me stuck here for hundreds of years, unable to leave this place! He's afraid that I would spread the word that he's still alive. He's afraid that... Well, he's no big deal either! Little demon, if you really want to eat him, I'll lend you a hand."

As expected, he saw the brocade carp's eyes lit up, even as he carefully suppressed it and pretended not to give a damn.

Xue Mei gloated, "You have to agree even if you don't want to. I have already disclosed Jing Lin's past to you. Since you have heard it, then you are bound to me. If you want to live, you must do as I say."

The color drained from the brocade carp's face as he said, "You're so devious!"

Xue Mei continued. "You will not suffer if you obey me. And you can even get Jing Lin's spiritual energy for free. Don't you want it? As long as you eat him, there is no way he can ever discard you."

The brocade carp hesitated for a moment and said, "Is what you say true? I don't want to be bound to you."

"Unless I die, no one can extricate you from this bond. You have to do whatever I tell you to. Although I can't kill you, I can freeze you in the snow until you're half-dead, never to walk out from it." Xue Mei coldly scrutinized the brocade carp. When he saw that the brocade carp was slightly scared, he laughed. "Be good, and I will show you the way back."

Zhenchan Garden had been blanketed by the dense snow fog. The brocade carp saw the familiar garden from a distance away. The wound on his forehead had been so frozen by the cold that it had stopped hurting.

Xue Mei crouched on the brocade carp's back and whispered, "You must hide the grass I gave you. The pain it causes would be so unbearable that even an immortal would be immobilized if he swallowed it. You don't know how fearsome Jing Lin is. Even if he can't move, we still cannot let our guards down. Once he has swallowed it, I'll teach you what to do."

The brocade carp looked ahead and exhaled. He suddenly asked, "Does it work on demons too?"

Xue Mei rolled his eyes, and the wind tightened its grip around the brocade carp's neck. He said, "Don't try anything funny. That grass doesn't work on me. If it can harm me, do you think I would give it to you?"

The brocade carp's neck turned red from the freezing cold. He snorted coldly and trotted a few steps ahead to ascend the last step.

The small stone figure was sitting under the eaves shaking its legs and ringing the copper bell when its gaze fell upon the brocade carp who was standing at the entrance looking all battered and exhausted. Stunned, it jumped up and ran over to him, circling around him as if it was looking at some rare object.

The brocade carp kicked it and sent it staggering. He said resentfully, "Don't you recognize me? You and your master have hearts of stone!"

The little stone figure rolled over and sat in the snow as it dug out a snowball and threw it at the brocade carp. The brocade carp did not dodge or evade it. His eyes were red and swollen, and he looked miserable.

The brocade carp said to Xue Mei, "Are you going in with me? Jing Lin must be sleeping at this time."

Xue Mei was sizing up the small stone figure as if he could not figure it out. When he heard the brocade carp, he urged him on. "This is a rare opportunity! Take me in quickly!"

The little stone figure tossed the snowball up and down as it watched the brocade carp walk past him. However, it did not block the brocade carp's way or pick itself up from the ground. Xue Mei had found the little stone figure unusual when he approached the garden. From the looks of it, the little stone figure did not seem to be a gatekeeper either. Then, it dawned on him and he cried out in alarm. "It's—"

The brocade carp tripped against the threshold and fell headlong onto the ground. The wooden planks in the inner chamber seemed to be affixed with a layer of a spiritual barrier. There was a sizzling sound when Xue Mei neared it. Xue Mei harshly ordered, "Fool! Carry me up quickly!"

Who would have expected the brocade carp to trip over a small table again and fall on Xue Mei's semi-solid body? Xue Mei realized something was wrong when he saw the brocade carp struggling to raise his hands to pin him down on the floor. The ground was so scalding hot that Xue Mei wanted to scream, but a clump of grass was forcefully stuffed into his mouth.

Xue Mei could not spit or vomit it out and could only swallow it. His mouth was covered, and he was burning up so much he was about to melt. The pain in his stomach was unbearable. Before he boiled, he heard the brocade carp whispering in his ear:

"Thanks."

The brocade carp retreated in panic and frantically climbed up the couch. He threw himself into Jing Lin's arms, choking with sobs as his entire body trembled. "Jing Lin, Jing Lin, I'm scared!"

The insides of Xue Mei were churning violently. He crashed into the threshold, having almost evaporated. His expression was savage as he howled dismally, "You—"

*You deceitful demon!*

Jing Lin had just woken up. He raised his eyebrows as he saw the brocade carp shivering as he nestled against Jing Lin.

His clothes were mostly gone, and he was only wearing a small robe and an inner coat. It was clear that it had not been easy for the brocade carp to follow him all the way back here. The abrasion on his forehead had been frozen, and he had yet to wipe away the blood on his face. Jing Lin's image was still reflected in those pair of clear, innocent eyes. On seeing that Jing Lin had woken up, the brocade carp drew his hands back in fear and aggrievement.

"Jing Lin..." His eyes danced with tears. "Jing Lin."

There was a "plop" as the little stone figure squashed the snowball in its hands, dumbfounded by the scene unfolding before it.



## Footnotes

1. 雪魅 (pinyin: xuě mèi). A snow incarnate or a snow demon. I'll be using "Xue Mei" from now on because it's easier to type than "the snow incarnate" .\_. I'll continue to use "snow incarnate" if referring to snow demons in general, while "Xue Mei" will be used to refer to this particular snow incarnate.



# Nan Chan – Chapter 6: Cang Ji



The shrill cry of the snow incarnate made it difficult for Jing Lin to compose himself. He waved his hand, and Xue Mei<sup>1</sup> was flung out into the snow. The coldness of the snow unexpectedly eased some of his pain. He was terrified of Jing Lin and did not dare to linger, so he endured the pain, transformed into powdery snow and beat a hasty retreat.

The brocade carp was still covering his face, wailing. Jing Lin felt a splitting headache coming on. He could not even raise his hand to lift the brocade carp away. He could only partially close his eyes and said:

“Why are you so heavy?”

The brocade carp looked up and saw Jing Lin’s pale face and the exhaustion between his brows. He looked even more sickly than last night. He did not know exactly where and how Jing Lin was injured, nor did he know why Jing Lin had turned so frail all of a sudden. His heart ached a little, and he raised his hand to hold Jing Lin’s cheeks.

“Jing Lin.” The brocade carp sobbed and murmured, “Don’t die.”

He was only a child at present. As he cupped Jing Lin’s face, the sadness welled up in him, and he began to sob again. But he was an adorable child,

and the sight of him crying as large tears rolled off his cheeks was a sad sight for anyone to behold.

“I am but a dead man.” Jing Lin replied, his eyelids heavy.

“How can you be dead!” The brocade carp’s head knocked against Jing Lin’s chin, almost drowning him with his tears.

Jing Lin felt his collar getting soaked through as the tears slid across his neck and seeped into the pillow. He suddenly felt a little “alive”, as if these little scalding tears had stirred up ripples in a world that had been dead for a long time. It had been a very long time since he had been this close or had spoken this casually to anyone.

“Why do you have so much tears?” Jing Lin’s voice dropped gradually. “... Leave this place and explore the vast lands beyond. Like fledglings leaving the cage, you will come to understand that remaining here is no different from being a walking corpse. You don’t know the world, so this lease of life will be your awakening. It’s by a twist of fate that you could evolve. Your destiny isn’t here.”

“Can’t I just stay with you?” The brocade carp asked.

Looking at how naïve the brocade carp was, Jing Lin endured his fatigue and repeated the words he had said that morning in a slightly mocking tone. “You know who I am, and you still dare to say that?”

“Then, who am I?” The brocade carp looked up. “I don’t even have a name.”

Jing Lin looked like he was asleep. After a while, he said, “Let’s just call you Cang Ji.”

The brocade carp wanted to continue chatting with him, but Jing Lin's breathing grew heavier as he fell asleep for real. Once Jing Lin was sleeping, it would be impossible to wake him up. If not for his chest that was still heaving, one would almost believe that he was truly dead.

The little stone figure suddenly stretched its arms and waist. It leaped up with vigor, entered the inner chamber, and climbed up the couch to look at the brocade carp. The expression on the brocade carp's face changed. He dragged the small stone figure off the couch and pushed it aside.

“What you saw and heard just now doesn't count for anything. I don't know that demon, and I don't know what he is here for. Don't feed Jing Lin any nonsense.” He caught hold of the little stone figure to prevent it from running off, then said harshly, “If you dare to tell on me, I'll throw you into the pond.”

The little stone figure nodded quickly. It was pinned to the edge of the small table, and its toes could barely reach the ground.

Satisfied, the brocade carp released his hand and said, “From now on, stop calling me ‘fish’. My name is Cang Ji.”

The little stone figure originally had no mouth. It just went along and nodded its head vigorously. Cang Ji felt good to be obeyed. He pulled up his sleeves and said, “I want to wash my hands and face.”

The little stone figure poured water for him. Cang Ji wiped the filth away with a handkerchief. The wound on his forehead felt cool and did not hurt. He looked at his reflection in the basin for a moment, then asked the little stone figure. “He really didn't look back? I fell so hard. Did I not fall painfully enough?”

The little stone figure kicked him, and Cang Ji hissed and hopped on his leg.

“You didn’t look back either. You are exactly the same as Jing Lin!”

The little stone figure thought it was fun to see him hopping around in pain. Thus, it went around to the other side and kicked him again. Cang Ji wrapped his arms around its leg and tossed it down to the ground with all his strength before he saddled it. Tugging at the grass crown on the small stone figure’s head, Cang Ji said, “How dare you kick me? Now that I’ve become human, I’m much stronger than you. So I’m now your big brother.”

The little stone figure raised its head and thumped him so hard that Cang Ji felt dizzy. Venting his anger, Cang Ji messed up its grass crown. Both of them tumbled around on the ground wrestling each other, even knocking over the table. Finally, Cang Ji rolled over on his back, panting.

“I’m hungry. Jing Lin can’t be eaten in his present state. I have to find something else. “Cang Ji kicked the small stone figure and climbed to his feet. “Come with me to the mountains.”

On the other side, Ah Yi was unable to turn back into his human form and could only remain as a five-colored bird as he searched for food in the mountains. He was accustomed to luxuries and had no interest in eating insects. Thus, he forcefully took over nests among pine trees and even tyrannically appropriated food others had stocked up for hibernation, driving them away.

Ah Yi despised the other birds. He thought they were dull-looking and dumb. When he had slept enough, he would even kick the baby chicks in the nest that were crying out in hunger before he flew off the branch to look for water.

Cang Ji was bundled up again in fur clothes as he followed the little stone figure to pick mushrooms. And because Cang Ji wanted to eat meat, they went through the forest and dug through the snow to search for small animals.

Cang Ji pulled the shrubs apart and poked his head out to look around. From a distance, he saw a bright, colorful bird drinking water by the stream with its tail sticking out. Cang Ji felt that this bird looked very familiar to him.

“Isn’t that Ah Yi?” Cang Ji pressed down on the small stone figure until it was buried in the snow. It struggled desperately. Cang Ji motioned for it to keep quiet and continued to stare at Ah Yi for a moment. He saw the bird combing its wings from time to time, looking all arrogant and condescending.

“It must be him.” Cang Ji bared his teeth and said to the little stone figure, “You wait. I’ll hold him down. Come out when I call you.”

Then he removed his fur clothes, folded it, and placed it aside before he crawled over.

Ah Yi was fondly admiring himself near the water. He felt that his color was so gorgeous and unique that not even a phoenix could match it. The more he looked at himself, the more absorbed he became. He was unaware of who was crawling towards him from behind. Unable to control himself, Ah Yi hung his head closer to the water to take a clearer look at himself.

*Such feathers...*

Before he had finished praising himself, someone kicked him in the ass. Ah Yi was caught off guard and fell into the water. The stream was not deep, but

it was cold. It also wet his wings, causing him to flail about wildly in the stream.

“Ignorant fool! How dare...”

Water splashed around as Ah Yi was grabbed by the foot. Cang Ji’s strength was much greater than that of a bird, and he dragged Ah Yi onto the snow. Ah Yi flapped his wings and tried to escape, but Cang Ji sat on him to pin him down.

“What are you doing? You fool! What the hell are you doing?!” Ah Yi fumed in anger.

Once Cang Ji was settled down, he told the little stone figure to come out and shove Ah Yi’s bird head into the snow. The little stone figure was more than happy to comply. Once it was done, it even rode on Ah Yi’s long neck. Ah Yi could not break free and could only cuss, “How dare you?! I’ll kill you!”

Cang Ji was facing Ah Yi’s tail as he counted the feathers on his tail. He tugged at one and snorted heavily. “What did you say? Speak louder.”

“How dare you pluck my feather?! I’ll kill you!” Ah Yi lashed out at him.

“Easy.” Cang Ji’s heart stirred. “If you don’t want me to pluck them, then you must tell me your sister’s history with Jing Lin.”

“Bah! Are you even worthy of asking about my Ah Jie?!“ Ah Yi spat back. “Don’t even think about it!”

Cang Ji pulled out a feather and waved it in his hand. It was so bright it hurt his eyes. Ah Yi cried out in pain, not expecting him to really have the guts to pluck it out.

“Just you wait!” Ah Yi said ferociously. “I’ll scrape off all your scales and make you...”

Cang Ji pulled off another one. “Are you telling me or not?”

Ah Yi choked in anger. But he braced himself and pushed on, “I won’t tell you! If you kill me, my Ah Jie will not let you off...”

“You are so strange. You’ve already evolved and amassed spiritual energy, but you still cry for your sister all day long. You cry until you are all a mess. You don’t look like a male bird at all.” Cang Ji perplexedly yanked out the feather on Ah Yi’s tail. “Are you actually female?”

Ah Yi was red-eyed with rage.

Cang Ji thought for a moment and said, “I’m not curious about your Ah Jie. You just need to tell me about Jing Lin.”

“I don’t know!” Ah Yi rebuffed him.

“How was the taste of being in the water just now?” Cang Ji hardened his voice, “If you don’t tell me, I’ll pluck out all your feathers and let you soak in it for a few days. We’ll see how you can face your Ah Jie. Without this body of feathers, you will be nothing but a bald chicken. Do you think your Ah Jie will still recognize you?”

He spoke harshly, but he also meant what he said. He knew nothing about human relations; he only understood that he should do whatever he wanted to do. Even if you told him that the Jade Emperor did not allow such acts, he would challenge back with, *Who is this Emperor? Who is he to Cang Ji? Who does he think he is?* Whatever Cang Ji wanted to do, nobody could stop him!

Ah Yi was dragged to the edge of the water. He was trapped in the snow. Gritting his teeth in fear, he said, "I'll tell you! Stop it! I'm just afraid you don't dare to hear me out even if I dared to say it!"

"Cut the crap." Cang Ji kicked him and said impatiently.

"You promise me first. If I tell you, you will let me go and scam!" Ah Yi struggled with his wings.

"I promise you." Cang Ji sat on Ah Yi's back with his back facing him. He propped his cheeks in his hands and said, "I always keep my word."

Ah Yi calmed himself down before he continued, "My Ah Jie treated him differently – with respect and fear. She didn't tell me anything except to call him 'Jiu Ge'. But I knew there must be a reason, so I made a special trip to the central section where the Registry for the Doctrine of Gods was displayed to check it out. In Heaven and Earth, there was only one person who dared to call himself Jing Lin. Who do you think he was? He was Lord Lin Song, the man who killed the sovereign five hundred years ago!"

He deliberately paused for a moment after finishing, obviously pleased with himself. He wanted Cang Ji to admit that he was "scared". It did not matter if he was not familiar with the name "Jing Lin", but "Lord Lin Song" was well known. Five hundred years ago, the turmoil he stirred up had caused instability in the Three Realms for countless years. The Three Thousand Armored Warriors of Heaven were nearly wiped out. Lord Sha Ge of Ninth Heaven, Li Rong, sank into a deep sleep because of this incident. If Lord Cheng Tian had not sought help from Fan Tan True Buddha, no one would not have been able to take down Lord Lin Song.

It was a pity Cang Ji was not acquainted with all the well-known characters in Heaven and on Earth, and so he was not afraid at all. He simply kicked Ah



Yi again to prompt him to continue.

Ah Yi fumed, “I’ve already told you! Why kick me again?!”

“That’s all?” Cang Ji frowned. “That’s all you know?”

“This was enough to make the gods of Zhongdu lose their heads. You are so stupid! Jing Lin killed his sovereign father. Among all the gods of Ninth Heaven, who can condone him? He clearly died, and yet he’s still alive. Humph, he can’t hide the truth from me. My guess is that he achieved the Great Accomplishment Stage that day. Do you know what that is? Jing Lin was previously ranked as a Lord, but there were only six in the universe who could be addressed as ‘Lord’. No more than six. He killed Lord Jiu Tian, the sovereign who established the Ninth Heaven Realm. Lord Jiu Tian was both his father and his king! Since then, six lords were reduced to four lords. Now, the only one who can be considered to have achieved the Great Accomplishment Stage is Lord Sha Ge, Li Rong. If Jing Lin had reached that stage too, it wouldn’t be a surprise if he didn’t die.”

“Why?” Cang Ji asked.

“Because those who have cultivated until the Great Accomplishment Stage can never die or be destroyed. They will live as long as Heaven lives.” Ah Yi’s voice deepened as he spoke. “... but I think he is faking it because he is not even the least powerful! There is so much hype about him outside but look at him. His expanse of spiritual energy is empty, and he looks like he has reached his limits. After hanging on for so long, he is still an invalid. He is weak and cowardly, not even daring to descend the mountains after so many years! What’s the point of living like this? He might as well die.”

He had yet to finish talking when his head was smacked a few times, the force of it nearly sending him into the snow. The little stone figure stepped

on his head, then continued to stomp on him several times as if it was venting its hatred.

Ah Yi was furious, but he dared not speak. He could only continue, “My Ah Jie was originally a five-colored bird under Lord Lin Song, so it’s not strange for her to know him! I’m done talking. Now scram!”

Unexpectedly, Cang Ji looked back and said sinisterly, “Scram? You think it’s so easy? You’re unrepentant and almost fed me to a snake. If I let you off this easily, wouldn’t I be on the losing end?”

Ah Yi spat out hatefully. “You deceived me?! Don’t you dare touch me! You! You... Ah Jie! Jing Lin! Save me—”



Credits: Many thanks to saed (@[saedee\\_](#)) for the correction and to Cheshire (@[ivory\\_and\\_horn](#)) for pointing out the inconsistency in the naming of stages!

## Footnotes

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# Nan Chan – Chapter 7 : Overturn The Mountain



Cang Ji kicked his shoes off and pushed the inner chamber door open. He had been running about outdoors until his cheeks felt hot and he was sweating all over. It was even more sweltering inside the inner chamber. Jing Lin was still asleep. Cang Ji climbed up the couch and watched Jing Lin with bated breath for a moment, exhaling only when he was sure Jing Li would not wake up.

The little stone figure ran in, shook off the bird feathers on its head, and climbed up after him.

Cang Ji asked, “For how long is he going to sleep?”

The little stone figure naturally could not answer. Cang Ji took off his fur clothes and robe, wanting to snuggle up to Jing Lin. He had only lifted the corner of the quilt when someone grabbed his back collar.

He looked back and said, “Do you want to sleep beside him too? No way. Go outside. You usually sleep outside.”

The little stone figure stepped on Cang Ji’s back and dragged him away from Jing Lin, but Cang Ji was unwilling. In a moment of desperation, he grabbed Jing Lin’s neck and forcibly squeezed in next to Jing Lin. He threw a fierce

glare at the small stone figure, totally disregarding their earlier camaraderie when they were plucking feathers together. It was not a stretch to say he had fallen out with a friend over Jing Lin.

The little stone figure butted its head against Cang Ji's back, causing him to grimace even though he did not dare to utter a sound. He could only let the small stone figure thump him on the back. It was so hot in the room, but Jing Lin was not even sweating. Cang Ji closed his eyes, tempted by the neck right under his nose. Even if he just had a full meal, he still wanted to bite off a piece of Jing Lin's flesh.

The small stone figure punched Cang Ji from behind, which hurt and surprised him although it also cut his desire short. He licked his teeth and touched Jing Lin's neck. He supposed he would not be able to rip off Jing Lin's flesh in his current state and thought how nice it would be if he could grow up a little more.

But the strange thing was that he was a fish, not a beast. He should not have been so ravenous for meat, nor should he have been so clear about the vital parts of a body that would have been fatal if wounded. But these were like natural instincts embedded in him, so much that even he found it odd.

*Am I truly just a fish?*

Cang Ji's mind was wandering when he fell asleep.

It was night when the fog receded and the snow stopped falling.

The copper bell under the eaves shook as someone rapped urgently and continuously on the door.

Cang Ji curled up and felt the warmth beneath him. He did not want to wake up, but the person beyond the door would not stop knocking. He clung on to Jing Lin and asked, vaguely, "Who is it?"

The person at the door called out, "Jiu Ge."

Cang Ji was suddenly awake, having recognized Ah Yi's sister as the person at the door. He had plucked out Ah Yi's tail feathers during the day, balding him so much that Ah Yi was both ashamed and resentful. Thus, he kept his eyes peeled as he climbed out of bed and put on his robe.

"What do you want?"

Fu Li saw a gap in the door of the inner chamber and poked her head through. She seemed to be in a hurry and simply asked, "Is Jiu Ge still asleep?"

"He's sleeping, and can't be woken." Cang Ji played innocent as he observed minute details about her. On seeing that she was not here to avenge Ah Yi, he continued, "Jiejie, would you like to come in for a cup of tea? It's uncertain when Master will wake up."

Sure enough, he heard Fu Li saying, "I'm afraid I have to give the tea a miss. Open the door and let me in."

"Can't jiejie enter?" Cang Ji asked.

Fu Li's expression froze, and her eyes dimmed slightly. "Jiu Ge's spiritual barrier is everywhere in this garden. I can't even touch you, let alone enter the inner chamber."

The copper bell under the eaves corridor shook again.

Fu Li took a step forward. “This is bad! The Eastern Sea Division has caught up with us. It’s inadvisable to remain here. Open the door, fast!”

Cang Ji sniffed; the salty tinge of sea tide was rapidly saturating the air. The sound of the waves seemed to have pervaded the mountainside, and an invisible power surged forth swiftly and violently. The starry sky suddenly darkened, and Cang Ji stared up at it. The sky was not covered by dark clouds, but by a massive body making its way through the sky.

Fu Li knew it was already too late. She shook herself, and there was a great rush of light all at once in the darkness of the night. Her original form was absolutely not something Ah Yi could match up to; she almost stole the brilliance away from the starry sky.

Fu Li waved her wings, and Cang Ji was blown into the room. The doors and windows were shut tight, and the entire garden was blanketed with fluttering, accumulated snow. Fu Li soared into the sky and whistled in a clear voice. The massive object in the air followed the sound, and a head emerged from the clouds.

This was a bona fide Jiaolong!<sup>1</sup>

“The Northern Deity of Can Li left her place without authorization to come to the coast of the Eastern Sea. What matters of importance do you have here?” The Jiaolong censured in a low voice.

“Zong Yin!” Fu Li spun through the clouds. You have lived in the Eastern Sea for a hundred years, devoted to cultivation with the aim of evolving into a dragon. Now the Dragon Gate<sup>2</sup> has yet to appear, but you have left for an inspection tour without permission. So, what brings you here?”

“I’m in charge of the Eastern Sea, and it’s my duty to inspect my land.” Zong Yin’s gaze was deep. “I’ve been frank with you, and I hope you will give me a straight answer. What are you doing here? This place is deserted and barren of spiritual energy. Even if you’re here to go into seclusion, you should not have chosen this place.”

“I am the Deity of Can Li, and wherever Can Li tree points to are my lands to oversee. I am surprised too. There are no aberrations in the stars anywhere else except this place. So I rushed here, but it turned out that you were the cause of it.”

Zong Yin scrutinized her and said, “Don’t deceive me. A snowstorm broke out here this morning. A snow incarnate informed the Eastern Sea that there is evil lurking here. Evil beings are not trivial matters. I need to go through this place with a fine comb. You were from the Ninth Heaven Realms, so you’re well aware of how heavy the consequences of an evil contagion is. Don’t be lead astray, leave quickly.”

When Lord Lin Song had killed his way to the Ninth Heaven, Zong Yin was at the crucial point of his evolution into a Jiao. Therefore, he did not see the tragic state of the Ninth Heaven. All he knew was that Lord Cheng Tian had said that Lord Lin Song had been tainted by evil and was reaping what he had sowed.

“The snow incarnate is cunning, greedy, and fond of inciting trouble. You actually believe the words of such an ill-reputed being?” Fu Li said. “The stars are unstable. I can’t return now. Don’t hinder me doing my job.”

Zong Yin swirled his body around. “There must be a reason you are trying to stop me from inspecting this place!”



As soon as he said that, the Jiaolong suddenly transformed into a topless man and dived towards the ground. Fu Li spread her wings, and five colors cut through the sky as she chased after him.

When Zong Yin landed on one knee, he noticed spiritual energy wandering all over. He stood up and looked towards the garden, saying in a cold voice, “There are demons with such level of cultivation in this place. You hide them instead of reporting them. If my Lord asks about this someday, you and I will be held responsible for it!”

Fu Li raised the wind to obstruct him. He was a difficult opponent to deal with! She would still have countermeasures if the one who came was not Hai Jiao Zong Yin.<sup>3</sup> But of all people, it just had to be Zong Yin. Among the lands of Zhongdu, Zong Yin was the most loyal to Lord Cheng Tian. This person was upright and tenacious; he would never give up until he got to the bottom of the matter!

The snowstorm rushed at him, and Zong Yin waved a hand to reverse its direction. In that instant, the sighing of the wind among the pines surged, and the entire mountain of accumulated snow flowed backward and started to quake violently.

Cang Ji could not see outside the house, but he felt the sudden tremor under his feet. It made him dizzy and nauseated. Jing Lin’s sleeping body slipped towards the ground, and Cang Ji hugged half of Jing Lin’s body tightly and dragged him back to the couch. Unexpectedly, the next moment, he staggered and stumbled, rolling off the couch with Jing Lin. As he collided with the small desk and chairs in the room, a fire raged within him; he could not wait to bite the perpetrator to death.

It gradually became harder for Cang Ji to maintain his grip on Jing Lin, so he bent over to protect Jing Lin’s head, saying through clenched teeth. “I

haven't eaten you yet! How can I let someone taste your blood first!"

The small table smashed into his back, pinning him down and making it hard for him to breathe. He did not have any hands free and could only endure and resist it. Among the complete mayhem in the room, he suddenly saw the little stone figure deftly dodging the debris as it came to his side.

Cang Ji almost choked on his blood. "Stop playing! Give me a hand..."

The little stone figure stretched out its arms and stepped on Cang Ji's arm to climb onto his shoulder, pressing Cang Ji down even lower. Cang Ji fumed, "How dare you step on my head!"

The little stone figure stomped on him. Cang Ji bent his neck to stick close to Jing Lin. Even at this moment, he was still thinking idly: *this man has a romantic air about him when he's asleep. He's totally a different person from when he's wide awake. Even if he were to remain unconscious forever, it wouldn't...*

"What are you doing?!" Cang Ji ground his teeth.

The little stone figure pulled a strand of his hair as if he knew what Cang Ji was thinking. Then, the weight on Cang Ji's back disappeared as the small table was pushed off him. Cang Ji was gasping for breath when the room was turned upside down. Apparently, Zong Yin could find nothing unusual, so he had intended to overturn the entire mountain.

Even Jing Lin's spiritual barrier would be unable to withstand this blow. The garden was located at the top of the mountain. If it was flipped over, they would fall to the very bottom. With the weight of the entire mountain on them, even if Jing Lin was able to prop it up, Cang Ji did not want to take the

risk! If Jing Lin coughed out blood and the spiritual barrier was shattered, they would all be crushed into a mass of minced meat instantaneously.

Fu Li stomped on the ground, jolting the toppling mountain back into its original position. The birds in the mountain scattered and the wild beasts fled, miserable beyond words.

“Overturning the mountain to destroy a soul! Do you want to end the lives of all living spirits here? Stop at once!”

The slapping sounds of the sea tide permeated the air. Zong Yin said, “I know my own limits. Get out of the way.”

“How can I stand by and do nothing when you are behaving like this!” With a sweep of Fu Li’s tail, a violent wind swept past and pushed Zong Yin off the ground, sending him towards the Eastern Sea.

Zong Yin steadied himself mid-air and tore the wind apart. Scales swiftly sprang up on his arms as he pounded heavily towards the ground. The gale receded and disappeared without a trace, while the ground cracked rapidly as the pine forest toppled over.

“I must see who is hiding here! You must be acting so timidly and cautiously because you’re afraid to alert others. This person is no small fry, who is it? Fu Li, who are you hiding?!”

The ground tilted and collapsed.

Cang Ji crashed into the wall, aching all over. He exhaled in a hoarse voice, unable to stop the situation from deteriorating. Jing Lin lurched towards him following the tremors, and his arms slid to his sides. Cang Ji’s gaze subconsciously followed Jing Lin’s arm down to one of his fingertips when

he had a sudden brainwave. He extended his neck, desperately drawing closer to Jing Lin's finger.

“Hey!” Cang Lin hissed at the small stone figure. “Give me Jing Lin's finger!”

Just a little closer and he could touch it. But it was tilting even more, and he could only watch as Jing Lin's fingertip swayed lightly before him.

This body was useless. It was neither tall nor strong. There were no other uses for it except to play dumb and act obedient! He wanted to grow up; he wanted to grow up; he wanted to grow up!

The fingertip was like white jade, and it drooped and came into contact with Cang Ji's lips. Without even thinking about it, Cang Ji bit down on it! He pressed his milk teeth down hard on Jing Lin's fingertip and drew blood. The blood entered his mouth, tasting like sweet dew when it flowed down his throat. It turned into a surging wave of spiritual energy, gushing throughout Cang Ji's viscera and organs. There was pain all over his body as his bones cracked, forced by the spiritual energy to grow within his body.

Cang Ji was like a pine tree that had a sudden and frenzied growth spurt. In the blink of an eye, he could feel the complete difference in his surroundings compared to the past. He could clearly see the texture of the wall corner and hear the waves in the distance. Tempestuous waves rose from his expanse of spiritual energy, and the pain silenced him.

What kind of treasure was Jing Lin?! It was only one mouthful of blood, but it was worth more than a hundred years of pure cultivation. It grew his body in such a violent way, but internal organs were all fine, and he remained in one piece. Except for the pain, he was unharmed.

The rope of the copper bell under the eaves broke, and the copper bell tumbled into the snow and disappeared from view. The spiritual barrier faded away at a speed visible to the naked eye, immediately exposing a garden that had been hidden from sight.

Jing Lin seemed to be heavier. Behind him, Cang Ji heard a “plop”. The little stone figure had somehow turned into two pieces of ordinary stones, rolling to one side.

Cang Ji could think no more of it, because the door behind him was smashed into smithereens before he had time to move.

The overwhelming sense of oppression drew closer as Zong Yin stepped onto the threshold and said in a chilly voice.

“Found you.”

But what he saw was a man sitting with his back to him in the shade of the inner chamber, his clothes tattered and barely covering him, and his hair, disheveled. The man looked back. It was clearly the face of a haughty and arrogant youth, yet his gaze was wild and ferocious. He spoke resolutely and decisively,

“Scram.”

Zong Yin did not blow his top.

Because that glare unexpectedly gave him a sense of déjà vu.



Credits: Many thanks to saed (@saedee\_) for the correction! ♥

## Footnotes

1. 蛟龙 Jiaolong (Jiao dragon), or Jiao, is a mythical, aquatic creature capable of invoking storms and floods; sometimes also known as a flood dragon.
2. 龙门 Dragon Gate, mythical dragon gate where a carp can transform and evolve into a dragon.
3. 海蛟宗音 literally Sea Jiao (Dragon) Zong Yin

# Nan Chan – Chapter 8 : Hai Jiao



Cang Ji tightened his arms around Jing Lin and picked him up. The lean muscles on his back rippled like a beast that would burst out of the shadows any time in an attack. With a slight tilt of ear, he could hear his heavy breathing.

Zong Yin leaned over to enter the room. He was tall in his human form, blocking even the last ray of light. He was lost in memories, looking at Cang Ji with a gaze that was part scrutiny and part speculation.

“Who are you?” Zong Yin asked.

Zong Yin’s intimidating presence stimulated Cang Ji to the point that his spiritual expanse was unstable. The aura of the Hai Jiao<sup>1</sup> saturated the surrounding air, holding Cang Ji captive at the corner with nowhere to run. But Cang Ji had no intention to flee. His extreme greed and terrifying desire were rekindled, hiding an insatiable thirst in his heart.

Cang Ji did not reply. He pressed the back of Jing Lin’s head to bury Jing Lin’s face in his neck. It was easy for him at the moment to even break Jing Lin’s waist by exerting a little more force. His displeasure was reflected in his eyes as he stared at Zong Yin’s every move. It was as if he had already expressed all he wanted to say with the word “scram”.



“Zong Yin.” Fu Li sighed behind him. “As you have seen, this isn’t an evil being but a brocade carp that has cultivated enough to evolve into human form. What else do you want to do?”

“That’s not right.” Zong Yin countered. “You said he is a brocade carp, but I saw a reverse scale<sup>2</sup> below his neck. There are countless things in the world, but only the dragon is born with a reverse scale. He is not a fish at all.”

There were no longer any dragon and phoenix in the realms between Heaven and Earth. Even after a hundred over years of hard work and cultivation, Hai Jiao Zong Yin had yet to see the Dragon Gate<sup>3</sup>, nor had he gotten the opportunity to pass through it, so he had remained in the Eastern Sea, unable to ascend to the Nine Heavens Realm. It was because of this that he was sure he was right. Cang Ji was an oddity. Zong Yin had looked at Cang Ji’s original form; even his spiritual expanse was built in the form of a brocade carp, and he did not have the bearings of a dragon at all. More importantly, his eyes were full of malice and ferocity. He was clearly a demon that had yet to set foot in the mundane world — it was evident that he would not listen to reasoning nor play by the rules of Heaven and Earth.

*Strange.*

Zong Yin could not help taking a step closer.

*This was too strange.*

“Zong Yin!” Fu Li grabbed hold of Zong Yin’s arm. “How could you get close to him? Have you forgotten what you are? Take a good look again. He’s just a brocade carp. The spiritual energy of this garden is blocked off, even more so for the inner chamber. If you go closer, he will not be able to withstand your tremendous power and die. You have no grudges or enmity with him, so why hurt the innocent?!”

“If he’s really just a brocade carp, why do you have to be so secretive?” Zong Yin asked in a steady tone.

“I have a past affinity with him, so I’m just lending him a hand. As you know, the Demarcation Division is paying close watch. My helping him isn’t that big or small of a deal if someone reports me, but it’s still against the law of Heavens and the rules of Ninth Heaven.” Seeing Zong Yin’s unreadable face, Fu Li sighed heavily and continued hesitantly, “You know that I used to be a subordinate of Lord Lin Song, and our current Lord hates Lord Lin Song the most. All these years, I’ve never wanted to displease him, fearful of incurring his wrath. So naturally, I’ve to be careful. Can’t we forget about today’s incident on account of our years of relationship?”

Fu Li was the Deity of Can Li, and the astronomical phenomena of the North all fell under her charge. The five-colored bird was born after phoenix, a divine bird designated into service by the Supreme Father himself back in those days. Unlike Hai Jiao Zong Yin, Fu Li was a true immortal who had been officially conferred a title in the records of the Ninth Heaven Realm. Technically speaking, she was one rank higher than Zong Yin. But as she said, it was well-known that she had slumbered in the palm of Lord Lin Song even when she was still a fledgling. At that time, the roots of Can Li Tree were damaged, and so she had grown up under the command of Lord Lin Song. She was a divine bird that had been raised by Lord Lin Song. Therefore, when Lord Lin Song rebelled against the Heavens, she had been implicated and imprisoned in Zhui Hun Prison and interrogated by the Supreme Lord. Eventually, after their investigations, Zhui Hun Prison had determined that Lord Lin Song had acted alone. That was how she had managed to escape death, and it was also why her glory had lost its shine and no longer what it used to be in the Ninth Heaven Realm.

Zong Yin saw her sincerity and looked at Cang Ji again. He had initially suspected that Fu Li was hiding someone that Heaven and Earth could not

tolerate. But it was a fact that he had never seen Cang Ji before. No matter how fierce Cang Ji was, he was still not at fault.

Except for that piece of reverse scale.

“I’m afraid the reason you hid him here isn’t just to help him. The *Canglong*<sup>4</sup> had not appeared for thousands of years, and it is even harder to find the right time to evolve into a dragon. I could not succeed even after seeking it for a hundred years. The reason you pick him up is likely because you have taken a fancy to that peculiarity of his. I know you are deeply depressed over Lord Lin Song’s case, and you are determined to prove his innocence. But a word of caution. Fu Li, you saw with your own eyes how Yan Quan sword had beheaded the Supreme Father in front of Buddha; you saw how the Three Thousand Armored Warriors of Heaven were totally wiped out; you saw how Ninth Heaven had been awash in a sea of blood and buried under a mountain of corpses. Even if Lord Lin Song used to be a good person, he had already sunk into the Way of the Devil after that incident. His death is not worth lamenting. You shouldn’t harbor any ill feelings towards the Supreme Lord, vainly attempting to use a *Canglong* to turn Heaven and Earth into chaos.”

“I wouldn’t dare.” Fu Li panicked and said, aghast. “How could you doubt my loyalty? The lives of all the birds and beasts from Can Li tree are all connected here. If I had the intention to rebel, would I have the face to return to the tree? If you don’t believe me, feel free to hand me over to those above. I’ve been through Zhui Hu Prison. Would I still be afraid?!”

Zong Yin finally stepped back and gave way. He said, “I can pretend not to know anything today, but this demon can no longer stay on the coast of the Eastern Sea. If you want to help him, then lead him onto the right path. From what I see, his nature is unrestrained and untameable. If he sets foot on a wrong path, he will surely become a calamity. Take him away.”

Fu Li's expression was heavy as she raised her hands in a gesture of thanks. Cang Ji was just about to get up when Zong Yin spoke up again.

"He may follow you away, but the man in his bosom must stay."

Cang Ji's eyes moved, and he said in a hoarse voice. "Don't even think about it. He's my man. Why should I give him to you?"

"He's your man or your meal?" Zong Yin asked.

Cang Ji wavered as he hugged Jing Lin tightly. Zong Yin remained where he was, having firm control over the way out. Fu Li sensed the situation deteriorating and was about to speak up again when Zong Yin turned his head to the side.

"I could understand going to the extent for a fish, but you also want to make such demands for a man. Why? Do you have a past affinity with mankind too? There are no mortals beneath Can Li Tree, and yet you wish for it. I'm afraid that's not going to be easy. I've already allowed you to take him away, but you can't even leave a man behind?"

Fu Li maintained her composure and cast a few glances at Cang Ji. She said, "If he is really a man, there is no problem leaving him with you. But he was sculpted out of stone; he just looked human. Silly boy, there is no need to conceal it anymore. It wouldn't hurt to show him to this Great Master."

"No way." Cang Ji lowered and buried his head in Jing Lin's hair, looking as he cherished him very much. "He's mine, I don't want to show him to anyone. I won't be able to defeat him if he falls in love with this skin and takes it away by force."

"There's no need to hide him. I've never believed in love." Zong Yin said.

Cang Ji scoffed. “You have relied on the higher status of your cultivation to censure me so many times today. Are you not afraid it will become a long-standing grudge the next time you and I meet again? I just took a shine to a piece of stone, and you want to forcibly steal a look at it. Do immortals always do things this way? Are they always this rude?”

“Don’t argue with me.” Zong Yin said, “Show him to me quickly.”

Cang Ji lifted the hair on the side of Jing Lin’s face, revealing a vague shape underneath. Zong Yin could only see a profile, but that complexion that was whiter than snow was so alluring and aloof to the point that it did not seem to be that of a living man. Cang Ji’s palm was pressed against Jing Lin’s back. In this long moment, he almost believed that Jing Lin was dead. Jing Lin’s head was inclined to the side, motionless, and at Cang Ji’s disposal. There was no warmth in his body. The temperature and moisture that Cang Ji had initially felt had all turned cold and hard. His skin felt satiny to the touch, like porcelain. There was no sign of life.

Cang Ji’s heart beat uncontrollably. He wondered in alarm and doubt. *Was Jing Lin awake? Or dead?*

Fu Li took a step forward and said tartly, “Why would you even want a stone? Can’t you just let this silly boy have his fun with the stone so he won’t stir up trouble in the mortal world?”

Zong Yin remained silent when he saw that she was angry to the point of tears. He was skeptical, but could not voice his suspicions to Fu Li. He stared at Cang Ji for a moment, then said, “I’m sorry. I have a duty to check. You may leave.”

But there was no relief in Fu Li’s heart. She was aware of Zong Yin’s character. The incident today would have definitely aroused his suspicions.

He could not put them in a spot, but he would investigate in secret. However, they did not have a choice. The longer they stayed, the harder it would be to extract themselves from their predicament if more people got involved.

“I’ll take this garden with me and leave no trace. We won’t give you a hard time.” Fu Li said.

Zong Yin nodded slightly, retreated a few steps, and transformed into a Jiaolong. Before he took to the sky, he said to Cang Ji, “I don’t know why you were born with a reverse scale. I expect you are not far from evolving into a dragon. Behave yourself, or there will be bloodshed the next time we meet.”

Cang Ji did not even look at him, giving no indication of how much he had heard. As soon as Zong Yin left, Fu Li quickly stepped forward and looked at Jing Lin in shock.

“Jiu Ge?”

Jing Lin’s brow wrinkled, and he opened his eyes, choking on his blood. His breathing was weak as his chest heaved again, and the iciness in his limbs slowly faded away.

It had only been a hundred years, and that little snake frolicking in the water beneath his seat had become so powerful that it had almost shocked him into giving himself away.

Cang Ji met Jing Lin’s eyes. Before he had time to adjust himself, he saw the frostiness in Jing Lin’s eyes. Jing Lin stared at him until it made Cang Ji nervous. He had a pair of exquisite eyes. When his eyes were cold, they would look haughty, sharp, and extremely wild. But when his eyes were smiling, they would overflow with liveliness and cheerfulness. Cang Ji let his

smile reach his eyes, looking earnest and sincere as he raised one of Jing Lin's hands and held it in his palm.

"I was so scared. I thought you wouldn't wake up." Cang Ji lowered his eyes and said.

Cang Ji's grip on Jing Lin's hand was so tight that Jing Lin thought his hand would break. He could not break free. Cang Ji felt uneasy about Fu Li's presence and hid the bite wound on Jing Lin's hand in his own hand. Given Jing Lin's temperament, he was sure that Jing Lin would not ask Fu Li for help.

As expected, Jing Lin gradually let out a cold smile and said softly, "I just took a nap, and you've grown up so much."

Cang Ji picked him up and said, "That's right. You don't have to be afraid in the future. I will treat you well, just like how you treat me."

"There's no need to stand on ceremony." Jing Lin let Cang Ji pick him up. "Just keep whatever I've given you."

Fu Li found it odd and asked, "What has Jiu Ge given him? Since Jiu Ge is indisposed at the moment, you can leave him in my care."

Jing Lin narrowed his eyes and said lazily, "I'm afraid you can't afford to feed him."

It suddenly hit Fu Li, and she turned towards Cang Ji, seething in anger. "How dare you?! I was wondering how you could have grown up in such a short period of time when you were just a child the last I saw you. Even your disposition had stabilized so much! You actually dared to consume Jiu Ge's flesh and blood?!"

Cang Ji embraced Jing Lin tightly and nimbly dodged her. He said with aggrievement, “Jiejie, it’s a misunderstanding! The situation was so critical that I had no choice. Otherwise, none of us could survive today if that Hai Jiao had gotten a clear look.” He inclined his head to sniff Jing Lin’s hair and smiled. “Besides, I respect and adore Jing Lin so much. How I wish I could hold him in my palm every day and pamper him. How could I bear to take a few more mouthfuls of him?”

Even if he wanted to take a mouthful, it had to be a time when he was fully prepared and would not leave any loose ends behind.

Fu Li noted that Cang Ji differed totally from when he was a child; even his inner state seemed to have changed. This kind of demon was certainly unusual! However, Jing Lin did not look like he was being held hostage. For a moment, Fu Li was uncertain.

“Return Jiu Ge to me. I’ll not pursue today’s matter.” Fu Li had no wish to jump out of the frying pan into the fire.

“I’m afraid.” Cang Ji did not want to antagonize Fu Li today, so he said, “But what I’ve said is all true. If jiejie doesn’t believe me, you can ask Jing Lin. Would he rather let me hug him, or let you hug him?”

Jing Lin looked at Cang Ji for a moment. Cang Ji felt like his gaze was a solid, icy cold hand roaming around his neck.

“I’ve raised him for so many days, he can take a few steps more.” Jing Lin shifted his eyes away. “Go to the porch.”

Cang Ji smiled at Fu Li and stepped out of the door. He asked, “What are you looking for?”



“I’ll move the garden away. It won’t be too late for Jiu Ge to search for it when we arrive at Can Li.” Fu Li followed closely behind Cang Ji.

Jing Lin did not answer. His eyes searched through the edge of the eaves. After a pause, he asked, “Where is the copper bell?”

Cang Ji blew at the broken rope. “I’m afraid it was lost when the mountain was overturned.”

“I can’t lose it.” Jing Lin said, “I want that copper bell.”

Cang Ji wanted to tease him, but Jing Lin did not look like he was joking. The gears in his mind turned, and he asked in a low voice, “What object is that important? Do you use it to lull you to sleep? I rarely see you treasuring it that much.”

Jing Lin raised his chin slightly and motioned for Cang Ji to move closer to him. Cang Ji lowered his head towards Jing Lin’s lips, feeling that looking down at Jing Lin like this was quite a sight to take in.

“What you have devoured was just a couple hundred years of my cultivation.” Jing Lin said, “What truly matters is all in the bell.”

“I’ve only tasted a mouthful; I can’t tell what’s genuine or not.” Cang Ji was unhurried. “What if you deceive me?”

Unexpectedly, Jing Lin chuckled and the warm flow of air tickled Cang Ji’s earlobe. Cang Ji raised his eyebrows slightly. The corners of his lips curled up in a smile, but the smile did not reach his eyes. He said, “You’re so sure I’ll look for it.”

Jing Lin answered, “Aren’t you calling the shots now?”

“I can search for it if you want me to.” Cang Ji whispered, “Make this jiejie stay away, and I’ll go wherever you point to.”

If Fu Li kept following, Cang Ji would not dare to act rashly. He already knew the benefits of Jing Lin’s flesh and blood. Right at this moment, Jing Lin was like a piece of meat dangling right before his nose. It was definitely impossible for Cang Ji to have a heart of benevolence and not to be greedy. Moreover, their positions were now reversed; he could hold Jing Lin in his arms, or flung him to the ground. He was at the helm, and the pleasure of looking down at someone instead of looking up was indescribable.

Jing Lin said, “She has to hold you to lead you in the right direction.”

Cang Ji played dumb. He inserted his fingers into the gaps between Jing Lin’s fingers and lifted their holding hands. “My dear Jing Lin, aren’t we already holding each other? If it’s not enough, I can even let you wrap yourself around me or hug me.”

After waiting and not getting a response, Fu Li tentatively stepped forward. Cang Ji took a step back and patted Jing Lin’s lower back with the palm that was behind Jing Lin, coaxing him amiably.

“Jing Lin, what were you going to say to this jiejie?”

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Credits: Many thanks to saed (@saedee_) for the correction! ♥

Footnotes

1. 海蛟 literally Sea Jiao (Dragon), a 蛟龙 Jiaolong (Jiao dragon), or Jiao, is a mythical, aquatic creature capable of invoking storms and floods; sometimes also known as a flood dragon.
2. 逆鳞 reverse scale; a piece of scale that is reversed on a dragon's throat or neck that's considered to be precious and important to them. It's said that the dragon will kill anyone in fury if they touched that scale. It is now used to refer to someone's weakness, sore spot, or most cherished and important thing. For example, touching one's reverse scale is an idiom that could be said to be touching someone's sore spot, attacking their weakness, or rubbing someone the wrong way, etc.
3. 龙门 Dragon Gate, mythical dragon gate where a carp can transform and evolve into a dragon
4. 苍龙 Cang Long, or Blue Dragon, is another name for the Azure Dragon (青龙), one of the Four Symbols, mythological creatures that are viewed as the guardians of the four cardinal directions – The Azure Dragon of the East, the Vermilion Bird of the South, the White Tiger of the West, and the Black Tortoise of the North.

Nan Chan – Chapter 9 :

Westbound



Ah Yi was perched on a tree when he suddenly saw the night sky awash in brilliant lights. That was how he knew that it was his sister. He did not see Jiaolong and thought his sister had come to find him and take him home. Thus, he jumped off the branch and dug into the snow to hide. The sight of him sticking his tail up as he burrowed into the ground was both funny and awkward because his tail had already been stripped bare by Cang Ji.

Ah Yi was running when he woke the birds up. He could hear the mountain woods spirits snickering, so he put up a tough front and scolded them severely. “Who was that? Whoever laughs again, I’ll gouge out his eyes and cut off his tongue!”

But the spirits were everywhere around him, hiding in the trees and in the snow. Their laughter grew, and Ah Yi hopped in a fury, feeling as if he had been stripped bare and placed on display for all to see. He was both furious and resentful, and said in irritation, “Don’t laugh! You’re not allowed to laugh!”

Ah Yi was so humiliated and full of hatred towards Cang Ji that he wanted to skin him alive. The fury consumed him, and he turned around, intending to make a trip to Jing Lin’s garden to drag Cang Ji out to give him a severe beating. But he had only taken a couple of steps when the ground shook

below him and the mountain tilted. The mountain was full of birds taking flight into the air. Concerned that his sister was still at the top of the mountain, he raced there.

A wild boar came crashing out. Unable to avoid Ah Yi in time, it bowled him over and sent him tumbling onto its back as it continued running. Sprawled on the back of the wild boar, Ah Yi was tossed around so much that he was all a mess.

“Are you blind?! Do you want to die?!” Ah Yi cranked his neck and cursed.

“We’re going to die!” The wild boar panted heavily as it lowered its head in a mad rush. “Hai Jiao is overturning the mountain! If we don’t flee now, we will die!”

“It’s just a Jiao, not even a dragon. What are you afraid of?” Ah Yi felt relieved. “That’s the Jiao in charge of the Eastern Sea. He will not hurt the innocent. Most likely, he’s just patrolling this mountain. Hey, have you seen my Ah Jie?”

“I saw her. I saw her! The flapping wings of the Deity of Can Li hurt my eyes so much!” The wild boar dashed maniacally towards the foot of the mountain.

Ah Yi looked up and smiled. Spreading both his wings, he said smugly, “That’s natural. My Ah Jie is...”

Before Ah Yi could finish his words, a burst of snowstorm swept by him and grazed his wings. Ah Yi heard a tinkling sound as a copper bell dropped out.

Ah Yi stared at it and asked, “What are you doing stealing someone else’s bell?”

Xue Mei¹ assembled into form; half of his face had already been destroyed. He hid his face, revealing only an eye. He looked fearfully at Ah Yi and forced a smile. “It was blown away by the wind. No one wanted it. So I picked it up to play with it.”

“Is it that fun?” Ah Yi sneered. “Then gift it to me. I’ll play with it too. Now, scram.”

Xue Mei suddenly exposed the savage-looking half of his face and met Ah Yi’s eyes before settling on pleading with him, “I’ve remained here for hundreds of years without venturing out. It wasn’t easy for me to find a toy. Please let me keep it.”

Ah Yi shook the copper bell and said, “What’s so interesting about a broken bell? Do you think I’ll believe you?”

There was a chill in the depths of Xue Mei’s eyes, and his voice sounded as if he were sobbing with aggrievement. “What treasure is there that you can’t get your hands on? I just want a bell to relieve my boredom. You even want to snatch it from me?”

Ah Yi’s voice turned shrill. “Snatch? Bah! Who gives a damn about the broken bell of an invalid? I don’t want it even if you pay me! What the hell, you actually said I snatched it from you! Then, all the more I won’t give you, what can you do?! Scram!”

The malevolent aura of Xue Mei was apparent as he moved to seize it. “Return it to me!”

There was a seal cast by Fu Li on Ah Yi’s body, keeping ghosts and demons away from him. When Ah Yi saw the audacity of Xue Mei to strike out at him, he dumped all his hatred for Cang Ji onto Xue Mei and kicked him

over. Xue Mei had only lunged a little nearer to him when he was scalded by Ah Yi's five-colored feathers, causing him to shriek in pain.

“Are you blind?! You even dare to fight with me over it?!”

Xue Mei whimpered like a woman weeping. In a demonstration of his might, Ah Yi jumped off the back of the wild boar and paced around Xue Mei as he haughtily flaunted his feathers.

“Do you acknowledge your mistake?! Are you scared of me now?! I won't hit you if you kowtow and beg for mercy.” Ah Yi stepped on Xue Mei with his claws. “Hurry up! Otherwise, you'll die here tonight with not even a soul left.”

Xue Mei wept even more mournfully. Even Ah Yi could not go on listening. He hugged his head and yelled, “Stop crying!”

“Give it back...” Even if it was wishful thinking, Xue Mei persisted. “Return it to me.”

“Why are you so obsessed about a broken bell?” Ah Yi was perplexed. “Could it be that you have a past with it?”

For a moment, Xue Mei simply cried without saying a word. Ah Yi was alarmed. “But this obviously belongs to Jing Lin. Don't tell me you bear him some grudges. If that's the case, why do you still want it? If it isn't a grudge, oh—” Ah Yi continued opinionatedly. “Is it because you have a past love affair with him? You know, I was wondering why he had to imprison you here but not others. So, I see! I get it now! Then you need not kowtow to me. Tell me, is Jing Lin...”

Ah Yi had yet to leap in excitement when the surrounding beasts dispersed in an uproar. The wild boar was the first to flee, bellowing as he ran, “Run! Run!”

“Run for?” Ah Yi was still stepping on Xue Mei and asked blankly, “What are you running for?!”

Ah Yi realized something was wrong when everyone was gone. Xue Mei had also stopped crying as he lay motionless on the ground. This gave Ah Yi the creeps, and he retreated a few steps. When he saw that there was no one looking at him, he turned around to flee. Who would expect that he had only just taken a few steps when someone picked him up by the wings?

Ah Yi was caught off guard. At the same time, understanding dawned on him, and he said resentfully to Xue Mei, “You dare to summon a human to catch me?!”

He had been wondering why Xue Mei had cried like a woman; so it had all been an act to lure a human over. They had already arrived at the foot of the mountain, and within a few miles, there were signs of human habitation. The strange disturbances in the mountains had probably startled them, and this was likely someone who was taking advantage of the chaos to hunt for treasures. Ah Yi could not flap his wings as someone wrenched him up by the wings and stuffed him into a sack. Right now, Ah Yi was filled with resentment, but he did not know who to hate! His Ah Jie had confined him in his original form, and he was no different from an ordinary bird if he encountered human beings. If he could not escape, then the only thing left was to make a last-ditch struggle.

“You want this bell? Fine!” Ah Yi held on to the copper bell tightly as he tumbled in the sack. He was so infuriated he burst out laughing and said contemptuously, “Don’t even think about it! If I were taken away, there

would be no escape for it too. Without Jing Lin's orders, you can never leave this mountain in this life! How's this for you? You will never see it again!"

He heard Xue Mei throwing itself at him, and there was a rustling sound of snow sliding off. "Return it to me!"

The man dragging the sack could only feel the chilly wind pouncing at him, and he shivered from the cold. He did not want to linger, so he turned and left, taking Ah Yi with him.

"Humph! Serves you right!" Ah Yi shook the bell. "You will never see it."

Xue Mei burst out bawling as if he was genuinely sad.

Jing Lin looked to the West. The night was black, and the view was obstructed with snow. He could see nothing. Fu Li remained at one side, a strange feeling nagging at her. This was because when she was under Jing Lin's command, she had never seen him so intimate with anyone. Even Lord Sha Ge, Li Rong, who could be considered a close friend of Jing Lin, was only served a cup of tea from Jing Lin at the very most. She felt that Cang Ji was evil by nature, but she did not dare to speak rashly when she was still uncertain about Jing Lin's likes and dislikes. Now that she has lost Jing Lin's favor and trust, she dared not intervene more than she should.

This apprehension was exactly what Cang Ji had hoped for.

"You may leave." The frown on Jing Lin's face deepened as he sensed the copper bell moving further away. He had no wish to stick around any longer.

Fu Li prostrated herself in response and retreated after receiving the command, not even daring to question him. With a wave of her hand, she

turned the garden into a dot of fluorescent light and took it with her as she soared into the sky.

“There’s only you and me left now. There’s no one to disturb us.” Cang Ji said. “I would save a lot of energy if you are this obedient every day.”

“Remove your hand.” Jing Lin said.

Cang Ji’s palm had been caressing Jing Lin’s back all the way to his tailbone, occasionally kneading his back with varying amount of force as he probed it carefully. He said, “So this is how touching the back of a human feels like. You actually have soft spots too.”

Jing Lin naturally had soft spots; his skin was soft everywhere. Cang Ji was well aware of this, but he wanted to appraise Jing Lin himself with his palm. It was not a loss to him if Jing Lin flew into a rage from shame. It was a pity Jing Lin remained expressionless even as Cang Ji placed his arm around the softness of Jing Lin’s waist to support him.

“All you have to do is lie on the ground.” Jing Lin said, “And I’ll help you find a softer spot on your body.”

“All I did was to hug you, Jing Lin. Why are you so fierce towards me? I’m still in a panic now. I’m so scared.” Cang Ji looked back and watched as the figure of Jiaolong receded among the clouds. “Where’s the copper bell?”

“It’s heading west.” Jing Lin answered.

Cang Ji remained where he was. He knew that the West was a prosperous and bustling area in Zhongdu, where all kinds of spirits mingled. His momentary hesitation was not because of fear, but because he was weighing the pros and cons.

If he devoured Jing Lin here, he would have Jing Lin all to himself. But once at the West, he would not know if anyone else would also be eyeing Jing Lin's flesh and blood. He did not intend to share Jing Lin with others; this was born out of an instinct to protect his food.

Jing Lin clearly saw through him and said sarcastically, "Since it scares you, why not devour me now? Consuming lesser cultivation is still better than nothing."

"You are truly considerate." Cang Ji's brows relaxed, and the gloom disappeared, and yet he said, "Before we hit the road, I need to make it clear that no matter what we come across, don't let them touch you. Although I'm magnanimous and generous by nature, I'm very particular about food. I won't tolerate even a strand of hair missing on those I want to swallow into my belly."

"Today, I'm fish meat."² Jing Lin said. "It's pointless to tell me what the knife would do."

"Let's put it another way." Cang Ji pinched Jing Lin's cheeks and said slowly. "I'm amassing cultivation now, and I'm now at the point when I'm ravenous for food. Whoever dares to snatch my fish, I'll make them pay back with interest. If they touch you once, feel you once or bite you once, I'll chew them all up and gobble them down, regardless of whether they are demons or mortals. But if you touch someone, wanting to make use of the chance to escape. Jing Lin." Cang Ji lowered his head, his eyes vicious. "Then I'll drag you back, tear you up inch by inch without spilling a drop of your blood for others to taste. We will become one, never to part again."

"We have been companions for so many days." Jing Lin stared at him as if looking at a child. "And I actually never discovered how naïve and adorable you are."

He did not seem to be a human or a fish; he was clearly like a beast. Avaricious and insatiable. Stubborn and opinionated. Great at pretense, yet silly and thickheaded. It was as if Jing Lin was looking into a mirror and seeing himself in it.

“Why be modest? You are well-aware of it. You are only just indulging me on purpose.” Cang Ji released his grip and asked. “So, how was it? You were the one who fed me until I turned out this way. Is this what you wanted? Are you satisfied?”

Jing Lin did not answer, and Cang Ji leaped down to the foot of the mountain. The sleeves of Jing Lin’s robe fluttered in the wind, and its color of azure was like spring water, soaking Cang Ji in it. They both seemed interdependent on each other as they rose and fell, and yet they were both silent.

Cang Ji went west in pursuit. There was a weight at the back of his neck, and the small stone figure popped out. Cang Ji burst out laughing, more affectionate than when he had seen Jing Lin. “I thought you were dead, never to wake up again.”

For some reason, the little stone figure punched him several times. Unaffected by the punches, Cang Ji shook himself lightly, and the little stone figure tumbled and fell into Jing Lin’s arm. Cang Ji glanced at Jing Lin, only to find that he had closed his eyes again. He huffily snorted to himself and thought:

He’s always like this. Sometimes I really want to bite him to death.

With this thought, he said to the small stone figure, “Although you are just a piece of stone, you are much warmer than a living man.”