

Protect OCL 51

Chapter 51 Celestial Being from a Prominent Family_1

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A night passed.

The next day, the death of two independent cultivators did not cause a stir in Golden Sand City. Perhaps there might be some upper-level government investigation, but they would not exhaust too much energy. Given that the Hundred Islands Guard is more chaotic than other regions, the deaths of two independent cultivators are not a big deal.

As for the shadowy hand behind the disciple of the Yinsha Sect's outer gate, they might express shock and disbelief for a while, but they probably can't openly investigate. After all, the Hundred Islands Guard might be a mess, but it is still within the power of Longzuo County, not a place for the Yin Sha Sect to cause trouble.

Wang Shouzhe and his companions, of course, acted as if nothing had happened and showed no interest in any conspiracy that the shadowy hands could have arranged.

The little Wang family would be wise to care only about their own survival for now.

The black market tends to open every few days.

Today happens to be a market day.

At dusk, Wang Shouzhe asked Chen Fanghua to arrange a carriage to take him, along with Master Longyan, to the black market. This time, no one else accompanied them. It was just the two of them.

The black market lies to the east of Golden Sand City, close to the corner of the sea, where ordinary people are not allowed in. Only Profound Martial practitioners above the fourth level of the Qi Refinement Realm are eligible to enter, and most of them can only stay in the main hall.

Wang Shouzhe and Master Longyan had both thoroughly disguised themselves that day. He was dressed as a rough-looking man, while Master Longyan was draped in a gray robe and only her eyes were visible.

As the two reached the entrance of the black market, they got off the carriage and walked up to the front door.

As soon as Master Longyan used a bit of her Spiritual Platform Realm aura, she was immediately invited into the black market by the doorman and ushered into a private room on the second floor where her background was not inquired about. When she indicated she wanted to sell a spiritual artifact, it immediately drew attention, initiating the process of summoning a steward to appraise it.

This was the style of the black market, allowing customers to disguise themselves and ensuring their privacy.

This way of doing things had been instrumental in spreading the reputation of the Golden Sand City's black market under the Hundred Islands Guard. Many families from neighboring cities would find ways to participate in black market transactions.

Soon after, a server brought fruits and tea and then respectfully left.

In a moment, a voice sounded outside the booth, "I am the steward of the Black Market, my surname is Zhong."

Master Longyan signaled Wang Shouzhe with her eyes.

Wang Shouzhe understood and went ahead to open the door, inviting the steward in. According to the intelligence he had read, the black market was a joint venture of the Zhong and Ouyang families, the two Profound Martial noble families under the Hundred Islands Guard.

The man was dressed in a black robe and wore an expressionless mask on his face. Since his surname was Zhong, he should be a member of the Zhong family.

"Steward Zhong, my ancestor invites you," Wang Shouzhe, pretending to be a rough man, saluted the visitor with his hand cupped in the other.

After entering, Steward Zhong politely saluted the grey-robed Master Longyan, "Thank you for your trust in our black market. Our market has been around for two hundred years and places great importance on integrity. You need not worry about any transactions in our market. May I see the spiritual artifact you wish to sell?"

His words were fair and marked the fundamental principle of the black market. Any marketeer would cherish their credibility. It isn't easy to build a reputation like that over two hundred years.

Master Longyan didn't waste time with him. She turned her jade hand over, and a palm-sized object suddenly appeared. The thing looked like a tortoise shell, layered with dense scales. On the scales, inscrutable and complex inscriptions were engraved.

"This is the item. What would you estimate its value to be?" Her voice was deep and hoarse, deliberately concealing her original tone.

"This?" Steward Zhong took a closer look, and his eyes immediately changed. He spoke sharply in a low voice, "It's the Turtle Scale Treasure Shield! Where did you find this?" A strong Spiritual Platform Realm aura enveloped him.

Wang Shouzhe's heart raced. What was happening in the black market? One moment they were boasting about their credibility, and the next moment they began questioning this item. Ignoring the intimidating aura of the Spiritual Platform Realm, he stepped in front of Steward Zhong and said coldly, "Are you trying to break the rules of the black market, Elder Zhong?"

His words rapidly snapped Steward Zhong back to calm, yet he still looked solemn, "I was being impulsive. This Turtle Scale Treasure Shield is a relic of an important figure in my sect. If you're willing to explain its provenance, I'd be happy to increase the price by ten percent. No, twenty percent."

"Huh?"

Wang Shouzhe's eyebrows furrowed. The Turtle Scale Treasure Shield, a defensive Spiritual Artifact, was usually more valuable than offensive spiritual artifacts. The price could reach tens of thousands of Qian Gold! He was offering an increase of a few thousand Qian Gold, which was extraordinary.

Was this Zhong steward really that interested in this treasure? But his words...

"We won't sell it then. Let's go." Master Longyan turned her hand and quickly put away the Turtle Scale Treasure Shield, murmuring in a low voice.

"Wait!"

Minister Zhong actually tried to block the door. With an incredulous look in his eyes, he stared at Master Longyan, whispering, "Elder sister, are you... are you Longyan, my senior sister? You...you...you are still alive?"

Senior sister?

Wang Shouzhe's heart pounded. This Minister Zhong was actually Master Longyan's junior brother? Did he also graduate from the Purple Abode Academic Palace... Could it be that there was... His imagination began to run wild.

"Who are you!" Master Longyan stopped in her tracks, a trace of sharpness flashed across her eyes. "How do you recognize me and the Turtle Scale Treasure Shield?"

"I, I am Zhong Xingwang," Minister Zhong quickly clasped his hands and said, "Senior sister Longyan, do you remember me?"

While speaking, he voluntarily took off the mask on his face, revealing a plain, slightly old face.

"Zhong Xingwang?" Master Longyan pondered for a moment, a touch of confusion surfaced in her eyes. "I don't know you. I might have forgotten."

Minister Zhong didn't mind, only chuckled and greeted with his hands: "It is normal that Senior Sister Longyan doesn't remember me. When Senior Sister Longyan was just sixty, she had already reached the mid-stage of the Spirit Platform Realm, a prominent figure in the Academy.

While I, Zhong Xingwang, only entered the Academy because my family bribed, and I was merely an underachiever who could only look up to the glory of Senior Sister Longyan."

While speaking, his face and eyes were filled with uncontrollable admiration, respect, and even a hint of fear.

At this point.

Wang Shouzhe finally understood. His previous imaginations were all wrong. This Minister Zhong and Master Longyan were not some infatuated immortal classmates but simply a relationship of an admirer and his goddess...

The Master couldn't even remember his name...

Furthermore, judging by his appearance, he seemed rather worn and old. And since he referred to Master Longyan as senior sister and entered the Purple Abode Academic Palace through the back door, he must have ascended to the Spirit Platform Realm at a rather old age.

It's also understandable that he doesn't know about Master Longyan's family background. Within the Purple Abode Academic Palace, any form of empty boasting or prying into other people's families' details is strictly forbidden.

Unless their relationship is extremely good, most of them are part of all the young talents in the Academy, and there aren't many divisions based on family lineage. This is the dominance of the Purple Abode Academic Palace.

"What purpose do you have to block me?" Master Longyan's voice was indifferent. "Do you intend to break the rules of the black market?"

"I dare not, I dare not." Minister Zhong quickly shook his hands. "If you break the market rules, the Old Ancestor will kill me. They all said that senior sister Longyan had died in the outer realm, and I was heartbroken for many years. So I was a bit excited seeing senior sister Longyan, please don't take it to heart, please, don't take it to heart."

With that, he kept bowing, requesting Master Longyan's forgiveness.

"Then make way." Master Longyan said coldly.

"Make...make...no, no." The dignified Spirit Platform Realm's Minister Zhong suddenly became flustered. "Master Longyan, please give me a chance to make amends. I wonder why master wants to sell the Turtle Scale Treasure Shield? I remember it was the spirit artifact gifted to you by Master Binglan!"

"Short of money." Master Longyan said coldly.

"Lack of money?! Why didn't you say so earlier?" Minister Zhong let out a sigh of relief then showed a somewhat fawning and ingratiating expression. "As a direct descendent of the Zhong family, I have managed to save up a bit of private funds and have amassed some connections. How much does senior sister Longyan need? I can try to raise some."

The Zhong family lineage?

The Zhong family is certainly one of the revered celestial bloodline prominent families within the Hundred Islands Guard. And he, as a direct descendent, how did he end up in such a condition? He even had to go through the back door to get into the academy. And his mannerisms were exactly like that of an obsequious follower.

Moreover, a rather unskilled, reckless old follower who openly flatters others without any technique or subtlety.

Wang Shouzhe was speechless. Minister Zhong, oh Minister Zhong, this is not how you approach your goddess. Haven't you heard: a man who blindly offers his admiration to others will eventually have nothing left?

As expected, a cold aura gradually radiated from Master Longyan, igniting a rage within. She sneered, "Zhong, are you planning to buy me, Wang Longyan?"

Minister Zhong's legs suddenly gave out, he panicly replied, "Senior sister Longyan, don't misunderstand, I just want to repay a favor, repay a favor. Have you forgotten? During one of the Academy's trial missions, you helped me once, although you don't remember anymore..."

This is the end!

Wang Shouzhe was shaking his head internally. In front of his heart's goddess, he couldn't even stand straight, let alone hold himself in high regard?

In this state, he probably didn't have even half a chance. Given such a lack of dignity, not to mention Master Longyan wouldn't have any interest in him, even Wang Shouzhe himself would find him unimpressive.

Chapter 52 【Heavenly Spirit Pill】 _1

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The conversation between the two was unbearable for Wang Shouzhe. He immediately stepped forward, placing himself in front of the Old Ancestor, and respectfully said to Minister Zhong, "Minister Zhong, we are here to do business, hence, let's follow the rules."

After speaking, Wang Shouzhe picked up the Turtle Scale Treasure Shield and handed it to Minister Zhong for appraisal.

"Yes, yes, business must be done properly." Minister Zhong seemed distracted. While appraising the Turtle Scale Treasure Shield, he looked to Wang Shouzhe and asked, "Young man, how are you related to Sister Longyan?"

"Elder, my name is Wang Shouzhe, I am the Clan Leader of a small family in Ping'an Town, Changning County. Elder Longyan is my grand aunt." Wang Shouzhe spoke without any concealment. His status was inferior to the elder. Even if Elder Longyan was not polite to him, he should conduct himself accordingly.

Now that Minister Zhong had clearly recognized Elder Longyan, he had previously refrained from prying at the Academic Palace due to rules. Later, he assumed that Elder Longyan had passed away, so it was unlikely he would look for her anywhere.

But now, given the status and influence of the Zhong Family, it wouldn't be difficult to find her. Even though Elder Longyan has been very low-key recently, her fame and influence outside were relatively small.

Upon hearing that they both had the surname Wang and that she was his grand aunt, Minister Zhong laughed out loud mysteriously, as if he was having a wonderful dream.

"Why are you laughing?" Cold light shimmered in the eyes under Old Ancestor Longyan's veil.

Minister Zhong's laughter abruptly halted. He hastily lowered his head pretending to continue his appraisal. "This defense spirit Turtle Scale Shield has been personally refined by Master Binglan of the Purple Abode Academy. Naturally, its quality is superior. However, it appears that the spirit weapon has been damaged and not promptly repaired, so it requires at least a 10% deduction..."

He hadn't finished his sentence when he felt a chill crawl up his spine. It was Elder Longyan's gaze. He quickly corrected his statement while shuddering uncontrollably, "A simple repair by a Master Refiner should suffice for such trivial damage, no deduction necessary. This spiritual treasure should be valued around 31,000, no, around 32,000 Qian Gold.

Do the honorable guests wish to consign it or sell it directly to us?"

Listening to the implicit information in his words, Wang Shouzhe had also estimated the price. Given that Elder Longyan's Turtle Scale Treasure Shield was damaged, the actual valuation should be around 27,000 or 28,000 Qian Gold. If they consigned it, it would be tough to exceed the price of 30,000 Qian Gold.

Additionally, as the market organizers, they would need to charge a 5% venue fee, which equals 1500 Qian Gold.

Just as he was about to speak, Elder Longyan coldly said, "Sell it at the price of 30,000. After it's repaired by the Zhong Family's Master Refiner, you should be able to make a small profit. Consider it a favor owed by Wang Longyan."

"Sister Longyan, I can..." Upon hearing that the goddess could owe him a favor, Minister Zhong intended to express his position further.

"Not necessary!" Elder Longyan coldly interrupted him, "Wang Longyan would not owe any favors unless forced to. If you want to supplement the loss out of your pocket, I won't sell this Turtle Scale Treasure Shield."

"Yes, yes, yes, Sister Longyan has the final say." Minister Zhong nodded repeatedly without any dignity. Despite his disappointment, he relished the idea of Elder Longyan owing him more favors in his dreams.

The parties agreed, Golden Sand Black Market purchased the Turtle Scale Treasure Shield for 30,000 Qian Gold.

Minister Zhong rarely had the opportunity to serve his dream goddess, so he immediately rushed to complete the paperwork. Given that he was the rightful heir of the Zhong Family and a Spirit Platform Realm cultivator, this matter was already set in stone.

During this interval, Wang Shouzhe and Elder Longyan started discussing how to utilize this money.

Originally, Elder Longyan intended to purchase a Level Five Spirit Pill, the Heavenly Spirit Pill, for Wang Shouzhe. She advised him to store it carefully; it was a scarce, in-demand spirit pill, the best auxiliary pill to assist in the breakthrough from the peak of Qi Refinement Stage to the Spirit Platform Stage, significantly improving success rates.

This pill was one of the coveted pills for prominent families. With this, the family might potentially gain a Spirit Platform Realm elder.

However, as a Level Five Dan medicine, it was extremely difficult to make, requiring many expensive heavenly treasures. Whenever it appeared, it usually sold via auction for prices between 32,000 and 35,000 Qian Gold, even more expensive than typical spiritual artifacts.

This astronomical figure was unreachable for most families. Even reasonably successful families would struggle to afford it without saving for decades. Moreover, possessing a Heavenly Spirit Pill didn't guarantee a family could produce a Spirit Platform Realm elder.

As an example, the Wang Family's once highly anticipated Sixth Grand Elder Wang Xiaohan, had failed to breakthrough to the Spirit Platform Realm using the Heavenly Spirit Pill, leading to his prolonged depression, feeling as if he'd let the family down.

It was no wonder Wang Xiaohan felt this way. The resources for his cultivation to the peak of Qi Refinement Stage and that Heavenly Spirit Pill were accumulated from the Wang Family by selling numerous family assets in Changning County. The failure resulted in enormous losses for the family.

However, Wang Shouzhe declined Elder Longyan's suggestion. Since he didn't need it in the short term, it was not beneficial to let the funds sit idle. It would be better to purchase a Level Three Spirit Pill, the Creation Pill, to heal her severely damaged internal organs.

Her injuries have lingered for too long; every year of delay may lead to irreparable consequences. Now that she could refine the Yin Sha poison, it was the perfect time to heal the injuries.

"Elder." Wang Shouzhe said solemnly, "Putting everything else aside, your prompt recovery from your injuries would be the most beneficial to our family at the moment. Without your protection, no matter how well our Wang family develops, we would still be easily targeted by others."

After moments of contemplation, the Old Ancestor Longyan reluctantly agreed. Shouzhe's suggestion was indeed the most appropriate given the current circumstances. Previously, he wanted to purchase the Heavenly Spirit Pill for fear that the Wang Family would be unable to secure it after his death. But now, the situation had changed, and death seemed unlikely.

Soon, Wang Shouzhe, using the writing materials provided within their room, diligently listed and deliberated a series of items to acquire with Old Ancestor Longyan.

300 Little Pei Yuan Dans, 100 second-level dan medicines, Pei Yuan Dans, 20 third-level dan medicines, Creation Pills, 10 Spirit Stones, and one set of the Small Five Elements Array Flags.

The total cost was roughly around 30,000 Qian Golds.

The Little Pei Yuan Dans were specially reserved to be used precisely in conjunction with the familys' contribution points. The young generation of the family was at the quintessential juncture for cultivation. If this opportunity were missed in the prime of their youth, it would be immensely difficult to compensate for the loss later, no matter how plentiful the resources bestowed upon them.

Wang Shouzhe could hardly bear the sight of his younger siblings spending an extra few months refining their Cultivation base due to the lack of even a single Little Pei Yuan Dan, ultimately falling behind others.

Pei Yuan Dan was reserved for himself, Old Ancestor Longyan, and the six elders, especially for Wang Xiaohan, who had been crestfallen and immersed in the family industry at the Prosperous Farm after failing to break through the Spirit Platform Realm. This was, undoubtedly, a huge waste.

Now was the time to take advantage of resources such as the Pei Yuan Dan to gradually restore him to the peak of the Vital Energy Refining Realm and prepare for the breakthrough to the Spirit Platform Realm at any time. Having only one Spirit Platform Stage Ancestor in the clan was undoubtedly disadvantageous.

As for Wang Shouzhe himself, he also wanted to speed up his cultivation progress, using the Little Pei Yuan Dan for usual cultivation and Pei Yuan Dan for crucial breakthroughs.

After all, according to the original plan, he was to reach the peak of the Vital Energy Refining Realm and then prepare to attempt breaking the Spirit Platform Stage when he was nearly forty years old.

Too slow!

With the mentality of a transmigrator like Wang Shouzhe, he could hardly bear such a sloth-like pace. Even if it meant being lavish and wasting some resources, he was determined to rush to the Spirit Platform Stage as soon as possible.

As for the Small Five Elements Array, it was naturally for Lu Xiaoxiao. Back then, spending the 500 Qian Gold from Old Ancestor Mingsheng to buy the Purple Crystal Spirit Beehive for her was a waste. But with Lu Xiaoxiao's talent as an array master, this basic formation could be utilized as a learning tool.

When Minister Zhong returned to their room and saw the list compiled by Wang Shouzhe, he was shocked. Was the Wang family some large Profound Martial-prominent family with such enormous resource requirements?

"Senior Zhong, I was wondering if your market sells any breath-concealing treasures? The price should not be too high, preferably within a thousand golds," ventured Wang Shouzhe.

After a moment's thought, Minister Zhong replied, "We have an inconspicuous spiritual treasure—Breath Concealing Jade Pendant. However, it can only conceal the non-burst state of Qi Refiners, and it can't fool the cultivators at the Spirit Platform Stage. The price is not too high, just a thousand Qian Gold."

"That should suffice," Wang Shouzhe expressed satisfaction, "Add it to the list."

During this time, Wang Shouzhe intended to speed up his cultivation progress. He didn't want his cultivation status to be exposed to prying eyes all the time.

"Our honored guest's order is rather large," Minister Zhong looked troubled, "It will take me a day or two to procure them."

"No worries at all. We can just sign an agreement."

Soon, Wang Shouzhe let Minister Zhong experience what Steward Qian felt, the procurement agreement was meticulously detailed, with every minor loophole addressed.

With Minister Zhong taking care of the order, Wang Shouzhe and the others didn't have to wait around. They returned to the tavern during the night.

Sitting cross-legged on the bed, Wang Shouzhe meditated. After a few hours, he slowly opened his eyes with evident progress.

At this point, Wang Shouzhe had finally calmed down.

This trip to the Hundred Islands Guard had been far from peaceful, with constant upheavals, firstly encountering disciples of the heretical Yin Sha Sect, soon followed by meeting his old Academy's junior brother.

Both incidents in improper handling could easily escalate into grave crises. Thankfully both matters were resolved favorably.

However, once they returned, Wang Shouzhe was determined to continue quietly building the family's strength for some time. The world of Mysterious Magic was simply too dangerous, carelessly messing about could easily cost one's life.

Chapter 53 Foodie Talent_1

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For the next two days.

Wang Shouzhe and Old Ancestor Longyan planned to stay at the tavern courtyard and cultivate.

Old Ancestor Longyan, having endured the torment of the Yin Sha poison for fifty years, was deeply fed up with this state. The technique was very simple, even an ordinary Independent Cultivator could understand it. After brief contemplation, she began to attempt transformation.

Wang Shouzhe, fearing any accidents, decided to keep her company. He also hoped the old ancestor would be able to clarify any unanswered questions about his cultivation. After Old Ancestor Longyan ascended to the Spirit Platform Realm at the Purple Abode Academy, she studied under Master Binglan and cultivated to the mid-stage of the Spirit Platform Realm at a young age.

Neither her talent nor her knowledge were comparable to those of Mingsheng, the Old Ancestor of the Lu family.

With a little guidance, Wang Shouzhe felt as if his mind had suddenly opened up, and his thoughts were pouring in like a flood.

However, Wang Licui, the little girl at home, was too young and restless. Wang Shouzhe simply arranged for the head of the household to accompany her out for a stroll, and even gave her ten Qian Gold as spending money, as a reward for her recent hard work and attentive care of the old ancestor.

Then at noon.

Wang Licui ran into Wang Shouzhe's room in tears. Her chubby face was full of grievance: "Fourth Uncle, Fourth Uncle, I was tricked by a wicked Independent Cultivator. Wuu wuu wuu, I spent ten Qian Gold on this broken stone, there isn't anything yummy inside."

As she spoke, she held out a fist-sized stone that she had somehow managed to cut open, revealing a white layer inside.

Wang Shouzhe's heart twitched. Ten Qian Gold was not a small amount. However, since he had given it to her, it was her own money. But now it was just wasted like this, Wang Shouzhe felt a little tired.

Could it be that his older brother Shouxin was good at raising prodigal sons and daughters? One loved gambling, the other loved food!

What could possibly be tasty inside a stone? This level of intelligence was worrying.

"Eh, wait a minute." Wang Shouzhe's eyes suddenly twitched, and he picked up the stone which she had cut in half.

The stone had a lush green exterior and looked quite nice. It was clearly a gambling stone, the most common item on the stalls of Independent Cultivators! Some extremely powerful families, such as the Tianren Family, or other powerful forces, could potentially have control over some spirit stone mines.

In the spirit stone mines, a lot of leftover pieces occasionally contained spirit stones. But for the sake of greater profits, these leftovers were sold as gambling stones.

At first, it was mainly Independent Cultivators who gambled, trying their luck. But then it became an industry chain. Independent Cultivators took gambling stones and set up stalls all over the place, allowing people to try their luck.

Everyone knows that you lose nine out of ten times when you gamble.

But there will always be someone with extraordinary luck. For example, spending ten Qian Gold and winning a spirit stone worth hundreds or thousands of Qian Gold, thus becoming rich overnight.

Various legends have led to the prosperity of the gambling stone industry, and those families with spirit mines are happy to maximize their profits.

But Wang Shouzhe usually wouldn't even spare a glance at such gambling stones. He didn't have golden pupils or X-ray vision. The chances of going broke are far greater than winning. It's better to be honest and cultivate step by step to make money.

However, this gambling stone from his niece... the white layer inside, even Wang Shouzhe could feel the abundant spiritual energy. Holding it in his hand, he could feel a hint of coolness entering his body.

Of course, he knew it was a spirit stone, but he was not sure about the content of the spirit stone, as he had only seen a spirit stone once or twice in his life from childhood onwards.

Therefore.

Wang Shouzhe quickly grabbed the still sobbing and complaining Wang Licui, and went to find Old Ancestor Longyan to give them a look.

Even with Old Ancestor Longyan's extensive knowledge and experience, she was slightly surprised after examining the stone for a while. After some consideration, she said: "Indeed, this is a spirit stone. I reckon that you should be able to cut and polish three to four spirit stones from it."

Three to four pieces?

Wang Shouzhe's face stiffened. In this procurement list, he had added ten spirit stones at a huge cost of a thousand Qian Gold. He originally planned to use one or two stones for cultivation to see the effect.

The rest of the spirit stones were mostly going to be used at the Prosperous Farm, in conjunction with the Spirit Gathering Array, to see if they could cultivate more spirit fields. To his knowledge, there was a spiritual spring in the Prosperous Farm, large enough to support about sixty acres of spirit fields.

However, at present, the Prosperous Farm only had twenty acres of spirit fields. This was because the family had been financially strained after the major disaster struck. The original plan was to wait until Wang Xiaohan, Wang Shouzhe's grandfather, ascended to the Spirit Platform Realm, and then slowly expand the remaining spirit fields after stabilising the family situation.

However, Wang Xiaohan's attempt to ascend to the Spirit Platform Realm failed, which also led to the plan to expand the spirit fields being put on hold.

But at this point, Wang Shouzhe had to develop the Spirit Fields. If not, it would hinder the cultivation progress and development of their family members. He couldn't always rely on outside sources for Spirit Rice, could he?

He gritted his teeth and bought ten Spirit Stones.

Yet, unexpectedly, this little brat Wang Licui gambled ten Qian Gold and won three to four of them!

"Girl, do you know gambling for stones is not good?" Wang Shouzhe's voice was somewhat stern. Temporary winnings may provide instant profit, but this habit mustn't persist. Otherwise, if the eldest girl gets a taste for it and becomes addicted to stone gambling, all the money in the world will not be enough.

"Scared?"

Wang Licui was frightened to the point of turning pale, shivering and sobbing, "Fourth Uncle, what do you mean by 'stone gambling'? I just thought that there was something delicious inside the stone; it seemed like there was something really good to eat. That detestable Independent Cultivator said that there was sure to be good stuff inside too.

Who knew, he tricked me~wah wah wah, my money is all gone, with which I could have bought lots and lots of dried little fish, dried octopus, squid strips..."

Ever since she arrived at the Hundred Islands Guard after coming from home, Wang Licui became infatuated with delicacies like dried little fish, feeling they were even better than candied fruits. She had neither seen nor heard of Spirit Stones before.

"Foodie! What kind of good food can you expect to be in a stone!? What on earth is going on in your head all day long?" Wang Shouzhe rubbed his forehead, feeling both amused and vexed.

"It's okay, stop crying." Fourth Auntie Xu Zhirou hurriedly stepped in to mediate, hugging Wang Licui and comforting her while persuading Wang Shouzhe, "Shouzhe, the eldest girl is still young. She's never been far from home before and doesn't understand these things."

"Wah wah wah~Fourth Granny, that detestable Independent Cultivator, I don't know what kind of tricks he pulled, making me really believe that there was something delicious inside, but, but once it came out, it was all inedible trash." Wang Licui's heart felt like it was shattered, she was so angry.

Trash?

Wang Shouzhe held his forehead, feeling somewhat dazed. If Spirit Stones are considered trash, then are there any treasures left in the world? However, Wang Licui really might not know what Spirit Stones are, since she had always grown up in the family, and the Wang family was too poor, with few Spirit Stones.

By this time, Wang Shouzhe was convinced that the eldest girl was not making up stories to fool him.

She didn't have the intellect for that!

"Shouzhe, if the eldest girl can truly sense that there's something delicious inside..." Fourth Auntie Xu Zhirou said expectantly, "Doesn't this indicate that..."

Wang Shouzhe of course had also thought of this point, but, he felt somewhat puzzled, so he looked toward the Old Ancestor Longyan.

Old Ancestor Longyan slightly furrowed his brows and also looked doubtful, "As far as I know, even if a Tianren Realm Cultivator wanted to see through a gambling stone, they would have to apply Secret Techniques, which definitely wouldn't be minor in terms of expense and stir. But in the past, I did hear of some remarkable people with special Pupil Skill who could also see through gambling stones.

But such people are too rare, and if they were to use the Pupil Skill, their eyes would undergo noticeable changes and easily give them away. As for Licui's situation... I've never heard of it."

After a pause, the Old Ancestor added: "Shouzhe, the world is far larger than you can imagine. What I have seen and known is but a drop in the vast ocean. Maybe, Licui has quite a talent in terms of spiritual perception."

What sort of spiritual perception talent? Wang Shouzhe was somewhat skeptical. Even if this little girl had some talent, it was probably a talent for being a foodie.

Let's give it a try and find out.

Wang Shouzhe took out thirty Qian Gold, handed it to Wang Licui, and said, "Go buy three more stones and bring them back, and remember, they need to be the kind of stones you think contain something delicious."

Then Wang Licui stopped crying, and with innocent eyes, she looked at Wang Shouzhe like he was an idiot, she thought, 'Fourth Uncle, have you been driven mad with anger? Isn't being fooled once enough of a lesson for you?'

"Heh heh."

Wang Shouzhe's cheeks twitched, and he gave a cold laugh, "Eldest girl, let me tell you, your Fourth Uncle just bought two..."

Before he could finish his sentence,

Wang Licui tightly grasped the thirty Qian Gold Note, and ran like the wind.

The speed and quick response left even Wang Shouzhe somewhat taken aback. He wasn't certain whether the eldest girl indeed had some spiritual perception talent, but he could be certain that she definitely had a talent for speed.

But in case she was taken advantage of, he quickly asked Wang Zhong and Wang Yong to follow her.

"Shouzhe, you really are..." Fourth Auntie Xu Zhirou standing to the side, gave a chuckling smile.

Chapter 54 Wang Shouzhe is very pleased_1

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In fact, Wang Shouzhe also performed this operation with a try-it-out mentality.

Of course, being addicted to gambling on stones is wrong, but if Wang Licui truly has some inexplicably bizarre talent, then it would be utilizing his talent to pick up leaks, and this might not be an accidental windfall to supplement the family's resources.

It's almost like those golden pupil type novels he read in his previous life.

The Wang clan is too poor, so poor that Longyan Old Ancestor had to sell his personal spiritual artifact, the Turtle Scale Treasure Shield, to gather a sum of resources. Especially that third-level Spirit Pill, the Creation Pill, it's too expensive, a whole thousand Qian Gold for one piece.

It seems like being an alchemist is the most lucrative profession in this world.

However, if an alchemist wants to achieve something, his talent requirements are very high. Moreover, the initial investment in training an alchemist is absolutely outrageously expensive, and it is possible to go bankrupt if you are not careful.

But if a clan wants to make a lot of progress, the training of an alchemist is unavoidable.

Enough of the idle talk for now.

Wang Shouzhe and Old Ancestor Longyan once again entered the cultivation mode.

By the evening, when Wang Shouzhe came out of his meditation, Wang Licui and the head of household had already returned. This time they didn't bring back three gambling stones, but a football-sized stone.

"Fourth Uncle, there isn't anything yummy in the other small stones, only this big one has something yummy." Wang Licui, eager for praise, handed over a big stone.

Her words really were a messy jumble.

"Master," Wang Zhong explained, "we accompanied Miss Licui for half a day and Miss Licui picked this one. After haggling, it cost 45 Qian Gold, and I and Wang Yong pooled 15 Qian Gold."

"You all worked hard." Wang Shouzhe paid back the Qian Gold that the head of household contributed, and let Wang Zhong cut it open.

This time, Wang Zhong got a rasp, and he gently filed along the skin to avoid wasting half a spirit stone.

Wang Shouzhe watched on the side, and couldn't help but feel nervous, this unremarkable broken stone cost a full 45 Qian Gold. If the gamble failed, it would all be flushed down the drain.

Soon, Wang Zhong had filed off two or three centimeters of skin, exposing a material like white jade crystal inside, and he was overjoyed: "Congratulations, Master, the value has increased, greatly increased."

It really worked...

Even with Wang Shouzhe's state of mind, he couldn't help but feel excited, feeling light and airy all over. It must be admitted that gambling, as a thing, gives people a great thrill, no wonder it's so hard to quit once you become addicted.

It seems that when we go back this time, we must increase the intensity of the family law again. The younger generation of the family must absolutely not develop a gambling addiction.

However, this big girl's talent is quite terrifying, she has completely transcended the concept of "gambling". She is purely relying on her inexplicable talent as a foodie, confident that there are spirit stones in this stone.

This is completely different from gambling, it's simply like picking up money.

Even Wang Shouzhe has to utter a word... it's heavenly.

Half an hour later.

Wang Zhong filed off all the stone skin, and he had a whole piece of large spirit stone in his hand. If it was cut properly, it was estimated to be about ten standard spirit stones.

Everyone was stunned, and Old Ancestor Longyan was also very surprised.

Wang Licui, through the head of house's explanation, also understood that although spirit stones can't be eaten, they are good things and can be exchanged for a lot, a lot of delicious food. She was overjoyed and eagerly looked at Wang Shouzhe, as if she was expecting Fourth Uncle to give her some reward or something.

At this moment, Wang Shouzhe was dumbstruck, and his gaze at Wang Licui became weird.

For this big niece who is heartless and a foodie to reach this step, he was also very strange. Could it be that forcing her to study stimulated her to awaken some sort of unusual potential?

One can't completely rule out this possibility.

Thinking about the development of the family, Wang Shouzhe's gaze at Wang Licui became even kinder.

The familiar gaze, the familiar smile.

Wang Licui felt like she has been hit by five thunders, feeling the end of the world is approaching, what's the point of living like this?

Tears, they fell uncontrollably.

"Alright, alright, I was just teasing you." Wang Shouzhe smiled and pinched her chubby cheek, "This time you have made a huge contribution to the family, tell me, what do you want to eat? Fourth Uncle is treating."

Really!?

Wang Licui suddenly came to life, blinking her sparkling eyes and licking her lips, "Fourth Uncle. I want to eat steamed large lobster, the type that weighs ten jin. And abalone, the huge, washbowl-sized ones, I want to eat five in one go. And shark fin..."

"Well, in that case, let's start by discussing your studies." Wang Shouzhe said with an even warmer smile.

"No, Fourth Uncle, I'll settle for a small lobster if there's no big one, five jin, no, a two jin one will do. As for the abalone, just fist-sized ones..."

Of course, in the end, Wang Shouzhe did take her to enjoy a feast according to her wish.

In this world, many creatures and plants tend to grow much larger, and non-spiritual species are not expensive, the Hundred Islands Guard lacks many things, but not sea delicacies which fall within their culinary range.

Wang Licui was naturally satisfied with her meal, after getting down from the carriage, she leaned against the wall all the way back to her room, her heart filled with gratitude for Wang Shouzhe.

Ha ha~ She's terrifyingly innocent.

Subsequent events went quite smoothly. Minister Zhong, as promised, delivered the resources listed on the billing slip, with a total worth of 31,300 Qian Gold. As the quantity purchased at one time was large, Minister Zhong took the liberty to cancel out 300 Qian Gold, bringing Wang Shouzhe's total expenditure down to 31,000 Qian Gold.

In these resources, the largest chunk went to 20 Creation Pills, which cost a staggering 24,000 Qian Gold. It's evident that the consumption of the Family Spirit Platform Realm Cultivator is much greater than that of the Vital Energy Refining Realm. For poorer families, even being injured is unaffordable for Spirit Platform Realm cultivators.

However, for a Profound Martial Prominent Family, without a Spirit Platform Realm cultivator to stabilize its position, it may as well be a sitting duck for others.

As a gesture of thanks to Zhong Xingwang and Minister Zhong, Wang Shouzhe personally invited them to a meal. It was unfortunate that Longyan Old Ancestor didn't attend, which somewhat disappointed Minister Zhong, but he quickly recovered and happily engaged in conversation with Wang Shouzhe.

Wang Shouzhe, true to the name of a transmigrator, with his broad vision and unique consciousness, often impressed Minister Zhong, who would slap the table in admiration with a few cups of Spiritual Wine. Soon he started calling Wang Shouzhe his brother.

Wang Shouzhe broke out in a cold sweat at this; Minister Zhong truly lacked the grace and demeanor of a Spirit Platform Realm old ancestor. Compared with Zhou Xuan Old Ancestor and even Mingsheng Old Ancestor, he was lacking by a long shot.

Yet upon further reflection, it was normal. Zhong Xingwang being from a Celestial Clan, there must be quite a number of Spirit Platform Realm cultivators in his family, none of whom require him to bear the burden of the family's rise or fall.

Furthermore, he wasn't some domineering and self-confident genius. Otherwise, he wouldn't have needed to pull strings to gain entry to the Purple Abode Academic Palace.

A person such as this, how could he catch the eye of the proud, confident, and slightly wilful Longyan Old Ancestor?

But even if Longyan Old Ancestor looks down upon him, with their shared student relationship with Longyan Old Ancestor, Wang Shouzhe still had to find a way to get along with Minister Zhong. The Celestial Clan is too powerful, and their comprehensive strength can't be compared with a small family like the Wang's. Having a connection like him would be handy for future endeavors.

There wasn't much of a sensation in the following days.

The young lady had once again scoured the Independent Cultivator's market for all the Gambling Stones, bringing back two that turned out to be six Spirit Stones. She couldn't find any more Gambling Stones that interested her.

This made it apparent how deceptive the real Gambling Stone market was. Trying to make a fortune from it was virtually a pipe dream.

Wang Shouzhe and the others boarded the Jun Yao merchant ship very discreetly and returned to Donggang. By then, Sixth Uncle Wang Dinghai had already arrived as arranged to wait for them by his boat.

After briefly thanking Chen Dewei, the Chen Clan Leader, in the absence of Chen Fangjie, Wang Shouzhe bid him farewell.

Some of their luggage was moved onto Wang Dinghai's ship. All of it was purchased from the Hundred Islands Guard, including seafood and local delicacies. There was also a bag of Oyster Cement that Wang Shouzhe had high hopes for — its price was indeed high, almost as expensive as food.

However, being a loving great-uncle, Wang Shouzhe had also purchased some unique ancient books exclusive to the Hundred Islands Guard for Wang Licui. He could already envision her delighted, chirpy expression.

The biggest gain from this trip was finding a solution to Longyan Old Ancestor's injury. Over these days, Longyan Old Ancestor had fully mastered the method of refining Evil Qi and had begun gradually refining the Evil Qi within her body.

From the eyes of Longyan Old Ancestor, which were originally filled with melancholy, Wang Shouzhe could now see a spark of enthusiasm and urgency. He thought to himself, the Old Ancestor was certain to give Zhao and Liu Clans a big surprise.

With this thought, Wang Shouzhe's mood also began to change considerably.

To return to Ping'an Town from Donggang, one must accurately catch the tidal rush. The sky of this world also had a considerable-sized satellite, causing rising and falling tides. When the tide began to rise, the flow of water from Peace River would become much steadier.

At this time, it required a combination of the wind sail and manual rowing.

As the chorus of the rowers rang out, Wang Shouzhe was anxious to return home.

However, this return journey had some unexpected twists and turns.

While Wang Shouzhe was meditating in the cabin, after traveling for no more than half an hour, suddenly the boat jolted with a "clang" as if it hit something, causing the entire ship to sway.

At the same time.

A mix of delight and anger echoed from outside, it was Sixth Uncle Wang Dinghai's voice, "Shouzhe, come out quickly to help, there's a Fierce Beast, a Level Two aquatic beast!"

A Level Two aquatic Fierce Beast!?

Wang Shouzhe was taken aback; rather than being terrified, he was delighted. This was essentially food being delivered to their doorstep. His large family at home, with several dozens of members, were all waiting to be fed.

Chapter 55 Casualties and Gains_1

...

Wang Shouzhe immediately grabbed his strongbow and sword, rushing out.

Reaching the deck.

Wang Dinghai, holding a fishing spear with spikes and a rope, directed the crew to rapidly hit the water surface with long bamboo poles. The two family heads, Wang Zhong and Wang Yong, also drew their strongbows, ready to shoot at any time.

"Shouzhe, your timing is perfect." While Wang Dinghai's expression was serious, he couldn't hide his excitement, "It's a lone East Sea Spearflag, likely flushed into the freshwater by the tide. It is not too difficult to handle. You need to shoot at its vital points when it surfaces."

Generally speaking, aquatic beasts are no less difficult to deal with than land beasts. They are often powerful and fierce when in the water, and it is common for them to capsize or smash ships.

Wang Dinghai had been an "old fisherman" for more than a dozen years. He had his methods of dealing with aquatic beasts. The sound of the bamboo poles hitting the water can disturb the judgment of these creatures, making them reluctant to ram the ship. At the same time, it will arouse their anger.

Except for a few fish species, most fish, even the fiercest ones, are generally less intelligent than land beasts.

Just as Wang Dinghai finished speaking, a large splash erupted about forty-five feet from the left side of the ship. A nearly two feet long aquatic monster abruptly leapt out of the water, ferociously charging towards the ship.

With Wang Shouzhe's dynamic visual acuity, he could barely make out the beast's long, sword-like stinger and a dorsal fin that resembled a triangular flag. Its appearance was somewhat similar to the swordfish on Earth.

But in terms of size or ferocity, it was far from comparable to a swordfish.

"Zing! Zing! Zing!"

Three arrow vibrations echoed almost simultaneously, with arrows hitting the beast one after another. However, the arrows shot by Wang Zhong and Wang Yong only penetrated a few inches into its body. But Wang Shouzhe's arrow sunk more than a foot deep.

The difference was not due to the arrows, but because Wang Shouzhe's Mysterious Energy attached to the arrow was of higher quality.

"Beast, you dare."

Wang Dinghai, the fiercest of the old fishermen, swelled with energy, his Mysterious Energy exploding to its limit, as he hurled out a fishing spear specially designed for large fish, "pu" - it sank two feet into the beast's flank.

However, at this moment, the beast's stinger pierced a sailor, his falling body showing no signs of slowing as it plunged into the water. At the same time, with a flick of its tail, two more sailors were swept off the ship.

"Boom!"

With a huge splash, the beast plunged back into the water with the sailor.

But the fishing spear of Wang Dinghai was stuck in its body, with a specially made thick rope tied to the end of the spear.

Before it could swim more than a dozen feet, the rope was stretched to its limit and snapped taut with a fierce jerk, "Ga Ga Ga". This medium-sized merchant ship was pulled to tilt to one side, with the bow swinging under the great tension.

This was a human technique for dealing with large aquatic beasts on a ship. Clearly, the East Sea Spearflag had made a mistake. This mistake, naturally, would cost it its life.

The constant nagging of the fishing spear and the barb caused unbearable pain, though it struggled desperately to get rid of it, the more it struggled, the more severe its injuries were and the more tangled it got in the specially made rope.

Welcoming it next were the remote attacks from Wang Shouzhe and the others' strongbows.

Even so, Wang Shouzhe and the others had to empty a quiver of arrows before the East Sea Spearflag finally stopped struggling and turned belly-up. The sailors came together to slowly haul it back in.

By this time, the body of the sailor pierced by the beast's stinger had long been thrown out, washed away by the tide to who knows where. Of the sailors who fell overboard, only one was rescued. The other one was probably swept away by the underwater current, and couldn't be found.

Although they had killed a Level Two aquatic beast, they lost two lives in the process, which cast a shadow over Wang Shouzhe's face.

The morale of the crew was also very low, after all, the ones who died were their comrades.

"Shouzhe, fighting a Level Two aquatic beast, today can be considered a great victory," Wang Dinghai came over and patted Wang Shouzhe's shoulder, comforting him before saying, "Even bloodline clansmen and family heads could die in battle, it's not impossible."

Wang Shouzhe understood that while Level Two beasts were classified at the same level as the Advanced stage of the Vital Energy Refining Realm, beasts were generally much stronger than humans at the same level.

Moreover, this world was ultimately different from Earth. Humans have always been competing with beasts for survival space. Because humans live on land, the land beasts in human habitats have long been eradicated, making it relatively safe.

However, how many people would die in such eradication and colonization was unpredictable.

But conditions were different underwater.

Humans do not live in water. A large river like Peace River has a wilderness source and multiple tributaries; some of these tributaries lead to unexplored fierce water marshes, the paradise of water-dwelling fierce beasts.

It's precisely this extensive water system that allows water-dwelling beasts to continuously appear within the realms of human habitation. Otherwise, humans' annual hunting activities would have long since wiped clean the beasts within their habitats.

This East Sea Spearflag is obviously a sea beast. At a moment of bad luck, it was swept into the freshwater river by the tide. Moreover, it had no experience dealing with humans. The ocean is immeasurably vast, hiding countless terrifying species that humans are still unable to fully comprehend to this day.

Because of this, merchant ships are usually constructed not only large but also very sturdy, and are equipped with weaponry such as siege equipment. And the city wall on Golden Sand Island, naturally, is not just set up to guard against human trespassers...

The beasts within the sea also aren't herbivores.

After slightly collecting his thoughts, Wang Shouzhe said: "Sixth Uncle, it's time to distribute the condolences and rewards."

"Of course, it will be according to the traditional high standard, with each deceased worker receiving a condolence amount of 30 Qian Gold. That's 60 for the two deceased, which I will handle personally." Wang Dinghai, having experienced such events before, showed little emotional reaction.

"The remaining twenty crewmen will each receive two Qian Gold pieces as hush money and a reward, totaling 40 Qian gold. Our total expenditure will be 100 Qian gold."

100 Qian gold isn't a small amount, but the workers' compensation is also typically high.

However, Wang Shouzhe willingly handed over 100 Qian Gold to Wang Dinghai to take care of it.

Upon hearing each of them would receive two Qian gold, the once-angered workers instantly had their spirits lifted. The overall earnings for the ship workers, who put their lives at risk, weren't poor, but two Qian gold pieces counted as a significant bonus.

Their feelings were exhilarated and excited, assisting Wang Zhong and Wang Yong in dragging the beast's carcass onto the ship deck bit by bit.

"We need to depart quickly. Wang Zhong, Wang Yong, get the prey into ship's hold and start cleaning the deck. We shouldn't stay here long." Wang Dinghai immediately issued the next order, and explained to Wang Shouzhe, "This water territory isn't our families hunting area, but belongs to the Left Family of Donggang. It would be best for us to leave as soon as possible to avoid further complications."

Without a doubt, Wang Dinghai, a man who has made a living for a long time on the water, made a wise decision.

About a quarter of an hour after the ship set off, they encountered the Left Family's fishing fleet from a distance. The tide was rising at this time, making it the best fishing opportunity for this water area.

They saw a passing medium-size merchant ship. But being busy with the golden fishing period, they had no intention to approach and inquire. After all, commercial and passenger ships coming and going were not uncommon in Peace River.

Next, they safely passed through the Left Family's water territory without any mishap.

"Congratulations, Family Head." Wang Zhong and Wang Yong also took a moment to deal with the East Sea Spearflag and gladly reported, "The Spearflag is estimated to weigh more than a thousand jin. Even after removing the inedible parts, there's still at least 700 jin. We've made a killing."

The meat of a Level Two Fierce Beast is a few times more expensive than that of a Level One, and has better effects when it comes to replenishing vital energy and blood. Just the fish meat alone is worth several hundred Qian gold.

The skin of the Spearflag also has great value. After special processing, it can be transformed into high-end water-resistant clothing that enhances a Profound Martial practitioner's Water Escape Technique and their defense.

All edible parts, even the fish intestines and liver, will be consumed.

The non-edible bones and spines, on the other hand, can be dried and ground into Spirit Fish bone powder for use as fertilizer in the Spirit Fields.

Overall, not a single part of such an expensive and rare Spirit Fish will go to waste.

Furthermore, the swim bladder of the Spirit Fish is extremely valuable. After special processing and drying, it becomes the highly coveted Spirit Fish Collagen.

This is the most expensive part of a Spirit Fish. It's consumed by women after childbirth to prevent postpartum hemorrhaging, and to nourish and restore their energy and blood.

However, only women of Profound Martial noble families can consume such a nutritious delicacy during childbirth. Ordinary families' women would have no opportunity.

"Remember to note the fish collagen in the clan's repository ledger when it is processed. It will serve as part of my sister's dowry when she gets married," Wang Shouzhe instructed after a thought.

"Of course," Wang Zhong replied with a grin. "The collagen from the Red-tailed Spirit Bream that the former Family Head hunted is also stored away, it's definitely meant for Miss Luoyi's dowry."

Wang Luoyi, being a legitimate daughter of the Wang Family, will naturally have the finest Spirit Fish Collagen as a part of her dowry.

At the same time, under normal circumstances, Wang Shouzhe wouldn't need to worry about this for Miss Liu.

As a legitimate daughter of the Liu Family, when she marries Wang Shouzhe, she will naturally bring high-quality Spirit Fish Collagen as part of her dowry. This is a token of love from her parents, with hopes that she recovers healthily post-childbirth.

The customs and traditions of Profound Martial noble families permeate every aspect of life.

Chapter 56: Years later, if I become the Qing Emperor, I'll make your peach blossoms bloom all over your face_1

...

"Wang Zhong, Wang Yong, both of you have done well." Wang Shouzhe was quite pleased with the performance of these two heads of household—both their combative strength and their administrative capabilities were commendable.

Immediately, he awarded each of them 10 Qian Gold.

Overjoyed, the two heads of household knelt down in gratitude, "Thank you, Family Head, for your generous reward."

During this period, accompanying the Family Head and performing various tasks had indeed made them quite a fortune, and their hearts were filled with vigour and enthusiasm.

They were the top commanders among the heads of the household, and the support they received each year was far from meagre. The yearly sustenance just for their clothing and food was about 2 Qian Gold, and they would also receive cultivation resources worth 20 Qian Gold, as well as an additional annual stipend of 12 Qian Gold.

Compared to the common folk, their earnings were considered exceptionally high.

Hence, when Wang Shouzhe bestowed 10 Qian Gold, it was indeed a substantial reward. Particularly for Wang Zhong, who had, a few days ago, taken the role of bait to catch the rogue disciple of the Yinsha Sect with a magnificent end, was rewarded with an additional 20 Qian Gold, indeed making a small fortune.

"Keep working hard, and also keep cultivating diligently," Wang Shouzhe encouraged them before retreating to his cabin to rest.

Being generous with them was also meant to promote and support them. Although the heads of households were supported well, the resources they were provided with were not as much as those of the current generation of the family. Both were in their thirties, and it was not easy for them to cultivate to Level Four or Level Five of the Qi Refinement Realm.

Afterward, they journeyed without exchanging many words.

Upon reaching the Fenggu Sluice, they traveled to the main house by a small boat on the inland river. The round trip was quite smooth and took about ten days...

Inside the awning boat...

Wang Shouzhe saw the tremendous change in the Fenggu Farm. Thousands of acres of wheat had been harvested, and the threshing floor was full of shelled wheat, resembling small hillocks.

It was a bumper harvest.

The busy tenant farmers had satisfied smiles on their faces. This harvest year would notably ease their lives.

Most farms in this world operated on the tenant farmer's fixed rent sharing pattern. The larger the grain yield, the more the tenants earned. Apart from their portion of grain for their families, the remaining grain could be exchanged for Copper Coins to save.

Once enough money had been saved, they could send their children to learn a craft at the Town Academy. Once the children had mastered the craft and could support themselves, they could start their own families.

If more money was saved, they could purchase ten to twenty acres of good farmland. Then, with a house built by the farmland, they would be independent farmers.

However, to transition from a tenant farmer family to an independent farmer family was not an easy task. It usually required the effort and diligent saving of one or even two generations.

In this world, there were quite a few tenant farmer families who gradually became independent farmers. At the same time, there were independent farmer families whose fortunes had declined, and they ended up as tenant farmers in various farms. These situations, like the ebb and flow of the tide and the waxing and waning of the moon, were all regular occurrences.

By the same token, in this world, there were also abundant Profound Martial prominent families that had declined and ultimately collapsed, and there were likewise rising, increasingly powerful Profound Martial prominent families.

In the eyes of these tenant farmers, the Ping'an Wang Family was akin to their sky.

However, at that moment, Wang Shouzhe came to a realization. Essentially, there was not much difference between the Wang family and tenant farmer families or independent farmer families. Everyone strived and accumulated resources with the hope of making their respective family stronger and better.

The awning boat passed through the Fenggu Farm and continued along the winding river towards the main house. On the way, they passed several villages. These villages varied in size, ranging from forty households to two or three hundred households, primarily made up of independent farmers and various small farms.

When their Old Ancestor Zhou Xuan held the Expansion Order and traveled south to open up new lands, he did not only bring along his small family. There were also hundreds of collateral branches of the Wang family who followed him. However, these collaterals had separated from the main bloodline of the Wang family for too long.

The bloodline from their Old Ancestor was extremely diluted, making it challenging for any cultivation talent to inherit it.

Nevertheless, these collateral branches of the Wang family followed Zhou Xuan and took root in Ping'an Town, growing and branching out generation after generation. Now, just in one generation, the collaterals of the Wang family in Ping'an Town had grown to over a thousand in number.

Due to the vast population, two individuals with cultivation talent had emerged in the recent generation. One was Wang Shouzhe's servant Wang Gui, and the other was the maid Wang Xiaoyu, who followed Wang Luoyi.

In this Profound Martial world, bloodline inheritance was of utmost importance. The main bloodline would not intermarry with the collateral branches. Because such marriages could dilute the Profound Martial bloodline of their descendants, there was a chance that offsprings without Profound Martial talent would be born.

Such a situation would result in tragedy.

This offspring isn't likely to marry a wife with an exceptional bloodline; no family would allow a daughter with Profound Martial talent to marry a useless man with no Profound Martial talent of his own.

Or, to put it another way, no direct male descendant of any family would consider marrying a woman without bloodline talent.

Most likely this child would only be able to intermarry with a side branch of the family. Such marriage could be the beginning of another tragedy—with a high probability of producing offspring without a bloodline. As a result, his descendants wouldn't even be recorded in the family lineage, but rather, would belong to the side branches of the family.

For this reason, the world of the Profound Martial attaches great importance to bloodlines. The direct line is treated as the direct line, and side branches as side branches—marriages cannot be arranged casually.

For a Profound Martial prominent family, the side branches are merely side branches and aren't even considered real family members. Under normal circumstances, most of the side branches wouldn't even be allowed to enter the main residence.

However, the side branches of the Wang family lived abundantly and comfortably under the care of the family. Positions that required trust within the family business were often left open for talented individuals from the side branches.

Furthermore, several managers and the Great Stewards' positions in the Wang family's main residence were also filled by outstanding talents from the side branches of the Wang family.

These regulations are not unique to the Wang family—it's how the world operates.

Wang Shouzhe had neither the power nor the intention to change these practices. After all, how could he—an heir of his family—be expected to marry a direct-line female or a side-branch female from another family? Putting aside the issue of the family reputation, it wouldn't be fair to his descendants.

Miss Liu is from the direct line, and so is he—their bloodlines are not inferior.

The offspring born from their union would naturally possess decent bloodline talent. There's even a chance of incredibly good fortune, generating an offspring with a middle-grade talent. That would indeed be a blessing for both the Wang and Liu families.

The fields and villages within the Wang family's control were somewhat cared for by Wang Luo Jing's spiritual insects. While they were still struck by disaster, the reduction in yield wasn't too severe. At least they could get through this year's season without major problems, which was somewhat comforting to Wang Shouzhe.

While Wang Shouzhe was lost in his thoughts, the awning boat entered Zhuwei Lake and subsequently the rear yard of the Wang family's main residence. By this time, the dock in the backyard was already void of transportation boats. It seemed Wang Luotong had successfully completed her task.

First, the old ancestor was taken back to the Long Yan Habitat. Then Fourth Aunt Xu Zhirou and Wang Licui finished their tasks as well. Wang Licui was so light on her feet it seemed like she was about to escape from a demon's grasp, experiencing the joy of surviving a calamity.

Hehe!

Wang Shouzhe sneered quietly. Bowing to Xu Zhirou, he stated, "Fourth Aunt, you've worked hard on this journey." She had taken excellent, gentle care of the Old Ancestor during the journey, showing great diligence.

"Shouzhe, you flatter me. This is my responsibility." Xu Zhirou quickly returned the bow.

Afterward, Wang Shouzhe handed over five banknotes of Ten Qian Gold each as a hardship fee. Xu Zhirou was taken aback by the generous sum and promptly waved her hands, "Shouzhe, this is what I ought to do. No need, really no need."

"Fourth Aunt, you should take it. This money came from the family treasury, not my personal account," Wang Shouzhe insisted, pushing the banknotes into her hand, smilingly saying, "Your son Shounuo, Fourth sister Luo Tong and Fifth sister Luo Jing are at crucial moments in their cultivation. Also, you've worked so hard these years. Pay more attention to building up your Qi and blood.

Take the time to take good care of your health."

Xu Zhirou's eyes welled up, and she was about to say something but was stopped by Wang Shouzhe, who told her to go back and rest.

Once Xu Zhirou left, Wang Licui anxiously watched Wang Shouzhe, not worried about the money but ogling the pile of local specialty foods Wang Shouzhe had brought back. Among them were many tasty snacks.

Dear Fourth Uncle, Licui is such a good listener. You should at least share half-your half-carriage load of food with me, or rather, a third? The idea made her mouth water.

"Good girl, you did pretty well this time." Wang Shouzhe lovingly pinched her round cheek, pulling several books from his bosom. "Uncle knows you love to read. These are special gifts Uncle prepared for you. They are the most suitable reward for you. You must not slack off. Uncle will test you at any time."

"What, what?"

Wang Licui felt dizzy. Heavens above, why are you being so unfair to me, Wang Licui? Why must I have such a devilish Fourth Uncle?

So infuriating!

Dear Fourth Uncle,

Haven't you heard the saying—what goes around comes around? Don't bully a poor girl!

When I become the Qing Emperor in the future, you will be served with divine retribution!

Chapter 57: Accelerating Sprint to the Spirit Platform Realm

...

Although she was daydreaming in her mind, her expression was that of extreme joy and sobbing, "Fourth Uncle, you treat me so well."

"Our family's Lici is very obedient. If you study hard, Fourth Uncle will have other rewards for you." Wang Shouzhe smiled and ruffled her head, "Like those delicious little dried fish."

Hum! Even though I, Wang Licui, am a young girl, young girls still have dignity. Don't think that you can buy me off with just some little dried fish...

But as the words came to her mouth, they turned into glimmering eyes and salivation, "Fourth Uncle, how much can you reward?"

"The snacks brought back from this trip are yours to manage." Wang Shouzhe generously said.

"Woo woo woo~ Fourth Uncle, you are so good to me." Wang Licui's eyes filled with tears, falling while looking at Wang Shouzhe. She felt that she shouldn't have cursed Fourth Uncle in her heart, let alone have caused him to bear the brunt of it. Where else could she find such a good Fourth Uncle?

"Yes, Fourth Uncle believes that you can handle it well. You must distribute it fairly to everyone." Wang Shouzhe added, "These snacks, everyone in our family under the age of 20 gets an equal share. You've learned the Nine Chapters Arithmetic and bookkeeping, right? Everyone who receives a share must sign in the ledger."

EQUAL! DISTRIBUTION!

She had to personally hand out these precious snacks house to house. This was unbearably cruel!

Fourth Uncle, you've gone too far, I will fight you...

Unfortunately, after Wang Shouzhe finished speaking, he had already disappeared before her.

Leaving behind a young girl holding several books, lost in the wind.

...

Wang Shouzhe returned to his own courtyard and took a minor rest. The back and forth trips to the Hundred Islands Guard had left him physically and mentally exhausted.

Fortunately, the danger was over. As long as Old Ancestor Longyan recovers, the Ping'an Wang Family would have a solid foundation.

A silent night.

The next day, Wang Shouzhe met with Grandmother Gongsun Hui once. He reported what needed to be reported, and warehoused what needed to be warehoused. In general, the large family's accounts mustn't be chaotic; otherwise, various undesirable problems would occur.

Among all these surprising events and gains, Gongsun Hui was also shocked while doing the accounting. Why did every return of Shouzhe bring unexpected surprises?

"Grandmother, I am without a doubt the first in line." Wang Shouzhe laughed, "As for resources, I plan to give myself a little luxury. The supply of Spirit Food each month must be double what it was before, and the Little Pei Yuan Dans would go from one a month to three a month. I also need one Cultivation Pill each month, and for now, I will use one Spirit Stone."

With this, Wang Shouzhe's resource consumption had reached a lavish and extravagant level. Just the Spirit Rice alone was fifteen kilograms a month, and the Spirit Fish and Spirit Meat were also fifteen kilograms each.

Adding up all the medical consumption, not counting the Spirit Stone, the cultivation resources would reach eight to nine hundred Qian Gold for one year.

Normally, after he advanced to the Qi Refinement stage, the budget for his annual cultivation resources would only be a little over two hundred Qian Gold. Now, he is directly throwing four times towards it! Four to five times the resources but it would not let Wang Shouzhe cultivate at four to five times the speed.

This involved the principle of diminishing marginal effect. At most, he could only be faster than before by a little more than double. With the aid of the Spirit Stone, at most he'd be quicker by a bit, but definitely not reaching three times the original speed.

Even a regular Profound Martial family, when training their direct-line heir who is the first in line and aiming for the Spiritual Platform Realm, would definitely not be this extravagant.

With such a request, even Gongsun Hui widened her eyes in surprise, "Generally speaking, you are entitled to that many cultivation resources given your merit, Wang Shouzhe. However, I'm afraid those elders accustomed to frugality might object. But it doesn't matter, with the backing of Old Ancestor Longyan, nobody will dare to gossip."

The family is everyone's family, not solely owned by him, the clan leader, Wang Shouzhe. Therefore, the rest of the elders in the family naturally have a say.

Nevertheless, Wang Shouzhe didn't care. Given his capabilities, this family would gradually enter a transformative phase. Besides, if they started implementing a contributory system, in terms of contributions, Old Ancestor Longyan would be the first, and he would be the second.

Moreover, he believed his future contributions would surpass that of Old Ancestor Longyan.

Taking up so many resources was not out of greed, but he simply didn't want to have to wait until his middle-aged years to have a chance to challenge the Spirit Platform Realm. Most importantly, this mysterious magical world was too dangerous. If he kept recklessly exploring with his current cultivation level, problems were bound to occur sooner or later.

Thus, it was safer to stay in the family and hasten his cultivation progress to the Spirit Platform Realm for some self-defense capabilities.

After settling this matter, Wang Shouzhe asked again, "Mother, how is the insect pest situation coming along?"

He had left the Changning Guard for ten days and was somewhat behind in terms of intelligence. The situation over at the Hundred Islands Guard was different, very few fields had been opened up for cultivation, perhaps due to geographical isolation, and they have not suffered from a disaster.

However, a shortage of food was imminent, even the Hundred Islands Guard would be affected by the food shortage.

"The situation is terrible." Gongsun Hui said solemnly, "With the exception of a small part of the families, most of them have seen a decrease in food production. But the hardest hit are the farmers in every city, town and family power range. Their ability to resist disaster is too weak, resulting in a general reduction of around 70%."

Wang Shouzhe frowned slightly, "Although a 70% reduction in production is a devastating loss, with the combination of stored food and new food, the farmers should be able to hold out until the next rice harvest, right? They surely can't be worse off than the tenant farmers."

"You do not understand, Shouzhe." Explained Gongsun Hui, "Let me begin by talking about tenant farmers, their families usually consist of one to six or seven people. Taking a typical tenant farmer with a family of three, calculating by two labor forces of husband and wife, they should be able to cultivate twenty acres of land, the total annual value of rice and wheat is about 600 copper coins.

Among which, the insecticide powder costs about 40 copper coins, oxen, farm tools, grain seeds amortization cost about 20 copper coins, the Prominent Family's farmland levy is based on a four-tax system, i.e., each of the town, guard, county and country levies a tax, which requires 80 copper coins for 20 acres of fertile land.

Thus, the remainder is about 460 copper coins, which need to be divided with the master family in a split of three to seven, meaning the tenant farmer can profit 138 copper coins."

"For a family of three tenant farmers, their annual income is slightly over one Qian Gold, after daily expenses, not much is left." Wang Shouzhe touched his nose, somewhat surprised. He had calculated the income from the land before, but he had not carefully calculated the income of the tenant farmers.

"The reason why the tenant farmers are stronger in risk resistance is because there is the Xuanwu Prominent Family backing them." Said Gongsun Hui, "In order to stabilize the tenant farming operation, the master family would guarantee a minimum income for the tenant farmers, even if they harvest nothing, they would still have an income of 60 copper coins. This allows them to farm with ease."

Of course, this income is not purely Qian Gold. But the account value of the distributed materials and Qian Gold combined.

"Furthermore, tenant farmers usually raise a small amount of poultry like chickens, ducks, geese, etc., and grow some fruits and vegetables in front of and behind their houses.

These will be supplied to our prominent family, the pure income from which can add up to 20 or 30 copper coins in a year." Gongsun Hui patiently explained, "During farming slack seasons, we would organize tenant farmers to carry out tasks such as land reclamation, river dredging, house construction, riverbank reinforcement, etc., and they will also receive about 20 copper coins for these tasks.

Therefore, a normal three-person tenant farm household can earn one hundred and eighty or ninety copper coins a year, and even in a year of disaster they can still earn over a hundred copper coins."

Having heard this, Wang Shouzhe nodded thoughtfully, "It seems that the lives of the tenant farmers are quite stable, after all, they have the backing of the master family. Even in a year of disaster, if

they tighten their belts they can still get by. If it's a bumper year, and if they are frugal, they can even save some copper coins."

"But it's different for the self-cultivating farmers." Gongsun Hui said, "Like the tenant farmer family I mentioned earlier, a self-cultivating farmer with twenty acres of land would only earn 90 copper coins this season if they suffer a 70% reduction in production. One season of oxen rental and seeds would take 10 copper coins, insecticide powder would take 20 copper coins.

The tax is based on a five-tax system, with the Prominent Family, town, guard, county, and state each taking a tax. Now is the summer tax season, twenty acres of land require a tax payment of 50 copper coins. How much can they have left?"

As mentioned earlier, the local Xuanwu Prominent Family has the duty to maintain peace and protect the land. They must deal with bandits, fierce beasts, and serious incidents. At the same time, they must also assist the local garrison in collecting taxes. Therefore, the tax on the fertile land within the range of power also requires 1 tax from the Prominent Family.

However, the current range of power of the Wang Family is rather small, apart from approximately six hundred households of tenant farmers in their own farms, there are just over a thousand households mostly, the total number of excellent farming lands within the jurisdiction of civilians is still far less than twenty thousand acres.

The total annual tax collected is only a hundred or so Qian Golds, and there are still a lot of expenses, so it can only be said to be better than nothing.

"So, are you saying that those self-cultivating farmers have more or less no harvest this season?" Wang Shouzhe frowned slightly, "If that's the case, should we still collect taxes?"

"Taxes are the foundation of the state. The town, guard, county, and state are all supported by tax revenues. And the land tax is the biggest source of tax. Without it, all levels of institutions would struggle to maintain themselves." Gongsun Hui explained, "For this summer harvest, the state tax in Longzuo County might be waived.

Still, inevitably, some self-cultivated farming families who have mismanaged their affairs will face significant difficulties, and at such times, some Xuanwu Prominent Families will start to monopolize the land."

"Like the Zhao Clan and Liu Clan, they suffered terrible losses and damages this time, to the point where their eyes seem red. Various signs indicate they intend to seize the opportunity to annex some land." Gongsun Hui sneered, "Wolves are wolves, even if they don a Prominent Family's skin, they can never hide their insatiable greed."

Chapter 58 Wang Mei, The Unremarkable Head of Household_1

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The worst affected by this locust disaster were naturally those low-ranking Profound Martial clans who had no means to combat the disaster.

Like the Zhao and Liu Clans.

A rough calculation would illustrate just how much they lost. Using the previous examples, a 70% crop failure on twenty acres of land would only yield 90 Copper Coins profit. The tenant farmer would take away 30 Copper Coins as a baseline, then 40 Copper Coins would go to taxes, 10 Copper Coins for oxen, farming tools, and seed amortization, and 20 Copper Coins for insecticide powder.

Just these expenses alone left the Zhao and Liu Clans not just without any grain harvest for the season, but they had to spend 10 Copper Coins for every twenty acres of land.

For the Liu Clan, their various farming estates totaled over ten thousand acres of fertile land. Therefore, not only did they not make a single shilling, they had to pay out 50 Qian Gold.

This sum of Qian Gold did not even include other expenses like the costs of supervising the farming process, which made the total deficit exceed one hundred Qian Gold.

It might sound like losing one hundred Qian Gold was not a big deal, but in reality, they were bleeding money from this. In a normal year, those ten thousand acres would bring them a net profit of eight or nine hundred Qian Gold for the season. The loss and the lack of profit meant they were now a thousand Qian Gold short.

Under normal circumstances, for a Prominent Family like the Liu Clan, their annual expenditure was massive. If they could save up five or six hundred Qian Gold a year, it was a feat. This loss of a thousand Qian Gold eroded two years of their savings.

"There's another piece of detrimental news that you're probably not aware of, Wang Shouzhe." Gongsun Hui continued, "The Government Office of Changning Guard City has issued an order to all the Prominent Families. This summer's taxes cannot be paid in Qian Gold but must be paid in actual grain."

Hearing this news, Wang Shouzhe drew in a sharp breath of surprise. This pushed the weaker Profound Martial families into a dead-end. In the past, they could choose to pay taxes either in grain or in Gold, as long as the equivalent value was met.

However, this year, all the families were short on grain. If they had to pay in actual grain, it would be adding insult to injury for the weaker Profound Martial families. This, of course, did not include the Wang Clan and some of their relative allies who managed to maintain their crop yields and were still able to afford the grain tax.

The ones truly affected were prominent clans like those in Ping'an, such as the Liu and Zhao Clans. Their grain supplies were already sparse. Now they were forced to pay grain taxes, which would deplete their reserves. When cornered, they would have no choice but to shift the pressure onto the commoners and even the tenant farmers.

"I can understand the government's command." Wang Shouzhe said gravely, "Given the overall grain shortage in the region of Changning Guard City, if the government did not issue this order to convene grain from the families, the city would likely descend into chaos."

"Are you planning to watch the commotion unfold within the Zhao and Liu Clans, Shouzhe?" Gongsun Hui asked. "The land annexation will inevitably trigger chaos, and it isn't risk-free for Zhao and Liu clans to take advantage."

"No!"

Wang Shouzhe's eyes were filled with icy resolve, "Ping'an is the land that our Old Ancestor Zhou Xuan claimed by slaying ferocious beasts, and the foundation he built painstakingly over a hundred years. How could I stand by and watch it be ruined by the two jackals? They want to play the land annexation game amidst the chaos? They have to get past me, Wang Shouzhe!

This time, I am going to strike against the Zhao and Liu Clans and show them just what I am capable of."

"Shouzhe, you do have grandeur. I wasn't wrong about you." Gongsun Hui's eyes twinkled, "No matter your decision, I will support you. At this critical moment, I will try to invite Old Ancestor Ming to our Wang Clan as a guest."

"Old Ancestor Ming?"

Wang Shouzhe's face lit up, "Mother, you can actually invite Old Ancestor Ming?"

In dealings between Prominent Families, figures of the Old Ancestor's level generally refrained from intervening in disputes between other families, so as to avoid triggering larger scale altercations among allied families.

Gongsun Hui laughed, "Did you forget? The eldest legitimate daughter of the fourth generation of our Wang Clan, Wang Lingdie, married into the Gongsun Clan to become the Lady of the house. Old Ancestor Ming is her biological son, with half of his bloodline coming from our Wang Clan. Thus, he naturally has close ties with our Wang clan.

Also, do not forget, Old Ancestor Ming is my biological grandfather. I paid him a visit when I returned to my maternal home a while ago. He deeply regrets the incident of Old Ancestor Longyan. He lamented that he was only at the ninth level of the Qi Refinement Realm back then and received the news too late."

After a pause, Gongsun Hui added, "Old Ancestor Ming also heard about you from your maternal grandfather and spoke very highly of you. He wanted to see you when there was a chance. I believe he would not refuse my invitation to visit our Wang Clan this time."

"Good, good, good, this makes things much easier." Wang Shouzhe was overjoyed. He had thought about Old Ancestor Longyan whose health hadn't fully recovered and wondered whether he could deter the opposition.

If Old Ancestor Ming were to come and stay for a few days, would the old ancestors of the Liu and Zhao Clans dare to make any wild moves?

After talking with Gongsun Hui for a while, Wang Shouzhe bid her farewell and left.

Planning to strike at the Zhao and Liu Clans simultaneously was a mammoth task. It required careful planning and scheming, as it was necessary to prevent the size of this move being rendered blind.

Intelligence!

It was always the foundation of warfare.

Wang Shouzhe called Wang Zhong over. Although Wang Zhong's strength was not high, being only at the High Level Four of Qi Refinement, he had shown himself to be quite resourceful and meticulous in his work.

"Greetings, Family Head." Wang Zhong bowed upon entering.

"You may rise." Wang Shouzhe said, "You didn't have the chance to reunite properly with your family before I asked you to work again. It must be tough."

"Serving the Family Head is not tiring at all." Wang Zhong seemed particularly spirited, his eyes shining with excitement at the mention of work.

It wasn't merely because the Family Head was generous, but also the fact that every action he took was powerful and decisive, showing promising signs of prosperity for the Wang family under his leadership. The relationship between the head of household and the family was one that thrived and suffered together.

Wang Shouzhe smiled, and told him what he needed to be done.

Wang Zhong deliberated seriously for a moment before saying, "Family Head, intelligence work is not my strong suit. I would like to recommend another family member to you - Wang Mei. She is only twenty-three years old, yet her cultivation base has reached Level Three of the Vital Energy Refining Realm.

More importantly, she has a delicate mind and keen observational skills, and she is very adept at disguising and infiltrating to collect clues."

Wang Shouzhe didn't give a definite answer, instead, he sent someone to summon Wang Mei, wanting to assess her personally.

Not long after, Wang Mei arrived. She greeted with sincere respect and fear, "Greetings to the Family Head."

Wang Shouzhe gave her a once-over. Her appearance was unremarkable, almost forgettable as soon as you turned your head. However, her figure was quite good, well-proportioned with long, strong legs, a promising indication of physical prowess.

He immediately showed interest, saying, "No need for formalities. Wang Zhong mentioned that you're good at undercover work and have a keen mind. Can you elaborate?"

"In return to the Family Head," Wang Mei replied evenly. "I indeed excel in undercover work."

"Oh~ You seem quite confident." Wang Shouzhe said with a smile, "Could you give me a demonstration?"

Wang Mei agreed, but she would need to do some preparatory work.

Wang Shouzhe found this interesting and insisted she prepare thoroughly. After she left, Wang Shouzhe sobered up and began to plot his plan.

The plan wasn't anything complex, just a small commercial maneuver. Such events were constantly happening on Earth.

But Wang Shouzhe began to plan meticulously as this was a opportune moment and he couldn't afford to miss it.

The steps of the plan started to take shape...

"Greetings to the Family Head." A robust male voice rang out.

"Dis--" Wang Shouzhe turned his head abruptly, only to see a stranger standing there greeting him with a hand held in salute. The man was not particularly tall, but imposingly solemn. His face clean and fair, making him look handsome, possessing an aura of scholarly military official.

"Who are you?" Wang Shouzhe didn't remember having such a member in the Wang family and raised his brows in question.

"Family Head, it's I, Wang Mei." The man suddenly spoke in a woman's voice, causing Wang Shouzhe to shudder in surprise as the shift in atmosphere was so drastic. Feeling the goosebumps, he responded, "This skill of yours is truly unique. Very interesting indeed."

When the Family Head praised her, Wang Mei filled with joy and said, "Please wait a moment, Family Head, I'll change into another disguise."

Two hours passed.

When Wang Mei appeared again, Wang Shouzhe, Wang Zhong, and Wang Gui were all stupefied.

In front of them stood a graceful young woman. She was dressed in a thin gauze, her feet clad in lotus-patterned shoes. Holding a vintage floral umbrella, she swayed with every step she took, emitting a hidden fragrance.

The most surprising thing was her face, which had become prettier. Her red lips and rosy cheeks coupled with her hair tied up presented her as a true beauty.

"Respectful greetings, Family Head." Her voice softened as she bowed.

"Gulp." Wang Gui, a young servant, swallowed audibly, his eyes glued to her.

Wang Shouzhe, however, had seen much and quickly recovered. At the same time, he was amazed at the mastery of Wang Mei's makeup skills, which were no less impressive than those he had seen on makeup apps in his previous life.

Wang Mei's makeup skills were comparable to that of those freakishly talented makeup artists on makeup apps, which completely shocked Wang Shouzhe. Ping'an Town was the countryside of the

countryside. How many of the youths from the Liu, Zhao, and other clans had seen such a spectacle?

Surely, with a little effort from Wang Mei, intelligence would follow right after.

Chapter 59 Great Demon King Wang Shouzhe_1

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This woman has enormous potential for cultivation.

Moreover, she is only twenty-three years old and has already reached the Vital Energy Refining Realm's Level Three. Although her cultivation base is not as superior as those with the bloodline of the clan, the difference is not significant. Therefore, her talent is not weak, and she must be extraordinarily diligent.

Wang Zhong, standing by the side, chuckled after coming out of his shock: "Wang Mei, I have seen your disguise art before, but never as impressive as it is today. Well done."

"Uncle Zhong, it's just that I've always had ordinary looks, thus developed a liking for makeup as a child and used it for my entertainment. This simple skill is nothing worthy of the stage," Wang Mei, with her melodious voice and dazzling eyes, interrupted Wang Zhong, "it's nothing more than a parlor trick."

Wang Zhong's heartbeat quickened, and he turned away, breathless, "Wang Mei, you shouldn't speak so, I already have a wife and children."

If he, a man in his thirties or forties, wasn't very familiar with Wang Mei, he would doubtless have succumbed.

Wang Shouzhe chuckled, wondering if Wang Zhong was suggesting he would accept her advances if he didn't have a wife and children.

"Very well, I'll assign this mission to Wang Mei." Wang Shouzhe coughed and continued solemnly, "Wang Zhong, you have always been steady. You will be in charge of the overall intelligence operation. You can request personnel from the family for assistance. You must take care of Wang Mei's safety, and don't take excessive risks to complete the mission."

"Understood," Wang Zhong responded with a solemn bow, serious as ever.

"Wang Mei," Wang Shouzhe addressed, "Your disguise art, though seemingly trivial, will prove to be a powerful tool if used well. However, you should lay off the excessive makeup and avoid overdramatizing your feminine fragility. While this could deceive naive youngsters, it might fail miserably against the wily old foxes of the martial arts world."

Then, Wang Shouzhe shared some theoretical principles he had learned from his last life, casually sharing tips on the cultivation of an elegant lady and how to appear unfathomably deep through seemingly accidental behaviour.

How to resist while seeming to accept, to accept while seeming to resist, to stay close yet distant, to maintain a distance yet appear close!

In Wang Shouzhe's second life, such things were plentiful. There were even special training classes for the cultivation of elite ladies, and worse yet, various PUA (Pick-Up Artist) trainings and practices.

Having been exposed to these principles, his understanding was much more advanced and extensive than Wang Mei's.

As Wang Mei listened, her eyes gleamed brighter and brighter. The Family Head had opened up a new world before her, with vast opportunities awaiting her.

However, Wang Zhong and Wang Gui became increasingly terrified as they listened, shuddering with fear.

If Wang Mei could indeed accomplish as the Family Head said, would there be any hope left for men? Would she not be toying with them, leaving them at her mercy?

"Also, remember one more thing. You can't let your targets achieve their goals," Wang Shouzhe advised, "Firstly, you are a member of the Wang family. I wouldn't want you to sacrifice yourself to this extent. Secondly, whatever men can't possess is often what they find most beautiful, allowing them endless space for imagination. This rule might come in handy for your future operations."

"I shall abide by the Family Head's teachings," Wang Mei responded with respect. It was not without reason that he was the Family Head. His deep understanding of human nature and far-sighted plans was truly remarkable. And she was touched by his caring considerations for her safety.

After receiving their assignments, Wang Zhong and Wang Mei excused themselves.

"Wang Gui, go call Wang Yong, Wang Wu, and Wang An," Wang Shouzhe commanded.

To his surprise, Wang Gui, usually a sycophant, remained silent, standing dumbstruck as if his mind was occupied with the memory of Wang Mei, which provoked Wang Shouzhe to reprimand him, "Show some ambition, would you?"

"Family Head, my apologies," Wang Gui quickly begged for mercy and then voiced his expectation, "Family Head, do you think there is any chance between me and Mei? Considering our status in the family..."

"Hmm," Wang Shouzhe sneered, shooting him a stare, "Wake up. I can tell that Wang Mei is not the kind to settle for a housewife's life. Her ambitions are far greater than you can imagine. You aren't capable of taming her. If you want to settle down, I'll help you explore potential matches from the side lineage of the Ancestor's bloodline. Now, quit dallying and get to work."

"Yes, Family Head," Wang Gui responded promptly, then scurried off to perform his duties.

In the meantime, Wang Shouzhe brewed himself a pot of Spiritual Tea and leisurely sipped it, calming his mind. To his surprise, such an enchanting woman as Wang Mei emerged among the household troops.

If he had not taken over as the head of the family, and the relatively conservative Wang Dingyue had remained in charge, Wang Mei's unusual talent would probably have remained hidden, even her talent might not have been discovered at all.

But since Wang Shouzhe had discovered such a rare gem, he could not let her talents go to waste. To deal with the young disciples of the Liu and Zhao clans was just a practice run for Wang Mei to sharpen her skills.

After this round, he would have to build a thorough intelligence agency centered around Wang Mei, a secret agency belonging to him.

However, it's too early to discuss this matter as it depends on her performance this time.

He decided to set the topic aside temporarily.

Later, several household troops, including Wang Yong, reported and received assignments one after another, busying themselves with their respective duties.

Meanwhile, Wang Shouzhe had some free time.

As the Family Head, he, of course, could not and should not intervene in everything. Personal involvement in all matters would merely undermine their abilities and restrict his resources.

Just at that moment,

A voice came from outside the door: "Is the Family Head in? This is Wang Xiaoyu, the maid from Miss Luoyi's room."

"Come in," Wang Shouzhe said.

From the side hall entrance, a young maid of about eighteen or nineteen years old came in. She was quite attractive, far more so than Wang Mei. But compared to the allure of Wang Mei, who had used dark magic, they were not on the same level.

One had to admit that one of the three major dark arts - the art of make-up - was indeed terrifying.

Wang Xiaoyu dare not lift her head to look at Wang Shouzhe, she respectfully said, "Xiaoyu pays respect to the Family Head. Miss Luoyi sent me over to ask if you have time to dine with her, she mentioned that it's been some days since she last saw you."

Wang Luo Yi.

She was Wang Shouzhe's full-blooded sister. Within his memory, the two of them had lost their mother at a young age, thus fostered a deep bond, clinging to each other for comfort.

Suddenly, a wave of longing surged in his heart. He nodded before saying, "Go back and tell sister, I will come over once I finish getting ready."

Wang Xiaoyu took the order and left.

Under Wang Gui's service, Wang Shouzhe washed his face, straightened his clothes, and took a glance at his own reflection in a large bronze mirror. Hmm, his appearance seemed quite heroic and exceptional, exuding youthful vigor while also possessing a sense of restraint, it was a good look.

If he had this appearance and temperament on Earth, Wang Shouzhe suspected he could make a living just with his looks.

Wang Shouzhe grabbed a few pieces of Spiritual Tea, a few sea delicacies brought back by Hundred Islands Guard, and some golden pearls infused with slight spiritual energy. With gifts in hand, Wang Gui carried them as he leisurely walked away.

The Main Residence, initially planned and built by Old Ancestor Zhou Xuan with long-term considerations, was large. The living quarters of his sister Wang Luoyi were rather quiet and secluded, it would take more than fifteen minutes to walk there.

There were many plants in the residence. It was verdant everywhere, particularly some ancient types of trees that were planted previously which had grown into towering trees after more than a hundred years. Their canopies provided continuous shade, providing a cool environment even under the sun.

This fully embodied the principle of one generation planting trees and the next generation enjoying the shade.

The deeper into the residence towards the mountain range you went, the quieter it got. This section was mostly occupied by the younger girls and boys of the household. Besides the ones who were too young and lived with their parents, the rest lived independently.

Beyond the courtyard, there were small ponds, rockeries, flower gardens and so forth. Pavilions and corridors were scattered around, the scenery was quite elegant.

Wang Shouzhe was taking a leisurely stroll, enjoying the rare tranquility just then.

Suddenly.

Noisy sounds came from the front.

"Wang Shouliao, you're doomed if you lose!" A somewhat domineering voice of a little girl sounded.

"Brother Five, come on, I'm rooting for you, it'd be too embarrassing if you lose to Brother Six." Another familiar voice of a girl spoke, well, it was Wang Luo Jing's voice.

Meanwhile.

The sounds of punches and kicks colliding, impacts of strong qi made by the two girls could be heard.

Are Fifth and Sixth having a sparring match.

Among the male descendants of the Ping'an Wang family with the moniker of 'Shou', there were a total of seven, from the eldest Wang Shouxin to the youngest Wang Shouye. Wang Shouzhe was only the fourth in line, with three younger brothers behind him.

Currently, the two sparring were his Fifth brother, Wang Shou Yong and Sixth brother, Wang Shouliao.

Such was the way of life in notable families. The older the family lineage, the greater the age difference within a generation.

Wang Shouzhe gave a soft chuckle. He wouldn't join the bustling scene as it might make them feel constrained.

He was about to discreetly slip away when he heard Wang Licui, the eldest girl, saying, "Wang Shou Yong, Wang Shouliao, have you guys skipped meals? Both of you are limp and soft, what kind of men are you?"

"Big girl, don't mess around," Wang Shou Yong called out, "If you think you can do better, go ahead!"

"Exactly, Big girl, you should refer to us as uncles!" Wang Shouliao, while still fighting, chimed in, "We're senior to you."

"Hmph, what use is there being a senior? I gave you my dried fish for free, and yet there's no increase in your strength," Wang Licui sighed heavily, "Sigh, how are you guys supposed to defeat the Great Demon King Fourth Uncle in this state?"

Fourth Uncle...

Great Demon King?

Wang Shouzhe touched his nose in confusion, when did he get this nickname?

Chapter 60 Brothers and Sisters are all very spirited_1

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"Miss, maybe we should reconsider." came the slightly shaky voice of Wang Shou Yong, "Fourth brother is quite formidable. Even big brother might not necessarily be able to best him."

"Reconsider? Wang Shou Yong, when you were munching on my dried fish, did you say reconsider then?" Wang Licui chimed in, mimicking a mature tone, "You ate my food, that makes you my person now. I warn you, if you disobey me, I'll spill about our pact to Fourth Uncle."

"Wang Licui, you're being unreasonable. When you gave us the dried fish, you never mentioned it was to take down Fourth brother." Another young man, Wang Shouliao, chimed in, his voice nearly on the verge of tears, "And Fourth brother almost got admitted into the Purple Abode Academic Palace, who can beat him?"

"Idiot, it's not like we're asking you to fight him one on one," Wang Licui scoffed, "We lure the big baddy into a trap and swarm him all at once, covering his head with a sack. He'd be so confused, he wouldn't know who hit him."

Wang Shouzhe was both amused and exasperated. This mischievous bunch seemed to be conspiring to beat him up.

And it was Wang Licui, the innocent little rabbit when she was in front of him, who was now rallying a group of little brats to retaliate against him.

The sudden shift in behavior took him by surprise, proving that her title of the troublesome big girl was not unwarranted.

"Wang Luo Jing, you're acting suspicious. You're not planning to betray us, are you?" A dominating voice echoed, presumably belonging to a sassy little girl, "The big sister already mentioned that the fourth brother has a pile of books ready for us to read. If we don't finish, he'll glare and scare the life out of us. You may like reading, but I certainly don't."

Wang Shouzhe recognized the voice, it was his third uncle's daughter, Wang Luoqiu. She was just eleven years old but already on the second level of the Qi Refinement state. He had been meaning to meet and encourage her but had not had the chance.

"Wang Luoqiu, I also don't want to read, but I don't think your scheme could take down our fourth brother." Wang Luo Jing replied, "He's much fiercer than you can handle."

"Luo Jing, don't you have an insectarium?" Wang Luoqiu suggested, "You can release the insects to sting him."

"No way, no way." Wang Luo Jing immediately shook her head.

Wang Shouzhe's face darkened. What kind of brothers and sisters were these? In order to get out of reading, they were actually plotting against their elder brother.

Thankfully, Wang Luo Jing still seemed to have some sense and respect for their fourth brother, which was somewhat reassuring.

"If we want to defeat fourth brother, we will need to hatch the second batch of Purple Crystal Spirit Bees." Wang Luo Jing calculated, "We have no hope of victory with a frontal attack. Luoqiu, you can pretend to sprain your ankle. Then I'll take the opportunity to release the Purple Crystal Spirit Bees."

Given your young age, fourth brother will definitely rush to protect you first... and then fifth and sixth brother can rush forward with their sacks..."

Cold sweat began to trickle from Wang Shouzhe's temples.

What a vicious plan. What kind of siblings were these? Especially Wang Luo Jing! The Purple Crystal Spirit Beehive was bought by me, wasn't it?

Wait, she managed to raise the Purple Crystal Spirit Bees? Truly a little devil.

But these brothers and sisters and nieces were not like themselves in front of him. They all pretended to be obedient and well-behaved angels. However, the split second they were out of his sight, they became completely different.

Perhaps Ruotong was right. They shouldn't underestimate Wang Luo Jing. That little girl was eccentric from a young age and highly unlikely to be a harmless, demure girl.

"Luo Jing, you indeed have a plentiful supply of cunning ideas." the big girl Wang Licui praised, "I'll reward you with an extra pack of dried octopus later, and I'll tell you about the vast and magnificent sea, the grand and magnificent Jinsha Island City, and the story of how I was invincible in Jinsha Island City."

Wang Shouzhe's lips twitched. Well done, Wang Licui. I asked you to distribute the snacks evenly. However, you used these resources to form an alliance and plot against me!

You think you're invincible? What could a little girl like you possibly do? With your intelligence, you'll probably be outsmarted by Wang Luo Jing.

"But I'll say this in advance." Wang Luo Jing spoke up, "We just need fourth brother to sign a promise not to force us to study anymore. And we absolutely can't hit fourth brother's face. Fourth brother is so handsome, if we make his face swollen, he won't look good anymore."

He could no longer bear to listen.

Wang Shouzhe walked out with an amused smile: "Ah Luo Jing, I never realized that you cherish your fourth brother so much. I'm really warmed to the core."

"Ah?"

A group of kids who were hatching a plot against the 'big demon king' were suddenly dumbstruck. Their conspiracy had been overheard by the target himself and they were caught red-handed.

They were done for.

The most frightened among them were Wang Luo Jing and Wang Licui.

One of them was the mastermind and the other the planner, both were clearly up to no good.

"I'm greeting you now, Fourth Uncle, and I'll also say 'goodbye' now." Wang Licui's knees gave way, her neck retracted as she prepared to dash off.

Wang Luo Jing's face was pale as a sheet and she quietly hid behind Wang Shou Yong. Of the three girls, only the eleven-year-old Wang Luoqiu was staring wide-eyed at Wang Shouzhe. She seemed surprised by his appearance, but also somewhat defiant.

As for his brothers, Wang Shou Yong and Wang Shoulian, they seemed the most timid—ducking their heads and trembling. They had been raised with the strict code of the Wang family which was especially rigorous towards boys. Wang Shouzhe, being their brother and the leader of the direct line of the Wang Family, had the right to discipline them if he felt they disrespected him.

"Freeze!"

Wang Shouzhe said with a grin, "Wang Licui, Wang Luo Jing. Just remember, you may be able to outrun the monk, but you can't outrun the temple."

Both girls, one taller and the other shorter, glanced at each other and then obediently came back to Wang Shouzhe, looking as docile as quails.

"Fourth big brother, I swear I won't dare to do it again."

"Fourth Uncle~ boo hoo, I was just joking with you."

Wang Shouzhe ignored them and turned his gaze to Wang Shou Yong and Wang Shouliao, saying with a half-smile, "Shou Yong, Shouliao. You both seem to have a big problem with your fourth brother, don't you?"

Both brothers were scared and quickly waved their hands, "No, no, we usually admire our fourth brother the most." This was true, Wang Shouzhe was like a shining star among those of the same generation, and they admired him from the bottom of their hearts.

"Then why do you want to throw a sack over me this time? Did anyone put you up to it?" When Wang Shouzhe asked this, he felt a bit amused. A sack? What a terrific scheme these guys came up with.

"No, no one ordered us." They both shook their heads vigorously. Although they were scared, they still said, "This is all our own idea. If fourth brother wants to punish us, we are ready to accept it."

That sounded reasonable, at least somewhat representative of the Wei family's responsibility. Just as he was about to speak, Wang Luoqiu, who was watching him with a frown on her face, threw herself on him: "Fourth brother, you're being a bully."

The little girl was certainly feisty.

"Luoqiu." Wang Shouzhe laughed. "Tell me, how is your fourth brother bullying you?"

"I don't want to read those books anymore, they're so annoying." Wang Luoqiu said with a headache, "Could you stop forcing me to read, fourth brother?"

"It's okay if you don't want to read." Wang Shouzhe nodded.

"Really?" Wang Luoqiu said with a mix of surprise and joy, "Fourth brother, you're the best."

"Don't get too excited yet, there's a condition for not wanting to read." Wang Shouzhe said with a smile, looking at his four younger siblings and one niece. If I were to force you to do your

homework as an older brother or as the clan leader, I'm afraid you wouldn't take it to heart. How about we make a deal? Each year, you can challenge me once, openly or secretly. If you win, I'll go with you.

If you lose, you can't skip any of your schoolwork for a whole year."

"Okay, it's a deal." Wang Luoqiu's eyes lit up, "I'll accept on behalf of everyone."

Then, the others looked at her with reproachful eyes: Who asked you to accept on our behalf? Without fourth brother's precautions, we might have a small chance if we strategize and plan. But now that he's prepared, how on earth are we going to challenge him?

"Buck up, don't be so pessimistic." Wang Luoqiu said, "Isn't it just studying hard and cultivating if we lose? We can win again next year."

Such confidence made Wang Shouzhe look at her with admiration.

This little girl's courage was admirable, no wonder she had already reached the second level of the Vital Energy Refining Realm at such a young age.

If she maintains this momentum, with the family's current financial resources, even if she isn't as good as Old Ancestor Longyan, she's sure to be a powerful woman.

Despite the unexpected encounter, Wang Shouzhe felt that these younger sisters were quite energetic.

But his two younger brothers needed more improvement. They were not strong-willed enough and a bit dull. They needed some polishing.

If a clan wants to thrive, it can't rely solely on him, Wang Shouzhe. The more excellent talents and up-and-coming future geniuses the better, only then can the clan truly prosper.

"Hehe, let me teach you a lesson." Wang Shouzhe said with a smile, "If you ever want to plot anything, make sure to find a quiet and safe place."

"Fourth brother, I was wrong." Wang Luo Jing, with tears in her eyes, moved closer in grievance. "You're so good to me, but because I don't like reading... boo hoo~"

"Alright, alright, I'm not blaming you." Wang Shouzhe really felt for Luo Jing. Her father died early, leaving her and her mother alone. Even though the clan took care of them, they still lacked a father's love.

"Then can fourth brother forgive me?" Wang Luo Jing asked hopefully.

"What forgiveness? I didn't blame you in the first place." Wang Shouzhe ruffled her hair, comforting her, "Actually, I think it's normal that you have your own unique thoughts and are a bit rebellious. You didn't really want to hurt your fourth brother."

Is that so? Wang Licui was stunned. She quickly walked up, pulling a face of insincere apology on her chubby face, "Fourth Uncle, I am also a bit rebellious, you definitely don't blame me either, right?"

"Beat it!"

Wang Shouzhe glared at her angrily, scaring Wang Licui to step back several steps. Covering her thumping heart, she felt regretful. How can Wang Luo Jing get away with acting spoiled...

"Fourth brother, thank you." Wang Luo Jing, with her eyes half-closed, leapt into Wang Shouzhe's arms, "Anyway, Luo Jing swears, I will, I will protect fourth brother for my whole life."

"Hehe~ Luo Jing, your words really touch me and I believe you." Wang Shouzhe laughed, "But can you stop throwing strange creatures at me while you're clinging to me? Your beauty trap doesn't work on me."

As he spoke, he flicked his finger, and a red-headed centipede over a foot long was expelled from his arms before it could take effect. After writhing a few times on the ground, it lost its life.