

## M. Slaying 781

Chapter 781: I Have My Own Plans (II)

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"As a child, one should learn to be filial. Respect your teachers and friends, and study the rites."

Amidst the verdant hills and rolling mountains stood an ancient academy, its halls rich with tradition. The rhythmic chants of students reciting their lessons filled the air, so soothing it felt like a spell.

A tall, slender woman dressed in red brocade robes embroidered with gold approached the academy's outer walls. She exuded a heroic aura, and her long hair was tied into a ponytail.

A man stepped out from within the academy and apologized in a calm, gentle voice. "I was unaware of the Sixth Princess's arrival. Please forgive me for not welcoming you sooner."

Dressed in simple scholar's robes, he carried a refined and gentle air. His bright, intelligent eyes added to his scholarly demeanor. This was Zhang Chen, the former head disciple of the Ascending Dragon Academy, now a teacher at Yushan Academy.

The woman standing before him was none other than Princess Jingyang, the Sixth Princess of the Yu Dynasty.

Among the members of the imperial family in this generation, three inherited the gift of the Divine Fire Spirit. They were the Second Prince Xia Qi, the Sixth Princess Xia Shu, and the Thirteenth Prince Xia Luo.

Back then, the Thirteenth Prince had been killed by Chu Liang. After that, the Second Prince, Xia Qi, became the crown prince. The Sixth Princess, Xia Shu, began handling matters of the imperial court. She was capable and highly trusted. She had always been the most talented member of this generation. If she had not been a girl, she would have surely been named the crown prince.

Able to act independently now, Xia Shu, the Sixth Princess, had arrived at Yushan Academy.

"This was never an official visit. There's no need for such courtesy," Xia Shu responded, her tone devoid of emotion. While she spoke, she stared at Zhang Chen with such bright, clear eyes.

The two of them had some interactions in the past. Years ago, Zhang Chen was the first to reject an imperial marriage decree with her, setting off the first wave of rumors about her supposed inability to marry.

They had met a few times in formal settings after that, but this was the first time they were speaking in private.

"Yushan Academy is but a humble school in the remote wilderness. There must be a reason for you to grace us with your presence, Sixth Princess," Zhang Chen said, his gentle smile as steady as ever, unchanged by the years or circumstances.

"I've been tasked with overseeing the acceptance of the Mount Mang City into the Yu Dynasty," Xia Shu replied. "My father has entrusted all negotiations to me, including the nomination of a sect to compete for a place among the Terrestrial Ten."

Zhang Chen said softly, "Sixth Princess, you excel in both intellect and governance. It is only natural that His Majesty places his trust in you."

Xia Shu replied, "Over the past two days, I've been reviewing the sects competing for a place in the Terrestrial Ten. Two of them stood out as particularly strange. One is the Talismanic Sect, nominated by the Mount Shu Sect. Their participation is utterly nonsensical, and there's no way they can win. The second... is your Yushan Academy. It's not that the Yushan Academy doesn't meet the standards. But as an immortal sect, your academy..."

As she spoke, her gaze swept over the academy, both inside and out, and a spark of amusement flickered in her eyes.

Zhang Chen answered, "The Yushan Academy can indeed be considered an immortal sect, as its students practice both the cultivation of Confucian arts and techniques as well as enchanted techniques. Many among them possess the potential for true cultivation. Given enough time, we will surely surprise the world."

"But like you said, time is required." Xia Shu frowned. "There isn't even a single seventh-realm cultivator here, is there?"

"There is," Zhang Chen replied. He paused briefly, then he spoke again. "Me."

"Eh?" Xia Shu was slightly surprised. "You've reached the Dao Attainment Realm?"

"I achieved enlightenment not too long ago and happened to get a glimpse of a Great Dao," Zhang Chen replied with a modest smile as he released a hint of his qi.

At once, Xia Shu sensed a surge of righteous qi rising around Zhang Chen, causing the edges of his scholar's robe to lift slightly as if stirred by an unseen force.

Xia Shu immediately recognized the nature of his Dao essence. "Righteous Qi."

What Zhang Chen had comprehended was one of the most traditional Great Daos of the Confucian path—the Great Dao of Righteous Qi.

Cultivating this Dao was incredibly difficult, requiring one to remain unwaveringly true to their inner virtue. Even over centuries, it was rare for a single person to truly grasp its essence. In fact, even the headmaster and vice-headmaster of Ascending Dragon Academy had chosen to master other Great Daos instead.

And yet, Zhang Chen had done it.

The fact that he had achieved this at his age should have left Xia Shu a hundred times more astonished. However, in their generation, powerful monsters kept emerging one after another. Compared to them, Zhang Chen already seemed late to the race. And so, she didn't seem that shocked.

After a brief pause, Xia Shu simply said, "Even so, it is not enough."

"The world is full of great Confucian scholars. If the headmaster were to raise his voice, many Confucian cultivators would rally to our cause. That is not something we need to worry about," Zhang Chen replied.

Unlike traditional immortal sects, Confucian cultivators followed a different path. They studied in academies, but their training required them to travel, immerse themselves in the world, and make a meaningful impact. They did not cultivate by inheriting cultivation legacies like the other sects.

Because of this, Confucian cultivators had long struggled to establish a strong presence among the Divine Nine and Terrestrial Ten.

However, something had changed among them. They had begun to fight for greater influence and a stronger voice.

"And what does the headmaster think of this?" the Sixth Princess asked. "He has not entered the palace in quite some time."

As the leader of the Confucian sect, the headmaster of the Yushan Academy was expected to constantly maintain a relationship with the imperial court. That was the true purpose of Xia Shu's visit today. By approaching the Yushan Academy, she was probing for the headmaster's stance.

"The headmaster's thoughts on this..." Zhang Chen muttered. He glanced into the distance before continuing, "It is difficult for a student to know what their teacher is thinking."

Then, he turned and asked, "But I, too, am curious. Does the court have a deeper plan behind its efforts to integrate Mount Mang City?"

"My father's thoughts are as difficult to grasp as ever," Xia Shu replied, meeting his refusal to answer with one of her own.

Then, she continued, "So even if the court intervenes, you have no intention of withdrawing?"

"Since we have started participating, there is naturally no reason to withdraw." Zhang Chen remained calm, but the firm resolve behind his words was unmistakable.

Xia Shu warned, "Then you had best be prepared. The Terrestrial Ten's Sect Selection will start soon. Word has spread that the master of Starhold Island has been assassinated. The killing has begun. No one will be speaking of virtue and righteousness any longer."

Zhang Chen nodded. He understood as well. Every sect vying for a place in the Terrestrial Ten had already begun sharpening their blades. The undercurrents were already in motion. No one would withdraw! The bloodshed to come would be no less than that of a battlefield.

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"Mister Huan, try some tripe."

"Mister Huan, have a meatball."

"You've been at Mount Shu for so long, yet we've never treated you to our signature hotpot. How terribly rude of us!"

"Eat to your heart's content! Tonight is all about joy and celebration!"

On the second floor of Red Moon Pavilion, the core members of Red Cotton Peak had gathered to host a feast for Huan Leisheng, the sect leader of the Talismanic Sect.

Thanks to Chu Liang's efforts, the first batch of talismans produced by the Celestial Talismanic Wheel had successfully hit the market, generating substantial profits. This newfound revenue stream provided Red Cotton Peak with a steady and sustainable source of income.

And the one most deserving of credit for this success was, of course, Huan Leisheng.

Thus, tonight's banquet was held in his honor—a grand celebration of his contributions.

Huan Leisheng waved his hands modestly, clearly overwhelmed. "There's no need to go to such lengths for me. I... truly don't deserve this."

Aside from Chu Liang, the others seated at the table were Wen Yulong, the Four Overlords of Mount Shu, and several other key figures. They were the veteran members of Red Cotton Peak who had supported Chu Liang since the early days of their venture.

Though Huan Leisheng was their senior in both age and cultivation, his status on Red Cotton Peak ranked lower than those present. He knew he worked under Chu Liang, so he always remained humble.

"Hehehe! Why are you so nervous?" Lin Bei laughed heartily. "We're all brothers here! Just eat and enjoy!"

Shang Ziliang chimed in, "It's your celebration dinner, of course we're here to cheer you on!"

Wen Yulong raised his cup and said, "These past days, working alongside you to refine the Celestial Talismanic Wheel has been an eye-opening experience. I've learned so much, Esteemed Senior. Please allow me to offer you a toast!"

Lackey A lifted his cup and added, "With the Celestial Talismanic Wheel, our burdens have been greatly reduced. Senior Huan Leisheng, you are truly the benefactor of Red Cotton Peak. I raise my cup to you as well!"

Meanwhile, Lackey B quietly picked up a few slices of fresh lamb, dipped them in sauce, and enjoyed his meal in silence.

"Everyone, you really don't have to be like this," Huan Leisheng said with a smile. "Since I'm working for Young Hero Chu, it's only natural for me to contribute. If you all thank me like this, it makes me feel like an outsider."

He paused before adding, "Besides, you shouldn't thank me for crafting the Celestial Talismanic Wheel. Instead, I should be thanking CEO Chu."

"Eh, I only made a small contribution," Chu Liang said with a smile, waving his hand dismissively.

Huan Leisheng furrowed his brows and asked, "CEO Chu, I've been too busy to ask before, but with the Terrestrial Ten sect selection just around the corner and no preparations made, is that really alright?"

"Heh." Chu Liang chuckled, then thought for a moment before responding, "Mister Huan, our approach is to do nothing in response to the many changes."

"It's fine if other things stay unchanged, but our Talismanic Sect doesn't even have a single disciple right now," Huan Leisheng said hesitantly. "Which immortal sect goes to compete for a spot in the Terrestrial Ten with only a sect leader? Is this really possible?"

Of course not, but that's exactly the impact we are hoping to achieve.

Chu Liang smiled faintly. He couldn't outright say that he was deliberately sending the Talismanic Sect to make a fool of itself, so he simply reassured, "Mister Huan, don't worry. I have my plans."