

Immortal 1111

Chapter 1111: Instigator Behind the Scenes

That person didn't walk in on her own; rather, she was brought in through Yun Jianyue's ki. Even though Yun Jianyue didn't just throw the person onto the ground, it was definitely not a smooth ride.

Zu An was shocked when he saw who it was, exclaiming, "Pink!"

The woman before him was actually that missing courtesan from Jasper Lane! Pei You hadn't able to find her the entire time, and yet now, Yun Jianyue had actually captured her!

"Big sis sect master, this is..." Zu An began. He noticed that Pink seemed to have her acupoints sealed. Her expression was full of alarm.

Yun Jianyue said indifferently, "I heard that your group made some arrests at the Pegasus Merchant Group. I'm using her as our bargaining chip. Let those who should go, go."

Zu An only hesitated slightly, but he quickly agreed. "Fine!"

It was Yun Jianyue's turn to be surprised. She said, "Those who are captured by the Imperial Envoy aren't so easily released. Are you sure you should be agreeing so quickly?"

Zu An gave the incredible long-haired beauty a look. It really was hard for him to associate her with the demoness the world made her out to be. He said, "Big sis sect master has already asked me for this favor, so I'd do my best to help no matter how difficult it was, let alone in this situation where you've brought me a gift in exchange."

Yun Jianyue harrumphed. "Smooth talker." Even though she sounded reproachful, there was a smile on her face.

"Right, I made Honglei go back into secluded training. Her mental state is always disturbed whenever she meets you. She has to fight against that stone cold woman's disciple next year, so now isn't the time for her to make any mistakes." She paused for a moment before giving Zu An a look, saying, "I'm forcefully intruding between you two. You won't blame me, will you?"

"I would be lying if I said I didn't feel anything. I always have to be apart from Honglei for a long time again as soon as we meet." Zu An sighed. He continued, "But I can't be so selfish as to affect Honglei's prospects. Big sis sect master is doing the right thing, so how can I blame you?"

Yun Jianyue nodded in satisfaction and said, "Very good. You aren't as hypocritical as those so-called gentlemen. I'll allow you two to meet again if there's a chance in the future. Now that things are done here, I need to leave. I'm sure we'll meet again."

She was just about to leave when Zu An called out to her. Seeing her confused expression, he lowered his voice and asked, "Big sis sect master, are you guys secretly working with King Yan?"

Yun Jianyue's expression changed a bit. After some hesitation, she nodded and said, "Indeed."

Since he had suddenly asked the question out of the blue and investigated the Pegasus Merchant Group, that meant he knew something. That was why there was no need to hide anything.

Zu An said, "Big sis sect master, you need to be careful. King Yan is just using you guys! For example, he's clearly abusing your relationship to seize the court's resources, making you take all the blame. Not only is he not telling you anything, he's instead using your help to seize Zhenyuan Merchant Group's market share in this place."

"I'm fully aware that King Yan is using us; do you think we aren't using him too?" Yun Jianyue chuckled. "But you've told me something important today. You haven't let down Honglei's kindness toward you."

Zu An couldn't help but say, "I'm not doing this only for Honglei. Sect master, you've treated me really well too!"

Yun Jianyue's expression turned dangerous. She retorted, "Do you have no more attachments to this world? Are you really going after both master and disciple?"

Sensing an overwhelming pressure, Zu An quickly explained, "Big sis sect master, please don't misunderstand. We know our boundaries. Honglei calls you master; I call you big sis. I'm really only treating you as my friend."

"That's more like it." Yun Jianyue's expression eased up a bit and she said, "I'm going." She kicked off lightly against the ground, then disappeared into the distance.

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Zu An secretly wiped the cold sweat on his forehead. What is going on with this woman? She said all of those things in front of Yan Xuehen, and yet now, she got angry because of that?

"What happened just now? Why was she angry?" Yu Yanluo called out. She sensed Yun Jianyue's sudden release of pressure and quickly came over to check on Zu An.

"Maybe that's just how the Devil Sect does things. They're a moody bunch." Zu An obviously couldn't tell her the real reason. The worst part was that he really was innocent!

"That makes sense." Yu Yanluo didn't suspect anything and instead looked at Pink, asking, "This is...?"

Her first reaction was to think Pink was another one of Zu An's girls. But upon closer inspection, she saw that even though the girl wasn't ugly, she couldn't even compare to some of Yu Manor's prettier maids. Furthermore, she seemed to be quite involved in the secular world, which didn't seem to match Zu An's tastes at all.

Zu An explained Pink's background to her and said, "I'm going to bring her back for interrogation, so I'll have to bid you farewell for now."

Yu Yanluo nodded and said, "Proper matters come first."

She froze up momentarily when she said that. It was almost as if the two of them being together wasn't something proper. She couldn't help but feel that their current relationship was a bit strange.

Zu An gave the ruins around them an apologetic look, saying, "I'm sorry. Your entire room ended up getting destroyed."

"It's fine; it'll all be rebuilt soon." Yu Yanluo gave the room a somewhat reluctant look. It was obvious that after all these years, she had developed some attachment to the place.

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After exchanging a few more words of consolation, Zu An left Yu Manor and quickly returned to the temporary residence. Along the way, he interrogated Pink, asking her who had ordered her to do the things she did. However, she kept avoiding the question.

Eventually, Zu An didn't even feel like asking any more questions. He simply handed her over to Xiao Jianren. Special situations had to be left to specialists, after all. The Embroidered Envoy were the best of the best at interrogating criminals.

Zu An went to see Sang Hong. With their current relationship, there was no need to hide anything. He asked Sang Hong to free Solitary Gold, Solitary Wood, and the others.

"Qiu Honglei sought you out?" Sang Hong asked. He knew that Zu An's relationship with her was different from the time when all of them had been escorted to the capital.

Zu An gave him an ambiguous reply. He couldn't just tell Sang Hong that it was Yun Jianyue, could he? After all, in theory, he shouldn't have had any interactions with Yun Jianyue. The only chance when they could have met each other was during the attack on the Imperial Palace. Zu An didn't want to bring that up and bring up more unnecessary drama.

Sang Hong frowned and said, "I know that witch is pretty, but the women from the Devil Sect are up to no good! She is the saintess of the Devil Sect. If you keep sticking around her, you will end up in trouble sooner or later."

Zu An explained, "She risked her life to save me back then. I can't be so ungrateful, can I?"

This time, Sang Hong surprisingly didn't say anything. If Zu An really were someone so disloyal, Sang Hong wouldn't have dared to form an alliance with him.

Seeing that Sang Hong remained quiet, Zu An knew he was hesitating. As such, he continued, "The Devil Sect Master, Yun Jianyue, appeared in the city not too long ago. Things will be disastrous if we aren't careful and get her involved. Our mission is to deal with Cloudcenter Commandery. There's no need to create new problems with the Devil Sect too."

Sang Hong's expression changed. He nodded and said, "Alright. Since we haven't reported anything yet, you should find a chance to let them go. The best situation is to create a hole in our security and have them run away themselves, lest our enemies find something to use against us."

Zu An thought, As expected of an old fox of politics; his thinking is so comprehensive. He replied, "Thank you, respected uncle."

"You should do your best to distance yourself from the Devil Sect..." Sang Hong intended to dissuade Zu An, when suddenly, Xiao Jianren sent news that Pink had confessed.

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"Speak! Who made you do all this?" Sang Hong arrived at the secret room and exclaimed seriously.

There was a distressed smile on Pink's face as she replied, "I can tell you, but do you have the stomach to hear me out?"

Sang Hong's expression changed. He gestured with one hand, having everyone else back down until it was just him, Zu An, Pei You, and Xiao Jianren present.

"Stop playing games and tell us!" Pei You exclaimed, a bit annoyed. He had really been toyed with by Pink for some time, so he was naturally upset.

Pink clenched her teeth and said, "I need you all to promise my safety first. Otherwise, I'll still die even if I speak."

"I am the Imperial Envoy, so please say what you wish to say," Sang Hong said coldly.

"Imperial Envoy..." There was a hint of mockery in Pink's expression. But she knew that she had no choice in the current situation. She then said a name. "If I said it was King Qi who would want me dead, would you still be able to ensure my safety?"

Chapter 1112: Revenge

Sang Hong exclaimed furiously, "Do you know what kind of a crime blindly accusing a king is?!"

Pink sighed and replied, "See? You're already so scared just from me saying a single name. Why are you in such a rush to hear any confessions then?"

Sang Hong's expression changed several times. It seemed he was debating something internally. Pei You and Zu An exchanged a look. No one got angry, unlike before. A strange silence descended on the room.

Zu An was the only one who remained relatively calm. He asked, "Was it King Qi who personally assigned you here, or was it one of his subordinates?"

Pink replied, "King Qi is so great; why would he personally carry out something like this? Of course it was one of his subordinates."

"Then how do you know it wasn't someone who was just falsely using King Qi's name?" Zu An asked seriously.

Pink harrumphed. "Do you think we spies wouldn't even know who we are loyal to?"

"In that case, why are you willing to betray him so quickly?" Zu An asked calmly. Even though the Embroidered Envoy did specialize in interrogation, they shouldn't have been able to make a spy like her croak so easily.

Pink replied hatefully, "Do you know why I was captured by Yun Jianyue?" She continued before Zu An could reply, "Because after I completed my mission here, King Qi's subordinates came to silence me. Fortunately, I had some things that I prepared beforehand and escaped. Then, I just happened to run into Yun Jianyue and was captured by her."

The group exchanged a look. This girl is pretty quick-witted.

Pei You said, "You told us that sob story of your relationship with Chen Zhou the last time we met at Jasper Lane. Was that the real you or the fake you?"

Pink sneered. "With things how they are, is there even any difference between what's real and what's fake?"

Pei You said quietly, "Of course there is."

Faced with Pei You's scorching gaze, Pink fell silent. A while later, she said, "I was trained as a spy ever since I was young. Everything I experienced was cruel and cold. Even the occasional favor from my superior was nothing more than a manipulative tool. Only Chen Zhou brought me sincerity and warmth. Even though he was clumsy and slow of speech, I really did like him."

Zu An said emotionlessly, "But he died because of you."

Pink smiled dejectedly and replied, "Indeed, he died because of me. I knew that was his fate from the moment I heard that he had been discovered by my superiors. Unfortunately, I didn't really understand what I was feeling at the time. Together with the fear of what the organization would do if I betrayed them, I didn't think too much about it."

"Only when I received news of his death and felt daggers dig into my heart did I realize that I was wrong. But at that point, it was already too late for regrets."

"But you still continued to act under King Qi as if nothing happened. You even used Chen Zhou to mislead us in this case," Zu An said grimly.

Pink lowered her head. "What could I have done? My very life is at the mercy of another man. Am I supposed to tell you something else? How could you high and mighty people understand the sorrow of a nobody like me?"

Zu An fell silent. He knew that what she said was the truth.

This woman most likely had shared feelings with Chen Zhou. Unfortunately, she hadn't had the courage to betray King Qi, and so she had constantly been torn between inner conflict and pain.

"Did the Zhenyuan Merchant Group modify the account book?" Sang Hong asked. He was already quite well along in years and had experienced all sorts of different things. His heart was already tough like steel, and he didn't care about the romance of youth at all. He only cared about the most important things.

Pink voiced an affirmation. "I wasn't involved, but someone disguised themselves and fetched the real account book, replacing it with the modified one. I don't know what parts they changed exactly."

"Who were you in contact with? How can we find them?" Sang Hong asked.

"West of the city, Peace Apothecary's Boss Ma. Jasper Lane's girls often need physicians to look after their illnesses, which is why he can come in and out without drawing any attention," Pink replied.

Sang Hong exchanged a look with Xiao Jianren, who understood his intentions and quickly left with his subordinates to make the arrest.

"Do you have any other proof?" Sang Hong asked.

Pink shook her head and replied, "Everyone in our line of work has to be extremely careful. We wouldn't leave behind any other proof."

Sang Hong frowned. He asked more questions, but he wasn't able to obtain any more useful information. As such, he had Pei You stay behind to continue the questioning while pulling Zu An aside to discuss things.

"Should we hide this as well?" Zu An asked out of curiosity.

Sang Hong shook his head and replied, "King Yan wasn't his majesty's target, so if we targeted him, his majesty would only blame us. But King Qi is the one his majesty wanted to deal with to begin with, so there are no such misgivings."

"But we only have a single person's confession; there's no material substance," Zu An said worriedly. After all, King Qi was incredibly powerful, so Pink's confession alone wouldn't do much.

Sang Hong sighed as well, saying, "Indeed. It'll now depend on whether Sir Xiao can find anything on his end. However, I'm not too optimistic."

Zu An also agreed with that sentiment. Why would an old fox like King Qi leave behind an obvious opening after Pink escaped?

He was also a bit hesitant. He had had some dealings with King Qi in the capital, and they had even formed some kind of 'alliance'. Even though they both knew it wasn't all that reliable, Zu An still had to help King Qi deal with the emperor somewhat. The best result would be for both of them to destroy each other. If King Qi were killed, it would instead go against his best interests.

Xiao Jianren returned soon afterward. He had returned so quickly because Peace Apothecary had already been emptied out, leaving only some servants who didn't know anything.

"It was as we predicted." Sang Hong had a bitter smile as he spoke. He began to hesitate as to whether or not he should hand over Pink to the superiors.

Even though he didn't share many interests with King Qi, what he was more worried about was something else. The criminal charge he would take on was definitely no joke. If this case was brought up and he had no proof on his end, King Qi would survive. Meanwhile, with the emperor's cold nature, he might just use the Sang clan as a scapegoat.

He had already paid a bitter price the last time. He definitely didn't want to repeat that a second time.

Just then, a subordinate came in and reported, "A large fire has broken out in a city outskirts village."

Sang Hong harrumphed. "Why are you telling me something like that? Do you think we do not have enough on our hands already or something?"

The soldier explained, "It was the village where Chen Zhou's widow resided."

Zu An had investigated that area, so the Imperial Envoy had stationed some people there to keep an eye on the village. They hadn't expected to end up receiving such grievous news.

"What?!" Zu An was shocked, and quickly asked for the details.

The soldier replied, "The exact details are unclear. It seems to have started in the middle of the night. Because everyone was sleeping, the fire spread quickly. Not a single one of the village's 36 inhabitants survived."

Zu An's expression became incomparably cold. He said, "It snowed for several days in a row not too long ago. How could it be that easy for a fire to start? And how could there not even be a single survivor?!"

"They were all silenced!" Sang Hong exclaimed, coming to a similar conclusion.

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Zu An and Sang Hong quickly brought their men to the city outskirts to investigate the scene of the crime.

There were already bailiffs present arranging the corpses. There was an extremely foul smell in the air. It looked just like hell on earth. Many of the bailiffs couldn't help but retch.

Zu An remained expressionless. He walked over to Chen Zhou's wife. When he thought about how the woman's playful son was now just a chunk of coal, he felt anger burn madly within him.

Even though he had already known that for bigwigs, the lives of commoners were worth as little as grass, he hadn't expected it to be this bad. They hadn't even let such young children go.

A government official came over to report, "We have already started to examine the corpses. There were large amounts of ashes in the deceased's lungs; they burned to death. For now, we can eliminate the possibility that they were murdered."

Zu An gave him a cold look and asked, "How do the corpses' conditions look?"

The person replied, "They look to be at peace. They were probably burned to death in their sleep."

Zu An harrumphed. "No matter how well they were sleeping, do you think they wouldn't react at all with the fire blazing like this? Someone clearly struck their acupoints, then set fire to this entire place!"

"Wha... Who would do such a deranged thing?!" The government official was horrified.

Zu An didn't reply to him and picked up the young remains. He said gloomily "There's no need to bring these two back to the government office. I'm going to bury them and let them rest here."

Since he knew the killer, there was no need to have those two corpses displayed in the government office. With Zu An's cultivation, he was able to quickly dig up a huge pit. Then, he hacked apart some trees to form a simple coffin, burying the mother and child within. He remained silent throughout the entire process.

Sang Hong said in consolation, "Ah Zu, please do not blame yourself too much. This is unrelated to you."

Zu An didn't reply. Instead, he silently took out the wooden sword the child had given him back then and called out, "I vow with this sword that I will definitely get revenge for you, lest I meet the same fate as this sword!"

His cultivation rippled outward, and the wooden sword snapped in two. He was about to stab the sword into the grave when his eyes suddenly narrowed.

Chapter 1113: Blood for Blood

The sword had a rolled-up piece of paper in its center. The paper was made of a special kind of material that granted it some resistance against water and fire.

Zu An unfolded the paper and gave it a look. His expression was grim and conflicted.

Sang Hong noticed his expression and asked curiously, "What is it?"

Zu An had already had his subordinates withdraw earlier. He replied quietly, "Chen Zhou left behind the proof we've been looking for all this time here."

"What?!" Sang Hong exclaimed. He quickly took the paper from Zu An and gave it a look.

The paper was a simple account book. The records matched up with the ones they had taken from the Zhenyuan Merchant Group before. The only difference was that this account also included a large amount of smuggling between King Qi and the fiend races.

No wonder King Qi hadn't let the entire village go. He had been worried about Chen Zhou leaving behind some proof, and yet they couldn't find it. That was why they had decided to just burn everything down. That way, the evidence would also go up in flames.

But they had never expected Chen Zhou to hide the evidence in his son's toy wooden sword, and that wooden sword had just happened to be given to Zu An as a gift. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been able to escape the flames either.

Sometimes, it was just like that. The will of heaven worked in mysterious ways.

Sang Hong said, "Ah Zu, I am going to seize all of these people on this list. Why not come with me?"

The account book was just an account book. They needed the real people named in the evidence to have ironclad proof.

Zu An shook his head and said, "Please go on your own, respected uncle. I have more important matters to tend to." He looked toward a certain section of Cloudcenter City.

Sang Hong guessed what Zu An was thinking and said worriedly, "Ah Zu, do not act rashly. We should take our time with our decisions."

Zu An said with a heavy voice, "What is cultivation? If I can't get proper revenge, it will be hard to find peace." He didn't wait for Sang Hong's response. With just a few steps, he vanished into the distance.

Sang Hong looked sullen. He waved at his subordinates to call them back to the city. The best thing he could do for Zu An now was to settle all of the evidence as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, Zu An moved quickly and arrived outside a residence in the city. He roared thunderously, "Zhao Zhi, get the f*ck out here right now!"

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The people inside the residence ate and drank happily. The silver-haired Han Fengqiu touched cups with some burly men, exclaiming, "All of you have worked hard!"

One of them had some yellow and black patterns on his face; his voice was naturally loud. He replied, "How can this be called hard work? They were merely some villagers; it didn't take much effort at all. The only thing I'm puzzled about is why we had to act against those ordinary people."

Han Fengqiu said with a chuckle, "It's mainly because some treacherous things have been happening around Cloudcenter Commandery recently. If we didn't deal with this situation as soon as possible, it would be quite bad if everything failed in the end because of a small mistake."

The large man nodded. He said with a bit of regret, "Then maybe we should've just eaten them. That way, nothing would've been left behind."

Han Fengqiu cursed the man inwardly for being stupid, but he still said in an amiable tone, "But that way, your identities might have been exposed. It would have made it harder to take care of things later."

"Hmph, I can go wherever I please in Cloudcenter Commandery. Who can stop me?" the large man retorted with a snort.

Han Fengqiu thought to himself, These fiend races really are barbarians. Interacting with them really is exhausting...

Just then, Zu An's furious roar rang out. Those who were in the room were angered and quickly rushed out.

"I was wondering which bastard was so confident. So it was Sir Zu." Han Fengqiu sneered when he saw who had arrived.

Zu An noticed the large man at his side. He had a round face, and the black and yellow patterns he bore were especially striking. Zu An frowned and remarked, "The Tiger clan?" The patterns were too similar to tiger stripes. It was hard to not make that association.

Han Fengqiu felt regret. That muscle-brained idiot had actually come out with him! But he blamed himself too, for being too worked up and forgetting to stop them.

But with things how they were, there was no point in hiding anything. He said indifferently, "These are my new bodyguards. The court doesn't forbid employing them, does it?"

Because of their defeat in the war back then, many of the fiend races had remained in the human territory to serve as slaves. Many nobles raised fiend race slaves, and eventually, that had even become a way to size up the power of a clan.

Zu An obviously wasn't there to talk about that. He asked coldly, "Where is Zhao Zhi? Why don't I see him?"

Han Fengqiu frowned and replied, "Isn't Sir Zu's address a bit improper? If we really pursue this, your actions will be punishable."

Zu An didn't pay him any attention and instead asked, "Chen Zhou's wife and son—was it you who ordered their death?"

The robust fiend race man's eyes narrowed. However, he knew it wasn't the time for him to speak either.

Han Fengqiu sneered. "What is Sir Zu saying? Who were the ones we sent to kill? I don't even know who 'Chen Zhou' is. We're all court officials; we need proof when we say things. Otherwise, I could go and write up quite a bit about you, leaving you with more than you knew what to do with."

Zu An gave him an indifferent look and asked, "Do you think I'm here to investigate a case? That I'm here to slowly show you some proof?"

"The Great Zhou I live in is one ruled by law. Could it be that Sir Zu came here not to accuse me of a crime, and instead to punish me?" Han Fengqiu crossed his arms and retorted contemptuously.

"Congratulations, you're correct." Zu An instantly rushed out as soon as he spoke, reappearing in front of Han Fengqiu. His fist smashed outward.

Despite what Han Fengqiu had said, there was no way he could have expected Zu An to really attack, and so decisively at that! He frantically drew his longsword, but he wasn't fast enough. Zu An's palm slammed against the sword, and the blade was pushed back until it pressed against Han Fengqiu's chest.

Pff!

A mouthful of blood gushed out of Han Fengqiu's mouth. He felt as if several of his ribs had broken, and he was blown back like a broken sack.

Zu An frowned. Han Fengqiu's injuries weren't as serious as he had expected them to be. He seemed to be carrying some kind of protective treasure.

Suddenly, the tiger-patterned man charged over, letting out a furious roar.

Zu An immediately understood why tigers were so famous for their roars. He could see visible sound waves rush at him. Even with his current cultivation, his entire body trembled, and he was briefly dazed.

It was clearly the Tiger clan's innate skill, and didn't seem to have too much of a connection to cultivation.

The tiger-patterned man sent his massive fist flying toward Zu An's waist. Judging from the sound barrier-shattering white light around his fist, it could easily crush one's innards. Disturbing the enemy with his roar, then seriously wounding his opponent with his powerful fist, was the fatal combo that had won him victory time and time again.

But shockingly, his opponent woke up earlier than he had expected. Zu An's fist arrived earlier even though it had begun moving later, blocking his fist.

Both sides backed up as a loud boom rang out. Gusts of wind swept out in all directions. All of the flowers, grass, and trees in a circle around them were completely destroyed.

Only then did Zu An discover that he had underestimated his opponent. The Tiger clan expert seemed to have reached the peak of the ninth rank. His body was tough, and together with his innate skills, he was much stronger than cultivators of the same level.

Just then, a draconic cry rang out, and an extremely sharp wave of sword ki stabbed toward Zu An's throat. However, Zu An flicked his finger casually, easily deflecting the flying sword.

The flying sword quickly returned to Han Fengqiu's hands as blood trickled out from his mouth. He got up from the ground and exclaimed, "Mister Zu, have you gone mad?!"

You have successfully trolled Han Fengqiu for +433 +433 +433...

Han Fengqiu felt awful. This kid had clearly been inferior to him when they faced each other in the capital, and yet he couldn't take him down back then. Instead, the young heir had been injured, and people all thought he had lost to Zu An.

The worst part was that the reason he had acted the way he did was out of reservation toward the Yu clan's expert. He hadn't gone all out. As such, he had always felt resentful.

And yet now, not only had he been unable to wash away his past shame, he had instead been wounded in their first exchange! If news of that got out, what kind of self-respect would he have left?

The worst part was that he had suffered badly in both battles because his opponent had played dirty!

Zu An said coldly, "The blood grudge of Chen Zhou's wife and son, as well as the other innocent lives in the village, needs to be repaid with blood!"

Chapter 1114: The Three Slashes

Han Fengqiu's expression changed. He hadn't expected Zu An to have known about the plan.

But the Tiger clan warrior couldn't take it anymore and boasted, "Hahaha! How daring! I was the one who killed them! What are you going to do about it? They were just some ordinary people. The fact that they were able to die to an expert like me is an absolute honor!"

You have successfully trolled Hu Xin for +398 +398 +398...

Zu An was carrying the spice bag Concubine Bai had given him, so he only seemed to be around the sixth rank to outsiders.

Even though Hu Xin was confused as to why Zu An had been able to take his previous blow, he just assumed it was because of some treasure. He didn't take Zu An too seriously. With his irascible nature, how could he tolerate the cockiness of a sixth ranked expert? Of course he couldn't sit still anymore.

"So you're Hu Xin," Zu An said, shooting him a cold look.

For some reason, when he looked into Zu An's deep and emotionless eyes, Hu Xin trembled inwardly. But he quickly flew into a rage out of shame. Why do I have to be scared of this brat? I've really become overcautious for nothing after hanging around human society.

"You've heard of this one before? If you kneel, kowtow, and confess your wrongs, I might just spare your life!" Hu Xin called out.

Zu An said indifferently, "I just wanted to make sure I could tell the ones who were wronged the name of their killer when I bring your head to their graves."

"You're courting death!" Hu Xin erupted into a rage.

You have successfully trolled Hu Xin for +444 +444 +444...

“Brother Hu, please calm down. There’s something strange with this brat.” Han Fengqiu walked forward to stop him and waved his hand.

A large group of masked soldiers suddenly appeared around the courtyard. Based on their austere presence and bloodthirsty gazes, they were clearly well-trained deathsworn soldiers.

“Kill him!” Han Fengqiu ordered. Even though Zu An’s status was special, he couldn’t be left alive now that he knew King Qi’s secret. He’d just raze the place to the ground afterward. Who would know how Zu An died then?

The deathsworn soldiers didn’t show the slightest bit of hesitation. They all drew their blades and charged forward.

Han Fengqiu was quite proud, thinking, Hmph, this is the power of high status. Why is there a need to fight like barbarians in the martial world?

Among the deathsworn soldiers, one was at the seventh rank, three were at the sixth rank, and the rest were all around the fourth and fifth rank. They weren’t inferior to elite imperial guards at all. Furthermore, they excelled at assassination.

Even though the soldiers might not be able to take down Zu An, they could wear him down. Furthermore, Han Fengqiu could use the chance to see what kind of tricks Zu An had. The kid had always been extremely strange, with all sorts of unpredictable methods.

As for the lives of the deathsworn soldiers, Han Fengqiu was someone of high status, so he obviously didn’t care about them. Even if they died, he’d just bring in a new batch.

The deathsworn soldiers rushed at Zu An fearlessly. However, Zu An raised his foot, then took a step forward. An invisible wave of pressure rippled out. The deathsworn soldiers were horrified by the pressure, and couldn’t even move.

Hu Xin had been planning to just watch the amusing scene from afar, but his eyes quickly widened. What? How the hell is this kid only sixth rank?!

The seventh and sixth ranked cultivators began to use their ki, barely recovering their ability to move. They brandished their swords at Zu An’s vitals.

They were deathsworn soldiers, trained in all kinds of killing techniques ever since they were little. They might not win against other cultivators in a friendly one on one competition, but in a battle of life and death, they could all take down cultivators stronger than themselves.

The strength Zu An had displayed was quite shocking, but they weren’t scared. Their eyes flickered with excitement. If they killed such a powerful opponent, their reward would be unimaginable.

Zu An casually waved his hand against the soldiers. The longswords coming at him from several different directions were pulled together by an invisible force. Then, he turned his wrist, twisting the swords into a lump of metal he casually tossed aside.

The deathsworn soldiers clutched their throats in disbelief, gurgling as blood spilled out continuously. Unfortunately, they couldn’t say anything else anymore.

Hu Xin's entire body trembled. He didn't dare to face Zu An with contempt anymore and became serious.

Han Fengqiu's eyes widened. He had fought against Zu An before. Even though Zu An had been strong at the time, if they were to fight seriously, he had believed he could deal with that brat with just a single hand. Even if Zu An had made some progress since then, it should have at least been within the realm of possibility, right?

He thought he had already overestimated Zu An enough. He had been so careful that he even sent out his subordinates first to test him out. But he hadn't expected them to be taken out in an instant! He thought, Am I still asleep?

Zu An looked at Hu Xin and coldly said, "I've heard that the fiend races were supposedly brave, but you only know how to hide behind someone else. You don't seem like a tiger to me, and more like a cowardly turtle."

"You bastard! I'm going to rip you to pieces!" Hu Xin yelled furiously. All of his clothes exploded into shreds.

You have successfully trolled Hu Xin for +882 +882 +882...

Then, he transformed into a ferocious tiger... No, he was simply returning to his original form. His body was about a zhang large. Powerful winds swept around him, making it hard for the ordinary soldiers to even stand still. Some of them were blown back, hitting the walls behind them, and blood spurted out from their mouths.

Dragons emerged from the clouds; tigers emerged from the wind!

Fiend race individuals were often much stronger in their original form. After seeing Zu An's power, Hu Xin didn't dare to show any carelessness. He had revealed his majestic body hoping to see a bit of fear in the other party's eyes.

Unfortunately, Zu An only looked at Hu Xin as if he were looking at a corpse. That made Hu Xin feel terrible. He didn't waste any time with words, roaring and charging at Zu An.

Now that he was in his original form, Hu Xin's roar was several times more powerful than his previous roar. He decided he had to seize the chance while his opponent was distracted to tear Zu An to shreds, and thus eliminate his grudge.

Shockingly, however, Zu An actually seemed completely unfazed before the visible sound waves. While Hu Xin was overcome with shock, a shrill bird cry tore through his mind. He seemed to have seen a strange, large bird.

"AHHHH!" Hu Xin clutched his head, roaring in pain. Just then, a cold glint flashed before his eyes, and he felt his body turn cold.

Two bloody tiger paws had appeared on the ground. Hu Xin was stunned for a long time before finally realizing that they were his own two front paws.

Zu An said indifferently, "That slash was dedicated to Madam Chen."

“Despicable human!” Hu Xin roared. After all, the bodies of the fiend races were tough to begin with, and considering the level it had reached, how could it be so easily hurt by weapons? Just what did he use to instantly cut through my paws?

But he didn’t have time to think about the answer. He turned around, and the air around them exploded audibly as he swung his tail at Zu An.

He had specially trained his tail, making it one of his trump cards. If his attack landed, even a ninth ranked cultivator would be cleaved in two at the waist.

Unleashing his attack angrily, he didn’t hold back at all. As he saw his tail land, a smile began to appear on his face, but his expression froze soon after.

His tail had only struck an afterimage.

He actually avoided my perception? Hu Xin thought. He became vigilant, dodging to one side. Unfortunately, he felt a cold sensation across his bottom. The tail he had trained with for decades had instantly been severed

As the Tai’e Sword dripped with blood in his hands, Zu An said indifferently, “This slash is for that child, Chen Hu.”

At that point, Hu Xin obviously knew Zu An was doing this just to humiliate him. After all, if Zu An had gone after his vitals during either of those times, he would definitely already be dead.

He couldn’t understand why the human was so powerful. Zu An clearly wasn’t at the master rank! But since I have my innate talents as a fiend race cultivator, doesn’t that mean I should be able to win easily?

However, he didn’t have time to think about that anymore. He limped over toward Han Fengqiu with his two hind legs and cried, “Sir Han, save me!”

Chapter 1115: Even You?

Han Fengqiu also felt chills run down his back. He almost blurted out ‘Don’t touch me!’ when he saw the tiger running at him. But he had been a cultivator for many years already, so his will was incredibly tough. He knew it definitely wasn’t the time to panic.

The longsword in his hand turned into a streak of sword ki, flying toward Zu An’s acupoint. If Zu An continued to chase after Hu Xin, he would definitely be severely injured by the attack. If Han Fengqiu managed to save Hu Xin, however, even though the tiger’s front claws had been removed, he was still a cultivator at the peak of the ninth rank. They would still have a good chance if they worked together.

When he saw the incoming sword, Zu An took a step forward. It was almost as if he had warped through spacetime, instantly reappearing in front of Hu Xin. Before the tiger’s disbelieving eyes, Zu An’s sword removed his head.

Zu An looked gloomy as he said, “And that sword was justice for the thirty-six souls who died unjustly.”

Only then did Han Fengqiu’s longsword arrive. Zu An flicked his finger outward, easily deflecting it.

Han Fengqiu called the flying sword back to his side. His complexion was extremely ugly. Never had he expected Zu An's cultivation to be so ridiculously high. Zu An had actually killed an opponent of the same level before his very eyes!

The other deathsworn soldiers also lost all confidence when they saw what had happened. Even though they didn't fear death, that applied against opponents who weren't too far above them. If the difference were as great as heaven and earth, being fearless would be nothing short of suicide. Seeing that Zu An's attention was completely focused on Han Fengqiu, they all quickly fled for their lives.

Han Fengqiu's expression was cold. The flying sword in his hand turned into a cold blur, moving through the crowd. Bursts of blood exploded outward, one after another. All of the deathsworn soldiers had been killed, without exception.

Zu An frowned and remarked, "You'd even kill your own people?"

Han Fengqiu sneered. "Fleeing from battle is a crime punishable by death!"

"You don't seem to be as scared as before, huh?" Zu An commented, surprised. Han Fengqiu was getting bolder and bolder, and he had begun growing bigger at a visible rate.

"What's there to fear? The reason why you were able to take down Hu Xin was mainly because you were able to restrain his natural talents. You must have been using some mental attack. Together with that strange movement skill of yours, Hu Xin ended up becoming terrified, and that was how you killed him," Han Fengqiu said analytically.

He was one of King Qi Manor's guardians, and he had even gone out on a long trip with the heir. King Qi had obviously granted him many treasures. For example, he had the Heart Guard Mirror that had saved him previously, as well as a jade pendant that specialized in dealing with mental attacks. As such, he had calmed down after figuring out how Zu An had won against Hu Xin.

As a powerful swordsman, he had great confidence in his own swordsmanship. Furthermore, his sword was named the Abelios Sword, and it had a demonic nature. He had always subdued that trait because of his misgivings.

But now that it was a matter of life or death, he obviously didn't care as much anymore. The reason why his flying sword had killed the deathsworn soldiers wasn't because he really cared about the rules, but rather to feed the sword more blood. The higher the cultivation of those it killed, the more blood it drank, the greater the sword's power would become.

Zu An clearly realized that the sword was gradually starting to glow red. He said, "I see. To have raised it to this level, you must have fed quite a few lives to it."

He was no longer a newcomer to this world. He had witnessed all kinds of vile and despicable techniques. As such, he was able to quickly guess the essence of the sword.

Han Fengqiu said proudly, "The strong prey on the weak; that's always been the law of the world. The fact that they could become nourishment for this sword is their honor."

“And you, your death will mark the 1000th death tribute for the Abelios Sword. Your cultivation, your blood, will be enough for it to evolve. I won’t have to fear even master ranks in the future, hahaha!” He brandished his sword as he spoke, and endless sword ki rushed toward Zu An.

The Abelios Sword’s demonic nature had a confusing effect, distorting one’s sight and judgment. The sword was hidden within endless shining, flashing swords that hid the sky. He was confident that he could severely wound Zu An with his attack.

The strength Zu An had displayed was way too shocking. Han Fengqiu had thought that Zu An merely had tricks, and that it would be no effort at all for him to take care of this youngster.

And yet, just how much time had passed? Now, he couldn't even see through Zu An. If Zu An were given time to grow, his face would be dragged across the ground as soon as they met in the future. Once he realized that, he didn’t hold back at all. He was going to end all his future worries with this one strike.

But his eyes suddenly widened, because he noticed an even more vicious sword ki descending from above, enveloping his entire body within. His own sword ki withered away like snow before a scorching sun, quickly dissipating.

It was at that moment that he saw Zu An swing his own sword at him.

Instead of being afraid, he felt happy. He might be at a disadvantage in terms of sword ki, but if they were to clash head-on, he would have a huge advantage. The Abelios Sword was a heaven-grade treasure! It had just had its fill of blood, reaching its most powerful state. It could slice through steel as if it were mud!

“You refuse to take the easy path and insist on destroying yourself!” Han Fengqiu cried, releasing a malicious smirk. He swung his sword outward.

Crack!

Han Fengqiu’s smile didn’t even have time to disappear yet, but his eyes were filled with shock as he heard a brittle crack.

He looked at the remaining half of the Abelios Sword in his hands, and then at the sword that had pierced through his body. He was in absolute disbelief.

“Even you are worthy of the sword?” Zu An remarked as he slowly withdrew the Tai’e Sword.

Han Fengqiu was furious and panicky. Blood gushed out of his mouth, and he collapsed to the ground in ruin. Even though the sword hadn’t taken his life, it had crippled most of his cultivation. All that was left was only enough to prevent him from dying from such a serious wound.

“But how is this possible? Don’t tell me your sword is immortal-grade?” he exclaimed as he stared at the ordinary-looking longsword in Zu An’s hands. Never could he have expected that his own Abelios Sword would actually be destroyed!

“I’m the one asking the questions, and you only need to answer,” Zu An said, dismissing the question. He asked, “Where is Zhao Zhi?”

Han Fengqiu looked away, expressing his stance with silence. Zu An sneered. "Hm? It seems you're still being stubborn. Do you think I don't know how to torture people?"

"I've already lost, and my cultivation has been completely crippled. Just kill me already; why is there a need for so many words?" Han Fengqiu retorted. He already knew he was dead, so there was no point in fearing death.

Zu An said indifferently, "You should know that many things in this world are more terrifying than death." He took out the Tai'e Sword and ran it across his fingers as he spoke.

Han Fengqiu's eyes twitched, but he still braced himself and asked, "Are you thinking of cutting off my fingers? I'm already a cripple anyway; what difference is there whether I have fingers or not? Just cut them off then! Even if you chop them off one by one, I won't even frown!"

"Cutting them off one by one? You wish!" Zu An laughed. "In my hometown, there was a story about an evil tyrant. When he passed a child, he would smack them in the ear, and when he saw an earthworm, he would cut it in half lengthwise. I've always been curious about his vertical cutting method. Why don't we test it out on your fingers? Don't worry, after your ten fingers, you still have your ten toes. I can slowly test them out one by one and see how long you'll last."

He raised Han Fengqiu's finger vertically, then lightly dragged the blade along the line where he was going to cut.

Han Fengqiu really was horrified now. He could just endure the momentary pain if his fingers were removed. But if his fingers were to be cut vertically, just the thought alone was painful.

He also knew he could endure the tremendous pain through sheer willpower for a few fingers, but he would definitely break down toward the end. If he still had to talk after all of that, why would he have had to go through all of that pain?

He could only accept his fate and say with a sigh, "You win. I'll speak."

Zu An gave him an indifferent look, but didn't remove the sword. Han Fengqiu could only quickly say, "Since the situation is already over, the young heir has already gone back."

"He left so early?" Zu An asked. He couldn't fully believe it.

"Cloudcenter's bitter cold can't compare to the capital's liveliness. Furthermore, this place is full of dangers, so the young heir obviously didn't wish to stay here much longer," Han Fengqiu replied.

"Your side felt that things were over just because Jian Taiding died and the Pegasus Merchant Group was investigated?" Zu An exclaimed with a frown. "What are you all really plotting?!"

Chapter 1116: For Them

Han Fengqiu hesitated a bit, but Zu An's sword began pressing downward.

How sharp was the Tai'e Sword? Han Fengqiu's finger was instantly cut open, and blood spurted everywhere.

“Stop, stop, stop! I’ll talk!” Han Fengqiu quickly exclaimed. This guy really is cutting my finger vertically! Sensing how ruthless Zu An was, he didn’t dare to hold back at all and explained, “King Qi was working with Jian Yanyou before, but Jian Yanyou was too cowardly. We noticed that his younger brother Jian Taiding had greater ambitions, so we supported his rise to power.

“But Jian Taiding rose up faster than we expected, so we decided to just work with him. Even so, once he became the acting Commander-in-Chief, he became cocky and defensive toward the king. He wasn’t willing to leave all of his bargaining chips with us anymore. He secretly roped in King Yan and tried to use his strength to keep us in check.

“The king obviously wouldn’t allow something like that to happen. That’s why he sent the young heir here to deal with things.

“We changed the account book and led you to discover it. Then, we were going to use the power of the Imperial Envoy to investigate Zuo Su and Jian Taiding, thus smoothly eliminating our two greatest stumbling blocks.”

...

Zu An frowned and remarked, “That Zhao Zhi was actually this skilled?”

They had carried out such an insane series of schemes in Cloudcenter Commandery. If not because he had just happened to discover the truth, he might just have been completely fooled.

Meanwhile, even though Zhao Zhi had some talent in terms of cultivation aptitude, he was too egotistical and domineering. He hadn’t seemed like the type to create such a scheme. If the plan really was his work, Zu An would definitely feel a need to be more guarded against him.

“This was the plan the King Manor’s aides and advisors came up with together after discussing things with each other, and the king approved it. The heir’s only purpose here was his identity, allowing us to effectively gather the forces we need,” Han Fengqiu continued. He stared at the sword edge pressing against his fingertip, really scared that Zu An might cut his finger open vertically out of anger.

Zu An said, “You’ve eliminated Jian Taiding and Zuo Su, but Jian Yanyou has returned. Doesn’t that mean everything is back to normal?” Even though he knew Jian Yanyou was dead, that didn’t mean others did.

Han Fengqiu replied, “In the two years since Jian Yanyou has disappeared, almost all of his trusted aides have been eliminated. Even though he’s returned, he’s completely cut off from support. He’s even seriously injured right now, and his cultivation is far weaker than when he was at his strongest, making him even less of a threat.

“But he’s still the duke. Too many things have happened recently in Cloudcenter Commandery too, which is why we’re allowing him to live a bit longer. Once your Imperial Envoy leaves Cloudcenter Commandery and the commotion passes, we’ll then secretly deal with him. We’ll eventually announce to the world that he passed away from his injuries. There won’t be too great of a commotion then.”

Zu An’s eyes widened when he heard that, realizing that Yu Yanluo had come up with the same plan. The way people with authority thought was surprisingly similar. As he had that thought, however, the sword in his hand pressed down.

“Ahhhh!” Han Fengqiu’s miserable scream tore through the air. He looked at the two halves of his finger that had been sliced vertically, exclaiming in pain and fear, “What are you doing?!”

You have successfully trolled Han Fengqiu for +777 +777 +777...

Zu An said indifferently, “It’s your fault for not being honest. You only reply when I ask you something, and I don’t have the patience to play this kind of game. Tell me everything you know. My sword slices through steel like butter, so I’m sure it didn’t hurt that much when I cut down on your finger just now. I can switch to a dull blade to slowly hack away at your finger if you prefer that instead.”

“You’re an absolute demon!” Han Fengqiu wanted to curse again, but he was terrified when he met Zu An’s gaze. He quickly said, “Once Jian Taiding and Zuo Su were taken down, we would have sent in our own men to take charge. The leader would naturally be Pei Shao. The Pei clan and King Qi Manor’s relations run deep. One of the major reasons the young heir came here was to become bound to them in marriage.

“The king didn’t wish to sacrifice the young heir’s happiness either, agreeing to allow him to see her for himself and decide if he wanted to be married to the Pei clan. The young heir was a bit unwilling at first, but when he saw the Pei clan’s young miss, his soul almost left his body. Unfortunately, the Pei clan’s young miss remained cold and indifferent. The young heir felt that the young miss was bashful because their marriage hadn’t been decided yet, so that was why he was in such a rush to leave. He wants to quickly return and settle the marriage, because then, he can have a proper wedding with Miss Pei.”

Zu An was furious. This Zhao Zhi bastard thinks he can do whatever he wants!

Faced with Zu An’s unkind expression, Han Fengqiu was worried that another one of his fingers would be cleaved down the middle. He quickly continued, “Apart from Pei Shao, the Martial Affairs Manor’s Yu Xuansu is also one of our people. He clashed greatly against Yu Xuanqing within the clan. Yu Xuanqing didn’t know what was good for him and decided to side completely with Jian Taiding. The king is currently supporting Yu Xuansu in taking his place.

“With those two officials planted among the local officials and Military Affairs Manor, and so many of the lower officials being followers of the king, taking control of Cloudcenter Commandery from then on wouldn’t be too difficult at all.”

...

Zu An thought back to when he had been at the Pei clan. I think Manman mentioned that her stepmother was someone from the Yu clan.

Back then, Yu Xuansu had even made several appearances in Pei Manor. Zu An had only thought that he was there to see his daughter and hadn’t paid too much attention to it. Now, it seemed that all of them had been colluding together.

His gaze landed on Hu Xin and he asked, “Then what’s going on with the Tiger race?” He was more familiar with Kong Qing’s group. This fellow hadn’t appeared on Kong Qing’s side before.

Han Fengqiu shivered. Fearing that Zu An would start cutting again, he hurriedly replied, “We relied on the Jian clan and the fiend races to keep the business going. The Jian clan and Peacock King race have good relations. In order to fully grasp those channels, my king wanted to bypass the Peacock King race.

It just so happened that the fiend races weren't too inflexible. The Tiger race has never been too happy under the Peacock King race's rule and hoped to take their place, so our two sides clicked together easily. The Tiger race will help the king establish a new network of exchange with the fiend races, while the king will help them rise up in status."

"That's why so many prohibited goods have gone to the fiend races?" Zu An sneered. "For the sake of his ambitions, King Qi actually disregarded the safety of the human race. He isn't worthy of his reputation."

Han Fengqiu felt some hesitation, but in the end, he still said, "The world isn't so black and white. Even the higher-ups in the church only make decisions based on their own benefit. Isn't Yu Yanluo, that woman you're close to, also doing business with and aligned with the fiend races? Even the former emperor did similar things in the past."

"What did the former emperor do?" Zu An asked with a frown. Such behind-the-scenes stories weren't recorded in the information archives. He could only hear them from elders who had experienced those times.

Han Fengqiu replied, "I don't know too much about the exact details either, but I previously heard the king mention that the reason the former emperor rose up to the throne was through the help of the fiend races."

Zu An was shocked. The information he had come into contact with, both from the court and common people, all described how several generations of emperors had led the human race in a great battle against the fiend races. Only after they had defeated the fiend races and drove them into the desolate borderlands was the human race able to live in peace.

The people worshiped those generations of emperors as saints, and yet now, it seemed that hidden behind their glorious and imposing figures was an untouchable darkness.

Han Fengqiu carefully gave Zu An a look. He didn't dare to stop and continued to tell him what he knew. "King Yan's subordinate Zhang Che vanished from this side of the world, but we've recently discovered that he's managed to obtain an elder position in the Devil Sect. He even established the Pegasus Merchant Company, providing King Yan with monetary support."

Zu An thought to himself, No wonder when I entered the Pegasus Merchant Group, I saw the Devil Sect's Solitary Eight among them. Qiu Honglei had also led him away from his investigation of the Pegasus Merchant Group several times. However, that silly girl had been completely fooled by King Yan and had had no idea.

"They wanted to take the place of the Zhenyuan Merchant Group this time, to completely seize trade channels with the fiend races. There's obviously no way we would permit something like that to happen. The king's strategies are wonderful and divine. He first sent Pink as a spy, placing her in the Pegasus Merchant Group's Jasper Lane. That way, she would be able to easily lead the Imperial Envoy to King Yan's forces with just a bit of guidance."

...

After listening to all that, Zu An was even starting to admire King Qi a bit. His plans and strategies had taken all of Cloudcenter Commandery's powers into account.

Han Fengqiu said to test the waters, "I've already told you everything I was supposed to tell you about. Can you let me go now?"

At first, he still had the courage to face death. But after so much time had passed, he suddenly didn't really want to die anymore. Even though his cultivation had been crippled, living was still better than dying.

Zu An said seriously, "Sincerely apologize to Chen Zhou's wife and son, and beg for their forgiveness. Then, I'll let you go."

They hadn't had time to bury anyone else in the village yet. Only the mother and son had graves at that moment.

Han Fengqiu was overjoyed, exclaiming, "Yes, yes, yes! I'll definitely apologize sincerely. Even though they didn't die at my hands, I still carry some responsibility."

Zu An could tell that Han Fengqiu was deflecting blame, but he didn't say anything about it.

...

Zu An quickly brought Hu Xin's head and Han Fengqiu back to the Chen family's tomb on the city's outskirts. He quietly placed Hu Xin's head in front of the tomb. Then, he lit three sticks of incense and kowtowed.

Even though he had endless thoughts running through his mind, he didn't say anything. Anything he said at that point would be meaningless.

Seeing how serious Zu An was, Han Fengqiu felt a bit unhappy. These are just some ant-like peasants. Do you have to be that serious toward them?

But for the sake of survival, he didn't dare to reveal any of his real thoughts. Instead, he apologized while weeping bitter tears. However, Zu An didn't show any reaction. Han Fengqiu clenched his teeth, then even knelt down and knocked his head against the tombstone.

Inside, he was angry. He was definitely going to repay the humiliation he had experienced today a hundredfold. Even though his cultivation had been crippled, he could slowly absorb the blood of cultivators through the Abelios Sword to cultivate again. With enough time, it wouldn't even be an impossibility for him to recover his strength.

Seeing that Han Fengqiu's head was even turning red from pounding against the stone, Zu An nodded slightly, seemingly very satisfied with the display.

Han Fengqiu was elated. He thought to himself that he had finally made it through his final trial. This kid seems vicious, but he's nothing more than a soft-hearted idealist.

He was about to stand up when a flash of light suddenly appeared before his eyes. Then, a head flew into the sky.

"You..." Han Fengqiu was both shocked and furious, looking as if he were cursing Zu An for not keeping his word.

Zu An gently wiped away the blood from his blade, seemingly as if he were looking down on it for being filthy. While wiping his blade, he calmly said, "Whether or not you're forgiven will depend on the mother and son. My job is merely to send you to them."

Chapter 1117: The Fate of the Commandery

Zu An had been wondering whether to hand Han Fengqiu to Sang Hong as proof. But now that he was in front of the grave of Chen Zhou's wife and son, and he thought about all the lives of the villagers that had been lost, he decisively gave up on that thought.

He didn't think he had the right to decide whether the perpetrators deserved to be forgiven or not. All he could do was to send the killers over and let the victims decide for themselves in the afterlife.

As for dealing with King Qi, having Han Fengqiu as proof wouldn't make much of a difference compared to not having him.

...

After paying his respects, Zu An returned to the temporary official residence. When he got back, he saw that the Armed Escort had already made quite a few arrests.

Sang Hong was nervously busying himself with tasks. He had to interrogate the criminals, look over the account book, and do several other things.

Zu An finally found a chance to talk to him. He asked, "Respected uncle, is there something wrong with the account book we got?"

"There are some parts that do not line up. King Qi's forces have definitely done some things to cover up the truth all this time, but I am confident that after some careful investigation, we'll be able to quickly find out the truth." A smile appeared on Sang Hong's face as he continued, "King Qi is the one who will be trying to get himself out of trouble this time. Right, I heard that a battle took place in a courtyard inside the city and that quite a few deathsworn soldiers passed away."

Zu An naturally knew what he was referring to. He nodded and replied, "There were some who had to pay the price for the slaughter of the innocent."

Sang Hong left it at that, saying, "I will entrust the investigation to the officials. Since they were deathsworn soldiers, it was probably a battle for revenge in the martial world. The case will probably be wrapped up quickly."

Zu An felt warm inside. He knew that Sang Hong was helping him deal with the aftermath. He said, "Thank you, respected uncle."

"This matter has nothing to do with you; why are you thanking me?" Sang Hong had a slight smile on his face as he replied.

...

The two of them discussed some more details regarding King Qi's case. Then, Sang Hong continued his investigation of the related personnel, while Zu An used some free time to visit Pei Manor.

When it came to the Pei clan's guards and building layout, they no longer posed any threat to him. He quickly arrived at Pei Mianman's small courtyard, and bumped into Hong Zao in front. He pinched her chubby cheeks, then gave her some snacks he brought.

In the past, Hong Zao's eyes would always light up when she saw the snacks, and she would even call Zu An 'young master' sweetly, but this time, she instead harrumphed. She turned around and went back to doing what she was doing, as if she hadn't even seen him.

Zu An was confused. When he went upstairs, he saw a wonderful figure playing the zither by the window. Her dress was fiery red, making her seem even more stunning. Her waist and back were perfectly straight, and her posture was dignified and relaxed.

But unlike other distinguished daughters, as if to ease the burden on her body, she was resting her heavy chest on the table. Her curvaceous chest was absolutely alarming; anyone who saw it wouldn't be able to look away.

Zu An didn't bother her. He calmly listened to the rest of the piece, then said in praise, "The music is beautiful; the person even more so."

"Oh? Our young master Zu probably uses these sweet words to fool other girls, right?" Pei Mianman had already known of Zu An's arrival for some time. Her fingers gently moved across the strings and she didn't even turn around.

Zu An knew what was going on when he heard her tone. He moved over and sat down next to her, asking with a smile, "What, are you jealous?" No wonder Hong Zao had given him the cold shoulder too. He had been so busy recently that he forgot he had been caught with Tang Tian'er wrapped around his arm previously.

"How could I dare? You have so many beauties at your side. If I were jealous of all of them, wouldn't I die from jealousy?" Pei Mianman replied. However, she still didn't look at him and instead seemed to be focused on playing the zither.

Zu An said, "I really was investigating a case last time. Only through Lady Tang did I learn that the owners of Jasper Lane were actually the Pegasus Merchant Group. So, we then went to investigate the Pegasus Merchant Group. Then, we discovered that the Pegasus Merchant Group was related to the Devil Sect and King Yan... After that, the deeper we went, the more complicated things turned out to be. It was all actually a scheme King Qi created..."

Pei Mianman harrumphed when she heard him mention Tang Tian'er, but as she listened, her attention quickly shifted. When she heard everything that had happened, her little mouth was left wide open. How could she still remember her slight jealousy? She exclaimed, "I didn't expect King Yan and the Devil Sect to actually be working together! King Qi really has rigorous schemes and deep foresight, to have played all of us."

Zu An sighed and said, "What I'm more worried about right now is you. One of the representative King Qi chose for Cloudcenter Commandery is your father, but the emperor is determined to get rid of King

Qi. Furthermore, the Imperial Envoy has already gathered enough proof. King Qi likely doesn't have many good days left, and at that time, your father will be involved too."

Pei Mianman harrumphed. "Since he likes to kiss up, he can just go down with the rest of them."

Zu An advised her, "He is still your father. And if he's punished, the blame will definitely carry over to you."

"He's only my father in name. Has he ever treated me like his own daughter all these years? Furthermore, how did he treat my mother back then?" Pei Mianman's expression was cold. She definitely carried great bitterness inside.

Zu An obviously knew what kind of a childhood Pei Mianman had gone through. It was only because she had become more and more beautiful as she grew up that the Pei clan had taken interest in her again, wishing to use her for marriage. That was why she had begun to be treated a little bit better.

But all they had done was give her a sickly maid and the manor's most ordinary and shabbiest courtyard. Forget about the treatment of a city lord's distinguished daughter, even an ordinary family's young miss might have been treated far better than that.

"I don't care whether he lives or dies, but I'm scared that something will happen to you," Zu An said as he held her hand.

The jealousy Pei Mianman had felt was already completely gone when she felt his concern. She leaned into his embrace naturally, saying, "Based on what you told me, King Qi has also chosen Yu Xuansu as a representative. He's my stepmother's father. I understand that woman's nature well. With that level of relationship, my father wouldn't be able to back out even if he wanted to.

"I know you're doing this for me, but if we let him know, it will instead put you in a dangerous position. After all, that father and daughter pair, as well as King Qi, have definitely made precautions. They might even act against you."

Zu An chuckled and said, "People say a woman is born to leave her family. It seems that really is the case. My Big Manman cares more about her lover after all."

"You really are a rascal!" Pei Mianman exclaimed, biting down on his shoulder in annoyance.

Hong Zao covered her ears when she heard laughing and teasing upstairs. She mumbled, "The young miss really doesn't have a moral backbone! How can she get along with the young master again so quickly?"

She turned her eyes toward the snacks Zu An had brought and couldn't help but swallow her saliva. She said to herself, "Hmph, this isn't my fault anymore! If even the young miss has forgiven the young master, what can a maid like me do?"

Afterward, the burden she had carried seemed to disappear. She quickly opened up the case and began to gorge herself, exclaiming, "Mmm, it tastes so good! Young master is the best!"

...

Meanwhile, after Zu An and Pei Mianman exchanged their affection, he still went to see Pei Shao in the end.

Even though Pei Mianman hadn't said it outright, Zu An knew that she still cared about her family. Even if they couldn't stop Pei Shao's ambitions, they had to prevent him from getting on the same war chariot as King Qi.

"Sir Zu, which wind carried you here today?" Pei Shao asked, a bit surprised to see Zu An. The most important part was that Zu An hadn't come through the main gate and hadn't contacted him ahead of time. It was a completely abrupt visit. He said, "Servants, bring in some tea."

"There's no need. I have some things I wish to discuss with the city lord in private," Zu An said, stopping him.

"May I ask what kind of guidance Sir Zu has for me?" Pei Shao could tell that Zu An didn't want anyone else present. He couldn't help but feel shocked. This guy is not here to assassinate me, is he?

He had heard quite a few rumors about this young man recently. He didn't have any confidence in defeating Zu An one on one.

"City Lord should have already heard that many people were arrested today, I believe?" Zu An asked, getting straight to the point.

"Indeed. But Sir Sang has maintained secrecy about the entire matter, so I do not know what kind of crime these officials have committed," Pei Shao replied.

"Does the city lord really not know, or are you pretending not to know?" Zu An asked with an ambiguous smile.

Pei Shao's expression changed. He exclaimed, "What is Sir Zu trying to say?!"

Zu An chuckled and remarked, "I heard that Sir City Lord has been planning to be joined to King Qi in marriage."

Pei Shao said with an embarrassed chuckle, "Sir Zu must be joking. What kind of a person is King Qi's heir? We would not dare to think so highly of ourselves."

Seeing that he was still playing dumb at that point, Zu An sneered. "Sir City Lord is a smart person; you should be able to guess what the capture of those people signifies. With the Pei clan's status and background, you can choose to stand on the sidelines and watch first before you make your decision. If you join hands with someone too early and something really does end up happening, it will be too late to state your innocence then."

Pei Shao's expression changed several times. He had already been losing confidence and having second thoughts, but then he heard that everyone who had been arrested had something to do with King Qi. When he heard what Zu An said, he immediately thought of a potential regret. He asked grimly, "Why is Sir Zu telling me these things? Are you... acting as a messenger for someone?"

Zu An chuckled and replied, "City Lord thinks too highly of yourself. His majesty is all powerful; I fear he wouldn't have the time to show the city lord such consideration."

Pei Shao's expression was unpleasant, but he knew what Zu An said was the truth.

Zu An sighed and said, "It's mainly because Miss Pei helped me out a lot back in Brightmoon City, so I owe her a favor. City Lord is a smart person, so I'll leave the ultimate choice to you." He didn't wait for a reply and disappeared through the window.

Pei Shao quickly called over a servant, saying, "Call over the madam and contact my father-in-law. Tell them there is something urgent to discuss!" However, just as the servant was about to leave, Pei Shao instead called him back and said, "Forget it; there is no need to call them."

Pei Shao's subordinate looked at him with a dumbstruck expression. He remained silent for a while, then ordered, "Have the manor's people postpone purchasing the dowry and tell them to wait for further orders."

...

Zu An paid close attention to the Pei Manor's activities. When he learned that Pei Shao had delayed the dowry purchase and seemed to have even fought with the madam over it, he sighed in relief. He knew what he had done had worked.

Pei Mianman felt a huge pressure disappear from her chest when she learned she wouldn't have to marry King Qi's heir anymore. She was very grateful toward Zu An and fully expressed it.

Unfortunately, Hong Zao alone had to listen to their noise day after day and couldn't sleep. She always had huge black rings around her eyes then.

...

After a few days of blissful life, the Vice Magistrate Xu Yu suddenly informed all of Cloudcenter Commandery's higher officials that something related to the very fate of Cloudcenter Commandery needed to be discussed.

Zu An and Sang Hong were completely baffled. They didn't know what had happened even after checking their information sources. But judging from how grave Xu Yu sounded, they could only brace themselves and accept the invitation.

Chapter 1118: Trouble

However, the two of them weren't completely unprepared. They told Pei You to remain vigilant with the Armed Escort Army, and they instructed Gao Ying to immediately bring over his men if something strange happened.

The two of them arrived at the Civil Affairs Manor. Because Zuo Su had died, the various affairs of the place were being managed by Vice Magistrate Xu Yu instead.

Once inside the manor, Zu An discovered that most of Cloudcenter Commandery's higher level figures had arrived. But compared to the welcoming banquet when the Imperial Envoy had first arrived, there were now much fewer people in attendance.

It was commonly known that the duke 'Jian Yanyou' was resting from his serious injuries. He naturally didn't make an appearance.

Magistrate Zuo Su had died. Governing Supervisor Yu Xuanqing had been involved in the illegal smuggling between Jian Taiding and the fiend races, so he had been locked up by Sang Hong a few days prior.

The Martial Affairs Manor wasn't much better off either. Jian Taiding was dead, so his core supporters and trusted aides had all lost their former privileges. Surprisingly, not even the Martial Affairs Manor's Yu Xuansu had come.

Zu An frowned. He thought to himself, Is it because everyone Sang Hong arrested was related to King Qi, so they didn't dare to come anymore?

But this was clearly something arranged by Xu Yu!

The only other person he was acquainted with who was present, apart from Xu Yu, was City Lord Pei Shao.

"City Lord Pei seems to have grown thin since the last time I saw you," Zu An said as he walked over with a smile.

Pei Shao thought to himself, That's thanks to what you told me before. I haven't been able to sleep well at all these days and I'm constantly anxious.

But he was an old fox in politics, so he looked completely natural on the outside. He said, "Too many things have happened in Cloudcenter Commandery recently, so I have been quite preoccupied with governmental affairs. Sir Zu seems to be glowing with health."

"Perhaps my mood has been rather good recently," Zu An replied. He thought to himself, I've had Pei Mianman's warm company every night, so how can my mood not be good?

For some reason, Pei Shao couldn't help but feel that he was losing out on a lot whenever he looked at Zu An. But he couldn't figure out just how even after thinking about it, so he could only conclude that he was overthinking things.

Chatting with Zu An just felt awkward somehow, though. As such, after saying a few more things, he returned to his own circle. As he heard the flattery of his surrounding colleagues, he felt a bit better again.

Zu An quietly sized up everyone around him. Because so many members of Cloudcenter Commandery had been purged recently, many new people had come in to take their places. Some of them were people he had promoted with the identity of Jian Yanyou, while many others had been promoted by Xu Yu.

"That fella didn't do a thing, and yet he ended up gaining the most benefits in the end," Zu An remarked, sighing to himself.

Suddenly, exclamations of alarm filled the air. People all stopped chatting and looked toward the entrance. Shock and eagerness flickered in their eyes. Zu An turned around and saw Yu Yanluo slowly walk in.

She was wearing a silver dress, with a fiery red fur coat draped over her shoulders. It made her seem even more glamorous than usual. Her brows were a beautiful umber-black, and her complexion was

pink. Her long and slender neck made her look elegant and refined. Her gracefully tied hair bun further added a hint of mature style.

Those present were all high-level figures of Cloudcenter's officialdom. They were all experienced individuals, and their cultivations weren't low. In theory, their willpower should have been quite firm. But when they saw the dazzling Yu Yanluo, many of them secretly gulped down their saliva. Even though they were all trying to hide it, it was as clear as day to those with high cultivations.

Yu Yanluo was already used to such scenes. She naturally greeted all of the officials present. For someone like her, she didn't need to fawn over people. Just a faint smile was enough to make them feel incredibly refreshed.

Zu An sighed. The position of number one beauty was no joke! Even without any techniques, beauty alone would invite packs of ravenous wolves.

Yu Yanluo treated everyone else with simple courtesy. Only when she faced Zu An did she display a hint of a truly gentle and soft smile. But there were too many people present, so she felt a bit guilty, not daring to let anyone know about their true relationship. She quickly pulled back her gaze.

Maids quickly arrived with tea and refreshments. The officials began to chat within their own circles of three to four people.

Sang Hong and Xu Yu had many officials around them. After all, one was the Imperial Envoy, while the other had become the head of the Civil Affairs Manor. But even the two of them added together couldn't compare to the number of people surrounding Yu Yanluo. Those people were all doing their best to leave their best impression within the shortest amount of time possible.

"Not many things in this world are so beautiful. An evening autumn breeze across the river, and madam's irresistible smile."

"Stars that fill the skies? You are the only one I see."

"I want you to know that I know just how busy you are, so madam only needs to hear the first three words of this sentence."

...

Zu An was completely stupefied. Aren't these guys simping way too much?

For better or for worse, you're all at least important court officials! How can you all be so unreliable?

But that was where Zu An was wrong. This world was quite open-minded, and there were quite a few who openly expressed their feelings.

Furthermore, these people wouldn't have many chances to meet Yu Yanluo to begin with. They obviously couldn't meet with her as often as Zu An did and gain some degree of immunity to her charms.

Those present all had some tea and refreshments. Seeing that things were getting more and more ridiculous, Xu Yu couldn't keep watching anymore either. He coughed and indicated that the meeting was going to start. The others thus began to gradually calm down.

Then, Xu Yu began to explain everything that had happened in Cloudcenter Commandery recently, saying that they were in for troubled times. Thus, they all had to abandon the past and push forward to overcome hardships and difficulties.

The other officials naturally voiced their agreement. But Zu An frowned instead. You called over everyone on such short notice just to tell us this?

Sure enough, Sang Hong said in a deep voice, "Sir called us over to discuss something related to the very fate of Cloudcenter Commandery. It cannot just be this, can it?"

He had a lot of work to do to verify the contents of the account book from the toy wooden sword. He wasn't in the mood to listen to such superfluous words.

Xu Yu thus said, "There is indeed another important thing."

Those present all knew that the most important moment had come. They all straightened up in their seats as Xu Yu said slowly, "We all know that all of the things that have happened thus far have been related to the fiend races. There are many members of Cloudcenter Commandery's higher court who have been influenced by the fiend races.

"Everyone should know about the grudge between the humans and the fiend races. They have slaughtered far too many of our compatriots.

"Normally speaking, the fiend races are immediately cursed at and beaten if they come over to our human side of the world. That is why I have always been curious as to why the fiend races seem to have become so powerful, that they could permeate so deeply into Cloudcenter Commandery's officialdom."

Those present looked at each other in dismay when they heard that. They didn't know what Xu Yu was really getting at. Was he going to carry out another great cleansing?

Xu Yu continued, "You might all think that I am merely giving advice in hindsight, but I have already suspected that something was wrong for many years, and I have already looked into this matter before. But each time, the trail of clues always ended for various reasons. Only after recent discoveries did I finally understand where the problems lay."

Some officials couldn't take it anymore, calling out "Sir Xu, please don't keep us in suspense anymore. What did you find out? Please tell us!"

Xu Yu's eyes swept across the room. This time, he slowly asked, "Have you noticed that every single case related to the fiend races seems to have the Yu clan's shadow behind it?"

The crowd erupted into an uproar when they heard that. Zu An was also shocked. Don't tell me the purpose of this meeting is to deal with the Yu clan? Where does this guy get his confidence from?

Sang Hong also frowned. He couldn't really figure out what Xu Yu's intentions were. The Imperial Envoy had come on orders from the emperor to deal with the Yu clan, but they didn't have a great way of completing that task at the moment. Who was Xu Yu representing?

Yu Yanluo's expression remained calm. She didn't even have to speak up. There were already many of her admirers speaking up in her place.

"It was Yu Xuanqing and Yu Xuantao who were extremely daring. They were the ones who colluded with the fiend races!"

"Exactly! What does it have to do with Madam Yu?"

"Madam Yu is a goddess-like existence; why would she take part in this filthy affair?"

...

Suddenly, Xu Yu's cold voice echoed through the place. He called out, "What if she is a fiend race individual herself?"

Chapter 1119: An Old Story

The room fell silent when Xu Yu spoke out. Then, refutations suddenly erupted from the crowd.

"That's impossible! How can Madam Yu be a fiend race individual?!"

"Exactly! The fiend races are all ugly and vicious. Madam Yu is so beautiful, how can she possibly be one of them?"

"Sir Xu, is there a mistake here?!"

...

Those present were worried that they might never be able to leave Madam Yu with a good impression. How could they let go of such a great chance?

Zu An's brows furrowed deeply. He also had some suspicions toward Yu Yanluo's identity. After all, judging from their interactions, her body really did seem to be a bit different from those of ordinary people.

Xu Yu was definitely not the kind of person who would speak blindly without thinking. Since he had said that, he most likely had evidence to back up his claim. Madam Yu could be in danger today.

Sure enough, no matter how the others spoke up in indignation, Xu Yu remained calm throughout it all. After they all clamored for a bit, they gradually realized that something wasn't right. They began to quiet down.

Sang Hong cleared his throat and said, "Sir Xu, the Yu clan is a great clan that has played a critical role for our Great Zhou Dynasty. Madam Yu is the clan leader. She is not someone who can be randomly accused."

When it came to him personally, he shouldered the emperor's mission first and foremost. He would be more than happy to see something happen to the Yu clan. But if Xu Yu didn't have proof and was just recklessly pointing fingers, he wouldn't mind stepping forward to uphold justice.

Sang Hong's status was different, so Xu Yu couldn't disregard him like the others. He finally spoke up and said, "I'm not saying that there is something wrong with the Yu clan, of course, but rather saying that there is something wrong with Madam Yu specifically."

“According to what I know, she isn’t a human, but rather from the fiend races’ Snake race. Not only that, she’s from the Snake race’s King race, a Medusa!”

“Medusa!”

The others gasped when they heard that name.

There were many branches within the Snake race, with every single community having their own king. The different communities refused to bow down to each other, so battles constantly took place year-round. Every few generations, however, the Snake race would produce a Medusa that would reign over all others, and the entire Snake race would serve her sincerely.

It was rumored that the Medusa was incredibly toxic. A single drop of her blood would be enough to turn an entire prairie into a desert. She would also take lives without a second thought, being vicious and merciless. Wherever she went, all that would follow was calamity and turmoil. Of course, her most distinctive feature was that wherever she looked, she could turn all living things into lifeless sculptures.

...

All the officials’ expressions changed as they recalled the legends of the Medusa.

Medusas had especially vicious poison. However, they all possessed incomparable beauty. Considering Yu Yanluo’s ridiculous beauty, quite a few people were starting to waver.

Zu An thought back to the Great Snowy Mountain cave; when Uncle Ming attacked him, he seemed to have frozen for a moment for some reason. That was why he had obtained the chance to use the Imperial Edict. At the time, he had sensed that Yu Yanluo’s aura had changed a bit. Could that be her natural Medusa skill?

But as a transmigrator, he didn’t have a deeply ingrained fear toward the Medusas like the natives of this world. Let alone the fact that Yu Yanluo was his friend; there was no way he would become hostile because of her real identity. He had more than a few fiends and demons he was close to.

As such, he spoke up and said, “Sir Xu, from what I know, Madam Yu had a nickname in her earlier years; she was the capital’s number one beauty. She made a trip to the capital in her earlier years and captured the hearts of many princes and nobles. Back then, many heroes gathered in the capital, and all of them admired her. His majesty was also one of them.”

Yu Yanluo’s expression had been turning pale, but when she heard those words, a light blush appeared on her face. Those words, when spoken by anyone else, wouldn’t produce the slightest reaction in her; and yet when Zu An said them, she couldn’t help but become embarrassed.

Zu An continued, “Back then, not even all of those powerful and capable individuals thought that Madam Yu was a fiend race individual, not even his majesty, and yet Sir Xu has noticed something? It is really hard to believe.” Even though he didn’t say it directly, his words implied complete disdain.

The others seemed to have woken up from their daze. They all voiced their agreement. “Exactly! The capital is a place filled with talented individuals. Even they didn’t notice anything! Madam Yu is clearly innocent.”

Xu Yu gave Zu An a deep look and replied, "This humble official obviously wouldn't dare to place myself on equal footing with his majesty. However, according to my investigation, the Medusa bloodline doesn't immediately show itself, and it instead manifests at a certain age. Madam Yu was still young when she arrived at the capital, so her blood hadn't awakened yet. It's natural that those in the capital didn't sense anything."

Zu An harrumphed and said, "But Madam Yu even paid the capital a trip not too long ago, and she even met with his majesty. She's met many individuals from powerful clans as well. Why did they not sense anything then either?"

Xu Yu said with a serious voice, "Once it awakens, the growth of the Medusa bloodline is rapid. Once Madam Yu's cultivation became profound, she naturally gained a way to seal off the bloodline so no outsiders could notice anything."

Zu An roared with laughter and replied, "Isn't what Sir Xu is saying taking things a bit too far? If you aren't even willing to consider the other side, what's the point of discussing anything?"

Many fans of Yu Yanluo voiced their agreement. However, they weren't as confident and loud as before.

Those present weren't stupid; they already knew that Xu Yu had gathered everyone today precisely to act against Yu Yanluo. They were worried that they might be dragged into a mess too, so they were starting to set their own boundaries.

At the same time, Xu Yu's trusted aides obviously spoke out for Xu Yu. As time went on, both sides reached a stalemate.

Sang Hong coughed and said, "Sir Xu, all things require evidence. Furthermore, Madam Yu's status is special too. A bit of negligence in this matter might have huge consequences."

He obviously recognized Zu An's intent to protect Yu Yanluo. Even though their mission was to act against the Yu clan this time, he couldn't let Zu An be dragged into this mess too.

Sigh, youngsters just can't retain their cool. They can't help but be blinded by beauty.

Are those two back home not enough?

"Of course I have evidence." Xu Yu looked outside as he spoke. "I reckon he'll be here soon."

Suddenly, a lazy voice called out, "Live every day as if it were your last; tomorrow will take care of tomorrow's worries." His voice seemed to still be far away as he spoke the first word, but as he finished speaking, a cool breeze brushed through the hall and a figure appeared inside.

His beard was messy, and there were a few strands of curled hair in front of his forehead. He looked drowsy-eyed. On his back was a giant green gourd, and others could sense his drunkenness even from far away.

His clothes were dark; no one could tell if it was because they were stained by alcohol year-round, or because of grease. His trousers were loose and slack, and on his feet were a pair of shabby straw sandals. He was as sloppy as sloppy could be, completely different from the well-dressed officials present.

"Xiao Yao!" an official called out, quickly recognizing him.

Xiao Yao had left too deep of an impression back during the evening banquet. Even so, he was the libationer's third disciple, the renowned Sword Immortal! But his drunken tramp's appearance was too big of a contrast with that former image.

Xu Yu exclaimed happily, eagerly welcoming him, "Brother Xiao, you've returned! Did everything go smoothly?"

Xiao Yao nodded. Then, he looked at Yu Yanluo, who was sitting upright nearby. His gaze became sharp as she said, "I was quite shocked when I heard what Sir Xu said back then, so I made a trip to the fiend race territories to confirm things."

The others were shocked. They knew something huge was going to happen.

Xiao Yao raised his gourd and took a sip of the alcohol. He sat down on a chair casually. He didn't provide evidence of Yu Yanluo's identity and instead spoke of a different matter, saying, "The former Medusa Empress was absolutely stunning. Her cultivation was powerful, and even in a place like the fiend race territories where cultivators are numerous, she was one of the most powerful. The Snake race she led grew more and more powerful over time. Unfortunately, that unavoidably brought her many enemies as well."

"One time, when she was cultivating in seclusion, several fiend race and human experts slaughtered their way in. She was seriously injured after that battle and fled. Along the way, she ended up being saved by a wandering human youngster..."

Zu An cursed inwardly when he heard Xiao Yao talk about the past. He quickly transmitted a message secretly through ki. "Brother Xiao, do you know that Yu Yanluo is your junior sister, that she's also the libationer's disciple? Her specialty is drawing!"

Chapter 1120: Snake Race Ceremony

Xiao Yao was clearly stunned. He gave Zu An a look, then looked at Yu Yanluo with confusion.

Zu An thought to himself, This guy really didn't know Yu Yanluo was the libationer's disciple?

What the hell is wrong with the libationer? He takes in disciples without telling anyone, and many of them don't even know who their fellow students are.

Seeing that Xiao Yao had suddenly fallen silent, the other officials thought he was at a loss for words. They began to speak out for Yu Yanluo again.

Xu Yu also became somewhat nervous and quickly tugged on Xiao Yao's sleeves. "Brother Xiao?"

Only then did Xiao Yao seem to wake up from a daze. He paused for a moment, then slowly said, "Even though that youngster wasn't strong, he was incredibly handsome. Even though the Snake race is a different species from humans, beauty is universal, and our appreciation for aesthetics isn't too different. Even the fiend races felt that the young man was extremely handsome. At the time, another female fiend race expert had been pursuing that young man, but she let him go when she saw how handsome he was."

The others stopped whispering, sneaking looks toward Yu Yanluo from time to time. After all, it wasn't easy to reach that degree of handsomeness, and yet the Yu clan's men and women were all incredibly attractive.

Yu Yanluo's father was known for his handsomeness. Even though Xiao Yao hadn't spoken of that young man's identity, the others had already reached their own conclusions.

Zu An thought to himself, This is really bad! It didn't seem as if Xiao Yao had any plans of stopping.

But why? Is it because of what he experienced in the past? Did he develop hatred toward his fellow disciples and the libationer? Is that why he doesn't feel any sympathy for them?

He wanted to stop Xiao Yao, but too many people were watching. He could only continue to listen to what Xiao Yao had to say.

"Once that powerful female cultivator left, the young man left with the well-hidden Medusa Empress. They continued to flee. She had been saved by a human while she was weak, and they had experienced a lot together, so the Medusa Empress unwittingly fell in love with the young human man."

Many people cursed inwardly when they heard Xiao Yao's introduction. It was probably because that young man was handsome too, right? If he had been ugly, the Medusa wouldn't have felt anything!

Xiao Yao continued, "Because the fiend races' territory was too dangerous, the young man brought the Medusa Empress into the human world, settling her down in his own hometown. The Medusa Empress was severely wounded from that great battle, and she liked that young man, so she agreed.

"Over time, the two grew fonder and fonder of each other. In the end, they got married and even gave birth to a daughter."

The others looked toward Yu Yanluo. After all, Xiao Yao's story was too detailed. Even Yu Yanluo's supporters were starting to waver.

It turned out this beautiful woman was a sinister Medusa!

Rumors of the fiend races' brutality were already deeply ingrained within them. Meanwhile, the word "Medusa" was synonymous with disaster and death. No matter how perverted they were, they still felt as if they had been doused by cold water. In their eyes, Yu Yanluo's beauty now seemed like a treacherous trap, one that hid a bloody mouth waiting to devour them.

Xiao Yao then continued, "The two of them lived in bliss for a few years. If nothing unexpected happened, they might have just continued to live in bliss.

"Unfortunately, later on, news arrived from the fiend races' side that because the Medusa Empress was missing, the Snake race ended up becoming divided. At the same time, their enemies began to enslave and slaughter them. The Medusa, as the leader of the Snake race, returned to fight for her clansmen.

"But by then, the young man had already become middle-aged, becoming a clan leader. He was shouldering the responsibility of a clan, so he couldn't leave."

When they heard the words 'clan leader', the others knew for certain that Xiao Yao was referring to Yu Yanluo's father, the former clan head Yu Xuanfeng.

Back then, Yu Xuanfeng had been known for his handsomeness. Paired with the fact that he was the young heir of the Yu clan, there had been countless clans who wanted to marry their daughters to him. But he had remained unfazed throughout it all and instead preferred to wander the world alone.

Later on, on one of his journeys, he had brought back an extremely beautiful woman. Then, the two of them had quickly gotten married. Many unmarried daughters had sighed in pity, and many clans secretly investigated to see which clan's daughter he was marrying. And yet, no matter how they searched, they couldn't find out that girl's background.

Meanwhile, that woman rarely went out in public. Not even the Yu clan's people saw her often. As time went on, others had gradually forgotten about her existence.

Only when they heard Xiao Yao's story did some elders recall things about the past. They began to realize that many details were suspicious. If she had been the Medusa, that would explain many things.

Yu Yanluo's posture was upright and graceful, but her expression was incredibly conflicted. She wasn't scared, nor did she feel fear. It was another kind of feeling that was hard to describe.

Xiao Yao continued, "The husband and wife were separated just like that. Many years later, the young man finally completed his duties back in the clan and wanted to help the Medusa. However, he then learned that the Medusa had passed away.

"That man left the clan as if he had gone mad, charging straight into the fiend races' domain. Unfortunately, the fiend races were too chaotic back then, and no more news of him followed. Some people said that he had died, and some said that he had ended up siding with the fiend races. Some said that a fiend race woman had taken a liking to him and raised him as her exclusive property..."

Many people's expressions became strange when they heard that. They thought to themselves, Being handsome really allows you to do whatever you please... You can even rely on a female demoness to raise you!

This Yu Xuanfeng is a real man! Not only was he able to live as a wandering hero for many years, he even managed to seize a demoness for himself...

Xiao Yao's gaze finally landed on Yu Yanluo again. He continued, "Their daughter's bloodline gradually took form, and she also learned about her history. Because of the Medusa's bloodline, she took pity on the Snake race that was experiencing dire times, using the clan's power to secretly form a relationship with them. She sent large quantities of medications and living necessities. At the same time, the Snake race returned the favor, sending over large amounts of precious goods from the Snake race.

"That was why, even though she knew that her subordinates were colluding with the fiend races, that they were working with Jian Taiding and the other fiend races in illicit business deals, she turned a blind eye to it. Instead, she borrowed their deception to secretly work with the Snake race. Am I right, Yu Yanluo?" Xiao Yao finished. His gaze became incredibly sharp, seemingly even containing a hint of killing intent.

Zu An frowned. He hadn't spent much time with Xiao Yao, but this man shouldn't have been such a person.

The past Xiao Yao had indeed been someone who had taken it upon himself to purge fiends. But Zu An had heard that later, a huge mistake had occurred, and his conviction had taken a huge blow. That was how he had ended up falling into his current state.

If he were still the kind of person who hated the fiend races bitterly, why would he have fallen into his current state? Furthermore, he now knew that Yu Yanluo was the libationer's disciple, and yet had still chosen to continue. It was almost as if the two of them shared a deep grudge.

Yu Yanluo finally spoke up. "Sir, all things require evidence. In the end, all of these are merely your own assumptions. A similar story could be created if any skilled storyteller were hired to write it. Wouldn't that mean anyone could easily be framed?"

Those who were close to the Yu clan all spoke up one after another. At this point, it wasn't about what was right or wrong anymore, but rather that their interests were already too interlinked with the Yu clan's.

Zu An nodded. As expected of a clan leader. Even if Yu Yanluo really was the Medusa, she definitely couldn't admit to it right there. As long as she insisted she wasn't, there wasn't much others could do about her. But he still didn't feel too optimistic. Would Xu Yu act out this way if he didn't have proof?

Sure enough, Xiao Yao replied indifferently, "Evidence? Of course I have something like that."

Zu An felt his heart sink as he saw Xiao Yao take out a recording stone. Xiao Yao said, "This is something I recorded when I infiltrated the Snake race. Once you see the contents, you'll know that what I've said is the truth."

The stone projected a screen of light in midair, and on it, a village appeared. It was entirely different from a human village. Every single house was like an earthen hole, which could make one wonder whether it could even resist wind and rain.

The villagers who were moving along the streets had snake bodies from the waist down, while their upper halves were not much different from human bodies. However, their eyes clearly had vertical pupils.

There were also ordinary snakes moving around along the ground. Together with the strange murals carved on the walls, the village gave off a chilling impression.

There was a giant sculpture in the village center that had a human head and a snake body. In place of hair, the sculpture had numerous small snakes. Many Snake race villagers were worshiping that giant sculpture, as if they were carrying out a grand ceremony. A ring of dark green torches was burning in a ring around them, which could make one wonder if they had poison mixed in.

The Snake race villagers were all muttering prayers as they knelt down on the ground. Their expressions were all full of grief and despair. There were some who were weeping bitter tears...

Yu Yanluo couldn't help but stand up from her chair when she saw that scene.

As the scene drew closer to the sculpture, those gathered finally saw its face. It was an extremely beautiful woman, so beautiful that it could shake one to one's very core.

But the others all subconsciously looked toward Yu Yanluo, because the face in that image seemed to have been sculpted with her as the model!