

M. Slaying 631

Chapter 631: Seeking the Dragon

In the end, it was the royal uncle who first returned to his senses.

His expression darkened with rage as he looked at Chu Liang. "Young Hero Chu! You openly attacked someone in our palace hall. That is rather improper."

The royal uncle activated his seventh-realm cultivation power. His aura was dozens of times more powerful than Tian Mingtai's earlier display.

Chu Liang, however, seemed completely unfazed.

He withdrew his foot and put on a small smile. "I merely wanted to show Shopkeeper Tian that I am fairly skilled. I had no idea this would happen. Before I even exerted any strength... he went flying."

Despite facing the oppressive aura of a powerful seventh-realm cultivator, Chu Liang stood firm.

Of course, the great amount of strength he had gained over the past six years was part of the reason for that, but the main reason was that his experiences ranged far and wide like great rivers and seas. He had seen a lot and encountered many powerful cultivators—monstrous seventh-realm beings like his teacher. He had even encountered some eighth-realm Hallowed Ones, so the pressure from the aura of a mere seventh-realm cultivator was not enough to faze Chu Liang in the slightest.

Moreover, even if they did end up fighting for real, he wouldn't be afraid. It didn't matter if he wasn't a match for the royal uncle. He now had the ultimate trump card for survival—the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm.

If it were in the past, he wouldn't have been able to use Shattering the Void even if he used up all of his cultivation power, but things were different now. Chu Liang possessed much greater spiritual energy. If he exhausted all of his power, he could successfully return to the dragon lair once. In other words, he could return to the Blue Dragon's Hidden Realm at any time and from anywhere.

As long as he wasn't fighting until he was utterly drained or facing an opponent capable of killing him instantly... Chu Liang didn't have much to worry about regarding his safety. That meant he could act boldly even against a stronger opponent.

Of course, the royal uncle didn't dare to attack Chu Liang. In terms of power, the Grand Wind Hall was roughly on the same level as the average mid-sized sect, placing them at an absolute disadvantage when facing sects from the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

Han Lu, who had accompanied Tian Mingtai there, was alarmed as well. He glared at Chu Liang and inhaled fiercely, condensing two white dragons of smoke in his nose. It seemed that he was preparing to unleash them on Chu Liang.

Nevertheless, Chu Liang had no intention of attacking Han Lu again, and Han Lu didn't dare provoke him either.

Tension filled the air.

The king of the High Moon Kingdom finally broke the deadlock and said, "Young Hero Chu and Shopkeeper Tian, I know both of you mean well. I do not wish to disappoint either of you. I'll entrust the task of finding the princess to both of you. No matter who finds her, you will be doing a great favor for the High Moon Kingdom."

A group of palace attendants busied themselves rescuing Shopkeeper Tian, while Chu Liang stepped back.

Tian Mingtai lay limp amidst the rubble. His chest had caved in, as his ribs were heavily broken. The sky seemed to spin around him, and he fainted. However, after being rescued, he quickly regained consciousness.

Chu Liang's kick had been powerful, but he hadn't used anything to boost the force of the kick. If the target of the kick was strong enough to survive the kick, then it wouldn't cause them significant lasting harm.

Tian Mingtai returned to his residence to recover by cultivating. By evening, more than half of his injuries had healed.

When he emerged from his residence, his face was filled with hatred. "So, Di Nufeng's not the only boorish and barbaric person in the Mount Shu Sect. They are truly detestable! The City Lord has

already secured the Penglai Supreme Sect's cooperation. I'd like to see how long they can remain so arrogant."

Upon returning to the residence, Han Lu informed Tian Mingtai, "I've already collected the traces of qi in the palace. We can begin the search now."

"Then, hurry up and get going. It will be bad if that guy finds the princess first and secures an alliance with the High Moon Kingdom," Tian Mingtai said grimly.

In the past, he worked as a shopkeeper for Taotie City, but he didn't have much authority in the city, as he only managed a few large stores. Many mid-level managers like him were only promoted in the recent years, during Taotie City's aggressive measures to combat their decline in popularity.

If Tian Mingtai could find the High Moon Kingdom's missing princess, then he would gain significant authority in the Western Regions. He would get to oversee the business operations in more than a dozen small kingdoms.

With the terms he offered, this shouldn't have been a difficult task for him to gain the king's favor. However, no one could have expected that a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect would suddenly interfere, throwing a wrench in his plans and even giving him a beating.

Nevertheless, Tian Mingtai had to push forward with his plan—finding the princess and securing the deal for the Crimson Moon Celestial Grass. He couldn't afford even the slightest mistake.

At Tian Mingtai's command, Han Lu opened a small bottle. A fragrance wafted out. It was mixed with the faint smell of something greasy.

Han Lu inhaled deeply with his eyes closed, then his nose twitched slightly. He turned in a certain direction and opened his eyes.

Han Lu told Tian Mingtai, "It seems to be over there. Follow me."

Leaping forward, he shot out of the residence.

Tian Mingtai ignored his remaining injuries and led his men to follow Han Lu.

...

During the time that Tian Mingtai spent tending to his injuries, Chu Liang had already arrived at the outskirts of the High Moon Kingdom's capital, where the princess had last been seen.

The princess had snuck out of the palace to have some fun roaming around, but her carriage had gotten attacked at the outskirts, and she disappeared.

According to the people passing by, a demonic dragon had descended from the sky at the time of the attack.

Chu Liang carefully examined the site of the attack and found that much of the surrounding grass had withered, scorched dry without the slightest sign of life. This wasn't the result of getting burned by flames; it had been caused by dragon breath.

That was the main reason Chu Liang had dared to take on the task. His ability to sense dragon breath was now exceptionally strong. Although he couldn't track down the princess' qi, he could detect the dragon's breath.

As Chu Liang detected the traces of dragon breath on the ground, the Dragon God Mark on his forehead flickered slightly. He found traces of dragon breath on the surrounding plants and living creatures, extending the trail of dragon breath.

Chu Liang flew forward, following the trail all the way to the edge of a seemingly endless desert land.

The Western Regions were mostly deserts and dry, rocky barren lands. The cities of the various kingdoms in the Western Regions were established around oases, so Chu Liang didn't fly too far before reaching a boundary zone.

At this point, the trail of dragon breath that he was following had become very faint.

Chu Liang pondered for a moment, then he closed his eyes. The purple-gold mark on his forehead flickered into a radiant glow, and he unleashed a wave of intense pressure.

It swept out like ripples on the surface of the water, and in an instant, the draconic descendants within a hundred-li radius felt an innate fear that ran through their blood. All of them prostrated themselves on the ground, not daring to move.

Chu Liang then took off, flying straight toward the strongest presence he sensed.

With a whoosh, he arrived at a desolate hill in the quicksand, but the hill was trembling continuously, shaking off the sand to reveal a gloomy, scaled form beneath.

Chu Liang stood suspended in mid-air. He looked down from above and said, "Lift your head."

The response he got was a creature's timid cry. "Rawr..."

Cracks rang out as the desolate hill turned and stretched out its massive head.

It turned out that the hill was actually a massive, lizard-like demonic beast! It disguised itself as a hill to catch its prey. The demonic beast would wait for prey to pass by and then devour them in one bite.

Unfortunately, under Chu Liang's keen perception, there was nowhere the lizard-like demonic beast could escape to.

"You are the strongest draconic descendant within a hundred li. I assume you've lived here for a very long time, so you must be familiar with the area. I have a question to ask you. I hope you can answer it," Chu Liang said.

Trembling in fear, the lizard draconic descendant replied in human language, "Exalted True Dragon, I will tell you everything I know."

Like Tian Mingtai, this lizard draconic descendant was at the sixth realm. However, the difference was that it could sense the power of the dragon breath that Chu Liang exuded, so it knew just how powerful Chu Liang truly was.

"Is there a descendant of the lightning dragon bloodline in this desert?" Chu Liang asked.

He asked that because the dragon breath he had been tracking earlier carried some lightning spiritual qi.

The lizard draconic descendant thought for a moment and then answered, "There is a sand cave two hundred li to the west. Inside it lives a draconic descendant with quite a pure bloodline, and it seems to carry the lightning bloodline."

Chu Liang nodded politely. "Thank you."

Then he leaped into the air and disappeared like the wind.

The lizard draconic descendant stood still like a tower for a moment, watching Chu Liang leave. Once Chu Liang was far into the distance, the lizard draconic descendant suddenly stood on all fours and ran off at full speed! This massive sand-colored creature caused the earth to shake and rumble with every heavy step, looking like a large fleeing mountain.

It wasn't running away because it had lied; rather, it was because it was worried that it might have made a mistake. What if Chu Liang didn't find the lightning dragons' descendant? The lizard draconic descendant wasn't certain it had remembered the location accurately.

What if that humanoid True Dragon were to return to get revenge for that mistake? His wrath was not something that this "tiny" hill could withstand.

Boom, boom, boom, boom.

The lizard draconic descendant was weak, pitiful, and helpless.

But it ran incredibly fast.

...

Chu Liang traveled westward two hundred li.

This area was near the Ancient Dragon Lair, and the descendants of many dragon bloodlines had been left there during ancient times. However, no True Dragons had appeared there for a very long

time, so the bloodlines gradually diluted overtime with each new generation, leaving very few descendants with pure bloodlines.

The dragon breath of the lightning dragon was significantly more intense than that of most other dragons, making it even rarer. That was why Chu Liang decided to investigate the lightning dragons' descendant. A being that powerful should be known among its fellow draconic descendants living nearby.

As Chu Liang flew, his divine sense detected a fairly concealed sand cave.

Chu Liang suppressed his aura and shot down toward the cave with a whoosh, swiftly arriving at the entrance of the sand cave.

Just as he stepped inside, he heard an angry yell.

"Fine! If you won't leave, I will!"

Chapter 632: Remember to Go Out to Sea

The sand cave was rather spacious. Inside it, there were piles of shiny, dazzling jewelry, sparkling gems, gold, and silver everywhere forming mountains of treasure. In between the mountains of treasure, there was a smooth jade platform, resembling a bed made of jade.

At this moment, a woman was lying on the jade bed. Her stature resembled a small mountain of flesh. Her smooth round head and body were pressed together. With her neck seemingly absent, she looked like two balls stacked together, much like a large snowman.

The woman was dressed lavishly, adorned head to toe with gold, silver, pearl, and jade jewelry.

Lying there with a pleased expression, she sneered, "Go ahead and leave. But your home is here. A monk can run to a temple, but where could you possibly run to?"

Her conversation partner was a youth standing near the cave's entrance.

He had golden hair, blue eyes, fair skin, and a very handsome face. However, half of his body was covered in deep purple scales instead of human skin. This youth was a draconic demonic beast. His cultivation level wasn't high enough for him to make a full transformation into a humanoid form.

An aggrieved look was plastered on the draconic youth's face. "I just wanted to snatch your jade pendant—that's all! Please, I'm begging you. I already promised to compensate you tenfold for the jade pendant. Can you please just leave?"

"You want me to leave?" The woman glared at him. "You don't even have a door for me to step out of."

"What on earth do you want?!" the draconic youth said angrily.

"Since you've abducted me, I've resigned myself to my fate. As the saying goes, 'If you marry a chicken, you should follow the chicken; marry a dog, follow the dog.'^[1]" The woman glanced at the youth. "As a draconic descendant, you're not unworthy of my status as a princess. I'll reluctantly marry you—"

The draconic youth got so enraged that he stomped on the ground and yelled, "Stop deluding yourself!"

Right then, the draconic youth sensed an unfamiliar presence intruding his territory.

The draconic youth spun around swiftly. "Who's there?!"

Chu Liang stood at the entrance, cupping his hands together within his sleeves.

He greeted the draconic youth with a charming smile. "Apologies for the intrusion."

The draconic youth eyed Chu Liang suspiciously. "You're a human?"

"That's right. I'm a disciple of the Mount Shu Sect," Chu Liang replied. "The king of the High Moon Kingdom requested that I rescue the princess, who was abducted by a demonic dragon."

"Rescue her?" The draconic youth raised an eyebrow, looking aggrieved once more. "Shouldn't be rescuing me instead?"

Chu Liang looked at the draconic youth and then at the tyrannical woman lounging on the jade bed.

He asked, "What exactly is going on here?"

"Hmph." The woman jumped down from the bed with two heavy thuds. "This demonic dragon abducted me. Hasn't the news spread already throughout the capital? Before long, the neighboring kingdoms will probably hear about it too. I'm a young lady; this news will ruin my purity. How am I supposed to get married in the future?"[2]

She crossed her arms and glared at the draconic youth. "That's why I'm staying with him no matter what."

"How are you even supposed to get married?" the draconic youth replied. "It's not like this only started being a problem for you today."

He turned his head and tugged on Chu Liang's sleeve, complaining, "I admit I was a bit greedy. I saw her jade pendant and thought it looked beautiful, so I tried to snatch it away. But I never expected her to cling to me and refuse to leave! I'm willing to compensate her tenfold for the jade pendant, yet she still insists on marrying me. Tell me, isn't she just bullying a dragon?"

Chu Liang chuckled, "Haha."

This was indeed a situation he had not expected.

As Chu Liang thought about how he should reply, the princess of the High Moon Kingdom spoke first.

"Young hero of the Mount Shu Sect, since it was my father who sent you here, please return and inform him on my behalf that I left the palace in search of true love, and now I've found it! He does not need to worry about me. I'll go see him in a few days with my husband."

The draconic youth clutched Chu Liang's sleeve. "You can't leave alone! No matter what, you must take her with you! I've never dared to harm any humans all my life, deathly afraid of causing trouble for myself. So, you humans shouldn't harm me either!"

"Hmph." The princess snorted coldly. "You draconic descendants have such long lifespans. Just accompany me for a few decades. Once I die, you can leave. Simple as that."

"Hear that? Is this how humans think?" the draconic youth asked. "Does a monster's youth not count as youth too?"

Chu Liang was speechless. "..."

Then he raised his hands up high, interrupting their argument. "Stop, stop, stop!"

He pulled the draconic youth aside first and whispered, "How about this? You help me with something, and I'll take her away for you."

"Deal!" The draconic youth nodded repeatedly. "As long as it doesn't involve killing humans, I'm in. I just want a peaceful life. I don't want to stir up any trouble."

"Don't worry. I'm not asking you to do anything dangerous," Chu Liang reassured him. "There will likely be other people coming to find her, so this place isn't safe for you. In a bit, take a few of her belongings and run."

"Where should I run to?"

"The southeastern coast."

The draconic youth: "?"

After a pause, he said hesitantly, "I've never even left this desert my whole life, and you're asking me to make my way across the nine provinces?"

"All the more reason for you to go and see the sea," Chu Liang replied, grasping the draconic youth's hands firmly. "At the far end of the East Sea, there are three islands with the Mirage Mountain towering over them. All you have to do is throw the princess' stuff into the sea there, then come back here."

After instructing the draconic youth, Chu Liang approached the princess of the High Moon Kingdom.

The princess eyed him cautiously and declared, "I'm telling you, don't even think about breaking us apart!"

"Princess, that's enough," Chu Liang said quietly. "This matter is getting out of hand. What you're doing is truly over the top."

"I don't care!" The princess stomped heavily onto the ground, shaking half the sand dune. "I want to get married! I want true love!"

Chu Liang continued trying to persuade her. "True love doesn't work like this. You're not even the same species."

"Xu Xian and Madam Bai weren't the same species either!" the princess retorted. "To have true love, you must overcome all obstacles together."

"Huh?" Chu Liang blinked. "You've watched The Legend of the White Snake?"

The princess gave him a disdainful look. "It's called The Legend of the Berries. Don't you know anything?" [3]

Chu Liang nodded repeatedly. "Ah, yes, yes."

Then he extended a finger, and the buzz of electricity ripped through the air. At the next moment, the princess collapsed to the ground.

Since Chu Liang couldn't reason with her, he had to resort to extreme measures.

He stripped off all the jewelry that the princess was wearing and tossed them to the draconic youth.

Chu Liang instructed, "Remember, head for the East Sea."

Turning back to the princess, Chu Liang raised his hand and conjured the Divine Dragon Fire.

"What are you doing?" The draconic youth quivered in fear. "You can't kill her! If she dies, I'll be in big trouble!"

Chu Liang couldn't help but laugh.

This demonic beast had a surprisingly upright character. Even after getting bullied by a human, he still didn't dare harm a single hair on a human.

Chu Liang shook his head. "I'm just removing the traces of her qi. This won't harm her."

The Divine Dragon Fire coiled around the princess, not singeing even a strand of her hair. This demonstrated that Chu Liang's mastery over the fire was nothing short of extraordinary.

He only burned away the qi that the princess exuded. Then he draped her in an Aura-Concealing Robe, preventing her qi from leaking out.

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Chu Liang took the princess and left the cave, while the draconic youth set out as instructed.

Chu Liang didn't rush to bring the princess back to the capital. Instead, he hid nearby, quietly watching the sand cave from a distance.

Just as he had expected, Han Lu arrived a while later, followed by a group of men and horses from Taotie City.

Han Lu investigated the cave briefly and then said to the group, "They just left."

Han Lu's party then headed eastward in pursuit of the princess.

Back in the palace hall, Chu Liang had noticed that Han Lu seemed to practice the cultivation art for the Divine Tracker Nose, so he had anticipated this method of tracking.

Once Han Lu's party was far from the sand cave, Chu Liang took the princess and headed back to the capital of the High Moon Kingdom.

When Chu Liang arrived at the palace hall, it was bright and sunny outside.

Before long, the king of the High Moon Kingdom came out to greet him.

"Oh, my!" The king repeatedly expressed his gratitude. "I'm so indebted to you, Young Hero Chu. You found my beloved daughter so quickly! I don't know how I could ever repay you."

"There's no need to thank me, Your Majesty. Since you're a friend of the Mount Shu Sect, it's only right for me to lend a hand," Chu Liang replied with a smile.

"My precious daughter..."

The king stepped forward and lifted the princess in his arms, albeit with much difficulty. It was clear that he treasured his daughter greatly.

The princess slowly regained consciousness, and the first thing she said was, "Where's my husband?"

The king was taken aback by the question. "Huh?"

The princess struggled to her feet and declared, "I'm not going back to the palace! I'm going out to find true love!"

"Oh dear, there's no need for that. I will send you to the Mount Shu Sect to become a cultivator. There are plenty of talented and handsome young men there. Won't it be great if we pick someone suitable for you from among them? Let's aim for one of the Four Overlords of Mount Shu. Now, that would be a perfect match."

With some cajoling, the king finally managed to placate the princess.

She pondered for a moment. "I don't need to aim for someone as high as one of the Four Overlords. Someone decent will do..."

The princess glanced up at Chu Liang. "I think he's quite good."

"Cough." Chu Liang quickly cupped his hands together. "Your Majesty, I'll be taking my leave now so that you can have some quality time with your daughter."

The princess got up hurriedly to chase after him. "Heeeeey!!!"

Right then, thunder-like rumbling reverberated outside as a sea of clouds billowed violently in the horizon.

A palace attendant exclaimed, "The airship from the Mount Shu Sect has arrived!"

Chu Liang had just reached the long flight of stairs outside the hall, and he looked up. He was just in time to see the airship approach.

It was a massive crimson airship. Calling it an airship was an understatement though. It was more like an enormous floating palace, complete with pavilions and towers. There were even flying swords rising and falling between them. The airship's shadow covered almost half the capital.

Two people stood side by side on the bow of the airship.

On the left was a slim man in fluttering white robes. He held a white-jade folding fan with an intricate painting of mountains and rivers[4] in one hand. His other hand was behind his back, highlighting the jade belt, a top-tier storage enchanted tool, at his waist. The hair at his temples swayed gently in the wind as a smile graced his face.

On the right was a man who was a bit short and a bit fat, draped in a black cloak woven from the feathers of an onyx bird[5]. He wore a jade hair accessory embedded with a high quality carving of an emblem, Silk Cloud Robes[6], and Wind Riding Shoes.

These two young men might not be conventionally handsome. However, as they stood looking down at the world from such a lofty vantage point, they exuded an overwhelming air of wealth that made them dazzling to behold.

Chu Liang heard the princess, who had chased after him, whisper, "Ah... They're so majestic..."

It wasn't just her; the entire capital buzzed with exclamations of awe.

"That's White Jade Fan and Mountain Tiger, right?"

"They're so rich..."

"They could probably buy the entire capital with the price of that airship alone!"

"Oh, heavens. Are they my two future husbands whom I've never met?"

"Nonsense. They are my fathers!"

"The two of us can each have one of them as our father. We don't need to fight!"

Hearing the chatter around him, Chu Liang was astonished.

No wonder people speak of the Mount Shu Sect with such reverence nowadays. It turned out that the wealth and influence of Red Cotton Peak has increased to such a great extent. Back when I first established Red Cotton Peak, I never went out so ostentatiously.

Moreover, it seems that societal morals have deteriorated in the past six years. When I was the wealthiest man in the Mount Shu Sect, I never encountered this many people eager to call me Father.

Of course, what shocked Chu Liang the most wasn't the Mount Shu Sect's rise in status or the degeneration of societal morals... It was that he knew the two men in question.

Those two imposing figures on the flying ship...

White Jade Fan and Mountain Tiger...?

Aren't they just Lackey A and Lackey B?!

Chapter 633: A Re-Encounter

"White Jade Fan, Jiang Huaixu?" Chu Liang asked.

Lackey A nodded.

Chu Liang continued, "Mountain Tiger, Meng Shouyang?"

Lackey B offered an awkward, embarrassed smile.

Chu Liang felt a strange sense of disillusionment. It wasn't just the passing of time that threw him off—it felt as if he had been transported into another life altogether.

For a moment, he didn't know what to say.

Lackey A and Lackey B just stood there grinning foolishly.

The royal family and subjects of the High Moon Kingdom, standing in front of the grand hall, were equally dumbfounded. Moments ago, they had already been shocked beyond words.

Just earlier, the massive airship owned by the Four Overlords of Mount Shu had appeared in the skies over the High Moon Kingdom for the very first time. The entire capital had looked up in awe, marveling at the grandeur of the arrival of the representatives of the Red Cotton Peak.

Two legendary figures had then descended from the ship, flanked by powerful experts, only to suddenly freeze, wearing expressions of disbelief the moment they entered the hall.

The king, along with the royal uncle and other members of the royal family, quickly stepped forward to greet the newcomers. While these two were technically juniors in terms of age or cultivation, the immense power behind them demanded that the High Moon Kingdom show proper respect.

"The arrival of the two esteemed young heroes brings great honor to our humble High Moon Kingdom," the king said warmly, taking the lead.

But White Jade Fan and Mountain Tiger didn't seem to hear him at all. Their eyes were locked on one spot in the hall. Without another word, they suddenly dashed forward.

While everyone else looked on in utter confusion, the two of them shouted in unison, "Big Bro!"

They moved like the wind and stopped in front of Chu Liang, appearing so excited and agitated.

The crowd turned to look, and there was Chu Liang, standing calmly with a faint smile, waiting for them. His demeanor truly matched that of an older brother.

It was well known that the Four Overlords were among the most powerful and influential figures in the Mount Shu Sect in recent years.

To outsiders, even a peak master of the Mount Shu Sect might not carry the same weight. After all, peak masters generally stayed out of external affairs. But the Four Overlords of Mount Shu managed Red Cotton Peak, whose wealth and influence spread across the world. Their power far exceeded what most could imagine.

Furthermore, with Di Nufeng of the Silver Sword Peak backing them, who could possibly outrank them as a "big brother"?

The royal uncle of the High Moon Kingdom, in particular, had assumed that someone of Chu Liang's age was merely an unremarkable disciple who had left Mount Shu. He never expected that Chu Liang would hold such a high status.

Had he known earlier, he never would have spoken so openly in front of him, supporting Taotie City and badmouthing Red Cotton Peak.

Unfortunately, it was too late for regrets.

"If I'm not mistaken, I know the other two Overlords as well?" Chu Liang said with a smile.

Lackey A scratched his head sheepishly and replied, "Hehe, it's just our boss and Lin Bei. All that Four Overlords stuff is just the martial world giving us too much credit."

Fragrant Tiger, Lin Bei.

Cloud-Turning Book, Shang Ziliang.

White Jade Fan, Jiang Huaixu.

Mountain Tiger, Meng Shouyang.

Hearing these familiar names, Chu Liang felt a wave of nostalgia. Those silly, clueless kids from back then had somehow grown into famous figures in the world of immortality cultivators.

Although... they still didn't look particularly bright.

Chu Liang couldn't help but ask, "With your combined intelligence... I imagine turning Red Cotton Peak into what it is today must not have been easy. Who's actually running things?"

Lackey A chuckled and replied, "Of course, it's your esteemed teacher."

Chu Liang responded, "Then it must have been even more difficult."

"Cough," Lackey A lowered his voice and glanced around cautiously. "Big Bro, it's not convenient to talk about this here. We'll explain everything once we get back."

With that comment, Chu Liang immediately understood.

At first, he wondered if someone like Venerable Wen Yuan or one of Mount Shu's Guardian Elders might be running things. But seeing how hesitant Lackey A was to say anything, it confirmed a surprising suspicion Chu Liang had.

It was quite unexpected.

Chu Liang smiled and said, "We'll catch up another day. Let's settle the matter with the High Moon Kingdom first."

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In the grand hall of the High Moon Kingdom, three large chairs were immediately arranged, a stark contrast to how Chu Liang had been treated on his first day.

Lackey A and Lackey B initially tried to get Chu Liang to sit in the center, but he casually stepped to the side and said with a smile, "You handle the business; I won't interfere."

The two exchanged glances and nodded firmly, clearly determined to give their best performance in front of him.

Chu Liang hadn't shared what he knew about Taotie City's dealings, as he could see they were confident and well-prepared. He didn't want to steal their spotlight.

It was also a great chance to see just how much they had improved over the years.

Lackey A and Lackey B might be grinning foolishly in front of Chu Liang, but the moment they turned to the royal family of the High Moon Kingdom, their demeanor changed. They exuded boldness and confidence and appeared sharp and composed.

"Your Majesty," Lackey A began in a calm, steady voice that immediately drew everyone's attention. "On our way here, we heard that Taotie City made a special effort to arrive early. I imagine they must have presented you with quite a generous offer."

"Young Hero Jiang, I was not not informed of Taotie City's visit in advance," the king of the High Moon Kingdom replied with a smile. "However, since they are part of the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten and they had worked with us for many years, we couldn't refuse to meet them. Young Hero Chu witnessed everything. Their offer was indeed tempting, but our friendship with the Mount Shu Sect is much stronger, so we never seriously considered working with them."

"That's the right attitude," Lackey A said with a smile. "At Red Cotton Peak, we've always believed in mutual support and shared benefits with our allies. As long as the High Moon Kingdom stands with us, I can guarantee that the conditions we offer will always be unmatched."

"Of course, the High Moon Kingdom has always considered the Red Cotton Peak as our closest ally," the king said, nodding repeatedly.

"This time, we have come here specifically to discuss this matter," Lackey A continued. "In addition to the original offer and accepting disciples from Grand Wind Hall, we have another proposal."

"Your Majesty may already be familiar with some of our franchise businesses on the Red Cotton Peak, which are well known for their success. For example, the Red Moon Pavilion has opened branches across the land of the nine provinces of the Yu Dynasty and has thrived in every location. Now, we're looking to expand beyond the Yu Dynasty's borders, and we'd like to choose the High Moon Kingdom as the location for our very first store. What are your thoughts?"

"That would be more than wonderful!" The king nearly jumped up in excitement.

The franchise businesses from Red Cotton Peak were never limited to a single restaurant. Wherever they opened, they always came with surrounding shop renovations. It could be said that wherever Red Cotton Peak developed, the place would immediately become a bustling hotspot and a veritable money tree.

If Red Cotton Peak invested this much effort into the High Moon Kingdom, their rise to prosperity would be just around the corner, and they would undoubtedly pull ahead of the neighboring small kingdoms of the Western Regions.

"Your Majesty, what is your opinion on this?" Lackey A asked again.

"It's settled then! The High Moon Kingdom and Red Cotton Peak shall forge a friendship to last a thousand years!" The king laughed heartily.

Lackey B nodded and said, "Then I will start scouting for a location in the city today."

At that moment, the royal uncle turned his head and whispered to the attendant behind him, "Where are the representatives from Taotie City?"

"I went to look for them. They weren't at the guesthouse. It's said they went out last night to search for the princess and haven't returned yet," the attendant behind reported.

The royal uncle glanced at the cheerful scene unfolding before him and snorted coldly, "Well, there's nothing I can do for them now."

Chu Liang smiled to himself as he watched Lackey A and Lackey B. It was clear that the two had grown significantly; they were no longer the clueless juniors they had once been.

With the deal settled, the two quickly huddled beside Chu Liang, their excitement bubbling over. "Big Bro, we've been looking for you for years! Once you're back, everyone will be so happy!"

"I miss you all, too. I've long wanted to return and reunite with everyone," Chu Liang said.

Just as he was about to say more, he felt a faint vibration.

He immediately took out the United Hearts Jade and, sure enough, saw a message from Jiang Yuebai.

"I am in the Blossom Barbarian Kingdom."

Chapter 634: Does It Look the Same?

As several arcs of light flashed across the sky and gathered among the clouds, Tian Mingtai finally lost his patience and snapped, "It's been nearly a whole day and night. Where on earth is the princess?"

He had led the group from Taotie City with the intention of locating the princess of the High Moon Kingdom first, hoping that they would then win the king's favor. With the royal uncle's support, they could then finalize the deal before the representatives of the Mount Shu Sect even arrived.

But who could have predicted that Han Lu, renowned as the best tracker, would lead them aimlessly through the skies for an entire day and night without results?

Even Han Lu started to doubt himself. He sniffed the small vial in his hand once more and took a deep breath of the surrounding air.

The rising smoke twisted and turned, forming the shape of a White Dragon that rushed into his nostrils. Opening his eyes with great certainty, he declared, "The scent is just ahead, and it's fresh. We are very close to the target."

"Still ahead?!" Tian Mingtai roared in frustration. "If we go any further, we'll end up at the East Sea!"

"That dragon kidnapped the princess of the High Moon Kingdom. Fleeing to the East Sea out of fear of punishment makes perfect sense, doesn't it?" Han Lu replied confidently.

"Fine." Tian Mingtai nodded. "We'd better find it."

With that, Han Lu took the lead, and the team set off once more.

They flew for what felt like an eternity until they finally crossed the coastline. Under the setting sun, they arrived at the vast, shimmering ocean, its surface glowing with hues of gold and red.

Suddenly, Han Lu came to an abrupt stop.

"What is it?" Tian Mingtai demanded. "Do you have results?"

"The scent trail here..." Han Lu stammered, "It's gone."

"Gone?" Tian Mingtai stared out at the endless sea. "Gone, like my career prospects?"

"It's possible it dove into the sea," Han Lu suggested hesitantly. "If we go down and search... we might still find something."

"Fine. Then you go down and look for it," Tian Mingtai snapped, the veins on his forehead throbbing with frustration. "And if you come back empty-handed, don't bother showing your face again."

At this very moment, the Mount Shu Sect people had likely already arrived at the High Moon Kingdom. So much time had been wasted chasing ghosts that the deal was probably concluded by now.

And it was all because of this man.

Han Lu, renowned in Taotie City for his Divine Tracker Nose, was famous for his "dog nose." Following a trail across thousands of li was child's play for him. Tian Mingtai really thought that Han Lu's presence would guarantee that they would find the princess.

Who could have expected such an embarrassing failure this time?

Han Lu felt equally aggrieved. "If you hadn't been injured and we'd left earlier, we might have caught the demonic dragon back in the lair."

"You think I got myself injured on purpose?!" Tian Mingtai snapped, his face darkening. Just hearing it made his anger flare up even more.

"You were the one who provoked him and pressured him with your qi flow," Han Lu retorted. "Was that intentional or accidental?"

"I..." Tian Mingtai stammered, momentarily speechless.

Initially, he had thought that the Mount Shu Sect disciple was just a young, low-level cultivator. His plan had been to suppress him effortlessly and prevent him from becoming a nuisance.

Who could have known that the young man would turn out to be so terrifying?

Even now, Tian Mingtai shuddered at the memory. That single kick had nearly sent him straight to his ancestral grave to reunite with his great-grandparents.

Since that day, he had reflected deeply on his actions.

When it came to strength, even if Mount Shu Sect was considered the weakest among the Divine Nine, it was still not an opponent the Taotie City could afford to provoke. As long as the members of Mount Shu followed the established business rules, Taotie City would have no choice but to abide by them as well.

After a brief pause, Tian Mingtai said sternly, "In any case, all of you stay here and don't leave until the princess is found. I'll return to the High Moon Kingdom first to see how the situation has developed."

With that, he turned and strode off decisively, leaving his subordinates behind, staring at each other in confusion.

Suspended aimlessly over the vast sea, they watched the waves roll in and out, their search growing increasingly futile. At this point, even the rhythmic crash of the waves seemed to mock them.

...

The Blossom Barbarian Kingdom had only one city, which was its capital.

Although it was called a capital city, it was a simple city built from stacked boulders in a crude, almost primitive manner. Yet, the stone walls were draped in colorful vines and blooming flowers, turning the rugged architecture into a vibrant and picturesque scene.

As its name suggested, the Blossom Barbarian Kingdom left two strong impressions: blossoming flowers and barbarism.

The blossoming flower referred to the kingdom's warm and pleasant climate, where vegetation thrived, and flowers bloomed everywhere. From palaces to homes, from tiled roofs to thatched cottages, every surface was adorned with blossoming flowers.

The "barbarism" referred to the kingdom's underdeveloped state, where many regions still clung to tribal customs. This wasn't uncommon among the kingdoms in the Western Regions, where vast deserts separated tribes, creating significant disparities in culture and civilization.

However, today, the most dazzling sight on the city walls was not the sea of flowers.

It was a woman.

Dressed in a flowing white robe, she stood silently atop the city wall, her gaze fixed on the distant sky as though she were waiting for someone.

Her face couldn't be seen clearly from afar, but she gave off this otherworldly and aloof presence. Upon seeing her face clearly, people couldn't help but wonder if a goddess had descended to earth.

Before long, many citizens of the Blossom Barbarian Kingdom stopped to watch her.

From the crowd emerged a sturdy young man riding an exotic beast clad in vine armor. With a grin, he called out, "Beautiful lady, I am the prince of the Blossom Barbarian Kingdom. How about I personally show you around our kingdom? You—"

Whoosh.

Before he could finish his sentence, the prince vanished.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself back in the royal palace, having been transported miles away in an instant.

Meanwhile, the people at the scene were left even more amazed. The reason no one else dared to approach her was clear—every man who had tried to speak to her had mysteriously vanished, as if by divine intervention.

It felt like a miracle, something beyond mortal understanding.

The citizens of the Blossom Barbarian Kingdom all came to the same conclusion: she must be a celestial fairy sent by the heavens.

After waiting for what felt like a long time, a sweeping gust of wind suddenly rolled in from the distant horizon. With a powerful howl, it descended upon the city wall and transformed into the silhouette of a young man dressed in fine robes.

The wind carried him straight into the woman's arms, and when it settled, the two were already tightly embracing each other.

"I came as soon as I got your message. You haven't been waiting long, have you?"

"No," she replied softly. "I knew you'd come right away."

"I'm sorry for making you worry all this time."

"I understand. If you'd been okay, you would have come to me as soon as you could."

Chu Liang held Jiang Yuebai close as Jiang Yuebai wrapped her arms around his back. After those few simple words, the two stood quietly, embracing each other in silence.

Though they hadn't seen each other for years, they both remained calm.

Yet, within that silence, they could clearly feel the steadfast longing in each other's hearts.

As the crowd of onlookers below grew larger, a soft cough broke the moment. "Ahem, that's enough. You're in public."

Chu Liang's gaze shifted over Jiang Yuebai's shoulder, landing on the figure of the Whale-Riding Immortal standing nearby.

"Hehe," Chu Liang quickly released Jiang Yuebai and greeted respectfully, "Esteemed Senior."

With a wave of his wide sleeve, the Whale-Riding Immortal stirred the wind. In an instant, the three of them were transported to an unremarkable, desolate hill far from the crowd.

"You've made great progress over the past six years," the Whale-Riding Immortal remarked. Unlike someone like Tian Mingtai, he could see Chu Liang's true strength at a glance. "It won't be long before you ascend to the Heavenly Gate."

"It's just a blessing in disguise," Chu Liang replied with a smile. "Have things gone smoothly for you these past years?"

Jiang Yuebai gently shook her head. "We've traveled across the nine provinces, but it's still nearly impossible to find any trace of the Divine Ruins' scroll."

At the mention of the Divine Ruins' scroll, the Whale-Riding Immortal's smile faded slightly.

"What exactly is this Divine Ruins' scroll?" Chu Liang asked. "Now that the Red Cotton Peak of the Mount Shu Sect has considerable influence, I can have people help investigate."

"That won't work," the Whale-Riding Immortal said firmly. "Searching for the Divine Ruins' scroll must be done in absolute secrecy. If word gets out and the Divine Ruins Monastery learns that someone is trying to locate them, they will definitely act to eliminate us."

Even as a powerful expert who had attained the Heavenly Origin, the thought still sent chills down his spine.

Back then, the Jiang Family, one of the renowned Three Aristocratic Families, had been wiped out overnight. The terror of the Divine Ruins Monastery was something he understood better than anyone.

"I see," Chu Liang said, giving up the idea.

"However," the Whale-Riding Immortal added, "if you happen to come across any clues, keep an eye out for us."

With that, he tossed a jade box to Chu Liang and Chu Liang opened it out of curiosity.

Inside was a dark golden leather scroll made of unknown material, yet imbued with a restrained spiritual aura. The surface was etched with strange, obscure patterns, and it was obvious this was only one-quarter of a larger whole.

"This..." Chu Liang stared at it, suddenly finding it familiar.

"This item is the key to finding my mother and the only path to locate the Divine Ruins Monastery," Jiang Yuebai sighed. "The world believes this map leads to the Immortals' Storehouse, so those who possess a piece of it remain hidden. Over the past six years, we've searched tirelessly, but even obtaining a single fragment has been nearly impossible."

"Hmm..." Chu Liang murmured thoughtfully. "I was going to say..."

Reaching into his robe, he slowly pulled out two more pieces and held them up side by side.

"Doesn't this look...exactly like the other two pieces I already have?"

Chapter 635: If You Are The One Handling It, I Have No Worries

When Jiang Yuebai had been listening to his father talk about her mother, she didn't cry.

Even when she had been worried about not being able to see her esteemed teacher, she did not cry.

When Chu Liang had been heavily injured and missing and she had no idea if he was alive, she never cried.

But at this very moment, she suddenly felt an uncontrollable urge to cry.

What is this? She thought. My father and I searched across the land of the nine provinces, hoping to find just one piece of the scroll. Yet, Chu Liang just casually pulled out two? Had we shown him earlier, we would have saved six years of effort?

The Whale-Riding Immortal's face was filled with sadness and frustration as he carefully took the scroll pieces Chu Liang handed over. Comparing them to his own piece, he found that they fit together perfectly.

He looked at Chu Liang, then back at the scroll pieces, and asked softly, "Where did you get these scrolls?"

WHERE DID YOU GET THESE SCROLLS...

Chu Liang recounted in detail how he had come across the two scroll pieces. After listening intently, the Whale-Riding Immortal fell into deep thought.

The Whale-Riding Immortal murmured, "Years ago, I had arranged to meet Jin Mucuo, but he vanished without a trace. Later, I found a message he left behind, saying he was being hunted by Xuan Yinzi of a diabolical sect. He mentioned planning to seek refuge with the Mount Shu Sect. The golden skeleton you encountered was likely his... Alas, it seems he met a tragic end, but at least he managed to keep the scroll out of the diabolical sect's hands."

He then glanced at Chu Liang and asked, "The Soul Destroyer Sect's scroll piece—you obtained that as well? The members of Scarlet-Robe Hall must have mistaken you for me, which is why they let you go unharmed."

Then, a moment of silence followed as the Whale-Riding Immortal scrutinized Chu Liang from head to toe. Though he had always thought highly of the young man, he hadn't truly regarded him as a significant figure due to his comparatively weaker strength.

But now, as he looked again, a flicker of envy crept into his eyes. He had spent over twenty years searching in vain, while Chu Liang had managed to stumble upon the scroll pieces purely by chance. It was hard not to attribute this to a stroke of extraordinary destiny.

The realization was enough to make one's teeth itch with frustration.

Chu Liang said, "I only blame myself for not asking earlier. If I had clarified things back then, it would have saved both you and Senior Sister Jiang a lot of effort. This is indeed my responsibility."

"How could this be your fault?" The Whale-Riding Immortal replied with a faint, complex smile. "No matter how you look at it, this is a good thing."

"With these two pieces, you will only need to find the last one," Chu Liang said reassuringly. "I believe you'll be reunited with your wife soon."

"Thank you so much," the Whale-Riding Immortal said solemnly.

"You saved my life back then, an act of immense kindness and grace I could never repay. What are two scroll pieces in comparison?" Chu Liang said earnestly.

"No need to mention that," the Whale-Riding Immortal replied with a smile, waving his hand. "Just treat Yuebai well."

"Father..." Jiang Yuebai furrowed her brows and lightly scolded him.

Chu Liang smoothly responded, "That's only natural."

After some lighthearted banter, the Whale-Riding Immortal's tone shifted. "As for the last piece of the Divine Ruins' scroll, we actually have a lead."

"Oh?" Chu Liang's eyes lit up with anticipation.

"Years ago, a piece of the map to the Immortals' Storehouse appeared in the border city of Muzhi, sparking fierce competition among the city's major families. The result? Overnight, four prominent families of the world of immortality cultivators left Muzhi City," the Whale-Riding Immortal recounted solemnly.

"Yuebai and I have already investigated two of them recently," he continued. "That leaves only the Lei Family of Cliffhold Bastion and the Gu Family of Blossom Barbarian Kingdom. If that piece of the map is indeed a piece of the Divine Ruins' scroll, it's most likely in the hands of one of these two families."

"In that case, looking into whether these families possess the Divine Ruins' scroll will require some effort," Chu Liang said thoughtfully. "I believe I can lend a hand."

"Alright," Jiang Yuebai agreed with a nod. "Father, you can investigate the Gu Family, and leave the Lei Family to the two of us. You already know how capable Chu Liang is—this will save us a lot of time."

"Very well, but remember to act discreetly." The Whale-Riding Immortal said as he patted Chu Liang on the shoulder. "If you're the one handling it, I have no worries."

...

High Moon Kingdom, Crimson Moon Valley.

Under the cover of night, the valley glimmered faintly with starlight. Scattered across its expanse were countless slender leaves of Crimson Moon Celestial Grass, their upright forms glowing with an otherworldly red hue. The veins on each leaf pulsed rhythmically, as if blood flowed within them, and with every pulse, a tiny bead of starlight seemed to flicker at the tips of the leaves. The moonlight spread over the valley like a frosty veil, drawn into the grass as though absorbed by its very essence.

This plant with multiple leaves along its stem was none other than the Crimson Moon Celestial Grass. Highly selective about its growing environment, it was nearly impossible to cultivate even a single stalk outside its natural habitat. Only in Crimson Moon Valley could it grow in such abundance. Despite its rarity, this grass was famous for its powerful healing abilities and was essential for making top-quality healing medicines.

Thanks to this grass, the High Moon Kingdom had become the prized jewel among the kingdoms of the Western Regions.

Because of its value, the kingdom guarded it with utmost care. Cultivators from the Grand Wind Hall patrolled the valley's entrance and sides in shifts, ensuring this vital resource was well-protected.

But tonight, a deadly threat silently crept into the valley, carried by the wind.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh—

Suddenly, streaks of black light tore through the air at incredible speed, striking down the cultivators guarding the upper valley before they could even react.

With a series of muffled thuds, the guards on the opposite cliff realized something was wrong. But as they turned to respond, they were ambushed by a group of black-clad attackers.

The black-clad attackers wielded glowing enchanted tools, their brilliance slicing through the darkness as they swiftly overpowered the guards, leaving them collapsed and motionless on the ground.

"Move quickly!" Tian Mingtai's voice rang out sharply.

He stood at the forefront, gripping a shimmering silver crossbow, his expression dark with resentment.

"The Mount Shu Sect and the High Moon Kingdom have gone too far," he snarled through clenched teeth. "Deceiving us, cutting deals behind our backs! Today, we'll destroy every last stalk of Crimson Moon Celestial Grass in this valley and burn the rest to ashes. If we can't have it, the Mount Shu Sect won't get a single leaf either!"

If this had been just a failed business negotiation, Tian Mingtai might not have been so bitter. But wasting time on a wild goose chase after High Moon Kingdom's so-called missing princess, only to return and find that the kingdom had already begun hosting a celebratory banquet with the representatives of the Mount Shu Sect, stoked a fury he could no longer contain.

A wave of humiliation surged through him.

The thought of those arrogant young men from the Mount Shu Sect—White Jade Fan and Mountain Tiger—only made it worse. To him, they were mere lapdogs riding on the coattails of Red Cotton Peak's success.

In Taotie City, they probably wouldn't even be considered worthy enough to find wives.

Today, I'll show you how ruthless the martial world can be! Tian Mingtai roared inwardly, his face twisting with malice as he prepared to carry out his "if I can't have it, no one can" philosophy.

But just as he moved, a sudden burst of brilliant light illuminated the sky, like a full moon descending to hover over the valley.

"Tian Mingtai!" boomed the voice of the High Moon Kingdom's royal uncle, shaking the air like thunder. "So, you dare harbor such malicious intent, plotting to destroy the foundation of my High Moon Kingdom!"

Shopkeeper Tian trembled as he looked up, his eyes widening in disbelief. Alongside High Moon Kingdom's royal uncle, an airship hovered silently in the sky. Though modest in size, its pitch-black exterior was inscribed with intricate stealth formations, making it almost invisible in the darkness.

Onboard the airship stood representatives from the Mount Shu Sect alongside members of the High Moon Kingdom's royal family, including the king himself, who stood with his hands clasped behind his back, observing the scene with a calm yet authoritative demeanor.

Tian Mingtai's supposedly covert operation had, in fact, unfolded entirely under their watchful eyes.

"This..." Tian Mingtai stammered, his voice trembling as fear set in. "This is a misunderstanding... let me explain—"

"Explain it to the King of the Netherworld!" the royal uncle bellowed, cutting him off.

With a wave of his hand, he unleashed a palm strike of terrifying power.

Boom—

Being the only seventh-realm cultivator present, his attack was utterly unstoppable.

In an instant, the massive moonlight descended with crushing force, and Tian Mingtai could only let out a desperate scream: "Aaaaah!!!"

The High Moon Kingdom's king let out a sigh of relief and said, "Thanks to the two of you for your warning. I would never have imagined Taotie City capable of such a heinous act. Had they succeeded in destroying the Crimson Moon Celestial Grass, my kingdom would have been gravely weakened for the next century."

"Heheh," Lackey A said, unfurling his White Jade Fan with a light laugh. "It's all thanks to our Big Bro's foresight. Even though he was in a rush before departing, he specifically reminded us to be cautious of any desperate measures by Taotie City."

"Young Hero Chu is truly wise and resourceful," the king said with admiration. "At first, he used an alias, and I assumed he was just an ordinary cultivator. I couldn't understand how someone so young could possess such skill and insight. Later, I learned he was none other than Young Hero Chu, who nearly single-handedly led his sect to victory at the Assembly of Immortal Sects years ago. Everything made sense after that."

"Exactly," Lackey B chimed in with a nod. "The success of Red Cotton Peak over the past six years is largely thanks to the foundation he built back then."

"Young Hero Chu possesses both intelligence and combat prowess," the king continued, his voice full of praise. "As expected of Di Nufeng's disciple—an exceptional teacher raising an exceptional student."

Lackey A and Lackey B exchanged glances and then let out an awkward laugh: "Aha... ahahaha..."

Chapter 636: Fierce Draconic Colt

The Cliffhold Bastion stood atop a towering cliff, overlooking a vast, desolate abyss teeming with countless demonic monsters.

Back when the humans fought against the Demon God, a bastion had been built here.

As the years passed, the bastion fell into disuse, leaving behind only a handful of descendants from its original gatekeepers.

The story of this bastion bore some similarities to that of Taotie City.

Since these fortresses were located at key geographic hubs, they were highly convenient for developing trade.

Over time, a bustling market took shape at the base of Cliffhold Bastion.

This market wasn't just for cultivators—citizens from over a dozen nearby minor kingdoms in the Western Regions often came here to trade and exchange goods.

Today, the market was bustling once again.

A middle-aged man in a dark blue robe strolled confidently down the main street, flanked by four or five attendants dressed like servants.

Wherever he went, vendors on both sides greeted him warmly:

"Steward Wang, you're here!"

"Steward Wang, what can I get for you today?"

"..."

He walked with an air of arrogance, paying no mind to the greetings as he led his group to a crowded spot along the street.

At the roadside, a group of people squatted idly, clearly waiting for odd jobs. As soon as they saw him approach, they stood up in a hurry. Clearly, all of them recognized this Steward Wang.

In the crowd, a young man with delicate features remained sitting in confusion until an elderly man beside him tugged at his sleeve and whispered, "Young man, you must be new here. That's the steward from the Lei Family. If you're hired by him, you'll have steady work and better pay than most. You're young and would have a better chance of being hired. Don't miss this chance!"

"Thank you, sir," the young man said, quickly rising to his feet.

Though the young man looked fair and handsome, his tattered clothing and dirt-smudged face made him look worse off than most. Dust clung to his disheveled figure, giving him a pitiful and downcast appearance.

"Ahem," Steward Wang cleared his throat in front of the crowd and then announced, "Today, the Lei Family is hiring, but we are looking for someone who isn't scared of death."

"Huh?"

The announcement caused a stir among the gathered crowd. Many of those who had eagerly stood moments earlier now squatted back down, unwilling to take the risk. Only four or five individuals remained standing.

After squatting back down, the old man glanced at the young man, who was still standing, and urgently whispered, "What are you doing? Do you have a death wish?"

"Didn't you say the Lei Family offers good pay?" the young man asked, looking genuinely puzzled.

"That's for the regular jobs," the old man explained hurriedly. "The Lei Family earned their wealth by raising demonic beasts and monsters, so most of their jobs involve handling those creatures. When he says he's looking for someone who isn't afraid of death, it means the job is feeding and tending to the most vicious of those beasts. One mistake, and you're done for—or worse, there won't even be anything left of you to bury!"

"Is that so?" The young man nodded in understanding but made no move to squat back down.

"Haaaaaa..." The old man let out a long sigh. Seeing that the young man looked just a little dim-witted, he wanted to dissuade him further.

But before he could say anything, Steward Wang pointed to the few who were still standing and commanded, "Step forward."

The young man, of course, was no fool—he was Chu Liang, who had come here from afar specifically to infiltrate the Lei Family. How could he fall behind at such a critical moment? Without hesitation, he stepped forward with the others.

"Our family is hiring just one person this time," Steward Wang began. "The pay is excellent, but you must have no fear of death. Life and death are up to fate, and the heavens decide if we should get riches and honor. I hope you're all prepared. Since so many of you want this, I'll pick the one who's the least afraid of death."

The few who stepped forward were all burly men, eager to prove themselves, and immediately began shouting over each other.

"I'm the least afraid of death!"

"No one fears death less than me!"

"Then prove it," Steward Wang said, narrowing his eyes. "I'll pick the one who's truly the least afraid of death."

"I'll go first!" one of the men roared as he stepped forward. Drawing a sharp blade from his waist, he slashed across his wrist with a swift motion.

Splatter—

A fountain of blood sprayed into the air, hissing as it splattered everywhere.

The man raised his arm high, letting the blood spray wildly toward the crowd. People scrambled to dodge, horrified by the scene, while he grinned smugly.

"Who dares to top this?!" he shouted.

The onlookers gasped in astonishment.

This was a ruthless man.

But the second man sneered. He pulled out a long rope, expertly flung it over a nearby tree branch, and looped it tightly.

To everyone's shock, he slipped the rope around his neck and let his body dangle, hanging himself.

He hung himself!

Even as his tongue lolled out and his face turned red, he managed a strained, breathless laugh. "Who dares to match this?!"

The crowd clicked their tongues in shock and murmured nervously.

This was also a ruthless man.

"Hahaha! You're all still afraid of death!" The third burly man suddenly burst into maniacal laughter, then bolted off in the opposite direction at full speed.

The crowd was utterly baffled, their collective thoughts echoing the same question:

What is he doing? Is he running away?

But judging by his wild, manic laughter, he didn't seem scared at all.

Under the puzzled stares of the crowd, the man dashed off into the distance. After running a great length, he reached the edge of a towering cliff—and leaped off without hesitation.

Only his shout echoed faintly in the wind: "Who dares—"

"Hiss..." The spectators collectively drew in a sharp breath.

This one was even more ruthless than the others.

All eyes turned to the last man.

As the crowd saw his delicate features, they wondered if he would back down.

The young man was, of course, Chu Liang.

Unlike the others, he showed no trace of fear. Instead, he strode forward with calm confidence, stopping directly in front of Steward Wang.

Just as Steward Wang was wondering what he was up to, Chu Liang swung his arm and delivered a resounding slap across Steward Wang's face.

Slap!

The crisp sound reverberated through the air, leaving Steward Wang stunned and the crowd utterly dumbfounded.

Does he have a death wish?

What is he thinking?

He wants to work for the Lei Family, yet he dares to offend Steward Wang.

Steward Wang was, of course, furious. "You dare slap me!"

At that moment, Chu Liang turned back and asked, "Who dares?"

Whoa—

The crowd finally understood. This one truly had no fear of death.

A few of the Lei Family's servants stepped forward, eager to teach Chu Liang a lesson, but Steward Wang raised his hand and barked, "Stand down."

"But Steward, he dared to hit you!" one servant protested.

"I'll take him," Steward Wang declared, pointing at Chu Liang. "You, come with me."

"Huh?" The servants were baffled. "Not only won't you punish him, but you're giving him the job?"

"Nonsense!" Steward Wang snapped, pointing at the other applicants sprawled on the ground. "Do you see anyone over there still breathing?"

...

The Lei Family originally came from Muzhi City, which was located near the border of the Yu Dynasty. It was once a prominent local family known for their expertise in taming beasts. Their trade focused on dealing with demonic beasts and monsters.

Later, for some unknown reasons, the entire family relocated to Cliffhold Bastion. Being near the Abyss of Barbarian Wilderness made restocking convenient, and being outside the jurisdiction of the Yu Dynasty freed them from its legal restrictions. This allowed the family to grow significantly in power and reputation across the Western Regions.

The family kept a large number of demonic beasts and monsters. Since the family disciples couldn't manage them all, they hired many mortal servants.

Steward Wang was one of the minor leaders among the servants.

"Although you're new, your task is quite important," Steward Wang said as he strolled ahead casually. "You've been assigned to care for the Fifth Young Master's prized beast, a Fierce Draconic Colt. It's only about a hundred years old—a mere child among demonic monsters. It has an extremely volatile temper. Even the slightest mistake can send it into a frenzy. So, be especially careful when feeding it."

There were numerous enclosures on both sides, each housing a demonic beast with its own designated area. The size of the area varied based on the creature's level of spiritual nature. The Fierce Draconic Colt, being of draconic lineage, was highly valued by the Lei Family and had an entire garden to itself.

From the outside, the enclosure appeared serene, with only green trees and yellow rocks in view—there was no trace of the Fierce Draconic Colt.

"We have set up restrictions and formation around this area for the sake of protecting the people outside. When you feed it, you must stand outside this area," Steward Wang reminded. "As for grooming it... well, that depends on your luck."

"Can these formations really lock the Fierce Draconic Colt up?" Chu Liang asked, glancing around with a hint of feigned nervousness.

"They can... but not completely," Steward Wang replied, shooting him a sharp look. "If they could, we wouldn't need to hire you."

Got it.

Chu Liang nodded repeatedly.

"By the way, I still don't know your name," Steward Wang asked before leaving.

"This humble servant is called Chu Liuxiang[1]," Chu Liang replied.

"A mere servant with a name fancier than mine," Steward Wang sneered. "The young master and miss don't have the time or patience to remember your name. Once you're in the Lei Family, you'd better pick something simpler."

"Then I'll go by Wang Fugui[2]," Chu Liang replied without hesitation.

"My name is Wang Fugui!" Steward Wang snapped, raising an eyebrow.

"Then I'll be Liu Bo[3]," Chu Liang said again.

Steward Wang stared at him for a moment before nodding in satisfaction. "Well, aren't you thorough. First time I've seen someone casually change their surname like it's nothing."

After giving a few more instructions on what to pay attention to, Steward Wang added, "The Fifth Young Master will be coming to see the Fierce Draconic Colt shortly. Find it quickly, and if it's dirty from playing around, clean it up. I'll go wait for the Young Master."

With that, he strutted away with an air of arrogance.

Chu Liang was left with a few other servants who were tasked with tending to the creatures. However, their gazes toward him carried a noticeable hint of pity.

Chu Liang thought to strike up a conversation, but the moment he opened his mouth, the others scattered in all directions, as if even speaking to him might bring them bad luck.

"Is it really that dramatic?" Chu Liang muttered with a faint smile, shaking his head.

Luckily, this place wasn't just filled with people. Compared to the servants, perhaps the demonic beasts and spirits would provide more useful information.

So he strolled to the enclosure, disregarding Steward Wang's earlier warning, and directly used the key to open the gate, stepping into the garden.

As soon as he entered, a wave of scorching heat enveloped him, carrying an undercurrent of wild hostility.

It seemed the Fierce Draconic Colt was indeed not one to be trifled with.

Chu Liang had barely begun spreading his divine sense to locate the creature when a shrill neigh pierced the air. A fiery blaze shot out from behind a fake hill! It had been lying in ambush!

A gust of wind surged toward him with deadly force, but Chu Liang stood firm, showing no fear. He calmly released a faint trace of the Dragon God Mark's aura.

Boom!

The blazing fire that had surged toward Chu Liang instantly crumbled, collapsing to the ground and kicking up a dense cloud of dust. When the dust finally settled, the true form of the Fierce Draconic Colt was revealed.

It was an imposing stallion at the height of eight chi and with a crimson mane that seemed to burn like fire. Its body was a striking blend of fur and scales, split evenly between the two, giving it a unique and fearsome appearance. A single horn jutted from its forehead, while one of its golden irises flickered with fiery brilliance.

The horse's draconic lineage was not particularly strong. However, it also descended from the ancient and ferocious Fiery Celestial Horse, a breed renowned for its aggressive and combative nature, which explained its intimidating appearance.

Unfortunately for it, as long as it carried even a trace of draconic bloodline, it couldn't act ferociously in the presence of Chu Liang's Dragon God Mark.

"You are really filthy," Chu Liang frowned and softly said. "Go wash up."

This wild, murderous draconic descendant immediately turned and trotted to the pond near the fake hill. Without hesitation, it began rolling around in the water to clean itself.

It only stopped once Chu Liang gestured that it was clean enough. With cautious steps, it approached him, lowering its head and lying down submissively on the ground, as if offering itself to be mounted.

Chu Liang's lips curved into a faint smile as he leisurely climbed onto its back. Stroking its fiery mane, he said, "I'll only be here for a few days. You seem to enjoy your freedom. If you behave and work with me, I might just take you with me when I leave."

"Neigh—" The Fierce Draconic Colt immediately leaped up in excitement.

Chu Liang was about to ask the beast a few more questions when the sound of approaching footsteps and voices interrupted him.

"Fifth Young Master, why are you here this early?" Steward Wang's fawning voice carried through the air. "You've seen the temper of your Fierce Draconic Colt last time—it's truly wild and untamed. Just yesterday, it killed a servant, and we've just recruited a new one. He might not yet..."

His words abruptly stopped.

As Steward Wang led the group of people to the fence area, they saw the once-untamable Fierce Draconic Colt lying obediently, allowing the new servant to sit atop its neck.

To add to their shock, the beast was even wagging its tail, its wide-open eyes brimming with a fawning affection that not even Steward Wang could hope to replicate.

"Huh? What's going on here?" Steward Wang asked in astonishment.

Among the group trailing behind him was a burly, tigerish-looking teenager dressed in ornate sword attire. His sharp eyes took in the surprising scene, and he exclaimed, "The Fierce Draconic Colt looks perfectly tame to me. Why were you claiming it's wild? Could it be that you weren't feeding it properly?"

"Exactly, exactly," Chu Liang chimed in, nodding earnestly from behind the fence. "This little guy couldn't be more obedient."

Chapter 637: Where's the Bull?

Lei Hou, the fifth young master of the Lei Family, was only fifteen years old—the age when boys were bold and reckless.

Seeing the Fierce Draconic Colt so obedient, it immediately caught Lei Hou's interest. "Can I take it for a ride?"

Steward Wang hurriedly intervened, "Absolutely not, Fifth Young Master."

Lei Hou's cultivation realm was only at the third realm. Even though he had some beast-taming divine abilities that were passed down in his family, there was no way he could control this Fierce Draconic Colt that was already at the fourth realm despite being a child.

Steward Wang thought, The colt won't care if you're a servant or a young master. Once it gets mad, it will certainly kick you at least once.

If the Fifth Young Master gets injured... That kick might appear to land on him, but that would actually be a hit on my lifeline! If Master gets angry, I'll get skinned alive!

Yet, at the next moment, Chu Liang nodded nonchalantly. "Sure."

"How dare you!" Steward Wang snapped. "You're new here. You don't know anything! How dare you speak so recklessly? If the Fifth Young Master suffers even a slight... uh, injury... huh?"

His voice gradually weakened.

Instead of responding to Steward Wang's questioning of his skills, Chu Liang just pressed his palm lightly on the Fierce Draconic Colt and said, "Sit."

The Fierce Draconic Colt immediately bent its hind knees and sat down on the ground obediently.

The horse was sitting in the standard seated posture... and even crossed its legs. When in his life had Steward Wang ever seen such a thing?

"This is way too absurd," Steward Wang muttered, his face darkening with disbelief.

Chu Liang raised his hand again and produced a flaming steel hoop out of thin air.

He yelled, "Jump through!"

"Neeigh!"

On Chu Liang's command, the Fierce Draconic Colt jumped through the hoop.

Lei Hou watched in awe, his eyes gleaming with excitement. This was no longer the vicious and uncontrollable Fierce Draconic Colt from before. The Lei Family rarely had such a docile demonic monster.

Steward Wang covered his face with his hand, utterly baffled. "Where did the flaming hoop even come from?"

The show wasn't over yet.

Chu Liang waved his hand again. "Give your greetings for the New Year."

The Fierce Draconic Colt actually stood on its hind legs and held its front legs together as though it was really bowing. It waved its legs repeatedly, doing its best to gain Chu Liang's favor.

"How is this even possible??" The Fifth Young Master said in astonishment.

Steward Wang held his head in his hands, struggling to process what he was seeing. "It's way past the New Year now, and it's still giving greetings for the New Year?"

Chu Liang let the Fierce Draconic Colt rest, allowing the farce to finally end for the time being.

Then he cupped his hands toward Lei Hou. "Fifth Young Master, do you now believe the Fierce Draconic Colt is well-behaved?"

Lei Hou chuckled, "Haha, I'll try riding it then."

He leaped onto the back of the Fierce Draconic Colt.

The Fierce Draconic Colt raised its head slightly, seemingly with the intention of throwing Lei Hou off. However, upon seeing the sharp glint in Chu Liang's eyes, the Fierce Draconic Colt lowered its head back down.

The Fierce Draconic Colt let out a loud neigh and bolted forward. Without a saddle or bridle to hold onto, Lei Hou simply grabbed the colt's mane, and in a split second, they were moving like the wind.

The colt galloped around the park in the form of a blazing ball of fire.

Lei Hou jumped off the colt's back and exclaimed excitedly, "That was exhilarating!"

"Hahaha!" he laughed heartily. Then he said to Chu Liang, "Come with me to claim your reward."

Lei Hou turned to Steward Wang and ordered, "Handle things here. Clean this place up; make it nice and tidy. Tomorrow, I'll bring my brothers and sisters to see the demonic beast!"

After that, Lei Hou left with a smiling Chu Liang, leaving the dumbfounded Steward Wang alone there.

A long while later, Steward Wang finally turned to look at the imposing Fierce Draconic Colt lying on the ground, suspicion still lingering in his gaze.

He picked up the flaming hoop that Chu Liang had discarded earlier and slowly raised it up high.

Then he called out to the Fierce Draconic Colt, "Jump through?"

Boom!

The sound of an explosion reverberated from the park as a human figure shot up, becoming a tiny speck in the sky.

The people below could faintly hear his drawn-out one-syllable scream.

"Aaaaaahhhh!!!"

...

The Lei Family's estate occupied a vast area. Most of the land consisted of parks used as enclosures for raising demonic beasts and monsters. In contrast, the residential quarters in the rear courtyard were not particularly large. The servants tending to the demonic beasts in the front courtyard were generally not allowed into the rear courtyard.

Lei Hou brought Chu Liang to the accounts room, ordered his wages to be doubled, and gave him a few words of praise before dismissing him.

After leaving the accounts room alone, Chu Liang did not return to his station straight away. Instead, he transformed into a whistling gust of wind and swiftly circled back to the rear courtyard.

The challenge of searching for the remaining part of the Divine Ruins' scroll lay in the uncertainty of the lead. They had a piece of information that seemed likely to be true, but ultimately, it was just a suspicion. Despite the Whale-Riding Immortal's incredibly high cultivation level and power, he couldn't rely on forceful measures to obtain the remaining part of the scroll.

Even if the Whale-Riding Immortal's party tied up every member of the Lei Family and threatened them, the family could simply insist they didn't have it. What could the Whale-Riding Immortal's party do then? Moreover, they were not from an evil sect, so they couldn't commit atrocities with the mindset of "it's better to wrongfully kill someone than to make a mistake in letting them go."

Thus, the Whale-Riding Immortal often employed a strategy of "luring the snake out of its hole".[1]

A cool breeze drifted into the study of the Lei Family's patriarch. The study was empty at the moment, but Chu Liang did not search through it. After all, no one would leave a map that led to hidden treasure out in the open. Instead, Chu Liang just did a quick sweep with his divine sense. That revealed nothing, so he didn't bother doing a physical search. Furthermore, rummaging around would leave traces that someone had been searching for something there.

In the end, Chu Liang just placed a letter on the desk.

The letter read:

I am aware that a part of the map to the Immortals' Storehouse is in your possession. The map is fake information that a malicious party released. It actually leads to an ancient perilous site that once caused great upheaval. The map part you hold is an ominous object. I am willing to pay a high price for it. I hope you will consider this offer carefully, patriarch of the Lei Family.

Chu Liang could not confirm if the last part of the Divine Ruins' scroll was in the Lei Family's possession. If it wasn't, the letter would simply cause some confusion. However, if it was, there would inevitably be some unusual movement within the family.

Of course, if the Lei Family's patriarch was truly willing to sell the map part, Chu Liang wouldn't mind spending money to buy it.

While Chu Liang quietly busied himself, an incessant string of wails rang out from the stewards' quarters in the front courtyard.

"Oooooow!"

Several of Steward Wang's subordinates carried him on a stretcher to his bed. They surrounded him with concerned expressions.

"Fortunately, I've cultivated some martial arts techniques. My cultivation level isn't high, but I did develop a sturdy physique," Steward Wang said with anguish. "Otherwise, that Fierce Draconic Colt's charge would've ended my life!"

"The Fierce Draconic Colt has always been vicious and uncontrollable. How could it have suddenly become so tame?" one of Steward Wang's subordinates wondered. "Maybe that new guy did something?"

"That's very likely!" another servant chimed in. "If not for him, Steward Wang wouldn't have gotten injured. He even sucked up to the Fifth Young Master, causing the steward to lose face!"

The rest of the servants showed disgruntled expressions.

"Should we teach him a lesson?"

"Have you all got pigs for brains?" Steward Wang snapped angrily. "If it's not because of something he did, then that's fine. Just forget about it. But if he really does have the skill to tame the Fierce Draconic Colt, what could we possibly do to retaliate? Or are you saying that one of you is able to withstand a kick from that colt?"

His subordinates quickly agreed with him. "Yes, you are right, Steward Wang."

"However, our facilities here are quite old and in disrepair. It wouldn't be surprising if a vicious beast accidentally escaped," Steward Wang said with a sinister smirk. "Newcomers don't know how things work here, and people sometimes get injured or even killed. Go inspect the enclosures thoroughly. After all, we wouldn't want any 'accidents.'"

...

Chu Liang returned to the Fierce Draconic Colt's enclosure, only to find the surrounding enclosures absent of people. It seemed that all the other servants had left.

He was a bit puzzled. Are they all attending a meeting without me?

Nevertheless, he didn't think much of it. He just wanted to stay there quietly until nightfall. After that, he would head to the study of the Lei Family's patriarch again to see if he could get some information.

However, when Chu Liang passed by one of the enclosures, a muffled roar rang from inside. Looking up, he noticed that the enclosure's fencing had collapsed.

Boom!

A massive vicious beast, two zhang tall[2] and covered in jet black hair, charged out. It resembled a wild bull with upward-pointing saber teeth and eyes brimming with ferocity.

Judging from its appearance, this vicious beast was every bit as aggressive as the Fierce Draconic Colt. With its four hooves pounding the ground, it rushed furiously toward Chu Liang!

Yet, Chu Liang stood motionless. Just as the vicious beast's horns were about to ram into him, he raised a finger and lightly tapped the beast's forehead.

Tap.

That one tap effortlessly brought the vicious beast to a halt. Then a ball of Divine Dragon Fire burst forth from Chu Liang's finger.

Boom!

The Divine Dragon Fire engulfed the vicious beast with a whoosh, reducing it to ashes in an instant.

A cool breeze dispersed the ashes in the blink of an eye. It was as though the vicious beast had never existed.

Chu Liang was deeply moved by how the beast had delivered itself to him.

What a pleasant surprise.

A short while later, Steward Wang rushed over with a group of cultivators working for the Lei Family. Naturally, the cultivators held a much higher status than the servants who did odd jobs around the estate. Thus, Steward Wang spoke to them with an extremely respectful attitude.

As they approached the enclosure of the massive bull-like vicious beast, Steward Wang said, "It's here. I heard that one of the vicious beasts escaped its enclosure. My incompetence in handling matters has inconvenienced all of you—"

He abruptly stopped talking mid-sentence.

The enclosure and the surrounding area were totally empty. There wasn't even a trace of the escaped vicious beast.

The ground was level, and the buildings undisturbed; there were no signs at all of a rampaging vicious beast.

The only person around was Chu Liang. He was sitting outside the Fierce Draconic Colt's enclosure with his eyes closed, dozing off.

Steward Wang walked over to him and asked, "Where's the Rampaging Devil Bull?"

Chu Liang shook his head. "I don't know."

Steward Wang said furiously, "You've been here the whole time, and you don't know?"

"The Fifth Young Master called me away earlier, so I just got back," Chu Liang replied. "Besides, I'm not responsible for tending to Rampaging Devil Bull."

"Then, who is responsible for the beast?" asked one of the Lei Family cultivators behind Steward Wang.

His displeasure was clear in his tone.

Steward Wang had been worried that the Rampaging Devil Bull's escape would cause excessive damage to the estate, potentially jeopardizing his position. So, he had estimated how long it would take for the Rampaging Devil Bull to harm Chu Liang once he entered the area with the enclosures. Then Steward Wang preemptively summoned the cultivators responsible for suppressing vicious beasts. This way, he could minimize the damage.

Yet, things had turned out completely different to what he had expected.

Why isn't there even a single bit of damage?

The servant responsible for tending to the Rampaging Devil Bull was dragged out and thrown to the ground.

Under the intent stares of the Lei Family cultivators, Steward Wang had no choice but to question the servant loudly. "Ah Wei, you're responsible for tending to the Rampaging Devil Bull. Where is it?"

"That's right, Steward Wang," Ah Wei said, looking at him with a baffled expression. Ah Wei trembled and pulled away from Steward Wang as he asked in return, "Where's the bull?"

Chapter 638: Eavesdropping in the Lei Family Estate

The Rampaging Devil Bull was, after all, a fourth-realm demonic monster. Now, they didn't know if it was dead or alive, as they hadn't seen it or its corpse. So, the servant responsible for tending it to it was taken away for intense questioning.

If the enclosure's formation had been damaged and the vicious beast escaped, there would undoubtedly be traces of that. Yet, it seemed to have disappeared into thin air, which made this situation very strange.

If they were to investigate thoroughly, they might eventually suspect Chu Liang had something to do with it. Nevertheless, Chu Liang never planned to stay there for long, so he wasn't concerned.

Before leaving, Steward Wang gave Chu Liang a wary glance, the apprehension in his eyes growing visibly. Chu Liang, however, harbored no hostility toward him.

After all, the bull hadn't harmed Chu Liang; it was more like a gift that had been delivered to his door. Still, Steward Wang likely wouldn't dare orchestrate such a thing again. If the fencing of another enclosure were to be found damaged, he would have to kiss his position as steward goodbye.

After the commotion subsided, Chu Liang resumed resting with his eyes closed and let his divine sense sink into the White Pagoda's space. He was taking advantage of the moment to reward himself.

The imprint of the Rampaging Devil Bull hovered inside a cell.

Chu Liang stepped forward and pressed "Refine." It was followed by a flash of crimson light.

Boom.

The reward floated out of the cell and into his hand. Once the light faded, the reward was revealed to be a pair of black horn-like items.

[Mother-Child Voice Transmission Horns: This item was crafted from the horns of a mother and child black rhinoceros. Place the child horn anywhere within a hundred-li radius of the mother horn, and the mother horn can receive the sounds around the child horn.

Note: These horns are for voice transmission only and cannot be used for other purposes.]

This item...

Chu Liang couldn't help but smile.

Isn't this a bug?[1]

He had initially planned to leave a clone in the front courtyard after his shift while he went to the patriarch's study to eavesdrop. That plan did carry some risk though. It would be much simpler if he placed this covert listening tool in the study.

With just a thought, he used External Manifestation. He left his clone there to guard the Fierce Draconic Colt's enclosure and avoid suspicion. Meanwhile, he turned into a gust of wind and slipped into the patriarch's study.

Like before, there was no one in the study. Chu Liang glanced around before placing the child horn inside a porcelain vase on a shelf.

He had previously even considered using a Talisman of Life Restoration to give life to an ornament and have it serve as his eyes and ears. However, such creations lacked intelligence and emitted a faint aura of life that powerful cultivators could easily detect. Consequently, Chu Liang dismissed the idea.

He truly acquired the Mother-Child Voice Transmission Horns at the perfect time.

Thinking about it, Chu Liang had to thank Steward Wang for this gift. Otherwise, it would've been difficult for Chu Liang to break into the tightly secured enclosures and kill those well-behaved, darling little demonic beasts and monsters.

Just as he finished placing the child horn inside the vase, he heard footsteps approach. Chu Liang hurriedly transformed into wind and slipped out the window, returning to the Fierce Draconic Colt's enclosure.

He then sent his divine sense into the mother horn, ready to eavesdrop on the secrets that were about to be discussed in the patriarch's study.

Yet, what he heard was a moan.

"Huh?" Chu Liang uttered with a frown, realizing something unexpected was happening.

A delicate voice of a woman said, "Mr. Fang, you're so bold. This is Master's study."

"Heheh," a male voice chuckled. "If we're seeking thrills, we might as well go all the way."

Chu Liang's expression darkened in shock as he put down the mother horn. He had not expected such a scandalous scene.

After a while, he picked up the horn again and found that it was silent on the other end. It seemed that those two thrill-seekers had chosen not to indulge for too long.

...

When dinner was served later that evening, Chu Liang joined the other servants in resting in the servants' courtyard. He didn't hear any more sounds come through the mother horn.

It wasn't until the moon was high in the sky that the child horn transmitted sounds from the study again.

There were two sets of footsteps.

"Someone's been in my study!"

It was the deep voice of a middle-aged man this time.

A second person uttered, "Ah?"

It was the voice of Mr. Fang, now shaking noticeably. Although Chu Liang wasn't present, he could imagine Mr. Fang's face as he frantically tried to figure out where he had slipped up, fearful that the truth would be discovered.

"Otherwise, how did this letter end up here?" the middle-aged man asked.

"Ah..." Mr. Fang let out a long sigh of relief. "So, Master's referring to a letter."

"What else would I be talking about?"

The middle-aged man was none other than Lei Ren, the current head of the Lei Family.

"I thought Master had lost something important," Mr. Fang said smoothly with a laugh, making his change in mood seem very natural.

"You know me; would I ever leave anything important out in the open?" Lei Ren paused. There was the rustling of paper, which was likely the letter. Then he gasped. "It's about this!"

"Master, is it something important?" Mr. Fang asked.

"You've been working as an advisor for my family for over a decade, haven't you? But I'm sure you don't know why the Lei Family moved to the Cliffhold Bastion."

"Wasn't the move from Muzhi City to the Cliffhold Bastion to make it easier to capture demonic beasts?"

Lei Ren explained, "That was just the front we used. The truth lies in a confidential matter from back then..."

He lowered his voice and continued, "A rumor had spread in the martial world that four pieces of the map to the Immortals' Storehouse were scattered across the nine provinces. Whoever gathered them all could uncover the legendary Unending Immortals' Storehouse and attain eternal youth. For a time, every immortal sect and aristocratic family was searching for these map parts.

"Back then, one was discovered in Muzhi City. My family was one of the major aristocratic families in Muzhi City, so we became one of the contenders to acquire the map part. At the time, the head of the family was my father. For that map, he fought with his life on the line against other aristocratic families and factions multiple times, until he finally..."

Lei Ren paused there.

"Got it?" Mr. Fang asked.

"...Until he finally got so gravely injured that he was dying. I was then able to take over as the head of the family."

Both Mr. Fang and Chu Liang grumbled inwardly. Well, that pause really wasn't necessary. And you sound rather pleased about your father dying and you taking over...

Lei Ren continued, "When my father died, the first thing I did as the new head was to move the entire family. At the time, everyone in Muzhi City thought we were fleeing trouble, trying to escape the chaos, but what they never could have guessed was that..."

"That the map part was already in our possession?"

"No, they could never have guessed that my wife was already pregnant at the time," Lei Ren said.

Mr. Fang and Chu Liang's thoughts were once again perfectly in sync.

What difference does that even make even if they guessed it?!

Nobody cares!

Lei Ren laughed, "Haha, my child was born on the day my father passed away. Before my father died, he imprinted the map part onto my child's back using a secret technique. That's why it hasn't been discovered all these years. The map part has always been in my family's possession!"

"Haa."

Mr. Fang and Chu Liang sighed simultaneously.

You could have just said that earlier.

It turned out that the last part of the Divine Ruins' scroll was imprinted on the back of a child in the Lei Family. Chu Liang quietly memorized this crucial piece of information.

Then Mr. Fang asked, "Master, do you intend to do as the letter says and trade with that mysterious person?"

"Of course not," Lei Ren replied. "That's the map to the legendary Immortals' Storehouse. He called it an ominous object. Does he really think he can fool me? Why would he be racking his brains to obtain it if it were truly ominous?"

"Indeed. In that case, Master, your intention is...?"

"You must have guessed by now. Since this person wants the map part in my possession, it means he must already have a map part!"

...

Chu Liang had already obtained the important information, so after listening to Lei Ren's plan, he transformed into a gust of wind and left.

Jiang Yuebai had been outside the Lei Family's estate this whole time, waiting to provide support for Chu Liang. The two had stayed in contact throughout. Now that Chu Liang had vital information on where the map part was, it was better to discuss the next steps with her face-to-face.

However, while Chu Liang had been busy eavesdropping, Jiang Yuebai encountered a group of unexpected visitors.

She had been hiding on a secluded cliffside near the Lei Family's estate. It was an ideal place to conceal her presence. However, just moments ago, over ten beams of divine light descended rapidly, occupying the cliffside.

Like Jiang Yuebai, they were observing the Lei Family from a distance. They glared like a tiger watching its prey, clearly harbouring ill intentions.

Just as Jiang Yuebai was about to flee, she recognized a familiar figure among the group.

She called out, "Feng Chaoyang?"

"Eh?"

That person turned around, revealing a strikingly handsome face. It was none other than Feng Chaoyang, the Celestial King Sect's head disciple.

Six years had passed since they last met, and Feng Chaoyang had grown significantly taller. He had made considerable advances in his cultivation as well.

Seeing Jiang Yuebai again, Feng Chaoyang broke into a delighted smile. "Yuebai! You're here too? It's been so many years since I last saw you. How—"

"What are you planning to do with the Lei Family?" Jiang Yuebai asked bluntly, showing she didn't have even the slightest interest in catching up with him.

"Ah..." Feng Chaoyang uttered, hesitating to answer her question. Then he replied, "We heard that people from the Thunderbolt Stronghold are coming here to trade with the Lei Family..."

Jiang Yuebai nodded slightly. She had heard bits and pieces about the ongoing conflicts between the Thunderbolt Stronghold and the Celestial King Sect in recent years.

Before Jiang Yuebai could respond, Feng Chaoyang said, "We all heard about what happened to Chu Liang. I know you're probably really heartbroken, but Yuebai, you need to move on, look toward the future. Chu Liang hasn't appeared for years; he's likely dead. You need to find someone new and stop dwelling on the past—"

Wearing an unimpressed smile, Jiang Yuebai interrupted him. "I suggest you take a look behind you."

"Hm?" Feng Chaoyang blinked, then he smiled. "Don't joke around. I'm being serious here. Back then, I was still young, and probably still immature, but now I can tell you that my feelings for you are definitely real, Yuebai—"

"Ahem." Someone suddenly coughed behind Feng Chaoyang, interrupting his heartfelt confession. "So you're the one spreading rumors about my death?"

Chapter 639: A Minor Arrangement

Feng Chaoyang left in a rather awkward state.

...

When Feng Chaoyang saw Chu Liang, his pupils trembled momentarily. As the youngest Cavalry Commander[1] of the Celestial King Sect, he didn't believe in superstitions like ghosts, but in that first instant, he did scrutinize closely to see if it was an illusion.

After all, Jiang Yuebai was skilled in creating illusions—maybe she had conjured up a fake Chu Liang to trick him.

But when he focused his divine sense to examine further, it became clear that Chu Liang was indeed standing there, alive and real.

A broad smile lit up Feng Chaoyang's face as he exclaimed, "You're actually alive!"

"I hope that smile isn't just for show," Chu Liang replied with a chuckle.

"You underestimate me," Feng Chaoyang said, patting his chest confidently. "Even if we're love rivals, I wouldn't hold a grudge. Six years ago, I decided that in this world, only you and I are true heroes. That belief hasn't changed."

"That's quite the compliment you've given yourself," Chu Liang sneered as he walked over to stand beside Jiang Yuebai.

"What?" Feng Chaoyang raised an eyebrow. "Are you saying I'm not worthy of being called a hero alongside you?"

"I meant the part about being my love rival," Chu Liang said ruthlessly. "From the very start, you've barely been a pebble on the road of Jiang Yuebai and me falling in love... Honestly, you're not even a pebble. At best, you're a decorative potted plant along the way."

"You..." Feng Chaoyang's chest rose and fell with frustration as he raised a finger, only to let it drop. "Fine, since it's been so many years since we last met, I'll let it slide."

"I won't hold it against you either," Chu Liang replied calmly. "So, why are you here?"

Feng Chaoyang glanced around warily before answering, "We got word that Thunderbolt Stronghold might be planning to come here to collect tamed beasts. We arrived early to set up an ambush."

"Oh?" Chu Liang raised an eyebrow and glanced at Jiang Yuebai.

Jiang Yuebai said, "A lot has happened over the years, some of which you don't know about."

With that, she briefly explained to Chu Liang the ongoing tensions and conflicts between the Celestial King Sect and Thunderbolt Stronghold.

Chu Liang only knew that Feng Chaoyang and Wei Tiandi of Thunderbolt Stronghold had a long-standing grudge, which had once escalated into a fierce, earth-shaking battle.

What he hadn't known, however, was how deeply that enmity had grown since then.

The Celestial King Sect was based in the Western Continent of the Yu Dynasty, while Thunderbolt Stronghold operated in Jiangnan. Since the two sects were geographically distant and their spheres of influence rarely overlapped, they seldom crossed paths. However, four years ago, an event of significant consequence changed that.

Du Wuhen from Thunderbolt Stronghold had a chance encounter with a disciple of the Celestial King Sect in a hidden realm. During the fight, he accidentally killed the disciple.

The Celestial King Sect was part of the Divine Nine, while Thunderbolt Stronghold belonged to the Terrestrial Ten. No matter how domineering the Thunderbolt Stronghold was with the other sects in the Terrestrial Ten, it remained a faction ranked below the sects in the Divine Nine.

Whenever conflicts arose between the disciples, the elders from both sects would usually turn a blind eye. After all, young people tend to be hot-headed, and these clashes often led to back-and-forth retaliation without escalating further.

However, with a murder involved, the situation escalated beyond mere squabbles, turning into a serious conflict.

The Celestial King Sect immediately responded with fury.

Within their sect, aside from the younger generation of disciples, the senior members were given titles based on their positions in the General's Supreme Constellation Disc.

Apart from the rank of King in the Purple Forbidden Palace[2], held by the sect leader, the second-ranking position, Heavenly Strategist[3], led dozens of members at the rank of General in a

devastating campaign against Thunderbolt Stronghold, overwhelming their defenses with sheer force.

Thunderbolt Stronghold, despite being one of the top factions within the Terrestrial Ten, lasted less than an hour under the Celestial King Sect's relentless attack. The assault ended with their mountain gates breached, leaving two elders and over a dozen disciples dead.

It had been years since sects in the world of immortality cultivation clashed in open battle, and this battle served as a sharp reminder of the immense gap in power between the Divine Nine and the Terrestrial Ten.

Typically, this would be the time for geographically close sects in the Divine Nine to step in and mediate.

Among the Divine Nine, aside from the Heavenly Cloud Monastery, which was located high in the sky, the other eight sects were distributed evenly across the four regions.

The Eastern Regions were home to the Penglai Supreme Sect and the Fog-Hidden Mountain of Immortals; the Southern Regions housed the Great Astral Sect and the Mount Shu Sect; the Western Regions were overseen by the Celestial King Sect and the Celestial Pivot Pavilion; and the Northern Regions were the domain of the Greater-Yin Cult and the Endless Sword Sect.

Sects within the Divine Nine that were geographically close often formed stronger connections and collaborated to maintain order and stability in their regions. However, despite Thunderbolt Stronghold being located in the Southern Regions, its ties with the two Divine Nine sects in the area were notably weak.

First, the Great Astral Sect had close ties with the Celestial King Sect and naturally wouldn't step in to mediate.

As for the Mount Shu Sect...

It was already generous of them not to exploit Thunderbolt Stronghold's crisis to add insult to injury.

After all, Thunderbolt Stronghold had schemed against Mount Shu for years, taking advantage of them and causing harm. Now, in their time of need, could they seriously expect aid from the very sect they had wronged?

Where in the world would such good fortune exist?

Moreover, even if the Mount Shu Sect were willing to help, they lacked the capability to do so. Among the Divine Nine, the Mount Shu Sect was perhaps the only sect without absolute confidence to intervene in a battle.

It couldn't be helped—without a legendary artifact to their name, their words carried little weight.

As Thunderbolt Stronghold teetered on the edge of destruction due to Du Wuhen's reckless actions, it was Penglai Supreme Sect from the Eastern Regions that finally stepped in. Leveraging its status as the leader of the righteous path, the Penglai Supreme Sect forcibly stopped the Celestial King Sect.

The Celestial King Sect had long been at odds with Penglai Supreme Sect, and by their nature, they would have clashed with Penglai as well. However, Penglai was not an easy target like Thunderbolt Stronghold.

As the forces of the Penglai Supreme Sect crossed the sea, it seemed that a war between two sects in the Divine Nine was bound to happen.

At this point, other major factions could no longer remain on the sidelines.

A mediation team, composed of members from the Imperial Supervisory Bureau and representatives from other sects within the Divine Nine, arrived at the scene using the Shattering the Void technique. They immediately called for a peaceful resolution to the escalating conflict.

At this point, the Thunderbolt Stronghold finally understood their position. Despite their dominance within the Terrestrial Ten, they were still not seen as equals to the Divine Nine. No one was taking them seriously and they meekly accepted their punishment and submitted to the terms imposed upon them.

However, Penglai Supreme Sect remained committed to protecting them and refused to back down.

Their reasoning was straightforward:

"If you were bullied before I intervened, it could be overlooked. But if I stepped in to protect you and you were still bullied, that would render my intervention meaningless.

At that point, it's not just your reputation at stake—it's mine as well."

Thus, under Penglai's unwavering protection, Thunderbolt Stronghold, though battered and with significant casualties, escaped further punishment. The culprit, Du Wuhen, was only sentenced to three years of imprisonment in the Thunderbolt Stronghold.

The Thunderbolt Stronghold insisted that the killing had been an accident.

The Celestial King Sect had already taken their revenge by killing many members of Thunderbolt Stronghold, which had somewhat assuaged their anger. And so, the Celestial King Sect, despite their reluctance, had no choice but to accept this ending.

In the end, the matter was resolved.

Both sides agreed to let bygones be bygones and move forward.

Following the incident, Thunderbolt Stronghold, once a dominant force, adopted a low profile, while the Celestial King Sect chose not to pursue the matter further. Three years passed swiftly, and Du Wuhen's sentence came to an end.

However, Du Wuhen didn't dare leave the safety of Thunderbolt Stronghold right away. It wasn't until another year had passed that the Celestial King Sect caught wind of him finally venturing out for an errand.

And the destination was the Cliffhold Bastion.

The Celestial King Sect hadn't pursued the matter further with the other members of the Thunderbolt Stronghold, but they still remembered what Du Wuhen had done. However, this was

not something that the elders could intervene. The younger ones had to step in and handle it themselves.

Feng Chaoyang, having been assigned the title of Cavalry Officer and becoming a mid-level leader in the Celestial King Sect, naturally took on the responsibility and led his team to the Cliffhold Bastion.

"I see..." Chu Liang nodded lightly.

Back then, he had crossed paths with the three brothers of Thunderbolt Stronghold, but it was purely in fair competition. There was no bad blood between them, and on one occasion, Huang Ling'er had even saved his life.

Now, seeing those familiar peers—once promising young talents of their generation—turned into mortal enemies, Chu Liang couldn't help but feel a tinge of emotion.

After the Assembly of Immortal Sects, the young disciples began carving out their own paths, stepping into adulthood and shouldering greater responsibilities independently. Even Lackey A and Lackey B had made remarkable progress. Naturally, the prodigies of that generation now carried even heavier burdens.

Conflicts like these were only bound to grow more frequent as they stepped into their roles.

But since it had nothing to do with him, Chu Liang merely sighed and said, "Just try not to cause too much commotion. I have some matters to attend to at the Lei Family, so don't disrupt my work."

"I'll try my best," Feng Chaoyang replied.

"Then let's finish our tasks and meet again another day," Chu Liang said, then added, "Come visit Mount Shu when you have time. I will treat all of you to a meal."

"Alright." Feng Chaoyang nodded. Watching Jiang Yuebai and Chu Liang prepare to leave, he suddenly called out, "Hey?"

"Hmm?" Chu Liang turned back to look at him.

Feng Chaoyang hesitated for a moment before saying, "If you have time, you should visit the Great Astral Sect. They've been searching everywhere for you these past years, putting in as much effort as Mount Shu. They'll be thrilled to know you're back."

My brothers from the Great Astral Sect...

Chu Liang felt a warmth in his heart and immediately smiled. "I will."

With that, he and Jiang Yuebai flew away side by side, their figures gradually disappearing into the night sky.

Feng Chaoyang watched their retreating silhouettes and, for some reason, found the night wind unusually chilly.

Even surrounded by more than a dozen fellow disciples, an inexplicable sense of loneliness crept over him.

...

The next day, the Fifth Young Master brought along two other youths to the enclosure.

Unlike the clumsy Rampaging Devil Bull, the Fierce Draconic Colt, which already had such a high cultivation level in its youth, could potentially reach the peak of the sixth realm or even the seventh realm as an adult. It was an exceedingly rare asset within the Lei Family.

The head of the Lei Family had entrusted the Fierce Draconic Colt to Lei Hou early on, and now that the creature was properly tamed, Lei Hou naturally wanted to flaunt his achievement.

Chu Liang had already done his homework and found out that the Lei Family had three children born around the time they relocated to the Cliffhold Bastion: Fourth Young Lady Lei Guan, Fifth Young Master Lei Hou, and Sixth Young Master Lei Pi.

Being close in age, the three spent much of their time together, forming a tight-knit bond. And today, Lei Hou only invited them.

Over the years, the details had become hazy, but one thing was certain: one of these three carried the piece of the Divine Ruins' scroll tattooed on their back.

When Steward Wang escorted the young masters and young lady to the enclosure, he saw Chu Liang already standing there respectfully, greeting them with a smile.

The Fierce Draconic Colt stood obediently within the garden, already outfitted with full armor and a saddle, stretching its four hooves in preparation.

"You've done well," Lei Hou praised.

"Where did all of this come from?" Steward Wang asked, his face filled with confusion.

This kid had never asked him for money. Did he spend his own money?

"Yesterday, when Steward Wang was injured and went to rest in the afternoon, I took the opportunity to make some minor arrangements," Chu Liang replied with a smile.

"Heh, not bad," Lei Pi, who bore some resemblance to Lei Hou but was leaner and more refined in appearance, said. Looking at the Fierce Draconic Colt, he voiced some concern, "But riding it still seems dangerous."

"It'll be fine," Lei Hou replied. "We'll just do a small tour around the garden to test it out."

At this, Chu Liang stepped forward, opened the enclosure gate, and gestured toward the area.

"Young masters and miss, I've prepared a three-loop track within the garden, designed with varying terrains and obstacles to provide an exceptional test riding experience."

Following his gesture, they saw that a winding path had indeed been created within the garden. Space in the garden was limited, so this maximized the length of the track. Along the flat road were rocky outcrops, dense forests, cascading waterfalls, and flaming iron pillars at intervals.

"You've put in quite the effort," Fourth Young Lady Lei Guan said, clapping her hands in admiration.

She was the tallest of the three siblings, with a slender, graceful figure. Her long hair was tied up, and her fitted outfit exuded a heroic charm.

The three siblings, unaware of the details, simply assumed their subordinate had been particularly thoughtful.

Steward Wang, however, was stunned.

Normally, constructing something like this would take at least ten days, require dozens of workers, and cost a thousand or so taels of silver—and that was just the actual expense; the reported cost would have been double.

But how long had it been?

He asked in shock, "When did you do this?"

Chu Liang replied with a smile, "Yesterday afternoon, when Steward Wang went to rest, I took the opportunity to make some minor arrangements."

Chapter 640: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!

"Haha," Lei Hou said with excitement as he looked at the newly constructed track. "I'll take the first ride and show Fourth Sister and Sixth Brother how it's done."

Without further ado, he eagerly mounted the Fierce Draconic Colt.

Steward Wang, still somewhat apprehensive of the Fierce Draconic Colt, quickly reminded, "Please be careful, Fifth Young Master."

"Scram."

"Sure thing!"

With a sudden burst of energy, the blazing Fierce Draconic Colt dashed forward, transforming into a fiery streak as it galloped away.

"Wow," Fourth Young Lady Lei Guan and Sixth Young Master Lei Pi exclaimed in unison, their eyes widening in amazement.

Although Chu Liang's track was designed to be long, it took only moments for the Fierce Draconic Colt to race through it. Just when it seemed the ride would end without incident, the colt decided to be mischievous.

Suddenly, it veered off course and charged directly into a nearby waterfall, drenching Lei Hou from head to toe. To make matters worse, the water from the waterfall, drawn from the pond, was murky and far from clean.

After circling around once, the Fierce Draconic Colt finally emerged, carrying a somewhat disheveled Lei Hou on its back.

"Hahaha, this Fierce Draconic Colt is so mischievous," Lei Hou said, laughing despite his soaked appearance, clearly amused rather than annoyed.

As he circulated his foundational qi, the water evaporated in wisps of steam, leaving his clothes dry. However, the dirt stubbornly remained.

"Oh dear!" Chu Liang quickly stepped forward. "This has dirtied Fifth Young Master's clothes. What a grave offense. There's a hot spring bathhouse over there; allow me to take you there to bathe and change."

As Chu Liang gestured, a large wooden building could be seen nestled deep within the garden, with steam curling gently into the air—it was, in fact, a hot spring.

"Hey!" Steward Wang finally couldn't hold back.

You can go against the normal way of doing things, but this is going too far!

Considering the earlier setups, the construction of a house wasn't entirely surprising. But the hot spring? Steward Wang's thoughts spiraled in disbelief. Where the heck did you get the hot spring? That's not something you can just dig up, right??

Chu Liang replied with a smile, "Yesterday, when Steward Wang went to rest—"

"A 'minor arrangement,' huh?" Steward Wang's nostrils flared in disbelief.

If this was considered minor, he really couldn't fathom what would qualify as major.

Moreover, none of these constructions had been reported in the budget, leaving him completely blindsided.

Is this kid using his own money for these projects?????

But since the young masters and miss appeared thoroughly impressed, he had no choice but to bite his tongue.

Chu Liang escorted the Fifth Young Master to bathe and change. Though he didn't follow him inside, the cleverly concealed gaps in the wooden structure allowed his divine sense to observe everything clearly.

Lei Hou's back was smooth and unmarked.

It's not him. Chu Liang felt a tinge of disappointment.

After Lei Hou returned, he called out, "Sixth Brother, it's your turn to try."

"Alright," Lei Pi nodded, approaching the Fierce Draconic Colt carefully. He mounted it with such caution and gripped the reins very tightly.

With a sudden burst, a ball of fire leaped into the air, accompanied by Lei Pi's scream.

Lei Pi was not as brave as Lei Hou. He clung to the Fierce Draconic Colt's back, his movements stiff and cautious. The colt galloped along the track, its fiery mane blazing brightly, and as it neared the end of the ride, it veered off course once again and passed by the waterfall again.

Bang—

The colt plunged into the waterfall, drenching Lei Pi even more thoroughly than it had Lei Hou.

Chu Liang quickly stepped forward. "This Fierce Draconic Colt just doesn't change its mischievous ways. Allow me to take you to the bathhouse for a bath."

With that, he led Lei Pi to the bathhouse.

Once again, Chu Liang discreetly used his divine sense to scan Lei Pi's back.

The result was the same: no tattoos at all.

It wasn't him either.

When they returned, only Lei Guan had yet to take her ride.

Could it be her...?

Just as Chu Liang was about to confirm, two servants hurried over, calling out, "The head of the family has summoned the young masters and lady to the front hall. A distinguished guest has arrived."

"Ah..." Lei Guan said reluctantly, "I haven't had my turn yet."

"Fourth Young Lady, you can always come back another time. The Fierce Draconic Colt isn't going anywhere," Chu Liang said tactfully.

"Fine," Lei Guan relented.

Her father's authority was still absolute, so she and her two brothers hurried away.

When they arrived at the front hall of the main courtyard, they found their parents and the other siblings already present. They were the last to arrive, and they quickly moved to the back.

Lei Ren turned and shot them a sharp glare. He didn't have time to scold them as the distinguished guests had just entered.

Straightening his robes, Lei Ren greeted the newcomers with a hearty laugh. "Young Hero Du, what an unexpected honor to have such an esteemed guest visit our humble home. Please forgive us for not preparing a proper welcome!"

...

The Lei Family members raised their eyes, their gazes collectively shifting toward the figures entering the hall.

Outside, several cultivators surrounded a tall, slender man whose dark skin blended almost seamlessly with the shadows of the porch. His long arms hung past his knees and he carried a massive scythe on his back. There was something extraordinary about him.

If Chu Liang had been present, he would have recognized at a glance that this man was none other than Du Wuhen, the leader of the Thunderbolt Stronghold's three brothers.

"Master Lei, you are too kind," Du Wuhen said with a smile, cupping his hands in greeting.

In terms of seniority within the world of immortality cultivation, Lei Ren naturally outranked Du Wuhen. Lei Ren had reached the seventh realm, which meant that he was an Eminent One.

By all rights, Du Wuhen should have respectfully addressed him as "esteemed senior."

However, Du Wuhen represented the Thunderbolt Stronghold, the undisputed leader in the field of beast taming. Even though the sect had suffered a heavy blow from the Celestial King Sect a few years ago, it merely lowered their status among the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten. In front of smaller families like the Lei Family, they still stood lofty and imposing.

Furthermore, since the Lei Family relied on trading demonic beasts for a living, they often had to bow to the Thunderbolt Stronghold.

Thus, Du Wuhen treated Lei Ren as an equal.

Lei Ren didn't mind and simply smiled. "Lord Huang sent a letter mentioning plans to visit our Cliffhold Bastion to select beasts. The Lei Family is honored by the visit. However, the letter was a bit vague, so I'd like Young Hero Du to clarify your requirements so I can recommend the right ones for you. The Lei Family raises a wide variety of demonic beasts, and I'm confident we'll have something suitable for you."

"It's actually quite simple," Du Wuhen replied. "Normally, when my Thunderbolt Stronghold needs beasts, we wouldn't purchase them—we'd catch them ourselves. However, the disciples we've recently recruited are still quite young, and their teachers hope to help them find beasts with strong bloodlines and powerful innate abilities. At the same time, their teachers were worried about potential injuries. And so, they wanted the beasts to be well-tamed so that it wouldn't hurt anyone. As for the price, we will make sure you are satisfied with it."

Lei Ren immediately grasped the situation.

The truth was that the new disciples of Thunderbolt Stronghold lacked talent. They couldn't tame demonic beasts themselves and needed a shortcut to boost their combat power, so they had to resort to purchasing tamed beasts.

Take Du Wuhen's generation, for instance—they were prodigies, brilliant and unmatched, and never had such worries. The beasts the three brothers tamed themselves were nearly at the level of those celestial beasts. They were immensely powerful!

However, after suffering a devastating blow a few years ago, Thunderbolt Stronghold's prestige plummeted. With their diminished reputation, fewer talented cultivators were willing to join their sect, leading to less capable disciples and, in turn, greater challenges for the sect.

This highlighted the importance of a sect's reputation.

After Mount Shu Sect claimed victory in the Assembly of Immortal Sects championship and Red Cotton Peak rose to prominence, the sect entered an era of rapid talent influx. Many promising individuals with the potential for cultivating immortality flocked from across the nine provinces, eager to join Mount Shu Sect.

Lei Ren smiled and asked, "So, how many beasts does Thunderbolt Stronghold require?"

"The more, the better," Du Wuhen replied. "At least ten."

"Ten?" Lei Ren frowned slightly. "That's quite a number. If you just needed beasts with high cultivation levels, it wouldn't be difficult, but finding young ones with strong bloodlines... that's not so easy."

Du Wuhen leaned in and whispered something into Lei Ren's ear, causing Lei Ren's expression to brighten. "Since Thunderbolt Stronghold is so sincere, I certainly can't hold back. Even the beasts I've reserved for my own children—I'll let Young Hero Du take a look. Follow me!"

With that, the group moved toward the beast-taming garden in the front yard in a grand procession.

A dozen or so stewards accompanied them, including Steward Wang. Wherever Du Wuhen showed interest, the servants would immediately bring out the demonic beasts for his inspection.

After inspecting several beasts, Du Wuhen stopped again when they passed by the Fierce Draconic Colt's enclosure.

"This is the enclosure of a Fierce Draconic Colt?" Du Wuhen blurted out as he stared at the enclosure with such sharp gaze that seemed to pierce through the barriers.

The colt wasn't near the fence at the moment, but its aura was enough for Du Wuhen to sense its bloodline.

"Yes," Lei Ren replied. "However, this Fierce Draconic Colt arrived not long ago and has yet to be ___"

"Master, the Fierce Draconic Colt has already been tamed," Steward Wang interjected quickly. "The young master has been riding it these past few days."

"Oh?" Lei Ren uttered and gave him a surprised look, then turned to Lei Hou.

Lei Hou nodded. "That's true."

However, Lei Hou wasn't particularly enthusiastic, as he didn't want his Fierce Draconic Colt to be sold.

"You've done well," Lei Ren said. Then he asked, "What's your name?"

"I'm Wang Fugui!" Steward Wang announced loudly, puffing out his chest as though taming the Fierce Draconic Colt was entirely his accomplishment.

Seeing his demeanor, Lei Ren added, "Bring it out for a look."

"Yes, right away," Steward Wang replied eagerly and turned to instruct the servants to open the fence.

But after glancing around, he realized the servant at this enclosure was nowhere to be found.

Where has Liu Bo gone now?

With the important guests from Thunderbolt Stronghold watching and the Lei Family elders observing, Steward Wang had no choice but to steel himself and enter the enclosure.

Recalling how the Fierce Draconic Colt had been playful with the young masters earlier, Steward Wang convinced himself it would be in a good mood, which gave him some reassurance. After navigating through the woods, he finally spotted the beast.

The Fierce Draconic Colt lay curled up, snoring away.

Steward Wang cautiously approached and gave its head a light pat. One of its fiery golden eyes cracked open, showing his reflection.

"Heh heh," Steward Wang chuckled nervously and said fawningly, "Wake up, the master has summoned you."

Bam—

