

Daily life 841

Chapter 841 Sentence Given (18)

"Good, but I have to warn you. Every lie is a debt to the truth. You already owe a lot, please don't add to the debt by lying or misleading us in any way. .." kindly exhorted Yang Qing.

"My word may mean nothing, but I promise not to lie. If there is one thing I value it's my life," said Song Ba as he solemnly cupped his fist to show his sincerity.

"Good, but before that, can I ask you something?"

"Yes?"

"The information you have offered to share, is some of it related to Elder Chen Gutian's son?"

Chen Gutian's eyes widened at Yang Qing's remark as his eyes filtered through to Song Ba, eagerly anticipating his response.

"It is.."

"Okay then, you can start with that first ..." Yang Qing said before pausing suddenly before he decided to ask another question.

"Chen Xue's death.. Was the Golden Bamboo Pavilion involved?"

"Remember Owner Song Ba, no lies, please.." Yang Qing added with an ominous allure to his soft tone which caused Song Ba to flinch even more.

Song Ba took a few seconds to gather his thoughts before he spoke, his eyes and voice clear as he did.

Chen Zian was infected with the same tenseness Chen Gutian had. If the Golden Bamboo Pavilion was involved, then the ramifications were much higher than Chen Xue just getting murdered.

Even if he didn't know why they would involve themselves in their affairs, it did show they were within the Pavilion's sights. At their peak when their ancestor was still alive, they were unworthy of gazing upon Golden Bamboo Pavilion let alone now.

"Why would the Golden Bamboo Pavilion care enough to have a junior who wasn't even in the palace stage, assassinated?" was the question that continuously circulated in his head as he waited with an abated breath for Song Ba to answer.

If the Golden Bamboo Pavilion then their family would be in a state of emergency. He would have to involve not only the three supreme elders of the clan and the entire clan, but he would also have to inform the rest of the major noble families and even the royal family would have to be roped in too.

The threat would be that dire. They may be at each other's throats all the time, but in the face of an external force like the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, they would have to join together.

If the Golden Bamboo Pavilion could have Chen Xue assassinated, then wouldn't they do it again to another family, and maybe it won't be just juniors with potential but it could leap over to people like them, the main pillars of the clans.

Chen Zian couldn't help but grow in worry. Assassinations were one of the few things the Order did not involve itself too much in. They would only get involved if the entire clan was massacred to the last man, or if the assassination was done by some heinous organization that they were after, but other than that, if Golden Bamboo Pavilion was doing assassinations then that matter was theirs to settle.

From what he knew, the best the Order could offer was maybe offer asylum to some of their seedlings or act as brokers to help them fall under the backing of another organization that was at the same level as Golden Bamboo Pavilion or act as a mediator.

But with the things some of his clan members had done, would the Order even help them? and even if they did act as a broker, ultimately it would be up to that organization to decide whether they would shield them or not, and the level of protection they would offer which may not be enough.

Then there was also the matter of paying the corresponding price to get that help, which would be anything but light. This was why Chen Zian felt that he had to rope in the other families if it was found

out that the Golden Bamboo Pavilion. Alone, his family would not be able to afford it, not even if they traded the cultivation art their ancestor left behind, and that was about the last thing he wanted to do.

With their poor talents that forced them to divert to alchemy, they already shamed their ancestor as it is, he did not want to add more to it.

Luckily for him, all his assumptions and scenarios were proved moot when Song Ba answered.

"Chen Xue's death had nothing to do with the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, though when I agreed to act, part of my motivation to do so was because I had the Golden Bamboo Pavilion in mind, but they had no part in it at all.." Song Ba firmly said bringing relief to the Chen Clan Patriarch.

"Continue.."

"Thank you... " Song Ba said with a polite bow.

"Patriarch Chen Zian, you hid him well.." Song Ba added out of the blue catching Chen Zian in surprise as his eyes went somewhere briefly before centering back on Yang Qing.

"So he was involved.." thought Yang Qing as he noticed the glance Song Ba made.

"Prior to the few months leading to his death, I had no idea your clan had someone as talented as Chen Xue which is something I am sure you went to great lengths to hide, especially from the other families.

I can understand why you did it. If someone with his talents appeared, I would do the same. For someone with his achievements, you do everything and anything to ensure they live to their fullest potential and Chen Xue had plenty of it.

I doubt the other families, including the royal family, have someone as talented. Someone breaking through to the foundation realm with quasi-gold grade pillars, I doubt the Red Maple Empire has ever produced such a figure in its entire history.

And it didn't just stop there, that same figure had also achieved sword intent before he was even thirty-five. Such achievements are enough to garner him the attention of even rank one organization. I find it strange why you never sent him to one.."

Seeing the glaring look Chen Zian and Chen Gutian were giving him, he quickly resumed to his original lane leaving the duo who exchanged a look.

With the talent Chen Xue had shown, they could have sent him to Jade Leaf Academy or Thousand Battle Hall Pavilion but they didn't do so because of Chen Xue and the inheritance their ancestor had left behind.

There was no denying the benefits the inheritance gave those who took its test and made gains. It was because of the tempering and nurturing effects of the essence contained in the leaves that Chen Xue was able to make the most of his talents. When he started, he was able to gain the diamond body from surviving the tempestuous sword qi which he used to temper his body, and then later, he was able to achieve sword qi and quasi-gold grade pillars because of the firm foundations and benefits refining the essence within those leaves gave him.

But even with such apparent benefits, there were some within the clan, including Chen Zian and Chen Gutian who felt Chen Xue would be better served in a rank one organization, but Chen Xue refused, insisting he needed to reach the 16th leaf before he paid any thoughts of cultivating elsewhere.

To him, it was his way of acknowledging and thanking his ancestor for his efforts. Leaving before reaching the end was the greatest disrespect he could ever show, and it could potentially leave him with a heart demon if he did.

Hearing the reasons he gave, how could Chen Zian and the rest insist on it, especially when to a sword cultivator tempering their hearts was just as important as tempering their way with the sword? Therefore he was left to stay.

Both Chen Zian and Chen Gutian could see the regret in each other's eyes.

"When I heard about him, I couldn't believe it myself, up until I saw it for myself..." Song Ba paused as he smiled in a self-

deprecating smile.

"Before true talent and strength, everything else is truly immaterial. When I saw him, I felt a deep sense of inferiority. I am a subordinate of a rank two organization, but in front of someone with a talent like Chen Xue's I felt utterly inferior, which I figure is one of the reasons it didn't take much to convince me to have him killed as the person who told me about him in the first place wanted..." Song Ba said as he looked up.

"With his talent, I knew it was only a matter of time before the Chen Clan birthed a palace realm cultivator, and with his identity as a sword cultivator, and the talent he showed, he was bound to be one of the most powerful one the Red Maple Empire had to offer.

If he reached that level, I would have to cancel all the deals I had with the elders I had roped in with the pill slaves and human cauldrons. With things as they were, that was something I could not afford to do.

I was already struggling to hold onto my identity as a subsidiary of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion. The potions and spiritual herbs I got from the Chen family were about the only things keeping me afloat. I couldn't afford to have anything that would interfere with it.

I judged Chen Xue's strength and potential as one of the greatest dangers to it. I could not let him grow to what he could be, doing so would mean I would lose everything I worked so hard to achieve. It was something I couldn't do.

The day I was told about him, I laughed thinking the heavens were cheering me on and helping me. What a joke..." said Song Ba with a bitter laugh.

"The person who told me about him and especially made the request that I kill him was none other than Elder Chen Zholan, the Elder you were grooming to be your next patriarch..."

Chapter 842 Sentence Given (19)

The moment Song Ba finished the statement it was like a thunderclap had exploded in the courtroom. First came the thunderous explosion then came the defeating silence that was accompanied by the heaviness in the eye.

Chen Gutian's eyes were as wide as they could be, overflowing with shock and disbelief. Chen Zian wasn't that far behind as his eyes flashed with bewilderment as he alternated his gaze between Song Ba and Chen Zholan.

He had been hoping Song Ba was lying to try so he could get whatever deal the Order would give him after this, but when he saw Chen Zholan's reaction, whatever hopes he had were quickly shattered. Shock, anger, and confusion flashed in his eyes as his eyes fell on Chen Zholan.

He couldn't believe it nor understand it at all. Today was the most lost he had ever been in. Finding out that some of the elders were keeping pill slaves and human cauldron didn't hit him that heavily when he learned of it. Bar the involvement of the disciple from the Medical Saint Garden which guaranteed that they would suffer significant damage to their reputation once everything was exposed, that was about the only part he was worried about.

But when it came to the rest, if he was being perfectly honest, a huge part of him was glad those elders got caught, especially those from Blacktear County.

Because of his rivalry with Chen Bo and the amount of influence Chen Bo had which included support from one of the supreme elders, his authority was always fragmented even if he was the Clan's patriarch. He never truly had full control of the clan.

To him, it always felt like he had split that authority with Chen Bo, as indeed it was. He could never implement whatever ideas he had for the clan, meeting constant stumbling blocks and opposition at every turn. Even when it came to enforcing clan rules, he was always restricted on those he could or could not punish.

The faction war between him and Chen Bo had infected every area of the clan, stifling its progress greatly, but now with the largest number of elders involved in pill slaves and human cauldrons coming from Chen Bo's faction, he had felt things had taken a turn for him. The elders involved, which included his son, were Chen Bo's core force, and with him in seclusion, it was mostly Chen Bo's son and those elders who were in the driving seat of the opposition.

But now, his core force was about to be eliminated for good, and at the Order's hand at that, and even better yet the crime they were being convicted of was dealing in pill slaves and human cauldrons. With such a crime over their heads, all the other members of the clan would draw a wide berth, severing any association with the Blacktear County, even the supreme elder who supported Chen Bo would have to

withdraw his aid, and that was even without Chen Zian bringing up the involvement of the Medical Saint Garden Sect into the matter.

Even if Chen Bo somehow broke through to the quasi palace stage like he suspected, with the taint of the deeds of his son and faction on him, he could forget about claiming the seat of Clan Patriarch, or wielding any form of authority. He was already guilty by association.

He had already planned it all, how he was going to use today's charges to galvanize the clan and do a thorough clean up, quelling all dissidents and finally consolidating all power and finally holding it firmly under his grasp.

He could already see it and he was excited for it, but there were a few aspects that he felt deep regret, and one of them was Chen Gutian and Chen Zholan being involved in the matter, especially the latter. When it came to his uncle, as cold as it was, he didn't mind it too much if he got executed.

After Chen Xue's death, he had become so unstable to the point that Chen Zian at one point had contemplated having him forcibly detained because of how he acted. In the pursuit of his son's killers, he constantly triggered feuds with the other major families who he felt were the greatest suspects.

Things among the founding families were already as volatile as it could get without an angry and reckless Chen Gutian stirring more things up with his actions. Luckily, Chen Gutian managed to gain some semblance of calm at some point and stopped acting out which surprised Chen Zian a bit, but with the information that had been revealed, he could guess why.

It finally made sense to him why his uncle who was always loyal to the clan would do something to jeopardize it.

But to Chen Zian, even his involvement, while it was unnerving when he saw him among those charged, he quickly adjusted to the realities of it. Chen Gutian didn't have long to live. He was closely approaching the end of his lifespan. He knew it and everyone else in the clan knew it and as a consequence of it, Chen Zian no longer needed his support as he did when he was at his prime. With him soon approaching his limit, whatever sway he had with the clan reduced concurrently with his dwindling lifespan. The future of the clan no longer had anything to do with him.

Losing Chen Gutian wouldn't affect the clan in any way, and as for the rivals using his charges against Chen Zian like he planned to use the same charges against Chen Bo and his cohorts, Chen Gutian had the least number of pill slaves and human cauldron, and if his guess about why he did it in the first place was right, no one would blame Chen Zian for what Chen Gutian did.

Plus the cold rational side of him welcomed his end, even. As a leader of any organization, one has to constantly expect and plan for the worst to avoid being blindsided and ensure the longevity of the clan. For him, his predecessor told him, he would need to constantly nurture his paranoia and learn to embrace it if he wanted the Chen clan to be able to survive the treacherous waves it swam in.

Chen Zian faithfully followed that advice and it served him well. This was why even after Chen Gutian showed he was stable, Chen Zian always treated him as an unstable element that one never knew when he would explode only that at some point in time in the near future, especially when he approached his end, that lid that was holding things together would definitely explode.

Chen Zian gave him the post as the supervisor of Misty Caldera County in part to keep a close eye on him to prevent that eventuality. But with Chen Gutian having involved himself in taboo matter, and thus falling under the clutches of the Order, as cold as it was, Chen Zian no longer had to worry about that unstable element.

The Order would take care of it for him, but it was Chen Zholan that he couldn't get to grips with in his involvement. While Chen Zholan didn't show the same prodigious talent as Chen Xue, he was still one of the most talented young figures of the sect, even whilst Chen Xue was alive.

Currently, he was among the youngest, standing at just a few years over a hundred, he was among the youngest people to cultivate up to the fourth leaf of the legacy their ancestor left behind, and with the preparations they had made, in another ten years, he would have been more than ready to try the fifth.

His talents were one of the reasons Chen Zian favored him as his successor, something he had long considered even when Chen Xue was still alive. While Chen Xue was exceptionally gifted with the sword, he was never that good at dealing with people, preferring to keep to himself or cultivate most of the time.

Chen Zholan was different, his aptitude for cultivating matched his ability to deal with people and establish relationships. He had good relationships all around not just within the clan, and even among Chen Bo's factions, despite their antagonistic nature, had favorable impressions toward Chen Zholan.

To Chian Zhen, Chen Zholan was the perfect candidate, and considering how close he had seemed to be with Chen Xue, with Chen Xue supporting him, the duo would have pushed the Chen clan further and maybe finally close the gap with the royal family.

But, Chen Zholan not only colluded with the Red Flaming Lotus Alchemy Pavilion to nurture pill slaves and human cauldrons in their domain, but he broke the one line that even Chen Bo and Chen Zian despite their rivalry, would never break, and that was to seek an outsider to murder one of their own, especially one with a rare talent like Chen Xue.

As a cultivation clan, and a considerably large one at that, clan members fighting one another was par for the course, and even ones leading to deaths, happened, but those deaths were always above board and direct like a death duel.

But even with the infighting, there were a few lines that were never crossed, one was murdering a clans member using an outsider's hands and the other was, geniuses of the clan, regardless of which faction they belonged to were untouchable, especially when it came to one of a kind genius like Chen Xue had been.

When it came to such individuals, it was the duty of the entire clan to support them to the best of their abilities. Chen Xue was a direct relative to Chen Zian, but Chen Bo and even the elders of his faction treated him with the same sincerity as anyone from Chen Zian's side would.

That was the reason, the clan elders despite standing trial and riddled with nervousness as a result of it, when Song Ba accused Chen Zholan of ordering the murder of Chen Xue, the fear they all had was replaced by huge surprise and something else, especially when they saw the evident guilt in Chen Zholan's face.

For the first time since stepping in the courtroom, they showed remorse, and shame.

Chapter 843 Sentence Given (20)

"I.. I... I.. I DiDn't Do iT! Clan Leader, you have to believe me! I didn't do it. I may have traded with Owner Song Ba to have a few pill slaves and human cauldrons on the farm, but that was only because he promised to help find Chen Xue's killer.

You all know how close we were. He was my brother.." Chen Zholan desperately said before he turned his pleas to the still muddle-headed Chen Gutian.

"Elder Chen Gutian, tell them. You were there when we both made that deal with him because the clan was dragging its feet in finding his killer.

Owner Song Ba is just slandering me! Chen Xue and I were brothers! Why would I have him killed?

We had already promised each other that we would help return the clan to its former glory. Don't believe him. He is just trying to protect his life and he will say and do anything to that end.

Please don't believe him! He is tricking you just like he tricked me and Elder Chen Gutian," added Chen Xue in a fluster.

"Seems my guess was right. That's how they got his cooperation.." muttered Chen Zian as he shook his head as he took in the sight of Chen Zholan desperately trying to make a case for himself that he had been framed by Song Ba.

As a clan leader whose job was to survive in an ocean of duplicity trying to constantly see through deception on a daily basis, Chen Zholan may have hidden himself well, but with the veil already exposed, Chen Zian could read him as plain as day.

It wasn't just him, the other elders could tell it too. The desperation and agitation in his voice wasn't because he had been slandered but rather out of fear at being exposed.

As old foxes who had engaged in a lot of dubious things over the years that they would not want seen exposed, such as what they were being charged with at the moment, if they were ever exposed, they would react the same way as Chen Zholan. What Chen Zholan was doing was exactly what some had been planning to do the moment it was their turn to defend themselves.

They intended to deny everything, grovel and try to appeal to Chen Zian, using their loyal service to the clan as their defence as a means of garnering sympathy and consideration from the court. But with how damning and incriminating the evidence had been, most abandoned that plan. They were not nearly shameless to try it.

Chen Zholan was relentless in trying to make a case for his innocence, as he tried to get Chen Zian and Chen Gutian to speak up for him, however, the former had already judged him guilty of the crime and would not speak up for him, while the latter was still frozen in shock with gibberish mumbles.

Chen Zholan was finally silenced when Song Ba revealed the final nail he had prepared for a moment like this.

"As a merchant, there is no way I would engaged in something risky without having certain guarantees in place, even if said thing was to my advantage, I would still try to get something out of it as payment for my efforts.

Having a potential clan leader under my thumb was a worthy trade off for the risk I was taking. I recorded the whole thing and the proof is here.." Song Ba said as he formed a small seal with his left hand muttering a strange incantation that resulted in something peeling off from the skin in his right forearm.

That object was a paperthin translucent object that looked like the wing of a fly. As it peeled off, the wing like object released a mysterious energy, as an elusive ethereal power emanated from it.

"The wings of the heavenly secrets cicada. How did you get such a thing?" asked Hou Dehui as his eyes glittered in interest.

The heavenly secrets cicada was a spirit beast know for its ability to conceal itself, and rumor was it was so good at it that it could hide even from the heavenly dao itself.

"It was a gift I received from one of the leaders of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion.." Song Ba said as his eyes flashed in complication as he peeled off the wing.

That wing was the most precious thing he owned, be it in terms of quality but also sentiment. Up until a few years ago, it was a possession of great pride, but it quickly turned into a painful reminder of how far he had fallen.

In value alone, the wing was just as precious as any concealing ascendant grade treasure. He had received it as a reward for all the efforts he had made, one of which was discovering a hidden property of sky grade herb.

The herb in question was the skyturtle dandelion. It was a good ingredient for healing potions, but when mixed with certain herbs, a certain aspect of it was released. That aspect was it had amplifying effects on potions that were related to the mind, such as meditation potions, or one's that were meant to give a cultivator small insights into a particular area.

The skyturtle dandelion had the ability to prolong the duration and increase the strength of the effects. The increase in duration or strength wasn't too outlandish, with effect being a minimal increase, but for potions of the mind, especially ones that helped one gain a deeper understanding into a particular area, prolonging that duration by even half a second, or increasing its ability by even a millimeter was the difference between one making a monumental breakthrough or not.

The gap was sometimes that small, a millimeter, or half a second. Whether one grasps the complete form of the dao he or she needs to breakthrough to the palace realm, or leaping from blooming to perfection in terms of mastery of a technique, or elevating the grade of an art; sometimes the gap between them was half a step, half a second, half a millimeter and the skyturtle dandelion, provided that chance.

This was why Song Ba gained a lot of merits and recognition when he submitted that discovery to the higher ups of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion which ended up with him receiving the wing of the heavenly secret cicada as a gift for his discovery.

Song Ba was over the moon when he got rewarded, especially the attention he got from the leading figures of the pavilion, with one of those figures being one of the founders. He expected from then on, he could only move up and eventually, he could maybe even rise up from being one of the thousands subsidiary members into one of the executives.

Chapter 844 Sentence Given (21)

That opportunity never came. He never made another discovery like the skyturtle dandelion again, and because of the desperation he had for getting recognized again, it gave rise to a heart demon that impacted his cultivation base, and his abilities as an alchemist.

More talented figures rose up, and it wasn't long before he was thrown into obscurity, his achievements a long-forgotten tale, as new sparks took the scene. He didn't handle that fall from grace well, but at

least, he thought he would always have the title of a subsidiary of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion to fall back on.

However, that thought was soon under threat when about four hundred years ago the Golden Bamboo Pavilion announced it would be reducing the number of subsidiaries it had as a result of the looming merger with the Maple Leaf Manor. By merging with another organization that was at the same tier as them, they no longer needed to have as many subsidiaries as they did.

Thus a culling era came about, where no one was safe. Competition among the subsidiaries was always brutal, but after the announcement from the Pavilion, it became even more ruthless and Song Ba who was already down on his luck, was quickly drowning in that storm.

Losing the title of a subsidiary of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion was the same as losing one's life. The moment one lost that title, they were nothing more than fat sheep ripe for slaughter. All the rivals, enemies, those they suppressed and those greedy, almost every person looking to get something would set their sights on them.

Being a subsidiary of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, while it was a blessing when one had it, it was a curse when one lost it because at the back of a lot of people's mind would be, a subsidiary that had fallen from grace, was no different than a piece of meat falling from the sky.

Song Ba didn't want to get devoured and out of said desperation, he moved onto the pill slave and human cauldron trade, to increase the quality of his goods at half the cost.

Some plan it was. In trying to protect his life, he ended up in the clutches of the one organization he should never have and now, he was already well on his way to losing his life.

But at least after his trade, though he was surely to lose his life, his end would be better than what would have awaited him the instant he lost the protection of the pavilion or if he had lacked something to trade with the Order.

Sometimes a peaceful death was more than one could ask for.

Song Ba couldn't help but smile at the absurdity of it all. He would have never expected that there would ever come a time that he would be this calm with dying and even have a positive outlook about it.

Shaking his head clear of excessive thoughts, Song Ba traced his finger over the wing, triggering the activation of silver runes which converged together to form a mirage-like light that shimmered and created the image of two people seated in a beautifully decorated room that had a large window that went from the ground to the roof, looking no different than a wall in and of itself. The view at the window was of an emerald-green lake that produced a resplendent beauty as the rays of the setting sun bounced off it.

Of the two people seated in the room, one of them was Song Ba and the other was Chen Zholan. Song Ba was the picture of composure, with the air of a seasoned merchant surrounding him, while Chen Zholan seemed slightly apprehensive.

["Owner Song Ba, are you sure this place is safe to talk?"

"Hahaha, what are you worried about, young lord? There is no safer place than here. Because of our close friendship, I am not afraid to reveal this to you, but I am one of the co-owners of this inn..

"Co-owner?! How?! So you and that palace realm senior are partners in this establishment? How did you manage that?"

"It's nothing much. I once brokered an important deal with that senior, striking a close friendship with him. Later when he decided to open up this place, he offered me the chance to partner in it with him..." Song Ba said with an air of fake humility.

"So what is the urgent matter you wanted to discuss? You can rest assured with the arrays in this place, not unless a domain expert decides to eavesdrop, anybody below that can forget listening in on what you want to share.

I give you my word, the only way what you discuss here sees the light of day is if you or I are the ones doing it or if there is a rumor-mongering domain expert lurking about.."

Both parties ended up laughing at Song Ba's apparent humor, with Chen Zholan relaxing as a result of it.

"Okay then... If anyone from the clan were to hear what I was about to say, they would immediately have my head. I have no doubt they would try to silence you too.."

"What information is so important that they would be willing to kill someone associated with the Golden Bamboo Pavilion?"

"In your line of work, you've surely interacted with a lot of sects, especially ones in rank three, right?"

"I have, why? If you are looking for a referral, In exchange for the information. I can promise to try, but I can't guarantee you an entry. It will have to depend on you, and them whether you get in or not. I hope you understand, young lord.."

"No, that's not it, though I do appreciate the sentiment. The reason I mention them is for context on what I am about to tell you, so bear with me, please. You've obviously heard of the term legacy disciples?"

"I have?"

"Then you know the demands for one to be considered as one. They need to be the best of the best. A talent that hasn't been seen in ten thousand years for one to qualify as a legacy disciple.."

"Y..es, but why bring them up?" asked Song Ba though he already had an idea as his gaze turned solemn.

"Well, one of the most guarded secrets in our clan is within our clan there is a figure whose talent is so high that his brilliance could easily outshine those legacy disciples. At just thirty-one years old, he has already achieved sword intent and has quasi gold-grade core. I do not doubt that within the next decade, he is all but guaranteed to reach the palace realm. I was hoping to prevent that reality, Owner Song Ba, but to do that, I need help, your help.."

Chapter 845 Sentence given (22)

?[The air in the room changed, heavy from the tension released from the duo.

"Young lord, Are you serious?" Song Ba asked with a questioning smile and look on his face.

"If your clan truly has such a figure with such a high level of talent, then just like how sects are with their legacy disciples, shouldn't you and the entirety of your clan be doing your utmost to ensure he grows to his full potential?

But you want to prevent that from happening? It doesn't make sense, young lord.."

Chen Zholan sighed, his eyes flashing with complicated emotions. He smiled bitterly as he answered with a resigned tone.

"It's because I am weak.."

"I don't understand.."

"It's just that. I am weak..." Chen Zholan paused, as his gaze seemed lost like he was in a different place, not the room they were in.

"Most within the clan admire his talent, and I used to at some point, but the older I got, and the further up my cultivation base grew, the clearer it became to me of the gap between us.

We live in completely different worlds. When I was younger, these feelings of inadequacy were not as strong as they are now.

When you're young, you have the luxury of dreaming. Believing that whatever you envision your future will be, it will turn exactly like that, as long as you are diligent and sincere in your efforts.

Thanks to those thoughts, I wasn't affected much by the talents he showed because I always told myself, my accomplishments would not necessarily lose out to his. I still had confidence in my talent and I never slacked off.

But if my talents and efforts proved short, I thought that I would be mature enough to accept it after all, I and that clan member were friends and could be considered as close as brothers even, but ultimately fear got the best of me.

I don't know when it happened, but I became afraid. Afraid that I wouldn't measure up, afraid that the kid I thought of as a younger brother would surpass me, afraid that the clan would quickly withdraw all the attention and nurturing it had been giving me and pour it all to him; Afraid that life would not turn exactly as I hoped it would.

I tried as much as I could to fight against it, but... I lost that fight. I can't keep living like this, Owner Song Ba, where I feel like the life I have, has just been loaned to me and eventually, there will come a day when I will have to give it all back.." Chen Zholan paused, his pitiful look transforming into a cold one.

"I don't want to give it back, but the only way I can do that is if he isn't around, and the window with which I can do anything about it is closing fast.

Owner Song Ba, I will be frank with you.."

"Please, young lord.."

"The clan member's name is Chen Xue, and I need your help to kill him.."

"Why would I agree to something like that? I stand to gain nothing from this. While I regard you highly young lord, merchants are not in the habit of engaging in things that will more than likely end in tremendous losses.

Someone with his talent is more than likely highly valued at your sect probably even more than your clan patriarch, if his talent is as high as you say, and you want me to help you? Isn't that no different than asking me to make an enemy of your entire clan?

Why would I do something so reckless and thankless? Your fears have nothing to do with me, and if I look at it critically, shouldn't I be befriending him instead? In my business, one can only make more friends, not enemies.

On account of our friendship I will not reveal this matter, but young lord, I am afraid other than my silence, I can't offer you anything else.."

Chen Zholan smiled calmly even with Song Ba looking like he was about to live.

"Owner Song Ba, we've known each other for long. There's no need to pretend here. There are a few reasons why despite the risks involved I chose to share these thoughts with you. One is my fear and the window of opportunity to do anything about it, closing fast, and the other is ... you and I are similar in certain aspects.."

"Oh.. how so?" Song Ba said with an amused smile on his face.

"There is nothing we would not do to ensure our well-being.. To people like us, our lives come above everything else.." Chen Zholan said, with still the same composed smile on his face.

Song Ba narrowed his eyes as he sensed there was something else hidden within Chen Zholan's words and demeanor.

"Owner Song, you are right, as a merchant, there is absolutely no reason for you to engage in a loss-making scheme, I may not be a merchant as seasoned as you, but I know whatever I am proposing is of much benefit to you as it is to me..."

"And what benefits are those?"

"Well for one, the potential clan leader of the Chen clan will owe you a huge favor and with what I am asking you to do, you can use even knowledge of this discussion as a chip in your favor.

As much as I want Chen Xue dead, there is a reason I decided to consult you on this. If I handled it myself, there are risks of me being found out as the culprit. I can't have my clan finding my fingerprints on this.

Having such a chip is worth it, isn't it?" asked Chen Zholan.

"It is still not enough.."

"I know. Earlier you mentioned forming a friendship with him.. Have you wondered why you've never heard of him before today?"

"For someone of his caliber, your clan would do everything to keep his identity a secret for his safety. A nail that stands out is quickly hammered down.."

"You are right. In part, the secret was so well maintained because of the clan but the other is because of Chen Xue's temperament.

He doesn't care much for things outside of cultivating the sword. It's why other than the elders of the clan, not many know of his talent. He keeps mostly to himself, cultivating. temperament.

He doesn't care much for things outside of cultivating Creating a connection with someone like that is easier said than done, even for someone as skilled as you. But there is another reason that I feel would make it impossible for the both of you to have a good relationship, one of the key reasons, I thought to bring this matter to you in the first place.." Chen Zholan said with a meaningful smile as he took the time to pour himself a cup of wine. Song Ba narrowed his eyes as he did.

"Some time back I met with Chen Jiang. You know Chen Jiang, right? I am pretty sure your paths have crossed a few times. He is one of the elders in charge of some of the farms in Cherry Blossom County.

When we were having drinks one time, he happened to

share a few interesting things about himself, Elder Chen Qiao, Elder Chen Longwei, and the things they have been doing for you..."Chen Zholan paused to take a sip of the wine he had just poured into his cup, his eyes forming crescent slits at the pleasant flavor of the wine.

"This 20,000-year pear glacial wine is a true masterpiece. I have never tasted a finer wine.."

"Young lord, if you have something to say, say it.." Song Ba said with a coldness to his tone that matched his look.

Chen Zholan stopped his playfulness as his look turned serious.

"I know of the business between you and those elders, and they're not the only ones handling that 'type of business' for you. I know of three more in Blacktear County.

Don't misunderstand, Owner Song Ba, the reason I mention this matter isn't to blackmail you.." said Chen Zholan when he sensed the killing intent released by Song Ba.

"If it isn't, why mention it? Or is it to show me you have a chip too?"

"I brought it up to show my sincerity. With the activity you are engaged with those elders, after finding out I could have just given that information to our clan leader and gain even more merits from him and the rest of the clan, considering the repercussions of having our own harbor pill slaves and human cauldrons.

But I didn't.. Like I said, we are similar, our well-being comes above the rest and for me, the Chen clan comes behind my needs, and would not hesitate to trade them if it would get me something that I want.

I could care less about those pill slaves and human cauldrons, but Chen Xue is different. He values the clan above his own life.

If you let him be, eventually, maybe when he is in the palace realm, he is going to find out and when he does, regardless of your backing, he will come after you.

Owner Song Ba, you and I are in the same boat here, for what we are after, neither of us can afford to have Chen Xue around. For me, as long as he is around, I will never have a life, my apprehension and helplessness born out of the inferiority I feel every time I am around him, will never let me. Only misery awaits if Chen Xue continues to live.

For you, I guess there must be a reason that made you desperate enough to take the risks you are taking with the pill slaves and the human cauldrons. I won't ask you what they are, but I promise you, as long as Chen Xue remains, you will have to alter those plans and even then, who knows, he may decide to come after you, long after you stopped.

It wasn't that hard for me to find out what you were doing, and for him, when he breaks through to the palace realm, I figure it will be even easier. And when he does, what then?

But if you help me take care of him, you will eliminate that threat and continue what you are doing, and I will even support you with the operations, and recruit more elders for you if you want, and I can also ensure no one is none the wiser. I can even engage in the activity myself if it will put your mind at ease, that I won't betray you later, and when I inherit the post as the next clan leader, I figure our partnership will be even easier.

What do you think, Owner Song Ba? This isn't much of a loss making scheme, is it? We both stand to profit immensely from this.."

Chapter 846 Sentence given (23)

?[Song Ba went silent for a few minutes before he finally gave his response, which was no different than what Chen Zholan expected.

"It seems other than cultivation, the young lord shows quite the skills in negotiations. You'd make a fine merchant.."

"So, what do you think, Owner Song Ba?"

Song Ba poured himself a cup of wine and took a single gup, emptying the cup before he poured himself another.

With his gaze trained on the clear wine, he asked,

"Are you sure you want to go through with this, young lord? I just can't understand it. Is it out of hate, out of envy, or to ensure your position as the next clan leader remains safe? Having a clan member who you think of as a brother, murdered.

Aren't things like these taboos in your clans? Is it really worth it?" Song Ba asked, his expression ambivalent.

Chen Zholan took the wine jar and poured himself a cup. After he was done, with a tired sigh he said,

"Like I told you before, I'm a coward. The fears I have, while irrational, are still there and they have overrun my life completely. I can't live like this. If I was a little braver, things would never have gotten to this point.

Either I would have been brave enough to continue forward, or brave enough to accept my limitations and live with them.

But I can't..."

Chen Zholan paused as he shook his head in dejection and took a small sip after.

"My cowardice wouldn't let me and now the only path I see forward is eliminating Chen Xue. He is the root of it all. As long as he lives, he will be a constant reminder of my weakness and ineptitude, a never-ending source of the fear that is stealing life from me every single day.

If I am to have a chance at living even a normal life, he has to go. At this point, I don't even care about my cultivation base, or achieving the things I set out to do when I was young. I just want to know what it feels like to not live constantly afraid.

Owner Song Ba, there is no turning back for me. I have zero hesitation about wanting Chen Xue dead. Only I know how much torment I have been living in because of his presence. I need peace, I need freedom, and right now, killing Chen Xue seems to be the only way to do that.

So, what is your answer? Will you help me with it? I hope you will, but if you can't, it's okay. I will just have to search for alternative means, but I will have to know your answer promptly. I can't afford to delay.."

Silence ensued in the room with both parties, the atmosphere turning solemn as the two maintained eye contact, each with their own reasons for doing so. Song Ba was trying to see if there was any hint of falsehood in Chen Zholan, while Chen Zholan was staring hard to see what choice Song Ba would make.

Even though he felt Song Ba's odds of agreeing to the matter were high, Song Ba was right about one thing. Chen Xue was highly valued by the entire clan, and if anything were to happen to him, the

repercussions were bound to be severe. Even with Song Ba's identity as the owner of a subsidiary organization with ties to the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, if he was caught, the Chen Clan would likely not let him off.

But for people he could work with on the matter, Song Ba was the best candidate. Even without knowing the full details, just based on Song Ba dealing in pill slaves and human cauldrons, Chen Zholan knew the merchant was just as desperate as he was if he was willing to engage in such taboo matters.

Therefore as things stood, killing Chen Xue was in both their best interests.

After a short moment had passed, Chen Zholan finally gave his answer.

"You drive a hard bargain there young lord. It would be remiss of me to refuse you. I agree, Chen Zholan.." Song Ba said his tone firm.

"But, you have to make sure to keep the promises you made, one of which is, that I need you to ensure no one finds out about my business within your clan. Seeing how you were able to sniff it out, I can think of no one better to ensure its anonymity.

Other than that, I will also need your direct participation like you offered, and I can't wait until you're the next clan leader, it needs to be now. Your fears aside, the clan still values you does it not?"

"It does, why?"

"That is perfect. I've only been there once when I was discussing something with your clan leader, but I have to say the environment in Spiritwood County and Misty Caldera County is really high quality from the denseness of the spiritual qi, to its natural composition. It wasn't part of the red maple spirit's territory for nothing.

I have long since wanted to have some of my business done there, but with Chen Zian keeping such a close eye on both places, It was next to impossible to find anyone to cooperate with, but with you, young lord, my dreams may be realized.

For me this is non-negotiable, I don't care how you do it, but if you want my cooperation, I need my pill slaves and human cauldrons in at least one of the two aforementioned counties, and since I can't trust anyone else to do it without Chen Zian finding out, it will have to be you.

That's my bottom line, do that, and I will consider your offer, but if you can't, then however much I need your farms for my business, I would rather pack up my business and do it elsewhere, or even stop it all together.."

"I will try and get a leading post in one of them but I can't have the same numbers as the rest. Even if Chen Zian values me, he always maintains a close watch on those two counties, mostly to guard against Chen Bo.

To be able to do so under his watch, the number has to be small. I can't do more than five. I hope you understand..."

"Five is okay... Though this isn't contingent on my participation, if you can find another person willing to do this business from those two counties, I would appreciate it if you sent them my way.

I would be more than willing to compensate you in kind for the assistance.."

"If the moment presents itself, I will, but it will be difficult. The elders from these two counties are loyalists, not to Chen Zian, but to the clan. It would be difficult to find anyone amongst them willing to cooperate considering the nature of the business, and the risks it poses to the clan.."

"As long as you keep an eye out, it will be more than enough.."

"Okay... So we have a deal?"

"We do, but I will need six months to a year for me to verify if Chen Xue exists and is as talented as you say. Only after I have verified it will I act..

What's his present cultivation base?"

"He is at the second stage of the core formation realm?"

"Mmh, no matter how heaven-defying his talent is, it would take more than a year for him to reach the peak stage of the core formation realm let alone reach the palace realm.

We can both afford to wait that long.."

Chen Zholan sighed as he answered,

"I wish we could take care of it today, but with how sensitive the matter is, I understand the need for prudence. Take the time you need, and when you come to a decision, please let me know, soon I hope.."

"I will, young lord.."

The two exchanged a few more words before finally, Chen Zholan left leaving Song Ba, behind.

Alone in the room, Song Ba pulled back the sleeve robe on his right hand until it revealed his forearm. He traced his hand over it whilst muttering an incantation that resulted in his forearm glowing with silver runes, that flashed for a few seconds before disappearing.

"I hope there never comes a moment when I have to use this.." Song Ba muttered to himself.]

The scene that had been playing ended soon after, but immediately after ending, Song Ba manipulated the wing of the heavenly secrets cicada, producing yet another recording.

The next recording was of Song Ba and Chen Zholan meeting a year later, with the former having confirmed the veracity of the information Chen Zholan shared with him.

After everything was confirmed came the planning. The planning phase showed Chen Zholan providing every single piece of information that he knew about Chen Xue which even included his unconscious fighting habits that Chen Zholan had discovered over the years from being his sparring partner.

Every single detail about Chen Xue whether relevant or not was laid out bare to Song Ba. With all the information in place, all they needed was an opportune moment to act, which Chen Zholan had said would provide, completely revealing how.

The scheme involved using Chen Xue's father to get Chen Xue away from the clan. In the recording, Chen Zholan sounded confident in pulling it off, owing to the close relationship he had developed with the father and son.

After he shared his plan, Song Ba added to it by providing the entrance tokens for an auction being held in one of the auction houses he was acquainted with.

Song Ba played recording after recording, showing him and Chen Zholan refining their plan, up until the day of Chen Xue's assassination. Song Ba didn't reveal who he would use, and Chen Zholan didn't ask either.

After Chen Xue's death, next they met, was three months after the deed was done at the same inn they had met to kickstart the whole thing, and the topic of discussion other than celebrating the successful assassination, was Chen Xue sharing the news of him being confirmed as the next clan leader, with the ascension waiting till he was at the peak stage of the core formation realm as per the rules and how he had found the perfect candidate for Song Ba to add to help him with his taboo business.

That candidate was none other than Chen Gutian. Exploiting his grief, Chen Zholan had devised the perfect plan. Most within the clan suspected the Gui clan of assassinating Chen Xue but without proof and the Gui clan having the same strength as the Chen clan, the higher-ups were unwilling to act which left the grieving Chen Gutian angry at the clan for sitting on the fences and refusing to take action.

Chen Zholan's plan was aimed at taking advantage of this satisfaction. He would slowly work on Chen Gutian to the point he would willingly sacrifice anything to get at his son's killer which was where Song Ba would come in.

Song Ba as the owner of a subsidiary of the Golden Bamboo Pavilion, didn't need to fear the Gui clan, and his identity meant his connections were extensive, even more so than the Chen Clan. Finding the killer would be easy with Song Ba's help.

Leveraging on the desperation Chen Gutian had in finding his son's killer, Song Ba would offer to search for Chen Xue's killer, in exchange Chen Gutian would harbor a few pill slaves and human cauldrons for Song Ba.

Chen Gutian wasn't yet the elder in charge of the farms in Misty Caldera County, but the recordings showed Chen Zholan saying how it would be easy to get him the post. Chen Zian having done nothing about Chen Xue's death or his killer, either out of guilt or appeasement, as long as Chen Gutian requested it, he would easily be given the post as the elder in charge of Misty Caldera County by the clan leader.

The only issue was getting Chen Gutian's agreement to nurture pill slaves and human cauldrons, but that proved to be a non-

issue in the end. Chen Zholan's played him like a fiddle.

He preyed on his grief and anger and pretended he was just as angry, willing to do anything, after that, he eased into Song Ba's matter and how he would be able to help them. He pretended that he would be the only one to engage in the matter, but he knew, with Chen Gutian's temperament, there was no way he would allow him to bear that price and infamy alone.

The recording showed Chen Zholan bragging about how everything played out perfectly from Chen Xue's assassination down to the scheme of roping in Chen Gutian.

Chen Zholan had long gone silent when he saw the damning recordings play one after the other. In the end, all he could do was stare at Song Ba in disbelief.

"I told you before, young lord, the only way that matter would ever come to light, is if one of us was the one to reveal it.."

Chapter 847 Sentence given (24)

?Chen Zholan stood there with the same dumbfounded expression Chen Gutian had been wearing all this time with Chen Zian showing the same look which quickly turned to shame and then anger.

He had seen and experienced his fair share of duplicity having done it himself a couple of times, even to fellow clan members no less. If it would help him ensure the stability and growth of the Chen Clan, there was no tool he would not use including the manipulation and exploitation of his fellow clan members.

As a result of the life he led, he had long grown accustomed to painting others with the same brush like how a cheater would automatically assume everyone around them cheats because they do it.

Chen Zian because of his duplicity, always looked at others through the same lens. He always assumed every single person he dealt with had a duplicitous side to them and therefore as a result he was always suspicious of almost everyone... Almost.

Even as a highly paranoid, highly suspicious person, there were a few that he let through. Those he deemed didn't need to be suspected, those he thought highly of and held great aspirations of. That list didn't have many people, just three in total. One of them was the previous clan master, the other was one of the three supreme elders, and the last one was Chen Zholan, his chosen successor.

With the way Chen Zholan carried himself, he was one of the few that Chen Zian held truly in high regard as he envisioned how the clan would flourish under his care. Chen Zholan had a decent cultivation aptitude, though it wasn't at the level of Chen Xue, it could be ranked high up there within the clan, with Chen Zian estimating it to be equal to his or even higher.

By his estimations even if the odds of him reaching the palace realm were slim, Chen Zian felt that given enough time he would reach the quasi-palace stage similar to the three supreme elders.

But what made Chen Zian appreciate him wasn't his talent, his talent was just a bonus. Those who made the best leaders didn't necessarily have to be the most powerful, yes strength was a pre-requisite, but it wasn't set in stone that they had to be the strongest, being among the top five was more than enough, but what was important for a leader, especially for a large clan like theirs was level of vision and adaptability, which was something Chen Zholan had in spades.

Chen Zian felt that the level would be sustained even if it didn't improve by much under Chen Zholan's stewardship. Longevity was all that mattered to him, and Chen Zholan was the right person for just that, and it was out of that admiration and expectation that Chen Zian gave him a lot of latitude within the sect, which was intentional on Chen Zian's part to help him spread his wings and exercise and develop his abilities in preparation before his ascension.

But the rope he gave him ended up being a noose tied around his neck. Chen Zholan dealing in pill slaves and human cauldrons, while it was bitter to swallow, Chen Zian was coming around to accepting it and filing it under a teachable moment.

But finding out that the person he had groomed for his post not only hired someone to kill one of the greatest hopes of the clan but had absolutely no regard for the clan and saw it as nothing more than a tool to further his own gains, that cut deep. To Chen Zian, nothing was more important to him than the clan, even his life, and to him, whatever means he used no matter how cold at times, it was always for the greater good of the clan.

That recording had given him a huge blow as his gaze fell on Chen Zholan feeling his rage boiling within him as he saw the frozen elder.

"I have truly failed the clan to have harbored a snake like you.." Chen Zian coldly said with every word laced with killing intent.

"Clan Leader, I.."

"There's no need for more words Chen Zholan,.. " Chen Zian interrupted before suddenly moving to the center of the courtroom which startled Chen Zholan as he thought Chen Zian was coming to attack him.

"Judge Yang Qing, I wish to request the court of something?" said Chen Zian as he cupped his fists.

"What is it?"

"From what I know of the Cultivator Baseline Conduct Charter, for an irreconcilable feud, the Order can be requested to stand as a witness for a blood debt life and death duel.."

"We can.."

"I would like to issue a blood debt challenge to Chen Zholan on the basis that he had a fellow clan member murdered. I am within my rights to issue one both as the clan leader and also as a direct cousin to the deceased, Chen Xue.

My question is would I be allowed to? With the charges looming over Chen Zholan's head can a blood debt challenge still be issued to him, if it is, then I, Chen Zian, in my capacity as both leader of the Chen Clan and a direct blood relative, would like to issue a blood debt battle to the death against the perpetrator, Chen Zholan, with the Order serving as witness and officiator of the duel.." Chen Zian solemnly said.

"C..clan L.." Chen Zholan had just been about to speak when his entire body was forcibly restrained by Yang Qing using his spiritual qi.

"The court has heard your plea, Clan Leader Chen Zian, but I reserve judgment and will give my verdict on the matter at the end of the case, as I pass my sentence to the rest which should be after Owner Song Ba gives his testimony and the rest of the elders who want to speak on their defense.." Yang Qing paused as his gaze swept over said elders.

"Though I have to warn you that lying will add more to your punishment so please be conscious of that when the moment comes.."

The elders sensing the unveiled warning in Yang Qing's words all nodded their heads.

"Clan leader Chen Zian, please wait until then.." finished Yang Qing as he addressed the Chen Clan Leader who cupped his fists in gratitude as he moved back to his position.

"Owner Song Ba, I doubt the information about the murder of Chen Xue was the only information you had to trade, was it? If it was, then I hate to be the bearer of bad news but it will not be enough..."

"I understand Judge, and you're right, the information on Chen Xue wasn't what I was looking to trade. The information I wanted to trade for an easy death is this.."

Song Ba pulled his left thumb right off his hand, however, the blood that was expected to be seen when one tore off his thumb wasn't there, all that was there was a smooth stump like it had been molded from clay, as for the dismembered thumb, it transformed into a small scroll.

"Gold earth genesis art.. an interesting art.." muttered Yang Qing as he saw the transformation.

The art was a low-tier blue-grade art, however, in terms of attack, it was weaker than even middle-tier orange-grade art. The art's true strength was as a utility art. The user could transform different parts of their body into artifacts by combining them with certain treasures.

For example, one could have a part of their skull bone mixed with serenity cloud pearls and have their soul and mind refreshed constantly by the pearl. Because of the art's influence, no one would be none the wiser that serenity cloud pearls are embedded into that cultivator's skull.

A cultivator's entire body would be a mix of different types of artifacts. The gold earth genesis art was an art that required considerable wealth to cultivate. What it lacked in firepower, it more than made up for in terms of versatility and potentially the survivability of the cultivator.

One could hide things within their body and others would never know, like the scroll that was reproduced from Song Ba's thumb.

Song Ba opened up the scroll, which was blank, but from the fluctuations released from the scroll, Yang Qing could tell there was more to the scroll than met the eye, especially from the well-hidden concealment arrays, self-destruct arrays, illusory, and about a dozen other arrays and seals that were beautifully hidden and crafted within the scroll.

Song Ba bit his left thumb, producing a gold-red blood drop which though was tiny produced as much energy as a thousand volcanic mountains, as it leaked out with a dense aura of life.

Song Ba's face paled instantly the moment the droplet was formed, as his forehead instantly produced buckets of sweat with his breathing getting labored as he did so.

His weakened state was understandable. The droplet he produced was the heart blood essence, which was the manifestation of his entire essence in the form of a drop.

Song Ba poured the droplet onto the scroll as he formed a seal with his hand which triggered a reaction from both the droplet and the scroll, as the scroll lit up and produced what looked to be the layout of a vivid lifelike map, while the droplet split into tiny droplets, about a hundred of them and spread out all over the map.

When he was done, with labored breathing, Song Ba out of habit reached out for his storage ring to get some vitality nourishing pills, only to find it wasn't there having been confiscated by the Order before he was taken to the courtroom. Just as he was wondering what to do about the dizziness and the weakness that was heavily assaulting his body, he felt a gentle cool nurturing force enter his body, and his weakness and dizziness disappeared in an instant.

The force seemed to have even restored the heartblood essence he had expended. Just as he was absorbed in shock at the change happening in his body, Yang Qing's voice trailed over.

"So what are we looking at here?" Yang Qing said as he pointed at the map.

Song Ba bowed in gratitude for Yang Qing's assistance first before he answered, with some hesitation, albeit.

"If the information proves worthwhile, I hope the Order, doesn't use what I am about to share to cancel the agreed-upon deal.."

"If it proves valuable, the deal will be upheld, but... if what you're about to share shows you actively participating in a mass massacre of people in the upwards of tens of thousands, then I'm afraid, you will have to pay the penalties for that, no matter what you share.."

Song Ba heaved a sigh of relief at Yang Qing's response as he quickly moved to point at the hundreds of droplets.

"Each place these droplets are represents the location of a member of the Blood Scavengers and no, I am not one of them, but they were the ones who gave me the art that I used to grow the herbs and make potions using pill slaves and human cauldrons, in exchange, I provided them the potions I brewed using those herbs.

I marked those potions using a secret art that would place a tracker on the target's soul once they consumed that potion. The tracker has an active shelf period. It would disappear after three months and the only way to keep it active is if that same person consumes the potion.

As it stands, I am not sure, if my potions have been consumed by the same person, or its different people, but what I am certain of is every single representation here is from the Grim blood scavengers or someone affiliated with them. Their locations will remain active for 79 days.

Is this enough for a trade?"

Chapter 848 Sentence given (25)

"What do you think seniors?" Yang Qing used his palace sense to secretly communicate with Hou Dehui and Lei Weiyuan who were still in the courtroom.

"It's your courtroom, Yang Qing. You should do whatever you feel is best as per your judgment.." answered Lei Weiyuan

Lei Weiyuan's words weren't all that surprising as it was more or less what he expected of him.

"I agree with Lei, it's all on you, Yang Qing, though, based on what that merchant is offering, Xiafan would owe you one. All things considered, this information is bound to make her life moderately easier, seeing how she is the one at the front lines dealing with the group.." said Hou Dehui.

"Thank you for your input seniors.." said Yang Qing as he leaned back in his seat, his gaze falling on Song Ba who was on pins and needles awaiting Yang Qing's judgment.

"Grim blood Scavengers, I can't deny that is quite something to trade.." thought Yang Qing as his gaze fell on the close to one hundred droplets that were actively moving around the map.

Each one of those droplets was a potential member of the Grim blood scavengers. It was less likely for any of those droplets to be a high-ranking member of the organization considering they got marked by a technique done by an eleventh-stage core formation expert in Song Ba.

Someone in the palace realm would more than likely realize if someone did something to their soul no matter how minute the interference. While Song Ba had done something to the potions to more than likely hide them from the eyes of potential even someone in the palace realm, such means can only evade their eyes if those figures don't consume the potion, if they did, they would surely be found out.

Song Ba's actions were also another indicator that those droplets were unlikely to feature important figures of the organization. With his cautious nature and considering who he was dealing with, there were three reasons Yang Qing could think of that would make such a cautious person like him go through with it. One, it was a great card to hold, if successful, second, Song Ba was confident in his ability to do it undetected, and third which was the most important factor, Song Ba knew his audience well which informed the chances of discovery.

Had those potions been meant for important figures, there was no doubt in Yang Qing's mind that Song Ba would have never dared to try and pull something with them.

The fact that those droplets could potentially be of low-ranking members was what made Yang Qing wrestle with the idea of agreeing to the trade. He could just reject it, and make use of the information, but that would be dealing in bad faith, which was something he would not do.

As deserving as Song Ba would be to the fate that awaited him, a deal was a deal, and Yang Qing had to be objective and fair about it. If he rejected the deal, he would have to give substantial reasons for it.

Having come to his decision, he sighed, as he gave the response.

"Do you have more recordings like the ones you have shown that show your dealings with the elders present?"

Song Ba who had been expecting a rejection, was thrown off slightly by Yang Qing's question, which left him bewildered in thought and delayed in his response.

"Huh?"

"Do you have any visual recordings that pertain to the deals made with any of the elders present when it came to the pill slaves and human cauldrons business you had with them?" Yang Qing patiently asked again.

Though still confused, Song Ba answered,

"I do.."

"Then we have a deal, provide those recordings and the deal we had can be considered fulfilled.."

"Really?!" Song Ba agitatedly asked with excitement in his tone.

"Yes. I, in my capacity as the judge of this case, agree to the deal made between Song Ba and the court, having found the information traded to be sufficient.." announced Yang Qing.

He had no choice but to agree to the deal. Regardless of whether those shown on the map were important members of the Grim Blood Scavengers or not, Yang Qing had to accept the deal.

The Grim Blood Scavengers was just as infamous as the Dark Helminth Ghost Sect, or the Scarlet Blood Hands Syndicate, and in some aspects they could be considered even more dangerous than the two, not in terms of ability, but in terms of origin and members they accepted.

The Grim Blood Scavengers was entirely comprised of blood-

fiend cultivators and they dubbed themselves as the 'true inheritors of the Crimson Blood Tide Sect'.

Them claiming that title wasn't anything new as it was a common occurrence among a lot of blood-fiend organizations who aimed to borrow the prestige of the Crimson Blood Tide to grow their renown, so they could gain more members and also establish their legitimacy amongst their circle.

The Crimson Blood Tide even destroyed, still held a lot of sway in the blood fiend community. It was the closest thing to having a holy land power they ever got which was why most blood-

fiend organizations that came after it, they all sang the same tune which was built on leveraging the prestige of the Crimson Blood Tide.

The Grim Blood Scavengers wasn't any different, however, the reason Yang Qing agreed to the deal wasn't because of their claim to be true inheritors of the Crimson Blood Tide, but rather how dangerous

they were. Their history, though not long, was still long, having been around for almost 50,000 years, which is quite the feat for them considering all blood fiend cultivators were dubbed the number one enemy of the entire continent.

Their longevity was a cause for concern, however, the greatest concern was they had a domain expert leading them and about nine palace realm experts within their ranks, and that was what was known on the surface, who knew what they hid beneath.

They were active all over the continent, however over the past seven hundred years, their activity had been concentrated in Five Clovers Kingdom and the Red Maple Empire which was what prompted the Order to create a branch at the border between the two nations and even dispatch a domain expert as the branch chief.

Most assumed the Order had created the branch because both the Red Maple Empire and the Five Clovers Kingdom were backed by rank two powers, but it couldn't be further from the truth.

Chapter 849 Sentence given (26)

?While the Order's presence reduced the activity of the Scavengers, the Grim Blood Scavengers still remain active in both nations to date, having deeply entrenched their roots in both nations well before the Order came there. Those roots enabled them to hide in plain sight, which made it difficult for the Order even with its considerable resources to completely root them out as they played catch up. But though small, the Order was making ground but they still didn't know why the scavengers were interested in the two places. The Order had some educated guesses, but it was just that.

This was why Yang Qing had to agree to Song Ba's trade. Even if he had only marked low-ranking members, maybe one or two of those low-ranking members had ties to an important figure. The hundred droplets provided a hundred threads to follow and one of them could potentially lead to something if followed. The trade was too good to pass up. Song Ba would still get executed in the end, the only difference was the process, and if he could trade an easy death for the chance to uncover something about the Grim Blood Scavengers, then he had no choice but to agree.

Song Ba riding the high of a successful trade, produced recordings from the same heavenly secrets cicada wing that contained the evidence of his collusion with Chen Zholan.

The recording was what would be expected of a merchant. It was clear, concise, and heavily detailed, leaving no room for doubt, and as the main instigator of the whole thing, Song Ba's recording contained more damning evidence than what the Order had, and the fact it was recorded with the heavenly secrets cicada wing, it left little room for doubt. The recordings were made by borrowing on the abilities

of the cicada, which concealed itself by borrowing and mimicking the true essence of whatever was around it.

The cicada's ability to capture the true essence of the world around it was legendary and this ability was translated to the recordings made. Just like the recordings made by Mei Xiling, using the silver void talisman, by using the heavenly secrets cicada's wing, the recordings Song Ba had captured everything to its truest essence.

In the recording that showed him and Chen Zholan plotting in the Emerald Lake Inn, those in the courtroom not only heard the gentle swooshing sound of the lake but could even smell its scent, along with wine and the dishes they had at the inn.

The recording didn't seem like a recording, but it made one feel like they were experiencing the memory themselves, like they were there as it was happening, and all that was thanks to the wing of the heavenly mystery cicada.

With the damning and thorough evidence completely laid out, the elders shown in those recordings couldn't help but lower their heads in embarrassment.

"Thank you for the testimony, you can now step back.." said Yang Qing, as the air around the courtroom turned heavy, with everyone except Chen Gutian, affected by it.

Chen Gutian still had a lost look on his face as he muttered, how? how ? over and over. If it wasn't for Yang Qing using his spiritual qi to calm him, with how unstable he was, owing to the emotional upheaval he was in, his qi would have long gone erratic along with his mind, but even with Yang Qing's assistance, he seemed to be barely hanging on.

"This is it!" unanimously thought the elders as they saw Yang Qing clasp his hands together.

"Now with all evidence presented, I now leave the floor to you all, the accused to make your case. If you have any defense you want to use, feel free to bring it up, but as I warned you earlier, any hint of falsehood in your statements and the penalties against you increase considerably on top of what you're supposed to face.

But.." Yang Qing paused.

"Owning up to your mistakes may have a slight impact on your treatment after the sentence. While your sentence won't change, I will send a recording of your conduct to those in charge of handling your sentence.

I can tell you now, being responsible and forthright goes a long way with them, so please keep that in mind, and also as I said earlier, should any of you wish to have your clan leader speak on your behalf, you can, provided he agrees with it..

Is there something you'd wish to say, Clan Leader Chen Zian?" asked Yang Qing when he saw Chen Zian's movements.

"Yes, judge, forgive my interruptions once more, but I would like to make my stance clear on the matter, I hope I can.."

"You can. Go on.."

"Other than Chen Gutian, I will not be speaking on behalf of any other member present. For the crimes they have committed, all I can say..." Chen Zian paused as his solemn gaze fell on the elders.

"You have dishonored our clan and spit on the sacrifices our ancestor and those who came after have given to ensure we are where we are today.

You have done what you have done, and that can't be changed, but you have a chance here, while it may not undo what you have done, or repair the damage done to those children and the clan, you have an option to bring honor to the Chen in your names by being honest and take responsibility.

We all know how ancestor Chen Fu was. His character was just like his sword, firm, enduring, direct, simple, and honest. His heart remained unblemished by falsehood.

I have failed to live up to who he was, but I have tried to, and I hope you will. Please uphold your honors of the Clan which I think you once loved and revered. Be sincere and direct and own up to the things you

did. It may not undo everything but if you do, when the end comes, you will not be ashamed to face the predecessors that went before us.

Do what is right, as a fellow clan member, I implore you.." Chen Zian said as he bowed slightly to them.

Chapter 850 Sentence given (27)

?Chen Zian's words seemed to have greatly affected the Chen Clan Elders. Some lowered their heads in shame, others had an air of resolve about them, while others seemed to be in deep contemplation.

Whatever they were thinking about, they had time, as Chen Zian didn't seem to be done.

"For my uncle.." Chen Zian paused as he sighed when he saw the state the old elder was in. A look of a completely lost and broken man.

"While I am not shameless enough to ask for a complete pardon for what he did, I would like to plead with the court to consider the circumstances that led him to the choice he made and show him some mercy.

Chen... My uncle... For as long as I've known, I've known to be one of the most loyal and selfless people I have ever met.

Before Chen Xue was born, he always put the well-being of the clan above his own needs, sacrificing everything for it, and when Chen Xue was born, I could tell, he always harbored some guilt as he felt he valued Chen Xue's life above that of the clan, but to me, he didn't.

The love, care, and attention he showed Chen Xue was no different than showing it to the Clan, both are not mutually exclusive.

Even though this comes from a utilitarian basis, the talent Chen Xue showed, he was the pride and joy of the entire clan, and part of the reason he was able to fully demonstrate his talent was because of the care and support my uncle gave him.

When it comes to cultivation, one's environment is a crucial factor, and when it comes to the environment, most think it is the quality of the spiritual veins and other cultivation resources, but to me,

the environment is everything that surrounds a cultivator which includes their everyday life and relationships, and my uncle helped provide one of the best aspects of that environment to Chen Xue.

So, all his life, to me, his loyalty has never wavered, be it to the clan or to his son, and it was because of that loyalty that someone like Ch.. someone like Zholan was able to exploit..

Because of the close friendship Zholan and Chen Xue had, Chen Gutian treated him as he would Chen Xue. In his eyes, he was no different than his son, and to those he had close relationships with, there was nothing Chen Gutian wouldn't do for them.

Zholan no doubt exploited that nature and convinced him to do something he would have never thought of doing in a million years.

While I don't know the grief he went through when he lost his son and can only estimate the pain, I can say without any falsehood in my heart, if it was anyone else but Zholan that brought forth the plan to harbor pill slaves and human cauldrons in exchange for his son's killer, he would never have done it, no matter how much pain he was in, and how desperate he was to find his son's killer.

I have no doubt in my heart that he agreed to it so that Zholan would not have to carry that sin alone. Zholan no doubt goaded him by saying he would do it with or without his consent, which more or less forced my uncle's hand into joining up with Song Ba.

My uncle has been nothing but loyal but whether it's Zholan or us, we all took advantage of it, and could never repay it back. Zholan betrayed it, and for us, the one time he needed us to stand up for him when his son died, we couldn't because we were trying to observe the bigger picture and not cause any waves that would rupture the fragile balance we lived in.

We all failed him, all I can do now is avenge his son's killer and beg the court to show mercy.." Chen Zian said as he performed a deep bow before stepping back.

"Thank you for your statement and the court will take your statement under consideration when making a ruling.." said Yang Qing before he turned to face the elders.

"The floor is now yours, should you wish to say anything on your defense.." Yang Qing said as he opened the floor to the elders.

After a momentary silence and lack of movement from them, someone stepped out, it was Chen Lai, Chen Bo's son.

He first bowed to Yang Qing and the rest before his gaze fell on Chen Gutian, where his eyes flashed with sympathy before they turned calm once again as he looked at Chen Zian.

"As someone who was always at logger heads with you, I never did like you or those around you, especially Elder Chen Gutian. He was obstinate, tempermental, short sighted and a meathead, but there was one thing I could never begrudge him for, and that was his loyalty to you but more so to the clan.

Considering what I did, I am unqualified to speak on it, but then and now, his relentless loyalty was and is something I grew to admire greatly.

As much as I am disgusted with Zholan for what he did, we have just as much blame to what happened to Elder Chen Gutian and junior nephew Chen Xue by allowing the fox into the hen house.

If it wasn't for our dealings with Song Ba, that snake would not have found the perfect dagger to use and for that,...

I AM TRULY SORRY.." Chen Lai said as he bowed to both Chen Gutian who still had a listless and confused look and to Chen Zian, who looked surprised by the bow.

Chen Bo may have been his direct rival, but with him in seclusion, the person he had been contending with had been his son, Chen Lai. With the amount of hidden battles and enmity they had for one another, he would have never expected Chen Lai to bow to him.

After the bow, Chen Lai rose as he turned to face Yang Qing, but not before casting another look at Chen Zian.

"I have no doubt that you will use all this to consolidate your power in the clan, and with everything that has happened.." Chen Lai paused as he sighed.

"I can't say it's a bad thing.Che.. Clan Leader, I know you need to do what you have to do, but the clan needs to stand firm together, so what happened here doesn't repeat itself.

Those involved are all here, I hope you can let the matter end here and try and make peace with my father and the rest. For him, I know , if he learns what happened to Chen Xue, he's sure to change.

The only reason he opposed you so much was because he always believed your strength was insufficient to help the clan sail the muddy waters that is the Red Maple Empire, but unlike me who resorted to tricks and villainous ways to oppose, he chose a more direct way, a way that honors our ancestor, and that is to surpass you in ability.

Don't shame him, he already has enough to carry because of me. I've never asked you of anything but as our clan leader I'll ask you of that.." said Chen Lai.

"I will consider it.."

"That's all I ask.."