

FANTASY

Dream Cutter ☺

By Shuang Gong

In the clouds he flew. Icy wind whistled past his ears, the air thin but refreshing. Bright sunshine fringed the clouds with golden edges; the sky was of the purest blue he'd ever seen.

He kept flying, the clouds making way for him.

His eyes roved around joyfully.

Up and down, clouds and sky. He was in the midst of white and blue.

He looked back.

A wagging tail went into his sight, then two huge wings fluttered in the air. He raised his hands, two claws covered with scales shining in the sunlight.

Startled, he lost balance in the sky and fell down. The scene changed rapidly in front of him, sky, horizon, mountain, forest, and a town.

He flipped his body, and flapped his wings to regain balance.

He hovered over the town, where the streets were empty, where people died in vain, where dead bodies piled up high outside hospitals.

His claws shivered; tears brimmed his eyes.

The scene faded to black.



Light came back slowly.

Vinz opened his eyes. He was in the forest, lying on the blanket with his normal human body. Birds twittered in the trees; golden morning sunshine came through the leaves.

It was just a dream, shadowed by reality.

He got up, his gaze falling on the silver knife beside his backpack.

He remembered finding the knife by chance in a creek. With a thin arching blade and slim handle, it had a tiny line of words carved on its back.

Dream Cutter.

Vinz picked it up, imagining one day he would take it back to town.

Though the day would never come.

He stared into the reflection of his own eyes on the shining blade.

Those weak and powerless eyes.



“Doctor, please save me”

The patient on the bed choked and vomited blood. The white bedsheet under him was stained with yellow pus oozing from the festering ulcers in his skin. Desperately, he reached out his shaking hand to the doctor standing by the bed.

Vinz watched the hand stop inches from his white coat as the patient convulsed and twisted into an eerie helical shape. Blood ran out of each of his pores, soaking the bedsheet.

Vinz turned his head sideways; the white surgical mask on his face hid his expression.

Then came the clear cracks of the bones.

Vinz took a deep breath before turning his head back to see the patient dead in a pool of blood and pus. Silently, he went out and came back with several hospital staff; together, they wrapped the body with the bedsheet and pushed the rollaway bed out of the ward.

Outside the hospital, a huge square hole in the ground was jammed with bodies stacking high.

The plague raged.

Like all other doctors, Vinz used to work day after day tirelessly in the hope of saving the patients. It didn't last long. One by one, the

doctors themselves were claimed by the plague. Until one day, they found there was no cure at all.

The hospital soon lost its function and turned into a glorified funeral home; for a lingering doctor like him, there wasn't much left to do other than receiving patients and watching them tortured to death.

His coworkers, friends, neighbours, and—one day—his family.

The day when his wife and son lay there on the stretchers in the narrow corridor, Vinz sat beside them, holding their hands. No last words, blood in their throats choked them. No deathbed privacy. The corridor was crowded with groaning patients. Vinz watched them take their last breath as the crimson teardrops on their faces slid down into the pool of blood.

Gently, he covered their bodies with bedsheets.

“I will join you soon.”

That day after reaching home, he packed his backpack briefly and splashed the whole house with gasoline. Stepping outside, he lit a match and dropped it on the floor.

In the soaring flame, the house burnt to ruins.

He went into the mountains. The one with lush forest. The one they used to go to for hiking. He wouldn't live long, he thought. Having contacted so many bodies, the virus must have settled down in him.

He didn't fear death. His own life no longer meant anything.

He was a doctor of no use. He couldn't save his patients, coworkers, and family. People said he was the best doctor in town, his coworkers respected him, and his family was proud of him. But he failed all of them.

His heart bled.

In one night, he dreamed that the plague had subsided, and peace had returned. When he woke up, the night was still deep, as

deep as his sorrow.

It was later in the same day, he found Dream Cutter in a creek.



The cool air smelt of the fresh scent of forest.

He stood by the lake. The shore was soft and moist under his feet. He opened his eyes, looking into his reflection on the smooth water surface.

Horns on the head. Claws. Wings. A long tail.

He was in that dream again.

He squatted down and studied his reflection, running his sharp claw across his scaled lower body.

He stared at his image before standing up and flapping his wings.

He flew fast towards the town, the place he missed.

From high in the sky, he saw a dark figure standing in the centre of town. Clouds of flies were flying around it. A deathly aura filled the air.

Vinz dove down from the clouds and landed behind it, folding his wings.

The figure swung around to face him, its face inky black except two green eyes.

A name jumped into his mind upon seeing this face.

“Exterminans.”

“Lord of Plague.” The demon grinned.

It was this demon that brought the plague. Vinz’s body shook.

“You shouldn’t be here,” the demon said.

“What shouldn’t be here is you.”

“Just by looking at my face, you know my name.” Exterminans pointed at Vinz’s chest. “Looks like that has given you much power.”

Vinz lowered his head. A necklace hung on his neck, its pendant the Dream Cutter.

Seeing the surprised look on Vinz's face, the demon smiled more. "Don't you understand," it said, "the cutter reads your mind, interprets it and casts it into your dream."

"I have only heard of Dream Cutter. Today is the first time I see it."

Exterminans walked up to him. "Can I take a look?"

Alert, Vinz backed off, his wings fully outspread.

Dark clouds gathered in the sky, and purple lightning flickered menacingly.

Exterminans raised its head and looked into the sky; the smile vanished from its face.

Without any warning, it pounced on him.

Vinz swiftly turned his body aside to avoid this attack; the demon's flies immediately encircled him, the rotten smell from them choking him.

Disgusted, he let out a low roar; all the flies caught fire and burned to ashes. He looked around, only to find Exterminans had fled.

He clenched his claws until his knuckles cracked.



Vinz was lost in a trance when he woke up. For one second, he wondered which world he was in; only by touching and feeling his human body could he tell he was in reality.

The boundary between reality and dream blurred.

He took out the Dream Cutter and touched its reflective blade, thinking of the demon Exterminans and what it said about the knife.

He shook his head a few times and put it back. A dream was just a dream. He told himself not to overthink it.

He had some biscuits before packing his bag and left.

Deep down into the forest he walked. Far from the trails, far from the town, and far from his grief and despair. As he went further, the forest got thicker, and then, in the green sea of trees, came an open space with a lake.

He stopped on the shore; the lake looked familiar like he had been here just minutes before. He walked around it, looking for clues to explain this familiarity.

Scents of forest and grass whirled in the fresh air. The lake surface was calm and smooth like a mirror.

He noticed some footprints on the soft sandy shore.

Footprints of claws, four toes with long sharp nails, like those of a lizard. The front part of the footprints was deeper than the heel, the sign of toe walking.

Vinz looked at the shoes he wore and the human footprints he left behind him. Suddenly, he remembered.

It was the lake in the dream, where he looked at his reflection and left for town.

He couldn't be wrong. He followed the footprints and saw how exactly they matched each of his steps in the dream, from where he stood to where he flew.

He inhaled deeply, feeling the lake and forest spin around him. And among the turbulent whirlpool of thoughts, a single one hit him.

If what he did in the dream affected reality in the same way, what would happen if he killed Exterminans?

This thought, once risen, couldn't be suppressed any more.

Outside the mountains, people were still dying. One day the plague would claim them all, like it did his family.

His blood boiled.



Quietly Vinz sat on the clock tower, wings folded, his eyes fixed on that dark figure in the hospital.

Exterminans—followed by its flies and rats.

Climbing onto the bed, the rats gnawed at the patients; from cheek to feet, they feasted on their bodies, not missing an inch of flesh. Flies landed on their faces, crawling into their noses and mouths.

Vinz's slit pupils dilated upon witnessing this scene.

At the same time, the patients, one by one, began to vomit blood, convulse and bleed. With the crack of their bones, they died.

This was why the symptoms were so violent, Vinz realized, for they were made by the demon's hands.

Buzzing and squeaking, those demonic creatures left the dead bodies, their sizes getting visibly bigger. One by one, they did the same to all the patients.

Tears trickled down his cheeks. Vinz let out a roar, his body tensed with rage.

Icy winds rose up. Sunlight faded away. The sky turned crimson.

Outside the hospital, door by door, Exterminans led the flies and rats to people's homes. They were spreading the plague.

Vinz jumped from the clock tower, darting towards the demon at full speed.

Before Exterminans could even look back, Vinz knocked it down onto the ground, plunging his claws into the demon's chest.

Exterminans wriggled under him. Suddenly, it vanished into black smoke, slipping away from under his claws.

Vinz sprang up from the ground, his long tail sweeping the whole area around him.

A long shriek sounded.

Exterminans emerged from the smoke, bleeding from its chest and legs. Its long hair waved in the wind. Its eyes flared green.

Fire, like raindrops, fell from the flaming sky, burning all the flies and rats to ashes.

Still trembling, Exterminans straightened its body, a cold smile played about its lips.

“Mr. Doctor,” it said jokingly, “seems you are very determined . . .”

A flash of lightning hit right beside it.

“I’m not interested in talking to you,” Vinz said.

Exterminans grinned more, revealing its sharp teeth.

“The moment I saw you, I knew I was no match for you,” it said lightly. “Dream Cutter grants power according to its holder’s mind. You are strong-minded, that’s why it chose you.”

Vinz listened, his face revealing no emotion.

In the sky, the lightning wove into a dazzling web. As Vinz raised his arm, the web of lightning travelled down to his shoulder, his chest, until his whole body was flaring with lightning.

Exterminans drew back, its body turning into smoke.

Before it moved an inch, Vinz grabbed onto its neck, his claw tightening with intense strength.

“You won’t want to kill me . . .” Exterminans choked, “I die, you won’t end up any better than me . . .”

Vinz raised his eyebrows, loosened his grip, and threw Exterminans to the ground.

The demon coughed, standing up.

“Dream Cutter breaks the boundary between dream and reality, but there are limits and consequences.” It wiped off the blood on its lips.

“You kill me, thousands of people who are supposed to die will

survive. You change the order of reality more than you are allowed to. Once you do it, chaos will fall on this dimension, and you will be locked in the void for eternity.”

Vinz lowered his eyes.

“What’s the use of saving these people’s worthless lives?” Exterminans asked. “They won’t know what you’ve done for them. They won’t even remember you. I’m sorry for your family, but they won’t come back even if you kill me.”

“What you said about Dream Cutter, is it all true?” Vinz asked, the lightning on him still glaring.

“Every single word,” Exterminans said, stepping closer to Vinz.

“Think. What do you really want?” The demon smiled. “Money? I can give you plenty, enough for you to start a new life anywhere. A woman? I can give you that too, more beautiful than your wife. Let’s make a deal. You give me the cutter, and I’ll give you all you want.”

Exterminans reached out its left hand, gesturing towards a handshake.

Vinz looked to the sky.

Dream and reality interwove, so real and so unreal.

Within all the unknown and uncertainty, he had only one thought—that would never be changed by anything.

The sky cleared up.

“What do you say?” Exterminans urged.

The lightning on Vinz blazed fiercely; it flew skyward and shaped into a dragon head, outshining the sun.

“I said, what shouldn’t be here is you.”

At the speed of light, the dragon’s head shot out and crashed into Exterminans.

The explosion was deafening. Among the splashing sparkles, the

demon roared in pain. Its body evaporated into wisps of dark haze in the scorching heat.

In the shockwaves, Vinz stood upright. The moment the last trace of the demon melted away, the Dream Cutter around his neck crumbled.

Under his feet, the ground vanished. The sky cracked into pieces like a broken mirror. The sun shattered into hundreds of drifting shards; with the last trace of dim light, he saw an approaching swirl made of the fragments of nothingness.

The swirl of the void.

He smiled, feeling a huge weight lifted from him.

Drowsiness crept up on him. Before he fell into eternal sleep, he saw a picture in his mind.

High above the clouds, he was flying freely.