

Immortal 981

Chapter 981: Made a Scapegoat

The black-robed man laughed sinisterly and said, "Since you know who I am, you should quickly leave behind your belongings. I can still spare your lives."

Zu An was curious. This person seemed to be pretty famous. He wondered who the man was. The amount of time he had spent in this world was still way too short, and he had been affiliated with the royal court for so long. He didn't know much about the world of wandering warriors.

Sun Ji just happened to ask the question Zu An had been wondering about. "Elder Yang, who is he?"

Yang Long didn't reply. His eyes didn't leave the black robed man's body even for a second as he said, "I might have actually believed the lie if I didn't know who you were. However, when has the evil way's infamous Thick-Browed Daoist ever spared anyone?"

"Thick-Browed Daoist?" Zu An frowned. He had never heard of such a person. Is this person really formidable? However, he saw the two eyebrows inside of his cloak. They were indeed thick and black after all, just like his nickname.

Sun Ji said angrily, "What 'thick brows' or 'thin brows'? In a place like Yi Commandery, if we put King Yan aside, our Sun clan has the final say! I advise you to know your place; perhaps then, our Sun clan might still take you in as a follower and present you with a bright future. Otherwise, you'll die without even knowing how it happened."

Yang Long frowned. He wanted to tell Sun Ji to stop, but he decided not to. The other party's vicious reputation was well known; it didn't make a difference whether Sun Ji provoked him further or not. That was why Yang Long didn't bother stopping him.

Thick-Browed Daoist roared with laughter when he heard that. "Hahaha, what a cultivator trains is their own body; their own insight is everything. What they pursue is a heart of freedom and transcendence. I, Thick-Brows, have no interest in living as a dog for your clan."

Yang Long's face heated up in embarrassment. The other party clearly treated him like the Sun clan's dog, even though he was also a cultivator and had his own clan. He immediately retorted, "What's wrong with requesting the help of a ruling clan in acquiring skill? The path of cultivation needs endless resources; how can one handle this need just by relying on yourself? The so-called freedom you speak of has left your hands covered in blood. You've killed other cultivators to steal their resources and cultivation, so how is that any more noble?"

Zu An was stunned. He hadn't expected Thick-Browed Daoist to also rely on stealing the cultivation of others! Tsk tsk tsk, as expected, such a skill is definitely an evil one in a world of cultivators! I definitely can't expose my Heaven Devouring Art to others, or else I'll have everyone after my ass...

Thick-Browed Daoist harrumphed. "Stop trying to stall for time. Die!" His black robes fluttered, and a black mist swept towards the carriage.

"Young master, be careful!" Yang Long quickly moved to protect Sun Ji.

The other guards all faced the great enemy, bringing out their most powerful skills to fend off the black mist. Unfortunately, their skills vanished into the black mist without accomplishing anything. Miserable screams emerged one after another. The guards with lower cultivations were already being pulled toward Thick-Browed Daoist by the black mist.

“Hahaha...” Thick-Browed Daoist reached out his hands and pressed down on those people’s heads. As his laughter echoed through the air, their vitality was quickly sucked away, turning them into dried-up corpses.

“I feel absolutely fantastic...” Thick-Browed Daoist tossed the dried corpses aside and licked his lips in reminiscence of the flavor. When his eyes swept over the survivors, those from the Sun clan gulped with difficulty.

Zu An frowned. This guy’s killing intent was way too strong! Furthermore, he could tell that even though there were some similarities between his cultivation technique and the Heaven Devouring Art, the two techniques were actually fundamentally different.

The efficiency of this man’s technique was too low, and he absorbed all kinds of impurities into his body. If this continued for a long time, there would be problems with his body. At the same time, his own temperament would become molded by the victims’ negative emotions. If left unresolved, it would lead to madness or mental disorders. This man was probably already close to such a result. It was no wonder that he seemed a bit neurotic and so bloodthirsty.

While Zu An was thinking to himself, Thick-Browed Daoist rushed out toward Sun Ji.

Sun Ji himself had five ranks of cultivation, which was normally enough for him to strut around confidently. But just then, when he was faced with the incoming killing intent, he only felt his entire body tremble and go weak. He couldn’t produce a single thought of resistance.

Yang Long roared out. After all, he was a seventh ranked cultivator. Countless icicles flew at the other party.

“An ice element cultivator...” Zu An couldn’t help but think of Chu Chuyan. He wondered if she was already back at that sect of hers.

Thick-Browed Daoist swept his spacious sleeves outward, and the pitch-black mist appeared in the center of his palm. The icicles instantly melted and disappeared.

Yang Long hadn’t expected his attack to be able to stop the other party. A cold glint flickered in the air, and a long spear appeared from behind him and thrust at his opponent. The spear was completely silver, and its entire body emanated an icy chill.

Zu An’s eyes widened. Where did this guy get such a long spear from? Wait, I think he got it from behind his butt, right? Hold up...

The spear produced a mirage of afterimages, and Thick-Browed Daoist was quickly trapped within. He soon appeared to have been sealed in a silkworm cocoon-like block of ice.

Those from the Sun clan cheered. Only Yang Long’s brow remained tightly furrowed.

A malicious voice suddenly spoke from within the ice. "In terms of spear arts, you've already attained quite some mastery. Unfortunately, the difference between seven and eight ranks of cultivation isn't something skill alone can overcome. You don't understand what it means to borrow the force of the world at all."

The massive chunk of ice around Thick-Browed Daoist cracked like an eggshell as soon as he said that. Then, shards of ice were sent flying everywhere as a dark figure rushed out from within.

Yang Long was horrified and screamed out, "Run, young master!" He charged with his spear, but the other party didn't even bother dodging. Thick-Browed Daoist struck Yang Long's spear with his palm, and the imposing weapon split in half on the spot. Then, another palm slammed into Yang Long's chest.

Blood sprayed out from Yang Long's mouth as he flew in reverse. For better or for worse, he had cultivated for many years, so he was thankfully able to free himself from the other party's control at a critical moment, avoiding the fate of being sucked dry into a withered corpse. However, that already used up all of his remaining strength. He collapsed onto the ground, no longer possessing even a shred of strength.

Meanwhile, Sun Ji was absolutely horrified. He pushed a subordinate off his horse and got on, urging the animal to run as fast as it could. The other guards took the chance to flee in several different directions.

Thick-Browed Daoist harrumphed. With a wave of his sleeves, the weapons scattered on the ground fired outward. They accurately pierced through the backs of the guards like guided missiles. Not a single one survived. He gave the direction Sun Ji had escaped toward a look. He kicked off, and a split second later, he instantly appeared in front of Sun Ji.

"Neigh~!" The horse's front hooves rose in alarm. Thick-Browed Daoist harrumphed, smacking the horse in the head. The horse shriveled up at a visible rate, and quickly lost its life.

Sun Ji was flung right off. He wanted to run, but he discovered that his legs weren't listening to him today for some reason. He continued to nudge his body backward, running his mouth in a desperate plea. "Great senior, you only want the goods, right? I'll give it all to you; we don't have to go as far as killing, right? After all, this is the Yi Commandery, so it'll still be quite troublesome if you end up carrying a grudge with the Sun clan!"

Thick-Browed Daoist nodded and said, "You're correct. Offending your Sun clan in Yi Commandery is an extremely troublesome thing."

Sun Ji was overjoyed when he heard that. He continued "As long as senior lets me go, I won't pursue today's matter at all! Those guards have already died; our Sun clan won't treat it as a big deal! The items are here, senior; please be magnanimous!" As he handed over the pouch carrying the auction's goods, he had a fawning smile on his face.

Zu An sneered. Those guards had died while trying to protect Sun Ji, and yet all their deaths had managed to do was produce such a scene.

Thick-Browed Daoist examined the contents. After confirming that there was no mistake, he put the pouch away. There was an amused smile on his face as his palm struck Sun Ji's head.

"You..." Sun Ji only had the time to utter one word before he died. Then, his body fell limply to the ground.

Thick-Browed Daoist said with a sneer, "Offending your Sun clan is annoying, but who will know I was the one who did it if I kill all of you?"

When he heard that, Yang Long released a long sigh and said, "There are no walls that don't leak wind in this world. The Sun clan will definitely find you."

After saying that, he struck his own forehead and ended his life. He knew he wasn't going to survive. Rather than letting the other party suck away his cultivation, he decided that it was better for him to just end his own life.

Thick-Browed Daoist walked over. When he confirmed that Yang Long was indeed dead, he said mockingly, "There's already a scapegoat ready to take the blame, so how could the Sun clan ever realize that it was me?"

He cleaned up the scene while saying that. He took out a bottle and scattered the contents on the bodies he had sucked dry. The corpses disappeared at a visible rate, and the ashes were blown away by the cool evening breeze.

Zu An nodded inwardly. This person was quite cautious. He had gotten rid of the corpses to prevent people from suspecting him.

Then, Thick-Browed Daoist walked over to Yang Long's body. He wrote down the number '333' on the ground next to him. In order to make it look as convincing as possible, he only wrote half of the last 3, then placed Yang Long's hand over that number.

After completing all of his preparations, he nodded in satisfaction. He was just about to leave when someone sighed nearby, saying, "Someone like you who dares to commit the deed but won't take responsibility, instead making an innocent person take the blame... Do you have no conscience at all?"

Chapter 982: Face of a Thousand Identities

"Who?!" Thick-Browed Daoist suddenly turned around and looked toward the source of the sound.

A single individual walked over; he seemed quite young. Thick-Browed Daoist sighed in relief. He thought he had been discovered by some powerful cultivator. How high could the cultivation of someone so young be anyway?

Zu An stared at the number 333. He said indifferently, "Truly a botched attempt at framing someone."

Thick-Browed Daoist's eyes flickered. He asked, "You're that 333?" No wonder he had felt a strange sense of familiarity when he heard the person's voice and saw his build. So it was guest 333.

"Indeed." At this point, there was no need for Zu An to hide anything. "You went out and committed this crime using my name. Shouldn't I at least enjoy a share of the benefits?"

"Using your name?" Thick-Browed Daoist roared with laughter. "How much is your name worth? Who would even hesitate to use it falsely? You're nothing more than a tool for me to deflect blame onto." His

palm struck at the other party's vitals right after he said that. Since this youngster had seen him in the act, he had to be silenced.

Thick-Browed Daoist had seen how this guest 333 had been bidding in the Hub of Freedom. The highest bid the youngster had placed was close to three million, but he had failed to buy the final item. That meant he had around three million silvers on him, so he was definitely from a wealthy clan.

I didn't expect the heavens to be so kind to me today, to deliver me such a fat sheep for slaughter! These two batches of resources today should be enough for me to break through into the master rank.

However, his vision blurred. When it cleared, the other party was already somewhere else.

"Sir, you really are heartless. How can you try to kill someone just over a slight disagreement?" Zu An's brow furrowed deeply. If it were anyone else, they would already have been finished.

Thick-Browed Daoist was a bit surprised. He hadn't expected the other party to actually avoid his attack. "No wonder you had the courage to challenge the Sun clan; so you had this strange movement technique to rely on. A pity, however, that a movement technique without the appropriate cultivation is worthless."

His speed suddenly increased, his body instantly appearing in front of Zu An. Black mist poured out of Thick-Browed Daoist's palms and surrounded Zu An. He was confident that the air had already become as viscous as water. This time, the youngster wouldn't be able to get away no matter how brilliant his movement technique was.

But to his surprise, Zu An didn't show the slightest bit of alarm. He stood in place without dodging at all, remarking as his palm rose to greet the other party, "Why are you so confident that I'll run away for certain?"

Thick-Browed Daoist frowned. His many years of experience in the world of cultivators told him that something wasn't right. However, no matter how he thought about it, there was no way the other party could be his match. Besides, this kid dares to trade blows with me?

Not even another cultivator of the same rank would dare to trade palms with me, because a portion of their cultivation might easily be sucked away. This kid is just courting death! A sinister smile flashed across his face. He slammed his palm forward, deciding that he was going to suck the other person completely dry!

The two palms collided. The black mist coming out of Thick-Browed Daoist's hand completely surrounded the other party as he exclaimed, "Absorb everything!"

"...Huh?" Thick-Browed Daoist's smile quickly froze on his face. He discovered that he couldn't suck away even the slightest bit of the other party's cultivation. He didn't know what was going on, but he finally realized that something wasn't right. He quickly jumped backward to try and increase the distance.

Unfortunately, it was already too late. His hand seemed to have been glued in place. He couldn't move it in the slightest. The young man across from him had a simple and innocent smile on his face as he asked, "Is the absorption you were talking about something like this?"

A black hole appeared in his palm as soon as he said that. Thick-Browed Daoist immediately felt all of his cultivation leave his body like a bursting dam. Even his own absorption of other people's cultivation wasn't this fast!

He was horrified, struggling frantically, yet he couldn't move at all. At first, he was swearing, but eventually, all that remained was begging and pleading. His voice became softer and softer.

All the way until his death, he couldn't understand why the other party's cultivation could be so much higher than his despite being so young. Furthermore, the other party's skill was also clearly more profound than his own... No, it was worlds apart! That was why he didn't even bother fighting back.

Zu An flung Thick-Browed Daoist's corpse away. He frowned. He could sense the cultivation swirling within him. He had previously been at the eighth step of the ninth rank, and after absorbing all of Thick-Browed Daoist's cultivation, he was clearly already at the peak of the ninth rank. He was just a hair away from the master rank.

However, he felt a ruthless bloodiness filling him. He knew that was a result created from Thick-Browed Daoist's ruthless slaughter of other cultivators. No wonder big sis empress told me not to use the Heaven Devouring Art to increase my cultivation. This kind of cultivation absorption is impure and needs a lot of time and energy to properly digest.

The key was that this person's cultivation had the resentment, killing intent, and other negative attributes of his victims mixed in. It would only do more harm than good for tempering Zu An's soul.

But he couldn't be bothered with all of that right now. The little creatures he had set around him as guards had already detected a group of people approaching quickly. As such, he grabbed Thick-Browed Daoist's corpse and left.

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Soon after Zu An left, a group of men arrived at the scene of the crime. The most eye-catching feature of the middle-aged man at the very front were his triangular eyes, identical to Sun Ji's. It was obvious that they were related.

His eyes flickered a bit. They appeared to always be scheming something. He had seen the scene even from far away. Alarmed, he had immediately leapt over.

"Ji'er!" His howl of grief and anger tore through the entire forest.

His subordinates rushed over one after another. They were all horrified when they saw the scene. How many years had it been since someone dared to challenge their master? Furthermore, they had killed Minister Sun's son! This was a grudge that wouldn't end until one side was completely wiped out!

Those investigating the scene reported, "Minister, Sir Yang left behind some clues before he died."

The middle-aged man with the triangular eyes was naturally Xiang Minister Sun Xun. He walked over to Yang Long's side and looked at the number 333 written on the ground. He glowered as he exclaimed, "What is the meaning of this?"

"It might be a guest number from the Hub of Freedom. The young master had just left the Hub of Freedom." There were sharp individuals among the subordinates, and one of them quickly provided his analysis.

Sun Xun's expression was icy. "Go! We're heading to the Hub of Freedom!"

Even though the location of the Hub of Freedom was mysterious, that was only for ordinary guests. He was someone with real authority in Yi Commandery, so how could he not know where the Hub of Freedom was?

It was just that his relationship with the Hub of Freedom's management was quite good, and they had given the higher ups quite a sum. That was why the higher ups just turned a blind eye to everything. But now that his son had been killed, how could he possibly hold back his anger?

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Meanwhile, Zu An returned to his room. Daji was still on guard under her covers, but that ended when she saw him. When he saw that, Zu An couldn't help but remark with a sigh of admiration, "Do you really not have a soul?"

Unfortunately, the other party was still like a machine, staring calmly at him without responding in the slightest.

Zu An was completely helpless. He could only take out the pouch he had gotten from Thick-Browed Daoist. As for the corpse itself, he had already dealt with it on the way back. This was an age of cultivators, so any random use of the ice or fire element was enough to destroy any bit of evidence.

Zu An sighed in relief when he saw the jade pendant. He now had some hope for big sis empress' Milk of Purple Frost.

He held the jade pendant in the center of his palm. Its patterns were quite strange, as if it were some kind of abstract map. But if it was a map, with the Hub of Freedom's resources, why hadn't they uncovered anything? He couldn't figure it out no matter how he thought about it. He put the jade pendant away and looked over the other things.

"Oh, the Immortal Beheading Knife!" he exclaimed. It was an unexpected surprise. Sun Ji had purchased the Immortal Beheading Knife previously, and Thick-Browed Daoist had seized it, but it had ultimately ended up in Zu An's hands. He now had five of them in total. He wondered what kind of miraculous effects there would be if he pieced together nine of them.

He then continued to look through the pouch, but he didn't find what he was looking for. He couldn't help but curse. "These two don't even have a single tael of silver added together? Just how freaking poor are you guys?!"

Back in the capital, he hadn't felt any financial pressure, as most essential expenses, as well as even cultivation resources, had been covered by the court. The money he had saved up from Brightmoon City even made him feel rich.

But only after that auction experience did he realize how poor he was. The road of cultivation was a bottomless pit...

Soon afterward, however, he realized that Sun Ji had spent everything to buy the Immortal Beheading Knife and the pendant containing the clue about the Milk of Purple Frost. It only made sense that he had nothing left.

An independent cultivator like Thick-Browed Daoist was used to killing for money. Even if he had any money, he would have already converted it into resources to be used. He had probably already used up all of the cash he had during the trip to the Hub of Freedom, and gone over just to scout out fat sheep for slaughter.

“Why am I so unlucky...” Zu An muttered. He only found some pills, weapons and other stuff that was pretty valuable in the world of warriors. But for someone like him who was from the empire’s Imperial Palace, he really didn’t care much about such trifling toys.

“Hm? What is this?” He suddenly discovered a yellowed booklet. It gave off an ancient feeling.

“Face of a Thousand Identities?” When he saw the words on the booklet, Zu An immediately knew that it was an extraordinary item. If the paper material was that old, it should have turned to dust at his touch; and yet, when he touched it, it didn’t feel like paper. Instead, it felt like a special material that was unaffected by water or fire.

Chapter 983: Confrontation

“What is this?” Zu An was now curious. He opened it up and took a look. He saw eight large words on the title page: ‘Thousand identities, one face; one face, thousand identities.’ All sorts of detailed diagrams followed, analyzing the various parts of one’s face, trunk, limbs, and other areas.

“This seems to be some teaching material for sketching and anatomy.” Zu An was stunned. A small scrap of paper fell out from the booklet. He picked it up and took a look. It contained Thick-Browed Daoist’s notes.

It turned out that because Thick-Browed Daoist’s brows were too conspicuous no matter how he dressed, he would always be recognized on the spot. That only made his reputation worse and worse.

He didn’t mind too much at first, but he found it harder and harder to deal with later on. He had to invest several times the effort to accomplish the same things. That was the consequence of being infamous.

That was why he always wanted to change his appearance, at the very least when he was about to commit some evil deed. That way, no one would recognize that it was him. Unfortunately, the camouflaging techniques of the martial world were full of restrictions. Even if he could change his face, they couldn’t cover up his glaring eyebrows. The only way to deal with that was to shave them off. And yet, he had been so fond of those brows that he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

In the end, after searching everywhere, he had ended up encountering the ‘Thousand Identities’ technique. It was a miraculous secret manual!

It was clearly a manual that needed a lot of luck and enlightenment to cultivate, and yet it didn’t increase one’s cultivation no matter how much one’s mastery of it increased. However, it could make one able to do something not even master rank cultivators could do—change one’s appearance at will.

It was different from the appearance reconstruction techniques that were common in Yi Commandery. Such techniques often needed medicines or other tools to complement them. Furthermore, it was hard to change one's appearance to the point of being completely identical to someone else.

'Face of a Thousand Identities' was different. It didn't need any medicine or any external help; it only needed one to be skilled in drawing and memorization. That way, one could instantly remember one's appearance and all sorts of fine details.

Then, one would modify one's muscles and even bone structure according to the ki transfer technique outlined in the manual, making one's appearance, physique, and other factors completely identical. Not even those closest to the person one copied would be able to tell the difference.

Unfortunately, the manual's cultivation difficulty was extremely high. The memorization part wasn't too bad, as the minds of cultivators were much more powerful than ordinary people. It wouldn't be too difficult for them to remember some details in the short term.

The key was that drawing was something that completely depended on talent! It was really hard for normal people to reach the level the Face of a Thousand Identities technique needed.

There was one other point of difficulty. Face of a Thousand Identities couldn't raise one's cultivation at all, but it consumed a large amount of ki. After all, one needed to constantly maintain the modification of their muscles and bone structure, and such things were maintained through ki. Furthermore, in order to change one's own body as one wished, the demand on both the quality and quantity of one's ki was absolutely frightening. Either way, Thick-Browed Daoist definitely hadn't reached that level just yet.

"No wonder he only used a black cloak and didn't successfully change his appearance." Zu An tossed the booklet into the Brilliant Glass Bead. I can turn into a girl now too; that's way too useful, no matter how you look at it...

He really was incredibly happy with how the day had turned out. He felt fantastic when he thought about his harvest.

Suddenly, there was a large disturbance outside. The voices of the Hub of Freedom's staff seemed to be mixed in as well. Zu An quickly unsummoned Daji, then lay down himself. Someone barged in as soon as he covered himself.

"Who...?" Zu An pretended to have been roused awake. He crawled up in a daze and looked toward the door. It was as if he couldn't process what was going on.

Meanwhile, he secretly observed the situation. The cultivation ranks of those who had come in weren't low. There were several people around Yang Long's level, and there was another person who was even stronger; his body's aura was extremely steady. He gave off a deep and immeasurable feeling.

Master rank?

The one who entered had clear triangular eyes that were identical to Sun Ji's. Furthermore, judging from his age, he was probably Sun Ji's father, the Yi Commandery's Minister Sun Xun. He looked around as soon as he came in, his gaze incredibly sharp as it quickly landed on Zu An.

Zu An suddenly seemed to have woken up from his confusion. He roared furiously, "Who are all of you?! All of you better get the hell out!"

Sun Xun's expression darkened when he heard Zu An's voice. He remarked, "The young truly don't fear death."

The Hub of Freedom's men also entered just then, led by Chubby Senior. However, he no longer had his earlier pride. Instead, his expression was one full of flattery as he asked, "Minister Sun, which wind brought your respected self here? Could it be that there has been some kind of misunderstanding here?"

Tang Tian'er and the others followed behind him; Tang Tian'er had the same sweet and professional fake smile as always. She snuck a glance at Zu An, a bit of confusion flickering through her eyes. Why was he able to wake up so quickly?

But after thinking for a bit, she realized that Sun Xun had slammed the door, so how could he not wake up from such a loud disturbance? Furthermore, the constitutions of those from the ocean races were different from humans, so she didn't think too much about it.

"A misunderstanding?" Sun Xun sneered. "My Ji'er was killed. Are you saying I shouldn't be looking for the murderer?"

"What?! Something happened to young master Sun?" Chubby Senior asked.

"Did you not know of it?" Sun Xun stared at him with sharp eyes. "The whereabouts of guests should be absolutely confidential when they enter and leave the Hub of Freedom. Guests have no way of knowing how other guests leave. You're the only ones who know how each person has departed from this place."

Chubby Senior immediately defended himself. "I am being wronged here, Minister Sun! Our Hub of Freedom has operated for so many years, and we have never done anything contrary to our guests' interests! This is the basis our establishment is founded on! Furthermore, young master Sun has purchased something from the auction that he has not even fully paid for, so he owes us money. Would we not be losing out on a lot if we harmed him?"

"What?" Sun Xun's brow rose. The temperature of the entire room immediately dropped.

Chubby Senior could only brace himself and hand over the debt note. He gave Sun Xun a rough recount of what happened, then asked, "May I ask if that jade pendant is still with the young master?"

Sun Xun harrumphed and said, "It was already taken away a long time ago." He gave the debt note a glance. Sure enough, it was his son's handwriting. There was even his own personal seal.

Sun Ji had already contacted him about that through a special channel. He had rushed over to receive his son when he received the message, but he hadn't expected to still be a step too late.

Chubby Senior's eyes twitched when he saw Sun Xun put away the debt note, but he knew that there was no chance of them getting the money back as well. In that case, he might as well let the money help them avert disaster, or else the other party might just redirect their anger toward the Hub of Freedom.

Sure enough, after Sun Xun put away the debt note, he didn't act out against the Hub of Freedom and instead looked at Zu An, asking, "You are that 333?"

"I am," Zu An got up and said indifferently.

"Arrest him!" Sun Xun ordered. A group of people rushed at Zu An.

Zu An quickly shot Chubby Senior and Tang Tian'er a look, asking, "Is this how the Hub of Freedom treats their guests?"

Chubby Senior was a bit hesitant, but Tang Tian'er spoke up first. "Minister Sun, may I ask why you are arresting him?"

At the same time, she transmitted some words to Chubby Senior through ki, simply stating that there were so many guests watching. If they didn't do anything, the Hub of Freedom's reputation would be done for, and they would even lose their connection with the ocean races. Chubby Senior had a huge headache. But what she said made sense, so he quickly rushed out to stop them.

Sun Xun's eyes narrowed as he asked, "What, is your Hub of Freedom going to defend the perpetrator who killed my Ji'er?"

Chubby Senior and Tang Tian'er were stunned. Chubby Senior asked, "He is the one who killed young master Sun? There has to be some kind of mistake, no?"

"One of our men wrote that 333 was the killer before his death. What, could it be that you think I would lie about this?" Sun Xun snapped impatiently. If not for his reservations toward the one behind the Hub of Freedom, he would have already razed the entire place to the ground to accompany his son to the grave. He wouldn't have the patience to say so much at all.

Zu An spoke up just then. "Absolute nonsense. I was in this room the entire time, and Miss Tang can serve as my witness. How could I possibly have gone out and killed someone?"

The eyes of the onlookers landed on Tang Tian'er when they heard that. They were all thinking, The stunning hostess actually kept guest 333 company? Do jade token guests really receive treatment that great?" The other jade token guests felt awful. They were also jade token guests, so why didn't they enjoy such benefits?

Now that she was being stared at that way, even though Tang Tian'er was usually confident and unrestrained, she still blushed. But as matters stood, she could only say, "Just now... I really was with him."

She couldn't say she had knocked him out, right? Doing something like that to a jade token guest would be a tremendous scandal for the Hub of Freedom!

Chapter 984: How Bold

"Oh..." Sighs came from all around them. The expressions of the onlookers were just like those of all Zu An's classmates from his previous world as they looked for some drama.

Tang Tian'er lowered her reddened face, looking incredibly shy. However, inside, she wanted to curse these boorish men to death! She sighed inwardly, feeling as if all of the prestige she had accumulated over the years was probably gone.

Zu An saw a string of Rage points enter through the back end. Upon closer inspection, he saw that there were fewer Rage points coming from the guests and more from the Hub of Freedom's staff! It seemed Tang Tian'er was actually the Hub of Freedom's idol.

Sun Xun harrumphed. "Aren't you all making a fool of me? This woman was clearly not inside when I opened the doors, and only now did she hurry over from outside. How can she be a witness? Even if your Hub of Freedom intends to defend a criminal, there's no need to speak such a blatant lie, right?"

Zu An feigned a shocked expression as he looked at Tang Tian'er. "Tian'er, you weren't in the room earlier?"

The Hub of Freedom's staff members all thought to themselves, That guy is already close enough to call her Tian'er! Sigh, this guest managed to sleep with our prettiest girl so quickly; why are the rest of us so disappointed...

Even when compared to the beautiful courtesans on the second floor, Tang Tian'er was only superior and not inferior to them in any way. Together with her sweet smile when she spoke, and her friendly vibe, she was extremely popular in the entire place.

Tang Tian'er was quite frustrated as well. When did I ever get that close to you?

However, she quickly realized that it was probably because of the dream he had after he was knocked unconscious, making him think she really had accompanied him in various ways. Yet with how things stood, she couldn't really defend herself. She could only brace herself and admit it. "Ahem, I saw that you were already asleep, so I didn't wake you up and went out for a bit first."

Aaah! Now everyone will think I slept with him! But the worst part is that what I'm saying is like tacitly approving it too. How am I even going to show myself in public after this...

The onlookers shot Zu An looks of disdain when they heard what Tang Tian'er said. If we had someone this beautiful accompanying us, we might not even be able to sleep all night! And yet this bastard just fell asleep? Are you kidding me?

They were all men, so Zu An could practically telepathically know what they were thinking. He was left at a loss too. He felt exactly what Tang Tian'er had been feeling earlier. There was no way for him to explain himself...

Sun Xun said darkly, "Even if what Lady Tang says is true, that can only mean she was with number 333 for a short time. He can still use the remaining time to go out and commit the deed."

After some hesitation, Tang Tian'er insisted, "Your honor, the amount of time I left for was only long enough to drink some tea. There should be no way he could have committed the crime in such a short time."

Chubby Senior was getting nervous. Why is she taking responsibility for this matter? She's already going above and beyond compared to earlier when she spoke up as a witness! Even Zu An gave her a look of surprise. He really couldn't figure out why she would side with him like this.

Sun Xun gave Chubby Senior a look, revealing a penetrating gaze. "Does your Hub of Freedom dare to vouch for the credibility of her words?"

Chubby Senior panicked. This wasn't something he could just reply to casually! Even though he didn't feel that guest 333 could have gone out to commit the deed, he didn't want the Hub of Freedom to get caught up in the matter either. As such, he didn't reply directly to the question and instead said, "If the minister doesn't trust us, you can ask the Sun clan's people. I noticed earlier that young master Sun left behind some people to monitor guest 333 before he left."

Hisses of displeasure filled the air. None of the onlookers were fools; they immediately realized what Sun Ji had planned to do. However, he probably hadn't expected to not only fail to get revenge on guest number 333, but also to come to ruin himself.

Sun Xun frowned. He quickly turned around and gave orders to his subordinates. Soon, they brought a guard over. Sun Xun asked, "Did the young master leave you behind to monitor the situation?"

The guard quickly nodded. "Replying to sir, that's correct."

"Then, has anything strange happened since then? Did he leave his room or not?" Sun Xun asked.

The guard shook his head. "He didn't. I was always guarding this spot without a moment of distraction. He didn't come out."

Zu An suddenly exclaimed, "Isn't the whole truth revealed now? I only put up with this nonsense out of respect for your grief toward your son's death. Isn't it time for you to apologize to me now?"

Chubby Senior broke out into cold sweat. Kid, are you really not scared of anything? How can you say something like that?!

Sun Xun gave Chubby Senior a deep look. Then, he gave the window a look. "Is there a chance that he left through here? That way, the guards outside wouldn't be able to see him."

Chubby Senior said, "That is impossible. Outside is the auction hall with many people passing by, and there are many powerful cultivators there. If he left through the window, he definitely would have been noticed by someone."

Zu An sneered. That Sun Ji wanted me to die so badly, but he never would have imagined that the person he left to keep an eye on me would instead become my witness!

Sun Xun waved his hand, saying, "Drag him back and slowly interrogate him later."

Tang Tian'er and Chubby Senior's expressions changed. They quickly asked, "Xiang Minister, why must you do this? His innocence has already been proven!"

"Then why did Yang Long leave his number behind before his death? Even if it wasn't him who did it, he might have colluded with a criminal outside. Arrest him." Sun Xun clearly didn't wish to waste any more words on them. He directly gestured for his men to arrest Zu An.

"Your highness is a glorious court official; do you judge cases without any regard for life like this?" Zu An sneered. "Many people saw my conflict with Sun Ji earlier, so if anyone was going to frame me, I would naturally be the most suitable candidate."

That was also why he hadn't erased that number. Firstly, he wasn't the one who had killed them, so he had a completely clear conscience. The second was that everyone knew about his grudge with Sun Ji, so

even if he erased it, the other party would still seek him out. In that case, he might as well leave a clear point of contention behind.

“A brat like you dares to teach this minister how to do things? Drag him back, have him carefully interrogated, and search this room for any stolen property,” Sun Xun said expressionlessly. Even if he isn’t the criminal, just the fact that he offended Ji’er like that means I have to make him regret living.

“Furthermore, not a single one of the guests who participated in today’s auction is allowed to leave. I’ll have people interrogate you one by one,” he continued. After saying that, he said to Chubby Senior, “Give me the list of names of everyone who participated in the auction today. I’ll check them one by one.”

The surroundings erupted into a commotion when Sun Xun spoke those words. They had just been here to join in on the liveliness, how had they all gotten caught up in this disaster? None of them were having it anymore. They argued noisily, saying that they wanted to leave, and they also publicly denounced the Hub of Freedom for going against its rules.

Chubby Senior was starting to panic. He quickly pulled Sun Xun aside and said quietly, “Xiang Minister, you must not do this! These guests are all important individuals! If their identities are exposed, we will all lose our dignity. I ask the minister to please be lenient; our Hub of Freedom will definitely cooperate with you as much as we can!”

Sun Xun frowned slightly. He felt a bit of regret after saying what he had just said. Forget about the Hub of Freedom’s hidden background, just these guests alone were likely his colleagues in court or some other commandery’s big shots. If he really offended them, he might be biting off more than he could chew.

After realizing all of that, he took the chance to say, “Fine, I’ll leave your Hub of Freedom some dignity. However, this person must have his body searched.” He clearly still hadn’t given up on his suspicion towards Zu An. At the same time, he wanted to find a reason to bring him away.

After some hesitation, Chubby Senior still didn’t say anything in the end. Sun Xun was already showing him quite a bit of respect. If he didn’t take a step back and completely angered the other party, the situation would only become even worse. As for having a connection to the ocean races, he couldn’t be bothered with that. He would just think of some other way to contact them in the future.

Tang Tian’er wanted to say something, but Chubby Senior stopped her. She could only look at Zu An with worry.

Zu An didn’t look panicked in the slightest and retorted indifferently, “What, I’m going to get searched just because you say so? Why? Doesn’t that mean that if I tell you to eat two bowls of shit, you have to cut open your stomach to show me you ate them?”

Sun Xun had never heard such a phrase before, but he could hear the mockery behind the other party’s words. He immediately became angry. How many years had it been already since someone dared to speak to him that way? Furthermore, it was from a young junior!

You have successfully trolled Sun Xun for +272 +272 +272...

“Why? Because I’m the Yan State’s most senior minister.” Sun Xun’s gaze was completely cold.

“Even the most senior minister has to obey the law. My innocence has already been proven through all manner of evidence, so why do you still insist on searching me?” Zu An replied indifferently.

Sun Xun finally couldn't take it anymore and exclaimed, “The law? In this place, I am the law!”

Just then, someone sneered in the distance. “You are the law? How bold!”

Chapter 985: Retaliation

The onlookers turned around. They all wondered just what kind of crazy idiot would say such words to Sun Xun in Yi Commandery.

Sun Xun's expression was completely cold. His skin bristled. Killing intent instantly appeared in his eyes. He gave Chubby Senior a look and said with a sneer, “Your Hub of Freedom's guests really are something.”

Chubby Senior felt even fatter today than usual. Why was everything going wrong today? He gave the one who had spoken a look. This person wore an ordinary mask, and he came from the second floor. He wasn't one of their most respected jade token guests. Chubby Senior thus said with a sigh, “The two of you, please do not act rashly. The matters here do not have anything to do with you two.”

He had already scanned the two of them with his cultivation. These two only had six ranks of cultivation. Regardless of whether it was Sun Xun or himself, they could crush these two with a single hand. He had no idea where the pair got their confidence from. Then he remembered that number 333. Why was he so confident with just six ranks of cultivation?

Chubby Senior thought that the two newcomers would tacitly back off if he intimidated them with his cultivation and gave them the chance to back down. But who could have thought that the two wouldn't even give him a look and instead walked right up to Sun Xun?

“Was it you who said you were the law just now?” the pair asked.

Sun Xun frowned. He immediately ordered his subordinates, “What are you all standing around for? Do I have to be the one to speak?”

He was a glorious master rank cultivator, and furthermore the Xiang Minister of this place. Speaking so much to that number 333 had already ruined his prestige, so he didn't feel like talking to these two at all.

When they sensed their master's dissatisfaction, the guards immediately pounced at those two like wolves..

Just then, however, the other party took out a golden token and exclaimed, “Who dares?!”

The guards were all stunned. The entire third floor fell silent. They all saw the words on the golden token: ‘Imperial Armed Escort’.

“You came from the Imperial Palace?” a guard asked. After all, not everyone had the qualifications to use the word ‘imperial’.

Those present quickly realized something. Some who were more familiar with the bureaucratic system immediately reacted. This was the token of the Imperial Palace's Armed Escort Division. They were in charge of ensuring the palace's safety. Why were they here?

The guards looked at Sun Xun for further instructions. Sun Xun's expression also changed, because he suddenly remembered the intelligence he had received a few days before, that the imperial envoy's troops seemed to have arrived in Yi Commandery.

Yi Commandery's governor and other Yan State officials had even gone to show them a welcoming reception, and yet even though the imperial envoy had met with them, his attitude had been quite cold and he hadn't left the ship. Those who had witnessed it immediately knew that the imperial envoy had an important figure who didn't want to associate with Yi Commandery's official system.

That also made those from Yi Commandery sigh in relief. After all, every place had some shameful things about it. Even though the imperial envoy was rushing toward Cloudcenter Commandery, what if he ended up finding out something about Yi Commandery? Who knew how many people would have to be executed to pay the price?

Sun Xun had never expected to run into people from the imperial envoy's group in such a place. He immediately changed his attitude, an amiable smile appearing on his sinister face as he said, "These two generals have come from afar. Excuse me for not going out to meet you."

If they had been ordinary guards from the imperial envoy, he naturally wouldn't have had to act so politely. The main reason was that the Armed Escort Division consisted of the capital's elites who had accumulated a lot of merit, and they had the great clans backing them. He didn't wish to offend the capital's elders.

"Sir is too polite! We don't dare to receive such treatment." The two were naturally Pei You and Gao Ying. The two of them had lost so miserably in the casino on the first floor, so they had come to the second floor to vent out their frustrations. Then, news about the disturbance on the third floor kept bothering them, so they couldn't focus on their own matters. They could only rush upstairs in annoyance to see what was going on.

When they saw that Zu An was being troubled by someone, they had immediately become enraged. As such, they had quickly stepped forward to help him out.

Sun Xun was angered when he heard the mockery in their voices, but he didn't show anything on the surface. He said, "My son was plotted against and killed by someone today. I am currently investigating this case. I ended up speaking irresponsibly out of an impulse due to the grief, so I hope that the two honored sirs do not treat it too seriously."

It would be fine if he said such words in Yi Commandery, but if those words reached the capital, it would cause quite a few problems. Even though there was no chance of the court doing something to him over such a small matter, leaving his majesty or the court's other big shots with a bad impression might have bad effects on future matters.

"Oh?" The two of them didn't even know what was happening, since they had just gone up in a hurry. As such, they walked up to Zu An and asked him what happened. Zu An gave them a rough summary of what had happened.

They actually knew each other! Sun Xun's brows furrowed tightly when he saw that. That made things much trickier...

Chubby Senior's eyes widened. Then, he gave Tang Tian'er a look. He asked through ki, "Didn't you say he was from the ocean races?"

Tang Tian'er was also baffled and replied, "I don't know what's going on either! Don't tell me the ocean races have something to do with the court?"

"That's not entirely impossible," Chubby Senior said.

Even so, he couldn't be bothered with that right now. With the imperial envoy involved, even the imperial guards were going to be implicated. He had been really worried that the situation might have a bad effect on the Hub of Freedom. The higher ups were definitely going to blame him for doing a poor job.

When Pei You and Gao Ying heard Zu An's explanation, they gave Sun Xun impatient looks. "Sir Sun, since there is already evidence stating that he is innocent, why do you still insist on arresting him?"

Even though Sun Xun's cultivation was high, he was still a Zhou Dynasty statesman. They were acting on imperial orders at the moment, and the two of them had met their fair share of big shots in the capital. Their clans didn't even lack experts on the level of Sun Xun, so why would they treat him as a big deal?

"That's..." Sun Xun hesitated, then changed his tone. "...because I made an inconsiderate judgment." The other party was connected to the imperial envoy. With his current authority, that wasn't something he could mess with.

Zu An spoke up just then. "Being able to recognize your own mistakes and reforming yourself is incredibly important. Sir Sun needs to genuinely and sincerely work for the people in the future. Be sure not to abuse the authority the court has entrusted you with."

Sun Xun was speechless. I yielded you some respect, and yet you're now running with it? But he couldn't really take it anymore while being berated in front of so many people, asking, "May I ask what your respected self's official post is?"

You have successfully trolled Sun Xun for +444 +444 +444...

Zu An said indifferently, "I have no official post. What I said are just things every commoner knows. Could it be that Sir Sun doesn't agree with what I said?"

Sun Xun's breath caught in his throat. Only after a while did he exhale. "You're absolutely right."

You have successfully trolled Sun Xun for +745 +745 +745...

He stormed off with a huff with an ashen expression afterward.

Those from the Hub of Freedom sighed in relief when they saw that. However, they still looked at Zu An and the others vigilantly. After all, this was a gray zone, so these people being from the capital left them feeling really uncomfortable.

Chubby Senior quickly came over and said with an apologetic smile, "Please come with me, honored guests. We had eyes but could not see before; I hope that sirs do not feel bothered by our poor treatment."

He wanted to use this chance to build up a good relationship with the other party. After all, even the imperial envoy was made up of people, so they had the same weaknesses. It wasn't as if the Hub of Freedom had never entertained imperial envoys before.

Zu An chuckled and said, "There's no need. We have some other matters to tend to, so we won't disturb you."

"Young master An is going to leave?" Tang Tian'er looked at him reluctantly. If not for the fact that Zu An had already experienced her charming skills before, he might have really thought she felt something for him.

"I'll come and visit the lady another day." Zu An gave her bottom a light pat, then left while laughing.

Tang Tian'er blushed as she watched them depart. That fella dares to take advantage of me!

She suddenly realized that even after all of that, she didn't even know the other party's real surname or identity. She had danced and sung at the Hub of Freedom for so many years, toying with so many men in the palm of her hand, and yet today, she suddenly felt she had been the one played by someone else.

Was he even charmed by me earlier? Tang Tian'er's pretty brow furrowed. However, a smile appeared on her face soon afterward. What an interesting man. I like him.

...

Meanwhile, Chubby Senior personally saw Zu An's group out. He had been worried about how he was going to make them coordinate with the Hub of Freedom's entry and exit rules, but Zu An agreed to enter a sealed carriage of his own accord. He immediately felt grateful. Because of the matter with Sun Ji, however, he only left after seeing them all the way to the pier.

"Why did we have to leave so early? I haven't had enough fun yet." Now that there was no one around them, Pei You finally voiced his misgivings.

Zu An replied with a smile, "They didn't even make you pay up; are you not happy enough with that?"

Pei You remarked with a chuckle, "How can I compare to big bro Zu? You managed to snag the Hub of Freedom's prettiest girl for yourself in such a short time. I asked around on the second floor, eventually finding out that Tang Tian'er was the Hub of Freedom's publicly acknowledged number one beauty!"

Gao Ying nodded. "I heard quite a few people mention her on the first floor. She's famous for being the Hub of Freedom's stunning socialite. She's able to associate with all kinds of men with incredible ease. Big bro Zu, you should be careful. It's okay to satisfy your body, but don't let your heart get caught up too."

"Thank you for the warning." Zu An knew he had said that with good intentions, but he had already seen Tang Tian'er's methods for himself. Those other men had probably all been duped by her, leaving no one able to really get anything from her.

Gao Ying sighed when he saw that Zu An hadn't seemed to take his words to heart. Zu An is still young and vigorous; that kind of exceptional beauty really is hard to resist. He didn't bother trying to advise Zu An further and instead changed the topic. "Brother Zu, was there any deeper meaning behind why you asked us to come back earlier?"

Zu An nodded and said, "Of course. There's no way that Sun Xun will leave the matter at that."

Pei You raised a brow. "What, don't tell me he'll dare to act against us?"

"Why wouldn't he dare? Isn't he here already?" Zu An sighed as he looked into the distance.

Chapter 986: Unexpected Hit

Pei You and Gao Ying turned toward where Zu An was looking and were shocked. Only now did they realize that there were already quite a few people gathered by the port where the imperial envoy was. The one in the lead was precisely Sun Xun, who had left earlier.

"Don't tell me he actually dares to start trouble with the imperial envoy?" Pei You sneered. They hadn't even been all that scared of him when they were in the Hub of Freedom, let alone here where they were back on home turf.

Those from the capital's major clans would always carry a bit of arrogance when meeting those from provincial areas. They were even here on the emperor's orders and part of the imperial envoy, so there were even fewer reasons for them to have any reservations.

Gao Ying was a bit calmer. He said in an overcast voice, "Let's get on the ship from the other side and see what's going on first."

Visiting the Hub of Freedom wasn't anything too glorious. Sun Xun might have come over to start a fuss. None of them had revealed their faces in the Hub of Freedom, though, so they could just refuse to admit anything once they were asked about it.

They got back on the ship in secret. Only after they changed their clothes did they come back out. By then, Sang Hong had already received the other party. Even though Sang Hong's official post and cultivation were lower than those of the other party, his status as the imperial envoy forced Sun Xun to treat him carefully.

"Sir Sang, what is going on?" the group walked over and asked.

Sang Hong said, "Let me introduce everyone. This is Yan State's Xiang Minister Sir Sun. This is the Eastern Palace's chamberlain, the Armed Escort Division Commander Zu An..."

After a round of introductions, they all greeted each other in a professional manner. Sun Xun gave them a look, then said with an ambiguous smile, "So it was Sir Zu. I've heard of your great reputation. My visit here today was precisely to meet Sir Zu."

Gao Ying and Pei You were alarmed. Did he already see through our identity?

Only Zu An remained calm as he replied, "Oh? I didn't expect to have such an honor. I wonder what Minister Sun needs?"

Sun Xun said, "I've heard that Sir Zu has solved strange cases in the capital again and again. This time, there is a tricky case I need Sir Zu's help with."

Sang Hong frowned and said, "I must ask for Minister Sun to excuse us. We bear the emperor's orders, so we are only going to be here for a short while. I fear there will not be enough time to help with any local cases." He was even a bit upset, thinking to himself that this Sun Xun really didn't understand the rules. Did we come here to help you with your cases?

But Sun Xun instead calmly said, "I really did not want to trouble the imperial envoys, but when we were just about to catch the criminal, we ran into someone claiming to be from the Armed Escort Division. That was why some suspects had to be let go, and we could not continue our investigation. That is also why I am asking for your respected selves' help."

Zu An's group exchanged some looks. They thought to themselves, As expected, it was unavoidable.

Sang Hong had already roughly guessed that this was something Zu An's group had caused. After all, they had left the ship not too long before. But he was shrewd and sophisticated, not giving the three of them a look at all. On the contrary, he instead asked, "Oh, was there something like that? Did Sir Sun examine their identities? After all, there are many daring individuals in the world now; there are even people who are willing to impersonate anyone." He was a wily old fox in the field of politics. He pushed the matter right back.

Sun Xun sighed. "Our local men are limited in our knowledge and experience; we do not know how to discern between the real and fake Armed Escort. Furthermore, impersonating the Armed Escort should be a huge crime. I believe Sir Sang has a duty to help with this investigation, right?"

"This..." Sang Hong was momentarily troubled. If that really had happened, he actually did have an obligation to cooperate. The very first thing he had to investigate was if any members of their envoy were involved.

While he was feeling troubled, Zu An asked, "Isn't it just a case? I don't think it'll take too long. I'll handle it." He obviously didn't want things to get out of hand either. It'd be really annoying if everyone else got dragged into it too. He knew who the main culprit was anyway, so it wouldn't take much effort at all.

Sang Hong trusted in Zu An's ability and agreed, knowing he had his own plans. He thus nodded and said in agreement, "That's fine as well; let us have Ah Zu help with this case. However, our mission is urgent, so we can only stay here for one more day. After that, regardless of whether there is a result or not, we need to leave. Do you understand?"

"I'll do as you bid!" Zu An gave him a thumbs up inwardly. As expected, the older the ginger, the hotter it was.

Sun Xun cursed Sang Hong inwardly for being an old fox. That fellow had said that to Zu An without consulting him at all. It was clearly to leave them a way out. But regardless, as long as they were willing to participate, his objective had been met.

"Then I'll have to trouble Sir Zu," he said as he cupped his hands toward the other party.

“Sir Sun is being too polite.” Zu An frowned. He just felt that there was something else that the other party was hiding, so he reminded himself to be careful as he asked, “May I ask what kind of case it is?”

“Let us take a look at the scene of the crime. How about we talk about the details along the way?” Sun Xun suggested as he got up..

“Sure.” Zu An wasn’t too worried about the other party doing anything. There were so many people who had seen Sun Xun invite him to help them with the case. If something really did happen, he wouldn’t have anywhere to run at all.

Sang Hong frowned. He gestured for Gao Ying, Pei You, and some other guards to accompany Zu An. He and Zu An were allies, and because of Zu An’s relationship with his daughter, he saw Zu An as his own junior. He obviously didn’t want to see anything bad happen.

Gao Ying and Pei You had the same intentions anyway, so they immediately followed behind Zu An with their men. Zu An didn’t refuse them. He had to enjoy his authority, so why would he have to play the hero and take on unnecessary risks?

Sun Xun didn’t say anything either as he brought everyone to the city outskirts. He had already recognized Pei You and Gao Ying from their auras. As for Zu An, he wasn’t sure. The other party was clearly only at the sixth rank, and yet there was something about his ki that made Sun Xun feel as if he couldn’t see through Zu An at all. It wasn’t quite the same as the prior number 333. But judging from Gao Ying and Pei You’s reactions, he was likely that person.

Even though he knew that the three of them knew what was going on, Sun Xun still patiently explained Sun Ji’s case. “My son was murdered by someone mercilessly. I hope Sir Zu can help this humble one find the perpetrator!”

Gao Ying and Pei You had worried looks on their faces. The death of Sun Xun’s son was quite the troublesome matter. However, they didn’t know just why their brother Zu would be involved.

Zu An replied indifferently, “I’ll do my utmost.”

This is quite the performance you’re putting on. Sun Xun sneered.

You have successfully trolled Sun Xun for +444 +444 +444...

A while later, the group arrived at a forest. Sun Xun said with a grieving expression, “This is where my son was harmed. I had my men guard this area, so no one else has entered the scene of the crime yet. I wonder if Sir Zu can help me find anything.” He stared at Zu An while saying that, as if he wanted to see if he could discern any panic or internal conflict from the other party’s expression.

However, he was completely disappointed. Zu An was extremely calm, and he looked around the scene of the crime as if it were his first time there. Then, he walked over to Sun Ji and the others’ corpses. Sun Xun was stupefied and continued to stare at Zu An to see if he could start something.

After examining the place for a bit, Zu An asked, “Who did the young master not get along with normally?”

Sun Xun replied, "My son has always been benevolent and helpful; he had no enemies. If we really have to talk about enemies, then he encountered a guest 333 in the Hub of Freedom today. A lot of conflict happened between the two of them."

"Oh? What kind of place is the Hub of Freedom?" Zu An asked calmly.

Gao Ying and Pei You were both left in admiration. As expected of brother Zu! His composure really leaves us in shame.

Sun Xun was angry inside, but he still gave a rough explanation of what had happened.

You have successfully trolled Sun Xun for +222 +222 +222...

Zu An asked a few more questions, then said, "Judging from what you're saying, that number 333 didn't have the time to commit the crime. He should be innocent."

Sun Xun was speechless.

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Zu An almost burst out laughing when he saw how furious Sun Xun was, but continued, "If a murder wasn't performed out of enmity, it would likely be out of passion. But, according to what Sir Sun told me, these two causes can be eliminated. That means only a murder of interest is left. When you were talking about the Hub of Freedom just now, it sounded as if he purchased something extremely precious. Is that item still here?"

"Of course not," Sun Xun said impatiently.

"Then the other party probably went after the item," Zu An concluded.

Sun Xun was finding it a bit hard to suppress his anger. "Sir Zu, this is the conclusion you have reached after all this time? I have known your great reputation for a long time, but I have to say that I am a bit disappointed today."

Zu An didn't get upset at all and replied, "What wise opinions does Sir Sun have about this?"

Sun Xun harrumphed. "Even though my son did not offend anyone normally, I am the Xiang Minister of a state. I have to deal with many political matters, so it cannot be helped that I might have offended some people and caused them to seek revenge. They would not dare to act against me, so they would come after my son. Among them, those who would dare to seek revenge and have the ability to do so could only be from the Devil Sect."

"The Devil Sect?" Zu An was shocked. He had never expected for them to be dragged into the conflict as well.

"Indeed." Sun Xun said. "I have helped my king fend off the Devil Sect all these years, dyeing my hands with the blood of who knows how many people from the Devil Sect. They all hate me bitterly. It would not be a surprise at all if they wanted to get revenge."

Zu An thought to himself for a bit. Why would he suddenly say that? Could it be that he really already believes I'm not the killer?

Chapter 987: Reunion with Old Friends

Even though he didn't know Sun Xun's objective, Zu An didn't want the Devil Sect to be implicated because of him. After all, whether it was Qiu Honglei or Yun Jianyue, they were both his good friends. As such, he said, "Sir Minister, please don't be in such a rush to come to a decision. I seem to have noticed something here. It might not have been the Devil Sect who did this."

Gao Ying and Pei You were stunned. The blame was deflected onto the Devil Sect; why the heck are you adding more meddlesome things? Sun Xun was also confused. He didn't know what Zu An's motive was.

Zu An said, "Based on our talk, it seems some of the young master's guards are missing. Could they have escaped during the chaos?"

Sun Xun shook his head. "That is impossible. The murderer's cultivation is extremely high, and many guards were taken out in one hit. Those people would not be able to escape. Furthermore, I sent my men out for several dozen li, and we found no traces of anyone fleeing."

Zu An continued, "Then could it be that they colluded with the enemy, then left with the enemy after the matter?"

"That is also impossible." Sun Xun immediately refuted that. "They were all reliable people who were carefully selected from the Xun clan. Furthermore, their families are still in the city, so no one would take the risk of doing something like that." He wouldn't assign anyone who wasn't loyal and devoted to his son's side. Furthermore, with their family members held hostage, how could so many people rebel at the same time?

"Then the case becomes much clearer." Zu An gave the corpses on the ground a look and said, "Those people were also killed, and their corpses were taken by the killer."

"What is Sir Zu implying?" Sun Xun was surprised. Now, he suddenly didn't feel that Zu An was the killer either. After all, he had only acted against him in the Hub of Freedom to vent his anger. If they really could find the real killer, what did a bit of personal grudge count for?

Zu An said, "The killer could clearly choose to leave on his own after doing the deed, yet he wasted the effort of bringing away all of those soldiers' corpses. That means he had a reason that forced him to do that."

"What kind of reason?" Even Gao Ying and Pei You had been sucked in now.

Zu An gave the two of them a satisfied look. These supporting characters really were doing their part well! He explained, "I gave their corpses a look earlier; they were almost all killed in one strike. That's why there was no need for the killer to deal with them. However, he had to bring the other corpses with him, which means his identity could be discerned from their corpses."

"Are you saying his cultivation techniques could be discerned from those people's bodies?" Sun Xun wasn't stupid. He quickly reacted to what Zu An was saying.

"Indeed." Zu An pointed at Yang Long. "According to what you told me, he was a seventh ranked expert. However, his spear was snapped from the front. That means the attacker's cultivation was much higher."

However, I noticed that he didn't die from being killed; rather, he struck his own skull to end his own life."

"Why would he do that?" That was also what Sun Xun had been confused about. However, he hadn't had the time to think about it in detail before.

Zu An explained, "It's because he knew he was dead for sure. If he didn't end his own life, it would only lead to more suffering. That means he knew the murderer would torment him. But judging from what you all said, you rushed over not long afterward. That killer definitely didn't have the time to torture him, so there must've been another reason why he had to end his own life. Sir Sun's cultivation is profound; do you have any ideas?"

Sun Xun's eyes narrowed. He muttered to himself, "If he didn't have to worry about being tortured, he had to have been so scared that he would rather be dead than alive. Looking at their situation, the killer didn't bring poison. Then..."

He suddenly thought of something. He said quietly, "There are some sinister cultivators in the martial world who rely on sucking away the cultivations or souls of others to increase their own cultivation. If Yang Long killed himself, it might have been to avoid such a result. However, if the other party needed a soul, it would have been useless even if he ended his own life..."

He quickly looked at his subordinates after saying that. He asked if there were any similar experts who had come to Yi Commandery recently. The target's cultivation was high, at least above the eighth rank, and he could absorb the cultivation of others. There weren't many who could satisfy those conditions.

Sure enough, one subordinate said, "There's a well known evildoer called Thick-Browed Daoist who appeared in Yi Commandery."

Zu An sighed when he heard that name. The reason he hadn't said it himself was because people tended to believe the conclusions they reached themselves more.

Sure enough, Sun Xun quickly said, "Send someone over to immediately ask whether Thick-Browed Daoist joined in the auction today. His brows are too distinctive. One can easily notice them even if he wears a mask."

He had heard about Thick-Browed Daoist himself. He thought to himself that if it really was him, he was going to skin the man alive and tear out his tendons to vent out his anger.

"Understood!" The subordinate quickly got on a horse and left.

Sun Xun thus cupped his hands toward Zu An and said, "Sir Zu is a genius at investigating cases after all. We have found some clues so quickly. As for the previous offenses, I hope that Sir Zu does not take them to heart." He felt sincere gratitude. After all, if he could find out the real culprit who had killed his son, then that would make him happier than anything else right now.

"Sir Sun is too generous with your praise. I offer my condolences to Sir Sun, that this kind of thing happened." Zu An thought to himself, Yes, you should be thanking me. To a certain extent, I was the one who got revenge for you.

He suddenly felt the ki within him become unstable. The explosive bloodiness he had absorbed seemed to be uneasy. He calmly suppressed it and told himself that he had to find a good time to properly purify the cultivation he had gotten from Thick-Browed Daoist. Otherwise, the rebound would really be bad for his body.

"Is Sir Zu uncomfortable anywhere?" Sun Xun was a cultivator after all. He could sense that there was something unnatural about the other party's ki fluctuations since they were so close.

"It's nothing." Zu An forced a smile. He was worried about how to explain the situation.

Suddenly, there was a loud noise in the distance and the entire sky became as bright as day. The expressions of those present became strange as powerful winds blew against them. Those with lower cultivations couldn't help but sway unsteadily from side to side.

"This is... the aura of a grandmaster?" Zu An and Sun Xun looked into the distance in shock.

Two individuals were standing in the skies several dozen li out. One was an elder clothed in official robes that only a king could wear. He was clearly King Yan. Across from him was a ridiculously beautiful woman. Together with her long hair that flowed all the way down to her waist, she gave off a cool, elegant womanly air.

"Yun Jianyue!"

"The Devil Sect's sect master!"

Zu An and Sun Xun both recognized her.

An alarm rang out just then. A guard quickly came to report, "Minister Xiang, there seem to be members of the Devil Sect who have invaded the manor to assassinate the king!"

Sun Xun's expression changed greatly as he exclaimed, "We're going back to assist the king immediately!" Then, he said to Zu An and the others, "Sirs, please go back for now. Forgive me for not being able to see you off."

Zu An said, "I'll go with you." When he saw the other party's shocked expression, he quickly explained, "As an official of the Zhou Dynasty, I should do my part as well. Furthermore, I've faced these Devil Sect evildoers in the capital back then too, so I have a debt to repay."

He was worried that something would happen to Yun Jianyue or Qiu Honglei. After all, Yi Commandery was King Yan's domain. King Yan not only had a lot of experts under him, but was also a grandmaster himself.

He was actually quite puzzled. Yun Jianyue wasn't someone who acted impulsively, so why had she done something so unwise? But he quickly remembered that she had even dared to invade the Imperial Palace, so what was the big deal with King Yan Manor?

"Brother Zu!" Gao Ying and Pei You quickly advised against him going. This is a grudge between King Yan Manor and the Devil Sect. It has nothing to do with the imperial envoy! Why the hell are you going over to throw your life away for nothing?

"You guys should head back and report to Sir Sang first. I'll take a look at the situation. Don't worry, I know what I'm doing," Zu An replied. Yun Jianyue didn't recognize these two, so he was worried that it would be bad if they ended up getting in trouble because of him.

Gao Ying and Pei You knew Zu An always acted with proper thought, so they didn't try to advise him further. They said, "Alright. We'll come over together after we meet with Sir Sang. You have to remember not to act impulsively at all costs!"

Zu An nodded. Then, he headed toward the city with Sun Xun's group. He continued to pray inwardly, Big sis Yun, Honglei, please don't let anything happen to you two...

Chapter 988: Locked Up

Zu An and Sun Xun arrived at King Yan Manor soon afterward. Sun Xun was shocked because he had rushed over and arrived faster than his subordinates, but even though Zu An couldn't fly, his speed wasn't much slower than his own.

Don't tell me his cultivation is close to mine? That thought flashed past Sun Xun's mind, but he quickly ignored it. How old is Zu An? Even if he cultivated ever since he came out of the womb, there should be no way he could compare to me!

After arriving at King Yan Manor, Zu An immediately took in his surroundings. He also used the jade badge's ability to control the nearby small creatures and have them observe any activity.

King Yan Manor was clearly inferior to the Imperial Palace, but it was still extremely grand and imposing. Out of all of the manors he had been to, King Qi Manor was probably the only place that could compare to this place. However, King Qi Manor had to conform to all kinds of rules since it was in the capital. That was why generally speaking, it wasn't as imposing in its manner as King Yan Manor.

But Zu An didn't attach too much importance to such things. He quickly began to search for Yun Jianyue and Qiu Honglei's whereabouts. However, the battle seemed to have already ended, so he didn't see anything. There were only aggrieved and wounded guards as well as some other people present.

Zu An frowned. He set aside his misgivings and looked at Sun Xun, remarking, "Minister Sun, the battle seems to have already ended, no?"

"Let's see the king first." Sun Xun didn't dare to show any negligence just then. He lifted the edges of his robe and quickly headed toward the inner courtyard of the manor. He ran into many guards along the way. But when they saw Sun Xun, they all let him through.

Many women had gathered in the inner courtyard, weeping endlessly, almost as if they were striving to express their deepest concern more than the ones around them. A furious roar soon came from inside. "I'm not even dead yet; what are you all wailing as if you're at a funeral for?!" Sure enough, the women stopped when they heard the angry roar.

Sun Xun had just reported his arrival at the entrance. When the guards left, the women began to leave as well. They all greeted Sun Xun as they passed by. Zu An was quite surprised. This Sun Xun really does receive quite the favor in King Yan Manor! Even King Yan's concubines have to greet him like this.

The guards came out to invite Sun Xun in soon afterward. Zu An followed Sun Xun and met the so-called King Yan. His complexion was pale, and his aura was incredibly weak. What grandmaster aura? He presently seemed more like an ordinary old man who was already nearing the end of the line.

Sun Xun was alarmed and quickly asked, "King, what happened to you?"

"It's nothing. I was wounded by the Devil Sect's Yun Jianyue, but she isn't much better off than me," King Yan replied weakly from his bed. Then, he looked toward Zu An with an expression of confusion.

Zu An was surprised. Yun Jianyue was also injured? He wondered if her injuries were serious or not.

Sun Xun introduced him just then. "This is Sir Zu An from the imperial envoy. His current post is the crown prince's chamberlain, as well as the Armed Escort Division Commander. He previously solved..." His string of praises even made Zu An blush. Then, he said, "It was because of his help just now that we discovered the real murderer who killed my son."

"Something happened to Little Ji?" King Yan subconsciously sat up from shock. However, the action clearly made his injuries flare up again, and he let out a burst of coughs.

Sun Xun quickly ran over and helped him lie back down, saying, "I've made the king worry. In the end, it was because my son had no ability himself..." He gave King Yan a rough recount of what had happened to Sun Ji.

King Yan was furious, exclaiming, "Nonsense! Someone dared to do such a thing in Yi Commandery?! Pass down my order! Order Thick-Browed Daoist's arrest. If anyone can capture him, there will be a reward of ten thousand taels of gold and three ranks of promotion. Anyone who provides any useful clues will be awarded a thousand taels of gold."

Sun Xun immediately knelt down. "Thank you for your care, my king. Ji'er in heaven definitely feels grateful too."

Zu An couldn't help but sneer inwardly as he watched the master and servant pair interact passionately. Just whose kid was Sun Ji really, between these two?

After King Yan vented his anger, he looked at Zu An and said, "I have to thank Sir Zu for Ji'er's matter. Sir Zu really is an outstanding youth as the rumors say."

"The king is too kind with your praise. I was merely carrying out my duty," Zu An replied modestly, then asked about what he really cared about. "By the way, we hurried over when we saw that something happened here in the King Manor. Were you able to execute those Devil Sect evildoers?"

King Yan shook his head. "That witch Yun Jianyue's cultivation is too high. With her protection, even though they suffered some losses, most of them were able to escape unscathed."

Zu An sighed inwardly in relief when he heard that Yun Jianyue and the others were fine. "But why did Yun Jianyue assault the King Manor? The security here is tight, so any attack would be futile. The Devil Sect Master is no fool; why would she make such an unwise decision?" That was what he couldn't figure out. However, with his current identity, he could ask King Yan that question without any misgivings.

"It's probably because we've been suppressing those Devil Sect evildoers these past few years, so they hate us to the bone," King Yan said angrily. "As for the reason why they came out in full force, it is probably because we captured their Saintess a few days ago."

King Yan didn't think too much when he said that, but that piece of information actually left Zu An extremely shocked. What? Qiu Honglei was captured?

"Zu An, what's wrong?" Sun Xun gave him a skeptical look. Even King Yan noticed how he was acting.

Zu An reacted quickly and immediately said, "I had some interactions with these evildoers in the capital before. That woman is especially crafty and cunning, and her cultivation skills aren't weak either. She was even able to escape from the capital, yet the king was able to capture her. I really am left in admiration."

King Yan stroked his beard, pleased. A bit of pride couldn't help but appear in his eyes as he replied, "Sir Zu overpraises us. It was completely a coincidence that we were able to capture her."

He didn't dare to act too proud either, because Qiu Honglei had managed to escape from the Imperial Palace, and yet was captured in King Yan Manor. If someone with ulterior motives wanted to use that as a pretext to start something, saying that King Qi Manor was even more formidable than the Imperial Palace, what then would they be trying to start?

Zu An chatted with the two of them for a while, then took the chance to ask, "Can I pay that evil woman a visit? I have a friend who was completely fooled by her. There's always been some resentment I wanted to vent."

King Yan and Sun Xun both revealed a knowing smile when they heard Zu An use the 'I have a friend' skill.

"That's fine. You should take Sir Zu to see that evil woman," King Yan said. He was injured, so the chat was already getting quite difficult for him.

"Please rest well, my king." Sun Xun immediately bowed toward King Yan, then said to Zu An, "Sir Zu, this way."

Zu An bid King Yan his farewell too. He followed Sun Xun out of the room nervously before remarking, "I wonder which expert captured the evildoer? I'll definitely report this incredible achievement to his majesty so they can be properly rewarded."

Sun Xun smiled and replied, "The one who captured that evil woman was naturally the king, so any further recognition isn't needed. It isn't too suitable with his identity."

"I see!" Zu An looked as if he had suddenly realized what was going on. No wonder Qiu Honglei had ended up in trouble; how could she get away if a grandmaster personally got involved?

Soon afterward, they arrived at a secluded courtyard. There were clearly more guards there. It was obviously Yan King Manor's private prison. They went through several layers of heavy security before arriving at the deepest part of the prison.

There, a woman dressed in black sat in the corner with her arms wrapped around her knees; her expression was a bit dispirited and she looked pale. However, that still didn't conceal her shocking

beauty. This stunning woman, who was usually lively and full of tricks, now had something of an innocent beauty to her that would only make those who saw her feel even more moved.

Zu An immediately felt his mood sink. He had been praying all the way there, hoping the Devil Sect Saintess they had spoken of wasn't Qiu Honglei. Unfortunately, he was still disappointed in the end.

Qiu Honglei raised her head when she heard the incoming activity. Her stunning features even made Sun Xun feel something. She coldly berated him, saying, "What else do I have to say to someone like you..." However, when she saw Zu An behind him, her expression froze.

Sun Xun remarked with a ruminating expression, "You two know each other?"

Zu An laughed and said, "Last time, I was able to get a look, and I couldn't forget just how incredible and sexy this Devil Sect girl was. Now that we've met again, I think she looks much prettier this way. Compared to the past, I like her current state much more."

Qiu Honglei snorted, exclaiming, "Wretched court dog!"

Chapter 989: Hot Potato

"And what can you do about it? You can only stay mad." Zu An sneered. Then, he pulled Sun Xun aside and asked quietly, "Minister Sun, can I discuss something with you?"

Sun Xun cupped his hands and replied, "Sir Zu helped me find my son's real killer, so I feel only gratitude. Please tell me if there's anything you need. I'll definitely help you as long as I can."

Zu An rubbed his hands together. He gave Qiu Honglei a look and deliberately gave Sun Xun a 'you know' expression as he said, "Minister Xiang, that woman really made me suffer quite badly last time, so I've always wanted to find a way to get back at her. Her background is mysterious, and she's crafty too, so I never thought I would have a chance to get revenge, but the heavens have eyes! God himself has allowed me to meet her again. I wonder if Minister Sun can hand her over to me for a few hours so I can properly return the favor?"

Sun Xun obviously knew exactly what Zu An was implying from his expression. How else would leaving a single man and woman together mean getting revenge? He had a troubled expression as he replied, "Sir Zu, I fear that would be quite troublesome. Her cultivation is extremely high, so you might be in danger if we let you in."

"It's fine; my cultivation is still barely enough to restrain her. Furthermore, can't we just cripple her cultivation?" Zu An could sense that her ki fluctuations were still normal, which left him confused. He wanted to take the chance to inquire about that.

"That would cause a grudge that wouldn't end until one side was completely eliminated! Her master is the Devil Sect Master, and also a grandmaster. If she really did seek revenge without any misgivings, then even the king would find it hard to handle," Sun Xun replied. "Sir Zu, we're all close, so I won't hide anything from you. If it were anything else, I would definitely agree, but this woman's status is a bit too sensitive. A single mishap and it might cause huge repercussions. That's why I ask for Sir Zu's forgiveness."

Zu An sighed and said, "Then that's really a pity. This woman is just too beautiful."

Sun Xun thought to himself, This kid is a pervert, as expected! He sneered inwardly, but he still had an extremely sincere expression on the surface as he said, "Sir Zu, I'll have my people make some arrangements for you later. The girls from Yi Commandery are all tall and slender. They aren't much worse than this evildoer."

"Forget it, I've lost my interest." Zu An directly refused. He walked over to Honglei's side with a lust-consumed expression. Secretly, however, he sent her a voice transmission. "Honglei, don't be scared. I'll teach you how to get out."

"What are you staring at? I'm going to gouge those eyes out if you keep looking!" Qiu Honglei exclaimed, glaring at him hatefully on the surface. However, she replied in private, "No! King Yan Manor is a place full of powerful cultivators and guards. King Yan is a grandmaster himself. It's way too dangerous for you to save me! Not only would you fail to save me, you might even end up getting involved too! Don't worry, I'm fine. They wouldn't dare to do anything to me."

"Come and gouge them out? Judging from how fair and slender you look, I'm sure it'll feel good even if you're gouging out my eyeballs," Zu An responded while saying through voice transmission, "Don't worry, I won't act recklessly. Of course I'd only do something if I felt confident in its success."

Sun Xun rolled his eyes when he heard that. This guy really isn't good at flirting with girls at all... Did he never meet women in his past life or something? Some guards approached and told him a few things, however. After his initial shock, he walked over to Zu An's side and said, "Sir Zu, the imperial envoy has arrived. We should head over together."

When he heard that Sang Hong had arrived, Zu An nodded. Then, he blew Qiu Honglei a kiss, saying, "Wash up and wait for me, babe. You'll be mine sooner or later."

Sun Xun had a smile on his face, but he sneered inwardly. This guy really has some crazy confidence.

Only Qiu Honglei knew what he was really talking about. She blushed slightly and harrumphed. It had already been a long time since they last met, yet this guy was still the same. But she was also worried. What if he really did something rash? But she had no way of contacting her master...

...

Zu An and Sun Xun went to King Yan's bedroom. Sang Hong was already chatting happily with him. He expressed his concern for King Yan's injuries, while the other side spoke highly of the imperial envoy's difficult work. Sang Hong then praised the accomplishments King Yan had.

Zu An was incredibly impressed. This kind of official bullshitting ability was something he would never be able to do even if he studied it his entire life. It really was a language art in itself...

Gao Ying and Pei You, who were behind Sang Hong, sighed in relief when they saw Zu An. They had been worried that Zu An might be in danger if he followed Sun Xun, so they quickly returned to report what happened.

Sang Hong hadn't dared to treat the matter lightly when he heard that either. Why would he care about King Yan's health at all? He had come purely for Zu An.

King Yan then said, "Right, Sir Sang, this king wants to discuss something with you."

"The king is too polite; please speak your mind." Sang Hong was hesitant. That was also the reason he hadn't wanted to go ashore before. He hadn't wanted any dealings with the local powers.

King Yan said, "I mentioned to you earlier that we captured the Devil Sect's Saintess. I heard that this evildoer caused a huge disturbance in the Imperial Palace, so I plan to send her to the capital for his majesty to deal with. That would also help the empress, crown prince, and the others vent a bit of their resentment."

Sang Hong was stunned at first, but he quickly realized that it was because the Devil Sect Saintess' status was too sensitive, so King Yan didn't dare to kill her; and yet, he didn't dare to release her either. That was why they figured they might as well just send her to the capital.

He obviously didn't want to get involved in anything like that, saying, "Respected king, we naturally do not wish to shirk out responsibility over something like this, but we already have another task on this trip. We need to hurry to Cloudcenter Commandery as quickly as possible. I fear we cannot let ourselves get distracted and help you deliver this evildoer back to the capital."

Zu An was nervous. He really wanted to just agree, but he quickly calmed down. Why had the other party proposed a request the imperial envoy had no way of agreeing to?

Sure enough, King Yan immediately said, "I would not dare to entrust something like this to Sir Imperial Envoy. I only hope that Sir Imperial Envoy can help me pass it on to Yi Commandery's Governor Zhang and have him escort this evil woman to the capital. We have to fight the Devil Sect battle after battle and really cannot attend to other things right now."

"I fear that..." Sang Hong immediately realized that the matter was touching upon the struggle for local authority. King Yan probably wanted to offload that headache to another local official. Not only would it make them feel disgusted, it would also leave them with a difficult problem to deal with.

If the government manor successfully delivered her to the capital, that was just something they were supposed to do. Since it was King Yan Manor who had captured the Devil Sect's Saintess, the reward would be King Yan Manor's. No one would reward the Governor Manor.

However, if something happened to the criminals being escorted along the way, that would be a ton of responsibility. When his majesty began to point fingers, even the governor might be forced to lose his position.

That was why Sang Hong obviously didn't want to get involved. He was just about to refuse when Zu An spoke up and agreed. "We're all working for the court, so we shouldn't shirk our responsibilities with this kind of thing. We'll tell the governor."

Sang Hong was surprised. But he knew that Zu An wouldn't speak without thinking, so he tacitly agreed. They chatted for a while longer, then Sang Hong got up to bid his farewell.

After seeing them off, Sun Xun returned to King Yan's room. King Yan had already gotten up from the bed. He didn't look as weak as before at all.

"Congratulations, my king. Now, the responsibility is completely on that Zhang bastard," said Sun Xun.

King Yan frowned. "I can't understand why that Zu An looks so enthusiastic about this. Could it be that there are some crafty plots in play?"

Sun Xun explained, "My king is overthinking it. It's just because he's lustful..." Then, he explained what had happened in the prison. "I fear what he wants is merely to bring her out of King Yan Manor to make it easier for him to get closer to her."

King Yan said with a sneer, "He really overestimates his own abilities. He dares to touch even the treasured disciple of Yun Jianyue? He'll end up losing his life without even knowing why."

Sun Xun remained expressionless. Even though that Zu An had helped him find out the real killer, his grudge with Ji'er earlier had been real too. That was why even if something did end up happening to him, it would also be a kind of revenge for Ji'er.

Just then, King Yan said seriously, "Minister Sun, you've had to experience the death of your child, and you still have to deal with all sorts of complicated matters. I've really troubled you."

"Thank you for your concern, my king. Even though this subordinate is grieving, it won't affect proper matters. After all..." Sun Xun paused and said, "I don't just have one son." His voice was so cold, it could send a chill down the back of anyone who heard it.

King Yan roared with laughter and said, "I'll bestow you a few more beautiful wives and concubines so they can give birth to a few more sons."

...

Meanwhile, after Sang Hong's group left King Yan Manor, he pulled Zu An over and asked quietly, "Why did you agree to that matter?"

Chapter 990: Golden Token Seven

Zu An replied seriously, "Respected uncle, I have other plans, but I can't explain them right now. I hope you can excuse me for this."

Sang Hong gave him a deep look, then said, "You're already calling me uncle, so I naturally trust you. Since you're saying this, I won't ask you any more." Does this kid think I don't know? I was the governor of Brightmoon City before! Immortal Abode's courtesan Qiu Honglei had quite a close relationship with him. This kid really is fickle, hmph.

When he thought of his own daughter, Sang Hong suddenly felt a bit unhappy for some reason. He then said, "I'll pay the Governor Manor a visit now to discuss the matter of escorting the Devil Sect's evildoer back to the capital. You've worked hard just now, so you should return early and rest."

"Thank you, respected uncle." Zu An sighed when he heard Sang Hong's agreement.

Sang Hong called out and stopped him right when he was about to leave, adding, "Ah Zu, let me warn you that adoration in youth is natural, but you should have clear discernment in who you're messing with. It's best if you don't get too close to these women."

Zu An immediately began to sweat buckets. Looks like I can't fool this old man after all. He could only say, "Respected uncle's words are wise."

Sang Hong harrumphed in annoyance when he saw that despite Zu An's words, his expression was still indifferent. He didn't bother trying to advise Zu An further. Either way, Qien'er was just borrowing this man for a bit; he didn't really have to become their son-in-law. He just needed that grandson.

Zu An returned to the port when he saw Sang Hong and his men head for the Governor Manor. Gao Ying and Pei You asked him if Sun Xun had made things hard for him at all, and he gave them a rough summary of what had happened. However, he was still worried about Qiu Honglei, so he made an excuse to return to his room for rest. Gao Ying and Pei You had tossed and turned for most of the night themselves, so they were both tired. They both went back to rest.

Zu An secretly changed into his Embroidered Envoy uniform, then went to Xiao Jianren's room. Sang Hong, Zu An, and the others had all left, and they had needed someone to guard the ship headquarters. Xiao Jianren was naturally the best candidate.

Xiao Jianren was reading under the light, his eyes about to touch the table from how close he was to it. His nearsightedness was already incredibly bad. But he was someone who could rise above the other Embroidered Envoys, so even though his eyes weren't great, his ears were extremely sensitive. He noticed Zu An as soon as he walked into the room, calling out, "Who?"

"It's me!" Zu An said in a low muffled voice. "I warned you not to read at night, that your eyes can't take it. Once we get back, we'll get you some glass spectacles or a Lasting Lamp."

Zu An had already inquired about those things before. The libationer's disciples came up with all kinds of weird inventions. They had things like glasses too; however, they didn't use the glass he was used to, but rather used a ceramic glaze. They used special runes to produce results similar to normal glasses, which was why they were extremely expensive.

As for the Lasting Lamps, the lamp Zu An had given Xie Daoyun was one; it was just a high level and precious one. Even though Zu An sympathized with Xiao Jianren, between a man and a cute girl, he would definitely choose the cute girl.

"It's fine; I've already gotten used to it after all these years." Xiao Jianren placed a bookmark in the place he had just left off and carefully closed the book as if he were handling a precious treasure. "Both the glass spectacles and the Lasting Lamps from the academy are too expensive. It's not an expense someone like me can handle."

Zu An was left speechless as well. As a silver token envoy, his salary wasn't that low. He could purchase one if he saved up for a few years. However, whenever he saved up even a bit of money, Xiao Jianren would always buy books. Furthermore, he read anything too. He would even enjoy the writing on the wrappings of pastries from certain restaurants for a long time. The purchase of all kinds of books made him the poorest person in the Embroidery House. He obviously wouldn't be willing to buy the academy's goods.

"Right, do you know where the Devil Sect is located in Yi Commandery?" Zu An didn't forget why he had come over and quickly asked. He needed to get into contact with Yun Jianyue as quickly as possible so he could discuss how to rescue Qiu Honglei with her.

Xiao Jianren couldn't help but say, "Sir really holds me in too high regard. If the Devil Sect's headquarters were so easily found, they would've already been wiped out by the court a long time ago."

However, I can try to contact the local Embroidered Envoy intelligence network to see if I can find any of their locations that aren't as important. These locations where they gather will have a spy or two there to monitor the situation; otherwise, we'd have to find the Devil Sect's new location again if we immediately destroyed them. Of course, these locations usually don't have much value, so I don't know if they'll be that useful to sir."

"We'll see after you find them." Zu An had no leads either, so he could only give it a try. If push came to shove, he'd just have to go himself.

"Understood!" Xiao Jianren cupped his hands. He was just about to leave when Zu An reached out his hand to stop him.

While Xiao Jianren was confused, Zu An called out seriously, "Since your respected self has come, why don't we meet and greet each other?"

"Is there someone here?" Xiao Jianren was horrified. He was a careful person, so he had even set up some small mechanisms nearby. His ears had always been sharp too. Only someone like Sir Eleven could enter his room without his notice; it was extremely difficult for others to escape his detection.

And now, even with Sir Eleven's reminder, he couldn't hear any breathing, nor could he sense any ki fluctuations. Just how high did the other party's cultivation have to be to achieve that?

A cold voice spoke from outside just then. "I was already being careful, yet you still found me out. As expected of a golden token envoy."

A dark figure entered, pushing the window open. Xiao Jianren was about to draw his blade when he was suddenly stunned, as the dark figure removed their stealthy clothing and revealed the clothing underneath. The special dragon and cloud patterns on it could only belong to another Embroidered Envoy's uniform. Furthermore, judging from his gilded collar, it was actually another golden token envoy!

Xiao Jianren quickly greeted them while carefully asking, "Is this Sir Seven, who's in charge of this place's information network?" He spent a lot of time in the Embroidery House's archives, so he naturally knew about such things.

"Golden Token Seven?" Zu An sized up the other party curiously. After all, it had already been a long time since he had been appointed as a golden token, but this was the first time he had met another golden token envoy.

The other party's face was covered, so there was no way to see who it was. However, his eyes were bright and expressive. Judging from the few wrinkles exposed around the corners of his eyes, Zu An could roughly discern that he was a middle-aged man. Even though his figure was smaller than average, there was an austere aura around him. It was easy to see just how important this person was from how Xiao Jianren didn't even dare to breathe too heavily.

Zu An sensed the other party's ki fluctuations. This person was roughly at the ninth rank. However, after experiencing all of those things, he also knew that as one's cultivation climbed higher, ki fluctuations weren't as accurate of a means to measure one's true cultivation. Unless they used everything they had

in a life and death situation, their normal level of ki fluctuations would vary greatly, let alone the fact that there were many artifacts or techniques that could help conceal one's real aura.

The small middle-aged man took out a shining golden token and showed it to Zu An, saying, "Identity confirmation, Golden Token Seven."

Embroidered Envoy items were all standardized. Outsiders couldn't imitate them at all. That was especially true for the special runes engraved on the tokens, which other Embroidered Envoys could easily differentiate.

Xiao Jianren quickly took out his silver envoy token, but the other party didn't even give him a look. He only continued to stare at Zu An. His intentions were clear. This is a conversation between high ranking officers; step off to the side.

Zu An took out his own Golden Token Eleven token to confirm his identity. Golden Token Seven thus sighed in relief. However, his brow quickly furrowed as he asked, "Why is your cultivation so low?"

Zu An had Concubine Bai's spice bag. Together with the Mirror Mirage technique he cultivated, it was difficult for others to see his true cultivation. He said indifferently, "It's enough as long as I can defeat those I want to deal with."

Golden Token Seven couldn't help but give the other party a look. This fellow only had six levels of cultivation, yet his speech was definitely quite arrogant. But he admired such a temperament. If the other party were a yes-man, it would instead lower the prestige of all of the golden token envoys. If this person's cultivation was so low, that meant his majesty and the chief commander valued other aspects of him.

"I came here to ask you all for help in the investigation of a certain matter." Golden Token Seven slowly explained his purpose for coming.