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Chapter 21: Emperor Longchang Appears! The Appearance of the Thousand Autumn Spiritual Treasure

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In truth, this can be considered a normal human reaction. The individual in question is none other than a Great Heavenly Proud, the direct disciple of the head of the Purple Abode Academic Palace in Longzuo—a remarkably honorable status, isn't it?

They show regard for the old bloodline connection and joyfully acknowledge kinship, but then Wang An Nan comes along and says, "I am your grandfather!" That's not just taking advantage of the Great Heavenly Proud, it's an arrogant attitude akin to a city dweller looking down on rural relatives...

Under normal circumstances, the elders would at most scold Wang An Nan for his lack of decorum and for not maintaining the image that befits the main lineage of the Great Qian Wang Clan.

But the problem is, the other party is Wang Liyao! Her potential is boundless, and so long as she doesn't fall prematurely, at the very least, she will take charge of the Purple Abode Academic Palace in Longzuo in the future.

And if her luck is at its peak, who knows, she might even soar to the heavens with the Green Phoenix's wings... becoming one of the two most powerful figures in the Great Qian Land!

Such a figure, even the prestigious Ding Duke's Mansion, has only one Divine Power Seed, Wang Zouhui, who could barely compare with her.

For such a Great Heavenly Proud, isn't it natural to have a bit of a temper?

Fortunately, the current Family Head of the Great Qian Wang Clan, Wang Yuchang, is also an ambitious individual, determined to revive and change the declining fortunes of the Wang family.

Right then, he took a stance. He clasped his hands together and bowed deeply to Wang Liyao, "Yao'er, about this matter..."

However, before he even finished bowing, Wang Liyao quickly stepped forward to support Wang Yuchang's arm, repeatedly saying, "Master Yuchang, you absolutely must not! You are an Old Ancestor of the 'Yu' generation, I cannot bear such a bow."

In a clan, seniority is paramount.

Even though Wang Liyao is a Great Heavenly Proud with a dignified status, if she casually accepts a bow from Wang Yuchang, it will surely make the entire Changning Wang Clan a laughingstock.

Then, rumors will undoubtedly spread that Wang Liyao is arrogant and ignorant of proper conduct, which may even affect her future path as a Saint.

Wang Yuchang, of course, was also putting on an act.

The moment he heard Wang Liyao call him 'Old Ancestor,' his heart leaped with joy, and he immediately climbed up the pole, grabbing Wang Liyao's arm, both excited and regretful as he said, "Yao'er, when I first heard you were related by blood to our Ding Duke's Mansion, I was ecstatic. I personally verified our family tree and lineage records while also ordering a cleanup of the ancestral home."

"I was about to send for you to welcome you back to the Main Residence. Yet who would have expected that outrageous brat, how dare he, how dare he..." As Wang Yuchang spoke, he grew angrier, his face reddening, and his body trembling.

Wang Shida trembled with fright and quickly brought out a thorny vine, lashing it furiously at Wang An Nan on the stretcher, all the while cursing, "I'll beat you to death, you wretched brat. How did I, Wang Shida, give birth to such a scourge? Enough, enough, as of today, I consider one less son born..."

Wang An Nan screamed miserably, feeling extreme injustice in his heart. Father, wasn't I once your pride? Just putting on a show would have been enough, did you have to hit so hard...

"Grand Aunt Liyao, I was wrong! Please, forgive me this once."

He knew that the only one who could resolve the issue was the one who caused it. In his agonizing pain, he could only plead with Wang Liyao for mercy.

But Wang Liyao didn't pay him the slightest attention and continued to speak politely with Wang Yuchang, "Old Ancestor Yuchang, I'm touched by your sentiments. However, I'm quite comfortable staying in the White Cloud Tower, and moving back and forth would be a hassle."

"How can that be acceptable?" Wang Yuchang said sternly, "Yao'er, you are of our Ding Duke's Mansion bloodline. You've come to the National Capital, how can you stay in an inn? If word of this gets out, people will ridicule our Ding Duke's Mansion for lacking propriety."

They're chatting now?

Wang Shida and his son, who were either hitting or being beaten, were both dumbstruck.

Miss Liyao, there's a child being beaten here, and before chatting with the Old Ancestor, could you not try to intervene?

But with the current situation, since Wang Liyao wasn't intervening, the beating had to continue. Wang Shida had no choice but to keep lashing and cursing, while Wang An Nan had to keep crying out miserably, wailing piteously.

Yet all this seemed to not disturb Wang Liyao at all. Seeing that the time was right, she gave Wang Yuchang a bow and said, "If that's the case, I will follow Old Ancestor Yuchang's arrangements."

"Very good, our family's Yao'er knows propriety and shows respect; I am deeply comforted," Wang Yuchang said, his dignified and handsome face showing complete delight, "Yao'er, rest assured, you can treat our family's ancestral home like your own. For all living expenses, you will be treated the same as our family's Divine Power Seed."

"Thank you for the love and care of the Old Ancestor," Wang Liyao gracefully bowed in thanks, "Once I have made some preparations and said my farewells to the Commandery Prince, I will follow the Old Ancestor home."

Going home?

"Very good, very good," Wang Yuchang's smile grew even broader, "then you go ahead with your arrangements, Yao'er. There's no rush, take your time."

No rush?

Wang An Nan's heart was shattering.

Old Ancestor, your own precious great-great-great-grandchild is almost being beaten to death, and you're still not in a hurry? Grand Aunt Liyao's heart is ruthless, but Old Ancestor, your heart is even more so...

As Wang Liyao gracefully departed, the shouts and whip sounds of Wang Shida, as well as Wang An Nan's screams for mercy, continued unabated on the platform.

Among the onlooking crowd, many who were initially taking pleasure in the misfortune began to feel a hint of sympathy for Wang An Nan. Isn't this kid a bit too miserable? Haha~

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Forming an alliance with the Great Qian Wang Clan was indeed a crucial part of Shouzhe's next big plan.

However, he deeply understood "human nature"; if he directly approached them, even if Wang Liyao was the Great Heavenly Proud, such an action would inadvertently lower her status, making it easy for others to look down on her. Only by making them rack their brains to invite him back would they value and cherish the connection more.

After what felt like ages for Wang Annan and having endured a session of beating that lasted an entire incense stick's time.

Wang Liyao finally returned gracefully and saluted Wang Yuchang, "Old Ancestor, Liyao is prepared."

Behind her, follower Mo Wanqiu paced beside her, mimicking her every move.

Upon seeing that Wang Liyao was about to introduce Mo Wanqiu to the Family Head, Wang Annan genuinely felt like dying.

Please, no more introductions, no more chatting...

Immediately, his howling became even more plaintive and melodious, implying, "Aunt Liyao, if you don't save me now, I'm truly going to die... I'm really dying..."

"Eh... why are they still beating him?" Wang Liyao finally noticed and turned to look at the father and son duo of the Wang Shida, her eyes wide with surprise, then she "hastily" urged, "Shida, even if the child has made some minor mistakes, a few symbolic lashes should suffice. Why the need for such heavy punishment?"

The hearts of the two members of the Wang Shida tightened.

Aunt Liyao, don't your words feel a bit insincere? If you had spoken earlier, could we have beaten him for so long?

"Aunt Liyao is kind-hearted, but this little beast really deserves a beating. I will beat you to death, you little beast," Wang Shida could not simply stop just because he was advised to; following tradition, he began to lash out with even greater force.

"Enough, enough, after all, he is still a junior. Shida, better take him home first and we can discuss this slowly later," Wang Liyao urged again, "Moreover, at that time, the two families indeed had not acknowledged each other. Annan might have been a bit harsh with his words, but upon reflection, it wasn't really too excessive. Seeing the child beaten to this state is quite heartbreaking."

Upon reflection, it wasn't too excessive?

Tears streamed down Wang Annan's face as he gazed up at the blurry sky, his heart wailing in despair.

Aunt Liyao, I thank you for your "sympathy" ah~~~

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Meanwhile, as Wang Liyao was summoned back to Ding Duke's Mansion, elsewhere, another individual was also working hard to fulfill their own "promise."

In the very center of Return to Dragon City, where top-quality Spirit Veins converged, stood a majestic and enormous palace complex.

This complex was the Imperial City of Da Qian.

Though these palaces had clearly existed for a long, long time, and despite the roof tiles still glittering as new, the walls bore the mottled marks of great age, the marks of lengthy epochs, the engravings of time.

However, while time had inscribed its marks of age, it hadn't made the palace look outdated. Instead, it endowed the structure with a profound heritage, making it appear even more towering and magnificent as the years passed.

Just like this country.

It was ancient, yet brand new.

It had a long history, yet it also radiated a vigorous vitality.

The efforts of every generation in the country had turned into a deep foundation, making it increasingly powerful and unshakable. It was also the relentless efforts and sacrifices of generations that had built its great wall that wouldn't tremble even if the sky fell.

Deep within the palace complex.

There was a palace that looked no different from the rest. A placard hanging at the entrance bore the powerful ancient seal characters for "Zhuozheng Pavilion."

This was the Imperial Library within the palace, also serving as the place where the Great Emperor usually worked and studied.

Inside the library.

Huge bookshelves lined up along the wall, densely packed with books, adding a weight to the library.

Like other parts of the Imperial Palace, the decor here was understated yet luxurious; even an inconspicuous curtain was made from the finest top-quality Spirit Silkworm silk, beautifully embroidered and vivid to life.

In the corner of the room, from a high table, spirals of smoke gracefully ascended from a Red Copper incense burner shaped like an Azure Dragon, slowly diffusing as they rose.

Beside the high table sat a chair carved from thousand-year-old Purple Spirit Sandalwood, its patina thick and glossy, clearly an ancient artifact used over many millennia.

In this chair sat an old man in plain dark clothing.

The long years had given him a visage of vicissitude, and the cell degeneration of old age had advanced into its final phase. At this moment, his skin was loose, its luster dim, and marked with age spots. His murky old eyes, half-closed, seemed devoid of any sparkle, as if he was always on the verge of sleep.

Behind him stood an equally old grey-robed eunuch, holding a dust brush, slightly bent at the waist. His gaze was perpetually fixed on his own toes, immobile, like a statuette.

"Grandfather, it's your turn to move the piece."

Just then, a crisp female voice broke the stillness.

It was a pretty and adorable girl, who looked just like a porcelain doll, none other than the second-ranked among the "Top Ten Outstanding Youths" of the National Capital—the Imperial Household's Greatest Genius, Wu Xue Ning.

"Oh~ Little Xue'Er, have you figured out so quickly how to counter my killer move?"

The old man swayed and awoke from his half-slumber.

He looked groggily at the chess board and then couldn't help but laugh: "Brilliant, brilliant~ Little Xue'Er, with this move, you've found a sliver of life amidst a myriad of killing blows. Truly worthy of being my great-great-great... granddaughter, as clever as I was in my youth. Old Yao, don't you think?"

He shifted slightly and smiled as he asked the eunuch behind him.

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Eunuch Old Yao hurriedly bowed even lower, a full smile on his face as he said, "Your Majesty is the body of a True Dragon, with a lifespan equal to that of the heavens. How could this old slave have the honor of seeing Your Majesty as a child? But one can imagine, at that age, Your Majesty must have been earth-shaking, an Invincible Great Heavenly Proud, a young emperor!

And Little Princess Xue Ning is so clever, she must resemble Your Majesty at your youth."

This old man was none other than Emperor Longchang, who had ruled over the Great Qian Land for over three thousand years.

"Talking about a lifespan equal to that of the heavens... I'm old, so old," Emperor Longchang said with a smile, shaking his head. He pinched a game piece between his fingers and looked affectionately at his precious granddaughter, who was many generations removed. "Today, your great-grandpa will teach you a good lesson. That one chance you had was intentionally left for you by me."

"Plop!"

Emperor Longchang made his move.

Instantly, the layout of the game changed.

When Wu Xue Ning made her move, the path of life was evident on the board. Now that this piece had landed, in the blink of an eye, it turned into a formation of certain death, with no chance of survival.

Then, Wu Xue Ning began a desperate struggle, only to be swiftly and neatly defeated by Emperor Longchang, defeated utterly.

Wu Xue Ning's little face turned deathly pale, her lips pouted, and with teary eyes, she said, "Great-grandpa is bullying me, intentionally setting a trap to trick me."

"Oh, oh, oh, why the tears?" Emperor Longchang chuckled, "My Xue Ning has a boundless future. Great-grandpa is teaching you to be more shrewd. Especially with the paths of life that barely appear visible in a formation meant for certain death; these are often the most dangerous traps.

Sometimes, when faced with a difficult situation, you need to do the opposite of what is expected, just like your move. If you could go on fighting with the determination to do or die..."

Before Emperor Longchang could finish speaking, Wu Xue Ning burst into a loud cry at the other end, "Great-grandpa is just bullying people! Bullying a child of just ten years old! You just don't want to lend me the Canglong Sword! Wu wuu wuu~"

She was crying so pitifully, so heart-wrenchingly, as if she had been greatly wronged.

"Absurd. The Canglong Sword is our Wu Family's ancestral Dao-level Item; only a Great Emperor of the Wu Family can wield it. What use would a little girl like you have for it?" Emperor Longchang had a headache from her crying and was also shaking his head in irritation. "What I said I would lend you is a Spiritual Treasure-level sword—[Thousand Autumn].

You just wanted a sword that can talk, didn't you? [Thousand Autumn] can talk."

Wu Xue Ning immediately turned her tears into laughter, hugging Emperor Longchang and giving him a big kiss, "Thank you for the reward, great-grandpa. I don't care if it's [Thousand Autumn] or [Ten Thousand Years], as long as it can talk, that's good enough for me."

"This, this, this... didn't I say you had to win the game first?" Emperor Longchang exclaimed in surprise, "When did it become that it has already been given to you?"

"Great-grandpa, you just said yourself, 'What I said I would lend you is...'" Wu Xue Ning repeated Emperor Longchang's words verbatim, mimicking even his tone precisely.

Finally, while hugging Emperor Longchang's arm and acting spoiled, she said, "Great-grandpa is the Human Emperor; your word is law. You can't go back on it now~"

"You're the one being tricky," Emperor Longchang said, staring at her in astonishment. He then turned to inquire, "Old Yao, what do you think? Did I say that?"

"This..." Old Yao nodded and bowed, his face all smiles, "Your Majesty did indeed say so just now."

"Aiyo, I've been tricked," Emperor Longchang lamented as he held his arm, "This girl distracted my thoughts with her crying, and then scared me by asking for the Canglong Sword. She caught me off guard. Child, this is treasonous of you."

"Hehe, that's only because great-grandpa taught me well." Wu Xue Ning smiled mischievously, spoiled by her charm, "Facing a difficult situation, you need to do the opposite of what is expected and create a new path."

"Good, truly worthy of being my very, very, very... granddaughter," Emperor Longchang said with great satisfaction, suddenly bursting into laughter, "In this way, once my life comes to an end, I also won't have to worry about anyone bullying you."

"Great-grandpa, don't say such nonsense," Wu Xue Ning instantly widened her eyes and admonished, "Great-grandpa, you've lived for more than three thousand six hundred years; you will surely continue living. Once my cultivation is successful, I will go overseas, to the Immortal Dynasty, to find an elixir of immortality for you."

"Good, great-grandpa hasn't doted on you for nothing."

Emperor Longchang was extremely delighted and then wrote a decree, which he handed over to Eunuch Old Yao, "Old Yao, go see the Little Princess off. While you're at it, take my decree to the Divine Soldier Hall and have [Thousand Autumn] brought out to give to the Little Princess."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Old Yao respectfully took up the sacred decree, leading a jubilant Wu Xue Ning out of the Zhuozheng Pavilion.

Less than half an hour later, Old Yao returned and reported, "Your Majesty, Little Princess Xue Ning has left with [Thousand Autumn]. Outside to meet her was Little Commandery Prince Wu Zhixing. However, the Little Princess gave [Thousand Autumn] to the Little Commandery Prince.

In this servant's opinion, she likely did so to increase the Little Commandery Prince's chances of victory in the decisive battle with the Great Heavenly Proud Li Yao. Your Majesty, what are your thoughts on this?"

"As it has already been gifted to her, how she disposes of it is her own affair," Emperor Longchang replied, his eyes half-closed. "Old Yao, have you seen Wang Liyao? What do you think of him?"

"Your Majesty, when Liyao, the Great Heavenly Proud, was battling with Wang An Nan of the Ding Duke's Mansion, this servant caught a glimpse from afar." Old Yao reported truthfully, "As for him, he certainly has an immortal-like presence, an extraordinary bearing, akin to a True Phoenix among men.

In this servant's observation and guess, Liyao the Great Heavenly Proud's Bloodline Talent is possibly above many Great Heavenly Proud."

"What a True Phoenix among men, to receive such praise from you, Old Yao, Liyao the Great Heavenly Proud must indeed be extraordinary, worthy of walking that sacred path," Emperor Longchang praised, then seemed to remember something that displeased him. His expression turned unhappy, "Hmph, the Ding Duke's Mansion really has good luck, a branch of a branch able to produce a Great Heavenly Proud.

I just hope that when they choose sides this time, they'll be more discerning, not making the same mistakes again."

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Hearing this, Old Yao looked down his nose and into his heart, pretending he had heard nothing.

Although he had only come to his side long after Emperor Longchang ascended the throne, he had heard hints from old palace hands and vaguely knew that the Ding Duke's ancestors had some grudges with Emperor Longchang.

This was also one of the reasons behind the gradual decline of the Ding Duke's Mansion over thousands of years.

In the past, His Majesty never mentioned this matter, but thinking about it now, it was mostly because the Ding Duke's Mansion had backed the wrong team when His Majesty was competing for the position of the Emperor's son... Over thousands of years of wear and tear, the Ding Duke's Mansion had fallen from the prestigious Second Class to the Third Grade.

...

At the same time.

The GuiLong Shangguan Clan is one of the eight Grade Four Aristocratic Families in Return to Dragon City.

Since there were only five third-grade aristocratic families in the whole of Da Qian, including the Imperial Household, each held an extraordinary status. Therefore, the actual status of the Grade Four Prominent Families within Return to Dragon City was, in fact, already quite high.

As one of the better-developed Grade Four Prominent Families, the GuiLong Shangguan Clan's status was naturally a notch above the average Grade Four Family.

At the very least, the Shangguan Clan was guaranteed a spot among the top ten families of Return to Dragon City.

In the southern part of Return to Dragon City, the Shangguan Clan's Main Residence.

At dusk, the lights were already lit in various parts of this vast complex. The faint luminescence twinkled throughout the residence, resembling a sea of stars melded with the night sky of Return to Dragon City, vast and magnificent.

Deep within the Main Residence, some distance from the Family Head's central courtyard but still on the central axis, there was a rather large and imposing courtyard named "Qingyun Court."

The master of this courtyard was none other than the Shangguan Clan's current sole Great Heavenly Proud, Shangguan Yunque.

At this moment, inside the inner courtyard of Qingyun Court, within the Warm Pavilion where Shangguan Yunque usually resided, a man and a woman sat facing each other, chatting while sipping tea.

The man sitting in the place of honor had sharp facial features and a distinguished bearing, exuding ease and unrestraint. He was the master of this courtyard, Shangguan Yunque.

He looked quite young, and since he was at home, he was not wearing a Jade Crown. Instead, his hair was casually tied back with a headband, which made him appear all the more carefree and unrestrained.

On the other hand, the woman sitting opposite him had her hair done up in the style of a married woman, possessing graceful charm, with her eyebrows and eyes full of allure, and every movement carried a natural air of flirtation.

If Wang Shouzhe were here, he would recognize this woman at a glance. After all, she was an old acquaintance of his, Lady Bilian.

Lady Bilian, whose real name was "Shangguan Bilian," was the legitimate daughter of the GuiLong Shangguan Clan and also Shangguan Yunque's younger sister. Although she was already married and her family affairs were many, Lady Bilian would occasionally return to her parental home to maintain her familial relationships.

This time, she had come back to celebrate her mother's birthday.

"Little sister, since there's nothing important for you back home, why not extend your stay a bit longer?" Shangguan Yunque sipped his tea and gently urged, "Mother rarely gets to see you, and although she doesn't say it, she has often reminded me in secret that as an older brother, I should find a way to keep you for a while longer."

"Don't worry, brother, I'm not leaving just yet," Lady Bilian said with a smile, casually picking up a piece of cake and taking a small bite, "I have other things to do on this trip home. Besides, the Heng Commandery Prince's Residence also sent a message a few days ago, asking me to drop by for a visit when I return home."

Decades have passed, and she too has become a cultivator in the Heavenly Human Realm, her demeanor far stronger than when Wang Shouzhe first met her in the auction house, truly giving the impression of a significant figure.

However, today, in front of her family, she didn't need to stay as tense as she had while with the Yuwen Clan, always showing a mien of having everything under control. Her whole demeanor was much relaxed, and in her conversation, she lacked some of her former authority and instead added a hint of sullen softness.

"Who would've thought, after all these years, the Heng Commandery Prince still remembers little sister," remarked Shangguan Yunque upon hearing her mention the Heng Commandery Prince, also appearing somewhat surprised, "But it makes sense, the Heng Commandery Prince always likes to foster the younger generation, especially those with character.

You made quite a stir at White Cloud Tower back then, so it's no wonder he still remembers you."

"It's also because our Shangguan family has developed well, and he often hears our family's name, so he might think of me occasionally. If our family were like the Yu Family, virtually invisible in Return to Dragon City, then the Heng Commandery Prince would have probably forgotten about me long ago," Lady Bilian thought to herself clearly, not one bit self-congratulatory.

According to that irritating fellow Wang Shouzhe, this is called "binding memory."

Her name, Shangguan Bilian, is naturally tied to the Shangguan Clan. The more prominent the Shangguan Clan's reputation is in Return to Dragon City, the more frequently her name would come up, and naturally, more people would remember her.

If one day the Shangguan Clan declines and several generations pass without notable young talents, everyone will gradually forget about the Shangguan Clan, and fewer people will remember her, Shangguan Bilian. Such is the lot of a distinguished family: they share in each other's glory and disgrace.

As they were talking, someone suddenly knocked on the door from outside, and then reported something in a hushed voice.

Shangguan Yunque acknowledged with a sound, and the servant left.

Soon after, a series of muffled footsteps were heard coming from the courtyard. Soon enough, a burly figure pushed the door open and walked in.

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"Sixteenth Brother..."

He stopped midway through his sentence when he noticed another person in the Warm Pavilion, hurried forward to pay his respects, and greeted her, "Twenty-Seventh Sister, you're here too?"

"Yo, isn't this Yunhong~ We haven't seen each other for many years, have we~" Lady Bilian teased with a smile, "How about it, have you found a wife yet? When can you bring your child for me to meet?"

The expression on Shangguan Yunhong's face instantly stiffened. Sister, could you not bring up the most mortifying subject?

"It's still the same old story; the one he fancies doesn't agree, and the one who fancies him, he doesn't like. It's just a stalemate. Uncle Thirty-Six and Auntie are nearly worried to death~" Shangguan Yunque sighed, casually helping Shangguan Yunhong out of a tight spot before gesturing to him, "Sit down."

Shangguan Yunhong then sat down with a stiff face, and purposely sat at the end of the table farthest from Lady Bilian.

After exchanging pleasantries, Shangguan Yunhong finally brought up his purpose for visiting: "You must have heard about what happened at the White Cloud Tower a few days ago, Sixteenth Brother? I really can't swallow this indignity."

His face flushed with anger he couldn't hold back when he mentioned it.

He hadn't even gotten the chance to start fighting properly when he was thrown off the stage in front of so many people. It was truly humiliating.

"Giggle~ Liyao is really formidable~" Hearing him speak, Lady Bilian glanced at Shangguan Yunhong, her eyes brimming with disdain, "You actually dared underestimate her, losing that miserably was well deserved."

Shangguan Yunhong retorted with dissatisfaction, "Twenty-Seventh Sister, whose side are you on? I am your brother!"

"Whose side am I on? Of course, I'm on Wang Liyao's side," Lady Bilian replied straightforwardly, rolling her eyes at him and poking his forehead with her finger, "With your impulsive, thoughtless temperament, do you expect me to take your side? If you had half the ability Liyao has, I would be on your side, but do you?"

Shangguan Yunhong reflexively shrank his neck from her jab, but quickly remembered that he was no longer the little brat he used to be. He had already become a Level Three warrior of the Heavenly Human Realm. In terms of cultivation base, he was even one level higher than Twenty-Seventh Sister—why should he still let her talk down to him?

He was filled with grievance and dared not lash out at her, so he turned to Shangguan Yunque, trying to pull in outside support, "Sixteenth Brother, you have to intervene. I am still a member of the clan after all. How can she be elbowing me out like this?"

However, Shangguan Yunque did not speak up for him. Instead, he picked up his tea cup and took a sip, saying indifferently, "You acted impulsively on your own, rashly rushing forth without assessing the opponent's strength first. Who can you blame when you lose?"

For a warrior, understanding the situation and adapting accordingly is essential. Otherwise, such carelessness could cost you your life on the battlefield.

"But, but I just can't let go of this anger!" Shangguan Yunhong argued, "I was counting on Chen Muying and Wang Annan to perform well and fight for the honor of our Shangjing Sky Prides, but who knew they would all turn out to be so useless? It's infuriating!"

"Do you want me to step in and regain face for you?" Shangguan Yunque looked at him.

Shangguan Yunhong felt somewhat guilty, but remembering the humiliation he suffered, he braced himself and said, "She herself declared, 'No refusal to anyone under 150.' You are just in your one hundred tens, perfectly eligible, and naturally can join the battle."

"Historically, the Challenger of Heaven has always been fought by the 'ten outstanding youths' of the time.

This serves not only to give young people under a hundred years of age a chance to showcase themselves, but also because only by doing so can we demonstrate the profound heritage of Shangjing and ensure the opponent loses convincingly," Shangguan Yunque took another sip of tea, stating calmly, "Liyao is merely sixty-nine years old, nearly fifty years younger than me.

If I were to battle her, regardless of the outcome, Shangjing would lose face."

"This..."

Shangguan Yunhong was at a loss for words.

He knew in his heart that Sixteenth Brother was right. For a cultivator over a hundred years old to step into the fray would already seem like a disadvantage, suggesting that Shangjing lacked depth. Let alone the fact that Sixteenth Brother was a Great Heavenly Proud.

If he were to fight and win, others wouldn't think it was because Sixteenth Brother was strong; they would see it as bullying the young, a hollow victory. If he lost, the disgrace would be monumental.

"I think there's still room for discussion on this matter," Lady Bilian said earnestly, her flirting eyes suggesting a deeper meaning, "Her challenge is against the entire younger generation of strong cultivators in Shangjing. If she truly sweeps through her peers, Shangjing's loss of face would be even greater.

Besides, as they say, no fight, no acquaintance; this is also a good opportunity to connect with a Great Heavenly Proud. Weren't Gong Yang Ce and Kang Commandery Prince brought together in this very way?"

"You're not wrong. However, if a move needs to be made, it should be Wu Zhixing, not me," Shangguan Yunque replied steadily, befitting his status as a Great Heavenly Proud with his own logic and principles, not easily swayed.

Nevertheless, since it was his own sister speaking, he didn't flatly reject her but left some room for consideration.

Lady Bilian didn't get discouraged, only saying, "In this Challenger of Heaven, there must be a battle between the Little Commandery Prince Zhixing and Wang Liyao. If the Little Commandery Prince also fails, it would be up to you, Brother, to cover for us."

Upon hearing this, Shangguan Yunque paused, then suddenly set down his teacup and looked skeptically at his sister, "Sister, tell me truthfully, your eagerness to push me into battle, is there another reason behind it?"

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His own sister, naturally, he knew her best. From a young age, she was full of tricks and always did whatever it took to achieve her goals. There might already be a pit in front of him, waiting for him to jump into.

"Er... giggles~ Brother, how can you speak of me like this? I did it all for your sake, don't just focus on cultivating all the time. Competing with masters can constantly help you break through your limits," said Lady Bilian righteously.

"While that may be true, I still feel something is off." Abruptly, Shangguan Yunque's eyes narrowed and his expression became extremely serious, "Right, I heard rumors earlier that you've been associating with a certain Wang family~ Could it be... that Wang Liyao is your lover..."

"Brother!" Lady Bilian was almost infuriated to explosion, "I am your sister! Do you really treat your sister like this by slandering her?"

In her heart, she was even more angered, muttering, I did have the impulse to sleep... but they just won't give me a chance.

"Ahem~ Ahem ahem~ Sorry, sorry." Shangguan Yunque felt awkward and hurriedly apologized, "It's all because those rumors were as clear as nose and eyes."

Although his sister appeared innocent, he always felt she seemed somewhat disappointed.

"Sigh~"

Lady Bilian secretly breathed a sigh of relief.

That Wang Shouzhe really knew how to give her tough challenges.

She wondered what he was really thinking, persuading her to provoke her brother into battle—was it because he feared his daughter wasn't having enough excitement in Shangjing? Or did he really think, that Wang Liyao could actually best her brother?

But then again.

Master Shouzhe was becoming increasingly intriguing... No wonder the Firefox Old Ancestor liked sticking around him, if positions were reversed... giggles~

This odd situation even gave Shangguan Yunque and his brother goosebumps; and Biliand, she...

...

Time flew, and in a blink of an eye, half a month had passed.

The hottest event in Return to Dragon City during this time was the Challenger of Heaven initiated by Wang Liyao.

And today.

It was the secretly arranged battle of the great warriors, set up by the Heng Commandery Prince, featuring Wang Liyao, the warrior from Longzuo Purple Abode Academic Palace versus the Imperial Household's Zhixing warrior.

This once-in-a-century battle naturally attracted everyone's attention, with the excitement reaching its peak.

Outside White Cloud Tower, there was a sea of people.

Those were the spectators who couldn't squeeze inside but even just experiencing the ambiance from a distance was considered good.

Inside White Cloud Tower, it was full of nobility, with princes aplenty like dogs.

Today, even those sitting in the scattered seats were, on normal days, highly esteemed leaders in their own right. As for those in the private booths, any single one of them when mentioned could cause the earth to shake three times with a stomp of their foot.

Especially in those few most luxurious and high-end private booths, the isolation array methods were fully activated, and it was impossible to tell who was sitting inside. All people saw was even the owner of White Cloud Tower, the Heng Commandery Prince, entering with a bent back and exiting with a full-faced smile, a picture of utmost respect.

In one of these private booths.

As one of the main characters of this battle—Wang Liyao.

She sat quietly on an ancient Spirit Wood Material chair, her bright and profound eyes tranquil and undisturbed, reflecting the calmness of her inner spirit.

Instead, the two Heavenly Proud-level followers behind her seemed somewhat restless.

Indeed, she now had two Heavenly Proud-level followers. One was naturally Mo Wanqiu, and the other was none other than Wang Annan.

Speaking of the vitality of the cultivators in the Sky People Realm, it was tenacious. Even with both legs broken and numerous flesh wounds, it only took a little over ten days for them to start jumping around again.

The physicians in the Ding Duke's Mansion were quite skilled, with internal Dan medicine and external applications, plus the nourishing and healing effects of Wood Type Mysterious Energy were remarkable.

This was the foundation of a top-tier noble family, possessing talents in all respects.

As soon as Wang Liyao returned to the Wang family's main residence, she received the best care. She was also summoned and encouraged by the only Old Ancestor of the Wang family, who bestowed her with many gifts and kicked Wang Annan to her as a follower.

Though Wang Annan's strength was not on par with the Great Heavenly Proud, he was still quite formidable among those of the Heavenly Proud level, serving as a follower to Wang Liyao wasn't really an insult to her.

"Grand Aunt Liyao," Once he became a follower, Wang Annan completely turned into a big-time flatterer of the Heavenly Proud Liyao, reporting continuously, "My brothers have already helped to find out that in the past dozen days, Wu Zhixing was nominally in seclusion but in reality, he was refining a Divine Spiritual Treasure. Apparently, it was the Little Princess who begged it from the emperor.

I mean wow, the Imperial Household is really too much—"

"Watch your words," Wang Liyao scolded with a cold glance.

"Yes, yes, I'll watch my words, watch my words," Wang Annan nodded and bowed, but he said with a worried expression, "Grand Aunt, even though Wu Zhixing is a bit timid, his strength is really not weak. And what is most critical is that he is about a decade older than you..."

For ordinary cultivators who were seventy or eighty years old, a decade would not show too much of a difference. But for this age group of Great Heavenly Proud, it was the time when their strength was rapidly advancing; sometimes even a five to six years difference could be significant.

"No matter," Wang Liyao said calmly, "This battle in the Challenger of Heaven is about self-improvement, and winning or losing is not important. The stronger the strength of Sky Pride Zhixing, the happier I am."

Wang Annan was just about to flatter praisingly.

Out in the random seating area comes a loud uproar: "Sky Pride Zhixing and Snow Condensation Warrior have arrived, they're here~"

Outside the White Cloud Tower.

A man with a restrained and gentle demeanor and a beautiful and flamboyant girl walked into the White Cloud Tower under the gaze of countless eyes.

Amid the discussions and cheers.

The man dressed in a dark fighting attire strolled leisurely onto the fighting stage.

"Zhixing requests to see Heavenly Proud Liyao," Wu Zhixing's voice had a hint of laziness. Normally, he just wanted to cultivate quietly and did not want to fight others to the death.

However, this battle had already caught the emperor's attention, who, through Xue Ning, had bestowed upon him the Divine Spiritual Treasure—Thousand Autumn.

He had no choice but to fight.

As soon as he finished speaking.

Wang Liyao, with a celestial grace, soared down before she even had a chance to speak.

From behind Wu Zhixing, a sword flew out with a "whoosh," trembling as it spoke: "Wow, this chick is so hot, Little Wu. Go on, quick, go defeat her, suppress her, make her yours—"

"Bang!"

Before "Thousand Autumn" could complete its sentence, it was stomped by Wu Zhixing onto the Obsidian Fighting Stage, and he said to Wang Liyao with an embarrassed face, "Miss Liyao, I didn't expect that damn thing to be so indecent."

Sorrowfully in his heart, no wonder the emperor handed over the Divine Spiritual Treasure so readily...

Chapter 22: Yin Turning Small Rain! Great Heavenly Proud Peak Battle

...

If that was all, it would have been fine, but there was more.

The key issue was that while "Thousand Autumn" was being trampled underfoot, it was still desperately struggling and spouting nonsense, "Kid surnamed Wu, let go of me this instant. I'm

doing this for your own good, trust me when it comes to flirting." It clanged and thrashed under Wu Zhixing's feet, like a fish out of water.

Such a scene left the onlookers at the venue dumbfounded.

This audience was composed of highly respected figures from Return to Dragon City. Even if they had never seen a Divine Spiritual Treasure, they had certainly heard of them and held them in high regard and anticipation. Who wouldn't dream of owning a talking Divine Spiritual Treasure?

But what on earth was this thing? Was it a sword, or just plain ruffian? Suddenly, it seemed to shatter everyone's understanding of Divine Spiritual Treasures.

Standing on the edge of the ring, Wu Xuening, who was there to support her obedient grandson, was also stunned. After looking around, she awkwardly stepped back, as if to distance herself from Wu Zhixing.

She murmured to herself, although she had requested a talking sword from her great-grandfather, this talking sword was just too despicable... Thankfully, it wasn't her Divine Spiritual Treasure, otherwise, could she even show her face?

"Shut up."

Wu Zhixing's face had turned as black as the bottom of a pot, and he was so embarrassed that he almost fled the ring.

He stomped on "Thousand Autumn" and ground his foot into it, angrily saying, "If you spout nonsense again, I'll eradicate you."

Even a clay figure has a point at which it will react. Wu Zhixing was generally calm, but even he was provoked into fiery anger by Thousand Autumn.

In recent days, it had been incessantly nagging him during his cultivation, which was tolerable, but to continue doing so in public was utterly humiliating.

"Hmph, fine, I'll shut up, but there will come a time when you need me," Thousand Autumn finally quieted down somewhat under the threat of obliteration, but still couldn't resist having the last word.

"Miss Liyao, I truly apologize." Wu Zhixing, his face flush with embarrassment, decided to ignore it and quickly apologized to Wang Liyao, "This sword of mine is really too..."

The word "perverted" was hard for him to utter in front of Wang Liyao, who seemed like an immortal descending to earth.

"No matter." Wang Liyao, her lips twitching slightly under her veil, responded with an elegant voice, "Little Commandery Prince, just train it slowly when you can, and I also appreciate the Little Commandery Prince accepting my challenge."

As the two faced each other in the ring, naturally, all eyes and focus in White Cloud Tower fell upon them.

In the best private booths.

The atmosphere heated up instantly.

An old man with white hair, dressed in a Four Claw Golden Dragon Jin Robe and wearing a purple gold crown, looked at the situation on the ring and laughed, "Old Ghost Tianhe, you're quite lucky. To think you could find a Great Heavenly Proud in that remote corner of Longzuo County."

"Hehe~"

In another private booth, Enlightened One Tianhe was present.

He was obviously dressed for the occasion today, wearing a plain white robe, exuding an aura like an ancient immortal, but his words were direct and scathing, "Wu Dexin, after over a thousand years, you're still the same as when you were young, lacking virtue and progress."

Longzuo County has just been established, and many descendants of prominent families have dedicated their lives to contribute to the rise of Da Qian. How can you describe it as a remote corner?"

"The support you, a royal, receive every year partly comes from the taxes of millions of Longzuo County's citizens. Don't bite the hand that feeds you."

Prince Dexin's face darkened slightly, "Is that what this prince meant? Which among us royal princes hasn't fought battles and protected the nation? How many princes have died on the battlefield over the thousands of years since our nation was founded?"

"Hehe, it sounds as if our Sacred Land doesn't contribute at all," Enlightened One Tianhe retorted disdainfully. "We of the Sacred Land also bear the responsibilities of protecting the nation and educating the people. Aren't there plenty of our predecessors from the Nine Veins of the Sacred Land who have also sacrificed much?"

In their youth, Prince Dexin and Enlightened One Tianhe had represented the Imperial House and the Sacred Land, respectively.

If the chosen of these two veins got along, they naturally became like brothers or friends. But if they didn't see eye to eye, various grudges were inevitable.

Without a doubt, these two had conflicts or irreconcilable differences since they were young.

"Brother Tianhe, today is the deciding battle between Yao'er and Wu Zhixing, let's focus on the battle and not argue further," another distinguished, imposing old man in a brocade robe in the same private booth interrupted, seeing that they were about to start quarreling again.

"Fine, we'll give Ding Duke some face," Enlightened One Tianhe agreed readily.

This brocade-robed old man was indeed the Divine Power Old Ancestor of the Third-Class Aristocratic Families of the Great Qian Wang Clan—Ding Duke.

The title of Ding Duke was bestowed upon the Wang family by the first Great Emperor at the founding of the nation, a tremendous honor.

The title of duke was equivalent to that of a prince, receiving the same annuities, and could be hereditarily succeeded without the need for battlefield merits. However, since the Great Qian Wang Clan only had one duke's title, if several members of the Divine Power Territory existed at the same time, only one could inherit the duke's title.

Currently, as the Great Qian Wang Clan had only one Divine Power Old Ancestor, the position of Ding Duke naturally passed to him. The next Ding Duke might very likely fall to the current Divine Power Seed—Wang Zhuohui.

Chapter 22: Yin Turning Small Rain! The Battle at the Peak of the Great Heavenly Proud _2

In another private room, a man who looked like a middle-aged man, also exuding a royal demeanor, persuaded, "Old Ancestor Dexin, please don't be angry. We are here today to cheer on young Zhixing."

This dignified middle-aged man was also one of the Imperial Household's princes, named Prince Yong'an. He and Prince Dexin descended from the same line, a line that had been passed down from the eldest legitimate sons of the emperors.

The line of Prince Dexin was the most powerful among the many bloodline descendants of the royal family, boasting two princes and eighteen commandery princes within their same lineage! Moreover, among the younger generation, there were outstanding individuals like Kang Commandery Prince and the Little Princess Xue Ning.

Wu Zhixing was not originally born into this line but was adopted by the prince of Fu Commandery in this line. As a result, there were now three Great Heavenly Prouds within this younger generation.

As a father, the Fu Commandery Prince naturally also came to cheer on his "foster son."

However, with two princes of his own line present, he, a mere youngster of just over three hundred years old, naturally had no say in the matter. In fact, he didn't even have a seat and could only stand respectfully with his hands down, adopting a demeanor of concentration.

He couldn't intervene in the elders' quarrel and had to listen obediently.

"Zhixing's sword, named 'Thousand Autumn,' might be renowned as a chatterbox and sharp-tongued among the various Divine Spiritual Treasures, but it does have strength," Prince Dexin said, giving up on arguing with the Enlightened One Tianhe and spoke to Prince Yong'an, "Furthermore, the boy is young but remarkably composed and steady. Yong'an, do take care of him more and cultivate him properly."

"Yes, Old Ancestor," Prince Yong'an replied with a smile, "The child has the patience for cultivation and has already reached the Heavenly Human Realm Level Five Cultivation base. With a bit more effort, he might break through to the advanced stage of the Heavenly Human Realm before he turns a hundred." His eyes showed a trace of satisfaction, obviously pleased with Wu Zhixing.

"Very good, very good, you were much more diligent than you were at his age," Prince Dexin said with great gratification, "Once he grows up, he will be the best support for Cheng Si, and he can also help Cheng Si stabilize his position as emperor."

Wu Chengsi was one of the current Quasi Emperor's Sons.

In the eyes of the royal members of Dexin's lineage, Kang Commandery Prince Wu Chengsi was almost certain to be the next Emperor's Son. Once he ascended to the throne in the future, Dexin's line was bound to gain even greater influence.

They believed that the emperor's decision to have Wu Zhixing adopted into the name of the Fu Commandery Prince of the Dexin lineage was to prepare a strong assistant for the future emperor.

However, as soon as Dexin mentioned this, Tianhe was again not pleased. He mocked, "Dexin, the struggle for the title of Emperor's Son isn't over yet, and you're so certain that Kang Commandery Prince will win?"

"Tianhe, don't tell me you think that little Wu Mingyuan can contend with Cheng Si for the title of Emperor's Son?" Prince Dexin couldn't help but retaliate, "Hmph, he only enjoys the status of a Quasi Emperor's Son because His Majesty doesn't want to violate the former emperor's dying wishes.

Whether in terms of virtue or capability, Wu Mingyuan can't hold a candle to Cheng Si, he's doomed to merely play second fiddle."

Since the Kang Commandery Prince was a descendant of Prince Dexin's lineage, both he and Prince Yong'an were the Kang Commandery Prince's most staunch supporters.

"Oh~ Since when do you, Dexin, have the power to perceive the secrets of heaven? Why don't you help this Academy Head predict who will win in this battle, my Li Yao or your Zhixing?" the Enlightened One Tianhe continued with his biting remarks,

It was quite clear that he had a big unresolved feud with Prince Dexin from their younger days that hadn't been forgotten, even after so many years.

However, as two of the older generation in the Divine Power Territory, aside from a few of their peers, along with Emperor Longchang and the master of the Sacred Land, probably no one knew what the grudge was about.

In the next private room, the Heng Commandery Prince put his ears up, eavesdropping.

To him, any one of those four Magic Realm big shots was an existence he could not afford to offend. If he wished to know these peculiar gossips, eavesdropping was his only option.

"Tianhe, you don't actually believe your Li Yao can win, do you?" Prince Dexin was caught off guard and appeared dubious, "If Zhixing lacked Thousand Autumn, he would be at a disadvantage in this fight. But now that both have Divine Spiritual Treasures, and my Zhixing even has a slight advantage in age, where does your disciple stand a chance?"

"Fine, let's make a bet," the Enlightened One Tianhe suddenly grew excited, "Let's each bet on our own children winning. Hmm... let's not bet too much, just twenty Top Grade Spirit Stones."

Twenty Top Grade Spirit Stones? Not bet too much?

Upon hearing this, the Heng Commandery Prince in the next room turned green with envy.

These Magic Realm big shots indeed had money to burn. You see, ordinary Spirit Stones were worth about a hundred Qian Gold, but Middle Grade Spirit Stones were extremely rare and typically increased by a hundredfold in value, reaching tens of thousands of Qian Gold.

Some powerful formations could no longer be driven by ordinary Spirit Stones. Thus, despite their high cost, Middle Grade Spirit Stones still had a significant market. For example, the Defensive Array set up by the Array Master on the stage was powered by ten Middle Grade Spirit Stones.

As for Top Grade Spirit Stones, they were extremely rare throughout the Great Qian Land, a necessity for top-tier Mountain Protection Arrays established by major Prominent Families, Academic Palaces, Government Offices, and imperial mansions.

If converted to Qian Gold, they could be worth millions of Qian Gold each. In the Great Qian Land, these items were almost considered strategic materials, seldom circulating outside.

Chapter 22: Yin Turning Small Rain! The Battle of the Great Heavenly Proud at the Peak _3

From this, it was evident just how big of a gamble the Old Ghost Tianhe was taking.

But, wasn't it said that Old Ghost Tianhe was already bankrupt? Where did he get those top-grade Spirit Stones from?

Heng Commandery Prince felt puzzled, but at this moment, Prince De Xin's expression turned solemn.

Even for a family as powerful as the prince's, twenty top-grade Spirit Stones were an astronomical sum. To refill that amount would be enough to cultivate a Tianjiao from the Qi Refinement Realm up to the Purple Abode Realm.

However, this solemnity lasted only a few breaths before Prince De Xin made his decision, "Old Ghost Tianhe, since you wish to give away money to me, how could I refuse? Twenty Superior Spirits, I accept."

At the same time, his voice, through the Isolation Array, reached Wu Zhixing on the arena, "Zhixing, display all your skills. In this battle, you may only win and not lose. Wang Liyao has come to Shangjing at a critical juncture in the battle for the title of the Emperor's son, likely with ulterior motives. We must be cautious."

In Wang Liyao's ears, she also received a message from Old Ghost Tianhe, "Yao'er, I've borrowed twenty top-grade Spirit Stones to gamble against that old fossil, De Xin, just to scrape together some coffin money. This battle, you must retrieve both the respect and the face for your teacher."

With two elders giving them secret instructions, the originally somewhat amicable top Tianjiaos' gazes immediately turned intense and sharp.

"Miss Li Yao, please~"

Wu Zhixing lifted his foot off "Thousand Autumn," and with a gesture of his hand, he summoned it into his grasp. Then, with a flick of his wrist, he danced a circle with his sword, assuming the starting stance of 'Azure Dragon Snatching Rabbit'.

Clearly, the sword technique he had been diligently practicing was the imperial household's signature top-quality sword technique— "Azure Dragon Swordsmanship."

"Little Commandery Prince, please."

Wang Liyao unsheathed her "String Song," gently gripping the hilt with her slender hand, sliding the sword with a flick, and pulling out a faint trail of water marks, which was the starting stance of "Tianyi True Water Swordsmanship."

Old Ghost Tianhe was so named because the Heaven Dao Divine Ability he comprehended was "Tianhe," and he originated from one of the nine veins of the Sacred Land, the Tianyi True Water Vein, with his main cultivation method being the top-quality "Tianyi True Water." This was an Inherit True Law; when fully mastered, it could lead directly to the Divine Power Territory.

Afterward.

As soon as their gazes interlocked, they both made their moves.

One sword moved like an Azure Dragon soaring through the sky, fierce and swift like the wind, while the other flowed softly like water, as graceful as an antelope hanging by its horns, concealing murderous intent, both displaying exquisite swordsmanship and profound Sword Intent.

"Clang, clang, clang!"

Their Divine Treasure Level swords shone with flowing light, clashing and sparking occasionally, with Sword Energy and Sword Glow flashing and crossing the arena.

Even the black onyx platform they fought on was scarred with trenches by the crisscrossing Sword Energy.

The arena's Defensive Array was fully activated, struggling to block the stray Sword Energy, causing ripples to spread.

As the Great Tianjiaos of the Celestial Human Realm, both had awakened their Fifth Layer of Bloodline, possessing the Taoist Body that ordinary Tianjiaos would only have upon reaching the Purple Abode Realm. Each of their movements carried an undercurrent of the Heavenly Dao.

Moreover, their weapons were both Divine Spiritual Treasure-level swords, greatly enhancing the power of their sword techniques, making their attacks extraordinary, and with a simple flick of their swords, they could evoke astonishing Sword Intent.

"Cackle, cackle~~~!" Having held back for quite a while, Thousand Autumn finally seized the opportunity to launch into trash talk, "So thrilling, truly thrilling! The chick across from you, better surrender quickly and become one of the million in my master's harem."

In the midst of such an intense battle, he doubted Wu Zhixing would dare to annihilate him, the Artifact Spirit.

Sure enough, Wu Zhixing, although seething with anger, was helpless to do anything. As the Old Ancestor De Xin said, he could only achieve victory in this battle, not defeat. He had to shamelessly turn a deaf ear.

Meanwhile, Wang Liyao remained as calm as still water, seemingly unaffected by the trash talk.

But "String Song" was infuriated.

Unable to hold back, she cursed out loud, "You disgusting old lecher, and you, Wu Zhixing, with your pretentious gentleman act—all of you with your swords are perfectly matched. I, on behalf of the moon, shall eradicate your filthy existence!"

It was clear that String Song sounded like a young girl, yet the birth of any Artifact Spirit required a long accumulation of time, so how could it truly be a naive little girl?

As a result, while Wu Zhixing and Wang Liyao were drawn into fierce combat, their respective Artifact Spirits began to quarrel too, throwing out insults, a storm of trash talk.

This scene opened the eyes of the onlookers.

A battle between Great Tianjiaos was already very rare, and a battle where young Great Tianjiaos each possessed a Divine Spiritual Treasure might only happen once in a thousand years. The masters' fight was thrilling, and the argument between Artifact Spirits was equally fascinating.

"String Song, little girl, if you kindly give me a kiss, I'll let you off easy by three points."

"Thousand Autumn, old fool, you're nothing but a useless old dog that can only bark. Even if I'm open**, you're only fit to hang and never rise again."

"Little girl, you're really * stubborn. You and your master's fate are bound only to become slaves and minions of my master."

"With that unworthy dog look of your master, he's not even worthy to kneel and lick the bottom of my mistress's feet."

As both sword spirits went more and more off the rails, Wang Liyao and Wu Zhixing both began to destabilize in their mental states, and not because they were affected by the other's Artifact Spirit insults, but because the words their own Artifact Spirits were spewing were so extraordinarily trashy and humiliating~

It made them both feel unbearably embarrassed.

Among them, Wang Liyao was the most astonished of all.

Chapter 22: Yin Turning Small Rain! The Battle at the Peak of the Great Heavenly Proud _4

Her Artifact Spirit "String Song" had always behaved like an innocent little girl in front of her, speaking with a coquettish and cute tone.

Who would have thought that when she exchanged trash talk with Thousand Autumn, not only was her aura not inferior, but there was even a hint of being more gangster than Thousand Autumn, and her words were full of censored terms.

What kind of sword life had String Song... been through in the past?

Wu Zhixing was equally shocked.

How had that old thing, Thousand Autumn, managed to survive until now without being erased?

"Shut up! Or I'll erase you all~"

Wang Liyao and Wu Zhixing roared almost simultaneously.

Clearly, their exchanges of trash talk had become so unbearable even for their masters.

Upon hearing this, the two quarreling Artifact Spirits suddenly snapped out of their enjoyable exchange of trash talk and wisely shut their mouths.

Ah~ Their young master was still too young, too thin-skinned.

After a few hundred or thousand more years, they would realize how important it was to have an Artifact Spirit that could spout trash talk~ after all, trash talk is also a part of overall strength~

The two swords sighed simultaneously in their hearts.

Without the disruption of the Sword Spirits' trash talk, Wang Liyao and Wu Zhixing finally had the chance to fight quietly, showcasing a splendid battle.

Above and below, the roaring applause was incessant.

However, as the prolonged battle continued, Wu Zhixing began to feel the pressure from De Xin, the Old Ancestor.

"Miss Liyao truly deserves to be a direct disciple of Tianhe, possessing such profound understanding of sword techniques at such a young age. It's indeed remarkable," he said solemnly, his expression suddenly becoming serious, "Miss Liyao, be careful now, I'm about to get serious."

As his words fell, he suddenly thrust his sword, forcing Wang Liyao back, then his figure flashed, creating a breeze under his feet and rapidly distancing himself from Wang Liyao.

At the same time, his aura also dramatically transformed.

Accompanied by a long dragon chant, a colossal dragon-shaped shadow suddenly appeared behind him.

It was an immense dragon shadow, even slimmer than the Azure Dragon, covered with faintly visible azure scales, its huge multicolored wings spread wide, exuding a majestic and immense Dragon Might.

This shadow was none other than Wu Zhixing's Bloodline Law Phase—Yinglong.

As everyone knows, Yinglong is one of the Ancient Divine Beasts. Born to belong to the skies, it commands the long winds between heaven and earth, making it an immensely powerful Divine Beast.

At this moment, even though it was just a Dharma Shadow, the huge and ethereal dragon body emanated an unparalleled formidable aura, noble and sacred.

With the emergence of the Dharma Shadow, waves of Mysterious Energy also burst out from within Wu Zhixing, instantly sweeping across the entire arena.

Threads of dawn light burst forth from the powerful Mysterious Energy.

That was Divine Power!

Although the dawn light occupied only a portion of the Mysterious Energy, with the bulk still being Mysterious Energy, Divine Power was Divine Power. This indicated Wu Zhixing's profound comprehension of the Law, reaching a stage where he could consolidate his own Divine Skills.

Although a Cultivator's Bloodline Power reaching the Spiritual Body allowed them to delve deeper into understanding the Law and attempt to comprehend Divine Skills, the process itself was extremely challenging and time-consuming. Normally, only after reaching the Purple Abode Realm could a Cultivator's understanding of the Law be deep enough to possess their own Divine Skills.

But as a Great Heavenly Proud, with the aid of the Taoist Body, there was a certain chance to comprehend one's own Divine Skills in the Celestial being Realm, albeit still incredibly challenging.

No one expected that Wu Zhixing, who had almost never publicly shown his hand, had already quietly stepped into the threshold of Small Divine Power, mastering Divine Power.

"This is the Small Divine Power I've comprehended—"Tiangang'. Although it's still nascent, it is the fruit of my painstaking efforts. Miss Liyao, here it comes~"

As he spoke these words, beads of cold sweat oozed from Wu Zhixing's forehead, clearly showing that controlling Divine Power was still quite strenuous for him at this moment.

However, a smile appeared on the corners of his mouth, evidently very confident in his Small Divine Power named "Tiangang."

As his words fell, he waved his Spirit Sword "Thousand Autumn" through the air.

A surge of azure-colored dawn light suddenly burst forth.

In an instant, the arena was engulfed in a fierce whirlwind, a massive tornado sweeping across the entire arena, making the black iron-cast platform tremble abruptly.

And Wang Liyao's hovering delicate body, like a small boat in a gust of wind, seemed as if it could be torn apart at any moment.

Suddenly, the expressions of all spectators became grave.

Inside the VIP seating, the few Magic Realm big shots who were previously chatting all shut their mouths. In the cheaper seats below, many spectators were so tense they stood up.

Many supporters of Liyao felt their hearts unconsciously tightening.

This was Divine Power, could Miss Liyao withstand it?

What they hadn't noticed was that amidst the rampant whirlwind, Wang Liyao's aura also changed.

Standing proudly in the air amidst the fierce wind, her eyes turned icy, and she softly said: "Little Commandery Prince's Dharma and Divine Skills are quite formidable. Now, please allow Little Commandery Prince to experience the Small Divine Skill that Liyao has comprehended~"

Saying this, her rosy lips parted slightly, and she slowly uttered a name.

"'Hanging Water Divine Power' first move, 'Yin Turning Small Rain.'"

Chapter 23: The Great Emperor Summons! Li Yao Dominates Her Peers

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The greatest prowess of the Great Tianjiao of the Celestial Human Realm still lay in their awakened Taoist Body. With the Taoist Body, their connection to the Heaven and Earth Laws became much tighter, qualifying them to comprehend the Heaven Dao Divine Ability based on their bloodline and Taoist Body.

However, the divine abilities comprehended at such times were basically "Small Divine Powers." Moreover, since their cultivation realm was merely the Celestial Human Realm, when using these Small Divine Powers, they still had to rely on the strength of their Bloodline Dharma Phase to support them, and couldn't fully unleash the full power of the Small Divine Powers, nor could they maintain it for long.

As Wang Liyao's words fell, a thick and strong aura surged upwards.

At the same time.

A huge phantom appeared behind her.

It was a gigantic blue giant bird, adorned with magnificent crown feathers, blue feathers of varying shades, and tail feathers shimmering with flowing light, appearing even more splendid.

Those who knew their stuff immediately recognized this Dharma, it was none other than the Ancient Divine Beast—the Green Phoenix!

The Green Phoenix, a creature of the same caliber as Yinglong, naturally ruled the waters of the heavens.

The image of the Green Phoenix Dharma Phase behind Wang Liyao was extremely clear, almost as if solidified. Its presence and aura even seemed to slightly overpower Wu Zhixing's Yinglong bloodline.

At the same time, her cultivation aura, which had always been concealed and never fully released, burst forth in an instant, revealing that it was slightly more profound than Wu Zhixing's.

In an instant, the entire White Cloud Tower fell silent.

"How is that possible?"

Inside the private room, Prince Dexin, who had initially looked totally composed, as if he had already held the winning ticket, his expression suddenly froze, his face becoming rigid on the spot, "This Wang Liyao's cultivation base has been hidden so deeply, reaching the Peak Level Five of the Celestial Human Realm, isn't she just sixty-nine years old?

Her Green Phoenix Dharma has also become more solid, with a profound aura... Could it be..."

All signs were showing that Wang Liyao's bloodline was by no means merely at the level of a newly risen Sky Pride. Indeed, her talent might not just surpass the Class C top geniuses; because the cultivation speed of Class C geniuses was simply not this fast.

Only the extremely rare Second Rate Supremacy Bloodline could possibly advance in cultivation so rapidly, achieving such a realm at the mere age of sixty-nine.

The last time Gong Yang Ce came to fight in the competition of the Great Heavenly Proud, he was already in his "advanced age" of ninety-something years, yet he was only at Level Six of the Celestial Human Realm. Even so, Gong Yang Ce was considered quite powerful among the Great Heavenly Proud, not much different from the current Little Commandery Prince Wu Zhixing, both around Class C.

However, compared to Wang Liyao, they fell short by a lot.

But then again, could Grade B and Grade C even be the same?

For Wang Liyao's bloodline enhancement, the Enlightened One Tianhe had poured in the savings of a thousand and hundreds of years. If this didn't create a gap, wouldn't that money have been wasted?

Seeing the expression on Prince Dexin's face, which appeared as if he had swallowed a fly, the Enlightened One Tianhe felt gratified inside, suddenly feeling that all his previous investments were worth it.

De Xin oh De Xin~ so you initially competed with me for Sister Muxuan in the Academic Palace!

Isn't it just because you relied on your family background, just because you are from the Imperial Household? You secretly used despicable methods, causing Sister Muxuan to be expelled from the Academic Palace, leaving her no choice but to marry you, becoming your queen.

Now, all these, I, Tianhe, will repay them one by one!

"Old Ghost Tianhe!" At this moment, Prince Dexin also reacted, unable to help shouting angrily, "You actually used despicable means to hide Wang Liyao's cultivation aura, deliberately luring me into gambling."

"Old Ghost Dexin, it has always been your overconfidence, blinded by your own arrogance," the Enlightened One Tianhe retorted mockingly, "If you want to default, that's fine too. Just bark like a dog three times in front of everyone, and I'll write off your debt."

Prince Dexin nearly choked on his own blood.

If he really did so, his entire royal family's face would be lost. He immediately retorted with a cold laugh, "Don't say the outcome is still uncertain; even if Zhixing loses this small battle, this prince can still afford to lose twenty Superior Spirits."

Even though he said that, he felt as if a knife was twisting in his heart. Indeed wealthy as a prince, his branch of the family was large, with many children needing his support, and he truly didn't have much spare cash. That was a full twenty Superior Spirits!!

While the spiritual gurus were exchanging blows with words, the battle on the platform continued.

Amidst a clear, melodious cry, the Green Phoenix Dharma Phase behind Wang Liyao suddenly spread its wings, and suddenly the surroundings became overcast with dense clouds, suppressing Wu Zhixing's Small Divine Power Heavenly Gang Hurricane to an extent that the wind speed drastically reduced.

Inside the White Cloud Tower, the atmosphere also seemed to become gloomy and misty with water vapor; the boys quickly activated the illumination formation, making the White Cloud Tower bright once again.

"Yin Turning Small Rain."

Wang Liyao, with eyes cold, whispered softly.

Her delicate fingers flicked continuously as if strumming the strings of Heaven Dao, and dazzling glimmers flowed out. In her eyes, a trace of Small Divine Power insignia faintly appeared.

"Whoosh!"

A refreshing breeze passed by, sweeping away the restlessness at heart, very pleasantly cool.

Immediately.

The surrounding water vapor condensed into gentle droplets, softly descending downwards. In a moment, it was like a spring rain had fallen.

"Is that all?"

Everyone looked at the soft, sparse raindrops, immediately becoming baffled. Indeed, such a delicate rain truly aligns with the essence of Yin Turning Small Rain.

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But what use is this thing? This Small Divine Power isn't even enough to water a Spirit Field!

Could it be that a gentle drizzle can set the mood, making people feel like falling in love?

Just as everyone thought that the Small Divine Power Wang Liyao had comprehended from the Heavenly Dao Laws—Yin Turning Small Rain—was merely a joke,

All of a sudden,

Wu Zhixing, who had previously appeared very calm, suddenly changed his expression. The Yinglong Dharma Form behind him let out a long chant, instantly transforming into an elusive shadow of wind, moving swiftly around the platform.

Yinglong is the master of the Long Wind, and its home field is the sky. At this moment, if he were in the sky, Wu Zhixing could have disappeared without a trace in the blink of an eye, but on this platform, he could only move within a limited space, and his strength was severely restricted.

This kind of restriction wasn't a big deal normally, but when facing opponents of the same level, or even those a notch higher, it especially became a hindrance.

Like at this moment.

"Snap!"

Each tiny raindrop fell on Wu Zhixing's Protective Gang Qi.

The power compressed to the extreme suddenly exploded, and layers of Sword Intent burst forth, causing his Protective Gang Qi to ripple slightly.

Contained within each seemingly tender tiny raindrop was a terrifyingly compressed Sword Intent.

Such raindrops, if just one drop, of course wouldn't matter—it couldn't break through Wu Zhixing's Protective Gang Qi. However, although the rain was sparse, it was incessant.

Suddenly a gust of wind blew, and the myriad of fine rain seemed to be pulled by an invisible force, covering Wu Zhixing like a swarm of bees.

"Snap snap snap snap!"

Wu Zhixing's Protective Gang Qi exploded like firecrackers during the New Year.

Each raindrop contained compressed Sword Intent, accumulating what terrifying force?

No matter what, Wu Zhixing was a Great Heavenly Proud, with unimaginably profound Bloodline Power and incredibly solid Protective Gang Qi, comparable in defensive power to a Magical Treasure, yet now it was also blasted into constant fluctuations and frequent ripples, causing him to feel dizzy and weak with unstable vital energies.

He only had to continue to stimulate Tiangang, using the power of Divine Skills to counteract, invoking gusts of wind to disperse the gentle drizzle.

"Little Wu, you seem unable to hold on anymore," Thousand Autumn began to chatter in his ear again, "The chick opposite not only has a perfect body, but her queen-like aura seemed to have switched from an immortal's temperament to that of a queen, powerfully explosive. How about we surrender, and become a member of her harem..."

"Actually, the feeling of being conquered by a queen isn't too bad when you think about it; there's some thrill to it. I've already mentally prepared myself for this ending. It's no problem if you can't accept it for now, I can slowly help build your psychological tolerance."

Wu Zhixing's face darkened.

What kind of spirit sword had he actually cultivated? Not long ago, he was insisting on taking Liyao into his harem, but now that the situation had changed, he was already contemplating kneeling under her pomegranate skirt.

The devil wants your psychological help! I, Wu Zhixing, just want to cultivate quietly.

As Wu Zhixing found himself at a disadvantage, the persona of "String Song" that had begun to crumble, started wildly revealing her true nature, excitedly screaming, "Miss Liyao, push harder, keep blasting them. We must knock them down, trample them underfoot, make them kneel and sing..."

Before she could finish her sentence,

Wang Liyao's aura became even colder and more menacing, a powerful aura like an invisible hand, seized String Song by the throat, cutting off her noise abruptly.

The pervasive fine rain, as if caught by countless invisible hands, hung suspended in the air like time itself had stopped.

The next moment,

The pervasive fine rain converged silently, like countless streams returning to the sea, then continued condensing, condensing, and condensing.

A single drop of dew appeared on String Song's sword tip.

This drop of dew was not large, even smaller than ordinary dew.

Under the dim light, its surface flickered with halos, shimmering beautifully, as if countless Mysterious Runes were floating up and down within, emitting an immensely complex and overwhelmingly powerful aura.

"Tianyi True Water!"

Prince De Xin, who was drinking tea, paused, his eyes showing a hint of surprise.

You must know that Tianyi True Water is the signature skill of the "Tianyi True Water Vein" as one of the Sacred Land's Nine Veins. To employ this technique, the requirements for a cultivator's comprehension of the Heaven and Earth Laws and control over power are extremely high.

Even for Great Heavenly Proud, most couldn't proficiently use it until they reached the Purple Abode Realm.

Seeing this scene, even though Prince De Xin looked displeased, he couldn't help but let out a sigh of admiration, "So young, yet able to master Tianyi True Water, this girl is indeed extraordinary."

"Hehe~ That's right. My disciple, whom I devoted myself wholeheartedly to training, how could she fall behind?" Tianhe Enlightened One stroked his beard, a look of pride painted on his face, yet tearfully mustering strength within.

To train this disciple, he had actually gone completely bankrupt, bearing heavy debts. If they weren't strong, would there be any justice?

As they were talking,

On the platform, the spirit sword in Wang Liyao's hand, String Song, trembled lightly, and the Tianyi True Water already left the sword tip, lightly floating towards Wu Zhixing.

The tiny dewdrop slid through the air, light and ethereal, yet seeming to carry the Power of Ten Thousand Jun, even the air made a sound as if it couldn't bear the weight.

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In that instant, Wu Zhixing felt a terrifying fear as if a great disaster was looming over him.

There was no time to think further; he exhausted all his strength to summon the Mysterious Energy. The shadow of Yinglong behind him let out a long chant, and the tremendous Divine Power burst forth layer by layer, instantly forming a strong Protective Gang Qi that enveloped him thoroughly.

The "Tiangang" Divine Skills not only could attack but also defend.

The multiple layers of Protective Gang Qi emitted a faint bluish glow, resembling armor that protected his body. Although its defensive power was not as good as those specifically Defensive Divine Spiritual Treasures, it was still considerable.

Ordinary Small Divine Powers could be resisted just by using the Wind Armor.

But at this moment, Wu Zhixing felt no confidence at all and was still desperately gathering Mysterious Energy, continuously thickening the Protective Gang Qi.

"Boom!"

A mere dewdrop fell on the Protective Gang Qi, and the highly compressed immense Sword Intent burst forth explosively. In just an instant, the thick Protective Gang Qi shattered violently.

Wu Zhixing's body shuddered, and in an instant, he was flung backward, slamming heavily against the Array Protective Wall of the arena, and he spat out a mouthful of blood with a "Wah".

The Array Protective Wall behind him also couldn't bear the strain and began to crack inch by inch.

Hiss!

Heng Commandery Prince stood up abruptly, covering his blood-dripping heart with immense heartache.

This this this, this array on the arena was expensive as he had specially hired someone to set it up; please don't let it be smashed by him!!!

"Little Commandery Prince truly is an extraordinary top expert among the younger generation in the National Capital," Wang Liyao's voice sounded somewhat ethereal, "My drop of Heavenly True Water apparently couldn't trouble you."

"Hold on... cough, cough, cough~"

Wu Zhixing's eyes were filled with shock; just as he tried to speak, he was seized by a fit of coughing, spitting out mouthfuls of fresh blood.

"Since that's the case, I can only reluctantly use the second form of 'Hanging Water Divine Power,' 'Light Rain Turns into Moderate Rain Sometimes with Showers,'" Wang Liyao's expression was serious, and her voice was filled with gravity, "This form is a recent insight of mine and still somewhat uncontrollable. Should the power be uncontrolled, I hope the Little Commandery Prince will forgive me."

As her words fell,

The originally cold sky darkened again, becoming even more somber.

Drop after drop of moderate rain fell, larger and more densely spaced than light rain.

"I... I surrender~ cough, cough, cough~~"

Wu Zhixing's eyes were full of fear, scrambling to refuse.

Immortal Li Yao, must you be like this? I can barely withstand your Yin Turning Small Rain, and yet you're bringing out the second form?

That what's called the second form... "Light Rain Turns into Moderate Rain Sometimes with Showers," just the name of this Small Divine Power move sounds so fierce!

He wanted to surrender, but continuous coughing up of blood meant he couldn't even speak, forcing him to hurriedly prop up his shattered Protective Gang Qi again.

Then he watched helplessly as the moderate rain fell; under Wang Liyao's Heavenly True Water Method, it turned into fully ten drops of "Heavenly True Water"!

The terrifying power broke through the protective array, permeating the entire White Cloud Tower.

In boxes and scattered seats, countless people stood up uncontrollably, their expressions filled with shock.

Boom!

One drop hit, shattering his Protective Gang Qi, while he spat blood and propped up the Gang Qi again.

Boom! The second drop, the third drop!

After three drops, Wu Zhixing had no strength left to resist and simply lay flat on the ground, fainting.

After he fainted, Wang Liyao finally stopped, retracting the "Light Rain Turns into Moderate Rain Sometimes with Showers" Small Divine Power.

This scene stunned everyone present.

The entire White Cloud Tower went silent, and for a moment, not a single person spoke.

Prince De Xin's face changed unpredictably, and after a long silence, he finally said, "Good! Although Zhixing lost this battle, he never admitted defeat and would rather be knocked unconscious. He has spirit, truly worthy of being a member of our Imperial Household!"

"Uh..." Enlightened One Tianhe next door sneered, "De Xin, you really are just like when you were young, always liking to glorify yourself."

Others might not understand, but these big shots were well aware. Was Wu Zhixing not wanting to surrender? It was clearly that he was beaten until he couldn't surrender in time!

"You..." Prince De Xin was so angered his face turned ashen, and after observing that Wu Zhixing was not in mortal danger, he immediately waved his sleeve, "This prince is ashamed to be in your company."

With that, his body burst into a halo of light, and he vanished instantly, directly using his Divine Skills to leave.

Seeing him flee in panic, Enlightened One Tianhe felt as if he had won a battle himself, feeling extremely relieved, and he even looked at Prince Yong'an more pleasantly.

"Yong'an, about the debt of your Old Ancestor..." he said smilingly, squinting at Prince Yong'an.

Although Prince Yong'an was a Divine Power Territory as well, both in age and seniority, he was much younger than Prince De Xin and Enlightened One Tianhe, so he had to act humbly in front of these old men.

Immediately, he respectfully bowed, "Elder Tianhe, please rest assured. Allow Yong'an to make some arrangements back home; within three days, twenty Superior Spirits will be delivered into your hands."

Even for the Imperial Household, twenty Superior Spirits was not a small number, but it wasn't so big that they would default on the debt.

"Good, then I will wait a few days. Speaking of which, of this lineage, I admire you the most, Yong'an. Your temperament and attitude are not like those pretentious acts of your Old Ancestor," Enlightened One Tianhe chuckled heartily.

Prince Yong'an had no reply to that comment, so he could only display an embarrassed yet polite smile and then, finding an excuse, he quickly flew off.

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At that moment, among those from the Imperial Household who had come together, only the stepfather of Wu Zhixing, "Fu Commandery Prince," remained.

Actually, the Fu Commandery Prince also wanted to leave, but since Wu Zhixing was his stepson, and now he lay unconscious, it would not be very good for him as a foster father to simply walk away.

Next, together with Heng Commandery Prince, Wu Xuening, and others, they carried the unconscious Wu Zhixing into a private room and took good care of him.

Although this battle had already ended,

the enthusiasm and excitement of all spectators still hadn't dissipated.

There was no helping it, this was a rare battle between Great Heavenly Prouds, and Wu Zhixing's performance alone had been dazzling enough, not to mention Wang Liyao's, which could only be described as shocking.

Particularly her "Hanging Water Divine Power": the first move, "Yin Turning Small Rain," and the second, "Light Rain Turns into Moderate Rain Sometimes with Showers," while the names seemed plain, were actually full of mystery, becoming more flavorful the more one pondered them...

In the private booths above, and among the scattered seats below, countless Profound Martial cultivators were still in the throes of excitement, discussing animatedly, unable to calm down for a long time.

In a corner, within a lower-end private booth they had paid a small fortune for, Shangguan Yunhong, Shangguan Yunque, and Lady Bilian, who had come in a low profile, wore different expressions.

"Brother~ I feel quite lucky to have fought with the Great Heavenly Proud Li Yao last time and still managed to return alive," Shangguan Yunhong, with his face full of trembling flesh, said while swallowing hard, controlled by the fear, "This Grand Aunt is simply too fierce; even Little Commandery Prince Zhixing was beaten into such a state."

"Brother~ are you still going to take part?" Lady Bilian looked toward Shangguan Yunque.

Participate?

Shangguan Yunque's face darkened somewhat.

If you think it's possible, why don't you do it?

Although both were regarded as Great Heavenly Prouds, his talents were ultimately a notch below Little Commandery Prince Zhixing, and two notches below Wang Liyao.

Even though he had now broken through to the seventh layer of the Heavenly Human Realm, he still wasn't completely confident that he could withstand Wang Liyao's second move "Light Rain Turns into Moderate Rain Sometimes with Showers." And even if he managed to endure it, who knew if she had a third move?

If she unleashed something like "Moderate Rain Turns into Heavy Rain," wouldn't he be pressed to the ground and ground down?

He was nearly fifty years older than Wang Liyao, and should he lose in front of a large crowd, what would happen to his face?

"Brother~ how about we make an arrangement to spar in private?" Lady Bilian suggested with a twinkle in her eyes, inciting him in secret.

"Sister, why do you always propel me into a battle with Wang Liyao?" Shangguan Yunque grew suspicious once more.

"Sparring with another outstanding Great Heavenly Proud can accelerate your understanding of the Heavenly Dao," Lady Bilian rolled her eyes and coyly complained, "Don't I also wish to see someone from our household reach the Divine Power Territory as soon as possible? That way, our Shangguan family could ascend into the upper Third Grade."

"That does make sense," persuaded by her words, Shangguan Yunque also felt a bit tempted, "Miss Liyao may be young, but her Taoist Body bloodline is even higher than mine by two measures, and her insight into Heaven Dao Divine Ability is no less than mine. A mutual exchange of knowledge would be beneficial for us both. It's just that, Miss Liyao may not be willing to do so privately..."

Don't worry, both being from Longzuo County, I have had a few encounters with Miss Liyao," Lady Bilian patted her chest confidently, "I will do my best to mediate this matter for you."

"In that case, thank you for your trouble, sister."

"We're all family, what's this about trouble?"

...

Just as everyone was still excitedly exchanging ideas and Wang Liyao stood on the platform, preparing to leave,

suddenly,

the sky above White Cloud Tower began to churn with wind and clouds.

Accompanied by a sharp hiss akin to both snake and bird, a heavy oppressive force swept over, cold and deadly serious, as if mixed with the clanging tumult of armed conflict.

Along with this oppressive force, a slightly sharp but very authoritative voice came: "Miss Liyao, please stay your steps."

Wang Liyao instinctively turned her head and saw at the entrance of the unoccupied White Cloud Tower, where a vast and tremendous Divine Power was crazily converging.

A moment later, as the tremendous force slowly dissipated, a figure appeared at the center of the energy vortex.

This person was dressed in a gray eunuch's robe, holding a fly whisk in one hand, his face beardless and pale, with a stooped figure, looking very old.

However, upon seeing this individual, many of the officials and nobles present changed their expressions and promptly stood to salute.

"Eunuch Yao."

It turns out that this person was none other than Old Yao, the eunuch from Emperor Longchang's side.

"Lords and ladies, please, there's no need for formality,"

Old Yao bowed to the crowd, then turned to Wang Liyao on the platform and said politely, "His Majesty has a decree to convey, he requests Miss Liyao to receive the edict."

"Thank you for your efforts, Eunuch Yao,"

Wang Liyao's expression was serious, and she immediately jumped down from the platform, ready to receive the decree.

The surrounding guests looked at one another, then respectfully bent their waists as well.

Seeing that everyone was prepared, Old Yao finally took out a golden imperial edict from the Storage Ring. The edict was made from the finest Spirit silkworm silk, with intricate and delicate patterns on it, looking very exquisite and magnificent.

Old Yao unfurled the edict and solemnly read, "The Great Emperor decrees thus, Longzuo Academy's Great Heavenly Proud Wang Liyao is to enter the palace tomorrow to have an audience with His Majesty, this I command."

After finishing, he carefully re-rolled the edict and then with a flick of his hand, the imperial edict, as if carried by a force, slowly floated towards Wang Liyao.

Wang Liyao, with a solemn expression, quickly received the edict with both hands, bowed deeply and said, "Wang Liyao, receives the decree!"

The imperial edict was light, yet when it landed in her hands, she felt its heavy significance.

Father, Yao'er finally did not let you down and secured the opportunity to be granted an audience; I can take the crucial step forward.

Even she felt a flicker of excitement and curiosity in her heart at this moment.

Emperor Longchang, what kind of person was he?

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...

Daqian Imperial City.

It was still the "Zhuzheng Pavilion."

Now, as Emperor Longchang had grown old, aside from the regular Grand Assemblies, he mostly worked within the Zhuzheng Pavilion on ordinary days.

Daqian comprised seven prefectures and one capital, its territories vast and expansive, with countless issues, big and small, occurring daily, very few of which actually required Emperor Longchang's personal attention.

Take, for instance, the recent promotion of the Changning Wang Clan from Rank 7 to Rank Six Prominent Family. According to protocol, it required the Prefectural Governor, Taishi Ankang, to

organize the documentation and draft the promotion memorial, which would then be sent to the national capital for His Majesty's personal review and approval.

However, in reality, most routine memorials were handled by the extensive cabinet staff, who followed procedures to draft the responses, which were then reviewed by the three Ministers, and after ensuring no issues, jointly signed and sealed, allowing for execution.

Only a very few significant issues, or those lucky enough to be randomly selected for review, would be presented to His Majesty for personal perusal.

This was indeed as it should have been. With the vastness of the Great Qian Land, if even the smallest matters required the Great Emperor's personal decision, he would never have enough time.

The Great Emperor would likely be overwhelmed by a mountainous and vast number of petitions.

Now, as Emperor Longchang aged and his energy declined, the time he spent managing court affairs became even less, spending most of his time resting in the Zhuozheng Pavilion, occasionally summoning some of the more outstanding younger members of his progeny.

The Great Heavenly Proud were already among the top elites of Daqian, and, barring unexpected events, would certainly become one of the pillars of the empire in the future.

Thus, even Emperor Longchang paid considerable attention to the Great Heavenly Proud. In fact, if any of them had important matters to report, they could even apply to be granted an audience.

As long as the Great Emperor was not too busy, he would usually make time for them.

However, it was rare for the Great Heavenly Proud to actively request an audience, after all, this was an emperor who had ruled over Daqian for more than three thousand years and maintained considerable authority in the presence of the younger generation. Should they provoke his ire, they might face severe consequences.

Inside the palace, Old Yao was personally leading Wang Liyao toward the Zhuozheng Pavilion.

He bent his back, frequently turning to the side to explain some of the Imperial Palace's rules to Wang Liyao and what to be aware of during the upcoming audience.

Within the entire Great Qian Land, the Great Heavenly Proud were the top-tier talents, so even though Old Yao was a close confidante of Emperor Longchang, he was quite friendly and patient with Wang Liyao.

Furthermore, Wang Liyao naturally did not look down upon him for being a eunuch.

Merely the overwhelming authority he demonstrated when transmitting imperial decrees, along with his formidable presence, was enough to show that he was also a major figure who might not be inferior to Tianhe Enlightened One in strength.

Yet Wang Liyao also secretly wondered why a person with Divine Skills would choose to stay beside the emperor as a eunuch. However, she would never show such doubts outwardly.

The two of them moved quickly.

In just a short while, they arrived outside the Zhuozheng Pavilion.

At the door stood two tall and upright guards, but both were only of the Sky Human Realm Cultivation, mostly for show. After all, if someone dared to assassinate the emperor, mere guards of the Sky Human Realm would be far from sufficient.

Following protocol, Wang Liyao was soon invited into the Zhuozheng Pavilion.

Behind the grand desk, Emperor Longchang looked much younger than his usually lethargic usual self these days.

Different from his amiable and approachable demeanor in front of his grandchildren, his eyes now deep as the sea and indecipherable, even his casual sitting posture exuded an aura of imperial authority.

Upon seeing Wang Liyao enter, his gaze swept over her, and his eyes soon rested on Wang Liyao.

"Liyao pays respects to the Great Emperor."

Wang Liyao stepped forward and bowed deeply.

Despite her status and cultivation, facing this emperor who had controlled Great Qian Land for over three thousand years still made her heart flutter with slight trepidation and nervousness.

This world was unlike ancient Huaxia, where one had to perform prostration before a monarch.

Generally speaking, cultivators from Profound Martial only bowed to their ancestors, and only in extremely special circumstances would they kneel before a monarch; otherwise, a deep bow was sufficient. Moreover, Wang Liyao being of Sky Pride from the Academic Palace had an exceptional status.

After a brief pause,

The authoritative voice of Emperor Longchang boomed, "Dispense with the formalities. Please sit, and have some tea."

"Thank you, Your Majesty."

After expressing her thanks, Wang Liyao sat on the chair that Old Yao had moved over.

Following Old Yao's earlier advice, she did not sit fully but perched lightly, keeping her back straight and demeanor respectful, displaying the etiquette a junior should show to an elder.

While accepting the tea, she glanced with the corner of her eye over Emperor Longchang's desk and noticed a stack of documents, which included the name 'Changning Wang Clan' at a glance.

It was quite clear that before her arrival, the emperor had been studying the Changning Wang Clan's documents.

However, these documents, which were collected, only displayed the information the Wang family intended to show publicly; the family still guarded many more secrets internally.

These secrets were managed by the family's Artifact Spirit, and even if a powerful intelligence agency targeted it, it would be difficult to uncover too much information.

This concealment was not unique to the Wang family. In fact, most Prominent Families in the world employed similar discretion, keeping secrets and trump cards hidden. The older the Prominent Family, the more secrets, and trump cards they tended to have, and in fact, this was part of what comprised a family's heritage.

The Daqian Imperial Family Wu's clan certainly had the most secrets and trump cards of any family.

Chapter 24 Shocking! Great Emperor, So You Are Such a Person _2

Emperor Longchang slowly closed the document, his voice slightly kind as he encouraged, "Liyao, your visit to the capital this time has revealed amazing talent and potential. Excellent, excellent, indeed, you are an extremely outstanding Great Heavenly Proud."

"Thank you, Your Majesty, for your compliments," Wang Liyao responded neither arrogantly nor humbly.

"I heard, Liyao, that you also plan to kick the Nine Veins in the Sacred Land?" Emperor Longchang asked with a smile that was not quite a smile, "Such a grand ambition, is it perhaps paving your way for the path of a Saint? Or not exactly, the competition for the Saint's position is still early, why the rush? Or could there be other hidden reasons?"

"I dare not deceive Your Majesty," Wang Liyao took a sip of Spiritual Tea, her expression calm and composed, her words, however, were like a thunderclap, "It is our Changning Wang Clan that has decided to support An Commandery Prince in his bid for the position of Emperor's son. Thus, Liyao took the initiative to come forth first to earn some fame to pave the way for An Commandery Prince."

As soon as she said this,

the smile on Emperor Longchang's face gradually stiffened, and a trace of coldness curled at the corners of his mouth.

"Daring!" Old Yao rebuked in a low voice beside him, "How dare you discuss such matters of competing for the Emperor's son before His Majesty?"

While speaking, he also secretly gave Wang Liyao meaningful looks.

"Lord Yao, the Changning Wang Clan supports the bid for the Emperor's son, not the competition," Wang Liyao firmly looked at Old Yao, her eyes clear as water, "Moreover, according to the law of the Great Qian Land, the so-called 'competition for the Emperor's son' essentially involves selecting two or more Quasi Emperor's Sons, allowing them to demonstrate their capabilities within a set period, from which the most outstanding successor is chosen to provide Great Qian with the best future."

"This is a completely legitimate affair, so why talk about interference? Why sneak around? Moreover, what I have said is the fact. With the Emperor inquiring, would I not be guilty of deceiving the ruler if I intentionally concealed the truth?"

Old Yao was left without a response, although he internally rolled his eyes in frustration.

Although that was the case, the competition for the Emperor's son does involve sensitive topics such as His Majesty's advanced age and the nearing end of his life.

In recent years, as the term of the Great Emperor approaches closer, sensitivity towards these issues has increased, even princes like Kang Commandery Prince and others, in front of His Majesty, try as much as possible to avoid this topic to not hurt His Majesty's feelings.

This young lady, however, repeatedly mentioning the "competition for the Emperor's son," really is like a naive calf who is not afraid of tigers.

"It's alright, it's alright, Old Yao, don't fuss over it," the coldness on Emperor Longchang's face had unknowingly dissipated and returned to being "kind and benevolent," "Liyao is right, the Quasi Emperor's Sons competing for the Emperor's son is an ancestral system and national law, aimed at selecting a more outstanding next Great Emperor. All this is best done openly, not through shady tricks."

"However, Liyao, your Changning Wang Clan is just a Grade Six Prominent Family, although there are a few young individuals in the family with potential. Yet, with only your support for An Commandery Prince, I fear your efforts might be insufficient?"

"Your Majesty, my father highly regards the character and talents of An Commandery Prince," Wang Liyao said with a bow, "Therefore, we thought to contribute our modest efforts. As for the final outcome, everything still relies on your imperial decision."

Of course, the final verdict in the competition for the Emperor's son must be made by the entire Imperial Household. However, in such instances, Emperor Longchang's judgment as the emperor and Family Head holds considerable weight and can often sway the situation, especially when the support rates for the Quasi Emperor's Sons are not vastly different.

Therefore, Wang Liyao mentioning His Majesty's imperial decision was not wrong.

Hearing her speak thus, Emperor Longchang seemed slightly more interested, "The gap between An Commandery Prince and Kang Commandery Prince is quite large, even with the support of you, Wang Liyao, a Great Heavenly Proud, it might not change the situation. Could it be that your Wang family has some other brilliant strategies?"

At this stage in life, and already nearing death, Emperor Longchang had lost interest in most matters. Even the competition for the Emperor's son wasn't high on his list, given that the current situation seemed almost settled.

A matter without suspense, how could it pique the interest of an elderly emperor? It was nothing more than following procedures automatically.

"Your Majesty, our Wang family has no special strategies," Wang Liyao shook her head and said, "My father has always adhered to being grounded and diligent in his work. He believes that where there's a will, there's a way, and people will eventually understand the achievements of An Commandery Prince."

At this, Emperor Longchang instantly lost interest again, and said listlessly, "It sounds similar to that young man Wu Mingyuan, no wonder there's mutual recognition. Well, as long as it's within the framework of ancestral rules and national laws, you and Wu Mingyuan can jump around all you want."

"However, be careful not to overdo it. Cheng Si, that boy, has a temperament like me, quite vengeful and petty. In case you fail in your efforts, be careful of the payback."

Err... petty? Your Majesty, are you not including yourself in that criticism?

Wang Liyao couldn't help but smile, feeling somewhat closer to His Majesty, and immediately bowed, "Your Majesty jests. You are renowned as a pioneering and capable emperor. During your reign of over thirty-two hundred years, you have increased the land area by more than double. My father also praises and marvels at Your Majesty's achievements."

"Hey, don't you disbelief it," Emperor Longchang chuckled, "Go back and ask Duke Ding of your main line of the Wang family, see if it's true. Just because they chose the wrong side and offended me, I made them wear small shoes for over three thousand years, grinding down the Wang family from Second Class to Third Grade. If it weren't for the sake of the Wang family's ancestors, hehe – "

Chapter 24 Shocking! Great Emperor, You Are Actually This Kind of Person _3

Wang Liyao had a wry smile on her face.

It is often said that the older people get, the more child-like they become, acting without concern and following their hearts' whims. Yet Your Majesty, to say such things about playing little tricks on others to her was indeed somewhat... mischievous...

"Liyao, you must be criticizing me in your heart," Emperor Longchang said with a smile, "You, looking like a fairy and speaking so directly earlier, not beating around the bush at all, yet it turns out you're just an ordinary person after all. I have been Emperor for more than three thousand years, and everything has been recorded by historians.

While I'm still alive, of course, no one dares to speak up."

"Once I am dead, when the land sees the new replace the old, they might praise me, but I can't climb out of my coffin to live a few more years. If they curse me, I can't get out and beat them either. What point is there in all this pretense?"

Wang Liyao was at a loss for words.

Your Majesty, your words are so reasonable that I am left speechless.

Before coming here, she had contemplated what kind of person His Majesty might be. Alas, she had thought of many possibilities, but had never imagined that he would be like this...

However, as much as His Majesty could speak of himself in such a manner, Wang Liyao could not simply agree insincerely.

After paying some empty compliments, she took out the gifts she had prepared in advance, "Your Majesty, these are a few gadgets designed by my father, which he has entrusted to me to present to you for your enjoyment."

Then, Wang Liyao took out a heap of items from her Storage Ring, including a meticulously crafted Luya Rod, a two meter tall large monocular Telescope, a small monocular Telescope, a set of a Formation-powered lighting System, and various other miscellaneous gadgets.

At first, Emperor Longchang thought the Wang family was just like other Prominent Families, offering some rare treasures to win his favor, and he wasn't very interested. However, he was surprised to find a pile of strange gadgets.

After Wang Liyao explained them, what interested him the most were indeed the Luya Rod, the large Telescope, and the small Telescope.

At the level of a Great Emperor, his vision and hearing had long surpassed that of ordinary people. If he wished, he could see clearly for dozens of miles from high above.

But no matter how extraordinary his vision, it couldn't compare to the treasure that had reached the level of a primary astronomical Telescope. The distance that this device could see was beyond description in mere miles, and at night, it could even magnify the night sky countless times.

The half-meter long small Telescope also intrigued him greatly, and he specifically took it outside his study, flying around and looking here and there.

Soon after, he returned to Zhuozheng Pavilion with a somewhat dejected look, holding the monocular Telescope and sighing deeply.

"Does Your Majesty dislike this gift? Just now, it seemed like Your Majesty was enjoying them quite a bit," Old Yao asked carefully.

Seeing this, Wang Liyao herself felt a bit nervous.

"Not at all... Ah~" Emperor Longchang sighed deeply, reminiscing, "Over three thousand five hundred years ago, when I was a young man, I had a chance encounter with Consort Fu, the concubine of my fifth Royal Uncle. I couldn't help feeling stirred and had trouble sleeping through the night."

"???"

Wang Liyao looked on subtly. So His Majesty had his romantic episodes when he was young, but alas, that was the concubine of the Royal Uncle, likely a hopeless case.

"After struggling internally for several months, tormented by longing, I decided to drag my elder brother with me to peep on Consort Fu bathing~~" Emperor Longchang said with annoyance, "We were discovered because we were too close, and as a result, both my brother and I were beaten half to death. If only we'd had this... Liyao, what's this called again?"

"==b..." Wang Liyao felt a drop of cold sweat slide down and replied helplessly, "Monocular Telescope."

"Right, right, Monocular Telescope. If only we had such a device back then, my brother and I would not have ended up in such a miserable situation," Emperor Longchang said angrily.

Zhuozheng Pavilion was becoming an uncomfortable place to stay.

Wang Liyao felt unease, as the chair beneath her seemed to grow hot.

Isn't it said that meeting the Great Heavenly Proud Emperor normally takes the duration of an incense stick? Now it has been almost two hours...

Facing such an Emperor, Wang Liyao felt a great deal of pressure. Hearing the Emperor's dark history, might she be silenced?

...

In the end, of course, Wang Liyao safely left Zhuozheng Pavilion and was even rewarded by the Great Emperor with a heap of treasures and resources to encourage her.

After this, the news of this battle of Challenger of Heaven swept through the National Capital and rolled out to the entire country like a wind carrying dandelions.

The reputation of Liyao the Great Heavenly Proud spread throughout the country in an instant, becoming red-hot and rising like the midday sun.

Rumors said that after resting for a year, Liyao the Great Heavenly Proud would set foot in the Sacred Land to stir up another battle among Sky Prides under the age of one hundred fifty-one.

This was bound to be different from the battle in the National Capital. The prides of the Sacred Land were known for their arrogance; upon hearing the news, many who were in seclusion would surely come forth.

And with a year to prepare, it was not impossible to achieve further improvements in strength.

Everyone was looking forward to whether Liyao the Great Heavenly Proud could live up to her bold claims: "First kicking the Shangjing Sky Prides, then sweeping the Nine Veins of the Sacred Land." And this time, the attention on her was far greater than it had been in the National Capital.

It was rumored that when Wang Liyao left Shangjing, she secretly exchanged blows with Shangguan Yunque of the GuiLong Shangguan Clan.

The outcome of the exchange was not disclosed, but it was heard that after returning, Shangguan Yunque entered a state of seclusion, claiming to have gained insights and needing to confirm them through meditation.

Chapter 24 Shocking! Great Emperor, You Are Actually This Kind of Person _4

As for the truth of the matter, it remained unknown.

...

Meanwhile, out in the tumultuous world.

The rhythm of the Changning Wang Clan was not affected in the slightest; they continued their vigorous campaign to clear and develop the territories beyond their domain. While Li Yao's endeavor to build prestige abroad was important, the foundation of the family's strength still lay in its own growth and development. After the excitement, the work that needed to be done, still had to be done.

The elders were all busy, working without rest.

Naturally, on rest days, with less supervision, the children in the Main Residence started to become more unruly.

Wang Ying Xuan!

She was the beloved granddaughter of Wang Shouzhe, and also, due to her exceptional talents from a young age, was being groomed to be sent to the Sacred Land for training in a few years.

At the same time, she was the one with the biggest presence among a group of children still displaying their childish innocence, reigning supreme over the rest.

Beneath her sat a majestic tiger, its fur a mix of white and striped patches.

Speaking of this striped and white tiger, it truly had an impressive appearance. With the character for 'king' on its forehead, it strolled around with a proud look, its aura of a Level Four Spirit Beast exuding, causing all sorts of snakes, insects, and rodents to scatter in fear.

If it had one flaw, it was that it ate a bit too much and had become quite fat, its body round and plump, particularly its potbelly that almost seemed to be rubbing intimately against the ground.

"Hua Hua~," Wang Ying Xuan patted the big tiger's head and giggled, "Today's battle is the most important one since the founding of the Invincible Beautiful Girls Mutual Aid Alliance. As long as we manage to wipe out the enemy without leaving a trace, I'll save you ten, no, twenty pounds of Level Five Fierce Beast meat from my provisions."

"Ao wu ao wu~"

The big tiger Hua Hua's eyes lit up, letting out a ferocious roar. That was Level Five Fierce Beast meat, just the thought made it drool with anticipation.

Indeed, this tiger was the one that was picked up by Wang Licui back in the day. Later, when she went off to the Academic Palace to study, she left Hua Hua in the farm.

Initially, Wang Xiaozhi, the elderly fourth Grand Elder, helped look after it. After the Grand Elder's passing, as Hua Hua grew stronger and its appetite increased, the farm could no longer sustain it.

Wang Shouzhe then brought it to the Main Residence, picking a house next to the Wang Licui family's home to raise it as the Clan Guardian Spirit Beast.

Since Hua Hua was raised by humans from a young age, it was very affectionate, especially with the children. Most of the time, it was indeed found mixing with the kids.

"Besides, during this expansion into the territories, I will ask Father to bring you a Level Three female tiger, so you can extend your lineage and sire cubs," declared Wang Ying Xuan with majestic vigor, as though she was boosting the morale of thousands of soldiers on the battlefield before a charge, somewhat akin to the tone of a Martial Goddess.

A female tiger?

Hua Hua became even more excited, ao wu ao wu, saliva almost flowing from its mouth. I'm finally going to have a wife and children, it hasn't been easy. Wait, something seems off? Didn't Miss Licui say she was going to find me a wife before... and then Young Master Zong'an said it too... Shi Zhao also mentioned it...

and now Miss Yuxuan... No, no, too much, too much~~~ I'm a tiger with principles; I can't have so many wives~~~ I'll wait for Miss Licui to come back.

"Ao wu ao wu~"

Under the collaboration of Wang Ying Xuan and Hua Hua, along with a group of "beautiful girls" howling away, they charged and routed the group of boys known as the "Undimmed Youth Sunshine Boys" in just a few rounds.

Wang Ying Xuan rode on Hua Hua, walking through the Main Residence as if she were a victorious grand general returning from battle, truly an imposing sight.

She tilted her head up at a forty-five-degree angle to the sky and sighed, "The greatest loneliness of life is to be invincible in battle. Now that Aunt Liyao has just swept the Sky Prides of the Imperial Capital and is about to step into the Sacred Land's Nine Veins, what a magnificent sight that is."

"As the saying goes, 'With Liyao stirring the world, who can compete if Yuxuan does not venture forth?'"

"Young prodigies of Shangjing City, wait for me... Sooner or later, I, Wang Ying Xuan, will also break through the Imperial Capital, making the prodigies of the world tremble at the mention of my name."

"Wang Ying Xuan, you damn little rascal, get off that tiger this instant!"

Just then, Wang Ying Xuan's mother, Mrs. Fang, descended gracefully from the neighboring rooftop, her face stern and armed with a vine whip, she moved toward her daughter with a menacing air.

"The Clan School tutor just came for a home visit and said out of your seven main subjects you've failed five. Your grandfather has already called in your father to give him a good thrashing! You better hurry over to your grandfather's place to save your dad~~"

What?!!

Wang Ying Xuan felt weak all over and rolled off the tiger's back, wailing inwardly. It was all over, she had forgotten to intercept the Clan School tutor on the way.

The matter had even disturbed Grandfather!

Could it be that I, the mighty Martial Goddess, will falter before I've even begun?

Chapter 25 Shou Zhe Sternly Reproaches Liu Ruolan

...

In Wang Shouzhe's small courtyard, the beauty of blossoming flowers and lush plants never ceased, and a faint mist hung in the air, carrying with it an invigorating sense of vibrant spirit.

Many children from the Wang family's direct and collateral lines had profound memories of this yard.

Simply because Family Head Wang Shouzhe had always shown particular fondness for the younger members of his family; nearly every child had, at one point in their early years, been cradled in his arms and had listened to his enthralling and marvelous stories.

For the children, Wang Shouzhe had always been like a kind spring rain, carefully nurturing them, providing comprehensive support so they could grow strong, striving to offer them a bright, positive, and healthy childhood.

However, today, Wang Shouzhe sat in the pavilion with a face as dark as the depths of water, unable to even sip the Immortal Tea he usually loved so much.

Wang Zongrui was Wang Shouzhe's second direct son and his fourth child with Liu Ruolan.

He was now fifty-two years old. From his youth, he grew up to be handsome and tall, resembling an elegant gentleman of troubled times. Although now he sported a pair of small whiskers, it did not make him appear wretched; instead, it added a touch of maturity and stability.

After marrying the direct daughter of the Fang Family from Liaoyuan, he had led a down-to-earth life and had fathered two sons and a daughter.

Overall, apart from a time during his childhood when he persistently suspected his father and Artifact Spirit Lil Snow of having an unspeakable past—being beaten by his mother so much he once doubted whether he was Lil Snow's child—he, like his elder brother Wang Zong'an, hadn't caused Wang Shouzhe too much worry.

Today at fifty-two, having dedicated thirty years of diligent work in "Changning United Manufacturers Department" and slowly shouldering more responsibilities, he was considered one of the mainstays of the Wang family.

But today, he was kneeling miserably before his father, Wang Shouzhe.

Sweat dripped from his forehead, his gaze darted about, his expression uneasy, as if he had made some grave mistake.

Since that incident in his childhood, it had been many, many years since he had seen his father this angry.

Even his mother's attempt to appease his father with his favorite dish, "Rock candy tremella lotus seed soup," especially made to plead on his behalf, was met with a stern look from his father and rejected.

"Grandpa~ Daddy, Daddy..."

When Wang Ying Xuan was "escorted" over by her mother from the Fang Family, and saw what was happening, she instinctively shrank back, her little face turning pale, and she was at a loss for words, looking as pitiful as a little quail.

"Father..." Fang Family's own demeanor changed from the fierceness she had displayed before Wang Ying Xuan to meek deference, as she carefully bowed and delicately said, "I have brought Yuxuan here. You may punish her as you see fit, even to death if need be, please do not let Zongrui kneel any longer."

Since marrying Wang Zongrui, their marriage had been filled with love and they had two sons and a daughter together. She felt immense pity seeing her husband punished, especially knowing that her father-in-law would be reluctant to strike Yuxuan.

Wang Ying Xuan was nearly furious.

Mother, am I really your child? To save your husband, you would even sell out your daughter...

As the daughter-in-law, Fang Family certainly would not receive any harsh treatment from Wang Shouzhe.

His expression softened slightly, and, trying to reassure her, he said, "Feng'er, since marrying into the Wang family, you have always been a prudent and capable homemaker, with impeccable behavior and social interactions. It's just that today's incident..."

While speaking, he covertly signaled Liu Ruolan, who was standing aside holding the lotus seed soup and was visibly upset.

After glancing at him, Liu Ruolan put down the soup, led Fang Family to the side, and comforted her softly, "Feng'er, don't worry about this. Old man might be angry, but Zongrui is still his son, he won't go too far."

Consequently, Fang Family was somewhat relieved and gave her daughter, Wang Ying Xuan, a fierce glare.

"Zongrui, do you understand your mistake?"

With Fang Family being counseled to one side, Wang Shouzhe returned to his stern demeanor and looked towards Wang Zongrui, his face as stern as iron.

"Father," Wang Zongrui said with a quivering voice, keeping his head low, "Zongrui understands his mistake."

"Yuxuan is my granddaughter. Her current messy state is largely due to your failures as a father," said Wang Shouzhe. "Since you have admitted your fault, the punishment will be halved. Bring in the enforcers of the family law, fifty strikes."

"As you wish, Father."

Wang Zongrui dutifully removed his outer garment, revealing his back.

"Present!" Two enforcers from the Spirit Platform Realm, already prepared, stepped forward, each holding a rod for family punishment, and said to Wang Zongrui, "We apologize, Young Master Zongrui."

"I deserve this, it's not your fault," Wang Zongrui, not daring to bear any ill will towards them, quickly returned the courtesy and then, closing his eyes and clenching his teeth, said, "Begin."

Only after seeing Wang Zongrui's response did the two enforcers from the Spiritual Platform Realm start to wield the rods, aiming for Wang Zongrui's back.

Just after the first strike, Wang Zongrui shuddered, but he had to bear it without using his Mysterious Energy for protection.

"Slap, slap, slap!"

The family law rod strikes were firm; after just a few, Wang Zongrui's back began to show welts and cuts.

Fang Family almost fainted, her head spinning. How was this considered restraint?

Immediately, she pinched the still befuddled and startled Wang Ying Xuan hard, "You foolish girl, what are you waiting for? Aren't you going to beg for your grandfather's mercy? He always favored you the most."

Wang Ying Xuan's little face turned pale as she hurried to Wang Shouzhe's side, tearfully grasping his arm, "Grandpa, Grandpa. This is all Xuan'er's fault, it has nothing to do with Father.

I shouldn't have been lazy or neglected my studies, I shouldn't have threatened the teachers at the clan school again and again—I should not have been the ringleader, wu wu~~ Please don't punish Father anymore..."

Chapter 25: 守哲 Sternly Scolds Liu Ruolan_2

"Don't cry, don't cry~" Wang Shouzhe gently rubbed Wang Ying Xuan's head with a sigh, "You are still young with a playful heart, and it is normal to lack self-control. Grandfather doesn't blame you. If anyone is to blame, it is your father for not fulfilling his responsibilities as a father."

After he spoke, Wang Shouzhe's gaze turned and he coldly said to the family head, "Has everybody not eaten enough? Make sure every strike counts. Whoever dares to let this failure of a father off easy, I will make sure they do not have it easy."

The household heads, with a shiver in their hearts, dared not hold back any longer and hurriedly increased their strength, almost going all out as if their lives depended on it.

"Smack, smack, smack!"

Each strike caused the ground around them to tremble faintly.

After a few more strikes, Wang Zongrui finally couldn't stand it anymore. He cried out in pain but dared not resist with Mysterious Energy in front of his father's family discipline.

"Mother, mother~" Mrs. Fang, her face pale with horror, her heart aching, pleaded with Liu Ruolan, "Mother, you love your husband the most, please beg for mercy for him. If this continues, my husband's life will be in danger."

Liu Ruolan also felt it was too much and said angrily, "Wang Shouzhe, Zongrui has been obedient from childhood, never defying you. Even though he was somewhat negligent this time regarding Yuxuan's matter, he is after all your and my son. A few symbolic strikes should suffice. If you continue to beat him, don't blame me for turning against you."

Knowing the mother's status, the heads immediately stopped their rods.

Mrs. Fang also secretly sighed in relief, her heart eased. With her mother-in-law intervening, her husband was saved.

But unexpectedly.

Upon hearing this, Wang Shouzhe glared coldly at Liu Ruolan and snorted in anger, "Hmph, the overly kind mother spoils the child. Isn't Zongrui's current state a result of your usual indulgence? This wretch can't even control his daughter, what good can he be? It would be better to beat him to death, and you shall not interfere in this matter anymore, stay aside."

Liu Ruolan trembled with rage, "Wang Shouzhe, you dare to treat me harshly? Fine, fine... Wang Shouzhe, since you despise me so much, I might as well return to the Liu Family and leave you in peace..."

"Hmph, unreasonable. Go back if you want to!" Wang Shouzhe also seemed enraged, for once not backing down. He turned his head and instructed the family heads, "What are you standing there for? Do you also wish to defy the orders of your family head?"

The household heads were truly frightened.

Having served as household heads for decades, this was the first time they had seen the family head reprimand the mother so severely. At this point, they dared not delay any longer and hurriedly resumed their strikes.

"I can't stay in this house any longer! Wang Shouzhe, I will wait for your divorce notice at the Liu Family..." Liu Ruolan became furious with shame.

"Mother, mother, don't be impulsive, it was just father's angry words, please don't take it to heart."
Mrs. Fang, too, turned pale with fright.

The situation had become so intense even her in-laws were fighting so fiercely; she, no matter how much she pitied her husband, dared not persuade anymore.

Especially the phrase "the overly kind mother spoils the child," which also caused Mrs. Fang's heart to tremble.

Yuxuan's personality developing to this extent today, her poor results all had something to do with her indulgence, and the spoiling of her by the many relatives of the maternal Fang Family.

At this moment, the one most terrified was Wang Ying Xuan.

Such a scene, she had neither seen nor even imagined before, and she was so scared that she didn't even dare to cry any longer, much less beg her grandfather for mercy.

At this moment, the only thought in her mind was: It's all over, it's all over. With father being beaten like this, will there be any good days for me in the future?

Fifty rods, solidly delivered, not one missed.

Wang Zongrui's back was already lacerated and bloody, a ghastly sight. Blood trailed down his back to the ground, and his face and forehead were coated with a cold sweat from pain, his complexion extremely pale.

He also didn't dare to seek treatment and just shakily dressed himself, bowed to Wang Shouzhe and said, "Son thanks father for the lesson. I will bear this lesson in mind and never repeat the mistake."

"Since you have learned your lesson, rise then," said Wang Shouzhe lightly. "However, later you still need to treat the wounds to avoid any long-lasting damage."

"Thank you, father, for your compassion."

Only then did Wang Zongrui dare to stand up and bow deeply to Wang Shouzhe again.

Then, he coldly glanced at the terrified Wang Ying Xuan, "Father, your son has some private matters to deal with at home, please allow me to take my leave."

Wang Ying Xuan's heart skipped a beat, immediately sensing trouble.

She turned to run, but was caught by her father, Wang Zongrui, who grabbed her and hoisted her upside down, making her struggles futile.

To this, Wang Shouzhe, while sipping Immortal Tea, looked on indifferently: "Rui'er, go handle your matters."

"Son takes his leave."

After speaking, Wang Zongrui walked off, holding Wang Ying Xuan upside down, his face grim, striding towards his own courtyard.

Mrs. Fang, seeing this, immediately paled even more.

She rushed back in a panic after bowing to Liu Ruolan and Wang Shouzhe. With such urgency, if she delayed even a moment longer, her beloved daughter might indeed end up beaten to death by her husband.

As a legitimate second son, Wang Zongrui's courtyard was not far from Wang Shouzhe's, just about a few dozen yards away.

Shortly after, his courtyard echoed with Wang Ying Xuan's screams, flickering between wails like a ghost and promises such as "Father, I won't dare again," "I will study well, and not be naughty" among other pleas and promises.

Chapter 25 Shou Zhe Sternly Reproaches Liu Ruolan_3

Then came the cries and shouts from the Fang family, "Wang Zongrui, Yuxuan is also my daughter, if you keep beating her like this, someone's going to die. You, you bastard, I have had it with you!"

"Stand aside! As the saying goes, indulgent mothers breed unruly sons. If it weren't for you, and the coddling from those relatives of the Fang family, Wang Ying Xuan would never have ended up like this!" Wang Zongrui's cold and angry voice also resounded through the sky.

"Wang Zongrui, you, you dare to be fierce with me... I'm going back to my parents' home, I'll take Yuxuan with me right now, let's see if you have the guts to give me a divorce letter."

"You want a divorce letter, huh? Fine, I'll write it for you right now."

"So, Wang, now that your abilities have grown, and you're about to completely take over Changning United Manufacturers becoming a big shot, you're preparing to find a new wife, aren't you? To think I, Fang Xunfeng, have followed you for decades, bore you two sons and a daughter!"

"Beyond reason, say what you will."

"Daddy, Mommy, wuu wuu~ it's all my fault, I won't dare to do it again, I promise to study hard, to show every teacher in the Clan School respect..." Wang Ying Xuan was truly terrified, crying heartbreakingly, fearing that if this continued, she might lose her family,

"It's all this wretched girl's fault, I'll beat you to death," Wang Zongrui raged, "I've lost my wife, what do I need a daughter for?"

"Indeed, if it weren't for your misbehaving all day long, how would your father have been beaten so miserably? Our loving marriage has also been torn apart by you. Husband, hand me the rattan cane, I need to vent."

Then, Wang Ying Xuan, who successfully attracted the firestorm, achieved a life accomplishment of "being mixed doubles battered."

Her crying and screaming spread around for hundreds of feet, quickly attracting many of Wang family's clansmen to check out the commotion.

Initially, seeing Wang Ying Xuan cry so miserably, the elders in the clan couldn't bear it and wanted to mediate.

But after hearing why Wang Ying Xuan was being beaten so brutally, even causing discord between Master Shouzhe and Ruolan, their expressions immediately turned grave. One by one, they silently returned to their own courtyards, grabbing their children to inquire about the situation.

The children whose grades and conditions were still decent, their parents breathed a sigh of relief, encouraging them a few words before heading out, naturally not missing the chance to boast.

For those children whose grades and conditions were poor, parents immediately started to beat them angrily.

Zongrui is the legitimate second son of the Family Head, even he was beaten up by the Family Head for his inability to discipline his child. What will happen if someone else's child causes trouble or performs poorly in their studies, and it reaches Master Shouzhe's ears?

That night, countless children were beaten by their parents because of past mistakes, even for something as trivial as entering the courtyard with the left foot first; they seized the opportunity to vent their anger.

The cries of the children echoed, one after another, continuously filling the sky over the Wang family's Main Residence, scattering the clouds above and revealing the bright moon.

That night, became an unforgettable collective memory for many children of the same age.

In the future records of the renowned internal associations of the Wang family, the "Heavenly Girl Alliance" and the "Spring Youth Group," it was explicitly recorded that on September 21st, in the year 3216 of Great Qian Longchang, they experienced the "ordeals" of that night.

The "esteemed old ancestors" of the Heavenly Girl Alliance and Spring Youth Group who experienced that night referred to it as the "Prologue to the Endless Winter Night," and "The Night My Rebellious Youth Fled From Me."

Throughout the Epoch, because of that night, several widely circulated epic masterpieces were born.

The legendary Martial Goddess Wang Ying, in her timeless work "How the Martial Goddess was Cultivated," described in detail the pain of that night and its tempering effect on her future path in life, which laid the foundation for her journey as the Martial Goddess.

And this book, became a treasured Codex for parents worldwide who struggled and hoped "to see their sons become dragons and their daughters phoenixes." It lit a bright "Lighthouse's light" for them, showing the way and alleviating their confusion.

Of course, that is a story for another time.

Now, this night, which would cost countless young men and women dear in the future, is not yet over.

In the small courtyard, Wang Shouzhe listened to the collective spanking from various households, his lips curling into a satisfied smile.

He sipped his Immortal Tea with great relish.

It really hasn't been easy, not easy at all~

Wang Shouzhe, for the future and foundation of the clan, truly racked his brains and exhausted his ingenuity.

Now that the family had grown and the number of children had increased, how could he, Wang Shouzhe, manage to discipline them all by himself? Especially as the Wang family continued to reproduce generation after generation, eventually, the children would number in the tens of thousands, how could he manage?

It should naturally be the responsibility of every family, every household, everyone to take responsibility for the children's future.

Wang Zongrui's self-harm scheme, though painful, was not in vain. Who told him he couldn't even educate his own daughter properly?

However, Wang Shouzhe was even clearer that the main reason for Wang Ying Xuan's behavior was due to Fang Xunfeng and her extended family from the Fang Clan. It was their excessive pampering that made Wang Ying Xuan more and more uncontrollable.

But Fang Xunfeng was still his daughter-in-law and Ruolan's daughter-in-law. Where in the world would a father-in-law reprimand his daughter-in-law?

He had no choice but to beat his son to death to kill the chicken to warn the monkeys, stirring up a storm to blow the trumpet of reform in the clan's child education and make the clansmen realize the importance of this matter.

Chapter 25 Shou Zhe Sternly Reproaches Liu Ruolan_4

Just when Wang Shouzhe was basking in his pride, Liu Ruolan had unknowingly already positioned herself charmingly by his side, holding a bowl of freshly reheated lotus seed soup.

"My dear, how was my strategy today? Does it not deserve the title 'grand vision'?" Wang Shouzhe waved his sleeve with a sense of accomplishment as if his "strategical wisdom would establish an eternal foundation" and then turned to Liu Ruolan, "Of course, this little trick of mine would certainly not have succeeded without your sacrificing your image to cooperate fully."

As he spoke, he picked up the lotus seed soup and drank it in one gulp, smacking his lips, feeling a warmth in his heart.

Although the lotus seed soup had a "unique flavor," his wife truly cared for him, having even reheated it for him.

Instantly, his heart felt warm, filled with endless drive.

For this blissful small home, and the cozy larger family, what do hardships or exhaustion count for Wang Shouzhe?

"Husband, you've finished your lotus seed soup, and your boasting too," Liu Ruolan's eyes hinted a trace of coldness, "It's time to settle the matter of you scolding me."

"My dear... I did that for Yuxuan." Wang Shouzhe felt a chill on his back, a bad premonition washing over him.

"But, you scolded me."

Liu Ruolan took a casual step closer, a more severe glint appearing in her eyes.

"My dear, I did it for the children of the Wang family." Wang Shouzhe unconsciously stepped back, feeling somewhat faint-hearted.

"I said, you scolded me."

The chill emanating from Liu Ruolan intensified.

"My dear, I did it for the eternal foundation of our clan! Most importantly, we discussed and agreed on this plan together—you agreed too," Wang Shouzhe felt utterly wronged.

"I know, but you scolding me is a fact."

"Liu Ruolan, don't think I'm easy to bully. You may be the Great Heavenly Proud, but I'm not easily provoked either."

"Heh~ Then try me," Liu Ruolan scoffed coldly.

"If you want a trial, let's have a trial," Wang Shouzhe retorted with a cold laugh.

Then, clashing sounds erupted in Clan Leader Wang Shouzhe's courtyard, interspersed with him occasionally exclaiming, "Liu Ruolan, don't overdo it, I'm letting you win."

Then, another round of clamorous fighting noises followed, mixed with painful screams.

Such commotion naturally alarmed most of the clan members.

Many clan members were deeply concerned, their expressions very grave. Indeed, for the education of the Wang children, the couple of the Family Head had started to quarrel.

Master Shouzhe truly had it rough~

Unfortunately, they couldn't offer any help.

The clan members listened for a while but couldn't bear it any longer. They had no choice but to shut their doors and tightly close their windows, pretending not to hear.

After a moment, they even picked up the children they had just scolded and scolded them again, as a way of indirectly supporting Master Shouzhe.

Even Old Ancestor Longyan, who had just returned to Long Yan Habitat from abroad and was resting, felt a frown creep across her face after hearing what happened, overwhelmed with sympathy.

"This child, Shouzhe, is struggling so hard for the strong foundation of the family~ I, Wang Longyan, can't help much, but I can at least continue cultivating diligently and strive to achieve the Purple Abode Realm sooner, becoming a real protector for the family," Old Ancestor Longyan resolved firmly as she then closed off her six senses from the outside world, ignoring Wang Shouzhe's covert calls for help, and entered a phase of secluded cultivation.

"Liu Ruolan, don't be ungrateful! This is the Main Residence, and I am letting you win in front of our clan members," Wang Shouzhe having no other recourse deployed his final "move," "If you dare, let's settle this at Water Moon Heavenly Pavilion."

"Hmm~ You two indeed often meet secretly while I sleep~"

As Wang Shouzhe finished speaking, the quality of Liu Ruolan's voice in the small courtyard transformed dramatically but was only heard by Wang Shouzhe.

"Ruoling? I'm done for!"

Wang Shouzhe's heart instantly plunged into the abyss.

Chapter 26: The Struggle of the Emperor's Son! Wang Family Fully Involved

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In the end, Wang Shouzhe still could not avoid that calamity.

Water Moon Heavenly Pavilion had become an indelible mark in Wang Shouzhe's life.

The unpredictability of Liu Ruoling's appearance also added a touch of thrilling excitement to his otherwise calm life, occasionally bringing him "fright" or "delight."

However, this process usually started with fright, followed by delight, and then fright again... The experience truly filled Wang Shouzhe's heart with mixed emotions, making him sigh at the cruelty of fate.

Five days later.

Wang Shouzhe and Liu Ruolan returned to their cozy family courtyard and resumed their warm yet mundane everyday life, as if that fierce battle of the night had never occurred.

The clan members, upon hearing of the couple's grand battle that night, were somewhat curious about the outcome but wisely refrained from asking too much.

After all, according to some clan members who went to report and consult on work, the Family Head appeared somewhat pale and seemed somewhat frail, likely having been at a disadvantage.

Therefore, the clan members who adored the Family Head buried this incident deep in their hearts and also made a silent resolution to properly educate the family's children not to bother the Family Head any more—He had it tough enough already.

That day.

Was like any other.

Except that there was a mysterious woman in Wang Shouzhe's study.

She wore a water-blue Profound Martial battle dress, her figure was curvy and attractive, her hair was tied up at one-third its length, she wore a mysterious veil on her face, and a longsword hung on her back, making her look heroic yet ethereal.

What caused Wang Shouzhe's cheeks to twitch was that she bore a faint resemblance to Li Yao, even some of her small accessories were almost identical.

"Hao Commandery Prince comes from a direct line of the Emperor's second son, and although this branch of the family isn't very prosperous, it does include a Prince and over ten Commandery Princes..." While the mysterious woman was reporting information, she noticed that Wang Shouzhe was somewhat distracted and couldn't help but raise her eyebrows slightly, "Family Head, I am reporting information to you, please focus."

"..." Wang Shouzhe's eyelid twitched, and he couldn't help muttering, "Wang Mei, dressed like this, how do you expect me to concentrate?"

This mysterious woman was none other than the most miraculous head of household of the Wang family—Wang Mei.

"Family Head, this is the most popular dress among women in Return to Dragon City now," Wang Mei flipped her hair nonchalantly and said, "Ever since Miss Li Yao swept through Shangjing City and dominated her peers to become invincible, her style of dress has become incredibly popular.

I also wanted to ease your longing for your beloved daughter, Family Head, do not be distracted by inappropriate thoughts."

At that moment.

Wang Shouzhe's brow twitched, feeling an impulse to throw her out. What kind of bizarre idea was this?

"Let's stick to business."

Wang Shouzhe sipped his tea, forcibly suppressing his urge to lash out.

Every time Wang Mei came to report work, she wore a different outfit, and each time she left him at a loss. This time she even dressed up like Li Yao—what would be next, dressing up like Ruolan?

Such that Wang Shouzhe was almost forgetting what she originally looked like.

Wait a minute...

Wang Shouzhe's brow furrowed slightly, descending into thought.

What did Wang Mei originally look like?

"Hao Commandery Prince has always been exceptionally talented, with a strong bloodline, and entered into the Military System for training.

Due to his divine strategy in warfare and always being the first to engage in critical situations, he has reversed adverse battle situations several times and thus has earned the title 'Little Military God,' and is greatly loved by the soldiers within the Military System," Wang Mei reported seriously.

As Wang Shouzhe listened, browsed through the information on the papers, he couldn't help frowning and said, "This person not only has the desire to govern, but he is also a military genius. Coupled with his exceptional origin, he does sound like a perfect candidate for Great Emperor."

"Exactly," Wang Mei nodded, "Even though the competition for Emperor's son hadn't started before, Hao Commandery Prince already had a high support rate within the Imperial Household and Military System, far surpassing the current Kang Commandery Prince.

If it hadn't been for his unfortunate pursuit of an enemy force deep into foreign battlefields right before the competition started, leading to his ambush and subsequent fall in that foreign battlefield, there would have been no doubt in this competition for Emperor's son."

"His résumé and character are quite good," Wang Shouzhe examined Hao Commandery Prince's past closely and analyzed his personality, "This person's commanding presence, quite indeed has the makings of a bold and visionary leader. He could be a great Emperor, far surpassing Kang Commandery Prince and An Commandery Prince. No wonder, An Commandery Prince has such high regard for him."

Previously, when An Commandery Prince mentioned his "Brother Emperor Hao," Wang Shouzhe had been cautious and commanded Wang Mei to investigate further.

Accustomed to relying on intelligence and predicting the enemy's moves, Wang Shouzhe naturally wouldn't miss such important information, especially given Hao Commandery Prince's significant influence on An Commandery Prince's development.

"Can you find out how he fell on the foreign battlefield?" Wang Shouzhe half-closed his eyes, rhythmically tapping his fingers on the desk, "There are some doubts about this. Judging by the results presented by his previous battles, Hao Commandery Prince indeed has a daring spirit, often employs cunning plans, yet his strategies are very meticulous.

And he was well aware of the perils of fighting in a foreign battlefield; he wouldn't have ventured there lightly without substantial benefit."

"Family Head, about Hao Commandery Prince's matter, Emperor Longchang has already issued a strict order forbidding discussion about it, and the information on that battle has also been sealed," Wang Mei said helplessly, "The time you gave me was too short. If you give me some time to investigate slowly, perhaps there will be some findings."

Chapter 26: The Emperor's Son's Struggle! The Wang Family Fully Intervenes _2

There was a pause, and then a light suddenly shone in Wang Mei's eyes, which looked very much like Wang Liyao's: "Could it be that the Family Head suspects that Prince Dexin's lineage is causing trouble behind the scenes?"

"It's hard to say. The struggle for the throne involves too many interests, and the advantages of Hao Commandery Prince are too obvious, so Prince Dexin's lineage indeed has a motive to commit the crime," said Wang Shouzhe, "Of course, this is just a speculation. Wang Mei, as long as you ensure safety, you can try to carefully verify it."

"For the Family Head, I could give up everything, including..."

"Be careful with your safety."

"What I mean is including..."

"What I mean is, be careful with your safety..."

"Alright, you are the Family Head; what you say goes," Wang Mei's eyes were full of a profound light, "Could it be that what I'm wearing today is inappropriate for the occasion?"

"..."

Wang Shouzhe silently took out his bow.

Five breaths later.

Wang Mei appeared quite disheveled outside the small courtyard.

Looking at the courtyard wall before her, her eyes did not show the slightest hint of discouragement; instead, they were filled with steadfast belief. Family Head, I, Wang Mei, will definitely not give up. I'm now in the Heavenly Human Realm, and have all the time to continue waiting.

As for Wang Mei, she indeed had some skills. Somehow, she had acquired an Infinite Treasure Pill, and after consuming it, she barely managed to raise her talent to the Heavenly Proud Level, and through trials and tribulations, finally stepped into the Heavenly Human Realm.

At the same time.

Wang Shouzhe's legitimate second son, Wang Zongrui, also arrived at the small courtyard, ready to report to his father about the education results of Wang Ying Xuan over the past few days.

But the moment he saw Wang Mei, he shuddered.

The elder sister is back?

No, that wasn't his big sister Wang Liyao.

At this moment, Wang Mei also noticed Wang Zongrui. She put away the strange expression on her face and showed Wang Zongrui a meaningful smile, bowing slightly: "Young Master Zongrui, it's a pleasure to see you."

Then, she floated away.

Wang Zongrui, however, stood thunderstruck on the spot for more than ten breaths.

Such a familiar voice... He remembered hearing this voice in his youth. Yes, Little Snow... the woman who looked exactly like Little Snow! It was that incident that became his biggest nightmare

during his youth, such that during the several times he got severely scolded by his mother later on, he even doubted if he was the son of his father and Little Snow.

It took him a very long time to suppress that nightmare.

But now... it seemed that the nightmare had appeared again.

...

At the same time.

To the west of the Guard City in Changning, there was a secluded valley.

This valley belonged to the Changning Government Office and was one of the military areas, which prominent families and commoners were not allowed to trespass.

The valley was called "Insect Valley", surrounded by various kinds of venomous snakes, centipedes, and other poisonous insects.

The nearby residents regarded this place as forbidden, and, following the teachings from generation to generation, never dared to approach within five miles of it.

On this day.

Above Insect Valley, two figures sped from the direction of Changning, like rainbows cutting through the sky, their mighty presence tearing through the clouds, leaving two long trails across the sky.

Such mighty presence could only belong to the exalted Tianren Realm Cultivators.

After all, the old ancestors in the Spiritual Platform Realm could only fly for a short duration and could not travel long distances, their presence while flying was incomparable to that of the Tianren Realm Cultivators.

When the two figures stopped above Insect Valley and the Protective Gang Qi from flying dissipated, it became clear that they were two women.

One of the women was dressed in a goose-yellow Profound Martial uniform, with sword boots on her feet, and a hunter's crown on her head. Her pretty face held an air of heroism that was hard for ordinary men to match.

Even as she simply stood there, she exuded a powerful and domineering aura. Her heroic bearing made her seem like a valorous warrior among women.

"Wang Luo Jing, speed up your task," she said, floating in the air with her hands behind her back. Every move she made was full of powerful confidence and ease, her eyes full of pride as she looked at the woman beside her, "This time, the clan's mission is nominally to develop outlying areas, but in truth, it's to pave the way to the Divine Martial Relics.

This is our chance to establish Merit Points for the clan and to shine, striving to enter the clan's first sequence. The opening of the Divine Martial training relics is the foundation stone for my imperial path. Do not delay me too much."

The woman beside her was slightly shorter in stature.

She had a face veil, and was wearing a beautiful dress with a somber tone and complex wrinkle patterns. Upon closer inspection, those patterns were actually the shapes of many fierce poisonous insects.

Her eyes were cold and calm, like a deep, bottomless pool carrying a hint of chill: "I was responding to a letter from my master to visit her; I don't need you to accompany me."

These two women were none other than the Sky Pride of the Changning Wang Clan at the Longzuo Academy, sisters Wang Luo Jing and Wang Luo Qiu.

The two grew up together and entered the academy together. Despite their constant bickering and differences, after so many years, they had grown accustomed to completing missions together. Almost everywhere they went, they were together.

For instance, this time, Wang Luo Jing had not specifically informed Wang Luo Qiu, but Wang Luo Qiu still habitually came with her.

Without paying any more attention to Wang Luo Qiu, Wang Luo Jing jumped down directly, landing in what was a dangerous place in the eyes of ordinary people—Insect Valley.

Indeed, Insect Valley was a place of strangeness, with countless venomous snakes and shadowy insects in the valley.

Chapter 26: The Emperor's Son's Struggle! The Wang Family Fully Intervenes _3

As soon as Wang Luo Jing landed, various poisonous insects scattered in terror as if meeting their nemesis, leaving her a clean spot to stand.

"Luo Jing seeks an audience with Master."

Wang Luo Jing bowed forward and spoke softly.

Looking at the exotic stilt house not far away, her eyes revealed a trace of nostalgia. Before going to the Academic Palace, she had spent half her time studying the Technique of Insect Control and the even more complex and dangerous Gu Techniques with Master Zhou Chang Feng.

Zhou Chang Feng was an Insect Master employed by the Changning Government Office, and he had made significant contributions to Changning in his lifetime.

The Red Fire Toad that her master Zhou Chang Feng had bestowed upon her had also been of great help. Without it, she would have likely failed to clear the side quests of the Divine Martial Dynasty.

However, as she entered the Valley of Ten Thousand Butterflies and gradually learned the more systematic and comprehensive inheritance of the Valley, the knowledge and various poisonous insects that Master Zhou Chang Feng had taught her seemed inadequate.

Most of the insects she had initially used were now obsolete, except for the Red Fire Toad, which still had good growth potential and which she occasionally used in battle.

Nevertheless, Wang Luo Jing still always regarded Zhou Chang Feng as her master. Every time she returned to Changning, she would surely visit him and share interesting stories from the Academic Palace.

"It's Jing'er, come in."

An old and weak voice came from inside the house.

Wang Luo Jing pushed open the door. Seeing Zhou Chang Feng sitting on the bamboo couch, already very frail, her expression changed, and she hurried over to support him, "Master, what happened to you? Who hurt you?"

"Do not worry, it is just my time," Zhou Chang Feng was very old, but he spoke with an indifferent expression, "Jing'er, do not be too sad. I have lived for one hundred ninety-two years, which is considered long-lived among Profound Martial cultivators in the Spiritual Platform Realm."

Although Wang Luo Jing understood this was a natural law—that cultivators of the Spiritual Platform Realm do not become Celestial beings and it is rare for them to survive past two hundred—she still felt a thick sorrow welling up in her heart.

"Jing'er, I don't have much time left," Zhou Chang Feng looked at Wang Luo Jing, his eyes filled with deep longing and seemingly looking through her at someone else, "I have called you here this time for two reasons: first, knowing that my end is near, I wanted to say goodbye.

Second, after much deliberation, I've decided to pass on the half-part of the 'Sacred Gu True Method' that I possess to you."

"True Method?" Wang Luo Jing was slightly startled, "Master, how did you come to possess the True Method?"

True Method is an extremely rare cultivation scripture, often known as "Top Quality Cultivation Technique." Profound Martial cultivators, according to its teachings, can directly reach the Divine Power Territory.

The so-called Sacred Lands possess nine veins because each has a True Method inheritance.

Outside of Sacred Lands, only the top third-grade Aristocratic Families have True Method inheritances. Apart from these, the only way to obtain a True Method is to try and excavate ruins. Aside from the danger, the chances of finding a True Method are also incredibly slim, and even if one is lucky to find it, there is a high probability of the method being incomplete.

Indeed, any True Method is important enough to serve as the core of a family's inheritance, and even within the Changning Wang Clan, there are no True Method inheritances currently. It is only Wang Liyao who, because she apprenticed under Tianhe Enlightened One, can cultivate True Methods.

Therefore, even just a half-part of a True Method should not be underestimated.

"I obtained this when I was young, from the Barbarian Gu Clan in Southern Frontier," Zhou Chang Feng's eyes showed a hint of regret, "I have detailed the entire story in two letters. One of these letters is for you, and the other..."

As he said this, he looked at Wang Luo Jing with an exceedingly serious expression, "Luo Jing, you must promise your master, once you have learned it, you must take this half-part True Method and the letter to the Saintess of the Barbarian Gu Clan in the Southern Frontier."

The Barbarian Gu Clan of the Southern Frontier?

Having studied over sixty years in the Purple Abode Academic Palace, Wang Luo Jing's knowledge had vastly improved. She was aware that around Da Qian, there still existed some Barbarian tribes. Some tribes were self-contained, resisting interaction with Da Qian; others had simply submitted, while yet others were already destroyed.

After all, the vast territory of Da Qian had not been achieved without conflict, and numerous Barbarian tribes had been decimated by it.

The Barbarian Gu Clan of the Southern Frontier was one of these tribes.

Da Qian's armies had tried several times to eliminate them but failed due to their geographical advantages and the powerful Gu insects of the opponents.

Because of this, the Barbarian Gu Clan of the Southern Frontier was particularly hostile toward the people of Da Qian.

This mission to the Southern Frontier was fraught with danger.

Nevertheless, out of respect for her master's past kindness, Wang Luo Jing agreed, "Master, when the time is right, I will undertake this task for you."

Once Zhou Chang Feng heard Wang Luo Jing's promise, his last worry was addressed, and the breath that had been sustaining him finally dissipated.

After struggling to chat with her for a few more sentences, he could no longer sustain his life, and his breath gradually extinguished.

Although Wang Luo Jing was saddened, she still followed Zhou Chang Feng's last wishes and did not conduct a burial. Instead, she let the thousands of poisonous insects he had raised consume both him and the stilt house completely.

...

At the same time.

Southern Desert County, Anbei Defense.

Chapter 26: The Emperor's Son's Struggle! The Wang Family Fully Intervenes _4

The Northern Defense Post was situated in the northwestern part of Southern Desert County, with West Sea Prefecture to its south and the boundless Dala Desolate Desert to its north. The area of the Northern Defense Post was vast, yet it was sparsely populated, and the majority of its populace resided on the prairies closer to the central region of Southern Desert.

Towards the direction of the Dala Desolate Desert, due to the sheer barrenness, hardly any citizens lived permanently, with only herbalists, who earned their living by gathering herbs, occasionally passing through.

It could be said that this was one of the most barren places in the entire Da Qian.

However, in this desolate land where few resided, near the border of the Dala Desolate Desert, stood a solitary town.

To call it a town might not be quite accurate, for this place didn't even have city walls; it resembled more of a settlement formed by the gathering of many people.

In the center of this settlement was a group of imposing buildings with flying eaves and upturned corners, exquisitely carved beams and painted rafters, all giving off a sense of grandeur.

At the main entrance of this group of buildings stood a towering archway, engraved with the Azure Dragon Emblem that represented the Imperial Household.

On the main gate hung a plaque painted in red with gold inscriptions, bearing the words "An Commandery Prince's Residence."

This estate, it turned out, was the home of An Commandery Prince in the Northern Defense Post.

Back in the day, An Commandery Prince chose the Northern Defense Post as his fief and personally designated the site for the Commandery Prince's Residence, thus resulting in the construction of this An Commandery Prince's Residence.

As a Quasi Emperor's Son, the Commandery Prince's Residence of An Commandery Prince was funded by the Imperial Household. Everything was built according to imperial regulations, naturally exuding an imposing magnificence that totally displayed the imperial majesty.

At that time, many from the Imperial Household's guards, The head of household, and An Commandery Prince's followers, including those from the same royal lineage and other complex elements, accompanied him to the Northern Defense Post, a multitude of people.

To facilitate living arrangements, everyone selected sites nearby to build their own mansions.

Over time, this place turned into a settlement. After several decades, it became quite sizable. On the two sparse streets, there were a few pubs, tea houses, grocery stores, and rouge shops, among other stores. Although customers were scarce, it actually gave the settlement a semblance of a town.

On this day, the seldom-opened red lacquered main door of the An Commandery Prince's Residence suddenly swung open from the inside.

Guards exited in pairs followed by numerous house servants, who began to tidy up the street in front of An Commandery Prince's Residence efficiently.

One must understand that Northern Defense Post suffered from heavy sandstorms all year round. If the streets were not cleaned every day, they would be covered with fine sand. At this moment, under the skilled cleaning by numerous servants, the streets quickly became very clean and tidy, as if they had never been touched by sand.

Even the Jiaolong stone sculptures at the Commandery Prince's Residence's gate were meticulously wiped clean.

Customers at the tea house across the street, surprised by the scene, couldn't help but chatter amongst themselves.

With such a grand setup, could the An Commandery Prince's Residence be welcoming an Honorable Guest? Could it be that a certain Commandery Prince from the Imperial Household was coming to visit?

While everyone was puzzled, a grand caravan entered the large settlement, not any less in scale than a town.

This was a convoy comprised entirely of ox carts, a long procession stretching from the door of the Commandery Prince's Residence all the way out of the settlement. The leading Spirit Cow cart carried the flag of the Qian Family's business, as well as the emblem of the Changning Wang Clan.

Only when it reached the entrance of the Commandery Prince's Residence did the convoy gradually come to a halt.

Shortly thereafter, Wu ShengJun, the eldest son of An Commandery Prince and Little Commandery Prince, emerged from the gate with several managers.

Wu ShengJun was a composed young man with handsome features and an upright posture, moving with a natural ease and carrying an innate sense of nobility.

Being born into the royal family, he had been accustomed to interacting with important figures from an early age, which naturally lent him more confidence than the average person in social interactions.

Just as Wu ShengJun stepped out to meet them, the doors of the covered ox carts were also opened, and a young man in a white robe with an extraordinary demeanor stepped out.

It was none other than Wang Zong'an, the Young Clan Leader of Changning Wang Clan.

"Wang Zong'an greets the Little Commandery Prince," Wang Zong'an bowed to Wu ShengJun with a humble and graceful attitude, "I did not expect to trouble the Little Commandery Prince to welcome me in person, Zong'an is deeply unsettled."

"Young Clan Leader Zong'an has traveled thousands of miles to support my father in Northern Defense Post, it's been a tough journey. I should be the one to welcome you. There's no need for talk of being unsettled," Wu ShengJun immediately returned the bow, matching the grace, and sincerity in his demeanor.

One was the Little Commandery Prince of An Commandery Prince's Residence, and the other was the Young Clan Leader of Changning Wang Clan; they represented An Commandery Prince and Changning Wang Clan respectively. This meeting was also a sign of further deepening cooperation between the two sides.

In some ways, this meeting could be described as a historical one.

As the two exchanged greetings, the doors of the subsequent ox carts also opened, and other individuals began to disembark.

Wang Zong'an's visit was not a solitary one.

Inside the subsequent carts was a vast number of seeds, saplings, and different instruments and equipment developed over the years by the Wang Clan and Changchun Valley in collaboration.

Indeed, to escort these items, they had to travel by covered Spirit Cow carts over land; they spent nearly half a year on the road. Otherwise, if they were to travel from Longzuo County to the Northern Defense Post by flying carriage, it would take no more than seven or eight days.

Accompanying him were Changchun Valley Elders and Disciples, led by Senior Brother Jinshan, as well as many direct and collateral members of the Wang family line, along with their retention of The head of household and house servants.

Chapter 26: The Struggle of the Emperor's Son! Wang Family Fully Involved _5

Among them, there were more than a dozen members of the Guangzhimai.

Wang Shicheng, the eldest son of Wang Zongchang, now fifty-four, Wang Shichuan, the eldest son of Wang Zongyao, now forty-two, and Wang Shihong, the eldest son of Wang Zongcai, now thirty-two, all three had accompanied Wang Zong'an to safeguard the Northwest and, as managers under Wang Zong'an, were ready to be dispatched at any time.

In addition to them, there were also a group of young clan members in their twenties.

Having graduated from the Clan School, these youngsters had gone through several years of practical experience and could handle some matters independently. With their help in running errands and managing affairs, Wang Zong'an's work within the Northwest Guard would be more convenient, and crucially, would not suffer from a lack of manpower.

This was possible only because the Wang family's population had grown, giving rise to such an arrangement. Fifty years ago, when the Wang family had the fewest members, Wang Zong'an would likely have had to come alone, having to personally handle every matter which would not only slow things down but also make it easy for others to look down upon him.

After some pleasantries, both parties introduced the main people around them, and then Wu Shengjun invited Wang Zong'an to stay at the Commandery Prince's Residence.

After all, Wang Zong'an had come here to replace Master Shouzhe in presiding over the Northwest and to assist An Commandery Prince Wu Mingyuan in developing the Great Desert. This was a massive project, not something that could be completed in a short period, and Wang Zong'an would need to stay in the Northwest Guard for a long time.

Wang Zong'an naturally would not refuse.

As for the other people Wang Zong'an had brought with him, they also had their respective accommodations arranged already by Wu Shengjun.

This arrangement took approximately two hours.

Once everyone was settled, Wang Zong'an then expressed his desire to meet the An Commandery Prince.

Wu Shengjun had anticipated this and immediately took him to the protective forest.

The Commandery Prince's Residence was less than a hundred miles northwest of the Northwestern Desert.

The initial decision by An Commandery Prince to establish the Commandery Prince's Residence here was to make clear to everyone his determination. He wanted to stay here and witness the desert slowly disappear under his governance.

Soon, they reached the sparse protective forest.

Under the guidance of Wu Shengjun, Wang Zong'an entered deeper into the protective forest to find the An Commandery Prince.

Nipping at Wang Zong'an's heels, Senior Brother Jinshan leisurely entered the protective forest as well. Seeing a few managers slicing watermelons, sharing and eating them, he did not feel out of place, grabbed a slice to munch on, and casually started chatting with those officials.

Being technical professionals, they naturally had common topics to discuss. It did not take long before Senior Brother Jinshan blended in with the officials without any sense of discrepancy.

One would not know he was not an official under the command of An Commandery Prince.

Senior Brother Jinshan also came this time with "sincerity." After all, he owed Green Fern too much for the transformation of the White Jade Spiritual Peony.

He now had only two choices, one, to cooperate with Little Junior Sister in all sorts of strange and terrifying experiments. Two, to come with the Wang family to the Northwest Guard to work and repay his debt.

Even if he made the decision with his backside, he was firmly committed to the latter...

"Zong'an pays his respects to the Commandery Prince," said Wang Zong'an, led by Wu Shengjun, who had also successfully found the An Commandery Prince, bowing deeply and respectfully, "Zong'an, by the command of his father, has come to lend assistance to the Commandery Prince."

As per seniority, the daughter of the An Commandery Prince was Wang Zong'an's granddaughter-in-law, making An Commandery Prince technically a generation junior to Wang Zong'an. However, since An Commandery Prince was of the Imperial Household, Wang Zong'an naturally would not presume too much and have the Commandery Prince address him by seniority. They could only address each other as equals.

"Young Clan Leader Zong'an," seeing Wang Zong'an, An Commandery Prince was also very pleased, quickly reaching out to support him and eagerly asked, "Previously, Master Shouzhe wrote in his letter that you would bring a treasure this time that could significantly accelerate the construction of the protective forest. May I know what exactly Master Shouzhe referred to?"

"This is it."

Wang Zong'an smiled calmly and then took off an antique bracelet from his wrist.

"Xirang Bracelet?" Although the An Commandery Prince was of royal birth and had exceptional eyesight, recognizing the origin of the bracelet instantly, he was still somewhat puzzled, "Though the Xirang Bracelet is precious, it cannot solve the current predicament of this prince. Could it be that there is something else within this Xirang Bracelet?"

"The Commandery Prince is insightful," Wang Zong'an smiled. "This Xirang Bracelet is just a vessel. What my father really had me bring here is the mysterious plant within the Xirang Bracelet."

"Oh? What kind of mysterious plant might that be?" the An Commandery Prince asked with renewed interest.

Senior Brother Jinshan, overhearing this, also became interested and hurried over with a melon to see what Wang Zong'an had brought. On the journey here, he had noticed the Xirang Bracelet on Wang Zong'an's wrist, but despite his repeated inquiries, Wang Zong'an had refused to reveal what was inside, leaving him burning with curiosity.

Now, at last, the mystery was about to be revealed, and he was determined to see it clearly.

"You will see once you look," replied the Commandery Prince.

Wang Zong'an didn't keep them guessing and raised his hand to channel Mysterious Energy into the Xirang Bracelet.

Instantly, the Xirang Bracelet emitted a burst of light, and a cluster of green light shot out from it, landing on the ground in front of them.

The next moment, the cluster of green light rapidly expanded and transformed into a large tree.

This tree stood towering, its trunk robust and powerful, and its crown lush and green as if a splendid canopy, spreading out broadly. A rich fragrance of wood spiritual energy permeated the air.

Unnoticed, within a few dozen miles around this tree, which served as the center, young shoots seemed to have received a shot of adrenaline and suddenly became vibrant, their previously wilting leaves now bursting anew with life.

Even the air around seemed somewhat fresher.

"The, the Longevity Tree?"

Senior Brother Jinshan's eyes nearly popped out in astonishment.

Where did Zong'an get a Longevity Tree? Could it be Green Fern Junior Sister's tree? Could it be that the rumors are true, that Zong'an really is the...

But that was not right—Green Fern Junior Sister's tree that he had seen was much bigger than this one. Could it be...?

Suddenly, Senior Brother Jinshan thought of something and his eyes widened in shock.

"Clatter~"

The melon in his hand dropped to the ground, as if he had been struck by lightning.

One of Changchun Valley's ten unsolved mysteries for a long, long time—"The Mystery of the Disappearance of the Longevity Tree Spirit Seed"—was finally being uncovered.

Zong'an, Zong'an, did you really manage to acquire the Longevity Tree Spirit Seed while we were all unaware? You really fooled us all, terribly so...

His gaze was profound, his expression as if Wang Zong'an had stolen the goddess he had been enamored with for a century.

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...

Under the faint gaze of Senior Brother Jinshan, Wang Zong'an was now looking at the Longevity Tree with a tender expression in his eyes.

Ever since he had obtained the spirit seed of the Longevity Tree, he had been diligently nurturing it and building a bond. After ascending to the Heavenly Human Realm, he refined it into his life-bound Spirit Plant.

Having become his life-bound Spirit Tree, one couldn't say that there was complete mutual understanding between the man and the tree, but their connection went beyond that of ordinary Spirit Plants. Wang Zong'an could clearly sense her happiness, anger, sorrow, and a myriad of subtle emotions.

Despite being only a few meters tall, the effort and resources poured into its cultivation were vast and heartbreaking, even more so than raising children.

"Whoosh whoosh~"

In the howling northwest wind of the Great Desert, the Longevity Tree swayed its leaves joyfully, each leaf lush and jade green, radiating a strong vitality.

The lively branches affectionately rubbed against Wang Zong'an's body, just like a young daughter snuggling up to her father.

"There, there, Yinglu, it has been hard on you staying inside the Xirang Bracelet these past days," Wang Zong'an said indulgently, soothing the Longevity Tree "Wang Yinglu" with a gentle tone as if talking to his own child, "I will make sure to treat you to a good meal to make it up to you."

Wang Yinglu was overjoyed, and once again, the wood-attribute spiritual energy diffused outward, making every breath feel refreshing and invigorating.

Unlike some Senior Brothers in Changchun Valley with unhealthy thoughts, Wang Zong'an had always treated the young Longevity Tree as he would a daughter.

He had even specifically reported to his father, giving her the name "Wang Yinglu," which was officially recorded in the family registry.

Whenever he thought of those Senior Brothers with unhealthy thoughts, Wang Zong'an couldn't help but sneak a glance at Senior Brother Jinshan.

Seeing him staring dumbfoundedly at Wang Ying, Wang Zong'an immediately became vigilant, guarding against Jinshan like he would a thief, "Senior Brother Jinshan, I have already repaid Green Fern Senior Sister's debt for you. Given your repeated offenses, I must ask you to keep your distance from my daughter. Otherwise, I will tie you up and send you back to Senior Sister immediately."

"Daughter?"

Senior Brother Jinshan looked at Zong'an as if he were looking at a pervert, utterly astounded. I, Jinshan, am already wretched enough, but Zong'an, you're even more...

"Stay back ten meters!" The normally good-natured Wang Zong'an couldn't control his volcanic outrage under such a gaze, "If you dare come within ten meters of my daughter, don't blame me for being heartless."

Senior Brother Jinshan's heart trembled, and he hastily retreated more than ten meters away.

Then, Wang Zong'an began to whisper to the Longevity Tree Wang Yinglu, occasionally throwing cautionary glances at Jinshan.

His demeanor was as if he were instructing his daughter to stay far away from that wretched pervert; should he dare to approach, she should beat him without mercy, and if she couldn't beat him, she should call for Daddy, and Daddy would come to beat him to death.

"Whoosh whoosh~"

Wang Yinglu waved her branches, giving Senior Brother Jinshan a contemptuous branch gesture from a distance.

Senior Brother Jinshan felt like crying from afar. Great Young Master Zong'an, not only did you secretly whisk away our precious treasure of Changchun Valley, but you also taught her to scorn me...

Why is my life, Jinshan, filled with nothing but tragedies?

Zong'an, oh Zong'an, as a young master with a perfect life like yourself, how could you possibly understand the bitterness and misery of my life?

In this brief interlude.

An Commandery Prince Wu Mingyuan and Little Commandery Prince Wu Shengjun had also gradually recovered from their shock.

Having visited Changchun Valley several times for this protective forest, how could they not recognize the Longevity Tree?

My goodness~~ I didn't expect the Wang family to be so generous, to have even brought a Longevity Tree Spirit Plant.

You should know, in the whole Great Qian Land, only Longzuo's Purple Abode Academic Palace had a Longevity Tree.

Even the Cu Wei Sect, one of the Nine Veins that outshines Changchun Valley in many regards, still falls short in this aspect.

"Very well, thank you, Young Clan Leader Zong'an, for your strong support," An Commandery Prince said with joy sprouting in his eyebrows, bowing politely, "With the blessing of the Longevity Tree, our protective forest will be able to grow faster and the survival rate of the saplings will surely see a great improvement."

You should know that currently, only about one-third of the newly planted saplings in the protective forest is surviving. Each section of the forest has only barely taken shape after multiple re-seedings. This Longevity Tree is indeed a huge help.

"Your Highness is too kind," Wang Zong'an hastened to support An Commandery Prince, smiling, "Our families are relatives by marriage, so it's only right and proper to help each other. Besides, my father has decided to support An Commandery Prince, we will do our utmost. However, Yinglu is still young, and her coverage of the Longevity canopy is small.

We need to plan a route for her and set up a Spirit Stone Array in advance for her to absorb energy."

"Spirit Stone Array?" An Commandery Prince's expression turned serious, but he immediately said solemnly, "Alright, leave this task to me. I will think of a way to gather a batch..."

Little Commandery Prince Wu Shengjun, hearing this at the side, trembled inwardly, his face unconsciously tensing.

Though the Longevity Tree was desirable for greatly accelerating the growth of the protective forest, improving the survival rate, and hastening the formation of the oasis, it required a large investment of Spirit Stones...

Just the thought alone was enough to make Wu Shengjun feel breathless with heartache.

The current state of Commandery Prince's Residence was such that, due to his father's commitment to a grand ideal, they had long since spent all available funds, and had even sold many ancestral possessions.

The grand Commandery Prince's Residence, apart from a beautiful manor, was practically reduced to an empty shell.

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Even though Wu Shengjun had tried every method to increase revenue and reduce expenses for the Commandery Prince's Residence, nothing could withstand his father's extravagant spending like water flowing in a river. What's the most expensive thing nowadays? It is of course ideals...

"Your Highness need not worry," Wang Zong'an observed quietly and said, "For this trip to Anbeiwei, I have already brought ten thousand low-grade Spirit Stones, enough for Yinglu for several years. For subsequent Spirit Stones, the Family Head has already sent people to make long-term purchases, so there's no need to worry about the consumption of Spirit Stones for the time being."

What a move, dishing out ten thousand Spirit Stones, which are worth a million Qian Gold! The Wang family had even considered subsequent Spirit Stones.

An Commandery Prince and his son looked at each other, both extremely surprised. Wu Shengjun was so relieved that it was almost disgraceful.

Being able to casually come up with a million Qian Gold proved that the Changning Wang Clan's reserves were far deeper than imagined.

They knew that their Commandery Prince's Residence, due to high expenditures and low incomes, would already be scraping the barrel if they were to dish out one million Qian Gold at once.

"This..." the complexion of An Commandery Prince turned slightly awkward as he said in a low voice, "Young Clan Leader Zong'an, your Wang family has brought so many talents and resources here to support my plan, I'm already very grateful. Asking you to also pay for the Spirit Stones... Never mind, let it offset the betrothal gift for Yiluo."

As he spoke, An Commandery Prince's face turned a bit red and hot, feeling as though he was selling his daughter. But who could blame the impoverished state of the Commandery Prince's Residence now? As the saying goes, poverty curtails ambition, and even speaking takes an effort.

"Your Highness," Wang Zong'an shook his head, his expression still as calm as water, "The betrothal gift is exactly that, how can it be mixed with other matters? The betrothal gift for Yiluo is already being prepared by my father and will definitely not disgrace the Little Princess's status."

"Additionally, my father mentioned that you need not worry about money. The struggle for the Emperor's son is not an overnight affair. Your Highness only needs to focus your efforts on accelerating the development of Anbeiwei, and we need to produce results as quickly as possible."

"Good, good, good~" An Commandery Prince, slightly excited, took Wang Zong'an by the hand and said, "I, Wu Mingyuan, will definitely not let down Master Shouzhe's expectations. Zong'an, let us together show the world a miracle."

Previously, when chatting with Wang Shouzhe, he was mostly happy to meet someone who shared his ideals. However, he really had not expected that the support and help brought by Wang Shouzhe would be so substantial.

"Your Highness, don't rush. My father also had me bring some seeds." Wang Zong'an said as he took out some small seeds. "These are root alfalfa, which have extremely developed root systems that can reach deep underground. They can withstand high and low temperatures and are highly suitable for planting in sandy soil, used for fixing sand and producing green fodder for cattle and sheep.

Over time, they can also gradually improve the soil quality and can be used as a pioneer crop for managing vast sandy fields."

"Great stuff, vast fields of alfalfa can rapidly form oases and significantly improve the local ecological environment," An Commandery Prince exclaimed excitedly, mentioning the ecological environment.

This was a new term he had learned while talking with Master Shouzhe.

"Furthermore, though the drought-resistant Pearl Rice from Purple Abode Academy is good and quite drought-resistant, it ultimately isn't perfect." Wang Zong'an took out some seeds of pearl rice. "These belong to the 'Fifth-generation Drought-resistant Pearl Rice,' a refined version of the original variety. Not only is it more drought-resistant, but its yield is also fifty percent higher.

The plants are also tastier and more nutritious when used as green fodder for livestock. These were developed by Little Senior Sister Green Fern after expending a lot of energy and time."

"This... this is top-quality grain!" An excited Commandery Prince trembled, "I never expected that Green Fern's Pride had already started researching this, and your Wang family could even obtain these seeds..."

He paused midway through his sentence, suddenly stunned, hesitating and sneaking a look at Wang Zong'an.

To tackle the Great Desert, he had been collaborating substantially with the academy over the years and had met Green Fern's Pride several times.

He had also heard some rumors about "that gossip."

Now in Longzuo Academy Changchun Valley, there were only two saplings of the Longevity Tree, one with Green Fern's Pride and the other with Wang Zong'an, which pretty much explained things.

Additionally, Green Fern's Dharma Shadow seemed to be a rare rose species while, it was said, Zong'an's Dharma Shadow was a tree— not just Zong'an, but even Zong'an's grandson, his future son-in-law Wang Anye, had a Dharma Shadow that was also a tree...

The more An Commandery Prince pondered, the more likely "that gossip" seemed to be true.

Why had the Wang family become so wealthy? Why did they have so many high-quality plant seeds? The gossip had made it very clear—it was because Wang Shouzhe, the handsome and noble-looking Family Head of the Wang family, had charmed the naive Green Fern's Pride!

She had even borne Wang Shouzhe a son, who was sent back to the Wang family to be raised. To support her clandestine husband and son, Green Fern's Pride had repeatedly broken the academy's rules and sold out many of its interests...

She would occasionally stay with the Wang family for a while to reunite with her son! At one point, she even sent Wang Zong'an to Changchun Valley, where he stayed for over a decade.

The academy also considered that since Green Fern was destined to be great and had a broad future, it could only turn a blind eye, doing its best to conceal this affair.

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The water here is too deep, far too deep.

An Commandery Prince shivered in his heart, quickly reined in his thoughts, and pretended he hadn't noticed anything as he remarked, "Having Shouzhe's assistance is the greatest fortune for me, Wu Mingyuan."

However, he thought to himself that his future son-in-law Anye having Lu Wei's Pride's bloodline might not be such a bad thing after all.

...

West Sea Prefecture.

As one of the several Da Qian rivers, Peace River's basin includes a portion that lies within West Sea Prefecture, overlapping with the largest freshwater lake in the prefecture, West Sea.

On the Peace River, there is a gorge called "Flying Eagle Gorge."

The torrential river waters split here: one part continued flowing eastward, while the other merged with West Sea.

From a bird's eye view, this scene was vast and magnificent, with the endless expanse of West Sea unfolding slowly ahead, reflecting the sky and the clouds, involuntarily arousing admiration for the majestic power of nature.

Near the gorge.

On the towering rocks, a middle-aged man dressed in simple fisherman's attire, sporting stubble, continuously cast and reeled in his Luya Rod.

He wore a conical hat and wooden clogs, the very image of a fisherman; yet, his whole aura exuded an indescribable dominance and strength, clearly no ordinary man.

Behind the middle-aged man stood two burly men.

One of them, bald-headed with a striking scar from his left eye to his mouth, looked fierce and formidable, the very image of ferocity.

He stood arms folded, straight and stiff, behind the middle-aged man, appearing like a loyal bodyguard.

The other burly man was idly leaning against a rock.

He was eight feet tall, his physique all sinew and muscle, clad in a rough leather armory, dressed rather casually, but his hands were as white as jade, exquisitely maintained like fine porcelain, which contrasted starkly with the rest of his rugged appearance.

If Wang Shouzhe were here, he would recognize at once that the unassuming middle-aged man was none other than Long Wuji, the leader of Jiaolong Gang.

The burly man standing arms folded was his adopted son, Zhao Wu Qing, the Great Commander of Jiaolong Gang, who had once been captured by them.

As for the other, his hands white as jade, he was naturally the third master of Jiaolong Gang, the Slaughter Spirit Hand "Du TianGang."

Suddenly.

Long Wuji, who was reeling in his catch with the Luya Rod, had a slight change in expression. His actions suddenly altered and soon, a lively West Sea Snowy Skin Fish was pulled up.

Seeing this, Zhao Wu Qing, who was behind him, leapt forth agilely and expertly clasped the gills of the Spirit Fish, rendering its struggles futile.

"Leader, your Luya skills have improved quite a bit," Du TianGang remarked with a rough, loud voice and a grin, "Just this morning, you've already caught two three-pound and five two-pound Snowy Skin Spirit Fish, releasing those under two pounds."

"After practicing for so long, of course, the skills should improve," Long Wuji casually put down the Luya Rod, satisfied, and leaned against a nearby rock, "It's a pity that the Snowy Skin Fish here in West Sea are still too small. It would be amazing to catch five-pounders."

I've heard that near the Green Luo Guard in the Dongfang seas, some superior cold sea Spirit Fish can put up a really addictive fight."

Despite saying this, Long Wuji appeared very smug. The West Sea Snowy Skin Spirit Fish were always extraordinarily expensive tributes, commanding high prices in Return to Dragon City. But, these Spirit Fish moved swiftly, diving deep into the sea the moment there was any disturbance, making them very difficult to catch with nets.

It was unexpected that fishing for Snowy Skin Spirit Fish with a Luya Rod would be this easy.

Following Long Wuji's lead, Du TianGang praised him a few more times, then said with a beaming smile, "Leader, I've heard that Qingluo Guard in Longzuo County is flourishing more and more, and even the goods passing from us have increased. Last time, one of my guys went there disguised to scout, came back as if he'd lost his soul. It would be great if we could have such a territory as well~"

Speaking, he paused and looked at Long Wuji with a hint of expectation, "Since there are no more pirates at sea now, and the Cao Family has declined, how about we acquire a few sea ships and expand our business to the sea?"

Long Wuji shot him a glance, a cold light flitting across his deep eyes, "What, thinking of going back to your old ways, returning to our original trade?"

"No, no, no, I wouldn't dare~" Du TianGang was chilled by that stare, he quickly waved his hands to show his innocence, "With the court's crackdown on pirates much stronger than before, I'm not a fool to rush into the line of fire. I'm talking about legitimate business, purely legitimate."

"You still have some sense," Long Wuji withdrew his gaze, returning to his languid demeanor, "Qingluo Guard might be prosperous, but isn't that all built up by Wang Shouzhe? As long as we can get the Wang family on board with us, what's there to worry about making money?"

"Exactly, exactly. Wise leader," Du TianGang quickly agreed.

"A truly smart person should not only see what's right before his eyes, but look farther beyond."

Qingluo Sea is merely a near-sea port; beyond the vast oceans lies a broader world," Long Wuji gazed toward the distant sea, his eyes deep, his expression proud, somewhat like he was strategizing over an empire," When Wang Shouzhe joins us in the future, I'll have him help me plan—we'll explore overseas together, discover other continents.

Then, I'll lead you all in achieving noble ranks and titles!"

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Du Tiangang was slightly persuaded by his words and couldn't help but fantasize, "I've heard there are other continents across the great sea, where people are born with blonde hair and blue eyes, bearing strange appearances, especially the women who are even more enchanting and beautiful, exuding an exotic charm. I wonder if that's true?"

Upon hearing this, Long Wuji let out a hearty laugh, "Hahaha, look at you and your ambitions. Once we have money, won't you have as many foreign women as you want? Don't worry, just follow me and do your job well, and everything will come."

"It won't be long before Shouzhe will be our own brother. When the time comes, we'll first have a good time at Qingluo Guard with Luya. Then I'll discuss with Shouzhe, and we'll go explore the new continent together. Blonde and blue-eyed beauties, hehe, don't you want as many as you wish?"

"Hehe, thanks much, Big Boss..." Du Tiangang's eyes gleamed.

Zhao Wu Qing cast a disdainful look at him. Is it only women in his eyes? Is that all the ambition he has?

However, Master Shouzhe was indeed a capable person, and working together in the future, the Jiaolong Gang could benefit greatly from the association.

While Long Wuji and his group were full of anticipation, busy planning their future, on the river, a thin reed stalk floated swiftly downstream with the rapid current, approaching at a great speed like a fleeing wild goose casting its shadow.

Atop the reed stood a refined middle-aged man dressed in a scholarly robe.

The river wind blew in gusts, lifting his robes and making him appear dignified and graceful with an indescribable air of romance.

Seeing this scene, Zhao Wu Qing immediately stopped what he was doing and turned back to report, "Foster father, the Second Boss has arrived."

It turned out that this scholarly-robed middle-aged man was the Jiaolong Gang's Second Boss, Jiang Yusong.

As he spoke, Jiang Yusong, who was standing on the reed, had already reached the vicinity of the rocks. With a light tap of his toes, he drifted over a distance of more than ten zhang like a gentle breeze, landing on the rocks where the three men were.

Upon witnessing this, a flicker of light passed through Long Wuji's deep eyes, but his face remained composed, still displaying his generous nature, "Yusong, what's so urgent that even you, the Second Boss, have to come personally?"

Jiang Yusong bowed to him respectfully and said, "Boss, Yusong has an urgent matter to report, please dismiss the others."

Long Wuji gestured with his hand.

Zhao Wu Qing and Du Tiangang sensibly withdrew to a distance.

Once the two men were sufficiently far away, Jiang Yusong then took out a letter from the Storage Ring and handed it to Long Wuji with both hands, "Your Highness, there's a letter from Prince Yong'an."

Long Wuji was startled, "That old man, he actually wrote to me again? Could it be that after our quarrel last time, he wants to scold me again?"

However, even though his heart was filled with doubts, his hands moved swiftly to receive the letter, and in a blink of an eye, the letter was already in his grasp.

Then he opened and read the letter.

The letter wasn't long—it didn't contain any superfluous words, just a simple account of Wang Liyao's actions in Shangjing, as well as Wang Zong'an leading a large amount of supplies and men to the northern defense of An, presumably having reached some agreement with the An Commandery Prince, leading to suspicions that the Changning Wang Clan had already allied with the An Commandery Prince.

The letter urged him to deal with the matter as soon as possible.

Jiang Yusong stood nearby, carefully watching Long Wuji's expression, afraid that something in the letter would provoke him. Instead, he saw Long Wuji's face remained eerily calm.

After a moment, Long Wuji calmly folded the letter back up, put it into the envelope, and with hands clasped behind his back, walked to the edge of the mountain rock, gazing into the rolling river waters, lost in thought.

Jiang Yusong, watching his silhouette, felt confused and clueless.

What's happening? Every other time the Prince had received a letter from Prince Yong'an, hadn't he been so angry he'd jump up and down, wishing he could rush back and fight his father in three hundred rounds? Why was he so calm this time? Could he have been shocked into stupidity?

Yet what he didn't know was that Long Wuji wasn't calm; he was merely feigning composure, but in reality, he was already restless inside.

Who could have expected that while he was fantasizing about future benefits from collaborating with Wang Shouzhe, Wang Shouzhe had already quietly sided with the An Commandery Prince?

Wasn't this like being slapped in the face in front of his subordinates?

No, he needed to find Wang Shouzhe and ask for clarification.

No, that wouldn't do. A gentleman's promise is worth a thousand in gold; if it was agreed for fifty years, then it must be fifty years. If he was anxious to seek an explanation from him now, before the fifty years had passed, wouldn't that make him look especially lacking in presence and impatient?

But if he didn't go, was he supposed to just watch as Wang Shouzhe sided with the An Commandery Prince?

Long Wuji, expressionless and appearing composed yet at ease, was caught in a whirlpool of conflict within his heart.

"Yusong, how much longer until the fifty-year pact?"

Suddenly, he asked Jiang Yusong.

"Reporting to the Big Boss, there are three hundred and twenty days left," Jiang Yusong quickly calculated in his mind and promptly replied with the answer.

Why is there still so much time left?!

Long Wuji's facial muscles twitched involuntarily. He felt like the bride he was set to marry had eloped with someone else, and he was about to watch her enter the bridal chamber.

Yet, he had to honor his promise and could only watch without being able to send his troops to intervene.

"Shouzhe, oh Shouzhe, how I valued and trusted you, and held you close," cried Long Wuji's inner voice, "Yet without any notice, you ran off to join that worthlessness Wu Mingyuan! What's so good about that kid Wu Mingyuan? Playing with me, Long Wuji, would have been far more enjoyable."

Indeed, it was like saying, "I intended to present my heart to the bright moon, but alas, the bright moon shines on the ditch!"

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"But I, Long Wuji, once I speak, even four horses cannot chase after my words! I will endure, I will, I'll endure you for one more year! Shouzhe, you must hang in there, wait for me!"

"I, Long Wuji, will definitely chase you down!"

...

More than a hundred miles outside Shouzhe Pass, there lies a vast lake that merges with the sky.

This body of water may not be as expansive and vast as the Great Wilderness Marsh, but its water storage capacity is considerably significant. Upon inspection, the lake's deepest part is more than a hundred zhang, and in terms of scale and water volume, it is far from comparable to the Zhuwei Lake near the family home.

This lake is one of the key projects in the Wang family's second phase of territorial expansion.

In the lake, there dwells a fierce type of Spirit Fish—the Swordtooth Carp. Generally, a Level Three Swordtooth Carp weighs three to four thousand jin and consumes a large number of common fish and other Spirit Fish each year.

South of Peace River, there is an abundance of water systems with numerous natural lakes, and a considerable number of small and mid-sized Spirit Veins are distributed underwater, which are very conducive to fish farming.

The Wang family had already started the research and study of cultivating Spirit Fish many years ago.

However, suitable economic species for aquaculture are certainly not top-of-the-food-chain predators like Swordtooth Carp. Despite being incredibly delicious and full of vigor, it is carnivorous, and the cost of raising it is too great, resulting in a low cost-performance ratio.

Therefore, the Wang family cleared out the Swordtooth Carps from the lake one by one and stored them in the Cold Crystal Storage as a food reserve.

During this period, Wang Shouzhe occasionally visited "Deep Taihu Lake" to take care of some matters.

The name of the lake was given by Wang Shouzhe. In his previous life, there was a Taihu Lake near his home, and upon seeing this lake, he couldn't help but think of Taihu. This lake, however, was much deeper than Taihu, and the capacity for water storage was more than tenfold. Therefore, he added a word, naming it "Deep Taihu Lake."

However, Wang Shouzhe's visit this time to Deep Taihu Lake was not for fish farming but for the Pearl Grass that parasitized within the clamshells.

Zhuwei Lake was too small, and it had no Spirit Veins; Spirit clams living there couldn't draw much nourishment and Spiritual Energy to sustain the Pearl Grass. When the Pearl Grass first stayed in Zhuwei Lake, it quickly became weak and even showed signs of degradation, prompting Wang Shouzhe to find it a new habitat.

And the most suitable place for the Pearl Grass to thrive, naturally, was Deep Taihu Lake.

After placing the Spirit clams on the Spirit Veins of Deep Taihu Lake, Wang Shouzhe, following routine, attempted to stimulate the growth of the Pearl Grass.

The result confirmed that although the Pearl Grass could parasitize, it was indeed a type of Spirit Plant.

Wang Shouzhe was now a Taoist Body, and the nurturing effects of his Bloodline were countless times stronger than before. With his full effort in stimulating along with the nourishment from the Spirit Veins of Deep Taihu Lake, the state of the Pearl Grass was changing day by day, growing at a rapid pace, and the time it needed to mature was significantly reduced.

In less than a year's time, this Pearl Grass had fully matured, transforming into a precious Rank Six Spiritual Medicine.

And with its maturation, three Pear Grass Spirit Seeds were also born, which was a pleasant surprise for Shouzhe.

It is known that Pearl Grass is one of the main ingredients for the Rank Six Spirit Communication Treasure Pill, which holds a very high economic value. If the Wang family could cultivate the Pearl Grass, they would own their own Pearl Grass industry.

However, Pearl Grass takes an extremely long time to grow, with thousands or even tens of thousands of years needed to mature. Even with the support of Wang Shouzhe's Bloodline Power, which had reached the Taoist Body, the growth rate could only be doubled at Level Five.

This truly was going to be a cultivation effort that could last until the year of the monkey and the month of the horse.

However, if Wang Shouzhe were to reach the Purple Abode Realm and his Bloodline Power advanced to the next level, perhaps the cultivation speed could be much faster.

"Ao~~"

A massive Yuan Water Green Jiao arrived in response to a summons.

It smelled the ripe Pearl Grass and excitedly swam through the lake, creating a huge whirlpool. Many fish that couldn't escape in time were spun until they rolled their eyes back and passed out, all gathered together by the vortex.

"Awoo~"

The Yuan Water Qing Jiao swallowed hundreds of pounds of fish in one gulp, smacking its lips contentedly, its huge golden pupils eagerly fixating on the Pearl Grass in Wang Shouzhe's hand, almost drooling.

"Shut up." Just then, the petite and exquisite bodied Firefox Old Ancestor suddenly descended from the sky, stepping atop the Qing Jiao's head and scolded the Yuan Water Qing Jiao in a gentle voice, "Little Qingjiao, you must learn to respect your master."

After a year of training, the Yuan Water Qing Jiao had become significantly more obedient.

Upon hearing the scolding from Firefox Old Ancestor, it flashed a look of fear in its golden eyes, then bowed its head to Wang Shouzhe in a show of respect.

During this time, the Deep Taihu Lake needed to be cleared of Swordtooth Carps, so Wang Shouzhe had asked Firefox Old Ancestor to assist with the Qing Jiao, which served both work purposes and to further train it, getting it accustomed to cooperating with humans.

The Yuan Water Qing Jiao was quite intelligent and quickly adapted to the rhythms of humans.

Therefore, after ripening the Level Six Pearl Grass, Wang Shouzhe and Firefox Old Ancestor discussed it and decided to give it the opportunity to advance.

"Qing Jiao, eat this fruit and sign this Spirit Contract sworn with the blood of your ancestors." Firefox Old Ancestor worked in coordination with Wang Shouzhe's actions, "Then you can enjoy this Pearl Grass and transform into a true Yuan Water Azure Dragon."

The Yuan Water Qing Jiao, having long anticipated this moment, did not hesitate and consumed the fruit and signed the Spirit Contract.

Wang Shouzhe also kept his promise and gave it the Pearl Grass.

The medicinal nature of Pearl Grass was violent, and humans had to refine it into Spirit Communication Treasure Pills to moderate its potency, which could then be used to assist in breaking through to the Purple Abode Realm. However, with its robust constitution, the Yuan Water Qing Jiao had no such concerns and could directly ingest and digest the medicinal strength of the Pearl Grass.

After consuming the Pearl Grass, the Yuan Water Qing Jiao coiled into a ball, began digesting the medicinal power, and commenced its assault on the next realm. Meanwhile, Wang Shouzhe and Firefox Old Ancestor stood by as protectors.

It had to be said, the medicinal effect of the Pearl Grass was indeed immediate.

A few days later, the Yuan Water Qing Jiao successfully overcame the shackles and faced the tribulation necessary for breaking through from Peak Level Six to Level Seven — the Dragon Transformation Tribulation.

Wang Shouzhe and Firefox Old Ancestor quickly retreated to a safe distance, closely monitoring its tribulation, their hearts filled with some concern.

After all, if the Yuan Water Qing Jiao failed its breakthrough, all the previous investment would have been in vain.

Fortunately, with a solid foundation and exceptional bloodline, the Yuan Water Qing Jiao did not need Wang Shouzhe's assistance and managed to successfully endure the tribulation on its own strength, transforming into a Yuan Water Azure Dragon.

Just as described in the texts—jade armor, golden pupils, and double horns atop its head, it looked imposing and majestic.

Under the sunlight, the newly formed dragon horns on its head, though short, shone with a golden light, looking extremely regal. The color of the blue-green scales on its vast body deepened considerably, appearing thicker and more resilient than before.

"Awoo awoo~~"

The Yuan Water Azure Dragon excitedly roared up to the heavens and then looked down at Wang Shouzhe, actually speaking in human language, "I have finally become a dragon. You humans, you're not too bad."

That voice, so sweet and tender, was unmistakably that of an underage girl.

Wang Shouzhe listened in astonishment, feeling as if he had been struck by lightning.

This, this, this Yuan Water Qing Jiao is female? And also, still underage?

Chapter 28 My Classmate is a Dragon

...

"Firefox, you didn't tell me this either?"

Wang Shouzhe looked at the Firefox Old Ancestor somewhat dumbfounded.

The Azure Dragon's little girl tone had given him a strong shock. Recalling everything they had done to the Green Jiao, he felt a sense of guilt for abusing a minor.

This, this is just too...

"Shouzhe brother, you didn't ask either." The Firefox Old Ancestor had an innocent face, her beautiful eyes rolling about, "Oh no, not good, Shouzhe brother, you must stick to your original heart. Remember the promise you made to me, before my transformation, you're not allowed to cultivate with other spirit beasts, especially not..."

"I won't! Rest assured."

Before the Firefox Old Ancestor could finish, Wang Shouzhe had already hastily interrupted her, breaking out in a cold sweat. Joking aside, as if he would cultivate with spirit beasts... let alone with a juvenile dragon...

"Giggle giggle~ Shouzhe brother, you're the best." The Firefox Old Ancestor snuggled into his embrace, laughing particularly sweet and joyfully.

Seeing it behave this way, Wang Shouzhe was quite helpless. Well, fine, let's just consider it as raising a talking, coquettish battle pet.

As the human and fox chatted, the Azure Dragon had already started to excitedly fly through the water and into the sky.

Her massive form twisted through the water and wove through the clouds. Her feet stepped on mist, her head touched the blue sky. Breathing in and out, she exhaled mist and inhaled clouds; her roar was thunderous, genuinely embodying a trace of an Ancient God Beast's bloodline.

Before transforming into a dragon, her roar was more akin to a beast's roar, but at that moment, as she lifted her head, she let out a series of high dragon chants. Distant and lasting, piercing through heaven and earth, carrying a noble and dignified air as if from ancient times.

Her flying ability also saw a substantial qualitative enhancement.

The previously quick-flying her, although fast, did not possess the agility she had in the water, like a fish in the flow. She seemed like a driver who had just learned to drive; capable of being on the road, but not on par with experienced drivers.

But now, as she serpentine-twisted and spiraled in the air, she already seemed as free and unrestrained as in the water, as if the sky too had become her home field.

Turning seas and rivers upside down, arranging clouds and rain, omnipotent.

The grand Dragon Might spread throughout the airspace over Deep Taihu Lake, causing all the Spirit Fish living in the lake to be severely frightened, frantically dashing around. Some even jumped out of the water, attempting to escape, while others delved deep into the depths, trying to bury themselves in the mud, thinking they could deceive the Azure Dragon's perception.

In short, the entire Deep Taihu Lake was in chaos, with animals running amok.

"Little Green Jiao, no, Little Qinglong, come here." After a cozy moment between the Firefox Old Ancestor and Wang Shouzhe, she authoritatively called out to the Azure Dragon.

The Azure Dragon swished her dragon tail in the water, "whoosh" creating a giant wave, before transforming into a half-zhang long Mini Qinglong, lazily flying over to the duo.

The cultivation methods of fierce beasts, generally speaking, are not that different from humans, except that the beasts' reliance on their bloodline is stronger. Most of the fierce beasts' fighting techniques and divine skills are inherited through their bloodline.

Therefore, the purer the bloodline of a fierce beast is, the greater its potential for development is.

This Azure Dragon's bloodline was indeed pure. Having just passed her tribulation and transformed into a dragon, she awakened many innate divine abilities, gaining the skill to alter her body size.

Generally, only after a fierce beast had breached Level Seven could it change its shape and size. Doing so had many benefits, the greatest being the significant savings in energy consumption due to their enormous size.

However, as cute as Little Qinglong might be, it seemed that the boost in power had gone to her head.

She even patted Wang Shouzhe's shoulder with her tail, saying, "From now on, our Wang family will be under my protection. Just make sure I'm well-fed and catered to, and I promise the Wangs two hundred years of peace and prosperity. As for after two hundred years... hmm, that depends on your performance.

If you take good care of me, I might consider continuing my duties as the Wang family's Clan Guardian Spirit Beast, and protect the Wangs."

Her voice was still sweet and tender yet the words that came out carried a condescending and old-fashioned tone, with a hint of a bandit's air, as if she was the boss of a mountain.

Upon hearing this, the Firefox Old Ancestor's fur instantly bristled, each strand standing on end, her aura flaring up, "Little Qinglong, are you looking to rebel with that kind of talk?"

Mini Qinglong's body shuddered at the words, as if recalling something terrifying. But she quickly composed herself, realizing she had now broken through to Level Seven. Why should she fear this smelly fox?

With that, she puffed up and retorted without showing weakness, waving her claws, "Stinky fox, according to the Spirit Contract, I am the Wang's Clan Guardian Spirit Beast. You're just an external spirit beast, what gives you the right to meddle in our Wang family's internal affairs?"

"I am brother Shouzhe's wife-to-be, and you're just a working spirit beast who signed the Spirit Contract. In terms of status, you should call me mistress," the Firefox Old Ancestor raged, flames erupting all over her body, even her claws unsheathing from her paw pads, "It looks like the lesson I taught you wasn't stern enough."

"You said it yourself, not yet a wife, what claim have you to the title of mistress? As for fighting...

heh heh heh, come on, who's afraid of whom?" The Mini Qinglong's body surged with waves of blue energy vortexes, her dragon whiskers fluttering majestically, "Stinky fox, you bullied me to death before I transformed into a dragon, but now we're on the same level, do you think I'm still afraid of you?"

Chapter 28 My Classmate is a Dragon_2

"Everybody shut up."

Wang Shouzhe rubbed his temples, annoyed by their noise that gave him a headache.

Dealing with a lolita-minded Firefox was already troublesome enough, and now having to handle an arrogant, violent Little Qinglong who would start an argument at the drop of a hat was truly too stimulating for any average day.

"Hmph~ I listen to Brother Shouzhe. L-girl is the most well-behaved." Firefox Old Ancestor glanced at Wang Shouzhe's expression and obediently retracted her flames before hopping back into his embrace.

"Hmph~ In consideration of our Wang family Family Head, I'll spare you this once." The mini Little Qinglong casually waved her mini dragon claw in an arrogant tone.

Fortunately, she took the Spirit Contract sworn in the name of the Ancestor Dragon quite seriously, innately acknowledging herself as the Wang family's Clan Guardian Spirit Beast. There was also a clause in the Spirit Contract, which required her to respect the Family Head.

While enjoying the Wang family's tribute, she must be ready to follow the Family Head's orders at any time, without defying them, so Wang Shouzhe's words still carried some weight.

But while she might accept it, her attitude, well, was another story.

"Azure Dragon of Elemental Water, first of all, congratulations on your successful transformation." Seeing the two Spirit Beasts stop bickering, the twitching vein at Wang Shouzhe's temple finally subsided. He adjusted his facial expression and looked at the mini Little Qinglong with a smile, "Do you still remember, when signing the Spirit Contract, that you ate a fruit?"

The Little Qinglong blinked, nodding with a puzzled look: "I remember. That fruit was crispy and sweet, quite delicious. If you have more, offer me a few baskets as a tribute, and I'll savor them slowly."

"That fruit is called the 'Nine Yous Bloodthirsty Demon Seed,' which I spent a long time cultivating. If you like it, I can spare some time to cultivate a few more for you, guaranteed to your satisfaction," Wang Shouzhe's expression was serious, but the corners of his mouth held a meaningful smile.

"This fruit's name sounds...it doesn't seem like a typical fruit..." Little Qinglong blinked her watery, gold eyes and started feeling an ominous premonition, "It's not poisonous, is it?"

"Poisonous, of course not," Wang Shouzhe shook his head to deny, but before Little Qinglong could relax, he explain patiently, "Its preciousness lies in the 'Demon Seed Spirit Core' within the flesh. Once ingested, the demon seed will nestle deep within your stomach."

"Then, then what..." Little Qinglong's pupils began to dilate, gulping nervously.

"Then, just with a single thought from me, the Demon Seed Spirit Core will take root in your stomach, and the thorns that grow on the roots will pierce your belly," Wang Shouzhe continued with an animated expression, as if telling a story to children, with vivid detail, "They will absorb your qi and blood for nourishment and will grow slowly, ever so slowly.

As you eat more and more qi and blood, they will grow faster. The roots, like tendrils, will gradually spread into your veins... Your body will be filled with the roots of the Demon Seed Spirit Core."

"No, don't, don't go on," Little Qinglong, floating in the air, looked terrified and was swaying as if she was about to fall into Deep Taihu Lake.

"As the root keeps growing, you will be in more and more pain, and you will also become hungrier," Wang Shouzhe was unperturbed and continued, "Driven by intense hunger, you will start to eat frenziedly, but even if you eat until your stomach is about to burst, it will be futile."

"Because all that food will become nourishment for the Nine Yous Bloodthirsty Demon Seed. In the end, it will burst your body, madly devouring your blood, tendons, bones, skin, and those beautiful scales."

"Eventually, it will grow into a magnificent demon tree atop your corpse. I reckon, if cut down, the wood would make for very sturdy chairs."

Wang Shouzhe's voice was like the whispering of a demon, illustrating one terrifying scene after another.

"No! I don't want that, I don't want to be eaten by the Demon Seed Core~~Waaaah~ It's so scary~ I don't want to become a chair!" Little Qinglong cried out in fear, "You're a big bad guy! I don't believe you! You must be lying to a dragon!"

"Don't believe it? Let's try it then."

Wang Shouzhe snapped his fingers with a "pop", his voice deep, as if summoning something, chanting, "Nine Yous Bloodthirsty Demon Seed Spirit Core, do you hear my call? The time is ripe; start to take root and sprout."

Suddenly!

Little Qinglong's eyes bulged, as if she had been immobilized, her entire body stiffened on the spot.

She could clearly feel something coming to life inside her stomach, squirming bit by bit, scraping her stomach lining as if taking root there.

The sensation wasn't very painful, but it acted like a switch, involuntarily triggering her imagination of the horrifying scenes described by Wang Shouzhe, causing Little Qinglong to break down on the spot.

Her dragon face drooped, her whiskers drooping, while tears streamed uncontrollably to either side, spraying out.

L-girl's dragon life had just begun, ah woo~ Was it to end so tragically? Waaaah~ L-girl doesn't want to die, waaaah~~~

The more she thought, the harder she cried, and the sadder she became. Moisture in the air kept gathering, and dark clouds rolled over Deep Taihu Lake, soon pouring rain "whooshing" down heavily.

Wang Shouzhe and Firefox Old Ancestor watched her cry and vent in silence, their expressions sympathetic.

Even in the world of adults, a breakdown can happen in an instant. Let alone Little Qinglong, she was too young, just a baby dragon who had recently transformed, and her inability to accept the harsh realities of the world was to be expected.

Chapter 28 My Classmate is a Dragon_3

Cry, cry, just keep crying and you will get used to it and accept it.

She cried for half an hour, and the torrential rain around her had been pouring for more than half an hour. Fortunately, the surface of Deep Taihu Lake was vast and the water was deep enough; otherwise, the water level might have risen substantially.

Such an innate divine ability of the Yuan Water Azure Dragon, if assigned to help An Commandery Prince plant trees and forests in the northern defense, wouldn't be a bad choice for a strong warrior.

However, the main issue with the northern defense was actually the low humidity in the air; even if Little Qinglong really went there to exert her divine power to gather clouds and make rain, it would be hard to achieve such might and effect.

Otherwise, given An Commandery Prince's status, borrowing a dragon capable of gathering clouds and making rain would not be impossible.

The top prominent families that initially tried to develop the Great Desert might well have tried this method too, but mostly failed.

Moreover, after Wang Shouzhe's observation, her divine power of bringing torrential rain was, truthfully, just creating a cloudburst, not comparable to the lethality of Li Yao's "Hanging Water Divine Power."

The "Hanging Water Divine Power" is a bona fide combat divine skill for offense, whereas the Yuan Water Azure Dragon's cloud-gathering and rain-making divine power seems more suited to creating favorable environments.

But this doesn't mean her divine power isn't formidable; it all depends on how it's used. If it were in a place like Qing An Prefecture, where the air is rich with moisture, gathering several Yuan Water Azure Dragons to make rain together might flood the County Town outright.

"Human...Wang...family..." After more than half an hour, the sobbing Little Qinglong finally stopped crying with hiccups and, blinking her golden dragon eyes, she looked pitifully at Wang Shouzhe, "Is there any hope for my condition?"

She wanted to call Wang Shouzhe "human" but feared offending him; calling him by his name didn't seem intimate enough, and calling him Family Head felt too cheesy, so she hesitantly skipped the title altogether.

"As long as you behave, I will take it out after two hundred years," Wang Shouzhe stroked her dragon head, smiling benevolently, "Little Qinglong, since you've not shed your wild nature, I have no choice but to put on the Tight Hoop Spell for you."

Having her vital gate seized, Little Qinglong instantly became docile and obedient. She rubbed Wang Shouzhe with her dragon horn and asked, "What is the Tight Hoop Spell?"

"That's a story, I'll tell you slowly later. Don't worry, as long as you don't misbehave, I guarantee I won't bully you." Wang Shouzhe had brought up many children, having seen all sorts of mischievous kids, and had long since mastered the art of dealing with them. Moreover, when it came to consoling a child afterward, his methods were quite rich, truly a master class.

"That's great, I, I love stories the most. The Old Ancestor dragon in our Daze always loved to tell us stories." Little Qinglong's eyes still filled with tears, but her distress had vanished in a flash, and she spoke cheerfully, "Then from now on, like that stinky fox, I'll call you 'Shouzhe brother' too."

"No way!" The Firefox Old Ancestor shrieked angrily, spreading all four paws to protect Wang Shouzhe firmly, "'Shouzhe brother' is my exclusive title; you must find another one."

Seeing her furious expression, if Little Qinglong didn't agree, there's no telling whether the Firefox would violently lash out in desperation.

"Then what should I do?" Little Qinglong started to worry.

Although she no longer feared the fox, having just transformed into an Azure Dragon, her powers were not yet fully accumulated. She wasn't adept in using many of her bloodline's divine powers. If a fight really broke out, she was probably no match for the fox.

"Why not, you just call him 'Daddy' then," suggested the Firefox Old Ancestor with a crafty turn of her eyes, "After all, Little Qinglong, you aren't very old, and I've heard that your species are hatched from eggs, mostly unaware of who their biological parents are, which is quite pitiable."

Dad can be called so casually?

Wang Shouzhe glanced at the Firefox Old Ancestor who was casually throwing out suggestions.

As if you know who your own parents are.

Fierce beasts at the Spiritual Platform Realm previously had clouded consciousness, mainly acting on instinct. Only after reaching the Heavenly Human Realm does their cognitive ability gradually reach a similar level to humans, and memories from before this tend to be vague. Not knowing one's parents is entirely normal.

"Great idea, great idea~~"

But Little Qinglong wasn't bothered in the slightest by the Firefox Old Ancestor's suggestion, finding it quite sensible instead.

She looked carefully at Wang Shouzhe and even sniffed him with her nose, her golden eyes growing brighter, "I smell the ancient aura and the totem flavor in your bloodline; very good, very good~ I declare that from now on, you are my Daddy."

Her joy didn't seem faked but rather came from the heart.

"Alright then." Wang Shouzhe hesitated for a moment, then helplessly patted her dragon head, "Ruolan and I haven't had children for a long time; having another child wouldn't be bad. So here it is, from now on, you will be called 'Wang Lilong,' my adopted daughter."

Although this Little Qinglong was haughty, temperamentally poor, and often liked to resolve problems with martial power, her mind was still quite innocent. After all, in the wilderness, strength reigned supreme, and besides eating, drinking, sleeping, and fighting, she hadn't experienced much else complex. How could it compare to the many scheming ways of humans?

Adopting a Yuan Water Azure Dragon with a rather pure bloodline as his daughter wouldn't disgrace the Wang family name; it would also ensure long-term protection for the descendants of the Wang family.

After all, at the same level of cultivation, the lifespan of a spirit beast is generally much longer than that of humans. Once she reaches Level Nine and assumes human form, she should be able to protect the Wang family for thousands of years.

Chapter 28 My Classmate is a Dragon_4

"Wang Lilong?" Little Azure Dragon Wang Lilong was overjoyed, mimicking the Old Ancestor Firefox as she pounced into Wang Shouzhe's arms and cooed, "This name sounds so nice, from now on everyone will call me 'Wang Lilong'. Daddy~ Daddy~"

Listening to the repeated "Daddy," Wang Shouzhe's heart was also somewhat touched.

However, their current affection was only just beginning and not yet stable. Lilong herself still had her wild nature and her way of thinking on many matters leaned more toward that of a wild beast. Wang Shouzhe was absolutely not going to "take out" the Nine Nether Bloodthirsty Demon Seed Spirit Core inside her at this stage.

This served both as a "Tight Hoop Spell" for her and a tool to urge her rapid growth.

Seeing the affectionate appearance of Wang Shouzhe and Wang Lilong, Old Ancestor Firefox immediately felt jealous.

She immediately went up and pushed Wang Lilong aside, rubbing against Wang Shouzhe while cooing, "Shouzhe brother, I also want a name. I don't want people to keep calling me 'Old Ancestor Firefox,' it makes me sound so old."

"Then do you belong to the Luo generation?" Wang Shouzhe tentatively asked.

"How can that be~ if I were Luo generation, I'd really become your sister."

Old Ancestor Firefox, having mingled in human society for hundreds of years and being more knowledgeable than Little Azure Dragon Wang Lilong, did not fall for it.

She immediately rejected Wang Shouzhe's suggestion and then her eyes spun, "I have a Spirit Contract with the Yuwen Clan anyway, so how about I take 'Yuwen' as my surname? Dear Shouzhe brother, help me choose a good name so that the Yuwen Clan can later include my name in the Direct Line of the Yuwen family tree.

By doing so, once I transform, my marriage into the Wang family will be even more proper."

"Uh..."

Wang Shouzhe wiped his sweat and thought to himself, Firefox, your planning is really long-term and meticulous.

But, her transformation after reaching Level Nine, that's an event for the distant future. Besides, when did I ever agree to marry you?

He skillfully avoided the sensitive topic and seriously began to think of a name for her, "The women of the Yuwen Clan do not follow generational order. Your fur is as red as fire, and your fox tails are as showy as a canopy, so how about the name 'Maohua'?"

"Yuwen Maohua? That's too ugly," Old Ancestor Firefox chirped in protest, "Chiwei, from now on I'll be called Yuwen Chiwei, a miss of the Yuwen Clan's Direct Line, a lady destined to marry into the Wang family."

"'Chiwei' it is then, although it's not as nice as 'Maohua', but I still respect your choice," Wang Shouzhe said with a sigh. Ah~ truly a good name lost.

Though the events of today had some ups and downs, everything ended up going smoothly.

Now the Wang family finally had a Purple Abode Realm combat force of its very own.

Added to the vast and profound foundation that the Wang family had accumulated over many years, ordinary Fifth Grade Prominent Families could no longer possibly compete with the Wang family.

This made Wang Shouzhe feel profoundly emotional.

It wasn't easy. The Wang family had once been so precarious, nearly falling out of the Rank 9 classification and becoming a mediocre family. Now they had managed to turn the tide completely, achieving what no ordinary family could easily replicate.

Suddenly having a daughter, Wang Shouzhe of course had to go back and report to Liu Ruolan.

Adopting a Clan Guardian Spirit Beast as a son or daughter was rare, but there were precedents in the Great Qian Land. After understanding the situation, Liu Ruolan did not object.

The Azure Dragon and Liu Ruolan both belonged to the Water Spirit Bloodline, naturally making it easy for them to feel close to each other. After spending some time together, they found Little Qinglong Lilong quite adorable, and felt having another daughter was not bad at all.

Moreover, both she and Wang Shouzhe were of the Great Heavenly Proud, and with their high Bloodline Awakening Level, conceiving another child was not easy.

Thus, the family of three had respected and loved each other for a few days.

But after a few days, Liu Ruolan's traditional ideas about teaching children began to awaken, and during her leisure time, she took out some of the Clan School's test papers and gave Wang Lilong a test.

When Wang Lilong was placed on the table, she hadn't yet reacted, staring at the test papers, completely bewildered.

Liu Ruolan glanced over and wow, Wang Lilong was purely an illiterate dragon.

How could this be?

Her, Liu Ruolan's daughter, how could she be illiterate?

With a grand wave of her hand, Liu Ruolan immediately secured a spot for her in the Wang family Clan School. Being a child of the Wang family, how could she not attend the Clan School? Even if she was a dragon, she still needed to go to school. She couldn't just stay at home doing nothing, idling away her days; she should strive to be a cultured dragon.

Then, while Wang Lilong was still confused, she had already been registered at school.

When Wang Shouzhe heard about this, he was utterly shocked.

Would sending a dragon to the Clan School put too much pressure on the teachers?

But he really couldn't argue with his wife's obstinacy about pushing their child's education and growth. In the end, he had to give in.

He had no choice but to properly educate Wang Lilong, making her swear not to fight or bully her classmates using her strength, and especially not to reveal her true Azure Dragon form inside the school. If she caused trouble, she would definitely get a beating when she got home.

Ultimately,

Wang Shouzhe even added an extra layer of insurance by having his great-grandson, Wang Anye, accompany Wang Lilong to school. Although Anye was only ten years old, he was already quite mature and stable. With him around, the situation was unlikely to get out of hand.

Thus, the following scene could be seen later.

Early morning.

On the pier behind the main residence of the Wang family.

Dressed as a young nobleman, Wang Anye carried his little schoolbag, nonchalantly leading a half-zhang long, cloud-riding little Azure Dragon Wang Lilong to the pier.

Although she was a dragon, Liu Ruolan had personally sewn a beautiful new dress for her, along with a large pink crossbody schoolbag, stuffed full with various Spirit Foods.

According to her philosophy, the first day of school was mainly about adaptation. Preparing extra Spirit Food would help her bond with her classmates and quickly integrate into the group.

Feeling Wang Anye's presence, the massive Old Turtle, now larger than a horse carriage litter, slowly surfaced and cheerfully rubbed its head against Wang Anye's chest.

Over the years, it had carried so many young masters and misses to school, but its favorite was Wang Anye.

The reason was nothing special; the seventh young master was simply too wealthy. His casual tips often exceeded the Old Turtle's monthly allowance. Who wouldn't like a rich and good-looking young master?

Wang Lilong liked him too.

Spotting the plump Old Turtle, Wang Lilong's golden eyes lit up, and she immediately started drooling.

Feeling a bit embarrassed, she said, "Anye brother, it's our first time going to the Clan School together, and you've prepared such a lavish breakfast for me. Lilong is so happy, so very happy~"

"I'm not your brother. Just call me Anye, Grand Aunt Lilong," Wang Anye had lost count of how many times he had corrected Wang Lilong's way of addressing him, then suddenly realized something was off, "Wait, breakfast?"

He was somewhat baffled. He hadn't prepared any lavish breakfast for Wang Lilong.

Poor Old Turtle, by then, had already collapsed in fear, not daring to move at all. A dragon, a dragon, a dragon...

I, Old Turtle, am doomed.

Chapter 29: Wang Family's Territory Expansion! Path of the Power Minister or Path to Becoming an Emperor?

...

In that moment, the Elemental Water Spirit Tortoise shed a few sorrowful old tears.

As an Elemental Water Spirit Tortoise with a very ordinary bloodline, it had also experienced many shining moments in its life.

For instance, it had followed its family in a decisive battle, earning merit points for its contributions, and had been used as transport, carrying the mistress through dangerous foreign domains, and on numerous occasions served as the mistress's vehicle in battles across the lands, unmatched in its grandeur.

It had even snatched a magical treasure weapon from the greatest enemy of the Wang family in those years, establishing a glorious record of battle accomplishments for the Wang family.

Of course, it was aware that as the overall strength of the family continued to grow, and competition within became more intense, its modest power was no longer significant.

Therefore, it had always diligently served as a mount, attending to generation after generation of young ladies and young masters. Watching those young masters and ladies grow up on its back each day and gradually becoming powerful figures who could shake the heavens with a stomp of their feet.

Whenever it thought of this moment, the Elemental Water Spirit Tortoise felt indescribably proud and satisfied. It was like watching its children spread their wings and soar through the sky.

But now, was it actually going to end up as breakfast for the next generation's Clan Guardian Spirit Beast?

This survival of the fittest seemed too cruel, too realistic.

Wuu wuu~ Is it because I, Old Turtle, ate too much and got a bit fat? I'll voluntarily reduce my daily rations from now on, okay?

Old Turtle looked pitifully at Wang Anye, young master seven, you must stand up for Old Turtle.

"Stop." Wang Anye had always respected Old Turtle and immediately stood in front of the Elemental Water Spirit Tortoise, "Grand Aunt Lilong, Grandfather Turtle is our Wang family's Clan Guardian Spirit Beast, not your breakfast."

"Clan Guardian Spirit Beast?" Wang Lilong, who took the form of a mini-dragon, paused, but then burst into loud laughter, her dragon whiskers flaring as she said, "This Elemental Water Spirit Tortoise, with such a shallow bloodline, also qualifies to be our Wang family's Clan Guardian Spirit Beast?"

"With me there to protect the Wang family in the future, there's no need for such a low-level Spirit Beast. Fat tortoise, oh fat tortoise, you might as well obediently become my breakfast." With that, she clawed at the air, and a vast Dragon Might pressed down towards the Elemental Water Spirit Tortoise.

The Elemental Water Spirit Tortoise trembled all over in fright, and tears were scared out of it.

"Great grandfather said you're not allowed to show your true form casually, you'll burst the clothes that great grandmother sent." Wang Anye's eyes flashed as he pinched a sword technique, "Grand Aunt Lilong, you stop right there."

"Buzz!"

A humming sword sound emanated, and the ancient and weighty Divine Ability Spirit Sword [Epoch] thrummed as it rose into the air, enveloping Wang Lilong with a heavy and profound Sword Intent.

Through the hazy shadow, one could see an outline of a man with white hair and beard, clad in flowing white robes, who said in a deep voice, "Little Azure Dragon, Ye'er asks you to stop."

With Wang Anye's power alone, he could not even activate one ten-thousandth of Epoch's might. Now, thanks to the Energy accumulated by the Spirit Remnant, Artifact Spirit Ji Wuchen, he could barely activate it, but it was still impossible to unleash its true power.

Only when Wang Anye reached the Divine Power Territory would the Divine Spiritual Treasure truly show its splendor. However, even so, with Ji Wuchen's help, the ordinary Tianren Realm Cultivators could already be confronted.

Wang Lilong blinked her dragon eyes curiously at [Epoch]: "A talking sword, you must be the very powerful weapon Divine Spiritual Treasure spoken about in the stories of Profound Martial Old Ancestor, right? I didn't expect that brother Anye, who looks so weak, would actually have a Divine Spiritual Treasure."

"Call me Anye... Grand Aunt." Wang Anye felt a headache coming on.

The Profound Martial Prominent Family put great emphasis on seniority, and although he was the heir of the Wang family's Direct Long Line, he could not casually disregard ranks.

Great grandfather had a point to be worried; with Grand Aunt Lilong's wild nature unchecked, who knows what kind of trouble she could stir up. But with Grand Aunt Lilong being so fierce, the task of watching her was indeed quite stressful for Wang Anye.

"However, Anye, you're really too young and have no idea how terrifying a Level Seven Great Yao can be." The aura around Wang Lilong changed, and a torrential might began to rise, "With just this broken sword, you want to suppress me, a formidable Elemental Water Azure Dragon? How is that possible? Argh~"

Her demeanor was indeed fierce, but when paired with that pretty little dress and pink backpack, she looked adorably clueless no matter how one looked at her.

Actually, she quite liked the dress herself, it was not only beautiful but also meticulously sewn by her mother, stitch by stitch.

As an Elemental Water Azure Dragon that grew up in the wild, aside from occasionally listening to old stories from Profound Martial Old Ancestor, she had never experienced such tender familial affection.

Therefore, Wang Lilong tried her best to refrain from showing her true form, fearing she might ruin the dress.

"Grand Aunt, let's not play anymore," Wang Anye saw her "super fierce" expression, couldn't help but feel amused, yet he had to put on a serious face, "Great Ancestor instructed that if Grand Aunt causes trouble, I should recite the Stomach-expanding Spell."

"Stomach-expanding Spell?" Wang Lilong shuddered, her dragon eyes blinked, "Is it something like the Tight Hoop Spell?"

In these warm few days, during father-daughter moments, Wang Shouzhe had filled her with a great many stories. No child in the household could escape the fate of being told stories.

"That's right, great grandfather said that with just one incantation from me, your belly would burst," Wang Anye's pure and flawless eyes looked curiously at Wang Lilong, "Actually, I'm quite curious too, shall we give it a try?"

Chapter 29: Wang Family's Territory Expansion! Path of the Power Minister or Path to Becoming an Emperor?_2

Try it?

Try your big-headed ghost, ah!

Whimper~ Dad actually taught the Stomach-expanding Spell to Little Anye, that's just too evil. How will she ever dominate the Clan School now?

When Wang Lilong thought about that dreadful scene,

full of grumbles, she immediately reigned in her "eat human" presence and assumed a harmless look, floating over to Wang Anye on a cloud and snuggling up to him, saying, "Anye brother, was I fierce just now? Actually, I was just joking with you~~ Look, here's a piece of Level Three spiced Spirit Cow jerky for you to taste."

She reluctantly offered her favorite Spirit Food, and it was a sizable piece too.

It was something Mother had tucked into her backpack, telling her it could serve as a peacemaker in case of friction with classmates. That must be the right way to use it, right?

"Thank you, Grand Aunt, but I've had my breakfast," Wang Anye said as he saw her soften, and he also sheathed his Divine Ability Spirit Sword "Epoch," calmly speaking, "It's getting late, we must hurry to the Clan School. If we're late, the teacher will definitely smack our palms."

Due to systemic reasons, teachers in the Clan School held significant authority within its walls. No matter if you were the eldest son of the direct line of the Wang family or the child of some tenant farmer, all were treated equally; those who deserved punishment were punished, and those who needed a harsher discipline received it without leniency.

Moreover, they could even go to the Clan Leader great grandfather to file a complaint.

Those like super mischievous Aunt Yuxuan, who was always at odds with the school teachers, weren't they taken down by a "formal grievance"?

However, Wang Anye was quite by-the-book within the Clan School. Not only was he good at his studies and handsome, but he was also an amiable, elegant young master with impeccable manners. He was not only the male god in the eyes of the female classmates but also the treasured favorite of the teachers.

"I know, I know, I can hardly wait to get to the Clan School," Wang Lilong said nonchalantly as she shook her whiskers.

In truth, Wang Lilong also quite liked Anye, this boy who was "about the same age" as her, with a pure and sunny aura about him. Otherwise, given her character, she wouldn't necessarily have given Anye face.

During their conversation, Anye had brought Lilong onto the back of the Old Turtle, taking out some Spirit Food to feed it while saying, "Old Turtle Grandpa, no offense, Grand Aunt Lilong was just joking with you."

"Yes, yes, it was just a joke~"

Wang Lilong looked down at the chubby Old Turtle beneath her, secretly swallowing her saliva.

It being a domesticated Spirit Beast, it really was plump. Look at the flesh on its legs, bulging so much they almost couldn't retract into the shell anymore. She really wanted to have a taste.

The Spirit Tortoises in Daze were all cunning like monkeys – hard to catch, and even when you did, the meat was tough and woody, nothing like the succulent flesh of this one. It was a pity that, no matter how plump, she wasn't allowed to eat it.

Having started to enjoy the warmth of family life, Lilong had also begun to learn the concept of "restraint," as the saying goes: "Being willful feels good for a moment, but the consequences are serious."

Sigh~ Being the Clan Guardian Spirit Beast really is troublesome, there's so much you can't do, so much you can't eat.

Wang Lilong licked her lips, the mere thought of the delicate taste of the Old Turtle already making her mouth water so much she could barely stand it. Forget it~ She would just have a piece of beef jerky to curb her cravings~

"Ga crunch~ ga crunch~"

Wang Lilong stuffed the beef jerky into her mouth, eyeing the Old Turtle while eating it bite by delicious bite.

The poor Old Turtle was scared out of its wits.

Listening to that crisp chewing sound, feeling the menacing gaze of its natural predator on its back, as if it was about to be torn apart and devoured, its legs were trembling, and even its favorite Spirit Food jerky had lost its appeal.

Too, too terrifying~

It never dreamed that one day it would be watched while someone ate. With this little ancestor around, its days ahead were destined to be spent in constant fear and trembling.

Finally, after cautiously carrying the seventh young master and that little ancestor to the dock outside the Clan School, the Old Turtle quickly dove into the deep water, burying itself in the mud and didn't come out for a long time.

...

Today, the Clan School was destined to be anything but peaceful.

Even though the school principal and teachers had long been aware a dragon was coming to study and had discussed how to extend the spring breeze-like care of the Clan School to her, they were still taken aback when they actually saw the well-dressed dragon herself.

Reportedly, her name was Wang Lilong, and she was the legally adopted daughter of the Family Head of the Wang family. The Clan School teachers recalled over and over the plans they had come up with, and at the same time couldn't help but feel that the Clan Leader and his wife really had a flair for drama.

Was it possible they were thinking the teachers had it too easy and decided to throw in some excitement for them...?

After all, the direct line descendants of the Wang family always displayed extreme characteristics: they were either extremely well-behaved or extremely mischievous. The teachers hoped this dragon fell into the former category.

However, just after an incense stick's time, the teachers were in despair.

This adopted daughter named "Wang Lilong" was undoubtedly the biggest challenge the Clan School had faced since its establishment. She insisted on floating when she should be sitting, and when criticized by a teacher, she sprayed him with water. When asked to stand outside as punishment, she actually bared her teeth and threatened to eat the teacher...

At lunchtime, she snatched away lunch from fifty percent of the students, leaving them unfed.

Throughout the afternoon, she proceeded to blackmail and extort fifteen classmates, taking away their Copper Coins and shillings because she happened to hear that those could be used to buy all kinds of delicious snacks.

Chapter 29: Wang Family's Territory Expands! Road to Power or Road to Becoming Emperor?_3

Of course, she ultimately never spent that money because she found that directly robbing the clan school's snack bar was much simpler and more convenient.

Poor Wang Anye was almost never at peace for the entire day, constantly having to follow behind her and clean up the mess, bearing the burdens of life that he should not have at such a young age.

This made the clan school masters unable to help but feel suspicious, wondering if this was the Wang family matriarch taking revenge on purpose. Perhaps it was for the beating her granddaughter Wang Ying Xuan had previously endured, thus seeking retribution on the clan school masters.

...

Let us set aside Wang Lilong's "blissful life" at the clan school for the moment.

The Wang family's development in the outer regions also progressed in an orderly fashion. With Xin An Town as the center, a radius of fifteen hundred miles around it was designated as a key development area.

In this vast area, the Wang family displayed ample ambition.

This area was very large; once taken over, it could accommodate three to four Guard Cities, which would increase the Wang family's foundation several times over, transforming them into a power much greater than your average Fifth Grade Prominent Family, even though they would still formally be ranked as a Rank Six.

However, given the Wang family's appetite, taking over such a large territory was somewhat challenging. The main issue was not something else but the population.

Currently, the number of people in the Wang family's Direct and Direct Vessel lines was already over a hundred, but many of these were in-laws brought into the family, along with a large group of rowdy children.

The truly capable core forces were still insufficient.

Therefore, the Wang family adhered to their usual strategy and united with members of the In-laws Alliance in a joint development effort, which not only shared the investment burden and hastened the pace of development, but also aided the Affiliated Families in quickly becoming stronger and more prosperous.

The world was vast, and the Wang family did not need to monopolize it. Moreover, the growth and prosperity of the In-laws Alliance would, in turn, bring significant benefits to the Wang family in the future.

Wang Shouzhe's strategy of "if there's food, let's eat together" was unanimously embraced by the In-laws Alliance.

Marriages within the In-laws Alliance had been ongoing for many years, and their blood ties were intensely profound, which could be said to ensure a mutual sharing of interests and was the best guarantee for maintaining common benefits.

Thus, in the current Southern Six Guards, Wang Shouzhe's prestige soared exceedingly high, almost to the extent that he could obscure the sky with one hand.

Besides the bustling major development, there was also an elite team that had ventured thousands of miles away into the outer regions beyond Ping'an Town.

The team was not large, comprising just over twenty people, among them Spirit Platform Realm soldiers and Spirit Platform Realm cultivators from the Wang family out to gain experience, making up sixteen members.

Among them was a female soldier who had volunteered to follow along; her name was Ouyang Muqiu, and she was the granddaughter of one of Wang Luoqiu's earliest followers, Ouyang Junyan.

Originally, she was only of Lower Class A talent, but during her grandfather, Ouyang Junyan's, fiftieth birthday, she was fortunate enough to be visited by Wang Luoqiu and committed him to her memory.

Later, she entered the Wang Family School and consistently performed well. Through her efforts, she ultimately passed the assessments and joined the ranks of the family's soldiers. At the age of eighteen, in memory of past kindness, Wang Luoqiu personally gifted her a Bone Marrow Cleansing Pill, aiding her to break through the restraints of her bloodline and reach Middle Grade Class C talent.

From then on, Ouyang Muqiu's fate was completely changed.

The talent of Middle Grade Class C allowed her to stand out among many soldiers. With conscientious work and effort, her promotion speed was very quick, and she managed to acquire a Heavenly Spirit Pill in advance at the age of thirty-eight, breaking through to become a Spirit Platform Realm cultivator.

Having grown up on stories of Luoqiu, and with a name bearing special significance, as well as having received such profound favor from Luoqiu, Ouyang Muqiu's admiration for Luoqiu could be said to have reached an exceedingly fervent level.

This time, for the expedition along the foreign Divine Martial line, it was decided early on to have Wang Luo Jing and Wang Luoqiu lead the team. Upon hearing this, Ouyang Muqiu volunteered to join the team, simply to have the opportunity to follow Luoqiu.

Venturing into the outer domains was an extremely dangerous affair.

Even though Wang Zongchang had already scouted the area once, it was still quite risky.

Yet along the way, the journey was unexpectedly smooth. In the hands of the Sky Pride cultivators, Wang Luoqiu and Wang Luo Jing, not to mention the Level Four Fierce Beasts, even the Level Five Fierce Beasts, would often not last half a stick of incense's time in combat before they were vanquished.

In terms of talent, cultivation base, and age alone, Luoqiu and Luo Jing were comparable to Great Qian Wang Clan's Wang Annan. But don't forget, they had secretly engaged in combat in the foreign battlefields.

Their strength was simply not comparable to the younger generation from the Imperial Capital who had neither seen blood nor experienced the harshness of real combat.

Without exaggeration, whether it was Luoqiu or Luo Jing, if either of them went to the Imperial Capital, among the "Top Ten Outstanding Youths," apart from the Great Heavenly Proud Wu Zhixing, the rest could all be easily defeated by them.

Wang Luoqiu had just violently punched and exploded the head of a Level Four Fierce Beast as easily as if she were brushing off a speck of dust.

She stood with her hands behind her back, her goose-yellow Profound Martial battle robe fluttering in the wind, her expression serene as she gazed into the distance, seemingly lost in thought.

Meanwhile, Ouyang Muqiu busied herself with gathering the spoils of war, stealing glances at the commanding presence of Wang Luoqiu and occasionally blushing.

If only she could always follow Miss Luoqiu, how blissful would that be?

Chapter 29 Expansion of the Wang Family's Territory! A Powerful Minister's Path to Becoming Emperor?_4

But she didn't know that at this time, Wang Luoqiu's entire focus was on opening up the path to the Divine Martial army training as soon as possible.

Back in the rookie camp, there was something as good as the Primary Bloodline Improvement Fluid. Inside this Divine Martial army training point, there might also be something good that could improve bloodline talent. If she could get a chance to obtain it, her bloodline talent might be further improved.

She was eager to enter the training point and seek an opportunity to become a Great Heavenly Proud.

Once she became a Great Heavenly Proud, the first thing she would do was go to Return to Dragon City and break through the so-called "Top Ten Outstanding Youths" list of the unworthy Dragon City.

Then she would see what Emperor Longchang was truly capable of and whether he could serve as a reference on her own path to becoming an empress.

With this thought, Wang Luoqiu's heart ignited with passion.

...

Time flies.

Months passed in a flash, and before anyone realized it, another season of winter changing to spring had arrived.

With the support of the Wang family, Anbei Fort had been developing exceptionally smoothly over these past few months, with lush greenery everywhere.

While An Commandery Prince's rallying power was nowhere near that of Kang Commandery Prince, as a member of the Imperial Household Great Heavenly Proud and a Quasi Emperor's Son with the right to contend for the throne, he could still recruit quite a few talents as long as he raised his banner.

Just for attracting peasants to migrate, a single call from him could naturally draw many civilians to reclaim the land, amongst them were branches of families from 8th-rank, 9th-rank, and even 7th-rank Aristocratic Families.

As the continuous flow of population kept migrating in, it also brought an immense amount of labor power, turning vast stretches of sandy fields into reclaimed farmlands.

The high-quality seeds brought by the Wang family were also planted, successfully adapting to the sandy soil of Anbei Fort and growing quite well.

Anbei Fort was getting more and more into shape.

Seeing his "ideal state" gradually taking shape, An Commandery Prince felt as if he were living in a dream these days, his whole being seemed to be floating.

In excitement, he spent almost every day mingling with Wang Zong'an and other agricultural technology talents, discussing topics like how to plan water conservancy next, how pearl rice and cumin could inter-crop more effectively to utilize space, whether there were more optimized fertilizing methods for Jade Crystal Grapes, and the scaled implementation of Jade Crystal Grape Wine brewing technology, and things like that.

When a group of technical talents gathers to research technology, pulling all-nighters is the norm—they often study from morning until night, and before they know it, it's morning again, sometimes even forgetting to eat.

In short, the men were all bursting with energy.

The only one was Commandery Prince Consort Gongye Qingrui, who had been left alone in her room for several months.

One day, her personal maid Qin'er returned hastily.

Gongye Qingrui's face lit up, and she asked eagerly, "Qin'er, how are things? I heard that Commandery Prince His Highness's water conservancy blueprint is almost finished planning. He should be coming home to rest for a few days this time, right?"

Qin'er bowed respectfully and reported, "To inform the Consort, Commandery Prince His Highness said that tonight he plans to stay up with Young Clan Leader Zong'an to discuss the sales channels of [Jade Crystal Grape Wine] and how to establish the brand image and other major issues."

The Commandery Prince's words were beyond Qin'er's understanding, so she could only dutifully repeat them once more.

"Stay up together? That dog... Humph!" Gongye Qingrui almost fainted in anger, "Is this even a life I can live? Where is Jun'er? Call Jun'er here, and have him drag that old man back home for me."

"This... To inform the Consort, the Little Commandery Prince is also in Young Clan Leader Zong'an's yard. He said he was very interested in the brand building mentioned by Young Clan Leader Zong'an and also wished to explore it..." Qin'er replied weakly.

"Hiss~~"

Gongye Qingrui gasped for air, clutching her chest and almost didn't catch her breath, fainting for real.

Her Jun'er, her ever so obedient eldest son, had fallen too? So her entire family was sticking to the Wang family's side now?

What kind of enchanting soup did the Wang family feed them? How come they all became so mesmerized, not even returning home? Can I even live this life?

...

Days passed again.

A servant girl with an ordinary appearance entered Wang Zong'an's study and knelt, saying, "Your subordinate pays respects to the Young Immortal Master."

The Young Immortal Master.

Even though he had heard this title many times before, Wang Zong'an still felt somewhat dazed. What kind of terrifying, strange organization had his father secretly established?

How will the future unfold? Does he aspire to dominate court and country, or does he wish to establish a nation and proclaim himself emperor?

And he, Wang Zong'an, had gone from being a Young Clan Leader to a Young Immortal Master... Could it be that in the future, he might also become a Young Emperor's Son?

"Go ahead, my father..." Wang Zong'an began to say.

But before he finished speaking, the servant girl interrupted him with a passionate tone, "Young Master, please be careful with your words. He is the Immortal Master."

"All right then, what has the Immortal Master ordered?" Wang Zong'an was not new to the Group Immortal Palace, but he still wasn't used to... their fanaticism.

"To avoid attracting attention, the Immortal Master only sent one message. He said that we can start the second step now."

"The second step?" Wang Zong'an's gaze became serious for a moment, then he nodded, "I understand. You may leave."

"Yes, Young Immortal Master."

The servant girl quietly left.

Soon, she disappeared within the Commandery Prince's Residence as if she were a drop of salt water merging into the ocean, leaving no trace.

Meanwhile, Wang Zong'an stood in his study with his hands behind his back, his eyes filled with hope.

Finally, it's time for me, Zong'an Young Clan Leader, to make my appearance.

Father and Mother, I will prove to you that I, Wang Zong'an, will also become the pride of your hearts!

Chapter 30 I! Zong'an the Great Heavenly Proud! Hit the Jackpot!

...

Return to Dragon City, also known as Shangjing City or the Imperial Capital.

It has always been the political, military, economic, cultural, and even the trendsetting center of Great Qian Land. It could be said that it is the heart of the entire Great Qian Land.

Therefore, it is also an excellent place for gaining fame and climbing the social ladder.

Every year, countless ambitious young masters, or influential Prominent Families unwilling to remain as local powers forever, come here, trying to make a name for themselves in Return to Dragon City.

Yet most of them come eagerly and leave in defeat.

Only a very few of the few manage to gain a foothold in Return to Dragon City, then relying on reproduction and generational accumulation, eventually become part of Return to Dragon City.

As a result, people living in Return to Dragon City often have a sense of natural superiority, also a bit more pride and arrogance than the local mighty Prominent Families.

The meteoric rise of the Great Arrogant Li Yao, with an invincible stance, shattered the inner pride of the younger generation of Return to Dragon City while soaring her reputation to the zenith. It also deeply stimulated them.

Many young Sky Prides began to strive harder, entering a mode of arduous cultivation.

Especially Little Commandery Prince Wu Zhixing, who was knocked unconscious on the scene, has been urged by his family elders to cultivate daily, with Heaven and Earth Treasures and spirit pills being lavished upon him like money was no object. The aim was that one day, Wu Zhixing might avenge his humiliation and prove to the world that the Imperial Household is still the strongest.

Besides, Great Arrogant Shangguan Yunque from the Grade Four Prominent Family GuiLong Shangguan Clan was also living a secluded life, spending every day in strenuous cultivation or comprehending the Heavenly Dao.

Moreover, at his strong request, the clan's total resources were continually tilted towards him.

As a Great Heavenly Proud, Shangguan Yunque's position within the Shangguan family was undoubtedly very high for a Grade Four Prominent Family, being the key to their future promotion to Third Grade. As long as he had needs, the family would certainly try their best to meet his growth requirements.

As one of "the top ten Prominent Families" in Return to Dragon City, the Shangguan clan, even amidst the many prestigious families in Return to Dragon City, is a family of outstanding reputation and high prestige.

The Shangguan Main Residence is located in the southern part of Return to Dragon City, and with the family's growing strength, this Main Residence has undergone several expansions and has become immensely large.

The outer walls of the Main Residence have an irregular shape, winding and serpentine, resembling a "city wall". The area enclosed by this "city wall", just in terms of size, is almost equivalent to that of a medium-sized town elsewhere.

Inside, courtyards are densely scattered, and there is an abundance of trees and flowers, even a man-made lake spanning hundreds of acres, as well as a complex network of man-made waterways that run through the entire Main Residence.

This is the strength and foundation of a Grade Four prestigious Prominent Family, which, even in the gold-valued Return to Dragon City, still maintains such a luxurious and vast Main Residence.

Purely in terms of history and foundation, the current Changning Wang Clan is still far from matching the GuiLong Shangguan Clan. However, if one talks about developmental potential, the Shangguan clan is nowhere near the Changning Wang Clan.

In the backyard of the Shangguan Main Residence, there is a large martial field that covers a thousand acres.

Great Arrogant Shangguan Yunque is industriously practicing his Profound Martial Fighting Techniques.

Dressed in simple yet heavy armor, like that of ancient warriors, he wielded a spear overflowing with Evil Qi. Each move and style was without frivolity, solid as a mountain, with a ferocity that could sweep through thousands of troops, fierce as though fighting for life on the battlefield.

Behind him, a massive and solid Kylin Dharma appeared almost tangible, majestically moving across the martial field alongside Shangguan Yunque, running as fast as the wind, roaring like thunder, displaying the unrivaled and fierce aura of the king of beasts.

That's right, the Cultivation Technique that Shangguan Yunque primarily practiced was one designed for the battlefield.

In single combat, he might be at a slight disadvantage, but once on the battlefield amidst thousands of troops, he could dominate the enemy lines and sweep away all opposition.

It should be said that Shangguan Yunque is a man of great fate.

His set of Spiritual Treasure-grade armor and spear, as well as the Qilin Xuanling Zhenfa he practiced, were all obtained from the secret legacies of his family, through his own strength and destiny.

In the future, once he joins the army, he is very likely to establish meritorious deeds on the battlefield, aspire for a Marquis title, and win a hereditary Marquis position for the Shangguan family.

At that time, the Shangguan family could thus join the ranks of the titled nobility, enjoy a series of preferential treatments, and greatly enhance the family's foundation.

As for the position of Duke, that was something the Shangguan family dared not hope for. After all, Great Qian was extremely cautious about bestowing the titles of Duke and Marquis. Unless it was the founding of the nation or there were heaven-defying Merit Points, the possibility of being decreed a Duke was almost nonexistent.

In the vast Great Qian, with countless Prominent Families, there are currently only two Duke's Mansions and two Marquis Houses.

At a distance.

The descendants of the Shangguan family, aside from their own cultivation, all cast admiring and reverent gazes toward Shangguan Yunque. That is our Great Heavenly Proud of the Shangguan family, the hope for our family's rise to power.

In the eyes of many young generations of the Shangguan family, Shangguan Yunque is a godlike figure. Even Wu Zhixing of the Imperial Household is seen as someone who relies on the support of the Imperial Household and the supply of countless precious resources to have his current reputation. If the circumstances were reversed, who would be stronger is still debatable.

As for the rumors circulating in the market, saying that the Great Arrogant Li Yao had a secret battle with Shangguan Yunque, resulting in a complete defeat for Shangguan Yunque, no one inside the Shangguan family believes that. They all think it's just Li Yao's boastful pomp.

Chapter 30 I! Zong'an the Great Heavenly Proud! Hit the Jackpot (Part 2)

What was Shangguan Yunque's strength? He was a Level Seven Heavenly Human Realm Great Heavenly Proud, how could he possibly lose to a woman not yet seventy?

While Shangguan Yunque was diligently cultivating, a gatekeeper hurriedly approached and whispered a few words to him.

Shangguan Yunque's expression shifted from astonishment to surprise, and then to solemnity. He then gave a few instructions to the gatekeeper who had reported to him before quickly removing his armor and leaving in haste.

Four hours later, within the Shangguan family's main residence.

In the "Celestial Guest Pavilion," which is specially used for entertaining honorable guests, a group of young and beautiful maids moved gracefully like flowing water, serving dish after dish of exotic fruits, dried meats, and candied treats.

Each of these snacks, regardless of the type, was exquisitely selected and meticulously prepared.

The attending maids, each young and beautiful with an outstanding demeanor, had deep and restrained breaths, clearly all possessing Profound Martial cultivation base.

Such caliber of maids, if placed in any province or guard post, could very well be the treasured pearls of Rank 9 Prominent Families.

Such an arrangement was indeed befitting of a wealthy family with thousands of years of accumulated heritage.

However, even in the Shangguan family, this was a very high standard of hospitality, not every guest was eligible to enjoy such treatment.

In the Celestial Guest Pavilion, there were only a few on each side of the host and guests, every single one of them men of exceptional demeanor and profound stature.

The one in the main seat was a man in regal purple attire, composed and restrained.

He had a gentle temperament, with every movement exuding maturity and stability. His polite smile, neither submissive nor overbearing, made one feel warmly welcomed and at home.

His name was Shangguan Zhenhai, a distinguished talent from the direct line of the Shangguan family. He had been the Family Head for two hundred years. Since his ascension, it was not to say the Shangguan family had soared greatly but it had steadily risen, unlike in the past.

This was a Family Head with considerable achievements.

Shangguan Zhenhai was born a Sky Pride. Though in his youth he did not rank among the top ten prodigious youths, he had his moments of glory. He was most skilled in the Profound Martial Sword Technique "Broken Army Sword Secrets" from the Shangguan family, a sword style vast and mighty, befitting the nickname "One Sword Subdues the Seas."

Fifty years ago, Shangguan Zhenhai had already broken through the Heavenly Human Realm, becoming the fifth Purple Abode Realm ancestor of the Shangguan family. Normally, Family Heads from Grade Four Prominent Families would step down upon reaching the Purple Abode Realm to focus on cultivation.

However, firstly, Shangguan Zhenhai had been doing well, with the family prospering during his tenure.

Secondly, fortunately, the Shangguan family had birthed a Great Heavenly Proud, with future hopes of rising to Third Grade. Therefore, they needed to enhance their standing, aiming to align with Third Grade families.

Thus, it was an unspoken consensus within the Shangguan family to continue supporting Shangguan Zhenhai as the Family Head, getting a head start in adapting to the situation. The subsequent Shangguan family heads also had to be at least at the level of Shangguan Zhenhai.

Besides Shangguan Zhenhai, the Purple Abode Realm Family Head, the main host included a Purple Abode Realm Great Elder with graying beard and equally impressive aura, alongside the pride of the Shangguan family, the Great Arrogant Shangguan Yunque.

Moreover, there was a mature, peach-like charming woman present—Shangguan Bilian.

Under normal circumstances, Lady Bilian, being married off, should not be involved in the clan's affairs. However, among the honorable guests this time, there was the Young Clan Leader from the Longzuo County's Changning Wang Clan.

Lady Bilian and the Changning Wang Clan, both being from Rank Six Prominent Families of Longzuo, had frequent interactions. Her presence eased the flow of conversation between the two parties.

Previously, a guest from the relatively unknown Changning Wang Clan would not have been taken seriously, at most treated by a common Heavenly Human Realm Elder out of respect for the "Rank Six Prominent Family" title.

However, since Li Yao Great Heavenly Proud's remarkable sweep through the Imperial Capital, the status of the Changning Wang Clan had also risen significantly, entering the vision of many powerful figures. Even out of respect for Li Yao Great Heavenly Proud, no one dared to underestimate the Changning Wang Clan.

Nevertheless, by itself, the Young Clan Leader of the Changning Wang Clan would not have garnered such attention from the Shangguan family. The especially solemn reception was because among the visiting companions was also one of the contemporary Quasi Emperor's Sons, the An Commandery Prince.

Although lesser in stature compared to the Kang Commandery Prince, An Commandery Prince was still a Quasi Emperor's Son, a prestigious Heavenly Proud Level Commandery Prince. Even if he failed in contesting for the emperor's throne in the future, he would still be a Divine Power Realm prince.

With such a personage at their door, how could the Shangguan family show anything but their utmost respect?Chapter 30 I! Zong'an the Great Heavenly Proud! Hit the Jackpot (Part 3)

"Of course, getting a bit away from your father has made my mood much more pleasant," Lady Bilian said with a delicate laugh, "Once the mood is pleasant, one naturally looks radiant. By the way, I heard that your family caught a Green Jiao. Congratulations, I hope it soon successfully transforms into a dragon and becomes the Wang family's Clan Guardian Spirit Beast."

She couldn't help but think to herself, once the Wang family has a Purple Abode Realm Clan Guardian Spirit Beast, surely they won't keep desperately clinging to our Family's Firefox Ancestor, right?

"Zong'an has been away from home for some time," Wang Zong'an replied with grace, "and I only learned about this through letters. I just didn't expect to encounter you here in Shangjing City. Meeting an old acquaintance in a foreign place, Zong'an is truly delighted."

Delighted my foot.

Lady Bilian secretly rolled her eyes.

She has stayed at her parental home for so long, wasn't it because your family head coerced and tempted her? I, Shangguan Bilian, born a direct daughter of a Grade Four family, yet have been tricked and tied down by your father.

Most crucially, she hasn't managed to gain any advantage from Wang Shouzhe yet.

However, these words could not be spoken aloud, and Lady Bilian feigned a smile with crafted grace, "Speaking of which, this can also be considered fate. Tonight, at the welcoming feast, let us drink a few more glasses together."

Afterward, the two engaged in a series of insubstantial exchanges. However, these quickly enlivened the atmosphere.

Off to the side, Shangguan Yunque frowned secretly. His sister's relationship with the Changning Wang family was deeper than he had thought—she even knew a lot of family secrets.

First, there was Wang Liyao, then Wang Zong'an, both influenced by his sister Shangguan Bilian behind the scenes, which made him think extra hard.

Immediately, he coughed and said to Wang Zong'an, "Young Clan Leader Zong'an, you and the Commandery Prince's arrival together can't possibly be exactly as the rumors say, that your Changning Wang family and..."

He left his sentence half-finished, eliciting keen glances from all the Shangguan clan members.

"The rumors are true," Wang Zong'an replied with a light smile, "Our Changning Wang family has indeed decided to support An Commandery Prince in the competition for the Emperor's son as much as possible. My older sister's visit to the Imperial Capital to boost her reputation is also to create momentum for An Commandery Prince and our Wang family."

Upon hearing this, Shangguan Zhenhai and another Purple Abode Realm Great Elder, Shangguan Liyan, showed no change of expression, as if everything was within their expectations.

The Challenger of Heaven battles have always been purposeful, and this time's purpose was not difficult to guess.

They were all experienced and cunning figures who understood that this was mostly a publicity stunt by An Commandery Prince's faction, presenting a symbolic Great Sky Pride banner to rival Kang Commandery Prince's Gong Yang Ce.

And in this Challenger of Heaven battle, Miss Liyao's achievements far surpassed Gong Yang Ce's initial ones; her prestige shines high in the sky, slowly eclipsing Gong Yang Ce's.

One can imagine that in the competition following the Emperor's son, Liyao Great Sky Pride will inevitably become a formidable opponent that Gong Yang Ce cannot ignore.

Although Gong Yang Ce has already advanced to the Purple Abode Realm first, at the level of Great Sky Pride, it's more about factors such as bloodline potential, willpower, and nature.

Usually speaking, the elevation to Purple Abode Realm among Great Sky Prides doesn't exceed 250 years old, and the process is as natural as water flowing in a channel. With Liyao Great Sky Pride's bloodline talent, when the competition for Saints truly starts, she will naturally already be a Purple Abode Realm powerhouse.

Among them all, only Shangguan Yunque appeared slightly embarrassed, as he was the one supposedly used by Wang Liyao to boost her reputation. Now all over Shangjing City, there were rumors that he, Shangguan Yunque, had been beaten to a pulp in a private battle with Wang Liyao.

But the reality was, he, Shangguan Yunque, had only barely lost by a small margin. And that margin was due to equipment—if he too had been assisted by a Divine Spiritual Treasure, the outcome of that battle would still be uncertain.

But that was an unavoidable situation; aside from families with profound heritages like the Imperial Household, which family can just produce a Divine Spiritual Treasure at will? Now being merely a Grade Four, obtaining such level treasures, even if desired, where could he borrow from?

And these rumors were most likely stirred up by Prince Dexin's faction, aimed at diverting everyone's attention to lessen the focus on Little Commandery Prince Wu Zhixing's disastrous defeat.

Shangguan Yunque, feeling irritated, said indifferently, "An Commandery Prince, Young Clan Leader Zong'an. Please forgive my boldness, Shangguan Yunque, but even with Liyao Great Sky Pride backing you, your odds of victory are still somewhat weak.

Moreover, our Shangguan family are loyal servants of the crown, irrespective of which Commandery Prince inherits the throne, we support them unconditionally."

His attitude was very clear. His statement also represented the true stance of the Shangguan family, politely declining An Commandery Prince's proposal under the guise of neutrality, suggesting that it was better not to voice some potentially hurtful truths and avoid discomfort for everyone.

With Great Sky Pride Shangguan Yunque at the forefront, should any change arise, Family Head Shangguan Zhenhai hadn't even spoken yet, still leaving room for maneuver.

"Yunque has misunderstood," An Commandery Prince seemed to have anticipated their reaction and laughed freely, "Wu's visit to the capital is not to leverage Liyao's momentum to persuade the prominent families to take sides with the Prince. The specific matters will be handled by Young Clan Leader Zong'an."

Upon hearing this, the Shangguan family members glanced at each other, then looked at Wang Zong'an with half-doubt, half-belief.

Wang Zong'an cleared his throat and seriously said, "Let's not talk about the Emperor's son for now. In the end, whoever it is that inherits the Emperor's position in the future, we in Da Qian, all large and small prominent families, must continue with our lives and cultivate our successors."

Chapter 30: I! Zong'an the Great Heavenly Proud! Give Me Money_4

"Our Prominent Family values two things above all else. The first is to ensure an unbroken heritage for ten thousand years, and the second is to strive for a higher rank, so that our clan members can live better lives."

All being members of Prominent Families, Wang Zong'an's words resonated with the Shangguan clan, who all silently nodded in agreement.

"And to achieve those two goals, there is one thing we cannot do without—'money.' With money, we can purchase limitless Treasure Pills, seek out higher-grade Heaven and Earth Treasures at the Immortal Dynasty, and even spare no expense to obtain Divine Spiritual Treasures," Wang Zong'an said with a smile playing at the corners of his mouth, his demeanor as gentle as jade.

"Why can't an average Rank Four Prominent Family raise a Great Heavenly Proud? It's well known that for a Great Heavenly Proud to grow into a Divine Realm Powerhouse, it requires at least six to seven hundred years, during which the various resources consumed, when converted into Qian Gold, amount to between two hundred million to five hundred million."

"Even for a strong Rank Four Prominent Family like the Shangguan, and with a Family Head skilled in management like Senior Zhenhai, it must still be quite a struggle to provide for Brother Yunque, right?"

Hearing this, the faces of the Shangguan clan members turned somewhat stiff and embarrassed.

Wang Zong'an was right, nurturing a Great Heavenly Proud to the Divine Power Territory is a massive systematic project with immense consumption.

Despite Yunque still not having reached the Purple Abode Realm, and his current expenditures seeming "quite manageable," the reality was that without advance planning and accumulating vast amounts of funds for his future advancement, they could face significant problems once he reached the Purple Abode Realm.

After all, even a Great Heavenly Proud only has a relatively high probability of successfully advancing to the Divine Power Territory. If the resource supply fails to keep up, there is a high chance they won't advance in cultivation speed and might never achieve success within their lifespan.

And should the cultivation to Divine Power Territory fail, the family's massive resource investment would have been for nought, and the entire clan could potentially fall into irrevocable decline.

Especially Yunque, whose expression was particularly gloomy.

Recently, when he increased his consumption, his family had supported him wholeheartedly and without a second word. But he knew that this meant the clan had to withhold resources from other family members, especially the elders in the Purple Abode Realm, who had voluntarily reduced their own resource consumption.

All of this was paving the way for his, Shangguan Yunque's, future, and it made him feel quite uncomfortable.

This is the fundamental reason why most Rank Four Prominent Families, eager to advance to Third Grade, still hesitate and look back. The family coffers aren't deep enough to afford it!

"What's more, upon reaching the Divine Power Territory, one must also consider the matter of Divine Spiritual Treasures," Wang Zong'an sighed. "The difference between a Realm Cultivator with and without a Divine Spiritual Treasure is huge. And the cost of obtaining a Divine Spiritual Treasure is something Zong'an doesn't need to elaborate on."

Yunque's face darkened.

He glared at Wang Zong'an with a hostile gaze.

Are you deliberately bringing up my weak points? If I had a Divine Spiritual Treasure, even if I couldn't fully utilize its power in the Heavenly Human Realm, I wouldn't have been beaten by your sister...

Wang Liyao had a cultivator in the Divine Power Territory go to all lengths to procure a Divine Spiritual Treasure for her, and Wu Zhixing also received a Divine Spiritual Treasure gifted by Emperor Longchang. Meanwhile, poor Yunque—the Shangguan family couldn't afford one.

It was all very disheartening to think about.

The expressions of Shangguan Zhenhai and Shangguan Liyan also turned slightly awkward. They felt rather confident initially, but as the conversation went on, the mood soured.

Wang Zong'an was spot on about the Shangguan's situation.

With their current family wealth, nurturing a Divine Realm Cultivator within the next five or six hundred years would be somewhat forced, creating an air of being stretched thin.

For now, they could reduce the shares of other clan members to supply Yunque. But in the future, when he advances to the Purple Abode Realm and wishes to maintain the current high-speed cultivation mode, they'll probably have to start selling off clan properties.

As for a Divine Spiritual Treasure...

Better to put that thought to rest, unless they're willing to drastically sell off most of their ancestral wealth, which would be difficult to afford.

Lady Bilian, on the side, rolled her eyes in secret.

Young Clan Leader Zong'an usually looked quite honest and upright, but she hadn't expected him to have inherited his father's eloquence. This kid... was truly a master of concealment.

In the world of Rank Four Prominent Families, the GuiLong Shangguan Clan was actually considered a fairly wealthy household. But after his depiction and analysis, they felt as though they were so poor they might have to beg for food.

"Young Clan Leader Zong'an, are you here to mock our Shangguan clan, or to boast that your sister not only has the nurturing of the Academic Palace but also received a Divine Spiritual Treasure early on?" Yunque looked coldly at Wang Zong'an, his tone not very pleasant.

"Here to boast? Haha, of course, I'd have no such free time," Wang Zong'an calmly replied, with a hint of pride, "I, Wang Zong'an, am sixty-five years old—just a humble Sky Pride."

"I'm here to help everyone get rich together."

Before anyone could react, a vast and pure surge of Mysterious Energy of Ethereal Wood erupted from him, instantly transforming into a formidable presence that swept around.

Heavenly Human Realm, Level Three!!!

With such age and cultivation base, he was undoubtedly a Great Heavenly Proud!

Lady Bilian's eyes widened in shock. Zong'an was a Great Heavenly Proud, too?

He had hidden it so well—and what about that infuriating Shou Zhe? To think that two of his children were Great Heavenly Proud, was his bloodline that formidable?

For a moment, Lady Bilian's gaze became transfixed, her lips unconsciously licked, curling into an intense longing.

If only there was a chance...