

Immortal 991

Chapter 991: A Crafty Escape Plan

"What are you investigating?" Zu An's expression was somewhat serious. After all, even though golden token envoys weren't forbidden from interacting, they rarely met with each other. If the other party had taken the initiative to meet him, that meant it was definitely not a small matter.

Unfortunately, he was completely preoccupied with Qiu Honglei's matter at the moment. He wasn't in the mood to listen to Golden Token Seven's issue. Of course, since he had brought it up, there was no way he could refuse. He could only listen for the time being. Then, he would just leave Xiao Jianren and the others to follow up, while he himself would deal with it once he had some free time.

Golden Token Seven opened his mouth. After some hesitation, he said, "I have a suspicion. However, I still don't have any proof and need to investigate further to know for certain."

Zu An could sense his hesitation. The other party didn't fully trust the two of them yet, and the matter might be extremely important. Without more of a guarantee he could trust, he might easily be bringing himself trouble.

This world wasn't like his previous world where one could easily cancel someone specifically with just a few tweets. There were too many individuals in this world that couldn't be offended. Furthermore, it was also expressly stipulated that accusing aristocrats and important ministers without proof was a huge crime. The more serious punishments could even amount to clan eradication.

"Could it be that it involves King Yan?" Zu An didn't want to bother with this matter. But if it did have to do with King Yan, he would try and see if he could use it as a way to save Qiu Honglei.

Golden Token Seven gave him a look and replied, "No. Don't make random guesses, or else you'll be inviting trouble onto yourself."

"But you're not even speaking in detail, so how am I supposed to help?" Zu An shrugged when he saw how the other party was deliberately mystifying the matter. He already planned to ignore it.

But Golden Token Seven's next words almost made Zu An jump in alarm. "Help me rescue the Devil Sect's Saintess."

Zu An was stunned. He was overjoyed to hear that, but on the surface, his expression instead darkened. "What are you saying? Don't you know that colluding with the Devil Sect is a crime punishable by clan eradication?" Is this guy testing me?

"Of course I know, but I don't have anything to do with the Devil Sect, nor am I doing this to save her. Rather, I'm doing this to confirm one thing," Golden Token Seven explained.

"This matter involves too much, so please forgive me for not joining in on it. But since we're both golden token envoys, I won't report this. Please act accordingly on your own." Zu An felt extremely conflicted inside, but he didn't know what the other party was really thinking and thus couldn't agree so easily.

Sure enough, Golden Token Seven also realized that Zu An probably wouldn't help if he didn't tell him anything else. He could only say, "Alright, to be honest, I need to catch the Devil Sect's Saintess to personally ask her something."

Zu An asked, "Isn't she currently in King Yan Manor? King Yan's people have already interrogated her, and she'll soon be brought to the capital. Why do you need to interrogate her yourself? Could it be... that you don't trust King Yan?"

Golden Token Seven was a bit surprised. He clearly hadn't expected Zu An to know so many details already. His opinion of Zu An immediately changed. He said, "Once we interrogate the Devil Sect's Saintess and prove some of my thoughts, I'll tell you everything that has happened. This matter will earn tremendous contributions that will be enjoyed by both of us. However, this is also a huge matter that could easily lead to terrible consequences if executed poorly. That's why I hope for your understanding right now."

"This..." Zu An still pretended to refuse. "This matter is too dangerous. There will definitely be heavy security around the Devil Sect's Saintess."

Golden Token Seven said, "You don't need to worry about that. I won't make you take the risk. I'll face them head on and draw their attention. You'll take that chance to leave with the Devil Sect's Saintess."

Zu An couldn't be happier. This was simply a gift from the heavens! However, he still couldn't lower his guard. He asked, "But what if you use this as a chance to frame me?"

"We've never associated with each other before, and the golden token envoys each manage a separate area. We don't have any clash of interests between us either, so why would I try to frame you?" Golden Token Seven gave the shuddering Xiao Jianren a look. "I never made this person leave. Can't you see I did that to leave behind another witness to help you feel more at ease?"

Xiao Jianren had a bitter expression on his face. He really wished he hadn't heard a single thing from start to finish. This was a huge matter that even made golden token envoys feel danger, so wouldn't he die many times over if he got involved?

Since the other party was already going this far, Zu An nodded and said, "Fine, I can help you." He had planned to save Qiu Honglei himself anyway. He was obviously happy to have another helper.

Golden Token Seven cupped his hands and said, "Good; I'll owe you a favor because of this. As long as it's not something that goes too far, I'll do everything I can to help you once."

Xiao Jianren looked surprised. This was a serious promise! Even though the other party hadn't explicitly said he was willing to break the law, it was obvious that he was willing to help even to that extent.

It was easy to see just how much this matter bothered Golden Token Seven. He was even willing to make a promise like that. Xiao Jianren began to tremble all over when he thought of that. Was he going to be silenced by these two after the matter was resolved?

Zu An cupped his hands and said, "Much appreciated. When will we act?"

Golden Token Seven replied, "I still need to look into their escort path. I'll contact you once I have more information."

Zu An pointed at Xiao Jianren. "You can just pass on the message to him if you can't find me."

Xiao Jianren was immediately overwhelmed by the favor. Sir Eleven really thinks highly of me! He even handed such an important matter to me!

Golden Token Seven didn't feel any suspicion. Golden token envoys usually worked in the shadows, so it was common for them to not be able to find each other. Having someone act as an intermediary was a good thing. As such, he gave the other two a nod before pushing open the window and disappearing into the darkness without any noise. It was easy to see just how high his cultivation was.

"Sir Eleven..." After Golden Token Seven left, Xiao Jianren wanted to say something, but then hesitated.

Zu An patted his shoulder and said, "Don't worry, I won't silence you afterward. I'm not that type of person."

Xiao Jianren sighed in relief. He had already forgotten when it started, but as an Embroidered Envoy, he was used to mutual deception. And yet, when he heard what Sir Eleven said, he felt a mysterious feeling of trust.

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Zu An secretly left after consoling him. However, he didn't go back to his room to sleep, and instead went into the city. He found the Devil Sect's hiding spot according to the information Xiao Jianren had given him. He couldn't place all of his eggs in one basket; thus, he needed to contact Yun Jianyue first.

This gathering spot was a tavern. It was already late into the night, so of course it was already closed. However, Zu An didn't have any misgivings and charged straight in. He quickly detained the people inside. Apart from the tavern boss, there were two other assistants. He didn't waste any time and questioned them separately.

At first, they refused to talk, but Zu An naturally had his reason for using force. He summoned Daji. These individuals' cultivation ranks weren't high; thus, they were quickly knocked out by Daji's Fox Charm skill.

But even after all of that, he discovered that they were all small fry. They didn't know how to contact the Devil Sect's upper echelon. Every so often, the Devil Sect would contact them to collect some intelligence, but that was completely a unilateral form of communication. Furthermore, their actions were extremely secretive. Not even the people from this tavern knew who came to take the information.

The most important part was that the last time they had collected information was three days prior, and it would be another ten days at the earliest before the Devil Sect would come back. How could Zu An wait for that long?

Daji erased their memories of what had just happened and knocked them unconscious. Zu An could only helplessly return to the imperial envoy fleet.

Sang Hong also came back with his men soon afterward, and sought out Zu An to discuss some things. "I just met with Governor Zhang. He originally wasn't willing to do this, but because of my appearance, the pressure from King Yan's side, and the fact that some local officials want this opportunity to accumulate contributions and thus urged him to accept this mission, he still agreed in the end.

"He's worried that the longer they wait, the more variables there will be. Those from the Devil Sect might realize what's happening. That's why they'll escort the prisoner out tomorrow at noon."

Zu An was shocked. "Tomorrow at noon?" Half a day of time really was too rushed for the Governor Manor.

"Indeed. When the time comes, Governor Zhang will march over with his men to visit the sick King Yan, using that chance to move Qiu Honglei from the manor's prison to his own fleet. This way, when his men leave the city, those from the Devil Sect won't realize that Qiu Honglei is already no longer in King Yan Manor. By the time they react, the procession will already be a thousand miles away. At that point, it will be too late for the Devil Sect to put together a rescue group." Sang Hong sighed and said, "That Governor Zhang really is quite something. He actually thought of something like this in such a short amount of time."

"He is indeed formidable." Zu An felt a bit of a headache. Would he really be able to rescue Qiu Honglei with just Golden Token Seven, and without the Devil Sect's people diverting attention?

"Who's in charge of the escort?" Zu An wanted to take the chance to get more information. The more he knew, the more assurance he would have.

"Yi Commandery's Martial Supervisor Yang Sheng, an expert at the initial stage of the ninth rank. Yi Commandery's City Lord Liao Ling, a cultivator at the peak of the seventh rank, is also going with him. I don't know about the other officers and guards." Sang Hong looked at Zu An as he said that, as if warning him to be careful.

Zu An knew that the governor was the most authoritative figure of a commandery, and that the Martial Supervisor was the highest military officer. They were similar to the highest officers of each geographical area of command in his previous world. He asked, "Why do these Yi Commandery officials' cultivation ranks seem much higher compared to similarly ranked officials from other commanderies?"

After all, the governors and martial supervisors of other commanderies were only at the eighth rank. The city lords were usually only at the seventh rank too. Yi Commandery was clearly much different.

Sang Hong gave the distant King Yan Manor a look and began, "That's a long story. Yi Commandery, this place, is a bit special..."

Chapter 992: The Early Bird Catches the Worm

"The north is cold and dry, so that's why the people of the north are usually tougher than others. There are many cultivators here as well, so a slight dispute will often result in blood being spilled," Sang Hong said.

Zu An thought to himself, It's just like the 'Whatcha lookin' at?' attitude from my previous world.

"The north's lands aren't as fertile as those of the south. Because of some historical reasons, many people were forced into exile, thus becoming bandits. Then, they discovered that stealing was much easier than farming, so more and more people began to turn to the bandit life. The north is full of mountains, with some that are permanently covered in snow. If the army surrounded them, they'd just hide inside. Once most of the soldiers left, they'd come out and start stealing again, giving all of the local governments and the imperial court a huge headache," Sang Hong continued. "The Devil Sect is a comparatively large branch among them. But unlike the normal bandits, they have their own political structure. Together with their beliefs uniting them, they're also much stronger than ordinary bandits."

Zu An was stunned. “The Devil Sect emerged in Yi Commandery? Their base of operations is here?” When he had passed by the North Order Commandery ruled by King Wu back when he was being escorted to the capital, he had witnessed a battle between the Devil Sect’s army and the official government army. He had thought that was where their main base was.

Sang Hong shook his head. “The Devil Sect’s teachings are bewitching in nature and are quite popular among the lower level people, to the extent where they’re still extremely prevalent among the masses even after repeated prohibitions. Their people are everywhere. Even though there are a few main bases, no one knows where their true base of operations is. This is also why the Devil Sect is hard to eliminate.

“Since they have to constantly fight against the Devil Sect and local bandits, local officials are also required to adapt to the situation. However, the Devil Sect is also powerful and impossible to wipe out by just relying on the local commandery’s military. That’s why princes from the royal clan are assigned to different places as kings to oversee the area. These territories vary in size and influence, and King Yan’s territory is one of the greatest of them.

“King Yan has earned many accomplishments over the years. He’s captured and executed many Devil Sect evildoers, but the Devil Sect is incredibly tough and he just can’t completely eradicate them. Thus, both sides have entered a stalemate. The court was also worried that the local powers would grow too great, so that’s why they’ve assigned local officials to supervise these kings.

“You saw for yourself that King Yan is a grandmaster, and even Minister Sun is at the master rank. His attendants include experts at the seventh and eighth rank. If the local officials were at the same level as those of other commanderies, how could they possibly keep him in check? That’s why, whether it is the governor, the martial supervisor, or other officials, their cultivations are all much higher than those of officials in other commanderies.”

Zu An was a bit confused, saying, “But even so, they’re still far too weak compared to the grandmaster King Yan and master rank Sun Xun! How can they possibly keep King Yan Manor in check?”

Sang Hong chuckled and said, “Don’t forget that there’s still the imperial court. Unless King Yan rebelled publicly, how could he dare to touch the local officials here? Furthermore, Yi Commandery has its own army as well. Even if King Yan wanted to start a war, with the existence of the regular army, individual strength wouldn’t be as important. Of course, that wouldn’t apply to you if you were really at his majesty’s level, but there’s only one earth immortal in this entire world. Of course, what you said isn’t entirely without reason. I suspect that the court has other cards they’re hiding. For example, the Embroidered Envoy has the responsibility of monitoring the entire world.”

Zu An recalled Golden Token Seven. Could it be that he was placed here just to keep an eye on King Yan? That he was working together with the governor, martial supervisor and other officials, coordinating with them in the shadows?

But that doesn’t really seem right either. King Yan is the emperor’s uncle, so he isn’t young either. Even if he does have any ambitions, he still can’t become the emperor!

The royal family had a complete set of inheritance rules. Forget about the emperor, who had the crown prince and other sons; there was also that ridiculous figure, King Qi. Apart from King Qi, there were some other brothers in the same generation. Rather than someone like King Yan who was a distant

relative of the royal family, there were more than a hundred people before him in line to succeed the throne. He was unlikely to have any such ambition.

Sang Hong then said, "I'll use this chance to stay in Yi Commandery for three days under the pretext of expressing sympathy for King Yan, and of helping Governor Zhang keep the order locally. However, we can't stay here for too long. No matter what happens after three days, we must continue on our journey."

Zu An knew that Sang Hong was warning him that if he was going to do something, then he had to do it within those three days. Otherwise, Sang Hong wouldn't be able to cover for him. Considering Sang Hong's identity, doing all of that wasn't easy. He said, "Thank you, respected uncle."

Sang Hong sipped on his tea and said indifferently, "I'm not doing it for you, but rather... Forget it. You need to be careful."

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Zu An suddenly thought of something soon after he returned to his room. He changed into his Golden Token Eleven outfit and went to Xiao Jianren's room.

Golden Token Seven was also there. He was a bit surprised to see Zu An, because he actually hadn't noticed when he arrived. This person is mysterious as expected. Looks like I can't evaluate him purely through his cultivation strength.

He had originally been worried whether Zu An would even be able to really be of help in his mission. He'd had no one else to depend on before, but figured that for better or for worse, the other party was also a golden token envoy. That was why he had braced himself and asked Zu An. When he saw that, he felt completely at ease.

"I've already received information that the escort fleet will depart from the city's western main gate at noon. After traveling for a bit, they'll then turn and head south." Golden Token Seven unfolded a map that had detailed records of the local mountains and other terrain. It was the highest level military map, something normal people would never be able to see. However, with his identity, that was naturally not an issue.

Zu An thought to himself, This person's intelligence network really is formidable. Sang Hong had just talked to Governor Zhang!

Then, Golden Token Seven pointed at a position on the map. "We'll make our move in Lone Wolf Valley. There are several hundred meters of valley terrain for us to exploit, and it's a place that's difficult for a large army to make use of their advantage. It's a good chance for us to make a move."

"Lone Wolf Valley? Do they have any formidable wolf-like beasts?" Zu An suddenly thought of some of his earlier encounters. Some strong beasts had always showed up out of nowhere whenever he was on the verge of success. They were going to be heavily outnumbered in this rescue operation, so it would be easy for things to fall through if such a variable occurred.

"There aren't. That location is named as such because there's a massive rock formation shaped like a lone wolf's head to the side of the valley, at its very peak. Even though there are some beasts roaming the vicinity, they're all low rank. They won't affect our operation at all." Golden Token Seven felt more

and more appreciation for the other person. In his opinion, cultivation was actually secondary for an Embroidered Envoy. A clear head and prudent nature were the most important things.

He then gave Zu An a rough summary of the cultivation and skills of the main individuals involved in the escort operation. It was even more detailed than what Sang Hong had explained before. Golden Token Seven even patiently explained many things about the regular soldiers.

This is what you call being a professional! Zu An thought in praise.

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The two of them chatted for a bit, then Golden Token Seven quietly left. He had to monitor the fleet's activity, or else the other party might suddenly change their mind at the last minute without him knowing.

As for Zu An, he rushed to Lone Wolf Valley. He sought out Pei You, Gao Ying, and the others before leaving, telling them that he had recently made some progress in his cultivation and needed some time to cultivate in seclusion. He told them to not let anyone bother him. The two naturally agreed, even congratulating him. Sang Hong even implied that he would help Zu An cover things up.

Afterward, Zu An then secretly headed to Lone Wolf Valley. With his current cultivation, he arrived at his destination without using up much time at all. He observed the area from atop a mountain peak, and subsequently understood why Golden Token Seven had chosen the location. The valley was like a funnel, wider on the outside and narrower the further in one went. The deepest parts were only a few meters wide. The narrowest part was a few hundred meters long, before the path gradually widened again.

Once one went into such a place, the power of numbers would be greatly reduced. But even the most ordinary commoner would know it was a strategic location, so how could the army not know? Yi Commandery had set up sentries there, and was always observing the situation in the valley. If they saw something strange, they would immediately use smoke signals to contact the nearby cities.

Meanwhile, Zu An's first mission was to figure out a way to deal with those sentry posts, to temporarily remove their communication functions. Golden Token Seven had warned him that getting rid of the sentries wasn't difficult; what was difficult was doing so without alerting anyone.

Even though there weren't too many people in charge of overseeing the valley, they were quite scattered, positioned at the valley entrance, inside the valley itself, and even at the far end. Furthermore, there were people monitoring the place from above the cliff, and every single location could send smoke signals. They would immediately light a fire beacon the moment there was anything strange in any area.

But that wasn't the main issue. What was more difficult was that if the escort fleet saw that there was something wrong with the valley sentries, they naturally wouldn't go inside. That meant they could only eliminate the sentries above and inside the valley. However, if they wanted to enter the valley, they had to pass through either end of the valley.

Zu An wasn't too worried himself. If he could even move freely in the Imperial Palace, how difficult could it be to navigate through some local guards? He immediately came up with four possible solutions.

He rushed to the entrance of the valley, moving quickly. It was daybreak just then. Even though the horizon was starting to glow, the valley was still dark. He borrowed the cover of the darkness, making his figure hard to detect.

As he approached the first sentry post, he was just about to do something when he suddenly frowned. He smelled a strong bloody odor.

What's going on? he thought as he carefully approached the sentry post entrance. He saw that the sentries were already lying in puddles of blood. Every single guard had a fatal wound, clearly unable to respond at all before they died.

Chapter 993: Why Is He Not Scared of Poison?

Could it be the Devil Sect? Zu An wondered if even Yun Jianyue had arrived. In order to be a sentry in this kind of place, cultivation was actually secondary, but one's senses had to be top-notch. Just how powerful would someone have to be to be able to take out all the sentries without even giving them any chance to react?

However, he immediately rejected that idea because Yun Jianyue had no reason to make such a bloody scene. If she had really done it herself, she would have made sure to do it elegantly.

Zu An stealthily left the entrance and headed farther inside. As expected, the sentries in the valley had all been dealt with, and there were no figures in sight on the watchtowers above. The sentries there had probably experienced similar fates.

He was about to go back and investigate what was going on by the entrance when his ears twitched a bit. He heard several footsteps approaching from a distance. He quickly leapt onto a tree, borrowing the cover of the leaves to hide his body.

Soon afterward, a group of black-clad individuals ran over. They began to sort out the messy clothes, bloodstains, and other visible traces. They scattered some kind of powder, and the bloodstains on the ground quickly disappeared.

Zu An naturally knew why they had done something like that, but it wouldn't help! Those sentries were all dead. Don't tell me you're all going to change into their clothes and pretend to be them?

As long as the governor's side wasn't stupid, they would definitely bring people familiar with the area with them. Those people would immediately recognize that something was off. In that case, what would be the point of taking the risk?

But what was surprising was that the black-clad group quickly left after cleaning things up. They didn't impersonate the guards. What was even more surprising was that they actually left the corpses where they were.

Zu An was stunned. However, the most shocking thing was still to come. Soon afterward, the corpses actually stood up! They rocked back and forth unsteadily at first, but then gained their footing. Eventually, they raised their spears and stood guard again, the only difference being that their faces were much paler than before.

Zu An felt a chill run down his back. If not for the fact that he had seen them dead himself just then, he would have thought they were still alive.

"Insect-controlled corpses?" he muttered to himself. This was a world of cultivators, so he naturally wouldn't believe in the supernatural. He immediately thought of a kind of secret technique he had encountered before. It was a corpse-controlling technique that used insects. The dead would then move as if they were still alive. There has to be a user of that technique nearby!

Zu An looked around him. The massive valley was completely quiet, with branches and leaves scattered everywhere. The black-clad individuals he had seen before had already completely vanished; how was anyone supposed to find them now?

But even though normal people couldn't find anything, that didn't mean Zu An couldn't. He reached out his left hand, and the jade badge diagram flickered. He began to control the valley's small creatures to help him in his search. Three-dimensional figures gradually took form in his mind. Those black-clad individuals who were hiding in the dark showed up clearly one after another.

Zu An couldn't help but appreciate the jade badge's miraculous abilities. Even though it didn't have any offensive capabilities, it acted just like a radar, allowing him to see through everything. As such, he quickly found his target.

Sitting behind the lone wolf-shaped boulder was a shriveled elder. A wave of black energy surged around him as he sat, and the nearby grass was black and shriveled.

"A human-shaped biohazard," Zu An said mockingly. He had already run into several cultivators whose cultivation methods turned them into monsters. What was the point of living at that point? If you tried to get close to a cute girl, you'd already poison her to death before you could even hold her hand, let alone do anything more intimate. You're already guaranteed to be without any heirs!

He shook his head and stealthily moved toward the mountaintop. The locations of every single black-clad individual had appeared in his head, so he didn't alert any of them. With Mirror Mirage to hide his aura, he was able to quickly climb a tree near the black-clad elder.

With his current cultivation, he could easily end the elder's life in a single strike. But after some hesitation, Zu An gave up on that thought. First of all, he wasn't sure if the elder was Yun Jianyue's subordinate and didn't want to hurt any of her people. Secondly, he still needed the old man to control the sentries, or else the governor's fleet would realize that something was strange with the valley and they would choose not to enter it.

There were a few dozen feet between the two of them. Zu An had sucked away Thick-Browed Daoist's ruthless and bloody true ki and never had any time to properly digest it. Now that he had some free time, he was going to purify the vicious energies. Otherwise, something bad might happen later on when he had to fight.

Many hours passed just like that, and the sun reached its zenith. Zu An opened his eyes, feeling the surging true ki within him. He had been at the eighth step of the ninth rank before, and now, he was already at the peak of the ninth rank. He was now really at the doorstep of the master rank.

"As expected, the further one gets, the harder it is to climb," he remarked. Every single small increase in cultivation needed a tremendous amount of ki. All of Thick-Browed Daoist's cultivation had only been enough for him to rise one small step.

Just then, the black-robed elder opened his eyes. He stood up and hid behind the giant boulder, secretly observing everything that was happening in the valley.

"They're here," Zu An muttered. He was also high up, so he could see the situation in the valley.

A group of people slowly appeared; in the lead was a general with a long lance in his hands. His figure was majestic and awe-inspiring as he sat on the leading steed, his bronze eyes scanning the surroundings vigilantly for any dangers.

He seems quite vigorous and tough; his body carries a killing intent that can only come from the battlefield. He should be Yi Commandery's Martial Supervisor Yang Sheng. Zu An sighed inwardly. The imperial court really was full of talents. Even a martial supervisor in a local region had this level of cultivation!

Zu An swept his gaze over them. There were no prison carriages, only a single airtight carriage. That was probably the governor's carriage. The Governor Manor was covering up Qiu Honglei's transfer under the guise of an inspection tour. There weren't too many guards, only roughly a hundred or so. They had probably done that to fool everyone else.

After all, if they really did end up alerting the Devil Sect, and the Devil Sect Master herself personally interfered, having a hundred or a thousand people wouldn't make much of a difference in front of a grandmaster. That was, of course, unless they brought an army capable of casting rune formations.

He didn't see the Yi Commandery City Lord Sang Hong had mentioned. Zu An figured that he was probably at the very end to hold up the rear.

Zu An thought the black-clad individuals would make a move, but they didn't do a thing the entire time. He frowned. He couldn't wait any longer, or else it would end up affecting Golden Token Seven's plans.

The black-robed elder suddenly realized that there was danger nearby. Black mist surged all around him and he quickly raised his palm. He began muttering chants as well.

Even though he was shocked that someone had been able to get so close to him without him noticing, he had confidence in his own poisonous mist. Normal cultivators would turn into white bones on contact. Even those of higher cultivation ranks would find being affected by the black mist extremely troublesome. They might not even be able to completely get rid of it for an entire year.

As long as the other party evaded, he would have enough time to summon his puppets. At that point, he would be able to escape whenever he wanted, so the situation would be entirely within his control.

However, his eyes immediately widened, because he saw a white jade-like hand thrust straight through the thick black mist and tap his chest. His final thought before he fainted was, Why isn't this person afraid of my poison at all? Don't tell me he's already above the master rank?

Zu An frowned. He tossed the old man aside in disgust. Even though he wasn't scared of the poison, poisons usually smelled bad. He really hated having such smells on him.

When the black-robed elder fell unconscious, the sentry soldiers seemed to lose their souls. All of them collapsed onto the ground like noodles. The troops below were alarmed, having clearly noticed the abnormalities above.

Zu An didn't hesitate and slammed his palm on the boulder in front of him. The several ton boulder rumbled as it smashed down.

"Enemy attack!" a soldier screamed, sounding the alarm.

Yi Commandery's Martial Supervisor Yang Sheng, at the very front of the procession, was the fastest. With a tap of his toes, he quickly brandished his lance as he rushed toward the descending boulder. If the boulder hit their group, the casualties would be extremely severe.

The spear in his hand thrust out like lightning, blocking the giant boulder from below. He didn't use brute force, but rather redirected it to the side. Even so, the momentum of the several ton giant boulder was massive. Zu An had also sent it flying, so it carried the force of his nine ranks of cultivation. Yang Sheng's lance bent to its limit, looking as if it might break apart at any time.

"Ahhhh!" he roared, forcibly flinging the boulder several feet away. Even though that wasn't too long a distance, it deviated from its original trajectory, thus buying enough time for the others to react. However, that already made the energies within him stir violently. He could even vaguely sense some internal pain.

Yang Sheng readjusted his condition while examining the current situation. Suddenly, someone shot out from behind him at lightning speed. His eyes narrowed. In that instant, he had already discerned that the other party's cultivation wasn't beneath his own. Furthermore, the other party's grasp of timing was absolutely vicious. The ambush had come right when he had just expended all of his strength and needed a moment to recover!

Chapter 994: Beautiful Scene

Even so, Yang Sheng was still a ninth ranked expert. At the most crucial moment, his wrist flicked, reversing the downward trajectory of the lance and perfectly intercepting the opponent. If his opponent didn't dodge, the lance would tear straight through his intestines.

He had seen his opponent. That person had a face that couldn't be more ordinary, a face that wouldn't even get a second look from him normally. That was also why he hadn't noticed the person before.

He noticed that even though the person was moving rapidly, there wasn't the slightest change in his expression. Martial Supervisor Yang Sheng immediately knew that wasn't the man's true appearance, but rather a mask. However, the workmanship needed to produce such a thin and natural looking mask was insane. Anyone who had a mask like that was definitely extraordinary.

As if to prove his point, that person didn't even avoid his strike and instead reached out to grab his lance.

Yang Sheng thought to himself, Is this person mad? You're going to grab my blade with your bare hands? Won't your hand be completely crippled?

He harrumphed. He slightly adjusted the angle of the lance to the side, aiming to stab straight through the other party's palm. However, he had witnessed just how sinister the timing of the other party's strike had been, so he didn't dare to look down on him. He secretly held back a bit.

The other party's hands crossed, and his hands clamped down on the lance like hawk claws; however, they were also like water snakes swimming along his lance. He almost instantly arrived in front of Yang Sheng.

Yang Sheng was shocked. He couldn't be bothered to do anything else and just gave up on his lance. He used the force to fly backward. He was really thankful that he hadn't underestimated his opponent just then and saved a bit of strength. Otherwise, his opponent's arms would have already stabbed through his chest.

But even though he had pulled back quickly, the force made his internal organs shake violently. In the end, he wasn't able to use all of his strength. There were even several bloody scars left on his body.

...

Zu An watched the entire scene from the peak above. This Golden Token Seven's claw technique is pretty crazy.

He could also tell that Golden Token Seven had actually held back. Otherwise, with such a great ambush, there was no way Yang Sheng would have been able to get away with just a few bloody scratches!

Golden Token Seven's main objective this time was just to confirm some things; it wasn't to start a rebellion. That was why there was no reason for him to kill anyone.

...

Yang Sheng was shocked and furious. After he created some distance, he immediately ordered his troops to get into formation. With their assistance, he finally managed to barely stop Golden Token Seven's assault. But the valley was already a complete mess.

Zu An looked at the places where the black-clad individuals were hiding. He frowned when he saw that they still didn't have any intention of acting.

It was almost the time he had agreed on with Golden Token Seven to act. He didn't want those black-clad individuals to reap the benefits after he interfered.

He suddenly thought of something and looked toward the black-robed elder he had tossed aside. How did this guy plan to signal his subordinates?

He searched the elder's body. Sure enough, there was something resembling a noise arrow on him. As such, Zu An took it and fired it downward. A shrill noise tore through the valley. When the black clad individuals received the signal, all of them charged out murderously.

Golden Token Seven jumped in fright. He had thought that Golden Token Eleven came to help him, but when he saw those individuals' outfits and how ruthless they were in their assault, he knew it wasn't Zu An.

With the addition of the newcomers, the escort troop's formation was completely ruined. Flesh and blood flew everywhere. Only the sealed carriage remained untouched.

More than ten black-clad individuals rushed forward soon afterward. The guards around the carriage tried to stop them, but they were clearly outmatched and were cut down.

The black-clad individuals smashed open the carriage's door. Just as they were about to say something, however, a vicious wave of sword energy slashed out. The black-clad individuals at the very front were instantly chopped into pieces.

"Sword ki!" Golden Token Seven was still paying attention to what was happening. He immediately recognized an attack from Yi Commandery's City Lord Liao Ling.

"The previous intelligence stated that he was at the peak of the seventh rank. I didn't expect him to actually have broken through," he muttered. He was now worried. Even though Golden Token Eleven was cunning, his cultivation was a bit lower than Golden Token Seven's own. How was he going to seize the saintess from the city lord's hands?

He wanted to help, but Yang Sheng was no easy opponent. He was being held up by the Martial Supervisor and his subordinates.

A middle-aged man slowly walked out of the carriage just then. His features were square and upright, and his figure seemed to exude a grand pressure. His strike was a sword that had been nurtured by the world's just ki!

Golden Token Seven felt more and more worried. The man wielded a monarch's sword, a sword of just ki. Its power was a bit greater than that of other experts! Even he would find it a bit tricky to deal with, so what could Golden Token Eleven possibly do?

The black-clad individuals near the carriage all held their blades up in front of them. They arranged themselves into a simple formation, then charged at their opponent.

"The Devil Sect's Five Elements Formation!" Golden Token Seven's expression darkened. Some of his suspicions had now been verified.

Just then, Liao Ling moved. A cold glint flickered. Countless afterimages covered everything within a zhang of him. Then, the afterimages all combined into one, returning to his original body. It was almost as if he never had moved from his original spot.

However, the black-clad individuals all clutched their throats as blood flowed out of them uncontrollably. One after another, they collapsed powerlessly.

Liao Ling didn't even give those people a look and instead looked at Golden Token Seven. He frowned slightly. The other black-clad individuals nearby all began to hesitate, shaken by the city lord's power.

"Miss Qiu, your sect seems to have only sent these people here to save you. I fear they were doomed to be disappointed," Liao Ling said. He didn't assist Yang Sheng and instead stood right in front of the carriage without moving.

A moving and charming sigh came from inside the carriage. "City Lord Liao, just the fact that you suffered from an ambush here means that things are clearly not that simple."

Liao Ling remained silent for a bit. A while later, he said with a bitter expression, "You're right. We might not be able to keep you here. However, Miss Qiu, please do not rejoice too soon. I will kill you before you are rescued."

"You dare to kill me?" Qiu Honglei's voice carried a shred of mockery.

"Correct. King Yan and the others might feel apprehension toward your master, thus being unwilling to kill you, but I am different. What I cultivate is the power of grandeur. As long as my own heart is free of guilt, I will not feel any misgivings."

Liao Ling's sword thrust straight at the carriage. He had already known that since the Devil Sect's people had managed to lay an ambush, that meant their original plans were a complete failure. Once the Devil Sect's experts surrounded them, how could their small numbers possibly do anything?

In that case, he might as well kill this Devil Sect evildoer. After all, she was rumored to be the last disciple of the witch Yun Jianyue, someone who might even inherit the sect master position. Killing her now was the same as eliminating a great future enemy.

The expression on Qiu Honglei's beautiful face changed. Why is this guy acting as soon as he says he will? Is he not going to speak reasonably at all?

Suddenly, a figure flashed in front of her. It was extremely fast, to the extent that even Golden Token Seven, Yang Sheng, and the others who were watching all turned around.

Did Yun Jianyue herself come? That was the thought on the minds of those present.

Only Liao Ling knew it wasn't her, because he could see who the other person was. There was suddenly another man in the carriage. Even though he had a mask covering his face, Liao Ling could tell he was quite young.

Hmph, as long as he isn't Yun Jianyue, he won't be able to receive this sword! That was the conviction of a sword master in his sword. Within a range of three feet, he was the one who decided all life and death. Even though he didn't know how the other person had suddenly appeared in the carriage, once his sword thrust out, it wouldn't stop halfway.

Since the other party had stopped in front of Qiu Honglei, that meant it was most likely someone from the Devil Sect. His sword strike was enough to nail both of them together.

"Neigh~!" The steeds up ahead struggled restlessly. Even though the sword wasn't aimed at them, their animal instincts made them feel a strong sense of danger and killing intent.

Meanwhile, the carriage could no longer handle the devastating power of the sword ki. It was instantly sliced into pieces, exposing the two people inside. The sword's ki was blinding, and those who were fighting in the distance all covered their eyes.

Golden Token Seven felt a bit of helplessness. Liao Ling's grand sword ki was formidable. If he were attacked by that sword from a distance beyond one zhang, he would have eighteen ways to deal with such an attack. If it were within a zhang, he would only have three ways. If it were within three feet, he could only do everything he could to dodge the strike. Even though he was confident he could survive, he would most likely be injured.

Golden Token Eleven is finished! Golden Token Seven thought, feeling regret. He shouldn't have involved him and led him to his death.

Judging from their previous interaction, Golden Token Eleven was clearly a colleague who excelled more in his resourcefulness; cultivation wasn't his strong point. Someone who could become a golden token envoy purely because of their wit definitely had a bright future.

Hmph, why am I comparing my own weak points to his strong points? At such a distance, he couldn't save Zu An even if he wanted to.

Then, the sword ki completely scattered.

Golden Token Eleven might already have been hacked to pieces by the sword ki, Golden Token Seven thought.

We're finished... Now that Qiu Honglei has died, Yun Jianyue's wrath will ensure that none of us here will be able to survive. Why is a bookworm like Liao Ling even more of a reckless brute than a soldier like me?! Yang Sheng thought.

Sigh... Someone that beautiful ended up dying here... the ordinary soldiers thought.

But soon afterward, their eyes widened in disbelief. The bitter sounds of slaughter also came to a standstill. The clamorous valley entered a strange state of peace as they all looked in the carriage's direction.

What they imagined hadn't happened. A young man sat casually at Qiu Honglei's side, while Liao Ling's vicious sword tip had stopped three inches in front of the two of them, clasped in place by that young man's two fair fingers. The sword couldn't advance in the slightest.

Amid the tattered carriage, a beauty in a black dress stood next to a masked young man in green clothes. It was an unexpectedly beautiful scene.

Meanwhile, the sword master whose clothes were as white as snow instead became the best backdrop for the scene.

Chapter 995: True Master of Charm Arts

Those present were stunned. Everyone from the Governor Manor knew just how strong City Lord Liao Ling was. His grand sword ki was just too powerful; most evildoers weren't his match at all. The black-clad individuals had fully experienced that.

But what was going on? Why was the City Lord's ridiculously powerful sword actually clamped between just two fingers? Could the other party be a master rank cultivator? But even though that person was masked, he was clearly a young man. How could there be a master rank cultivator who was that young?

Martial Supervisor Yang Sheng was incredibly shocked. He and Liao Ling were colleagues, so he couldn't be more familiar with the other man's cultivation. Even he would have no choice but to back off if he faced this sword, so how had this young man blocked it so easily?

Furthermore, he could see that Liao Ling's face was entirely red. He was obviously not holding back at all, and yet his sword still couldn't move forward in the slightest. When had the Devil Sect ever had such a formidable young man?

Golden Token Seven was even more shocked; his eyeballs seemed about to pop out. He had already checked the other party's cultivation, which was around the sixth rank. He had always thought that Golden Token Eleven was more of the intellectual sort and had even worried about his safety. Yet now, it turned out that the other party was actually this strong!

The most shocking part was that not even he could block Liao Ling's sword. Does that mean his cultivation is higher than mine? How can that be?!

Only Qiu Honglei looked at the man in front of her with a gentle and tender expression. At that moment, there was no one else in her world. Only his familiar back remained. Even though there was a mask on his face, she had immediately recognized his familiar aura. She didn't really care how high his cultivation was. Regardless of whether his cultivation was high or low, he was the one she loved.

What moved her the most was that he would always rescue her whenever she was in danger, regardless of what would happen to him. That had been the case in the Imperial Palace, and it was the case here.

The expression in her charming eyes was extremely gentle. She felt as if her heart would melt.

Zu An finally made his move. His forefinger flicked out, and a sharp scream emerged from the sword as it vibrated intensely. He took the chance to wrap his arm around Qiu Honglei's soft waist, then quickly leapt into the distance. He instantly vanished into the forest in the blink of an eye.

Liao Ling raised his sword up to his eyes. He was disappointed and frustrated. The other party had actually held back, or else that flick would have already made his sword break apart inch by inch.

That was what he couldn't figure out the most. Why would someone from the Devil Sect let him go? He cultivated the sword of grandeur, so all of his time and will were concentrated into his sword. If his sword broke, he wouldn't die, but his foundation would be seriously injured. That would be an injury he would take a few decades to recover from.

Meanwhile, Qiu Honglei leaned into Zu An's arms. She reached out her hand and took off his mask. She raised her head to look at the man beside him; her voice was incredibly soft and gentle as she exclaimed, "Big brother Zu, you're so great!"

Zu An almost fell from midair. As expected of the Devil Sect's seductress, with just a few words his masculine instincts almost erupted. "Then why don't you give me a kiss as a reward?" he asked jokingly.

Who could have thought that Qiu Honglei would immediately agree? She replied, "Sure!" Then, her soft lips pressed against him. However, it was just a light peck, like a dragonfly touching the water. When she saw that Zu An was moving in to return the kiss, she avoided him with a giggle.

Zu An became depressed. "It's been so long since we met; did we end up drifting apart?"

Qiu Honglei said with a giggle, "Don't you already know that the 'Voice of the Devil' I cultivate is special? I need to keep myself pure."

Zu An was speechless. He eventually said, "It's not as if you'll lose your virginity if I kiss you."

"If you really could do something like that, you could probably call yourself number one in this entire world." Qiu Honglei was laughing so hard she was shaking. "Actually, it was my master who taught me that men will always cherish what they can never get, but once they do obtain it, they won't cherish it anymore. I agree with what she says."

"Big sis Yun did me dirty!" Zu An ground his teeth in annoyance. He really wanted to pick up Yun Jianyue and give her a good spanking. But when he considered their difference in strength, he knew that was something he could only think about.

"Hmph!" Qiu Honglei harrumphed. "Why are you calling my master 'big sister'? Do you want me to call you 'uncle' or something?"

"You can call me daddy too," Zu An replied.

"You're so bad..." Qiu Honglei's eyes darted around. As a woman from the Devil Sect, how could she not understand the implied meaning behind his words?

While the two of them were teasing each other, they had already arrived at a secluded and safe place. Zu An lowered her to the ground and asked out of curiosity, "Honglei, why were you captured by King Yan?"

That was what he couldn't understand. Qiu Honglei had always been rather quick-witted, and her cultivation wasn't low. She had been able to easily execute most of her missions. Yun Jianyue wouldn't have assigned her to a mission that was outside of her ability either!

A bit of hesitation flickered across Qiu Honglei's face, but she still replied, "In recent years, Cloudcenter Commandery keeps claiming that the ki stones that they promised to ship out have been plundered by our Holy Sect. Even though we did steal some sometimes, there's no way we stole as much as they say we did. That's why we came to see who was impersonating us and doing those kinds of things.

"Moreover, Yi Commandery is a place that has dealings with the north. The ki stones Cloudcenter Commandery sends southward always pass through this place, so I came here to investigate what was going on. But soon after I arrived, King Yan personally came over. We were caught unprepared and suffered severe losses. Not even I was able to get away."

"Then could it be that King Yan Manor stole the ki stones, then framed you?" Zu An mused with a frown. If that was the case, this really was a huge case! If it were reported to the higher-ups, many people would end up losing their lives.

But he didn't expect Qiu Honglei to shake her head and say, "Even though I really want it to be him, based on my investigation, something happened to the ki stones from Cloudcenter Commandery even before they arrived in Yi Commandery. Furthermore, according to our insider sources, it was only because someone contacted King Yan ahead of time that King Yan just happened to ambush us at the perfect time. There's definitely someone else who wants to borrow King Yan's strength to get rid of us."

Zu An was shocked, asking, "Then are you saying that Cloudcenter Commandery caused the deficit, then framed you? Then, they also secretly contacted King Yan Manor to ambush you guys?"

"I don't have any proof." Qiu Honglei was a bit distressed. "But there is definitely something wrong with Cloudcenter Commandery."

Zu An began to think to himself. He obviously knew that there was something wrong with Cloudcenter Commandery. At first, he had thought that it was just a struggle within the clan for the family property, but now, it seemed the problem was much more serious.

After all, the amount of ki stones Cloudcenter Commandery had reported as plundered was a huge figure. Where had that huge deficit gone? That amount of resources would be enough to maintain an entire army!

Qiu Honglei looked at him curiously, saying, "I heard you were going to Cloudcenter Commandery this time."

"Yeah." Zu An gave her a rough summary of his mission, naturally omitting some things that weren't suitable for the Devil Sect to know.

"That Yu Yanluo was the number one beauty in the past. You'd better not let her seduce you or something," Qiu Honglei said with a smile.

"Do I look like that type of person?" Zu An replied in an upright manner.

"One hundred percent." Qiu Honglei laughed in her beautiful voice. After the two of them teased each other a bit, she said with a serious expression, "I wasn't joking with you. You really have to be careful of that woman. There's definitely more to her than meets the eye. She isn't as gentle and kind as she looks on the surface."

Zu An was stunned, asking, "What do you mean?"

Qiu Honglei seemed to be thinking of what to say. "You know that the technique my master and I cultivate is one of the charm arts. But even after cultivating it to my current level, the charm I exude can make others immediately think of taking me to bed when they see me. However, Yu Yanluo is different. She's the kind of woman who can make any man feel love when they see her. The men who see her don't feel lust, but rather passion.

"Others might not feel that anything is strange, but we who also cultivate charm arts are especially sensitive to these things. She's already reached the highest level of charm arts, reaching a level even higher than my master's."

"Even higher than big sis Yun?" Zu An was shocked. Yun Jianyue was a grandmaster, and she had already reached an extremely high level in 'Voice of the Devil' too.

"It isn't tied to cultivation, but rather to her achievements in the charm arts," Qiu Honglei explained. "According to our investigation, Yu Yanluo seems to have had some secret dealings with the fiend races."

Zu An became quiet. He really couldn't associate that goddess-like woman with a scorpion woman. But Qiu Honglei wouldn't speak without thinking. She was talking about charm arts too, which had been her specialty to begin with.

Don't tell me Yu Yanluo is a master of seduction? He was no longer sure either, when he recalled how his heart would pound with eagerness whenever he met her.

Qiu Honglei sighed. "Big brother Zu, you need to remember something. The prettier the girl, the better they are at lying. You need to be careful."

Zu An replied with a smile, "Then what about you? Will you lie to me?"

"Well, if you find out that I lied to you, will you hate me?" Qiu Honglei stared at him with her sparkling eyes.

Chapter 996: Daji's Anger

Zu An was alarmed. He didn't know whether Qiu Honglei was just using Yu Yanluo's words to tease him, or if she really had lied to him about something. But pursuing that now was meaningless, and he knew the textbook answer to such a question.

He grabbed her shoulders and looked her in the eyes, saying, "Honglei, I trust that you won't do anything to harm me. If there really were ever a time where you had to lie to me, it would definitely be because you had no choice, so of course I wouldn't hate you. If you really do encounter anything that's hard to deal with, talk to me and we can work it out together."

"Big brother Zu, you're the best!" Qiu Honglei leapt into his arms and hugged him tightly. She pressed her face against his chest, saying, "Don't worry, I definitely won't hurt you."

Zu An thought to himself, There really was something after all. But since she wasn't willing to talk about it, there was no need for him to ask about it. After knowing each other for so long, they shared at least that amount of trust. He reached out his hand and gently caressed her hair in consolation, saying, "You don't need to feel too much pressure. If you ever feel guilty at all, just make it up to me in the future."

"How do you want me to make it up to you?" Qiu Honglei looked at him curiously.

Zu An moved over to her ear and said quietly, "...Call me daddy."

Qiu Honglei pouted playfully. But her eyes lit up, then she said in a seductive tone, "Sure~"

Zu An lowered his head and looked at her beautiful face. He raised her pretty chin and gently moved down for a kiss. Qiu Honglei slowly closed her eyes. Her eyelashes flickered gently. Her heart was pounding like crazy.

...

Suddenly, an arrow screamed out of the distance, and a burst of dazzling fireworks erupted overhead.

Their lips separated. Qiu Honglei looked in the direction of the fireworks. Her expression immediately changed and she said, "That's the sect's emergency order. I need to hurry back. Big brother Zu, I really don't want to leave you."

Zu An couldn't help but frown, replying, "If we part now, who knows when we'll be able to meet again?"

"Who knows? It might not be so long." Qiu Honglei blinked charmingly. "Ah! This is bad, this is bad. I finally managed to control my feelings, but now everything is being ruined again. I have to go back and go into seclusion, or else I won't be able to keep up with you anymore!"

Zu An said seriously, "I don't care if your cultivation is high or not. I can also protect you."

“You might not care, but I do! Otherwise, if the other girls end up bullying me, I can’t just come to you, right? Also, only if I perfect my technique can the two of us... the two of us...” Qiu Honglei suddenly became bashful. She stomped her feet, then turned around and left, almost as if she were running away. She only left behind a faint fragrance in the air.

Zu An had a knowing smile on his face. However, he became a bit depressed when he remembered Heavenly Devil Temptation’s negative effects. What kind of stupid technique was that Yun Jianyue teaching anyway?

He suddenly realized something. He sensed that someone was approaching and put on his mask again. Soon afterward, a small figure quickly arrived. It was Golden Token Seven.

“Where is she?” Golden Token Seven asked. He naturally knew it was Golden Token Eleven. However, he didn’t see Qiu Honglei even after looking around.

“Someone saved her and took her away just now,” Zu An said without skipping a heartbeat.

“That person was able to seize her from you? Don’t tell me it was Yun Jianyue?” Golden Token Seven was shocked. He had seen just how terrifying this person’s cultivation was just now.

Zu An shook his head, saying, “It wasn’t. It was another Devil Sect expert. I couldn’t defeat all of them, and they didn’t continue to fight zealously either. They took her and left.”

Golden Token Seven nodded inwardly. He had only brought up Yun Jianyue as bait. If Golden Token Eleven really had said it was Yun Jianyue, he would instead become suspicious. Yun Jianyue’s status is special. She is a glorious grandmaster, after all! No matter how strong you are, aren’t you still just an ant in front of a grandmaster?

If you managed to survive an encounter with her, you would either be lying about meeting Yun Jianyue, or you would have known Yun Jianyue beforehand, and thus been colluding with the Devil Sect.

He sighed and said, “It was as I suspected after all.”

“What do you mean?” Zu An quickly asked. He had always been curious as to what the other man was suspicious about.

Golden Token Seven shook his head, saying, “It’s a pity that we weren’t able to capture the Devil Sect’s evildoer, or else I would have proof. I can’t tell you my suspicions yet. If something ends up happening to me, tell the chief commander what happened here over the last few days. He should be able to understand what exactly happened.”

Then, he cupped his hands and left without waiting for Zu An’s reply. “I owe you a favor. I’ll definitely return it when I can,” he said. His voice echoed through the valley, but his figure had already disappeared.

Zu An mocked him inwardly. Why are you setting that kind of flag for yourself? Looks like I won’t be getting that favor.

But he was more worried about Qiu Honglei. The Devil Sect had fired an alert arrow, so the situation was definitely dire. He wondered what exactly had happened. He rushed over, but there was already no one

there. He even used the Jade Badge's ability to look around, but he didn't find anything either. Helpless to do anything else, Zu An could only return to the envoy ship in heavy spirits.

...

By the time Zu An got back, it was already getting dark. He just happened to return as Gao Ying and Pei You knocked on his door. He quickly jumped in through a side window. Daji looked over in alarm when she heard the activity. But when she saw that it was him, she completely relaxed.

"You've worked hard," Zu An said. Even though he knew she had no soul, he still gave her a smile before opening the door. Daji's eyes flickered as she looked at his back, but that glint quickly disappeared.

Zu An opened the door and deliberately said in a displeased tone, "Didn't I tell you I was cultivating and to not disturb me?"

"You've already cultivated for a whole freaking day!" Pei You gestured with his eyes. "Hub of Freedom, you coming?"

Zu An was completely speechless, asking, "Did you not have enough fun last night?"

"You even have the nerve to say that?" Pei You was now the one who sounded annoyed. "I was at that critical moment when I heard something happened on the third floor. We had to stop halfway because we were worried about you!"

Zu An felt a bit apologetic when he recalled the two's loyalty the previous night. He said, "I'm really not in the mood today. How about you two go? I'll pay this time."

"There's no need. Just lend us that jade token. I heard we can play for free with it." Pei You finally told him why they had come.

Zu An laughed and asked, "With your family backgrounds, do you really care about this bit of money?"

"That's different. He still hasn't experienced what it feels like to play for free. Also, the Hub of Freedom's jade token isn't something anyone can have. That's a symbol of status! He just wants to show off a bit." Gao Ying ruthlessly exposed Pei You's thoughts.

Zu An chuckled and tossed the jade token over, saying, "Have fun, but I don't recommend getting close to that Tang Tian'er. She's a bit dangerous."

"I'm loyal to my friends!" Pei You held the jade token so carefully he looked scared that it might fall. Even Gao Ying couldn't help but glance over a few times. That legendary thing was something everyone who had ever visited the Hub of Freedom coveted. He said, "Don't worry, that Tang Tian'er is your woman; she's our sister-in-law. How can we go and mess with her?"

Zu An couldn't help but laugh. He had really wanted to tell them that Tang Tian'er was a thorny rose, and that with her wit, she'd immediately be able to tell that they were pretending to be him. That was the real reason why he didn't want them to approach her. They had completely misunderstood what he was saying, but there was no need to explain either.

Either way, that jade token didn't matter too much to him. It was only good for buying some special medicines and goods from the auction; he didn't have any interest in the other services.

“Right, where is Sir Sang?” Zu An looked in the direction of Sang Hong’s room. He had many things he wanted to discuss with him.

“Sir Sang was invited by the governor manor’s people. I reckon he won’t be back here for a while.” That was also the reason why the two of them had suddenly decided to go out again. They left impatiently after telling him that.

...

Zu An returned to his room after seeing them out. He saw Daji sitting by the window; the moonlight outside fell on her body, covering her in a silver veil. She really was ridiculously beautiful.

“Don’t move, I’m going to draw something for you,” he said. The first requirement for cultivating ‘Face of a Thousand Identities’ was to have extraordinary artistic talents. With such a great model in front of him, wouldn’t it be a waste not to practice?

Daji seemed to be a bit surprised, but she didn’t refuse. She continued to sit there, as if agreeing to his request.

Zu An picked up a pen and began to move it across the paper. A while later, he finally lowered the pen, saying, “Alright, I’m done.”

Daji looked towards him, her gaze seemingly expectant.

Zu An brought the paper over and held it in front of her, remarking, “My drawing is a bit abstract, but that just means that I have a lot of room for growth, right?”

He chuckled in embarrassment. It was because the drawing on the paper had thick brows, and the eyes were crooked. The facial features looked as if they belonged to someone with Down syndrome. In short, apart from the hair and clothes resembling Daji a bit, everything else was absolutely garbage. One would barely be able to tell the drawing was a woman.

Daji’s eyes immediately widened. Zu An laughed and exclaimed, “Your eyes are finally showing some expression!”

You have successfully trolled Daji for +2!

Zu An was stunned. He had actually got Rage points from her? Don’t tell me she already has a soul?

He was about to ask when a figure darted in through the window, thrusting a dagger at Zu An.

Chapter 997: Our Child

Zu An frowned. He had been completely focused on drawing Daji, and this was the imperial envoy’s ship, with guards patrolling everywhere. That was why he had ended up lowering his guard a bit.

But even if he had lowered his guard, with his cultivation, it shouldn’t have been that easy for ordinary cultivators to approach him at all. And yet, he had only noticed this person after they had already made their move! This person definitely had some special concealment skill.

Zu An didn't dare to show any carelessness. His fingers struck the dagger, and while the other party's fingers were trembling, he rammed right against the person's chest. However, the other person reacted quickly as well, their body bending at an inconceivable angle to evade his attack.

Zu An used the Feathersilk Entangling Art to prevent the other person from widening the distance between them. His opponent was also well versed in techniques, countering right back. They exchanged more than ten moves in a row.

Zu An noticed that the other party's figure was graceful and their movements ingenious. They used some evasive maneuvers that even left him in admiration. However, the other person's cultivation was clearly a bit beneath his own.

That person could still barely keep up at first, but as Zu An began to use his skills, his opponent began to feel pressured. Their figure stopped for a moment. Zu An seized that moment to smash through their defenses, slamming a palm into the person's chest.

"Ah...!" the person cried in a sharp and clear voice, slamming into a wall like a broken sack.

"A woman?" Zu An exclaimed. Both the feeling of her chest and her voice pointed to the fact that the other person was a female assassin. However, he didn't show any mercy just because she was female. Since she had come to kill him, there was no reason for him to hold back.

He was about to walk forward when he felt as if he had stepped on something. When he lowered his head, he discovered with shock that it was a jade token! The shape of the jade token was quite unique, and he could tell right away that it was from the Hub of Freedom.

What was more shocking was that the number on the jade token was actually 333! Zu An thought, Why does she have my jade token?

The jade token seemed to have fallen from the woman's body. The woman took off her veil and said weakly, "Young master... It's me..."

Tang Tian'er's usual sweet smile was nowhere to be seen. Now, only her pale face and a trickle of blood seeping out from the corner of her mouth were visible.

"Why did you attack me?" Even though they were acquaintances, Zu An's expression didn't change at all. He continued to look at her coldly.

"I didn't..." Tang Tian'er was about to say something, but her injuries were too severe and she was extremely weak. She fainted before being able to say what she wanted.

Zu An was worried that she was feigning injury to lower his guard, so he didn't relax his vigilance. But a while later, he sensed that her ki was extremely faint, so he then squatted down to examine her.

"She really is seriously injured..." He knew that even though he hadn't used all of his strength, his palm strike just then wasn't something anyone could handle.

In fact, it was a miracle that Tang Tian'er hadn't died on the spot. It was probably because of some kind of protective treasure that preserved her life. However, she was still going to die soon if nothing was done.

Someone knocked on his door. "Sir Zu? Sir Zu?" The nearby guards had heard the noise and came over to check on him.

"It's nothing, just a thief who has already been dealt with. You all can withdraw for now." Zu An showed himself at the entrance. The guards thus felt relieved and resumed their patrol after bowing.

Zu An closed the door and looked at the black clad woman on the ground, muttering, "Should I save her or not?"

The one he was asking was Daji. But unfortunately, Daji stood in place without moving at all. There wasn't even a trace of life coming from her body.

Zu An sighed. He had thought that she was already starting to obtain a soul, but she still didn't react no matter what he tested her with.

"By remaining silent, you're saying I should save her, right? Fine, I wanted to know why she came to kill me too," Zu An said confidently. Daji only continued to stare at him without any sign of pleasure or displeasure.

Zu An lifted Tang Tian'er up. Her body was so soft, it was as if she didn't have any bones. No wonder she had been able to evade in such inconceivable ways. He fed her a pill. He wasn't willing to feed her a Soul Return Pill; rather, he just used some pills Chu Youzhao had given him before. This person had been trying to kill him, so the fact that he was saving her life was already pretty good.

Zu An propped her up on the bed. Unfortunately, she couldn't sit up at all and quickly fell over. He reached out and prodded her body a few times with her finger to keep her in place. Then, he used his Primordial Origin Ki to help her absorb the medicinal strength, as well as simultaneously treating her injuries.

His Primordial Origin Sutra had already been cultivated to the fourth layer. As long as it wasn't a life-threatening injury, he could treat a patient. Strands of true ki left his finger and entered her body.

Tang Tian'er groaned, already starting to react somewhat. As the primordial ki flowed through her body, her entire body began to heat up. Then, she began to release white steam.

Just like that, after an hour passed, Tang Tian'er's brows gently flickered. Zu An retracted his hand and said indifferently, "I know you're already awake."

Tang Tian'er thus opened her eyes, saying, "I wanted you to treat me for a while longer... I'm still far from recovered right now." There was another more embarrassing reason that she didn't want to mention, which was that when his ki moved through her body, it was warm and felt really good. She really didn't want him to stop.

"Not dead and still capable of speaking is already pretty good. You still want me to treat you further? Perhaps you don't understand the current situation?" Zu An couldn't help but laugh.

"The current situation? Isn't it just you touching my body all over, then making my entire body all wet?" Tang Tian'er replied while pulling up her clothes to show him how she was completely soaked in sweat.

Zu An was speechless. Can you not use such ambiguous words? Otherwise, other people might think I did something to you!

Tang Tian'er was blushing, because her sweat had made her clothes a bit transparent. What she had done just then only made her body even more visible. In order to get rid of her awkwardness, she quickly let go of her clothes and looked around her.

"Huh? Where did that woman from earlier go? I've never seen a woman that beautiful before!" she exclaimed. That was a sincere question she had. She hadn't had much time to look at the woman in detail while they were hiding, but she had been shocked from just that glance. There was actually a woman as beautiful as that in this world? And that woman had been in the same room as Zu An in the middle of the night? She was growing more and more curious about this man.

Zu An had already recalled Daji. He didn't feel like replying to her and instead said, "Stop beating around the bush. Tell me why you're here, and then I'll decide whether I'll spare you or not."

Tang Tian'er's charming face fell. She could only say, "I heard that guest 333 came to the Hub of Freedom and thought it was you. I went over in high spirits to meet with you, but then I saw that it was two different people. I was so upset I took the jade pendant from them and came to give it back to you."

Zu An had a strange expression. I wonder how embarrassing it will be later for Pei You when he finds out that he lost his jade token and that this trip won't be free... But he obviously wouldn't trust everything she said, and replied, "Do you think I'd believe that?"

Tang Tian'er pursed her lips and said, "Fine, I'll tell you the truth. I was curious about your identity, so I came to see if it was you or not."

"So this is how your Hub of Freedom treats your jade token guests, by investigating them?" Zu An was getting a bit thirsty from treating her for so long. He left the bed and poured a cup of tea for himself.

"I want some too!" Tang Tian'er had just lost a lot of blood. Together with her injuries, she was extremely thirsty.

"Answer my question first." Zu An ignored her.

"Stingy." Tang Tian'er harrumphed. Then she said, "Of course we don't investigate normal guests, but you're different! How can I not even know the real identity of a man I spent a night of happiness with? Otherwise, if I get pregnant and my child asks me who the father is, I won't even know what to tell him."

Her expression suddenly changed and she exclaimed, "Oh no, do you think our child died from your palm strike just now?"

Zu An was speechless. What the hell is wrong with this woman? But he really did admire her acting ability. Anyone else might really have been fooled by her.

"You still have your virginity, so why do you insist on putting on this charming and seductive act?" Zu An handed over the tea cup in his hands when he saw her gulp her saliva several times.

Tang Tian'er had a grateful expression on her face. She immediately took the teacup and drained it in one gulp. "I want more~!" she said, raising her head and giving Zu An a pitiful look.

Zu An didn't feel like pouring her a cup and just picked up the entire teapot, saying, "Open your mouth!"

“Ah~” Tang Tian’er was cooperative too and just opened her mouth, gulping down the tea. But she began to choke on it soon afterward. “Slow down a bit~!” She gave Zu An a resentful look.

Zu An completely ignored her and said, “You’ve had your fill now too. Isn’t it time for you to speak?”

Tang Tian’er’s expression became complicated. She said, “I just wanted to test you a bit. Now, I know you weren’t knocked out back then after all, and that I looked like a complete dummy in your eyes.”

Zu An narrowed his eyes, retorting, “Are you not scared that you’ll be silenced forever after telling me these things?”

Chapter 998: What the Hell?

Tang Tian’er tilted her head to one side and asked, “The only matter someone might have needed to be silenced in was Sun Ji’s death, but we’ve already found Sun Ji’s killer, with even the Sun clan’s own people bearing witness. It has nothing to do with you! So why would there be any need to be scared?”

Zu An said indifferently, “Being too smart as a girl isn’t necessarily a good thing. You could die without anyone ever knowing how.” Even though he wasn’t the one who had killed Sun Ji, being misunderstood by Sun Xun would be really annoying.

Tang Tian’er panicked a bit when she sensed his killing intent, asking, “Are you really planning to kill me? For better or worse, we had a close physical relationship before.”

Zu An declined to comment. But the less he said, the more panicked Tang Tian’er became. The man before her was completely different from the men she had met before! In the past, whether they were young or old, whether their cultivations were low or high, other men had always been toyed with in the palm of her hand. However, she just couldn’t see through this person, and she was instead the one who had been played with the entire time.

When she sensed the ice-cold atmosphere in the room, Tang Tian’er bit her red lips and quickly said, “How about this? I can ransom my life with information. You should know how well-informed the Hub of Freedom is. We know many secrets.” She thought, I refuse to believe he won’t feel anything from my persuasion! Hmph, I’ll let him have his moment right now, but I’ll melt him down in the future, even if he is a lump of iron.

“Oh?” Zu An gave her a look, then asked, “Then who is the Hub of Freedom’s boss?”

Tang Tian’er’s smile immediately froze. Zu An remarked, “What’s wrong? Didn’t you say you knew many secrets?”

“Young master, you’re really making things hard for me here! Our boss is so mysterious that few in this world know who he is, and those who do don’t dare to speak his name. Furthermore, how could a nobody like me have any dealings with someone on the boss’ level?” Tang Tian’er kneeled down on the bed. She tugged on his clothes in a coquettish manner, asking, “Young master, can you change your question? I promise I can answer it.”

“Then do you know what happened earlier with the Devil Sect? Why was the highest level signal used to summon all of their people?” Zu An asked.

Tang Tian'er's face fell. She replied, "Young master, you already said it was the Devil Sect's highest level signal, so how could an outsider like me know? If you give me a few months of time, I might be able to find some clues."

Zu An harrumphed. "You don't know this, you don't know that. What's the point in keeping you alive then?"

Tang Tian'er felt as if an arc of lightning had passed through her entire body when she sensed the chill in his voice. Her body couldn't help but tremble. However, she couldn't be bothered with her body's reactions and quickly said, "I have some information here that the young master will definitely be interested in."

"Speak." Zu An leaned against the bedside casually, declining to express an opinion.

Tang Tian'er spoke quickly. But even so, her voice was still extremely pleasant. "I heard that the young master is going to Cloudcenter Commandery to investigate the disappearance of their duke..."

She looked for the other party's reaction while speaking. When she saw that he hadn't shown even the slightest reaction, she could only continue, "The young master needs to be careful. The state of affairs there is extremely complex. Furthermore, as far as I know, there are traces of fiend race activities there."

"Fiend race?" Zu An frowned. After the fiend races' defeat in their war against the humans, all those who had remained in the Zhou Dynasty were either slaves or living in hiding. This was the first time he had heard of any of them stirring up trouble.

"Indeed. There are people in Cloudcenter Commandery who have colluded with the fiend races. As for who it is, we don't know." Tang Tian'er gave him a worried look. "I don't know who the young master is going to investigate by going there, but you must prepare beforehand. There might be fiend race powers behind those you investigate. If they're driven to desperation, the situation might become unfavorable for the young master."

Zu An suddenly realized what was happening. No wonder Kong Nanwu gave me one of her feathers before I left the capital... Ahem, no, she gave me a peacock feather. She probably already knew what was happening in Cloudcenter Commandery. Was she worried about the fiend races harming me, or was this a secret signal for the fiend races to eliminate me?

But after recalling everything that had happened between the two of them, he would rather believe that it was the former.

"Young master, can you spare my life?" Tang Tian'er batted her eyelids. Not many men could resist such an expression.

"Don't try to use charm arts on me. I've met many who are more skilled than you in this field," Zu An said indifferently.

Tang Tian'er immediately shrugged and exclaimed, "I'm not, I'm not! This is a sincere plea! I wouldn't dare to use any charm arts."

She was quite troubled too. Even though she had been hard pressed before, it had never been as bad as just now. When she realized the other party might really kill her, she felt strange inside. She hadn't had time to think more about it back then, but now that she had some time to think about it, she felt incredibly embarrassed. She had actually let those words of his...

She carefully looked at the man's facial features, which seemed as sharp as if he were sculpted out of marble. She couldn't help but blush.

Zu An gave her a look. This woman's expression is a bit strange...

"Young master~" Tang Tian'er crawled over. When she was a bit closer to him, she began to act spoiled again.

Suddenly, a noisy clamor filled the corridor outside. "Ah Zu, let me tell you just how stupid today was! We're never going back to the Hub of..."

Pei You and Gao Ying cursed as they walked in, pushing the door open from outside. When they saw the scene inside, they were stunned. "...Freedom again..."

From their perspective, Zu An was sitting calmly on the bed while a gorgeous woman was lying at his waist. Even though they couldn't see what was happening too clearly, they were all men, so how could they not know what was happening? The two of them couldn't see who the girl was, but just from her slim and graceful back, as well as her small waist, they knew she was an incredible beauty.

"Sorry for disturbing you..." The two of them tacitly backed up and even closed the door behind them.

Zu An glowered and exclaimed, "Hold on!"

Pei You and Gao Ying's expressions turned strange. Don't tell me brother Zu has some weird fetish, that he wants others to watch him when he does this kind of thing?

Tang Tian'er also raised her head. She naturally moved her messy hair behind her head, then wiped the corners of her mouth bashfully.

Zu An was speechless. What the hell are you rubbing the corners of your mouth for?!

"Tang..." Pei You and Gao Ying widened their eyes. They had already recognized that this was Tang Tian'er. After all, she was the number one beauty of the Hub of Freedom, a girl no one would forget after seeing her even once.

But why is she servicing Zu An in his room... Even Gao Ying was feeling a bit jealous. Their expressions were a bit sour when they looked at Zu An.

"Ahem." Zu An didn't really want to explain the situation to them either. He asked, "What happened to you two? Didn't you go to the Hub of Freedom for some fun? Why did you come back so early?"

"It makes me angry just thinking about it!" Pei You said angrily. "When we arrived at the Hub of Freedom, we thought we could have some fun with your jade token and enjoy the treatment of a VIP, but some bastard stole our jade token, and the Hub of Freedom thought we were impersonating you!"

Zu An couldn't help but give Tang Tian'er a look. But the other party looked as if nothing was wrong at all and responded with a big smile.

Gao Ying couldn't help but voice his resentment toward Pei You. "It's all your fault for not being careful enough. You had no idea when that jade token was stolen from you! I ended up being embarrassed together with you."

"How could I know that the Hub of Freedom had thieves? That thief better not let me catch him, or else I'll definitely make sure they get it," Pei You said through gritted teeth. He was definitely pissed off. They had gone to show off a bit, and yet not only had they not looked good, they had ended up being treated as a joke by the other guests. What dignity did they have left?

Zu An was shocked. Pei You was a sixth ranked cultivator for better or for worse, and he was definitely careful. The fact that Tang Tian'er could steal the jade token from him without him noticing a thing meant she was quite the talent in that field.

"Brother Zu knows how to have it easy, as expected." Pei You and Gao Ying both sighed, their tone full of envy. The two of them couldn't even have any enjoyment with the jade token and had instead lost it. Instead, they had experienced a huge amount of embarrassment. And yet, Zu An didn't have to go anywhere. The freaking number one beauty of the Hub of Freedom came here on her own to serve him, what the hell is this?!

Zu An almost wanted to laugh out loud. He wondered how they would react if they knew that the main culprit was right there.

Tang Tian'er sorted out her clothes and got off the bed. She said sweetly, "I am truly sorry; the Hub of Freedom has made the two young masters feel wronged. Please take this. Even though I do not have the qualifications to give out a jade token, with this token, you can still enjoy yourselves without having to pay in our different locations..." Her previous flirtatiousness was nowhere to be seen. She seemed to have become the dignified and composed auction hostess again.

Gao Ying and Pei You received the token. They saw that it was a small token made from glass. They cheered up instantly, exclaiming, "Thank you, Lady Tang!"

Tang Tian'er smiled. Then, she gave Zu An a warm look and said, "The two of you are Big Brother Zu's friends, so you are naturally Tian'er's friends too."

The pair became jealous. They knew they were receiving this because of Zu An. The fact that he had a girl who was so beautiful and so good at understanding others made them so jealous they almost cried.

"Brother Zu, we won't disturb you anymore. We'll head back first." Gao Ying and Pei You looked at each other, then left. They even closed the door behind them.

When the two of them left, Tang Tian'er knelt down in front of Zu An. She blinked her large eyes and asked with a pleading look, "Big Brother Zu, I didn't let you down just now, right?"

Chapter 999: Spy Obtained Through Deceit

Zu An said indifferently, "You're very smart; you know that you have to pretend to be my woman while in the presence of others. But do you think this is enough for me to let you go?"

Tang Tian'er immediately felt as if she had lost all motivation. She scowled and said, "Young master, I really didn't come to assassinate you! I just came to test you out a bit to play around... But I didn't expect your cultivation to be that high! That attack was so strong that I was seriously wounded before I could even explain myself."

"Young master, you know that I held back too, right? Even though I was coming after you, I didn't really aim at your vitals. You should have been able to sense that with your high cultivation!"

Zu An harrumphed. "If it weren't for the fact that I realized that later, do you think I would've bothered to use all that effort to save you?"

Tang Tian'er was overjoyed when she heard his tone soften. She moved closer to him and said sweetly, "Young master, you're so bad. I really was scared just now, you know?"

"Did you come here on your own accord or are you representing the Hub of Freedom?" Zu An asked seriously.

"Of course it was on my own. Everyone from the Hub of Freedom still thinks that the young master is from the ocean race," Tang Tian'er said gently. "I was curious about the young master, so I came to test things out. But I didn't expect things to turn out this way."

"The ocean race..." Zu An had a general idea of why they thought that.

Tang Tian'er quickly said, "Young master, please don't worry. I'm the only one who knows about your identity. I definitely won't tell anyone else."

"The mouths of women and the words of men in bed; both of these can't be trusted," Zu An said with a laugh.

"Then what would make the young master believe me?" Tang Tian'er suddenly had a bashful expression as she said, "If the young master is willing, I can become the young master's woman. That way, the young master will trust me, right?"

"Stop trying to test me. If you were willing to use your body as a weapon, you wouldn't still be a virgin in a place as complicated as the Hub of Freedom." Zu An immediately exposed her lies.

Tang Tian'er put away her professional smile and said with a sigh, "I've met all kinds of men in my life, but young master is the only one who understands me... These words aren't praise, but rather my real, sincere thoughts."

"Don't try to flatter me." Zu An took out two pills, one red and one blue, saying, "Choose one and eat it. Then, I'll feel at ease."

Tang Tian'er's expression changed a bit. She asked, "What are these?"

Zu An said indifferently, "The red one is called the Brain Parasite Pill, while the other is called the Pill of Alteration."

"The Brain Parasite Pill is made of three different types of brain parasites. After ingesting it, nothing wrong will happen in one's body for a while, but at noon on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month afterward, if one doesn't take an antidote for the brain parasites, they'll breed and spread throughout

the body. If they reach the brain, the one who has ingested the pill will become like a living corpse who will even eat their father, mother, or spouse.”

Tang Tian'er's expression finally changed. Even though she had guessed that these were poisons, she had never expected them to be such a vile sort. She asked, “Then what about that one?” Girls had a natural rejection toward things like bugs and ghosts. Her finger was shaking as she pointed at the blue pill.

“This one is called the Pill of Alteration,” Zu An explained with a mocking expression. “It’s made from leopard fetus, deer fetus, human placenta, fur seal kidney, and other rare ingredients. Ingesting this pill will greatly strengthen the body for a year, but if the antidote isn’t taken after a year, several side effects will happen. It can make a fat person suddenly grow by three feet within three months, leaving their skin entirely covered in blood. Alternatively, it can make a thin person become short, turning them into an obese ball of meat. With someone of your build, that would probably be the side effect you’d experience.

“So? Have you decided which one you want to eat?” he finally asked.

Tang Tian'er's complexion became deathly pale. She asked in a trembling voice, “Can I choose to take neither?” With how much detail Zu An had used to explain the medicines’ effects, there was no way he had come up with them on the spot. She was now really panicking.

Zu An shook his head and said, “You must choose one, or else you’ll die right now.”

Tang Tian'er's expression flickered several times, and her breathing became rough. She appeared to be experiencing a severe internal struggle.

“What, are you thinking about putting up one last fight before your death?” Zu An asked indifferently.

Tang Tian'er finally gave up and said, “Your cultivation is far above mine, so I wouldn’t stand a chance.”

After saying this, she picked up the blue pill with a trembling hand. Compared to having parasites inside of her that would devour her brain, that other pill was easier to accept.

She suddenly looked toward Zu An as she brought it up to her face, asking, “Are you planning to make me your spy in the Hub of Freedom?”

“Lady Tang is very smart.” Zu An nodded in praise. “As long as you’re obedient, I’ll give you the antidote every year. That way, you won’t have to worry about anything bad happening to you.”

Tang Tian'er swallowed the ‘Pill of Alteration’ when she heard Zu An say that, exclaiming, “You’re satisfied now, right?!”

You have successfully trolled Tang Tian'er for +555 +555 +555...

Zu An smiled. Of course he didn’t have any ‘Brain Parasite Pill’ or ‘Pill of Alteration’. However, he needed some way to control her, so he had thought of some famous pills from wuxia novels. He hadn’t expected to actually fool her just like that. He was actually feeling a bit sorry now that he saw how she was about to cry.

“Sit down,” he said.

“Why?” Tang Tian’er immediately became a bit defensive. Her previous sweet smile was nowhere to be seen, and she now looked like a demon instead.

“Your injuries haven’t fully healed yet. Since you’re one of my people now, how can I let you leave with injuries?” Zu An replied. He had just played the bad cop for so long, so he figured there was no harm in being a bit nicer now.

“Hmph, who’s yours?” Tang Tian’er wanted to stick to her pride and refuse. After all, this person was just way too hateful. She had gone all the way over to meet him in the middle of the night like those love stories, and yet this guy had actually done something so infuriating!

But when she remembered that comfortable feeling from earlier, she couldn't resist the temptation in the end. She obediently sat down. Zu An reached out his finger and pressed against her back, using his primordial ki to continue treating her injuries.

“Hnng...” Tang Tian’er moaned when she felt that familiar comfortable feeling again.

Zu An was speechless. “Can you not make those noises? Those who don’t know anything might think I was doing something to you,” he said. This kind of moaning really startled him.

“Did the young master not do enough to me yet? I’m already about to break,” Tang Tian’er said resentfully.

Zu An was stunned. He said, “If you don’t know how to speak properly, don’t say anything.”

“But am I wrong...?” Tang Tian’er gradually calmed down from her earlier anger. “I’ll obey you in the future, so you’ll give me the antidote, right?”

“Of course.” Zu An had a grin on his face. He wondered how she would react if she learned the truth.

“Then how will I find you in the future? What if something happens to you and I can’t get the antidote? Wouldn’t I feel really wronged then?” Tang Tian’er asked worriedly.

“Don’t worry, I’ll give you the antidote ahead of time. Also, I’ll be in the capital, so it’ll be easy to find me. Instead, it’s someone like you from the Hub of Freedom who’s more mysterious and hard to find.” Zu An thought to himself, You only ate a sugar-coated bean; it’d be weirder if some poison really did activate then.

But he could try to give her a real Pill of Alteration the next time she came for the antidote. Of course, that was based on the premise that he could actually make a pill like that.

Tang Tian’er obviously didn’t know that she had been schemed against badly. She said, “You have a jade token from the Hub of Freedom now; you can contact me in any of our locations.”

Zu An was surprised. He remarked, “Your status in the Hub of Freedom doesn’t seem as insignificant as you made it sound...”

“But of course. I am the flower of the Hub of Freedom...” Tang Tian’er replied, but her face fell as she continued, “But unfortunately, I still ended up being done in by you.”

“Right, where’s my remuneration?” She suddenly reached out her hand.

“Remuneration?” Zu An was stunned. “Stop moving randomly. I’m still treating your injuries.”

Tang Tian’er replied with an ‘oh’. Then she continued, “Of course I need remuneration! Even though I was forced to obey you and I have to work for you, I might not try as hard if you don’t give me anything! If you only continue to threaten me, even though I won’t go against your orders, I won’t do it that seriously either. I’m only going to do a barely passable job.

“But remuneration and reward are different. Not only will I complete the mission, I’ll think about how to complete it in an even better way.”

“What you say makes some sense.” Zu An really didn’t know if he should call her optimistic or something else. She shifted her mindset so quickly... He asked, “What kind of remuneration do you want? I have to make it clear that right now, I’m extremely poor.”

Concocting pills, his own cultivation, Daji’s breakthrough, and other things all needed a lot of medicine. These things were all money-burning machines! The Hub of Freedom’s auction house had also made him learn just how broke he was for the first time.

“I don’t know if you really are poor or not, but you’re definitely stingy.” Tang Tian’er rolled her eyes. She had seen him spend extravagantly back in the Hub of Freedom. How could someone like that possibly be poor?

She began, “Don’t worry, I don’t want your money, I only want you...” Her expression turned a bit red halfway through her sentence. “I only want you to treat me like this once in a while.”

Zu An was stunned.

Chapter 1000: Primordial Ki’s Side Effect

“What do you mean ‘like this’?” Zu An was stunned. What was going on with her bashful expression? Why did he feel that her ‘like this’ wasn’t all that honest?

“Just like this, of course.” Tang Tian’er blushed a little. “Help me treat my injuries like this.”

Zu An was speechless. He said, “I’m only healing you like this because you’re injured. Do you want me to treat you like this even if you’re fine?”

“You can just beat me up first then,” Tang Tian’er said matter-of-factly.

Zu An was stunned. This girl looks pretty smart normally. Was she actually an M in the making?

Tang Tian’er knew he had misunderstood when she saw his expression. She quickly said, “It’s not what you’re thinking! It’s just that... This feels really good... I mean really comforting.”

“Comforting?” Zu An almost burst out laughing. “Did you suddenly get sick or something? You were beaten up just now, yet you feel comforted?”

“Oh my gosh, it’s not about getting hurt, but about healing! When you heal me...” Tang Tian’er jerked her body around. “My entire body feels warm... I’ve never felt like this before.”

Zu An was stunned. He wasn’t a stiff guy who couldn’t figure such a thing out; it was just that he had never thought about that before. When he saw the other party’s reddened face and how she looked as

if she had more to say, wasn't that just like what Chu Chuyan looked like back then? The fourth layer of the Primordial Origin Sutra has this kind of effect too?

Wasn't there that blue pill, Viagra, from his previous world that had been created to help with heart disease or something? But instead, it actually made guys have that kind of reaction... Later on, they decided not to use it for heart disease and just put it on the market to rescue a large amount of the male population.

Zu An was stupefied. Why didn't I realize that primordial ki had this kind of effect before?

Then what if I have to treat guys in the future? He immediately shivered when he imagined those men enjoying themselves.

Tang Tian'er grabbed his hands and placed them on her body. She said resentfully, "You stopped again."

Zu An was speechless. Why do I suddenly feel like I'm the one losing out here?

Suddenly, there was a knock on his door. A voice called out, "Sir Zu, Sir Sang has returned. He has invited you over to talk about some matters."

With Sang Hong and Zu An's relationship, he could just come over and look for Zu An. However, officialdom had its rules, and so many people were watching. Sang Hong's official rank was higher, so it wasn't too appropriate for him to come to a subordinate's room. That would easily cause rumors to spread.

"Alright, I'll head over soon," Zu An replied. He then said to Tang Tian'er, "Your injuries are pretty much cured."

"You don't have to chase me out; I'll just leave on my own, okay? I don't really want to meet an imperial envoy or whatever either." Tang Tian'er licked her lips meaningfully. "Don't forget our promise~"

Zu An was speechless. Tang Tian'er showed him a sweet smile, then leapt through the window, quickly disappearing into the dark night.

"What an elegant movement skill!" Zu An couldn't help but say in praise. No wonder she had been able to seize Pei You's jade pendant so easily, and even approach him without him noticing anything.

...

After seeing Tang Tian'er out, Zu An headed over to Sang Hong's room. He had thought that there would be other officials there, but Sang Hong was actually there alone.

"Help yourself to some tea." Sang Hong didn't act overly polite with Zu An. He was busy hanging his heavy overcoat on a rack and changing into some inside clothing. It seemed he had called Zu An over immediately after returning.

Zu An sat down in front of the table and said, "I heard respected uncle paid the Governor Manor a visit."

"Yes. The Governor Manor is in chaos right now." Sang Hong walked over and said, "The fleet escorting the Devil Sect's Saintess was attacked. Do you know anything about that?"

"I know a bit," Zu An replied humbly.

"When Yi Commandery's Martial Supervisor Yang Sheng came back, he mentioned that two experts and a large group of black-clad men came. There was one at the ninth rank whose cultivation was even higher than his, and the other person was even more mysterious. He couldn't figure out his exact cultivation, but two fingers were enough to stop the full-force sword thrust of Yi Commandery City Lord Liao Ling." Sang Hong gave Zu An a look. "I've met that Liao Ling before. He has already broken through into the eighth rank, and he uses a sword nurtured by grand ki. His sword ki is powerful, making him much stronger than other experts at the same level."

Zu An pretended to be shocked. "There's actually someone in the world who can stop his sword with just two fingers? Don't tell me the Devil Sect's sect master arrived?"

Sang Hong rolled his eyes. He clearly looked down on Zu An's act. He said, "No, it was a man, and he seemed to be young. Judging from their description..." Sang Hong paused for a moment and gave Zu An a look, "He seemed to be around your age."

Zu An laughed and replied, "Being able to stop a sword with two fingers is also my dream too, you know?"

Sang Hong sighed. "Sigh, the youngsters today are really on an entirely different level. It's really hard to believe. When I was your age, my cultivation was only at the fifth or sixth rank."

"It's all thanks to the guidance of seniors like respected uncle," Zu An said humbly.

Sang Hong chuckled. There were many things that the two of them already knew about, so there was no need to point it out bluntly. He said, "Compared to those two mysterious experts, there's something else the Governor Manor is paying more attention to. They suspect that there's a traitor among them."

"Traitor?" Zu An had guessed that was probably the case before too.

"Correct. The Governor Manor made that plan in the middle of the night, and in order to deceive everyone, they even rushed to move the next afternoon. However, the Devil Sect had already prepared an ambush ahead of time. What else could it be but a traitor's doing?" Sang Hong sneered. "They even asked me if I leaked the plan to anyone else."

He gave Zu An a deep look after saying that. "I denied it, of course. Our envoy's people were all right here, so how could we have created such a disturbance? At the very least, that ninth ranked cultivator couldn't possibly have come from us."

Zu An laughed awkwardly. "Respected uncle has penetrating insight, as expected." Sang Hong obviously knew that he had participated in this matter, but he knew Zu An wasn't the main force. The matter of leaking out the Governor Manor's plans was unrelated to him too.

"Then what did the Governor Manor find out so far?" Zu An asked curiously.

Sang Hong shook his head. "They actually found a vice official, but by the time they located him, he had already committed suicide."

Zu An frowned and said, "He was probably silenced."

"That is indeed a possibility." Sang Hong's expression was grave. "The situation here in Yi Commandery is more complicated than we thought."

Zu An remembered what Qiu Honglei had told him. He tested the waters and asked, "I heard that ki stones that are supposed to go from Cloudcenter Commandery to the court often go missing in Yi Commandery. Does the court have any ideas about that?"

Sang Hong shook his head. "The court has indeed paid attention to that matter, but his majesty can't be bothered with that small problem right now. He won't do anything about it for some time too."

Zu An thought, As expected. The emperor was currently focused on his battle against King Qi. He might not even have sent anyone to investigate the disappearance of Cloudcenter Duke if it weren't because he wanted to take down King Qi's supporters, the Yu clan.

Zu An remembered that Cloudcenter Duke had already gone missing when he first transmigrated into this world. So much time had already passed, yet only now was the case being investigated.

He then remembered Golden Token Seven's reminder. He couldn't help but ask, "Could it be that... There's something wrong with King Yan?"

"Shhh!" Sang Hong's expression changed. He gave the door a look, then said quietly, "Criticizing the king without reason is a crime punishable by death! If someone accuses us of that, things will get extremely troublesome."

When he saw Zu An's expression, he then continued, "I have a rough idea of what you're thinking, but these things have nothing to do with our mission. Yi Commandery's matters are too muddled and complex; there's no reason for us to get involved."

"Respected uncle is correct." Zu An bowed. Whether King Yan was guilty or innocent indeed had nothing to do with him. The only thing he needed to worry about was Qiu Honglei's side.

But Qiu Honglei had her master to take care of her. Her capture was something unexpected; if she were captured again... That master and disciple pair weren't that stupid.

Sang Hong nodded in satisfaction, saying, "I'm going to restrict anyone from leaving the ship for the next few days. I'll try to deal with Yi Commandery's court again tomorrow. We'll depart the morning after."

"Understood!" Zu An now knew why Sang Hong didn't want to have any dealings with Yi Commandery's court. As expected, it was easy to get caught up when one got involved even a little bit.

When Zu An left the room, Sang Hong suddenly stopped him, saying, "I heard you have a girl in your room? The young should pay attention to their bodies."

Zu An began sweating buckets. He felt as if he had been caught by his father-in-law in a nightclub or something. He said, "Respected uncle has misunderstood. She just had some matters to discuss and has already left."

Sang Hong gestured that he could leave with a smile. He didn't say anything, but his expression showed that he didn't believe Zu An.

Zu An felt a huge headache. After all, Sang Hong's daughter was going to have a kid with him! Even though they didn't have much of a relationship, seeking out other women in front of her father was a bit...

But I clearly didn't do anything!

The worst part was that he couldn't even properly explain the matter.

...

Zu An returned to his room gloomily. He had been running around for several days and had barely gotten any sleep. He had used up quite a bit of energy treating Tang Tian'er, so he decided to use his leisure time to get some rest.

But when he got in bed, it was still warm. It smelled strongly of a young lady, so he couldn't even fall asleep...