

Immortal 1031

Chapter 1031: On the Verge of Eruption

"That's not entirely impossible." Tang Tian'er looked a bit worried. That person had come all the way to get something from their bank, and then had immediately captured the magistrate. He really is the bane of my existence!

"I am worried that this matter will quickly implicate our Zhenyuan Merchant Group." Qian Dong had also seen Zu An fetch an item from them. He also couldn't avoid that possibility.

"Who do you all think is the one making mischief behind the scenes?" Tang Tian'er asked with a frown.

"Could it be Pegasus Merchant Group?" Qian Dong mused. "They have always wanted to take our place."

"Not even ten Pegasus Merchant Groups could compare to us. The only one who's of any threat is the one backing them." Tang Tian'er got up and looked out the window. She asked, "Pegasus Merchant Group's boss Zhang Che, have you investigated his background yet?"

Qian Dong and the others nodded. "That person's background is mysterious, and his cultivation is high as well. We were unable to find any concrete proof. However, according to our analysis, we suspect he might have some kind of a connection with the Devil Sect."

"The Devil Sect?" Tang Tian'er harrumphed. "Those guys aren't good at anything else, but they sure are good at messing things up. Send some men to keep an eye on the Devil Sect's operations in Cloudcenter Commandery. Report to me as soon as anything happens."

"Understood!" Qian Dong quickly left to give out the orders.

Tang Tian'er then gave the other managers their tasks. When she saw how deeply worried they were, her usual sweet smile returned to her face. She said, "Everyone, please don't be worried. What kinds of hard times haven't our Zhenyuan Merchant Group experienced in the last few centuries? Our current situation is nothing."

The managers all began to smile, replying, "The first miss is right. It has always been us who has bullied others; when has anyone else ever taken advantage of us? It would be one thing if this matter has nothing to do with us, but if they want to frame us, there is no way we can stand that!"

Tang Tian'er smiled and nodded. She waved her hand, indicating that they could all return to their respective posts. However, she remained in the room to think to herself.

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Meanwhile, Sang Hong brought Zuo Su and the others back to the temporary residence. Then, he personally interrogated them about the smuggling matter.

Zuo Su obviously denied everything. He claimed to have been framed. They were all old foxes, so they naturally knew how to deal with such interrogation tactics.

They were interrogated for a long time, but Sang Hong didn't obtain any useful information. He could only suspend the interrogation for the time being. He left the prison cells and went outside to discuss things with Zu An.

"Does respected uncle think he's innocent?" Zu An asked. Sang Hong's face darkened and he shook his head. Zu An was surprised, asking, "The interrogation bore results?"

"No," Sang Hong replied. "That fellow is incredibly cunning and will not reveal any openings. Unfortunately, that is precisely his biggest flaw. If he truly were innocent, he would definitely work with me to investigate who the true criminal was, and not seem so worried about some meaningless things."

Zu An was incredibly impressed. He said, "Respected uncle's foresight is bright like a torch after all. You've already seen through him so quickly."

"There is no need for flattery. Things are quite difficult now." Sang Hong said with a bitter smile. "I was still hoping that someone really had framed Zuo Su at first, because we would then at least have some people from the court on our side. But seeing as there is something wrong with even him, it proves that Cloudcenter Commandery's court is already rotten to the core. We are completely on our own here."

Sang Hong had every reason to feel the way he was feeling. Even though they had brought a several-hundred-men strong Armed Escort Army, a force respectable in its own right, it was nothing before a real army. He had been hoping to cooperate with the Civil Affairs Manor's troops to keep the Military Affairs Manor in check, but now, not even the Civil Affairs Manor could be relied on.

"Let's wait until Gao Ying and Pei You capture the others first. They definitely won't be as calm as Zuo Su. As long as one person speaks, the rest will be easily dealt with." Zu An consoled him.

Zuo Su's identity was special, so they couldn't use torture, but there were no such restrictions for the others. The Embroidered Envoy specialized in making people speak.

As long as they had enough proof, they would have a proper reason to punish Zuo Su. Then, they would take the chance to gain military leadership of the Civil Affairs Manor. No one would be able to criticize their actions at that point.

"I hope things work out that way." Sang Hong knew that was the best result as well. But his brow quickly furrowed. "Why haven't they returned yet?"

Just then, there was a disturbance outside. Soon afterward, someone reported, "Sir Gao and Sir Pei have returned."

Sang Hong and Zu An quickly exited. They saw the two dejected individuals and asked in alarm, "Where is everyone?"

The two hadn't returned with suspicious individuals the way they had imagined, but had rather returned with many stretchers. There was white cloth covering many of them. When they saw that, Sang Hong and Zu An's moods immediately plummeted.

Gao Ying and Pei You explained with sullen expressions, "We sought them out according to the list of names, but those people already received news ahead of time and either fled or committed suicide. We didn't even find a single living person to interrogate."

“They were all silenced!” Zu An and Sang Hong exchanged a look. They saw shock in each other’s eyes.

But that didn’t make any sense! After all, they had taken action so swiftly. Why had those people been able to move before them? Wasn’t the one behind the scenes a bit too remarkable?

While the two of them were shocked by the situation, heavy footsteps suddenly rang out from outside.

“What is that noise?” Those present suddenly raised their heads.

A guard ran over in fear and alarm, exclaiming, “Reporting! Chief Officer Dong Jin is leading a great army in our direction!”

“What?!” The group was shocked.

Sang Hong harrumphed. “How daring!” He quickly walked outside with an overcast expression. Gao Ying and Pei You quickly followed. Zu An waved his hands, gesturing for the Armed Escort Army to make their preparations.

The group arrived outside the entrance. They saw that the entire temporary residence had already been completely surrounded.

“Dong Jin, you have quite the guts!” Sang Hong looked at the one in the lead with a furious expression, exclaiming, “Are you trying to rebel?”

Dong Jin was a tall and strong man. All of them had met each other before during the evening banquet. But back then, his official position hadn’t been as high, so he hadn’t sat in the highest positions.

“I do not dare!” Dong Jin cupped his hands. “We are only here for an explanation. Sir Zuo has acted cautiously and conscientiously over the years in Cloudcenter Commandery, and he has always worked diligently for the court. Yet you all captured him today with baseless accusations, and even hounded many Civil Affairs Manor officials to death. Could it be that just because you are the Imperial Envoy, you can act so ruthlessly and willfully?”

Sang Hong said calmly, “As the Imperial Envoy, I am naturally acting in place of the heavens. I have the authority to punish local officials. Why do I need to explain anything to you?”

“On the contrary, I have just captured someone, and yet you immediately led an army over. How can there be such a coincidence in this world?”

Dong Jin replied, “Cloudcenter Commandery is strategically located, with evildoers spying on us all the time. That is why we will always have troops monitoring the situation. Furthermore, Sir Sang has caused such a scene with your actions that it would be impossible for us to not know about this even if we tried to ignore it.”

“Then what are you trying to say right now? Surrounding the Imperial Envoy’s official residence can already be viewed as rebellion.” A flash of killing intent appeared in Sang Hong’s eyes. He had to deal with these situations quickly and decisively, or else those who were watching from the sidelines would start to do the same things.

But the other party seemed to have anticipated that. He had hidden deep within the enemy force. This situation would be hard to deal with if they couldn’t take him down in one blow.

"Please do not try to attach that kind of a title to me, Sir Sang. We only came to uphold justice, and not to rebel." Dong Jin's entire body was taut as he spoke. He gripped the handle of his blade tightly.

"Then what kind of justice do you want?" Sang Hong asked expressionlessly.

"Let Sir Zuo go." As soon as Dong Jin spoke, his subordinates shouted as well. Shouts of 'Sir Zuo!' echoed through the place.

Even Zuo Su in the prison heard them. He opened his eyes, but no changes of emotion were visible on his face.

The soldiers had begun hollering louder and louder, and they looked as if they were about to charge forward. The elite Armed Escort Army raised their spears and assumed a defensive position. When they saw that, the city gate troops also drew their longswords one after another.

Visible beads of sweat began to trick down Dong Jin's face. It was easy to see just how nervous he was. The current situation could still be explained, but if they really fought, his actions would be synonymous with a rebellion.

Sang Hong's expression was also ashen. He quickly tried to think of how he could immediately capture the other party. Unfortunately, Dong Jin was extremely experienced and had hidden among his troops. No matter how Sang Hong calculated it, the chance of success wouldn't exceed fifty percent.

Both sides knew that a battle might break out at any moment. Once there was the slightest spark, the whole situation would erupt into an uncontrollable wildfire.

Even though both sides were still holding back, if a third party with ulterior motives interfered...

Sure enough, whatever one was most scared of was what would happen. A loud arrow suddenly flew out from the side, and a Cloudcenter Commandery soldier fell.

Someone from within the troops thus shouted, "They want to kill us all as traitors! Brothers, we have to stake it all!"

Those present all felt extremely tense. With that voice as the fuse, the gathered forces subconsciously followed blindly. Cloudcenter Commandery's soldiers quickly clashed with the Armed Escort Army.

"Motherf*cker!" Dong Jin cursed. How could he not tell that someone had incited disharmony? But as matters stood, he couldn't do anything about it. His subordinates were all in a frenzied state, so he couldn't stop them even if he wanted to. He had to save Sir Zuo first no matter what.

Sang Hong also felt a huge headache. Even though he knew both sides had been schemed against, this was an overt plot. No one could stop it anymore. A hint of ruthlessness flashed through his eyes. If that was the case, he would execute all of them here as an example to intimidate those who were starting to get restless. With his and Zu An's cultivation, as well as the elite Armed Escort Army, they definitely wouldn't lose. However, serious casualties were unavoidable.

"Ding!"

Just then, the sound of a pipa filled the air. Those present subconsciously turned around. They saw that a figure had appeared on the second story of the temporary official residence, emerging from a window.

That person was dressed in gilded embroidered clothes, and on his head was a sinister mask. His presence gave off a mysterious feeling of pressure.

It was a golden token envoy!

Chapter 1032: To Capture Evildoers, Capture the Head First

The Embroidered Envoy was a taboo existence in the hearts of most Zhou Dynasty subjects. Often, when children were being disobedient, parents would tell their children that they would be captured by the Embroidered Envoy if they kept crying. Those children wouldn't dare to cry anymore.

Even though that example was a bit extreme, the Embroidered Envoys were definitely terrifying existences to most people. And that was just referring to ordinary Embroidered Envoys, let alone one of the legendary golden token envoys.

"Golden Token Eleven!" Sang Hong and the others immediately felt much more at ease when they saw his appearance.

Zu An raised his head and called out, "Sir Eleven has arrived; Sir Eleven is here!"

The morale of the Armed Escort Army immediately received a huge boost. On the contrary, Dong Jin's expression became much uglier. But with things already the way they were, he couldn't just surrender, right?

"No matter how strong he is, he is just one person!" Dong Jin exclaimed with a cold snort. At the same time, he prepared for a sudden ambush from the other party.

Just then, Golden Token Eleven seemed to pick up a musical instrument. His hand moved along the strings, letting out a burst of pipa notes. It sounded like the shattering of bottles and the bursting of rivers, and the harsh clashing of weapons. Those present felt their heads ring. It was as if a sharp, stabbing pain had entered their heads.

Sang Hong was alarmed. He quickly transferred his ki, and only then did that uncomfortable feeling go away. Afterward, he quickly looked at the battlefield. Most people were clutching their heads in pain. Only Gao Ying, Pei You, and a few others with cultivation levels that were relatively high could barely hold on.

"What kind of skill is this?" Sang Hong was incredibly shocked. He subconsciously looked at Zu An to see if he was fine. However, he was nowhere to be seen.

Just then, the air exploded. He quickly turned around. Only then did he see a white-clad figure catapulting toward Dong Jin.

Dong Jin was horrified. The spiritual attack had left him momentarily distracted. His cultivation wasn't bad, so he had quickly suppressed that uncomfortable feeling. However, just as he recovered, he saw a figure charging straight at him!

He drew his blade while ordering his subordinates, "Get into formation!" Unfortunately, the soldiers were in a state of confusion, so how could they carry out his order? Helpless to do anything else, he could only brandish his blade at the other party.

As someone who often fought against the fiend races and local uprisings in Cloudcenter Commandery, he was a strong and tough individual himself. He immediately discerned that the other party's cultivation was above his own. As such, he didn't vainly hope that his sword strike alone could stop his opponent. Instead, he aimed to take the other party down with him.

He was gambling, gambling that the other party wouldn't be willing to trade lives in this kind of situation where he clearly had the advantage. As long as the other party showed even the slightest bit of hesitation and evaded, he would have a chance to gain some distance. By then, his subordinates should be able to react in time. It wouldn't be so easy for the other party to capture him again.

Even if the other party completely ignored his move, dragging them down with him wouldn't be too bad of a result either. After all, he had just broken through into the seventh rank not too long ago. He had absolute confidence in his ability to deliver a lethal blow.

However, his eyes immediately widened. The other party actually didn't plan to evade at all and instead reached out with a finger.

Dong Jin felt a sense of absurdity. How could two weak, fleshly fingers possibly contend against his sharp blade? His expression grew cold as he brandished the tip of his sword at the other party's fingers. After fighting constantly in Cloudcenter Commandery in situations of life and death, he knew he shouldn't hold back. Otherwise, the situation might easily change.

But soon afterward, his eyes widened completely. His ferocious blade was actually gently clasped between those two fair fingers! He wasn't willing to give up and twisted his blade to try and cut off those fingers, yet the blade didn't move in the slightest! All of his strength seemed to be completely useless.

He was horrified. He quickly realized he had offended someone he shouldn't have. He instinctively decided to abandon his blade and back off. But it was already too late. He felt that a suction force seemed to be coming from his blade, preventing him from letting go. Furthermore, his ki seemed to be failing him.

If someone took the same set of stairs year in and year out, but one day, one flight of stairs was suddenly a bit higher or a bit lower than before, there was a chance that the person might just fall.

That was even more true for cultivators. They were used to their own ki flow and physical coordination. At the moment when Dong Jin's ki output changed, it caught him off guard. The energies within him surged chaotically.

Normally speaking, such a thing wouldn't be too big of a problem. He would completely recover as long as he was given a momentary breather. Unfortunately, his opponent perfectly seized the moment to press forward, pushing a finger against Dong Jin's chest.

At that moment, the back of Dong Jin's outfit exploded into pieces. He felt as if he had been rammed into by a bull charging at full speed. Blood gushed out of his mouth. He felt all of his internal organs rapidly shift their positions.

He subconsciously thought to use the force to increase the distance between them. However, the other party's hand seemed to contain some strange suction force, preventing him from breaking free.

Then, the other party's hand pressed down on his shoulder's major acupoint. His entire body went weak, and he couldn't resist in the slightest anymore. Only then did he see the other party's appearance clearly. That person was the most handsome young man from the imperial envoy.

Even though he had seen him receive Xiao Yao's sword in the evening banquet, that sword had been made of alcohol. Together with the fact that Xiao Yao was someone who had been invited by the Vice Magistrate, there was a chance that he had been going easy on purpose.

As such, he had felt that even if the other party's cultivation was higher than his, it couldn't be too much higher. After all, he was way too young, and he looked like a pretty boy. It was really hard to associate him with being a powerful cultivator.

But at that moment, he understood just how badly he had been mistaken. I am an utter fool, truly.

Zu An picked up Dong Jin. His ki empowered voice echoed through the battlefield as he said, "Dong Jin has already been captured. Out of consideration that you did not know the truth and were coerced, as long as you lower your weapons, we will let bygones be bygones. Otherwise, you will be dealt with as traitors!"

He was glad that Daji's use of 'Voice of the Devil' had made those with lower cultivation sink into a state of confusion. Afterward, he had been able to take the chance to capture their leader Dong Jin. If these people had successfully gotten into formation, he wouldn't have been able to succeed so easily.

Furthermore, he was lucky that the enemy had had to rush over in a hurry, so not all of their equipment had been in order. Otherwise, they could have used war drums to offset the effects of Daji's 'Voice of the Devil'.

The war drums of the military were all special items with formations engraved into them. They were also extremely loud and full of killing intent. They were a perfect tool for offsetting Daji's Voice of the Devil.

Cloudcenter Commandery's soldiers looked at each other in dismay. Their boss was already being carried like a chicken by the other party; what were they even fighting for anymore?

When they recalled how Zu An had shot out like a specter and instantly subdued Dong Jin, Sir Imperial Envoy's ferocious gaze, and that mysterious golden token envoy, all of them immediately lost their confidence. They instinctively wanted to lower their weapons.

Suddenly, however, someone shouted, "Don't trust him! If you hold onto your weapons, there's still a chance of survival, but if you let them go, there will only be death awaiting you! Did you all already forget the battles we fought against the fiend races over the years?"

The soldiers shivered. Only then did they recall that in the battles against the fiend race, the other party would also say they wouldn't kill those who surrendered, but if they really did lower their weapons, they were almost always slaughtered in the end.

Later on, they began treating the fiend races the same way. They would advise the other party to lower their weapons, but would then take that chance to kill them one by one.

As time went on, no one spoke similar words again.

Zu An narrowed his eyes. He noticed that it was precisely those people who were adding fuel to the flames. Otherwise, the two sides wouldn't have ended up fighting. Those people's cultivations were clearly higher than that of the soldiers around them. The others were still a bit dizzy from Daji's Voice of the Devil, but they had already completely recovered.

He tossed Dong Jin toward the Armed Escort Army, while he himself shot at those people. Sang Hong clearly had similar thoughts, rushing toward the instigators.

"They're going to kill us! They're going to kill us!" the instigators screamed in alarm. They brandished their weapons defensively. Unfortunately, their cultivation levels were far from Dong Jin's. How could they be a match for Zu An and Sang Hong? They were almost instantly detained.

Sang Hong was alarmed. He only had time to detain one of them, but Zu An had already taken down the other four. Even though he had been a bit farther out, that was a bit too ridiculous, right?

Just then, Zu An exclaimed in surprise, "They're dead?"

Sang Hong quickly checked the one he had captured. Black blood was coming out from the corner of that person's mouth. He had clearly poisoned himself to death.

"Deathsworn soldiers!" Sang Hong exclaimed, alarmed. Just now, he had clearly already subdued the other party, proving that they had crushed the poisonous pill between their teeth when he and Zu An first rushed at them. To have that level of composure and bravery... just what kind of power had nurtured them?

They had originally planned to capture those people to find out who the one behind the scenes was. However, they had failed for want of a final effort.

The other soldiers had been kept in the dark. They had only seen Zu An and Sang Hong rush at those comrades of theirs, but then the soldiers had quickly died. They had heard the words 'They're going to kill us, they're going to kill us', so they subconsciously thought it was Zu An and Sang Hong who were responsible. As such, they instinctively picked up their weapons. Another chaotic battle was on the verge of erupting.

A panicked voice exclaimed just then, "All of you, stop, stop!"

A group of people ran over from afar. The one in front was Vice Magistrate Xu Yu. He quickly stopped both sides. When he saw the mess and the seriously wounded Dong Jin, his expression became sullen as he exclaimed, "What is going on? What the hell is going on?!"

Sang Hong said in an awe-inspiring voice, "Sir Xu has come at the perfect time. Has your Cloudcenter Commandery decided to rebel?"

The situation was already completely within his grasp. As long as the other party's response was even the slightest bit suspicious, he didn't mind completely purging Cloudcenter Commandery's court.

There was a reason why his colleagues in the imperial court called him the Grim Reaper. He had never been someone lenient.

Chapter 1033: Mysterious

“Of course not!” Xu Yu jumped in fright. He turned around to look at the soldiers, exclaiming, “Why aren’t you lowering your weapons yet? Hurry up and drop them!”

He was the number two figure in Cloudcenter Commandery’s court. Normally, he was on equal footing with Zuo Su as well. He had high prestige. As such, when they heard him speak, all of the soldiers lowered their weapons. They didn’t want to rebel either. After someone took the lead, their weapons fell with a clatter, one after another.

Sang Hong thus said, “Chief Officer Dong Jin has coerced the commandery’s troops to attack the Imperial Envoy’s temporary official residence. He ought to be executed on the spot, but out of consideration for the fact that he was worried about Sir Magistrate’s safety, it is pardonable to a certain degree. We will keep him in custody for now. If it has been proven that he has nothing to do with the current case, we will then release him.

“For the time being, Gao Ying will take his place as acting Chief Officer to maintain the safety of Cloudcenter Commandery.”

Gao Ying was stunned. However, he reacted quickly. When he heard that, he immediately led an Armed Escort Troop into the center of the commandery’s troops, exclaiming, “This subject will not let you down!”

For someone like him who was the disciple of an influential clan, a trifling Chief Officer position naturally didn’t matter. However, they needed to control the military leadership position.

Sang Hong nodded. Gao Ying was a dependable young man. With him as the Chief Officer, even though they might not be able to control the soldiers in the short term, having someone there would definitely be of use later on.

Of course, that mission was dangerous. If the middle and upper level military officials had thoughts of rebellion, Gao Ying would be in danger. But they couldn’t be bothered with all of that at the moment.

He gave Xu Yu a look and asked, “Does Vice Magistrate Xu Have any objections to these arrangements?”

Xu Yu’s expression changed slightly, but he still immediately replied, “Stabilizing the situation is naturally the most important. How could this lowly official have any objections?” He then waved his hands toward the soldiers and asked, “Why aren’t you greeting your new Chief Officer yet?”

“We greet Sir Chief Officer.” The soldiers greeted Gao Ying in a weak and dispirited manner. All of them were clearly forced to do so, helpless in their situation.

“Gao Ying, take them back and have them return to their positions. Don’t let those evildoers have any opportunities to exploit,” Sang Hong commanded. He wanted the soldiers to leave first to avert crisis.

As for how they were going to be appeased once they were brought away, that would be up to Gao Ying’s ability. Judging from their interactions so far, he believed Gao Ying had sufficient ability.

“I have received your orders!” Gao Ying bowed. He called over a group of Armed Escort soldiers, then left with the local soldiers.

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Sang Hong looked at Xu Yu after they left, saying, "The timing of Sir Xu's arrival really is quite the coincidence."

The man hadn't come too early or too late. He had appeared as soon as they had already calmed down the situation. How could others not find that suspicious?

Xu Yu said with a forced smile, "I rushed over as soon as I heard the news. Even though I came a bit late, at least things didn't go completely out of control. Sir Sang, what exactly happened? Why did you suddenly capture Sir Zuo?"

What he was saying was, 'Even though I came a bit later, I helped you take in the commandery's troops. Even if I didn't do too much, I still helped you here.'

Sang Hong sensed his implied meaning, so he naturally didn't act out. He was just about to reply when he heard the sound of hooves rushing in. There were several troops rushing over from afar. The ones in the lead were Jian Taiding, Pei Shao, Yu Xuansu, Yu Xuanqing, and some other officials.

Jian Taiding's horse arrived first. He asked coldly, "Sir Sang, why was there such a huge disturbance?" A group of soldiers followed behind him. Compared to the city defense soldiers, they were clearly well trained.

Sang Hong said with a sneer, "Chief Officer Dong Jin surrounded the Imperial Envoy's temporary official residence. Could it be that Sir Jian wishes to follow in his example?"

Jian Taiding narrowed his eyes, but didn't reply. A strange silence fell.

Sang Hong stood in place proudly. Even though the other party was a master rank cultivator and had more troops, they were the Imperial Envoy. They had the imperial court behind them, as well as Golden Token Eleven there as backup.

Zu An stood next to Sang Hong. He was worried that Jian Taiding might have shown up to cause trouble. He had to protect this father-in-law of his.

Sang Hong felt warm inside when he saw that. As expected, it was one's own family who would be the most reliable.

Jian Taiding laughed and said, "Sir Sang worries too much. I merely heard that Sir Zuo was captured, so I came to see what exactly happened. That's all." He jumped off of his horse as he spoke.

All of the tense officials sighed in relief. They really had been worried that something would have happened out of a moment of rashness. If that happened, who would they as Cloudcenter Commandery officials side with? If they helped Jian Taiding, they would be traitors once the court pursued the matter. If they helped the Imperial Envoy, however, they might not even live to see tomorrow.

Sang Hong also released a small sigh of relief. He said, "I received a report that Sir Zuo has colluded with the fiend races, and that he was involved in the smuggling of ki stones and the court's strictly regulated strategic resources. That was why we took Sir Zuo into custody. If we investigate the matter and find out that Sir Zuo is innocent, we will naturally uphold justice for him."

Even though the officials had all heard some rumors, they still couldn't help but become alarmed when they heard Sang Hong confirm it himself.

“There is definitely a misunderstanding in play here!”

“Sir Zuo has always been cautious and conscientious. Why would he collude with the fiend races?”

“Someone has definitely framed him here!”

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Sang Hong’s eyes scanned over the noisy officials and he remarked indifferently, “All of you who are speaking right now, do you dare to place your own clans on the line to vouch for Sir Zuo?”

Those people’s expressions immediately froze. We were merely speaking out for him a bit as colleagues; you didn’t have to put it like that, did you?

Since Sang Hong dared to capture Zuo Su, that meant that he definitely had a certain amount of proof. Who dared to vouch for him right now in such a situation? If there really was something wrong with Zuo Su, wouldn’t they all be finished?

Just then, Jian Taiding remarked, “I wonder who the one who issued that report was? And what kind of proof was it that made Sir Sang immediately carry out arrests?”

Sang Hong remained expressionless and said, “We have the obligation to keep the confidentiality of the one who issued the report, as well as to ensure their safety. As for the proof, please forgive us for not speaking of it before our investigations have been completed.”

Seeing how tight-lipped the other party was being, Jian Taiding became a bit annoyed and said, “I heard that quite a few officials lost their lives when they were captured by your men. Even if you are investigating a case, you need to abide by the rules, right? How can you just kill them without properly investigating things?”

As he had spoken out first, the others became restless. They all began to condemn the imperial envoy’s people. They were also Cloudcenter Commandery officials, so who knew if they might be next for such a thing?

Zu An spoke up just then. “We weren’t the ones who killed them. By the time we found them, they had either fled or already died. In other words, it was the mastermind behind everything who planned all of this. If Sir Jian knows anything, please feel free to share your findings. Who in Cloudcenter Commandery could do something like this?”

Jian Taiding’s expression changed. Zu An’s words were clearly indirectly making insinuations against him. Who else apart from him in Cloudcenter Commandery would be capable of something like that? Even the other officials present couldn’t help but look toward him.

Jian Taiding was furious inside, but he couldn’t show it. He replied, “Forgive me for being ill-informed and narrow-minded. I did not know there was someone like that in Cloudcenter Commandery.”

You have successfully trolled Jian Taiding for +236 +236 +236...

He didn’t want to continue with the topic and turned to Sang Hong, asking, “Sir Sang, can we meet with Sir Zuo?”

Sang Hong shook his head, saying, "We have not completed the investigation of the case yet. In order to prevent unwanted exchanges of information, we currently cannot permit Sir Zuo to come into contact with anyone else."

Jian Taiding's face darkened. He replied, "Sir Sang's words are implying that we colluded with Sir Zuo?" The other officials also spoke up, unsatisfied that they were being suspected as well.

Sang Hong said indifferently, "That is not what this official meant. However, the current case is full of oddities, so we must treat it with extreme caution. Our decision was made for everyone's sake, so we do not end up implicating everyone in this case.

"If Sir Zuo is innocent, everyone else will not be affected by this case. However, if things really are as the reports stated, I fear that right now is when his accomplices would wish to meet with him most urgently."

He looked at all those present as he spoke.

Jian Taiding's breath caught in his throat. Since the other party had already said that, if he continued to insist, wouldn't that just prove the accusation that he was conspiring with Zuo Su? He said before storming off in a huff, "Then I hope that Sir Sang can get to the bottom of this case as quickly as possible so Cloudcenter Commandery does not enter a state of chaos."

With Jian Taiding's departure, the others asked to be excused as well. Xu Yu wanted to say something several times, but in the end, he didn't. In the end, he released a long sigh and left.

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After the officials left, Sang Hong ordered the Armed Escort Army, "Guard the surroundings of the residence. Do not let even a single fly enter!"

"Understood!"

Sang Hong had someone bring Dong Jin into his own cell, not giving him any chance to fabricate a story with Zuo Su.

Zu An took the chance to ask, "Why did Jian Taiding seem so concerned right after something happened to Zuo Su? After all, I thought the two of them didn't get along."

Sang Hong said with a snort, "When has what people in the court said ever really matched up with what they think? He probably wanted to take the chance to express his own innocence in the matter. He might just be grinning from ear to ear right now."

Pei You said gratefully, "It was a good thing that we had Sir Golden Token Eleven and Brother Zu here just now. Otherwise, if we really fought, we would have suffered endless casualties."

Sang Hong raised his head toward the second floor, asking, "Where is Sir Eleven? Hurry and invite him over. We need to properly thank him." He also wanted to properly discuss their following plans with him.

However, the guards quickly returned and reported, "Sir Eleven has disappeared!"

Pei You exclaimed in admiration, "Sir Eleven really is mysterious."

Sang Hong instead frowned, saying, "He didn't even come to discuss things with us even in our current situation."

Zu An coughed lightly and said, "I believe Sir Eleven definitely has his own reasons. However, he'll definitely continue to watch over us in the shadows. Let's try to deal with this matter ourselves first."

Chapter 1034: Sinister Glint

Sang Hong thought about their recent interactions. That Golden Token Eleven was indeed mysterious, so he didn't force the issue either.

On the contrary, Pei You was still excited about what had just happened, exclaiming, "Sir Eleven really is too cool! There were so many soldiers, but he easily took all of them down! Do we even need to fear Jian Taiding's army in the future?"

"If only things were that simple." Sang Hong was clearly more experienced. "A true army would have measures to deal with such soundwave-type skills." He wasn't too certain about whether it was a sound attack or a soul attack, however. Back then, he had even felt his own soul tremble.

"Either way, he was really cool. If I ever get the chance, I definitely have to ask him for some tips. If I could learn anything from him, just how great would that be?" Pei You's eyes were shining. He was already starting to imagine himself knocking out everyone with a single instrument.

Zu An coughed and said, "I don't think that's something you can learn."

"Tsk, my talent is top-notch among my peers..." Pei You gave Zu An a look, but then his confidence immediately fell. "Even though I'm not as great as Brother Zu, I'm still pretty good myself. Why can't I learn something like that?"

Zu An had a strange expression. That was Daji's unique skill. Forget about the fact that she couldn't speak, even if she could, she wouldn't be able to teach it.

"Enough, enough. It definitely has something to do with cultivation. Your cultivation isn't high enough right now, so even if you forcibly try to learn it, it might just harm you instead," Sang Hong said with the attitude of a senior.

Pei You nodded and replied, "Sir Eleven's cultivation is indeed deep and immeasurable. Just what level has he reached? Maybe he's already at the master rank?"

Sang Hong shook his head and said, "I cannot see through him either. His cultivation is clearly not that high, yet the strength he has displayed is extremely shocking." Just confusing so many soldiers at the same time was something he himself definitely wasn't capable of.

"I was a bit worried at first, but now, I realized just how mistaken I was. Anyone who could become a golden token envoy would definitely be an exceptional expert." Sang Hong sighed in amazement. "Now that we have Golden Token Eleven with us, as well as Ah Zu, there is nothing to fear even if Jian Taiding rebels."

Zu An was just drinking some tea to moisten his throat, but he almost choked when he heard that. He felt he had to remind the other party, "Um... Even though Sir Eleven is deep and immeasurable, we can't rely on him too much. After all, his mission might not be the same as ours, or else he wouldn't have refused to meet with us all this time. Furthermore, he's hiding in the shadows, so we might not be able to promptly contact him. What if he just happens to be missing if there really is some conflict?"

He was fully aware of Sang Hong's ability to plot. He worried that Sang Hong might overestimate his strength and make an error in judgment, so he decided to make things clear ahead of time.

Sang Hong nodded when he heard that, remarking, "It is still Ah Zu who is the most meticulous. What you say is entirely possible. Then from here on out, we will make our plans assuming that he will not be there."

Zu An took the chance to ask, "Should we interrogate Dong Jin first for now?" He had to talk about himself with other people, and even pretend he didn't know that it was him. It really did feel strange. There would definitely be some holes to exploit if he used Daji to act as Golden Token Eleven, too. He worried that some problems might arise if they continued the topic.

"Alright." Sang Hong had planned to express his thanks to Sir Eleven first, then discuss the following situation with him. Since Sir Eleven wasn't present, interrogating Dong Jin was top priority. He added, "Bring Xiao Jianren with us."

Xiao Jianren was a silver token envoy. Things like investigating cases were his specialty. Since Golden Token Eleven wasn't there, he was the highest-ranked among the Embroidered Envoys.

They quickly arrived at the temporary prison cell, where Dong Jin was sitting on the bed dejectedly. The Armed Escort Army had already treated his wounds with medicine. Even though his injuries were severe, there was no danger to his life.

"Sir Dong, speak. Who sent you to cause trouble here?" Sang Hong asked coldly.

"No one sent me here. I only came to ask for an explanation after Sir Magistrate was captured without reason," Dong Jin replied. At the same time, he gave Zu An a look. That fellow looked weak and delicate. It really was hard to imagine that his body carried such terrifying explosive strength.

"We had just captured him, and yet you immediately rushed over with your men. How could things be that much of a coincidence?" Sang Hong harrumphed. "Do not try to use the city watch as an excuse. There is no way you could have moved that quickly even if you had spies among everyone in the city."

After some hesitation, Dong Jin replied, "It seems I was schemed against by someone. Some subordinates reported to me what happened, and they even said that Sir Magistrate was requesting for help. I did not think too much about it at the time and just rushed over."

"Who were these subordinates?" Xiao Jianren asked. At the same time, he took out a little booklet and began to write in it.

"Zhang Yong, Wang Hu, Zhao Wei..." Dong Jin said a few names. Then, he added, "It was precisely the ones who ended their own lives earlier. I did not expect them to be deathsworn soldiers sent by someone else. This humble one has really been done in badly this time."

Sang Hong sneered. "Are you trying to push all of these things onto the dead? After all, the dead cannot testify."

"I really am not lying." Dong Jin began panicking. Back then, those people had informed him privately about what had happened, and he didn't have anyone else to serve as a witness. He frantically tried to think of a way to free himself of guilt. Suddenly, his eyes lit up and he said, "Right, just now, those deathsworn soldiers were trying to make the situation go even more out of hand. If both sides really fought, I would most likely die. Why would I have my own men send me to my death? Furthermore, I am only a Chief Officer. I do not have the ability to raise so many deathsworn soldiers."

Sang Hong gave the others a look. Then Xiao Jianren said, "Whether or not that is the case is up to us to decide. Tell us those individuals' family backgrounds, their own history, interpersonal relationships, and other such things in detail. Do not omit anything."

"Very well, that is no problem at all." Dong Jin was no longer as nervous as before. He quickly told them the requested information.

When they saw they couldn't get any more information out of him, Sang Hong and the others withdrew. "What do you all think?" Sang Hong asked with a frown.

"Dong Jin shouldn't be lying. These kinds of deathsworn soldiers are something only great clans with powerful backgrounds can raise. I've looked through Dong Jin's background as well. He comes from a humble background and couldn't possibly have raised them," Pei You said. As someone from a top-level clan, he had the qualifications to make such a judgment.

"Then who exactly is causing all of this trouble?" Zu An mused. He agreed with Pei You. A trifling Chief Officer didn't have that much ability.

"Even though the current situation is complicated, there is a principle that will allow us to see through the root of the matter," Sang Hong said. "Whomever has the most to benefit from this matter is the most suspicious."

"Jian Taiding!" Zu An and Pei You blurted out at the same time.

"Indeed. The Civil Affairs Manor and Military Affairs Manor do not get along, with both sides keeping each other in check. Now that Zuo Su has been stripped from his position, and something has happened to the Chief Officer and his other trusted aides, Jian Taiding will become more powerful here than ever before." Sang Hong was full of worry. He felt as if he had been caught in Jian Taiding's schemes, and yet had no choice but to play along. After all, Zuo Su and his collusion with the fiend races was too big of a matter.

"I just feel like something isn't quite right," Zu An said with a frown. However, he couldn't exactly say what part it was either.

Just then, Xiao Jianren wrapped up his interrogation and came out of the prison cell. Sang Hong said, "Sir Xiao, I must trouble you to look into the backgrounds of those deathsworn soldiers, to see if there are any clues we can obtain from them." However, since they were deathsworn soldiers, their backgrounds had most likely been forged. He could only hope that there was some mistake or hole to be exploited.

"Understood!" Xiao Jianren replied. He was just about to leave when Zu An stopped him.

Zu An asked, "Golden Token Eleven informed me that he told you to ask your men to keep an eye on King Qi's heir earlier. Were there any discoveries?"

"King Qi's heir has remained inside and rarely goes out. Apart from visiting the Pei clan from time to time, the other times he leaves are only to buy some small gifts, food, clothes, and other such things for Miss Pei," Xiao Jianren reported.

"No one else paid him a visit?"

"No one."

"How often does he visit the Pei clan?"

"Almost everyday."

When he saw that Zu An didn't have any more questions, Xiao Jianren cupped his hands and left to investigate the deathsworn soldiers' backgrounds.

Pei You clicked his tongue and said, "I didn't expect this King Qi's heir to be such an affectionate person. He's actually that enthusiastic about visiting that cousin of mine."

"Something's not right!" Zu An exclaimed, suddenly standing up. "Even though that Zhao Zhi is insufferably arrogant and has many flaws, he definitely wouldn't ignore his main mission because of a pretty girl. Furthermore, Big Manman... Ahem, even if Zhao Zhi is sex-crazed, King Qi would never permit such a thing. The Pei clan is suspicious!"

"How so?" Pei You jumped in fright. Even though Pei Shao wasn't from the same branch as him, they were both from the Pei clan. He was still worried that they might have really committed a tremendous crime.

"It's hard to say for now. We need to investigate further to know more." Zu An already couldn't sit still anymore.

Pei You asked, "Should I go with you? Since I'm also from the Pei clan, they might show me a bit of respect."

"There was no need. It'll be more convenient for me to move alone," Zu An replied. What kind of joke was that? With Big Manman, the best spy, would he need anyone else?

"That is alright too. You need to be careful!" Sang Hong remarked, entrusting Zu An with that task. Zu An nodded and quickly disappeared into the darkness. Afterward, Sang Hong said to Pei You, "Have more people look over Zuo Su. You cannot let him have any contact with anyone outside."

"Leave it to me. I'll guard him personally. Not even a fly will be able to approach him." Pei You accepted the task and left.

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Pei You arrived at the prison soon afterward and sat down in meditation. He released his ki to monitor everything in his surroundings.

In the dead of night, he suddenly opened his eyes. A sinister glow flickered within them.

Chapter 1035: True Mastermind

Meanwhile, Zu An rushed toward the Pei clan's vicinity under the cover of night.

Those who lived along the City Lord Manor street were all high officials and nobles. There were guards patrolling everywhere. The security was sure to be much better than in other places.

As such, Zu An didn't dare to act carelessly. He evaded several patrolling guards, then finally arrived at the wall surrounding Pei Manor. He chose a secluded area and quickly leapt over the wall. He had already visited several times, so he avoided Pei Manor's guards easily.

He soon arrived outside of Pei Mianman's courtyard, and was just about to go in when a figure shot out from within. His expression sank as he thought, There's actually a little scoundrel here? He kicked off the ground, instantly striking at the other party's side.

That person sensed something was strange. Their figure evaded Zu An's attack like a flexible snake. At the same time, a long leg kicked at his underbelly at an inconceivable angle. Such a level of elasticity really was absurd. Zu An quickly defended himself, and the two individuals exchanged several moves in succession.

"Huh?" Both sides suddenly felt a sense of familiarity. When he saw the other party's massive peaks, Zu An quickly gave up and exclaimed, "Big Manman?"

"Ah Zu?" The black-clad figure removed her mask and looked at him with pleasant surprise. Under the faint moonlight, her face looked bright and beautiful. Who else could it be but Pei Mianman?

"Why are you dressed like this?" Zu An removed his mask as well and looked at Pei Mianman curiously. She was actually dressed completely in black in her own home! But her getup was quite skintight, fully outlining her seductive curves.

He couldn't help but chuckle. Those familiar with Big Manman could tell that it was her just from her figure. Whether or not she had a mask on made no difference.

Pei Mianman blushed. She was about to reply when she heard guards calling out in the distance, "There seems to be something going on over there. Go check it out."

"Hurry and come inside with me." Pei Mianman grabbed Zu An's hand and quickly went back into the small house.

"Young miss, why did you come back..." The maid Hong Zao was surprised to see Pei Mianman again. But when she saw Zu An behind her master, she immediately froze. I'm done, I'm done for! I'll have to stand guard outside all night again!

Zu An was a bit surprised too, because Hong Zao wasn't wearing a servant girl outfit, but rather Pei Mianman's clothes. Even her hair was styled somewhat similarly. What is this master and servant pair doing? Are they changing roles?

Pei Mianman quickly closed the door and removed her clothes. Zu An's expression froze. He asked, "Um... We're not in that much of a rush, right? Hong Zao is still here."

Pei Mianman rolled her eyes at him and didn't respond. When he saw the normal clothes she was wearing underneath the black getup, Zu An immediately knew his thoughts had gone in the wrong direction.

"Young miss, there seems to be a disturbance in this direction. Is your respected self okay?" the guards called out from outside.

"I'm fine." Pei Mianman opened the window partially to show her top half and added, "Didn't I already say that you're not to come to my courtyard if there's nothing important?"

"The master is worried about the young miss' safety, which is why he sent more men to patrol the surroundings recently," the guard immediately lowered his head and replied. Even though it was just a glance, he was still amazed by the young miss' beauty.

"Your cultivations are beneath mine, so just who is protecting whom?" Pei Mianman harrumphed. "Don't disturb my rest." She slammed the window shut afterward.

Those guards didn't get upset when they heard that. They were just happy they had gotten a chance to even talk to the young miss. Sigh, the young miss really is big...

"Search the surroundings. Don't let any bad people disturb the young miss." The guards didn't dare to have any improper thoughts, though. They only subconsciously wanted to do more things for her, to protect her safety.

Two wild cats suddenly emerged from off to the side, meowing and baring their fangs.

"So it was just a fight between some cats." The guards sighed in relief. They bowed toward the residence and quietly left.

Zu An retracted his hand, having used the jade badge to control the wild cats. He looked at Pei Mianman with a smile and said, "They were only doing that out of concern for you. Why were you so mean to them?"

Pei Mianman rolled her eyes and retorted, "Isn't it because of you? If I had been polite to them, they would keep showing up from time to time. What if they end up bumping into you?"

"I guess you're right." Zu An couldn't help but chuckle. Then, he took out a sack of food for Hong Zao, saying, "Here, take this. I said I'd bring some food for you last time."

"Ah! They're all the most popular foods from Xu Shop! You can't get your hands on these even if you line up normally!" Hong Zao immediately began to drool when she saw the food. "Thank you, young master!"

"You're welcome, Hong Zao." Zu An felt great when he heard her call him young master. These foods were things Yu Yanluo had given him before he left Yu Manor, however. All he'd had to do was pass them onto Hong Zao.

"Look at you, trying to get closer to my maid as soon as you arrive." Pei Mianman felt a bit jealous. She asked, "Then what kind of gifts did you bring me?"

"I'm going to treat you to my lollipop, of course." Zu An grabbed her hands with a giggle.

"Hmph!" Pei Mianman's face turned red. She quickly let go of his hands.

Hong Zao immediately had a craving when she heard that there was something else to eat. She asked, "What's a lollipop? Can I eat it too?"

Pei Mianman got annoyed and said, "It has nothing to do with you. Go downstairs by yourself and go to sleep." She began to gently push Hong Zao toward the stairs after saying that.

Hong Zao replied with an 'oh'. The young miss really is selfish. If you have a lollipop, you should share! Young master is much nicer, giving me so many things to eat. She had a big smile on her face when she thought of that.

Pei Mianman glared at Zu An and looked downstairs, saying, "Don't say those random things in front of Hong Zao in the future. She's still small."

Zu An was stunned. He remarked, "But she's not small at all?"

Hong Zao's rather impressive body appeared in his mind. Don't tell me that because they share the same food and drink, they were raised the same way? Otherwise, why are they both so big?

Pei Mianman was speechless. Zu An finally reacted when he saw her murderous gaze, however,. He chuckled in embarrassment and changed the topic. "What were you and your maid doing? She wore your clothes, while you changed into an undercover outfit?"

Pei Mianman replied, "Wasn't there a huge disturbance in the morning? I heard someone led a huge army toward your temporary residence, so I was worried that something might have happened to you. However, my father sealed up all of Pei Manor and wouldn't allow anyone to leave. Helpless to do anything else, I could only try to sneak out and have Hong Zao pretend to be me just in case. But I never expected to see you as soon as I left."

Zu An felt warm inside when he heard that. He grabbed her small hands tightly and said, "Manman, you're really good to me."

"Are you alright?" Even though Zu An was standing perfectly fine in front of her, Pei Mianman still checked his body all over, worrying that he was injured.

"I'm fine..." Zu An gave her a rough summary of what had happened.

"Do you think it might have been Jian Taiding who is causing all of this trouble?" Pei Mianman asked as she leaned against him, her beautiful lashes fluttering. Her eyes were like the brightest stars in the night sky.

"He is indeed a bit suspicious, but I can't help but feel like something's not right." Zu An frowned and asked, "Oh, by the way, Zhao Zhi visits your clan every day, right?"

Pei Mianman blushed and replied, "Don't think anything of it. I never go out to meet him."

"But that's where the issue lies." Zu An slapped his thigh and said, "Even though that Zhao Zhi acts like an idiot sometimes, he is King Qi's heir after all. There's no way he would fall so low as to become this much of a bootlicker. If he still comes to your clan every day, that's really weird."

Pei Mianman's expression changed. She asked, "Are you suspecting my father?"

"It hasn't reached that level yet." Zu An thought to himself for a bit, then asked, "Who does he meet with whenever he comes here?"

"My father and that woman of course." Pei Mianman harrumphed. She really didn't want to call her 'mother' when she wasn't out in public. "Right, that woman's father will come to see his grandson sometimes too."

"Yu Xuansu?" Zu An asked.

"Yeah," Pei Mianman replied.

Zu An frowned. Yu Xuansu was the War Minister of the Military Affairs Manor. In the Military Affairs Manor, apart from the Commander-In-Chief, beneath that were the Chief Historian and War Minister. Chief Historian had been Jian Taiding's previous position, so Yu Xuansu was already the Military Affairs Manor's number two figure.

Don't tell me this really does have something to do with the Yu clan?

That beautiful and flawless face couldn't help but appear in his mind. He thought to himself that if that woman was the final boss behind the scenes, none of those Oscar winners from his previous world added together could compare to her.

"Ah, what is your hand doing? It's cold..." Pei Mianman suddenly sensed something. She immediately became embarrassed when she lowered her head.

"I can't hold myself back." Zu An smiled, but he didn't stop.

Pei Mianman bit her lip and pressed down on his hand. She said, "Not today. I'm on my period. Should I get Hong Zao to accompany you?"

"I'm not some brute." Faced with that death sentence question, Zu An obviously wouldn't take the bait. He added, "It's fine; that's its own kind of fun."

Pei Mianman was completely puzzled. Suddenly, however, she felt a chill run through her entire body. Her clothes were already being removed.

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"Keep it up on your own."

"Mmm... And you still say you're not a... brute..."

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Meanwhile, by the official residence, Pei You walked into the prison cell. He was the manager of the place, so those guards naturally didn't stop him.

Zuo Su was sitting on the bed cultivating. He opened his eyes when he sensed the activity. He asked, "Are you going to question me again? I already said everything I should be saying. It's meaningless to ask me anything else."

Pei You didn't reply. His eyes flickered with a strange light as he stared calmly at Zuo Su.

Zuo Su's expression suddenly changed greatly. He exclaimed, "It's you!"

Chapter 1036: Kawaii Waifu Voice Changer

After his initial shock, Zuo Su gradually calmed down. He looked at the other party and asked, "Did you come to silence me?"

Pei You stood in place without saying anything, tacitly agreeing. A flash of color filled Zuo Su's face. His chubby face jiggled; he was clearly furious as he exclaimed, "But why? I didn't say a single thing!"

Pei You finally spoke up. "As someone who was able to sit in your current position, why would you ask something so naive? For others, only the dead can be trusted with secrets. If you were in our position, you would have made the same choice."

Zuo Su fell silent. If it were him, he would definitely have made the same decision.

"Can you give me a chance?" Even though he knew there wasn't much hope, his survival instincts still made him try one more time. "Since you could enter this place, you can use this chance to save me..." His voice became softer and softer, because the other party's eyes continued to stare at him expressionlessly.

"I understand." He smiled in distress. "I tried so hard to prevent this situation, but I was still dragged down by you guys in the end. I should've realized that this day would come a long time ago."

"You've enjoyed yourself plenty over the years. Your life wasn't lived in vain," Pei You said indifferently.

"That's true. You're all full of different tricks and styles. I was able to enjoy things many people wouldn't be able to enjoy even if they lived ten lifetimes..." Zuo Su sighed, as if acknowledging his fate. However, the next second, he suddenly raised his head and hollered, "Help..."

But Pei You was already prepared for that. He instantly sealed up Zuo Su's vocal acupoint, making the man's voice come to a grunting halt. A hint of disdain appeared in Pei You's eyes as he remarked, "You've shown an unsightly side, Sir Zuo."

In that instant, Zuo Su's eyes filled with pleading and horror. Tears even poured out from his eyes. No words could describe his conflicted expression fully.

Pei You no longer had any interest in chatting further with him. His eyes shone with light, and Zuo Su's eyes began shining with a similar light.

The light in Zuo Su's eyes faded soon afterward. His head also slumped weakly to the side. He had instantly lost his life. Pei You checked to confirm that he had already died, and only then did he turn around and leave.

Normally speaking, with Zuo Su's cultivation, killing him would definitely be no easy task. But all of his major acupoints had been sealed, so he couldn't use any of his ki to protect himself. That was why he had ended up becoming the sacrificial sheep.

...

The next morning, after Zu An left, Hong Zao came in to check the room. She saw that Pei Mianman was lying lazily in bed as if she didn't even want to move a single finger.

"Young miss, are you going to get up?" Hong Zao asked. She thought to herself, The young master really is formidable! Whenever he left, the young miss would look as if she were completely broken.

"Stupid girl, aren't you asking a question you already know the answer to? Stop disturbing me and let me sleep for a while longer." Pei Mianman mumbled. She then turned around, adjusting her body to find a more comfortable sleeping posture.

Hong Zao exclaimed in surprise, "Huh? Young miss, why is your mouth so swollen?"

Pei Mianman subconsciously covered her lips, her face turning red. However, she pretended to be calm as she said, "I might have caught a cold."

"Why would a cold make your lips swell?" Hong Zao looked at her with a 'do you think I'm stupid' face. She suddenly smacked her own head and said as if she had a sudden realization, "I know now! The young miss must've secretly sucked on the young master's lollipop, but then your lips became like that after eating it too much. You didn't want to give me any either, so you told me that kind of lie to trick me, right?"

Pei Mianman was ashamed and panicked. She grabbed a pillow and threw it at Hong Zao, exclaiming, "You stupid maid, eat eat eat, all you know is eating! You'll definitely be done in by that mouth of yours one day!"

Seeing that the young miss had gotten angry, Hong Zao stuck out her tongue and quickly went downstairs.

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Zu An returned to his temporary residence with a refreshed expression. Big Manman really is incredibly talented, a treasure that men yearn for day and night!

But he suddenly noticed that something was wrong with the atmosphere. The Armed Escort Army's expressions were serious, as if they were facing a great enemy. Zu An called some of them over, but they didn't know what was going on either. They just said they were following Sir Sang's orders.

He felt a huge weight drop down in his heart. He quickly went inside with large strides.

There were only Sang Hong, Xiao Jianren, Pei You, a few others, and a few guards present. Zu An recognized them as the guards that had been in the prison. What was truly unexpected, however, was that Pei You was tied up and kneeling in the very center.

Sang Hong paced back and forth nervously, as if he were making an extremely difficult decision.

Zu An was alarmed. He had only left for a single night; why did he feel as if he had left for an entire century? He asked, "What happened here? Why is Brother Pei..."

Pei You seemed to have found his savior when he heard Zu An's voice. He quickly turned around and bawled, "Brother Zu, you've finally returned! Sir Sang wants to kill me!"

Zu An turned to Sang Hong in confusion. Sang Hong exclaimed angrily, "Scoundrel, you still have the nerve to say that? You killed Zuo Su! Do you know the consequences of such a thing?"

"Pei You killed Zuo Su?" Zu An blinked blankly. No matter how powerful his imagination was, he still couldn't understand what was going on.

"I'm being wronged here. I didn't!" Pei You immediately cried out.

"You still dare to argue back?" Sang Hong slammed the table furiously. Then he pointed at the jailers and commanded them, "Speak! What exactly happened last night?"

The guards gave Pei You a look. After some hesitation, they said, "Last night, Sir Pei came to guard the prison. Later on, in the middle of the night, Sir Pei suddenly got up and went into the prison, and he even sent us away.

"We didn't think too much of it and let Sir Pei in. But early in the morning, we discovered that Sir Zuo had already died inside the prison."

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The guards took turns recounting what had happened the previous night.

Zu An looked at Pei You with a strange expression, thinking, I didn't expect this brat to be that kind of person.

"I didn't do it!" Pei You immediately spoke up to defend himself. "I was always sitting outside in meditation. I never left that spot! You guys are making things up!"

Sang Hong said seriously, "Ah Zu, you can see for yourself that the two sides have continued to stick to their own versions. There were many who saw Pei You enter the prison cell, while he is the only one who claims to not have done such a thing. Tell me, who should I believe?"

Zu An frowned. He pulled Sang Hong aside and asked, "Respected uncle, have you looked into the backgrounds of those Armed Escort Army soldiers?"

"I have. They are all individuals with clean backgrounds without any dealings with the people in Cloudcenter Commandery. Furthermore, I even interrogated them separately and there was nothing wrong with their confessions," Sang Hong replied gravely.

"Then Pei You is the only one with a problem?" Zu An frowned.

"That is indeed the case right now," Sang Hong said with a sigh.

"But he doesn't have any motive, does he?" Zu An replied. After he had been around Pei You for so long, they had already established quite a bit of camaraderie. He obviously didn't want to see anything happen to Pei You.

"That is something you will have to ask him." Sang Hong gave Pei You a look, his eyes filled with worry. "But judging from how scared he is, he might not speak the truth."

Zu An thought of something and said, "Don't worry. I have a way to tell if they're speaking the truth or not."

“How so?” Sang Hong asked, confused.

“Prepare an isolated room for me and send them in one by one.” As insurance, Zu An decided to question the jailers first.

When he passed by Pei You, he asked quietly, “What rank and what step are your cultivation at exactly? This is related to your very life, so don’t lie.”

Pei You was really scared badly by the current situation. If he couldn't prove his innocence, then he really might perish, so how could he dare to hide anything? He replied, “The eighth step of the sixth rank.”

Zu An sighed in relief, thinking, That’s good then; everything is still within my realm of control. As such, he entered the room first and had the jailers come in one after another. Even though Sang Hong didn’t understand what was happening, he trusted Zu An and didn’t ask too many questions.

When the jailers entered, they saw that there was a devastatingly beautiful white-clothed woman inside. The woman perfectly combined both charm and purity.

How can there be a woman this beautiful in our imperial envoy? they thought. But the jailers’ expressions became blank the moment that thought arose.

Zu An used Daji’s Fox Charm skill to control those people. Then, he asked them about what had happened the previous night. Their replies were identical to before, however,

Zu An became gloomy, thinking, Looks like Pei You really did go in last night.

After the jailers left, he didn’t call in Pei You and instead summoned his keyboard.

Daji was only at the fifth step of the sixth rank, and Fox Charm was at the second level. It was enough to control a target at the same level of cultivation as her.

Meanwhile, Pei You was at the eighth step of the sixth rank. Daji’s skill couldn't control him just yet, so he had to increase Daji’s cultivation. He had saved up a total of 338,795 Rage points, which was already enough to raise Daji’s cultivation with Ki Fruits.

The shop’s price for Ki Fruits, at 1000 points per fruit, was too boring for him. Zu An decided he was still going to try his hand at pulling the lottery.

‘Thank you for playing’ messages quickly appeared on the screen. Zu An didn’t panic at all. He had already pulled the lottery many times, so he was already used to it. If he got a new skill each time he pulled the lottery, he might have to start worrying about his own predestined lifespan.

He quickly earned 340 Ki Fruits.

Zu An was about to feed them to Daji when his eyes narrowed. He saw that the last pull had landed on the ‘S’ key.

Congratulations for pulling the skill ‘Kawaii Waifu Voice Changer’!

Zu An was stunned.

Chapter 1037: A Painstaking Investigation

Zu An was dumbfounded. He had only planned to pull some Ki Fruits to raise Daji's cultivation. He had never expected to actually pull a skill!

He quickly read the description the keyboard gave him.

Kawaii Waifu Voice Changer: In a certain time and place, there was a man who really liked to pretend to be a girl and play together with other men. That way, he could receive the most consideration from them, and he got better and better at it as time went on. This voice changer is the result of his hard work, allowing him to become a kawaii waifu. He relied on this sweet voice to capture the hearts of many men. Unfortunately, he was unable to keep this up forever. One time, he accidentally exposed himself. The men who discovered the truth were incredibly furious, and no one knows his pitiful ending. However, this magical artifact was still passed down.

Usage effects: When the item is used, you can change your voice into any target's voice. Not even those closest to you will be able to tell the difference. But whenever you want to use this skill, you must make an offering.

Note: The so-called offering is that the user must first use this item to pretend to be a kawaii waifu, and furthermore successfully fool a male target.

Zu An was flabbergasted. What the flying f*ck?

Almost every skill he pulled was sketchy in some way. However, he hadn't expected this skill to be so horrible.

He had actually been somewhat happy when he first saw the effects. After all, even though 'Face of a Thousand Identities' could change his appearance with ki, some parts of that secret manual were missing. Currently, he could only achieve seventy to eighty percent similarity. Someone close to the real target would easily see through his disguise. With this voice changer, together with Face of a Thousand Identities, he could successfully impersonate anyone without giving himself away.

But when he saw the usage condition, his expression immediately darkened.

Didn't the offering condition mean he had to pretend to be a girl each time first? If he just had to crossdress or something, then whatever, he'd change into a girl's outfit when no one was watching. But this freaking scam needed him to actually fool a male target first! Didn't that mean he had to pretend to be a girl in front of another guy? That would be complete social suicide if he were exposed! What kind of dignity would he even have left?!

He was already extremely embarrassed before he even gave it a try.

"Ah Zu, are you ready?" Sang Hong knocked on the door. He was clearly a bit worried that Zu An hadn't replied for so long.

"Please wait for a bit longer." Zu An could only suppress his thoughts when he thought about how dire the current situation was. He stored the Kawaii Waifu Voice Changer away into the Brilliant Glass Bead for the time being to examine later.

"Come here." He gestured toward Daji, who obediently came over. Her expression looked like a smile, yet if one looked at her closely, it wouldn't seem as if she were smiling anymore.

"Even you're laughing at me." Zu An was a bit dejected. "Open your mouth!"

Daji blinked. She leaned her head back slightly and obediently parted her red lips. Zu An threw in the Ki Fruits one after another. Fortunately, they immediately melted when they entered Daji's mouth. Otherwise, she'd choke to death from eating so many of them.

During the process, Zu An's finger couldn't help but touch her tongue sometimes. He was surprised to discover that the other party didn't reject him for the first time.

"She was actually a freaking foodie," Zu An muttered with a strange expression. When this kind of exceptional beauty opened her mouth and waited for food, it really was hard for others to resist the urge to feed her something...

He quickly concentrated and fed all the Ki Fruits to her. Then, he got up and stopped looking at her, saying, "Digest those fruits. I need you to earn your keep soon."

Daji nodded slightly, as if understanding what he meant. She ate all of the Ki Fruits, and her aura began to steadily climb.

Sixth step, seventh step, eighth step, ninth step...

In the end, her cultivation stopped at the ninth step of the sixth rank.

800 Ki Fruits were needed to reach the peak of the sixth rank. She had already eaten 740 fruits, making her extremely close to that level.

Looks like I need to hurry and find her breakthrough materials, Zu An told himself.

When Daji's cultivation stabilized, Zu An signaled the people outside to let Pei You in.

"Brother Zu, you have to trust me. If even you don't believe me, then I... I..." Pei You immediately complained to Zu An as soon as he saw him. However, halfway through his wailing, he suddenly noticed Daji. There was actually a woman so ridiculously beautiful in this world?

Even the legendary Yu Yanluo can only be this beautiful and not more so, right?

"Wow, Brother Zu, you actually had someone like this all to yourself..." Pei You couldn't help but say with a sigh.

Zu An rolled his eyes. This fool was about to lose his life, yet he was still thinking about such things. He didn't feel like wasting any words on Pei You and immediately had Daji use Fox Charm to control him.

Pei You's expression gradually went blank. Zu An took the chance to ask him about what happened last night. In the end, however, his response was identical to what he had said before.

"Huh?" Zu An exclaimed. Neither side was lying, so what was going on?

He remained silent for a moment, but then suddenly thought of something and asked, "Did you notice anything strange while you were sitting outside the prison yesterday?"

"There was nothing strange. Everything was completely quiet from start to finish. No one came in or left," Pei You replied.

Zu An frowned, then asked, "How many rotations did you send your ki flow through last night in meditation?"

Pei You replied, "I first sent my ki through eight small rotations, and then I... I went through five great rotations."

Zu An then asked him how long he usually took for each rotation, and then asked him when each rotation began. Eventually, he finally realized the problem. Pei You's cultivation and the time didn't match up. There was a period of time missing.

But Pei You couldn't recall what had happened before, no matter how he tried to rack his brains. He began, "I think I saw a bit of rainbow light, then slept for a bit. But I shouldn't have fallen asleep..." He clutched his head with an expression of deep pain. He clearly felt some kind of irritation there.

Zu An was worried about injuring Pei You's soul, so he quickly told Daji to stop her skill. Then, while Pei You was still dizzy, he carried him out.

"Did you find anything out?" Sang Hong asked while pacing around in the main lobby. His eyes were filled with hope when he saw the two people come out, but he was also worried that he might hear some bad news.

"Neither side was lying." Zu An said.

"How is that possible?!" Sang Hong's expression changed.

Pei You was moved to tears. Zu An really is a good brother! No one believed me, but he believed me.

Just how many times was I saved by him already?

I definitely have to set up a memorial arch in his name once I return home and burn incense for him every day.

Zu An lowered the weak Pei You off to the side, then explained, "Some expert must have temporarily invaded his body, controlling his body to kill Zuo Su."

"Huh" Pei You cried out in alarm. Wasn't he still the killer in that case? But he quickly noticed a more severe problem. That mysterious person invaded his brain? Didn't that mean that guy had gone inside of him?

I'd be okay with it if it was a beauty, but if it was a freaking man... He had an expression of horror when he realized that. He couldn't help but start retching off to the side.

Zu An and Sang Hong gave him a look. They didn't know why he was acting like that all of a sudden.

Sang Hong didn't pay him any attention and said gravely, "There are only some evil cultivators or members of the fiend races who are capable of the kind of mind invasion you are talking about. Furthermore, Pei You is no pushover either. Anyone who could control him without his notice, and then silently kill Zuo Su, might have a cultivation far above mine."

His brow furrowed deeply as he spoke. This matter really was way too difficult... Just Jian Taiding alone was already outside of their ability to deal with. Now, there was some mysterious expert too? Even someone like him whose mind was tough was starting to waver.

When he heard what Sang Hong said, Zu An recalled that Daji's skill seemed to be of the same sort. Don't tell me he'll mistake me for an evil cultivator too? He quickly commented, "Ahem, since Zuo Su was suspected to have colluded with the fiend races, then it was most likely a fiend race individual who silenced him."

"There are definitely others involved, or else the fiend races wouldn't have silenced him so quickly," Sang Hong swiftly deduced. He mused, "Then is it really Jian Taiding?"

Jian Taiding was the most suitable candidate in Cloudcenter Commandery, with both the strength and backing. But he had great status and authority. His subordinates had a lot of power as well. Their group couldn't investigate him even if they wanted to!

"Finding that mysterious fiend race expert is the top priority. Once he's found, everything else will become much easier." Zu An said.

"Indeed." Sang Hong got up. He continued, "Furthermore, Zuo Su's death must remain a secret. No one who knows about it is to leave this residence. Everyone must continue to deliver meals and patrol the area to create the illusion that Zuo Su is still alive."

They had finally quelled the rebellion of the commandery's soldiers. If those soldiers learned that Zuo Su had died in their temporary official residence, it really would be hard for the Imperial Envoy to escape blame. If those with ulterior motives fanned the flames and the city's troops charged at them again, the entire Imperial Envoy might be wiped out.

After arranging everything, Sang Hong then brought Zu An to his room to discuss some details. His expression was full of fatigue as he said, "You and I both know that this fiend race expert isn't someone who would be so easily captured."

At the moment, the fiend race expert was most likely hiding in Jian Taiding's Military Affairs Manor. However, security there was strict, and Jian Taiding was a master rank cultivator himself. They couldn't even try to sneak inside and investigate the matter.

"I have a way," Zu An said seriously.

Chapter 1038: I Want Everything

"What kind of way?" Sang Hong quickly asked.

"I'm not sure yet." Zu An said in a low voice. "I need to make a trip right now."

"Alright. I will stay here to oversee this place, or else those Cloudcenter Commandery people might come here and find out that something happened to Zuo Su." Sang Hong harrumphed. "I want to see for myself who will immediately rush over now that Zuo Su has died."

Even though he had given the order that no one who knew what happened was allowed to leave the official residence, that obviously didn't include Zu An.

"I've troubled respected uncle." Zu An cupped his hands, then secretly left through the back door. He made sure to shake off anyone trying to tail him as usual, then headed to the Civil Affairs Manor.

The Civil Affairs Manor had no leader, so it was quite the mess. Fortunately, Xu Yu was there to watch over things, thus barely maintaining the normal operations of Cloudcenter Commandery. When Xu Yu saw that Zu An had come to visit him, he quickly came out to greet him. Then, he indirectly tried to ask about how their investigation of Zuo Su was going.

Zu An obviously wouldn't tell him the truth. He found some excuses to answer the questions with, then told Xu Yu why he had come.

"The commandery duke's recorded materials? We do have some. When the commandery princess held the heaven offering ceremony, it was recorded with a recording stone. It should be at the government office right now. But why do you need something like that?" Xu Yu felt the request was a bit strange.

Zu An sighed in relief when he heard that. He replied with a smile, "It's something Sir Sang needs. As for what it will be used for exactly, I don't know."

"Could it be related to Sir Zuo's case?" Xu Yu still didn't drop the matter and continued asking.

Zu An said with a smile, "Sir Xu worries too much. This is just about investigating the duke's disappearance."

"Oh." Xu Yu nodded, but he was filled with emotions inside. The other party didn't seem all that interested in Sir Zuo's case. He was still in the mood to focus on the duke's disappearance? Perhaps there had already been a conclusion in Sir Zuo's case?

Those of the court excelled at reading facial expressions, and they often speculated about many things. When he saw Zu An's mysterious expression, many possibilities appeared in Xu Yu's mind. Every single one of those possibilities left him trembling in fear.

Fortunately, the recording stone arrived promptly. He collected his thoughts and handed the recording stone to Zu An, saying, "Even though this item is no great treasure, after the duke's disappearance, this is the only thing left. I hope Sir Zu can let Sir Sang know to take good care of it. Once he is done with it, please return it to be stored away."

Zu An received the recording stone and gave it a look. Sure enough, the duke's image was recorded there. He was overjoyed and said, "Don't worry, Sir Xu. The jade annulus will be returned to Zhao[1] after we're finished."

"Jade annulus to Zhao?" Xu Yu was a bit confused. He had never heard of that idiom before, but he could guess what Zu An meant.

...

After Zu An left the manor, he made a trip to Gao Ying's place. He worried that Gao Ying wouldn't be able to keep those wild troops under control. But when he arrived, he saw that Gao Ying was actually doing quite well for himself.

Gao Ying said with a smile, "It's all thanks to Sir Xu. He came over several times to help me keep them under control. That's how I was able to properly maintain this position."

"Of course, it was also thanks to those Armed Escort Guards of yours. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to convince all of these people through my own strength."

"You're being too humble. That's all external help. The reason you were able to keep this position was completely because of your own ability." Zu An thought, No wonder Xu Yu was able to become friends with Xiao Yao. He's probably one of the rare members of Cloudcenter Commandery's court faction.

The two of them chatted for a bit longer. Gao Ying asked about how things were back at the temporary residence. Zu An was worried about information leaking, so he didn't reveal anything, instead saying, "You only need to worry about properly controlling the troops over here; leave the temporary residence to us. We might very well need your subordinates in the future!"

"Don't worry. I'll definitely completely rope them in soon," Gao Ying said with an upright expression.

Zu An nodded. After bidding him goodbye, he took the main street back. He thought about what he was going to do next. With Cloudcenter Duke's recording, he now had an image of what the duke looked like. That way, if he had no choice, he could impersonate him to create a breakthrough in the case.

He suddenly smelled an aroma just then. When he raised his head, he saw a restaurant that was lively with business. Above the entrance was a placard with the words 'Cassia Moon Restaurant' written on it in fancy calligraphy.

Zu An suddenly recalled something. In the intelligence Xiao Jianren had given him, King Qi's heir would often go to places like Cassia Moon Restaurant to buy things for Pei Mianman before he went to the Pei clan. He hadn't thought much of it back then, but what if the purchasing of gifts was just a pretense, and he had actually gone to those places to meet with people? As such, he went straight in.

A waiter quickly greeted him. When he saw how impressive looking and well dressed Zu An was, his eyes lit up. He asked, "What does this guest wish to eat? Our Cassia Moon Restaurant is a famous restaurant in Cloudcenter Commandery. As long as there is anything you want to try, we can make it."

"You guys are that great? Then I'll have to have a taste," Zu An replied. He hadn't eaten anything since morning, so he could just settle that in the meantime.

The waiter guided him upstairs. Zu An chose a private room with a window that could oversee everything. After ordering a few signature dishes, he drank the restaurant's special Honey Black Tea while secretly observing the people who came and went through the place.

Unfortunately, he didn't see anyone suspicious even after doing so for a long time. When the waiter returned with the food, he casually asked, "Waiter, this place of yours isn't bad. How much would it cost to buy this Cassia Moon Restaurant?"

The waiter was alarmed. He exclaimed, "The young master must be joking! Cassia Moon Restaurant has such good business; why would the owner want to sell it?"

"That may not be the case. Many times, the only reason something isn't sold is because not enough money is offered." Zu An chuckled. He tossed over a silver ingot and asked, "Who's your boss? If I wanted to buy this place, who would I approach to ask something like that?"

The waiter had never expected to receive such a huge tip. He happily put it away, and an eager smile appeared on his face as he said, "The young master really is generous. I must secretly tell the young master that it is useless even if you talk to our boss. This is not something he can make a decision on."

"Oh? Why?" Zu An asked, surprised. Looks like this money I spent was worth it.

"Please do not share what I am about to tell the young master with anyone else." The waiter looked around. When he saw that there was no one, he then moved close to Zu An's ear and said quietly, "The shopkeeper downstairs is only Cassia Moon Restaurant's boss in name. The true boss is at the Pegasus Merchant Group."

"Pegasus Merchant Group?" Zu An exclaimed, shocked. Chen Zhou's case involved the Zhenyuan Merchant Group. He had learned about the Pegasus Merchant Group during his investigation back then.

The Pegasus Merchant Group was a merchant group as famous as the Zhenyuan Merchant Group. Both sides were constantly competing with each other. But the Zhenyuan Merchant Group had a longer history, so it operated on a slightly larger scale.

The Pegasus Merchant Group was an up-and-coming power. However, recently, their momentum had been extremely strong, almost as if they were trying to take over the Zhenyuan Merchant Group's top spot.

Zu An suddenly voiced his surprise. "How do you know something so classified?"

The waiter stuck out his chest. "Because the shopkeeper is the son of my grandfather's second aunt's niece's great uncle's nephew!"

Zu An was speechless. He couldn't figure out what their relationship was even after thinking about it for a long time. Either way, it was some kind of distant relation.

He remarked, "This little brother seems to have boundless prospects here."

"The young master overpraises me," the waiter replied.

...

After he obtained the information he needed from Cassia Moon Restaurant, Zu An went to the next location. There, a sweet scent spread through the air. It was different from Cassia Moon Restaurant's smell of food; instead, it was the smell of cosmetics.

Two graceful words, 'Rouge Spice', were inscribed onto the signboard.

King Qi's heir often visited that store before going to the Pei clan as well. There were married women and young ladies coming in and out of the store, chatting about the newest products and colors of lipstick.

When he entered the store, Zu An felt as if he had entered a country of women. Compared to Jasper House, the clothing of the women present was clearly much more reserved.

The madams and young misses all frowned when they saw a man enter. They all wondered where this pervert had come from.

But when they saw Zu An's appearance, they were all stunned, and light blushes appeared on their faces. The women who had been about to berate him instead revealed bashful appearances. All of them whispered among themselves, "Which young master is this? He really is handsome."

"He's probably here to purchase some products for his own woman."

"Sigh, it really is a waste. She actually sent her own husband to buy products for her. Isn't this kind of woman a bit too lazy?"

"Should we try and start a conversation with him? It's been so long since I met someone this handsome."

"Are you crazy? Won't you be beaten if you're caught by your man back home?"

"If this young master were the one hitting me, wouldn't I be more than happy?"

...

Even though their voices were soft, Zu An's senses were keen. None of their voices escaped his detection.

He immediately began to sweat buckets when he heard their discussions. He had heard beforehand that the citizens of Cloudcenter Commandery were fairly open-minded, but wasn't this a bit too much?

No wonder the ones who had played around the most at the office in his previous world had been married young wives. It seemed things were the same no matter which world it was.

He coughed lightly and quickly sought out the shopkeeper. Even though the shopkeeper was a bit surprised to see a man enter, this wasn't the first time. He asked, "What does the young master wish to buy?"

"Female makeup products and the like," Zu An replied.

"We have a variety of products. We have facial cleansers, moisturizers, skincare serum, emulsion, skin repair foundation, concealer, face slimming creams..." the shopkeeper began.

Zu An was stunned. He was completely baffled by everything he heard. He had no idea what any of that stuff was. He just exclaimed, "I want everything!"

The shopkeeper's eyes lit up. He asked, "May I ask what model number your respected self wants? We have..."

Zu An cut him off. He obviously didn't have the time to think about all of that stuff. He replied, "The most expensive one of each type. Give me, uh... Ten of them."

He obviously needed to display his wealth in order to discuss business with the other party. Otherwise, if he immediately said he wanted to purchase the store, who wouldn't ignore him?

As for those things, they'd be quite useful. He had so many close female friends at his side. He'd at least have some gifts to give out.

The young ladies and madams all cried out in surprise. They immediately looked at him with strange expressions.

"A playboy! He actually bought so many."

"What do you understand? This is called being charming, okay? Would it be that rare for a young master as wealthy as this to have ten concubines?"

"Exactly! Look at those rich and powerful figures in the city! Which one of them doesn't have a hundred or so concubines? This young master having ten concubines is already being quite single-minded."

"And he bought a gift for every one of them, treating all his girls nicely. I'm so jealous!"

"Sigh, unfortunately, I've already gotten married. Otherwise, I would even offer myself up."

"Why don't you go and give it a try? What if he doesn't mind having more wives?"

...

Zu An's expression darkened. Meanwhile, The shopkeeper put various kinds of skincare and makeup products into fine cases and handed them over, saying, "Young master, these belong to your respective self. May I ask where you live? We can have someone send them over."

Zu An was about to reply, but a familiar voice spoke up nearby. "Tsk tsk, you really are a womanizer."

Chapter 1039: New Clues

Zu An turned around. He saw a charming and graceful young lady standing by the entrance. She had a golden veil over her face, decorated with agates and rubies. It made her look glamorous and mysterious.

However, people's attention was drawn more to the girl herself. Even though there was a veil covering her face, they could still see that her face was beautiful.

Underneath her simple and elegant brows was a pair of lovely misty eyes. Those who saw them couldn't help but want to protect her. There seemed to be a faint smile resting on her lips. Those lips were soft and moist, as if they had been blessed by the sparkling dew of dawn, making all who saw them feel their throats go dry.

As the girl looked around, people would immediately feel the same thing. It was as if she were looking at them with tender feelings, full of friendly regard for them. It was as if she thought of them completely differently from other people.

If this were a different place, countless men would prostrate before her for her favor the moment they saw her. But this was a makeup store. There were only madams and young ladies present.

"Hmph, what a vixen!"

The madams and young ladies normally didn't usually like each other all that much. Yet this time, they were surprisingly unified.

This woman was just too good at seducing others! They knew if their own men back home saw her, those men would definitely abandon them to pursue her. That was why all of them looked at the woman with unkind expressions.

Zu An was instead pleasantly surprised, exclaiming, “Honglei!”

He had never expected to run into Qiu Honglei in such a place! After their separation the previous time in Yi Commandery, he had thought it would be a long time before they would meet again.

“Ah Zu~” Qiu Honglei completely ignored the jealous eyes around her. She had a big smile on her face.

“He was a playboy after all!”

“He isn’t even looking away after he sees a pretty girl.”

“What was wrong with me for actually liking him earlier?”

...

Because of their dislike toward the woman, all of the women in the shop immediately began to dislike Zu An too.

Zu An suddenly felt as if he had just broken new ground when he saw the continuous stream of Rage points. Not only could he earn Rage points from men by having a pretty girl at his side, he could also make a killing from other women! Once women’s jealousy was stirred, they would become much more terrifying than men.

“Should we chat somewhere else?” Qiu Honglei asked with a smile.

“Sure.” Zu An also felt a bit uncomfortable from being surrounded and watched.

He was just about to leave when Qiu Honglei looked back and gestured, asking, “Are you not going to take your things with you?”

Only then did Zu An notice that he hadn’t taken those products he had purchased yet. He smiled awkwardly and quickly went back in.

“Young master, it isn’t convenient for you to carry all of these things now. We can deliver the goods to you,” the shopkeeper reminded him kindly.

“There’s no need.” Zu An chuckled. After paying the bill, he stored everything in his Brilliant Glass Bead.

“A spatial artifact!” Those who were knowledgeable quickly realized what had happened. They began to whisper among themselves. Anyone who had such a large spatial storage artifact was definitely no one ordinary.

Zu An couldn’t be bothered with what they thought, however. He left the store to meet with Qiu Honglei again.

“Ah Zu, you really are a big spender. You actually bought so many sets in one go,” Qiu Honglei said with an ambiguous smile.

Zu An took out a set and said, “You came at just the right time. This is for you.”

Qiu Honglei rolled her eyes and remarked, "Hmph, are the rest for other girls? I already saw you buy those earlier, so I don't want it."

Zu An was speechless. He knew that now wasn't the time to try to reason with her, so he could only change the topic. He asked, "By the way, why are you in Cloudcenter Commandery?"

"How could I have seen that fantastic scene earlier if I hadn't come here?" Qiu Honglei was clearly smiling, but there was a hint of danger in her gaze.

Zu An sighed and said, "After we separated last time in Yi Commandery, I thought it would be a long time before we would meet again. After we separated last time, I was held up by the people from the court. After I dealt with them, I went back to where your smoke signal was to see where you were, but I didn't see anything."

Qiu Honglei's expression eased a lot when she heard the concern in his voice. She grabbed his arm and leaned naturally against his shoulder, saying, "But that's why this is a fated reunion."

When he felt that incredible sensation against his arm, Zu An didn't think any strange thoughts and instead only felt warm inside. He asked, "When will you finish cultivating that rubbish technique of yours?"

"The Heavenly Devil Temptation is our Holy Sect's supreme art. It's definitely not a rubbish technique." Qiu Honglei was clearly somewhat dissatisfied. Her playfully upset voice was sweet and intimate, drawing eyes all around them.

When they saw Qiu Honglei's appearance, the onlookers were incredibly shocked. They immediately aimed envious looks at Zu An.

"Fine, fine. You still haven't told me when you and I can have a proper relationship yet." Zu An touched her nose with a smile. When he saw the Rage points that were coming in, he began performing more of those intimate actions to incite those fellows who could see, but would never be able to obtain someone like Qiu Honglei.

Sure enough, those people's faces turned green. Those who were more fiery-tempered even rolled up their sleeves, as if they were going to come over and start some trouble.

Unfortunately, Qiu Honglei clearly didn't want their alone time to be disturbed by such side characters. She released her ki aura and scanned them coldly with her gaze. As the Saintess of the Devil Sect, she could even make all of the fierce and tough Devil Sect soldiers docile, let alone such ordinary local ruffians.

Sure enough, those individuals immediately felt chills run through their bodies, and they all withdrew. When they saw that Zu An hadn't done a thing, and that it was instead the girl who had stepped forward, they all cursed inwardly, This guy is a complete mooch!

But why did they feel so envious while cursing Zu An?

Zu An's previous overcast mood immediately became much better when he saw another huge wave of Rage points come in.

Only then did Qiu Honglei reply, "I don't know either... I need to wait until I receive my master's approval."

"Where is Yun Jianyue? I'll go and have a talk with her," Zu An said unhappily.

Qiu Honglei jumped in fright. She quickly reached out her hand and covered his mouth, exclaiming, "Don't talk nonsense! If master heard what you said, she'd definitely give you a proper beating."

"I don't think she'd do that." When he remembered all of the things that had happened between him and Yun Jianyue back in the Imperial Palace, a gentle smile couldn't help but appear on Zu An's face.

"Huh?" Qiu Honglei was confused. She just felt that something wasn't quite right.

Zu An coughed lightly out of awkwardness. He said, "Ahem, what I'm saying is that I'm her precious disciple's lover, so why would she hit me?"

"Even if you were her disciple, wouldn't she still discipline you properly? Let alone the fact that you're just my lover," Qiu Honglei said. Despite her words, she was still extremely happy.

The two teased each other for a bit, but then Zu An suddenly remembered the matter of Yi Commandery. He asked, "Right, what happened in your sect last time anyway? Why was there such a rushed signal for all of you to return? I was worried that something major had happened to you guys."

Qiu Honglei hesitated for a moment, but then she said, "This is actually something we can't tell outsiders, but you aren't an outsider. It won't matter even if I tell you." She continued, "One of our elders was killed by a fiend race expert."

"Huh?" Zu An was somewhat shocked. He had never expected the fiend races and Devil Sect's relationship to be bad. He asked, "What level of cultivation did your elder have?"

"Eighth rank, I reckon," Qiu Honglei said with a grave expression. "Most importantly, he died in a rather strange way. He was controlled by a fiend race individual's evil method, then suddenly attacked his own companions in the sect. Fortunately, the sect master arrived promptly, or else our entire base might have been completely destroyed.

"Out of wrath, my master killed that elder. However, that elder woke back up moments before his death. Only then did my master realize that he was being controlled."

Zu An's expression changed when he heard that. Why did the story sound so similar?

Wasn't Pei You also controlled by someone to kill Zuo Su? He quickly asked, "Which fiend race individuals are that powerful?"

Qiu Honglei replied, "Master immediately traced their aura and fought a great battle with that fiend race cultivator. However, that fellow's cultivation is extremely strange. Even though master was able to injure him, he was still able to escape."

"Just how high would his cultivation need to be to escape from someone like your master?!" Zu An was really shocked.

Qiu Honglei said quietly, "My master was wounded by that dog emperor the last time we invaded the Imperial Palace. She hasn't fully recovered since then. Furthermore, she fought against King Yan not too long ago, or else she wouldn't have let that fiend race bastard escape. The reason I'm here is also because I'm trying to track him down."

"Oh, do you know any more details about that fiend race cultivator?" Zu An quickly asked.

Qiu Honglei nodded and said, "Master fought against him, and with her experience and methods, it wasn't difficult to track down his identity at all. That guy's name is Kong Qing, one of the fiend races' three fiend kings. He's one of the most powerful subordinates of the Peacock King. He excels in invading the target's soul and controlling their body in battle."

"Kong Qing?" Zu An had a weird expression on his face. That fellow's surname was also Kong! Didn't that mean he was a fellow clansman of Kong Nanwu?

No wonder Kong Nanwu had given him a feather. It turned out she had already known that there was an expert from the Peacock Race in Cloudcenter Commandery. She had been worried that he might be targeted by them, which was why she had given him that identifying symbol. He had to admit that the girl was pretty loyal.

"Then do you know where that Kong Qing is hiding?" Zu An urgently asked.

Qiu Honglei replied, "According to the most recent news, he seems to have appeared at the Zhenyuan Merchant Group. However, I haven't had time to investigate that yet."

"It's the Zhenyuan Merchant Group again?" Zu An exclaimed, his eyes widening.

Chapter 1040: Mysterious Men of the Round Table

The first time Zu An had heard of the Zhenyuan Merchant Company was when he was investigating Chen Zhou's case. He had learned that Chen Zhou was investigating a smuggling case involving the Zhenyuan Merchant Group.

However, Zu An knew Chen Zhou had died near the capital. He should already have been en route to deliver his report to the capital at the time. There was no way he would be investigating some smuggling case.

Furthermore, the corpse that had been burned in the warehouse wasn't Chen Zhou. That was why Zu An hadn't paid the Zhenyuan Merchant Group too much attention.

But as the investigation continued, he saw more and more shades of the Zhenyuan Merchant Group. Now, after learning that a fiend race expert might be hiding in the Zhenyuan Merchant Group, he knew there was definitely something wrong with it.

"I'll go with you and investigate the Zhenyuan Merchant Group," Zu An said.

Qiu Honglei was happy but surprised. She asked, "Won't this interfere with your affairs?"

Zu An shook his head and replied, "It's fine. I just happen to have some things I need to investigate too."

Qiu Honglei leaned her head against his arm, saying with smiling eyes, "Ah Zu, you're always so good to me."

Zu An patted her head. The two of them began to talk about their lives after they had separated. Soon after, they unknowingly entered the Zhenyuan Merchant Group's territory. Many of the shops in Cloudcenter City belonged to the Zhenyuan Merchant Group, so the area they occupied was extremely large.

But according to Qiu Honglei's intelligence, Kong Qing was likely hiding in the merchant group's general headquarters. The two of them walked around the headquarters like two lovers on a stroll, while scouting out the state of the security and noting things like the shift changes.

After they looked around, Zu An was shocked. He exclaimed, "This Zhenyuan Merchant Group is crazy! The security is even tighter than the Civil Affairs Manor's main building!"

Qiu Honglei replied, "The Zhenyuan Merchant Group's scale was massive to begin with. Their stores are everywhere around the world. Meanwhile, Cloudcenter Commandery is where their general headquarters is located, so the situation here is naturally pretty exaggerated."

Zu An was somewhat hesitant. He thought, Would it be better to transfer over some troops first?

However, bringing troops with him would attract too much attention, and he didn't have any proof at the moment. If he didn't find out anything, the aftermath would be much more troublesome. After all, investigating such a huge contributor to the nation's taxes with troops for no reason would definitely have bad repercussions.

As such, he decided to look around a bit first.

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The two of them waited until nighttime. Qiu Honglei wanted to go inside, but Zu An stopped her, saying, "Wait outside here. After all, that Kong Qing was even able to escape from your master, so his cultivation is quite high. Furthermore, this Zhenyuan Merchant Group is too big of an organization. They'll have many powerful cultivators protecting this place."

Qiu Honglei harrumphed, sounding clearly dissatisfied. She said, "For better or for worse, I am a proper Holy Sect Saintess. I have the ability to protect myself."

"It really isn't the same this time..." Zu An said seriously, "Not only does this involve the death of your sect's elder, it involves a huge shift in Cloudcenter Commandery's court. This situation is extremely complicated, and even I have to treat it with utmost caution. I don't have the confidence to ensure your safety later."

With Honglei's talent and resources, one day, she could definitely become one of the world's most powerful cultivators. However, at the moment, she was still too young. She had only cultivated for a decade or so of time. How could she compare to those old freaks who had cultivated for decades, or even more than a century?

They were facing someone at the master rank this time. Not even Zu An was willing to take risks without understanding the situation inside.

When she heard the severity in his tone, Qiu Honglei thought for a bit and said, "Alright then. I don't want to hold you back inside. How about this? I'll wait outside to help you later. If I sense that you're in danger at all, I'll cause a disturbance outside to draw their attention."

She might just go in if she were alone. But since she was with Zu An, she absolutely didn't want to drag him down with her.

Zu An smiled and pinched her cheeks. He was just about to sneak in when Qiu Honglei suddenly grabbed him. In her hand was a lantern. She said, "Bring this with you. This thing is called the Little Empress Lantern. Once it's lit, it can lock down everything within a radius of several zhang. Of course, if the target's cultivation is really high, it won't be able to stop them, but it can at least slow their movements. You should keep this on you just in case."

She was about to explain how to use the Little Empress Lantern to Zu An, but he had already pushed it back into her hands. He said, "Don't worry. This item won't be of much help to me with my current cultivation. This is your trump card, so you should keep it with you to protect yourself. You still need to help me out afterward. What if those experts end up surrounding you? I'll feel more at ease if you have this thing on you."

When she heard the confidence in his voice and saw the calmness in his expression, Qiu Honglei smiled and didn't persist with the matter. She said, "I forgot that your cultivation is already entirely different now. That's fine too. You need to be careful."

Zu An nodded. He snuck right in as soon as the guards left. They had observed the guards' movements during the day, so he was able to easily break through their defenses.

But the further in he went, the more clearly he could feel the security becoming stricter. There were many hidden places with sentries watching from all directions. They would immediately become alerted if even a blade of grass moved a bit strangely.

"Why does a merchant group need to be so mysterious?" Zu An frowned. He felt more and more that there was something wrong with the Zhenyuan Merchant Group. Of course, with his current cultivation, as well as the jade badge's scouting abilities, it wasn't too difficult for him to evade all of the guards.

But there were just too many buildings in the Zhenyuan Merchant Group area. Zu An didn't accomplish much even after searching for a while. He quickly stopped his vain efforts and instead hid in the shadows of a building. At the same time, he increased the range of the jade badge's effectiveness, controlling all of the small creatures in the Zhenyuan Merchant Group area and having them help him.

Of course, with those little creatures' intelligence, it would definitely be extremely difficult for them to find a fiend race expert. However, Zu An didn't need them to understand anything; he just needed them for their instinctive feelings of fear.

The other party was a master rank fiend race cultivator. The little creatures were, to a broader sense, also fiend race beings. It was just that they were low intelligence beasts. That was why real fiend race cultivators would exert a natural pressure on such little creatures. If the little creatures entered a certain range, they would feel extreme fear. Then, he would know where his target was.

The small creatures began to scurry around all the different buildings. The manor's guards were baffled, wondering what kind of strange things were happening. But they didn't pay it too much mind and just thought that the creatures were too hungry, and had come out to find some food.

The process continued. After a stick of incense's time, Zu An finally found a result. He opened his eyes and looked at a building several hundred meters out. That place was pitch black, and none of the little creatures dared to approach that area. Even the cats and mice that passed by shuddered in fear.

"That's the one!" Zu An kicked off the ground. He silently took off like an owl.

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The entire courtyard was deadly still, but Zu An didn't dare drop his guard. He used Concubine Bai's spice bag to suppress his aura to the extreme, then used 'Mirror Mirage' to completely hide even the weakest ki fluctuations. Only then did he slowly approach.

Even though the other party was a master rank cultivator, it wouldn't be the first time Zu An had faced a master rank. He had even fought against stronger opponents in the past.

He was already at the peak of the ninth rank. Together with his arsenal of secret manuals and bizarre abilities, he wouldn't be at a disadvantage even if he really fought against a master rank one on one.

He carefully examined his surroundings along the way, worrying that there might be other hidden guards. However, he didn't find a single one even after searching for a long time. He quickly calmed down when he realized that there was no point in having any guards there anyway. The other party was one of the fiend races' best cultivators. If there had been guards there, it might only expose his identity.

As such, he quickened his pace and arrived at the center of the room. Suddenly, he heard some whispers.

Huh? There's more than one person here. Zu An was surprised and immediately slowed down. He could still deal with it if it were just one fiend race master rank cultivator, but if there were several, that would be much more troublesome.

But he still couldn't suppress his own curiosity. Since there were people talking, he might be able to hear some secrets about Zuo Su's assassination, and he might even be able to undo Cloudcenter Commandery's greatest enigma.

As for the fact that there were more people present, with his current cultivation, he should at least be able to escape alive. There was no way there would be many master rank cultivators in there, right?

He moved over to the window, then made a small hole to look through. There was no light inside, making the interior dark. However, with his cultivation, he could still barely make out the scene inside.

There weren't any household objects, save for a single round table. The table was extremely large, more than ten times the size of an ordinary one.

However, there weren't that many people seated there. There were only five people. They were all seated quite far from each other, as if they were on guard against each other. No wonder the table was so large. Meanwhile, every single one of them was concealed by voluminous black robes.

Zu An thought, Those dramas from my world lied to me after all. The characters in those dramas would only have some masks that covered their faces or even just their eyes, at most wearing a pair of glasses, but then no one else could recognize them. He had always thought that if he were there, he would definitely have recognized them.

But Zu An was really stunned, because these people were disguised way too well! He couldn't see their real appearance at all. He couldn't even discern their sex! Look at how secretive these fellas are. This is clearly an illegal gathering.

While Zu An was mocking them, someone spoke up. "Why was Zuo Su killed?"