

## Stranger 141

### Chapter 141: You Asked For This

As soon as Ye Qing entered the Pacification Bureau, countless Pacification Sentinels emerged from the rooftop, the gardens, the spirit screens, the fake hills, the waterside pavilion and more. They were all pointing their crossbows at Ye Qing.

“Haha. This is quite the impressive showing!”

Ye Qing smiled amiably as he looked around the area. “At ease, everyone. I am—”

Before he could finish, Luo Feibai suddenly turned into a paper doll. At the same time, Ye Qing sensed the flicker of a faint, almost indiscernible aura. When he looked, he saw a ghastly old man who was covered from head to toe in paper dolls. The old man raised his hand, and Luo Feibai appeared next to him like magic. Then, he stared Ye Qing right in the eye—he must have sensed his gaze—and cracked a dreadful grin. As if on cue, the paper dolls fluttered rapidly as if they had a life of their own.

“What a peculiar ability. He must have used it to save many lives!” Ye Qing exclaimed in amazement.

“You dare enter the Pacification Bureau without permission while holding a hostage? Take him down!” A dignified voice suddenly boomed across the air. The Pacification Sentinels immediately fired their crossbows at Ye Qing.

*“...” Take me down? Are you sure you’re not trying to wipe me off the map?*

Ye Qing immediately threw out a punch and unleashed his Burning Wind. The bolts immediately burned into a crisp before they could hit him. The Pacification Sentinels tried to react, but the Burning Wind hit them first and scorched their flesh, blood, bone and mind. The weaker ones blacked out immediately, whereas the stronger ones were writhing in pain and struggling to gather their energies. Naturally, they could no longer participate in the battle. Ye Qing had taken them all out in one punch.

“Please listen to me. I am Ye Qing. I have—”

Unfortunately, he was interrupted again by an angry roar, “Who dares to cause such a commotion in the Pacification Bureau?”

At the same time, a brawny man who looked like he was forged from steel stepped out of the crowd and charged straight toward Ye Qing.

Every time he took a step, bricks exploded into smithereens, and the ground shook like it was an earthquake. His behavior was more like that of a wild beast’s than a human as well.

“An Astral Refiner—no, a body-tempering Astral Refiner!” Ye Qing exclaimed with great interest. He could feel how thick the brawny man’s vigor was and even hear his muscles and bones roaring with every moment. The guy wasn’t just overflowing with strength, his astral qi was completely infused inside his flesh and blood. Generally speaking, that was how you identified a body-tempering warrior.

This was the first time Ye Qing encountered a true body-tempering warrior, and he was quite curious to put it mildly. He made up his mind to test the man right there and then. His sleeves billowed and flapped everywhere like clouds that were constantly being blown by the wind. It looked like it was slapping, sweeping, rolling or caressing all at the same time.

### *“Flowing Cloud, Flying Sleeves”*

When the brawny man’s fist finally struck Ye Qing, he felt like he was punching a ball of cotton, not a human arm. It was because the technique had depleted most of his momentum.

*He is as strong as seven pythons or so. Not bad!* Ye Qing thought while sensing the force transmitting through his arms.

A warrior’s attainment in body-tempering was measured differently from their cultivation. It could be categorized as fiery stallion, mad python, dragon elephant, and sky dragon. In ascending order, ten fiery stallions equaled one mad python, ten mad pythons equaled one dragon elephant, and ten dragon elephants equaled one sky dragon.

To put it in simpler terms, fiery stallion was the beginner level, mad python was the initiate level, dragon elephant was the journeyman level, and sky dragon was the adept level of body-tempering.

The brawny man’s punch was equal to seven mad pythons, meaning that he was close to entering the journeyman level of body-tempering. It was quite impressive considering that Ye Qing only gained a dragon elephant’s strength after a narrow brush with death in Firewind Valley. Had he been any other Astral Refiner, this punch would’ve been enough to deal him a severe blow.

Unfortunately, Ye Qing didn’t just possess a mighty amount of astral qi. His body was incredibly strong and tough as well. Naturally, the weakened punch failed to do any damage to him whatsoever.

“RAAAHHHH!”

Knowing that his punch had failed to wound Ye Qing, the brawny man let out a mighty roar that caused the ground beneath his feet to collapse. His muscles and veins bulged dangerously as he threw another punch so powerful that it caused a sonic boom.

Ye Qing responded the same way as he did before. He kept swinging his sleeves and neutralized the layers of force surrounding the man’s fists. This would continue for a time as the shockwaves of the battle were so deadly that most people could only watch from afar.

Inside a pavilion, a long-haired young man wearing a blue robe sipped his wine and asked in a lazy tone, “Who do you think is gonna win, Yuhuai?”

“The youngster is most likely going to win!” The man named Yuhuai answered. He was around twenty seven or eight years old, and his looks were perfectly ordinary. However, he possessed a warm aura and kind smile that easily endeared him to most people.

“Oh my, how can you say this, Yuhuai?” The lazy man teased him, “Wei Yueshan is one of us. How can you not believe in his strength? Shouldn’t you support your comrade no matter what?”

Yuhuai countered, “Who do *you* think is gonna win then, Nianjiu?”

The man in blue robe was none other than Chu Nianjiu, a Windcatcher of the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau and the man who had saved August Hill Village back then.

Chu Nianjiu took another sip from his glass and shot Yuhuai a disdainful look. “I think that that guy named Ye Qing is going to win as well.”

A warm smile crossed Yuhuai’s lips. “If that’s the case, then why did you question me just now?”

Chu Nianjiu started bullshitting through his teeth, “I arrived at my conclusion after careful observation and deduction. You were just saying whatever comes to your mind.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yueshan may be an early-stage Astral Refiner, but he’s also a body-tempering warrior. This means that he’s on the same level of a mid-stage Astral Refiner. Unfortunately, he severely lacks control and wastes most of his strength. It’s like he’s trying to punch a mosquito to oblivion!”

“While Ye Qing is also an early-stage Astral Refiner, and he’s the defending side right now, his astral qi is much thicker than you might expect for someone his level. Assuming I’m not mistaken, it seems to be the rare Burning Wind as well. ‘Flowing Clouds, Flying Sleeves’ is all he needs to block Yueshan’s full-powered attacks.”

“It is risky to stay on the defense for too long, but a long defense can also weaken the enemy. At this rate, Yueshan is going to lose for sure!”

Yuhuai nodded in agreement even though he could have poked many holes in Chu Nianjiu’s logic. “You are correct. Besides that, I’m pretty sure that Ye Qing still has many tricks up his sleeves.”

“Wait a second. Ye Qing? Ye Qing?” Chu Nianjiu leaned on top of the handrail and rubbed his forehead. “Why do I feel like I’ve heard this name before?”

Yuhuai chuckled. “Of course you’ve heard of him. Remember the recommendation letter Anyang’s Chief of Bureau, Ling Jianqiu handed us a while ago? The person they’re recommending this year is Ye Qing, and the timing is about right.”

“Moreover, Ye Qing is the man who rescued Anyang and ruined the Strangers’ plan to bring the Nether Lord to this plane a while ago. Both the Chief and the Deputy Chief of Bureau couldn’t stop praising him to the high heavens. They all think that he has a bright future ahead of him.”

“Finally, Ye Qing is also the one who ultimately uprooted the mastermind that plotted the descent of the Nether Lord and the spy who had been lurking in the Anyang Pacification Bureau for a long time, Evergreen Ivy. This was also mentioned in Chief Ling’s letter.”

“Ohh! I was wondering why he sounded so familiar!” Chu Nianjiu exclaimed in realization before sighing, “Man oh man, I can’t believe he’s already so accomplished at such a young age! The young truly are formidable!”

Yuhuai chuckled. “You realize you’re pretty young too, right?”

Chu Nianjiu asked, “Why did Chief Ling let Ye Qing go then? Shouldn’t he hold onto him like his future depends on it?”

“That was also explained in Chief Ling’s letter. Apparently, Evergreen Ivy had killed Xiao Yang and pinned the blame on Ye Qing as revenge. You know how Wang Luori is. It doesn’t matter if the news is true or false, he will capture Ye Qing first and find out the truth later. The Anyang Pacification Bureau isn’t strong enough to protect him, so Chief Ling recommended him to us instead! Say, do you think we should help him?”

Chu Nianjiu raised his eyebrows in surprise before chuckling. “No wonder Xiao Yang was in a hurry a few days ago! He was rushing to meet his maker! This is very good news. All sect disciples who join the Pacification Bureau are two-faced ingrates. They deserve to live fast and die young!”

Yuhuai shook his head. “Come now. One bad apple doesn’t spoil the whole bunch. Anyway, you haven’t answered my question.”

Chu Nianjiu replied without hesitation, “Of course we’re going to help him. If Wang Luori is stupid enough to challenge us, I will simply head to Sunset Hill and flatten his sect myself!”

Yuhuai smiled. “Oh yeah? Since when are you strong enough to fight a half-step Spirit Master?”

Chu Nianjiu shrugged. “I cannot, but we have the Chief and the Deputy Chief, don’t we? The Deputy Chief especially is just as protective of his underlings as Wang Luori, if not more. And let’s not forget that Chief Ling is the Deputy Chief’s disciple, and Ye Qing is the man Chief Ling recommended to him. He’s practically half a disciple even though he doesn’t know it yet.”

“Long story short, the Deputy Chief would turn Sunset Hill into a pile of rubble if Wang Luori dares to harm a hair on his person.”

Yuhuai shook his head again. “That’s not a praise, Nianjiu. Anyway, we’ve dilly-dallied long enough. Let’s get down there and stop the fight before someone crosses the line!”

“Yeah!” echoed Chu Nianjiu after taking another sip from his wine gourd.

The duo were just about to jump off the pavilion when a palm-sized sparrowhawk landed squarely on Yuhuai’s shoulder. The young man immediately stopped in his tracks and grabbed the secret letter that was tied to its feet. When he read the contents of the letter, his warm smile abruptly turned stiff and plastic.

“What’s wrong? What’s gotten your panties in a bunch?” Chu Nianjiu asked curiously. There were few things in the world that could faze Lin Yuhuai, which was why it was rare to catch him in a moment like this.

A short silence later, Lin Yuhuai answered, "It's a message from Banren. He said that Wang Luori's third disciple, Xu Wushang the 'Little Sword King', tried to intercept Ye Qing at Luo Shui River this morning."

"Oh? Wang Luori sure is a hasty man!" Chu Nianjiu snorted in derision before asking, "So, how did it go? Did Banren persuade Xu Wushang to change his mind?"

Lin Yuhuai hesitated for a few seconds. Then, he finally said, "No. Ye Qing took out Xu Wushang in one punch and nearly killed him."

"Pfff!!!" Chu Nianjiu spat out the mouthful of wine that just entered his mouth. *"Excuse me?"*

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Xu Wushang was strong enough that even they couldn't treat him lightly, and Banren was saying that Ye Qing had nearly taken him out in one punch?

How was that possible?

Lin Yuhuai said slowly, "Banren believes that Ye Qing has reached the initiate level in terms of body-tempering."

Chu Nianjiu took a second to process that information. *If Ye Qing is this strong, then... What's going to happen to Wei Yueshan?*

The two men exchanged glances with each other before turning to the entrance. It was at this moment Wei Yueshan let out a frustrated roar, "Stop dodging and fight me like a man, bastard!"

Ye Qing's lips curled into a devious grin. "Okay! You asked for this!"

Ye Qing rolled up his sleeves to reveal his fists. Then, he casually "bumped fists" with Wei Yueshan.

The next second, the body-tempering warrior flew out of the Pacification Bureau. It wasn't until a long, long time later that they finally heard a soft thump from somewhere.

#### Chapter 142: Purple Star Demon Subjugation Restriction

There was a momentary silence after Wei Yueshan was sent flying by Ye Qing. It was almost as if the Pacification Bureau was temporarily subdued by Ye Qing's show of power. However, it was just the calm before the storm. The next moment, swimming dragons started appearing between the ground, the fake hills, the buildings and more. The sky above the headquarters had also turned into black all of a sudden.

The stars in the artificial night sky grew brighter and brighter. Then, a terrifying pressure bore down from above. Wawa let out a panicked cry and disappeared into thin air. Faceless slumped to the ground and curled into a ball, shivering. Kung Fu Frog dropped to one knee, head bowed and eyes bloodshot with pressure. It tried to look up and stand back on its feet to no avail.

"It's the Purple Star Demon Subjugation Restriction..."

Ye Qing's pupils contracted a little. He too was feeling a stifling amount of pressure and trepidation.

The Purple Star Demon Subjugation Restriction was one of the thirty six Heavenly Astral Restrictions. A restriction that brought forth the Ziwei Emperor's presence into existence, it was a fusion between the natural order of the world, the power of the sun, moon and stars, the Purple Star and the Ziwei Emperor's soul.

The Purple Star Demon Subjugation Restriction was specifically made to suppress Strangers. Its presence alone was enough to incapacitate most Strangers, but at its maximum, it could even manifest Ziwei Emperor's soul to command the celestial bodies and do battle against humanity's enemies. It was incredibly powerful to say the least.

Although the Purple Star Demon Subjugation Restriction was much less effective against humans, Ye Qing highly doubted he would be able to survive its full power. That was why Ye Qing wisely raised his hands in surrender and shouted, "Please stop! I'm a member of the Pacification Bureau as well!"

"I was recommended by the Anyang Pacification Bureau to—"

Unfortunately, Ye Qing was interrupted yet again when a majestic, awe-inspiring presence appeared in the night sky. It was none other than the Ziwei Emperor. He pointed a finger at Ye Qing and said, "The Purple Star shall subjugate the demons..."

The night sky shook, and the stars fell from the sky one by one. They converged at his fingertip as if all the stars in the sky was his to command and leaned forward as if he was planning to squish Ye Qing like a bug.

"Out you go!" Ye Qing swung his sleeves and delivered Kung Fu Frog and Faceless out of the door. Then, he slowly raised his head and stared at the descending finger.

Rumble...

Every time the finger descended an inch, wind would howl, space would shatter, and invisible ripples would spread to the surroundings. Ye Qing truly looked like an ant compared to the finger.

*"Cloud Vaporization Style"*

Eyes bloodshot, Ye Qing bent his knees slightly and slowly raised his arm. However, his waist kept falling as if it could not withstand the pressure of the finger or the weight of his fist.

When his waist, his fist, and the ground were all on the same level [1], Ye Qing abruptly shot up like an arrow, his muscles and bones letting out a thunderclap as he did so. His force, his astral qi and his spirit were all gathered inside his fist and molded into his flesh, blood and bone. When all three elements were joined into one, his power was equal to that of a dragon elephant.

With this fist, he would defeat even the Purple Star!

Rumble...!

The second he raised his fist, the ground beneath him immediately started rumbling uncontrollably. It was like a series of spring thunders welcoming the return of spring. He punched right through the gale and force in front of the finger and clashed against the finger.

Boom boom boom!

Ye Qing's lower half sank into the ground instantly. He looked like a nail that had been hammered halfway into a plank. The earth surrounding him started breaking apart like it was paper, and Burning Wind, hot and unrelenting, surged up as if it would destroy the world.

"Oh crap."

"Retreat! Retreat!"

All the blood drained away from Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai's face. They could sense a terrifying amount of power both in the sky and underground. Their clash would surely reduce the entire Pacification Bureau into ruins!

"What are you afraid of when I'm here? Cowards!"

It was at this moment a lion-like roar erupted throughout the headquarters. It was so loud that it stirred up everyone's vigor and deafened their eardrums. A silhouette fell from the sky toward the courtyard, and the moment their feet landed on the ground, the mini earthquake affecting the entire Pacification Bureau abruptly ceased, and the powers in the sky and the underground vanished like they never were.

The silhouette did a little wave with their hand, sweeping away all the dust and air currents in one go and revealing their—no, his face. He was a middle-aged man with a gaunt, weathered face and dark skin. His appearance was unassuming, and his skin was coarse like that of a forty-year-old farmer who basked in the sun all year long. He also had a wide frame and unusually long arms that stretched below his knees. His fingers were covered in calluses as well.

The misshapen man looked nothing like a champion. In fact, Faceless looked more human than he was. But it was this man who had dispelled the terrifying energies like it was nothing.

"Shoo, shoo!" The middle-aged man waved at the figure in the sky first like it was a dog. The majestic figure responded to his command and slowly withdrew his finger. Then, he, his stars, and the night sky itself disappeared in the blink of an eye.

After the Purple Star Demon Subjugation Restriction was gone, the middle-aged man took two steps toward Ye Qing—he was still partially stuck in the underground right now—and laughed. "I see you've reached the initiate level of body-tempering, boy! No wonder you're able to withstand one-third of the restriction's power! Hahaha! Not bad at all!"

The middle-aged man looked haggard, but his laughter was as loud as a chorus of bells. While laughing, he tapped Ye Qing twice on the shoulder. The gesture was casual and unconscious, but Ye Qing still sank another two inches into the ground. His shoulder felt numb as well. It showed just how strong the man really was.

*He's most definitely a body tempering warrior, and his body is way stronger than mine!* Ye Qing thought in astonishment.

"Phew! Your body is pretty great! Now this is what I call a diamond in the rough!" praised the middle-aged man while giving Ye Qing's shoulder a squeeze. "Do you want to be my disciple, boy?"

“Er...” The question had come out of nowhere, but there really wasn’t much to think about. The middle-aged man must be pretty high up in the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau. If he could become his disciple, he would skyrocket up the bureau ladder like crazy, and Wang Luori should not be an issue anymore!

“Senior—” Ye Qing was about to say something, but the middle-aged man suddenly interrupted him with the wave of his hand, “Actually, forget it. I’m already in my forties, and I’m still only five dragon elephants strong. You, on the other hand, are already at the initiate level at your age. Frankly, I am not qualified to teach you, so forget it!”

Ye Qing: “...” *Can you let me finish?*

Also, I don’t mind even if you think you’re not qualified!

Unfortunately, it was too late to bring it up now. Bootlickers and desperate men were unsightly at best and loathsome at worst!

“We greet you, Deputy Chief.”

“We greet you, Deputy Chief.”

It was at this moment Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai walked over and saluted the middle-aged man respectfully.

“Deputy Chief?” Ye Qing was a bit surprised, to be honest. He never thought that this unassuming man would be the Deputy Chief himself, a.k.a Ling Jianqiu’s master and one of the only two Spirit Masters of the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau, Gu Suitang the “Mountainshaker”!

Seriously, senior, can you take back your words so I can become your disciple?

“Yes, yes, whatever,” Gu Suitang waved them off. It was clear he wasn’t one for pleasantries.

“I greet you, Senior Gu. My name is Ye Qing, and I am the one recommended by Chief Ling of the Anyang Pacification Bureau this year!” Ye Qing got rid of his stray thoughts and handed a letter to Gu Suitang. “This is the letter he wrote, senior. He also asked me to give you his regards.”

Gu Suitang accepted the letter while complaining, “Regards my ass! If that brat really wants to give me his regards, then why didn’t he visit me himself? Kids these days, they think that a single letter is...”

“Haha...” Ye Qing rubbed his nose smilingly. It was as Ling Jianqiu said. Although his master was a hot-tempered man who cared little for trivialities, he was really a big softie on the inside. If he really meant what he said, he would not have accepted the letter, would he?



“You can save the pleasantries as well, boy. Jianqiu had already messaged me about you yesterday. Long story short, you’re the guy Jianqiu recommended and my junior, right? So let’s act like actual seniors and juniors, okay?” Gu Suitang smiled while lifting Ye Qing back to the surface with two fingers.

“No problem, senior, and thank you!” Ye Qing saluted him.

“Deputy Chief, Peacemakers, you have to help me!”

It was at this moment Tian Wu ran over while crying, “This... this *insolent* bastard has committed many unforgivable crimes today! Not only had he harmed innocent civilians with his Strangers and used one of them as a hostage, he even wrecked the Pacification Bureau! You must kill him for all that is right, my lords!”

Just now, Tian Wu had run far, far away from the battlefield because he didn’t want to be caught in it. It was only after the dust had settled that he crept back to check if Ye Qing was dead, which was why he had missed Ye Qing and Gu Suitang’s conversation. Believing that Gu Suitang had captured Ye Qing, he did not hesitate to pin all the blame on Ye Qing and urge for his execution as soon as possible. Dead men tell no tales. If Gu Suitang killed Ye Qing now, then no one would ever know about his abuse of power.

“Yeah! This is the bastard who hurt my men and even took me hostage, my lords! You need to kill him right away!”

Luo Feibai also ran over to support Tian Wu’s statement, “I am Luo Feibai of the Luo Clan. I beg you to do right by me, my lords!”

“Is that so?” Gu Suitang wasn’t looking at Tian Wu, Luo Feibai or even Ye Qing. The question was directed at Lin Yuhuai.

Yuhuai smiled warmly and produced a book from his shirt. It was dark yellow, ancient, and normal-looking. When he opened the book, it gave off a mysterious energy that was decidedly not normal. After he penned the date on a blank page, the pages suddenly flipped on its own, and ink words leaped out of the papers and flew into the air. They formed a passage that said,

“On Jingrui 3, September 8th, the third quadrant of Rabbit Hour [2], a young man and the second young master of the Luo Clan, Luo Feibai engaged in conflict with one another at Pacification Street. Later, the Pacification Sentinels led by Guardian Tian Wu made an intervention.”

“According to eyewitnesses at the scene, the main cause of the altercation was Luo Feibai wanting to buy the Book Sprite he owned, and the young man refusing to comply with his request. After being rejected repeatedly, Luo Feibai allowed his subordinates to snatch the Book Sprite by force. Physical conflict ensued when a Malice-class Stranger accompanying the young man took action to protect the Book Sprite.”

Chapter 143: Gu Suitang the Tyrant

“Wow...” Ye Qing was pretty surprised. The passage had described the entire incident perfectly. It was almost like a minute taker had witnessed everything from the sidelines and jotted it all down from start until the end.

“Yuhuai is an Intelligence Officer, and he is responsible for gathering intelligence, sorting truth from fiction, maintaining the files in the archives and so on. Naturally, he is the most up-to-date person in the bureau.”

Noticing Ye Qing’s curiosity, Chu Nianjiu walked up to him and explained in a quiet voice, “The book he’s holding is a Hatred-class Strange Artifact called the Truthseeker. Any information that the Pacification Bureau had collected, sorted, and entered into the records would automatically appear in it. Think of it as an auxiliary-type Strange Artifact.”

“I see!” Ye Qing’s eyes lit up. This was the first time he encountered a Strange Artifact like this. It was also a peek into the true power of the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau. The incident had literally happened less than half an hour ago, and yet the Pacification Bureau had already found out about it and investigated the whole truth. They were definitely not to be underestimated.

Ye Qing also noticed that Chu Nianjiu didn’t recognize him, which wasn’t surprising. Be it in terms of stature, appearance or aura, he was nothing like the country bumpkin he used to be.

“Hmph. Luo Feibai, Tian Wu. What do you have to say for yourselves?” Lin Yuhuai put away the Truthseeker and questioned the duo.

Luo Feibai looked like he wanted to be anywhere but here. Tian Wu wanted to argue his way out of the hole he dug himself into, but Gu Suitang interrupted him before he could speak, “You’re a Guardian of the Pacification Bureau, Tian Wu, but instead of protecting the people and serving Chu, you chose to disrupt the law and order, collude with criminals, neglect your duty, and even frame an innocent. As per the law of Chu, I hereby abolish your cultivation and expel you from the Pacification Bureau!”

“I—” Before Tian Wu could even process what he was saying, Gu Suitang had already slapped his head over his head. He let out a bloodcurdling scream as he felt an unstoppable power breaking his muscles and bones, destroying his dantian, and ripping his veins into shreds. Just like that, the man would never cultivate martial arts again.

*Holy shit, this guy’s ruthless!* Ye Qing gulped. He wasn’t expecting Gu Suitang to cripple Tian Wu practically the minute after his guilt was confirmed.

Gu Suitang casually tossed the limp Tian Wu out of the way before turning toward the entrance. His mouth split into a shit-eating grin as he asked, “What’s wrong, Red Hair? Does it offend you that I beat up your dog?”

“You could stand to be more polite, Deputy Chief Gu!” came a voice as someone walked through the entrance.

The newcomer was a dignified-looking old man with crimson hair and beard. He looked to be in his fifties, and he was wearing a golden crown and a golden robe with sun symbols on it. The closer he got, the brighter the surroundings seemed to become. The surrounding temperature was rising at an incredible rate as well. It was like he was a walking sun that brought light and heat wherever he went.

In Ye Qing's eyes, the man was a burning sun that was bright, hot, and overwhelmingly powerful. If he wasn't careful, he could easily be caught up in his flames and burn into dust.

"And you can shove your politeness right up your sorry ass! First it was Xiao Yang, now it's Tian Wu. Do you really think I'm blind, you sonuvabitch? Who gave you the gall to plant spies in *my* Pacification Bureau?"

Gu Suitang spat on the ground before launching into another tirade, "Also, this is me in a good mood already! If I was in a bad mood, I would've called you Red Bush and made sure everyone and their mothers hears about it! Whatcha gonna do about it?"

The red-haired man hmphed, "Quit the baseless accusations, Deputy Chief Gu! I've never planted a spy in the Pacification Bureau!"

"Keep telling yourself that, Red Hair! Maybe one day you could convince yourself that it's the truth!" Gu Suitang's grin somehow grew even wider. "But I shan't complain. Both of your dogs are dead, and all is right in the world once more. Hahaha!"

"Speaking of which, are you here to pick up your dog, Red Hair? Will you simmer-fry him or steam him in broth? Whatever the case, you probably shouldn't eat him. You might just catch rabies!"

"Hmph! I've got no time for your bullshit!" The red-haired man uttered darkly, "I have come for one reason and one reason only, and that is to take revenge for my disciple! Give me that boy standing behind you, now!"

"What did you say? I'm so sorry, my age is getting to me lately. Care to repeat yourself, Red Hair?" Gu Suitang put a hand to his ear.

At this point, it was clear that the red-haired man was none other than the Hill Lord of Sunset Hill, Wang Luori. He said in an icy voice that did not fit his aura at all, "Give me the boy behind you. Give me Ye Qing, the one they call Joyless Ye!"

"Ye Qing? Joyless Ye?" Gu Suitang cast a glance at Ye Qing before turning back to Wang Luori. "Sure, I'll... give you a stick to stick it up your ass, you bastard!"

"Everyone knows that your disciple was killed by that Stranger named Evergreen Ivy or something. If you want revenge that badly, then go kick her sorry ass to kingdom come! Why are you going after a boy who has nothing to do with it?"

“Oh, I know! You couldn’t find Evergreen Ivy, so instead you’re going after the next best thing; a scapegoat. Do we look soft to you, Red Hair? Is that why you think you can snatch an *innocent man* from right under our noses?”

Wang Luori abruptly glared daggers at Ye Qing. “Hmph! I will find out the truth, Deputy Chief Gu. Until then, neither Ye Qing nor Evergreen Ivy are getting away from me!”

Ye Qing should’ve looked away the moment the Hill Lord’s eyes suddenly glowed like a pair of rising suns, or maybe it wouldn’t have mattered whether or not he met his eyes. All of a sudden, a golden sun rose inside his head, and all he knew were flames and agony.

His spirit evaporated as easily as a tiny stream that was under siege by a forest fire. His mind was next as it crumbled inch by inch under the burning sun.

“Hmph!” Ye Qing let out a muffled groan as intense pain assaulted his mind. By now, he had figured out that Wang Luori had invaded his head via his spirit and was trying to destroy his mind before Gu Suitang could react.

As a Spirit Purifier, Wang Luori possessed the ability to attack another person’s soul with their spirit. It was incredibly difficult to guard against, and there was zero chance a warrior with a weak spirit could survive a spiritual attack.

Luckily, Ye Qing’s spirit was anything but weak. He hurriedly visualized the “Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method” and manifested the majestic apparition of Emperor Fuxi. It shielded his mind from the worst damages and prevented the scorching sun from extinguishing it completely.

Ye Qing knew it wouldn’t last forever though. Every time a warrior entered the next cultivation level, they would undergo a transformation that could only be described as revolutionary. It was like the difference between a person’s bare fists and a gun; an army and a nuclear bomb. It was why very few people could overcome this gap and win against someone whose cultivation level was higher than theirs.

As if that wasn’t bad enough, Wang Luori was a half-step Spirit Master, and he was just an early-stage Astral Refiner. To say that the chasm between them was unbridgeable would be the understatement of the century.

“You motherfucking Red Bush! You actually *dare* to attack my charge from right under my nose!”

It was at this moment the noble, mighty roar of a lion resounded throughout the Pacification Bureau. Like a clap of holy thunder, it shattered the golden sun in Ye Qing’s head and extinguished the flames ravaging his mind. It wasn’t long before Ye Qing’s mind and spirit returned to normal. He opened his eyes just in time to see Gu Suitang rushing toward Wang Luori like an enraged lion.

Gu Suitang wasn’t giving off any energy, but his speed was as quick as lightning. Ye Qing’s senses were telling him that Gu Suitang was using every part of his body to execute his purpose. His blood, his flesh, his sinews and his bones were all moving in perfect harmony to move heaven and earth itself.

Gu Suitang reached Wang Luori faster than one could blink and unleashed a palm strike. Knowing full well how strong the Deputy Chief of Bureau was, Wang Luori responded with a full-powered punch of his own.

A golden sun appeared behind the Hill Lord's back without warning, and it was so bright that it dyed the entire bureau gold. At the same time, deadly flames appeared out of nowhere and threatened to consume anything and everything.

Although the punch was aimed at Gu Suitang and Gu Suitang alone, Ye Qing, Chu Nianjiu and everyone else still felt like they would be burned into dust if they did not get away immediately. And they did. It was like a second sun had manifested itself in the Pacification Bureau, and its terrific heat threatened to turn all life into dust.

There was absolutely nothing they could do before this power. Like ants facing down a blazing inferno, the only thing they could do... was die!

Gu Suitang paid the burning sun no heed, however. His palm easily scattered the all-consuming flames and smacked Wang Luori's fist sideways. There was a loud boom as the artificial sun suddenly shook as if something had thrown it off balance.

Stunned by how ineffective his counter attack was, Wang Luori tried to gain some breathing room by jumping away from Gu Suitang. However, Gu Suitang easily caught his wrist and pulled him forward. Then, the Deputy Chief took one step forward and rammed his shoulder into the Hill Lord's chest.

Wang Luori shuddered like he had been struck by a mountain. The attack had caved in his chest and disrupted his energies.

Wang Luori sucked in a shallow breath and gathered his energy for another strike, but he had just reached the halfway point when Gu Suitang abruptly backhanded him across the face!

Slap!

The slap was so crisp that it could be heard throughout the Pacification Bureau. Ye Qing was stunned, Chu Nianjiu was stunned, Lin Yuhuai was stunned, and even Wang Luori himself couldn't say a word until a few seconds later.

"You... slapped me?" Wang Luori's eyes bulged when his mind finally processed what just happened, crimson hair literally bursting into flames. It was clear that he was furious beyond imagination.

"Yep, I slapped you. Whatcha gonna do about it?" Gu Suitang guffawed. "I gave you face, and you thought you could barge into my territory and attack my men? Why can't you people ever be satisfied with what you have?"

Before Wang Luori could respond, Gu Suitang slapped him again and taunted, "I thought you might want a freebie, so here you go!"

"RAAAARGH!" Wang Luori screamed on top of his lungs. "You're dead! You're so dead!"

As it turned out, the sun symbols on his robe wasn't just for show. When they lit up, his power started growing at an exponential rate.

Unfortunately, he never got to do anything. The second he made a move, Gu Suitang sneered and punched him squarely in the chest. His strength was awe-inspiring, but what was even more impressive was his control. Somehow, the Deputy Chief managed to inject every ounce of force into Wang Luori's body.

BOOM!

Wang Luori's golden robe abruptly exploded into shreds. He himself was knocked flat on his back. The next second, Gu Suitang stomped on Wang Luori's chest and drove him into the underground!

"You do realize that you're a half-step Spirit Master at best, right? Did you actually think you stand any chance against me? Seriously, I could've pounded you dead with one hand!"

"You—!" A beet red Wang Luori struggled to get back on his feet, but it was futile. Gu Suitang's foot might as well be a mountain right now.

"You what mate?" Gu Suitang bent down a little and sent spittle all over Wang Luori's face, "It's very simple, small fry. Ye Qing is a member of the Pacification Bureau. If you touch a hair on his person, I'll turn you from Red Hair to No Hair. If you lay a finger on him, I will break your legs. If you kill him, I will slaughter you and your sect to the last!"

"You wouldn't dare!" Wang Luori shook uncontrollably.

Gu Suitang burst out laughing. "I wouldn't dare? Are you even listening to yourself? Give me a reason, and I will march to your Sunset Hill this instant! Or are you questioning the Pacification Bureau and my power?"

Wang Luori kept his mouth shut. The Pacification Bureau definitely possessed the power to destroy Sunset Hill with ease, but he still couldn't believe that Gu Suitang would go so far for Ye Qing.

Chapter 144: Skyrocketing Up That Bureau Ladder

"Heh. I can tell you don't believe me, Red Bush, but it's true!"

Gu Suitang chuckled. "Your short-lived disciple died, so the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau is missing a Patrolman right now. Ye Qing, get over here."

After Ye Qing came over, Gu Suitang pointed a finger at him and said, "Congratulations, you are now the new Patrolman of the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau."

"Ah, okay..." Ye Qing blanked out a little. He would've been satisfied if he was given a Lieutenant-rank post, but a Patrolman? That was a Peacemaker-rank post, wasn't it?

Gu Suitang ignored him and turned back to Wang Luori. "So, Ye Qing is now our Patrolman. Still think I won't flatten your Sunset Hill if you kill him?"

"You..." Wang Luori looked like he wanted to strangle Gu Suitang alive, but everyone knew how that went.

Before this, Ye Qing was technically a nobody. The Pacification Bureau had no reason to protect him, and even someone as willful as Gu Suitang would be hardpressed to find an excuse to flatten his Sunset Hill so to speak.

But now, Ye Qing was a high-ranking officer in the Pacification Bureau. Killing Ye Qing now would be the same as going to war against the Pacification Bureau and slapping Chu in the face. The emperor's dignity must be protected at all costs, and the imperial court might just decide that flattening Sunset Hill would be an appropriate punishment.

"Hehe. You think you're hot shit, right Red Bush? Go get the boy then! I promise you I won't stop you this time!" Gu Suitang removed his foot and stepped aside. Ye Qing did not hesitate to puff up his chest and make a provocative gesture as well.

I'm a man with a boss now! Come get me if you can, bitch!

Boom!

Violent energy burst out of Wang Luori's body as he rose to his feet. He looked like he was on the verge of unleashing all of his power to destroy everything and anything. In the end though, the Hill Lord did not dare to attack Ye Qing. He said, "I won't forget this, you bastard!" before turning around to leave.

Before he could do so though, Gu Suitang appeared next to Wang Luori and punched him in the waist. The man immediately shot out of the entrance like a cannonball.

"Who gave you the gall to threaten me, you little shit? I swear, I would've pummeled you into meat paste if your ancestor wasn't an acquaintance of mine!"

As the Hill Lord staggered to his feet, he felt something wet hitting him in the face. It was Gu Suitang spitting at him while saying, "Now get lost!"

This time, Wang Luori did not say anything. He leaped into the air and vanished in the blink of an eye. Everyone could see how angry he was and how close he was to losing control though.

*That was so cool! Now this is what I call a true champion, and it sure is nice to be carried [1] once in a while!* Ye Qing thought to himself.

Clap!

Gu Suitang clapped once to draw his attention before saying, "You're our Patrolman from now on, boy. Give it your all. I have high expectations for you!"

"You... weren't joking, senior?" Ye Qing honestly thought that Gu Suitang didn't mean what he said earlier, but now it would seem that that wasn't the case.

Gu Suitang rolled his eyes. "I'm the heavens damned Deputy Chief of Bureau, boy! Do I look like I got the time to joke around?"

Ye Qing hesitated, "But I'm not sure I—"

Gu Suitang interrupted him before he could finish, "You are qualified. You've proven during my earlier test that you are as strong as Yuhuai and Nianjiu, and your achievements in Anyang marked you as a man of exceptional intellect, so you have nothing to worry about."

He then turned to Lin Yuhuai and ordered, "When the registration is over, hand him his badge and give him a rundown on what a Patrolman is supposed to do, Yuhuai!"

Lin Yuhuai nodded affirmatively. "As you command!"

"Alright, is there anything anyone else wants to say to me? No? Then you are dismissed!" declared Gu Suitang with the wave of a hand.

The crowd was just about to comply with his order when a man suddenly barged through the entrance and roared, "Where is that boy? I can still go for another three hundred rounds! Let me at 'em!"

It was none other than Wei Yueshan, the body-tempering warrior who Ye Qing turned into a star a while ago.

Slap!

Not a second after Wei Yueshan was done yelling, a palm slapped him in the back of his head hard enough to make him stumble.

"Who hit me?" Wei Yueshan roared again.

"I did. Whatcha gonna do about it, huh?" Gu Suitang slapped Wei Yueshan a second time as he yelled, "I've been tutoring you for heaven-knows-howlong, and yet you still couldn't reach the initiate level. Not only that, you lost to a guy who's younger than you! Just how embarrassing can you get? Just get out of my sight!"

Gu Suitang kicked Wei Yueshan in the butt as soon as he finished, and once again, the poor guy turned into a star in the sky.

"If you don't mind me asking... what's going on there?" Ye Qing blinked in puzzlement.

Lin Yuhuai chuckled. "That guy's name is Wei Yueshan. He's a Lieutenant in the Pacification Bureau and the Deputy Chief's disciple."

"Oh! No wonder!" Ye Qing exclaimed in realization before introducing himself, "I am Ye Qing, the one they call Joyless Ye. I'm honored to make your acquaintance, my lords."

Lin Yuhuai smiled gently. "You flatter us, Brother Ye. You're a Peacemaker now, meaning that you are on the same level as Nianjiu and I. Please just treat us as peers and address us by our names."

"No problem!"

Lin Yuhuai then introduced himself and Chu Nianjiu, "My name is Lin Yuhuai, and I'm an Intelligence Officer. He is Chu Nianjiu, and he's a Windcatcher."

"Well met, Brother Lin, Brother Chu. Please feel free to address me as Brother Ye or Joyless!" Ye Qing responded in kind.



A smiling Chu Nianjiu wrapped an arm around Ye Qing's shoulder and took a sip from his wine, "Joyless, you're quite an impressive lad, aren't 'cha? You're not even twenty yet, and you're already a Peacemaker. Your achievement isn't unprecedented, but it's been decades since someone as young as you was made a Peacemaker in our bureau!"

Ye Qing rubbed his nose wryly. "I wasn't expecting this either. In fact, I still haven't quite recovered from the shock yet."

"Well, that's the Deputy Chief for you. He wouldn't be the Deputy Chief if he acts predictably. You'll get used to it!" Chu Nianjiu laughed. "Anyway, you've had an exciting day, haven't you? Follow me after you're done with the registration. I'll treat you to a drink at Cuiwei Boat tonight!"

Ye Qing saluted him smilingly. "Thank you, Brother Chu!"

Lin Yuhuai exposed Chu Nianjiu mercilessly, "You shouldn't thank him. He just wanted to enjoy their Cuiwei Rainflower Brew again!"

Chu Nianjiu paid him no heed. "So? I'm killing two birds with one stone!"

"Whatever you say!" Lin Yuhuai shook his head wryly before looking back at Ye Qing. "Follow me, Joyless. I'll guide you through the procedures, introduce you to your responsibilities, and give you a tour of this place!"

"Thank you very much, Brother Lin!"

"You're welcome!"

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"The Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method is on him?!"

Some distance away from the commandery, Wang Luori's rage-filled expression suddenly melted into a joyous smile.

"Hmph, now I understand why Xiao Yang and Qing Kui snuck into Anyang. Their ambition is one thing, but they should've known their place and informed me about it. Their deaths are well-deserved!" He muttered cruelly as his lips curled into a cold, detached sneer.

"Still, it's thanks to my dear disciple that the Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method is delivered right into my lap. Hahaha! The heavens are on my side this time!"

"Once I get my hands on the Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method, I'll finally be able to enter the Spirit Master stage. When that happens, you will pay for everything you've done to me tenfold, you old bastard!"

Wang Luori burst out laughing like a madman then. His crazed laughter was loud enough to be heard even tens of kilometers away.

When he was finally done, his face slowly turned dark and cruel. "Ye Qing... Ye Qing..."

“You won’t escape me. You won’t escape me!”

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“Luo Shui is famed for its One Water, Nine Bridges, and Eighteen Boats. One Water refers to the Luo Shui River, Nine Bridges refers to the nine Moon Bridges that connects the two shores of Luo Shui River, and Eighteen Boats refers to the eighteen pleasure boats scattered across the river such as Cuiwei, Brightmoon, Hongxiu, Ruyi, Crystal Clear, Aroma and so on.”

The moon glowed brightly in the night sky. Ye Qing, Chu Nianjiu, Lin Yuhuai, Wei Yueshan and Xu Banren were walking along the bustling riverside of Luo Shui River while Lin Yuhuai explained its most famous attraction, the “One River, Nine Bridges, and Eighteen Boats”.

The five of them were headed to Cuiwei Boat for a drinking session, of course. It was a small welcome party for Ye Qing. Wei Yueshan was tagging along because he somehow caught wind of their plans and muscled himself into their plans—he was just as much of an alcoholic as Chu Nianjiu was—whereas Xu Banren was forcefully dragged along after he returned to the Pacification Bureau.

A party wouldn’t be a party without enough people, right?

“A pleasure boat with friends, booze, and beautiful girls, huh? Not bad at all!” Ye Qing’s eyes were glowing with delight as he listened to Lin Yuhuai’s explanations.

“Hahaha... not only that, Cuiwei Boat’s Cuiwei Rainflower Brew is a uniquely delicious brew across all of Luo Shui. Only a limited amount is served every day, and only VIPs are allowed to order the brew. There are countless people who wish they could enjoy the brew, but couldn’t!” Wei Yueshan unconsciously licked his lips.

“It sounds like a must-have for sure!” Ye Qing replied smilingly.

Chu Nianjiu took a sip from his wine and added, “The Cuiwei Rainflower Brew is definitely incredible, but that is not the only thing they’re famous for. Their qin and se performance and their dances are famous throughout Luo Shui as well. I promise you won’t be disappointed, Joyless!”

Lin Yuhuai echoed in agreement, “Indeed, the Cuiwei Boat’s brew, music and dances are why they are the number one pleasure boat in Luo Shui!”

“Hahaha... I can’t wait!”

The group of five—well, all of them except Banren—continued to make idle conversation as they walked along the streets. The riverbanks were lined with restaurants, the pleasure boats and other vessels were floating along the river like strings, the flute and string music were positively endless, the delicious smell of food and booze was a constant, the sweet voices of songstresses could relax even the most strung-up men, and the innumerable candles, torches and lanterns lit the streets almost as bright as daytime. It was a phantasmal experience that did not seem to belong in this world.

“We’re here! That is the Cuiwei Boat!” Lin Yuhuai pointed when they arrived at an arch bridge that glowed white in the darkness as if it was forged from white jade. It was why it was called a Moon Bridge. A mysterious, exquisitely-designed pleasure boat was parked a fair distance away from it.

Appearance wise, the pleasure boat was definitely not the biggest, gorgeous, or most luxurious pleasure boat of them all. However, Ye Qing knew at first glance that it was the brightest star. Mysterious and elegant, it stood out among the other pleasure boats in a good way. It was unique like a night orchid in an empty valley, or the moon surrounded by a bed of stars.

It was at this moment Ye Qing noticed something strange. “Wait a second. This pleasure boat is parked in the middle of the river, and it isn’t close to the bridge either. Are we expected to fly over to it or something?”

“That is exactly correct! You are expected to fly over to Cuiwei Boat!” Chu Nianjiu let out a small chuckle before leaping into the air. He landed at the center of the boat.

“Sounds fun!” Ye Qing’s eyes lit up. The Cuiwei Boat was at least twenty five to thirty meters away from the riverbank, and it was even farther away from the Moon Bridge. Anyone whose movement art wasn’t up to snuff would not be able to board the Cuiwei Boat.

Ye Qing took one step and leaped into the sky as well. As light as a feather and as swift as the wind, he landed on Cuiwei Boat in just the blink of an eye.

“Joyless’ movement art is quite impressive!” Lin Yuhuai complimented. As Ye Qing was a body-tempering warrior, he thought that his movement art would be similarly brutish. Instead, the young man had looked like a bonafide celestial. It was honestly surprising.

Speaking of brutish, Wei Yueshan roared, “It’s my turn!” before backing up a few steps. Then, he dashed up to the shoreline and kicked off the ground with both legs. A few seconds later, he landed on the pleasure boat with a muffled thump.

“Now that’s more like it!” Lin Yuhuai shook his head. He and Xu Banren then leaped over to the Cuiwei Boat as well.

Xu Banren’s movement art was as soundless as a ghost, and Lin Yuhuai’s as calm and gentle as water. Regardless, they both landed on Cui Wei Boat without a sound.

#### Chapter 145: Here Comes Trouble

The first thing Ye Qing saw upon entering the Cuiwei Boat was a wide, circular stage that looked like it was carved out of jade. A woman was playing her pipa on it. Dining tables and chairs arrayed around the stage, and the customers were all listening to her performance intently.

Every time she plucked a string, it sounded like someone was striking a bead against the frame of a jade abacus; crisp and melodious. Every customer listening to her performance looked intoxicated even though some of them weren’t drinking.

Before Ye Qing came in, he had imagined that the atmosphere would not be too different from a restaurant or a brothel[1]. He also expected to be welcomed by cute, scantily dressed girls who were all too eager to inquire about his well-being and discuss the mysteries of life one way or another.

But that was not the case with the Cuiwei Boat. The girls were lightly dressed, but they exposed very little skin. Their behavior and mannerisms were extremely refined and elegant as well.

Even the customers were perfectly silent. They were all giving their full attention to the performance. The atmosphere was comfortable and calming to say the least.

It was at this moment a female attendant walked up to them and whispered, "Would you like to dine in the main hall or the guest rooms, dear customers?"

Chu Nianjiu answered just as softly, "A room, please. I've booked a place under the name Chu Nianjiu this noon."

The attendant was visibly surprised. "Lord Windcatcher! My apologies for not recognizing you sooner. I—"

Chu Nianjiu interrupted, "It's okay. Go bring a few jars of Cuiwei Rainflower Brew to our room, and don't worry about escorting us. I know where the room is."

The attendant bowed respectfully and replied, "At once, my lords!"

After she left, Chu Nianjiu led the four of them to his room with practiced ease. They chatted while enjoying the wonderful song and dance at the main hall.

"I thought you said you've run out of Cuiwei Rainflower Brew? What the hell is that you're holding in your arms then?"

Suddenly, an angry shout erupted from outside the guest room. "You're not even holding one jar, but several! I'll kill you, you lying bitch!"

"You misunderstood, Young Master Luo! These brews had been reserved by a customer beforehand!" A familiar voice answered. It belonged to the female attendant who greeted them earlier.

"And who in the world would need these many brews? Aren't they afraid that they'll choke to death?" Young Master Luo continued to complain loudly.

"Is that Luo Feibai I hear? Man, is this fate or what?" Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise as he exchanged a glance with everyone.

The man making a commotion right outside their door was none other than the so-called second young master of the Luo Clan, Luo Feibai. The young man had left with his tail between his legs this morning, and Ye Qing thought that that was the last he saw of him. He didn't think that they would meet again on the very same day.

"You know what? I want to see who this customer is with my own eyes!"

"Young Master Luo, please don't—"

"Get out of my way!"

Outside, Luo Feibai walked up to the room and kicked the door open. Sneering, he looked into the room and uttered, “Who the fuck do you think you are... to... to...”

Luo Feibai stopped talking halfway through his villain monologue. It was because he finally recognized the faces inside the room, each and every last one of them. His eyes bulged like a noisy duck who was suddenly caught by the neck.

“What were you trying to say, Scion Luo? Care to finish your sentence?” Wei Yueshan sneered and crushed the tea cup in his hand.

“I... er...” The blood drained away from his face, but he was unable to form even a single sentence.

Today must have been the unluckiest day of his life. This morning, he had tried to rob Ye Qing only to get his ass kicked at the Pacification Bureau. Later this evening, he decided that he would drown his worries away with the Cuiwei Rainflower Brew only to be told that they had run out of stock. Words could not describe how apoplectic he felt when he realized that that was, in fact, not the case. Just when he was about to unleash fire and brimstone on the sonuvabitches who had ruined his night, he discovered that it was the very same fuckers who had ruined his day. How unlucky was that?

Technically speaking, he could deal with Wei Yueshan and Xu Banren. They were just Lieutenants, and the Luo Clan was equipped to handle a couple of Lieutenants.

But the Peacemakers? Maybe Ye Qing didn’t count because this was his first day at the job, but Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuan were veteran Peacemakers with real power in their hands. They were most definitely beyond the Luo Clan’s influence.

More accurately, they *could* provoke the Peacemakers, but the cost was too great to be worth it.

“Why aren’t you talking? You were so confident when you were yelling at the female attendant earlier!” Wei Yueshan taunted.

“I’m sorry. It was my mistake,” Luo Feibai gritted his teeth and apologized.

Wei Yueshan scoffed, “You think an apology is enough to make up for what you did? Does that mean I can beat you up now and say sorry later?”

Ye Qing chuckled. Wei Yueshan truly was Gu Suitang’s disciple. Their temperament was more or less the same.

Luo Feibai turned blue in the face. “I already apologized, Lieutenant. What more do you want?”

Wei Yueshan smacked the table and sneered, “I want to kick your ass. What are you gonna do about it?”

Luo Feibai abruptly looked up and glared daggers at Wei Yueshan, but in the end he didn’t dare to say or do anything.

Wei Yueshan snorted, “Man, what a coward. I can hardly believe that it was you who had tried to frame our Patrolman. With your balls, your father should have named you ‘Luo I Suck’!”

“Enough, Yueshan. His older brother and I are friends, so let’s leave this here, shall we?” Lin Yuhuai spoke up after he deemed that Luo Feibai had received a suitable amount of rebuke.

“Hmph! Get out of our sight!” Wei Yueshan waved him off with a disgusted expression.

“Thank you, Lord Lin. Goodbye!” Luo Feibai saluted and left immediately. He did not want to linger for even a second longer.

But before he could step away, Wei Yueshan scoffed, “Hmph! There really isn’t a bone in him! He would’ve died ages ago if he didn’t have a good brother!”

Outside the room, Luo Feibai shuddered and clenched his fists so hard that veins were popping on his arm. His face was contorted into an expression of pure fury as well.

“Are you alright, young master?” One of Luo Feibai’s servants asked kindly after noticing his expression, but it was a mistake.

“Did I ask for your concern!? Fuck off!” Luo Feibai yelled and hit the attendant on the chest. The poor man let out a bloodcurdling scream and fell to the ground, unmoving. It was impossible to say if he was still alive or not.

“Let’s go!” ordered Luo Feibai before heading straight for the exit.

It was at this moment something happened. Luo Feibai had just taken two steps when he suddenly collapsed to the ground. It was so sudden and unexpected that it took his servants a couple of seconds to react.

“Young master!”

“Young master!”

They rushed to his side and shook him back and forth, but he didn’t react. Eye bulging and face as pale as a sheet, his pupils kept shrinking until all life had vanished from his eyes.

“He... he’s dead?” A servant mustered his courage and tried to feel Luo Feibai’s pulse, but there was nothing. He was so scared that he collapsed on his butt.

“The young master’s dead...”

“The young master’s dead!”

Everyone looked as white as a ghost. No one knew what the hell just happened, much less how to fix this situation.

The commotion was hardly quiet, so many customers were drawn out of their guest rooms. Cries of shock ensued, and it wasn’t long before a crowd had gathered around the young master’s dead body. It was chaos.

Suddenly, a man cut through the crowd and asked loudly, “What’s going on over here?”

Luo Feibai's servants subconsciously turned toward the person. When they saw who it was, their eyes lit up like they had found their savior. "Constable Li! Thank heavens you're here! Our young master, he... he's dead!"

"What?" Constable Li's full name was Li Lang, and he was a middle-aged man in his thirties. He possessed a stern, intimidating face that could easily cower people into submission. When he frowned, the nearest crowd literally flinched and took a step away from him. "Is that your second young master, Luo Feibai on the ground?"

"Yes, constable!" A servant answered, and Li Lang's heart dropped. The Luo Clan was a highly influential family who had started as a humble river merchant. Their foundation was solid, and their connections were not to be underestimated. The patriarch of the Luo Clan was called Luo Chunchao, and Luo Feibai was the son of his first wife. Therefore, his death was absolutely going to cause a massive splash in Luo Shui.

This is bad.

Li Lang's frown deepened. He had come here to enjoy a drink with his brothers, and a murder case, one that would cost many people's lives if it wasn't handled properly, had landed in his lap. How unlucky was that?

As reluctant as he felt, Li Lang didn't dare to treat this lightly. He immediately ordered, "Men, seal off the scene. Starting now, no one is allowed to leave the Cuiwei Boat without my permission!"

"As you command!" The bailiffs accompanying Li Lang immediately responded. They too were aware how serious the situation was and hurried to carry out their duties.

After Li Lang was finished giving his orders, he turned back to Luo Feibai's servants and said, "Tell me everything that happened prior to Luo Feibai's death. Also," he pointed at the servant who had been struck unconscious or dead by Luo Feibai earlier, "What's with that guy over there?"

The frightened servants quickly told the constable everything. When they finished giving their account, Li Lang thought for a moment before asking, "Just to clarify, you are certain that Luo Feibai argued with some customers in a guest room over the Cuiwei Rainflower Brews right before his death?"

"Yes..." The servants hesitated a little because it was more like a one-sided beatdown than an argument, but it was probably unnecessary to mention that, so they didn't.

"Alright, take me to that guest room right now!" Li Lang rose to his feet and ordered the servants to lead the way. They headed straight for Chu Nianjiu's room.

"Oh no, here comes trouble!" Ye Qing half-joked as he enjoyed a sip of Cuiwei Rainflower Brew. It had a rich taste and a lingering aftertaste that made him want to go for another sip again and again. It was definitely worth its reputation.

Everyone in the room was an Astral Refiner at least, so of course they heard the commotion as clear as day. But of course, they didn't hear the moment Luo Feibai died. They would've stepped out of the room to investigate if that was the case.

Slam!

Once again, the room door was opened roughly, and once again, an awkward silence permeated the air when Li Lang saw who the five men sitting inside the room were. The constable desperately wanted to say, "Sorry to disturb you. Goodbye!" and leave the place, but his sense of duty was ultimately greater than his fear.

Saluting the five men stiffly, he said, "Greetings, everyone. Something's happened outside, so if you don't mind..."

Before he could finish, Chu Nianjiu answered lazily, "No need for pretenses, Constable Li. We've all heard the commotion, and we know what you want to ask. Here is my answer."

"Yes, we had an argument with Luo Feibai over the Cuiwei Rainflower Brew, or more accurately, we verbally ripped a hole in his ass before we told him to leave. He was perfectly healthy when he left the room, as evident from the fact that he had slapped one of his lackeys unconscious outside the room. Everyone saw this, so you know I'm not lying."

"As for motive, we simply have no motive. We'd already vented our annoyance on him, and what kind of crazy would kill Luo Feibai over a couple of Cuiwei Rainflower Brews? He's not worth it."

Li Lang relaxed and echoed in agreement, "It is true that you have no motive to kill Luo Feibai."

However, his statement was refuted by a low mutter, "That's a lie! I know at least one person in there who absolutely has a motive to kill Young Master Luo!"

"What? What did you say?" Li Lang immediately turned around to look at the servant who said this.

The corners of Ye Qing's lips turned up. He knew it wouldn't be that easy.

The servant said, "This morning, the young master had tried to frame Lord Ye Qing for a crime, and his action had nearly resulted in his death. Therefore, it is definitely possible that Ye Qing had killed my young master for revenge!"

"You're right! That has to be the case!"

"It's him, it's him, it has to be him..."

*Here we go again,* Ye Qing sighed internally. He wasn't looking for trouble, but trouble just couldn't help but look for him, could it?

It didn't take long before Luo Feibai's servants divulged everything that had happened this morning.



## Chapter 146: Nameless Hair

“Shut your mouths!” Wei Yueshan erupted in anger, “How dare you piece of shits accuse our Patrolman of murder! You are courting death!”

“Calm down, Yueshan!” Lin Yuhuai quickly restrained him.

Li Lang furrowed his brow deeply and turned to Ye Qing. “Are they telling the truth, Lord Ye?” Ye Qing replied unhurriedly, “Partially.”

Li Lang was a bit displeased with how casual Ye Qing was acting. It was also partially because Ye Qing was far too young. The youth was usually arrogant, the arrogant was usually impulsive, and the impulsive was usually dangerous toward himself and others.

Unaware of Li Lang’s inner thoughts, Ye Qing explained, “I say ‘partially’ because it’s true that Luo Feibai had tried to frame me and hold a grudge against me. However, it’s definitely not true that I had killed him for revenge.”

The servant who accused Ye Qing at the very beginning hmphed, “That’s what you claim, but who knows if it’s true or not?”

Ye Qing smiled. “Where is your evidence then, since you’re so confident that I’m the murderer? Or are you just making baseless accusations?”

The servant stopped talking, but he continued to shoot Ye Qing with a “I know it’s you even if you don’t admit it” look.

Suddenly, Ye Qing cocked his head to the side and smiled coldly. “What is your name?”

The servant felt a chill down his spine as he asked warily, “My name is Luo Shen. What, are you plotting to silence me or something?”

Ye Qing’s grin widened. “Relax. It’s just a question.”

Li Lang did not interrupt their conversation. He simply frowned as he recalled all the clues he had discovered so far—or rather, the lack thereof. When he was checking Luo Feibai earlier, he couldn’t find any wound on his body whatsoever. His internal organs seemed perfectly fine, and there were no signs of poisoning either. In other words, he was unable to identify the cause of death.

Based on his many years of experience, he concluded that this was no ordinary death. Luo Feibai must have died to a Stranger or a powerful warrior.

Ye Qing must be pretty strong since he was a Patrolman. He almost certainly possessed the strength to kill Luo Feibai without leaving a trace. For now at least, it definitely looked like Ye Qing was the prime suspect.

Once Li Lang had reached a conclusion, he scanned the crowd with a severe look before announcing, “There are many suspicious points regarding Luo Feibai’s death. With that in mind, I’d like to invite Lord Ye to the commandery hall with me to assist with the investigation. The servants will be coming with me as well.”

*Slam!* A furious Wei Yueshan slapped the table when he heard this. “What is the meaning of this, Li Lang? Are you actually going to detain Lord Ye?”

Xu Banren didn’t say anything, but his expression was just as unfriendly.

Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai looked calm and collected, but it was them who gave Li Lang the most pressure.

Li Lang was the chief constable of the Luo Shui Commandery Hall and leader of the Three Companies and Six Offices with several hundred bailiffs under his command. Naturally, he could not be a weakling. He was a late-stage Astral Refiner just like Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai, though he was inferior to them because he didn't deal with Strangers all year long.

Despite this, Li Lang did not back down from his duty. He said seriously, "Watch your tone, Lieutenant Wei. You are a public servant, and it is your natural duty to observe the law. I will charge you with obstruction of justice and take the necessary actions if you try to stop me."

"Also, I've made it very clear that I am only inviting Lord Ye to assist with the investigation. This is not an arrest or even an interrogation!"

Wei Yueshan paid him no heed, however. He took a step forward menacingly and uttered, "You can try!"

Unafraid, Li Lang took a step forward as well. "I certainly shall!"

It was at this moment a wicked, arrogant voice boomed from outside, "Are you having trouble, Constable Li? Who in the world would dare to obstruct you from detaining the prime suspect?"

The crowd parted to admit a young man between twenty five to twenty six years old. "Oh, it's Brother Chu and Brother Lin! No wonder!"

Chu Nianjiu lifted an eyelid to look at the newcomer before shifting into a more comfortable position. While sipping his wine, he said, "One may not need to observe what they eat, but they most certainly need to watch what they say, Xue Shiwu!"

The young man possessed a handsome appearance, but Ye Qing could sense a hidden cruelty within him. This was a man who looked like a cute puppy on the outside, but was really as ruthless and bloodthirsty as a wolf on the inside.

Moreover, he had the cultivation level to match his inner wolf. He was a late-stage Astral Refiner just like Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai.

Xue Shiwu shrugged carelessly. "I'm just saying as it is though! It is a fact that you're trying to stop Constable Li from apprehending the suspect, isn't it? Speaking of which, you may proceed with the arrest, Constable Li. I will make sure that you are able to carry out your duties without further obstruction. But be swift! I don't enjoy cold food and warm wine."

Curious about the newcomer's identity, Ye Qing asked Xu Banren via sound transmission, "Who is this Xue Shiwu? He's talking down on us like we're common criminals."

"Xue Shiwu is the son of Xue Beikun, commander of the Black Feather Guards. Most people call him the 'Little Commander'. He is a cruel, wicked, and arrogant man who almost always butts heads with the Pacification Bureau," answered Xu Banren after some thought.

"He's the son of a commander? No wonder!" Ye Qing exclaimed in realization.

Although the Black Feather Guards technically answered to the Pacification Bureau and the commandery hall, their internal affairs were theirs to handle, not to mention that power struggles were a constant as old as time itself.

“What are you two talking about? You’re not talking behind my back, are you?” Xue Shiwu suddenly gave him and Xu Banren an icy look.

*His senses are pretty sharp!* Ye Qing thought warily, but on the outside he replied with an impeccable, “Nah, we’re just discussing a mad dog who bites whoever it meets is all!”

Bloodthirst immediately gushed out of Xue Shiwu, fiery and bloody. For a second, he looked like a vengeful wraith who had crawled out of a mountain of dead. Clearly, Xue Shiwu had killed a lot of Strangers or humans to accumulate such a terrifying amount of bloodthirst.

Xu Banren and Wei Yueshan immediately tensed up and watched Xue Shiwu warily, but Ye Qing acted like he couldn’t feel anything despite bearing the brunt of the Little Commander’s ire. His smile remained as laidback as it could be.

“Interesting! Very interesting!” declared Xue Shiwu three breaths later with a smile, but his eyes glittered like that of a hungry wolf. “You must be the guy who killed my brother, Xiao Yang and stole his position, Ye Qing!”

“You are mistaken, Little Commander. I am Ye Qing, but it isn’t me who killed Xiao Yang.” Ye Qing smiled. “Only a fool would believe an obviously false rumor like this, don’t you agree?”

Xue Shiwu laughed harshly. “We’ll know very soon who is the fool. Constable Li, what are you waiting for?”

Li Lang took a step forward and declared in an icy tone, “Patrolman Ye, if you would.”

“Not another step!” Wei Yueshan and Xu Banren took a step forward. As if on cue, the bailiffs behind Li Lang drew their weapons and gave not an inch.

For a time, the atmosphere in the Cuiwei Boat grew so heavy it was suffocating. Then—

“Gulp!”

A small gulp shattered the silence and drew everyone’s attention. It was Ye Qing picking up his jar and downing a mouthful of Cuiwei Rainflower Brew. He then shot them a smile and declared, “Relax. We’re all colleagues here, are we not? So why are you glaring at each other and drawing weapons like you’re about to war? Come! Have a drink and cool your heads!”

Xue Shiwu taunted, “You must have nerves of steel, Brother Ye. I wouldn’t be drinking if I were you!”

Ye Qing chuckled. “I can solve this case as easy as pie, so why would I worry about anything?”

Xue Shiwu sneered. “Really now? Care to prove it then?”

Ye Qing slowly set his wine jar on the table and rose to his feet. Li Lang immediately eyed him warily, “What are you doing?”

Ye Qing raised an eyebrow. “Didn’t you hear the Little Commander? I’m going to solve this case. I’m going to uncover the truth of Luo Feibai’s murder.”

Li Lang looked suspicious. “How?”

Ye Qing smiled and walked up to Luo Feibai’s body. A quick inspection later, he closed his eyes and thought for a moment.

“I’ve already checked the body. There are no external or internal wounds on Luo Feibai’s body!” Li Lang said with displeasure. It was because Ye Qing clearly had no training with body examination. He thought that he was just putting on an act and buying time for himself.

Xue Shiwu said sarcastically, “Even Chief Li couldn’t find anything, and you think an amateur like you could find what he couldn’t? Just stop pretending and go to prison already—”

But before Xue Shiwu could finish, Ye Qing suddenly opened his eyes and declared smilingly, “I know who Luo Feibai’s killer is!”

“What?” Li Lang’s eyes widened in disbelief. “Who was it?”

Ye Qing didn’t keep them on tenterhooks. “It’s a strand of hair that took his life!”

“A hair? What the hell?” Li Lang blurted. Everyone else looked confused as well.

Ye Qing bent down and grabbed Luo Feibai’s hair with his left hand. Then, he released a wisp of Netherflame. Luo Feibai’s hair immediately caught on fire.

“What are you doing!?” Li Lang exclaimed in shock and tried to make a grab for Ye Qing. He thought that the young man was trying to destroy the evidence. However, Ye Qing raised his right hand seemingly without thought and tapped Li Lang on the wrist. Immediately, the chief constable felt a scorching heat rippling through his arm and boiling his blood. Ye Qing himself was completely unharmed.

“Relax. I’m not trying to destroy the evidence. Now look!”

Ye Qing withdrew his hand and pointed at Luo Feibai’s burned scalp. Most of the scion’s hair had melted away like butter as soon as they caught on fire, but a single strand of hair suddenly started struggling as if it was alive. The next second, it pulled out of Luo Feibai’s head and shot straight toward the exit.

A bailiff who happened to be standing in the hair’s path subconsciously reached out to grab it, but he let out a bloodcurdling scream just a second later. It was because the hair had cut right through his right hand like it was nothing!

As if realizing it wouldn’t reach the exit in time, the hair abruptly swerved down and tried to slip through a crack between the floorboard. It was a good plan that would’ve allowed it to shake off its pursuers if not for a pair of fingers catching its tail end right before it would slip through the crack. No matter how hard it struggled, it was unable to leave a single mark on the man’s fingers, much less break free.

The man who captured it was Ye Qing, of course.

Ye Qing raised the hair above his head so that everyone could see it. "This is the Nameless Hair, a Malice-class Stranger [1]."

"Nameless Hair?"

"A Malice-class Stranger?"

Everyone looked confused. It looked like no one had heard of this Stranger before.

Xue Shiwu asked suspiciously, "You're not making this up, are you?"

"You don't look like a scholar, so I won't fault you for your ignorance!" Ye Qing mocked the Little Commander and continued, "The Nameless Hair is a very rare Stranger, so I'm not surprised that most of you haven't heard of it. But do you know why it is rare? It's because it's not a natural Stranger. It is something someone had cultivated into existence."

"A cultivated Stranger?" Li Lang immediately understood his meaning. "Are you saying that someone used it to kill Luo Feibai?!"

Ye Qing shrugged. "Isn't it obvious? Not only that, his murderer is still with us!"

Chapter 147: Godspeed! 2

"His murderer is still with us? But why?" Wei Yueshan interrupted curiously, "And who?"

Li Lang and everyone else were looking at Ye Qing expectantly as well.

Ye Qing ignored them all and continued his explanation, "The Nameless Hair's true body is, obviously, a hair. To kill someone with it, all you need to do is to drop it on someone's head, and the Nameless Hair would automatically take root in the victim's scalp, crawl into their brain, and destroy their central nervous system little by little."

"The Nameless Hair looks and feels just like a normal hair, and it gives off no noticeable vital signs that a warrior might be able to pick up. Practically undetectable in most situations, it is why those who own it usually use it to carry out assassinations!"

A pause later, Ye Qing continued, "But of course, the Nameless Hair has its fair share of weaknesses."

"One, it takes an extreme amount of time and effort to cultivate a Nameless Hair into existence. Two, the Nameless Hair cannot move too far away from its host. And three, the Nameless Hair's death would damage its host severely!"

Ye Qing smiled confidently. "This is why I'm certain that Luo Feibai's murderer is still present at the scene!"

"An excellent deduction, Joyless. Now tell us: who is the murderer?" Lin Yuhuai asked smilingly.

Ye Qing fired a question, “Who was the one who stirred up trouble at the start?”

As if on cue, the servant who accused Ye Qing of murder and kept drawing everyone’s suspicion back to him, Luo Shen argued instinctively, “That is a lie, and you have no proof! For all we know, you could be the owner of the Nameless Hair!”

“That’s strange. I haven’t even started throwing out names yet, and someone is already all too eager to defend himself!” Ye Qing sneered. “But if proof is what you want, then proof is what you’ll get!”

“There is only one way to cultivate the Nameless Hair, and that is to provide it with most of your nutrients and especially your hair’s. Naturally, anyone who cultivates the Nameless Hair is hairless, or to put it another way, bald.”

Ye Qing took one step forward and appeared in front of Luo Shen. Then, he pulled his hair right off his head. All of it.

“It’s a wig!”

“He’s bald!”

“You are the murderer, Luo Shen!” Li Lang erupted in rage and made a grab for the servant. Since Luo Shen was standing right next to him, and he was only a late-stage Vessel Augmentor, Li Lang thought for sure that he would be able to capture him. However, Luo Shen let out a bark of savage laughter and sprouted hair from every pore on his body in the blink of an eye.

Caught off guard, Li Lang was pushed away by the massive swarm of hair. Luo Shen immediately seized the opportunity to slip into the crowd. When Li Lang tried to give chase, the crowd themselves suddenly pounced toward him with eerie unison like puppets on strings! It took him a second to realize that they were being controlled!

“Keke... you can try and apprehend me if you don’t care about these people’s lives, Constable Lin.”

Somewhere behind the crowd, Luo Shen let out an eerie cackle. There was a strand of hair behind every person he was controlling. He then looked at Ye Qing and cackled again. “I will remember this, Patrolman Ye!”

Ye Qing was unperturbed by the dangerous situation, however. He raised his right fist slightly, and the Burning Wind abruptly swept through the place. Before they knew it, every hair behind the controlled people had burned into ashes. They immediately stopped in their tracks and collapsed on the ground.

Luo Shen turned as pale as a sheet. He shot Ye Qing a furious glare but did not hesitate to race toward the exit.

Unfortunately, he had just taken a few steps when Ye Qing’s voice suddenly rang beside his ears, “If you miss me so much, then you might as well stay!”

Every hair on Luo Shen's body stood on end immediately. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Ye Qing cracking a smile at him and showing off a strand of hair between his fingers. Then, he snapped it in half with a bit of strength. The hair automatically burned into ash when Ye Qing let it drop to the ground.

"Hmph!" Luo Shen let out a muffled groan and staggered on his feet. His complexion abruptly turned sickly pale, and a trickle of blood poured down his bottom lip.

Because the Nameless Hair was tied to his heart's blood, losing it was like losing his heart's blood. It was a huge blow to say the least.

It was at this moment Ye Qing appeared beside him in a blur and raised his left hand. Panicking, Luo Shen grew out his hair even more and wrapped himself in a cocoon. Not only that, countless strands of hair floating outside the cocoon and swinging with enough strength to trigger mini sonic booms.

"You think this is going to stop me?" Ye Qing smirked and brought down his left hand. The Netherflame immediately engulfed the hair and burned it all into ash. Then, he grabbed the cocoon and exploded it like a bomb.

There was no one inside the cocoon, however. It was because Luo Shen had seized the opportunity to slip away while Ye Qing was breaking through the obstacles.

*He's over there!* Ye Qing's spirit told him that Luo Shen had ducked into a nearby guest room.

Ye Qing burned the remaining cocoon into ash. Then, he made a beeline for the guest room. He had just reached when suddenly, he felt a fierce and vicious fist force flying straight toward his head!

Ye Qing turned around and dispelled the fist force with his own punch. Then, he looked at Xue Shiwu and asked, "What is the meaning of this, Little Commander?"

Xue Shiwu was the one who had attacked him.

The Little Commander let out a cold chuckle. "That is my room, and I'm treating an esteemed guest inside. No one is allowed to enter it without my permission!"

"Is~ that~ so~?" Ye Qing purposely dragged out his sentence, smirking. "My innocence counts on capturing Luo Shen though. What if I must enter your room?"

Xue Shiwu sneered. "You can certainly try!"

Chu Nianjiu sipped his wine and taunted, "Why are you blocking Joyless from capturing the murderer, Little Commander? You're not in cahoots with Luo Shen, are you?"

Xue Shiwu narrowed his eyes dangerously. "Fuck off with your accusations. I just told you I have an esteemed guest inside. It's not just him, no one is allowed to enter my room!"

Chu Nianjiu's smile abruptly disappeared. A bit of coldness entered his eyes as he said, "I think someone's forgotten that I'm not as easy-going as I appear to be. Get into that room, Joyless. I'll deal with the Little Commander!"

"Thank you!" Ye Qing chuckled and tried entering the guest room once more.

Unfortunately, Xue Shiwu had more tricks up his sleeves. He sneered audibly as he ordered, “Wind, Forest, Mountain, Fire, stop them while I deal with this so-called Patrolman who doesn’t deserve his title!”

“As you command!” His four personal bodyguards answered and charged toward Chu Nianjiu and the others fearlessly.

Xue Shiwu knew that there was no chance his four bodyguards could even defeat Chu Nianjiu, not to mention Lin Yuhuai, Wei Yueshan and Xu Banren were present as well. At most, they would be able to stall them for a short time.

That was all he needed though. Based on what his senses were telling him, Ye Qing was just an early-stage Astral Refiner. It would be all too easy for him, a late-stage Astral Refiner, to capture him. Once he had Ye Qing in his grasp, Chu Nianjiu and the others would have no choice but to submit to him.

This was why Xue Shiwu didn’t hold back. Blood red astral qi sprung into existence as he swiped at Ye Qing. It looked so ominous it was like a mountain of corpses, a sea of blood, and an infinite amount of souls screaming into eternity.

*“Greedy Wolf Howls At The Moon”*

*“Awoooo!”*

There was a piercing howl as a bloody wolf rose from the sea of blood. Souls were screaming as it stepped over a mountain of bodies, and a bloody moon slowly rose over its head. When the murderous astral qi washed over the Cuiwei Boat, those who were weak-willed or weak-bodied immediately experienced all kinds of horrifying illusions and collapsed to the ground, shivering from the bottom of their souls.

When the Greedy Wolf howled at the moon, a sea of blood was surely to follow!

“What a fierce and forceful intent!” Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise. He was feeling a terrific amount of pressure even before the punch could reach him.

Xue Shiwu’s astral qi was a match for his fist art. It was the average grade astral qi, the Greedy Wolf Blood Qi.

The Greedy Wolf was one of the Seven Stars of the Northern Dipper. Excelling at combat, the Greedy Wolf Blood Qi was commonly found in battlefields or places of terrible death and slaughter. In that sense, there was no astral qi more bloody and violent than the Greedy Wolf Blood Qi.

The Greedy Wolf Blood Qi could negatively impact the enemies’ mind and spirit. Excluding those who were too strong to be affected by the astral qi, it could instill fear into the enemy at best or terrify them to the point of breakdown at worst. Not only that, it gave the user infinite courage and allowed them to fight bravely no matter the circumstances.

It was why the Greedy Wolf Blood Qi was considered to be the best offensive astral qi on the battlefield. It was especially popular with soldiers.



Xue Shiwu was the son of the Black Feather Guard's commander, and he possessed a fierce, brutal personality. Therefore, he was a perfect fit with the Greedy Wolf Blood Qi and could unleash its maximum power.

As if that wasn't bad enough, Xue Shiwu was a late-stage Astral Refiner; a warrior who had entered the realm of Expression. He was capable of combining his astral qi and his fist intent and bringing his Expression into reality.

Ye Qing took half a step backward and pulsed his spirit. The shape of Xue Shiwu's fist intent, the minute changes of his energies, and the strong and weak points of his astral qi immediately became reflected in his mind. Then, he stepped horizontally with his right foot, bent halfway to the ground, and raised his fist one meter into the air. Inside his fist, a tremendous amount of lightning was coagulating and spinning wildly as if waiting for an opportune moment to unleash its power.

From Xue Shiwu's perspective, it looked like Ye Qing was stunned by his "Greedy Wolf Howls At The Moon". He thought the young man was paralyzed with fear right after he finished assuming a pose.

"Kill!" Xue Shiwu growled triumphantly.

Right before the bloody fist would punch Ye Qing squarely in the head, the young man abruptly sprung to full height and punched right through Xue Shiwu's fist force. Not only that, the punch was coming from an angle that prevented him from pulling any counterattack and disrupted his energy flow. It was almost as if the young man could see the weakest spots of his attack and the shape of his energies!

Thud!

Ye Qing's fist continued forward until it struck the bloody wolf right in the neck. There was a loud crack, and the seemingly invincible wolf abruptly shattered into a million pieces like glass.

Shattering the bloody wolf released a terrifying amount of force and astral qi inside the boat. It was like a mini cyclone had sprung to existence. The man bearing the full brunt of the gale did not budge an inch, however. His fist continued forward until it finally struck Xue Shiwu in the wrist.

Boom!

Thunder boom, and all the lightning, astral qi and force condensed within his fist erupted at the same time.

*"Strength of Dragon Elephant"*

*"Cloud Vaporization Style"*

Xue Shiwu shuddered violently as his clothes abruptly exploded into smithereens. His face turned beet red, and his pores started spitting tiny jets of dark red flames.

"Godspeed!"

Ye Qing grinned and took one step forward. Then, he slammed his elbow into Xue Shiwu's chest like a hammer.

Crack!

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Xue Shiwu's eyes bulged as his chest caved inward. The next second, he flew through the corridor and the window before sinking into the Luo River.

Glug glug glug!

The surrounding waters immediately started boiling unnaturally. Hot air and bubbles kept rising to the surface.

"Phew..." Ye Qing sucked in a deep breath. He then withdrew his fists and shot the stunned crowd a glittering smile.

Lin Yuhuai, Chu Nianjiu, Wei Yueshan and Xu Banren weren't too surprised. They had witnessed Ye Qing sending Wei Yueshan to the stars and even holding back the Purple Star Demon Subjugation Restriction temporarily before. Li Land and the others though, they could hardly believe what they were seeing. Not only had they just witnessed an early-stage Astral Refiner defeating a late-stage Astral Refiner with one punch, this was the Little Commander they were talking about! The son of the commander of the Black Feather Guards himself!

Just how was this possible?

Chapter 148: Wen Zailai

"Little Commander!"

"Little Commander!!!"

Xue Shiwu's four personal bodyguards—Wind, Forest, Mountain and Fire—shouted in horror when they saw this. The fight was over so quickly and unexpectedly that they never even got to start their own. They hurriedly raced out of the Cuiwei Boat and jumped into the river to save their charge.

After the four bodyguards were gone, Chu Nianjiu choked down some wine to suppress his shock. "Cough! Cough... You never fail to surprise, Joyless!"

Ye Qing smiled humbly. "Nah, it's because he underestimated me!"

It was the truth. The real reason he was able to defeat Xue Shiwu in one punch and deal him a severe blow was because he did not believe that Ye Qing was a threat at all and fought him as such. In reality, Xue Shiwu was a very strong Astral Refiner. If the Little Commander had come after him with everything he had, he still would've won, but it would've taken a lot more effort and time.

Ye Qing finally turned around to face the guest room behind him. The shockwaves of his battle with Xue Shiwu could've shattered even a tough limestone house, but it did no damage to the seemingly wooden structure of the Cuiwei Boat whatsoever. Clearly, this boat was no ordinary boat. Just like the Cloud Mountain, it was probably protected by powerful restrictions.

Despite his idle thoughts, Ye Qing did not hesitate to push open the door. However, he was met with a conundrum as soon as he entered the room. Luo Shen was lying motionless on the ground, eyes bulging. He was very obviously dead. Strangely, Ye Qing couldn't spot any injury on his body whatsoever. There was also a middle-aged man in his thirties sitting beside the table. He wore a silk hat and a scholar's robe and carried a feathered fan. He looked very much like your traditional scholar.

The man smiled and saluted Ye Qing as soon as he saw him. "Hail, Patrolman Ye. I am Wen Zilai."

*Another late-stage Astral Refiner? Since when did late-stage Astral Refiners become as common as cabbages?* Ye Qing thought in annoyance as he asked, "Well met, Brother Wen. What happened here?"

Wen Zilai replied casually, "It's like this. I was having a nice drink when this stranger suddenly barged in and tried to kill me. He was probably worried that I would reveal his whereabouts. Worried for my life, I have no choice but to kill him in self-defense!"

"Is that so?" Ye Qing asked suspiciously while crouching down to pry open Luo Shen's mouth. As soon as he did this, a mouthful of blood spilled out of the man's lips.

*What a sword!* Ye Qing's eyes glinted. He immediately noticed that Luo Shen had died from a sword wound, and the place he was struck with was none other than his mouth.

If he wasn't mistaken, Luo Shen was going to say something after entering Wen Zilai's room when suddenly, a sword pierced up his mouth and into his brain. Not only that, the attack was so fast that Luo Shen closed his mouth in panic only after the sword was withdrawn. After that, he was just dead. That was why he looked unhurt from the outside, and why the blood had pooled inside his mouth.

"What are you doing here, Wen Zilai?"

By now, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai had stepped into the room as well. They both frowned when they saw him sitting next to the table.

Wen Zilai took no offense from their rather cold attitude, however. He greeted them politely, "Hail, Brother Chu. Hail, Brother Yu."

"Shiwen is a good friend of mine, and we were having a good time until this incident happened."

"You're a scholar, and he's a brute from the army. I doubt that the two of you even share the same type of chamber pot, much less enjoying a drink together," Chu Nianjiu said sarcastically. "You're not plotting something heinous, are you?"

"You must be joking, Brother Chu!" Wen Zilai laughed uncaringly. "A person's hobbies aren't just limited to literature and martial arts, and one can have friends from both low and high places! But I suppose that someone like you would not understand such concepts!"

Clearly, Wen Zilai was indirectly calling Chu Nianjiu uncouth.

Ye Qing touched Xu Banren's shoulder and asked him through sound transmission, "Who is this Wen Zilai? And why does Brother Chu seem to dislike him so much? I could practically imagine a melodramatic past listening to their verbal spar!"

Xu Banren answered, "Wen Zilai is one of the four stars of the White Horse Academy. Not only is he well-read, smart, and judicious man, his attainment in martial arts is quite impressive as well."

“But although he is as strong as he is knowledgeable, Wen Zilai is cursed with a devious mind. Ruthless as a soldier and cunning as a fox, he especially enjoys scheming behind another’s back. It is also why people call him the Deceitful Scholar.”

“Lord Chu had been hoodwinked by Wen Zilai in the past, but he was unable to repay the favor because he couldn’t find proof. Since then, they had constantly butt heads against one another.”

“I see!” Ye Qing exclaimed in realization. No wonder Chu Nianjiu was acting like Wen Zilai was his ex or something.

“Patrolman Ye. Thank you for overlooking my transgressions and even identifying the true culprit behind Luo Feibai’s murder.”

It was at this moment Li Lang stepped into the room and inspected Luo Shen’s body for a bit. Then, he looked at Ye Qing and added, “I deeply apologize for the troubles I’ve caused. I hope you will forgive me.”

Ye Qing saluted him, “You don’t need to apologize, Constable Li. You were just catching a killer, and I was only proving my innocence!”

“Thank you!” Li Lang returned the salute and glanced at the others. “Thank you all for lending a hand in this incident as well.”

“You’re welcome, Constable Li!” Everyone including Wen Zilai responded.

Ye Qing thought for a moment before asking, “I have a question, Constable Li. Do you think that this incident is as simple as it seems?”

Since the beginning, he had a feeling that something wasn’t right about this whole incident. For starters, why did Luo Shen want to kill Luo Feibai? Why did he choose the Cuiwei Boat of all places to execute his murder? And why did he kill Luo Feibai right after they left his room? No matter how he thought about it, he felt that the time, location and motive were all very suspect. So suspect, that he wouldn’t be surprised if it turned out that Luo Shen’s true objective was him!

Besides that, Luo Shen’s own death was a little suspect. As someone who had fought him personally, he could tell that Luo Shen was pretty strong. He was also in possession of a special skill set that temporarily kept *him* at bay even if he was aiming to capture, not kill. However, the man had died as soon as he entered Wen Zilai’s room. He had died so cleanly and quickly that it was almost as if he hadn’t anticipated being attacked, a ludicrous thought considering his circumstances—unless he knew Wen Zilai.

It was the only explanation why Luo Shen had ducked into Wen Zilai’s room of all rooms, and why he was so unguarded that Wen Zilai was able to kill him in a single attack. It also explained why Luo Shen’s final expression was one of shock before he perished. He hadn’t expected Wen Zilai to kill him.

Finally, there was nothing strange about Xue Shiwu enjoying a drink with Wen Zilai, but it was beyond suspicious that Xue Shiwu would go so far as to assault him to prevent him from entering the room. The only reason he could think of was that Xue Shiwu was trying to stall him while Wen

Zilai killed Luo Shen, meaning that Xue Shiwu and Wen Zilai were the true masterminds behind all this!

The more he thought about it, the more certain he became that his deduction was correct. There was one thing he couldn't figure out though. He had just arrived at Luo Shui, and he literally didn't know that Xue Shiwu and Wen Zilai existed until tonight. So why did the duo go through all this trouble?

It could be because they were trying to take revenge for Xiao Yang. Earlier, Xue Shiwu had called Xiao Yang a brother, and as far as he could tell they were pretty close. It could be because he wanted to take revenge for Xiao Yang and roped Wen Zilai in as the brains of the operation, though at this stage it was pure speculation.

Li Lang said nothing for a moment. "That's up to Patriarch Luo to decide after I return Luo Shen's corpse to him, not me."

Ye Qing nodded in understanding. Li Lang was obviously an intelligent man who noticed the same thing he did. He was also a wise man who realized that the masterminds behind this incident were most likely people he couldn't afford to offend. That was why he decided to leave it to Luo Feibai's father, Luo Chunchao to make the decision.

Would Luo Chunchao choose to minimize the impact of this incident and overlook his son's murder? Or would he kick up a fuss and muster heaven and earth to take revenge for his son? It was all up to him now.

"Men, take Luo Shen's body away, and make haste. The last thing we need is another 'accident'!" Li Lang ordered. Two bailiffs immediately rushed into the room and carried Luo Shen's body away.

"Good night, everyone!" The chief constable saluted and left the room as well.

Ye Qing and Co got ready to leave. No one was in the mood to enjoy anything after this fiasco. However, they had just exited the room when a roar erupted from outside, "You are dead, Ye Qing!" Boom!

A silhouette covered in blood red astral qi burst into the Cuiwei Boat. The doors and windows shook violently as he charged straight for Ye Qing.

"Xue Shiwu!"

Chu Nianjiu, Lin Yuhuai and the others immediately stepped out of harm's way.

Ye Qing: "... *Such good friends!*

Ye Qing rubbed his nose and pulsed his spirit once more. He was planning to target the weak point in Xue Shiwu's energies once more. But despite looking like a crazed, savage beast on the outside, the Little Commander's bloodshot eyes were as cold as ice. Like a wolf, he was savage but calm, cruel but mindful. He made sure to conceal his energies properly so that Ye Qing wouldn't be able to find anything.

"Smart. Too bad it's not going to help you!" Ye Qing grinned. If Xue Shiwu thought he was just a warrior who happened to be born with a strong spirit, then he was going

to be very disappointed.? His spirit had grown by leaps and bounds after it was baptized by the Burning Wind. He could not claim that it was on the same level as a Spirit Purifier, but among Astral Refiners? It had to be among the best of the best. Despite Xue Shiwu's attempt to conceal his energies, he could still see them as clear as day.

Ye Qing did not move even though Xue Shiwu was getting closer and closer. When they were less than ten meters away from each other, he took one step forward and vanished from view. An instant later, both combatants had switched places.

The Cuiwei Boat abruptly shook, and an invisible shockwave spread outward across the waters. Some nearby vessels even exploded into smithereens without warning.

The Cuiwei Boat itself was fine even though the shockwave had happened in its belly. It was because a ripple of energy had canceled them out and protected the ship from harm.

Back in the ship, Ye Qing was standing calmly on one side, while Xue Shiwu was clutching a limp arm on the other. His complexion was beet red, and his aura was fluctuating erratically as well. It was clear who had won the second exchange.

"I had no idea that Joyless could predict his opponent's actions this well," Chu Nianjiu muttered while exchanging a glance with Lin Yuhuai.

Xue Shiwu had thrown a punch when the two of them entered melee range, and Ye Qing had countered with a perfectly-timed elbow flick that knocked it off course. As a result, Xue Shiwu's devastating punch could only sail harmlessly past Ye Qing's cheek, and he was unable to switch up his move. This could not have happened if he didn't know exactly what his opponent was planning to do or where the punch was aimed.

Then, Ye Qing straightened his forearm and smacked Xue Shiwu across the shoulder like he was wielding an axe, landing yet another powerful blow.

If shame could kill, then Xue Shiwu would have died a million times already. If the first time was a fluke, the second time was a coincidence, then the third time must be a pattern; a pattern where he, a late-stage Astral Refiner, had lost decisively against an early-stage Astral Refiner!

"RAAAAAGH!"

Xue Shiwu abruptly let out a mighty roar as his eyes turned completely red. He suddenly became a lot bigger as fangs suddenly stretched out of the corners of his mouth, and crimson hair grew out of his skin. Ye Qing frowned when he saw this.

"He's a Strangerkin?"

That wasn't all. A pair of crimson gauntlets had appeared in his hands, and it had a wolf's head at the back and sharp claws at the fingertips. It was an exquisite and deadly-looking Strange Artifact.

The moment Xue Shiwu put on the gauntlets, the eyes of the wolf's head abruptly lit up like a pair of crimson stars. At the same time, the apparition of a bloody wolf appeared around the gauntlet and let out a long, bloody howl.

“Joyless, Xue Shiwu has the blood of a Greedy Wolf in him. He is twice as fast and strong when his bloodline is active, and the gauntlet he’s wearing is a Malice-class Strange Artifact called the Greedy Wolf Gauntlet, so you must be careful,” Lin Yuhuai’s soothing voice rang beside Ye Qing’s ears.

“Don’t hold back, Joyless! Fuck him up!”

Chu Nianjiu’s sound transmission came right afterward. “You can cripple him or kill him, it doesn’t matter! The Pacification Bureau will back you up every step of the way, so just do it! We believe in you!”

Ye Qing: “...”

Such good brothers!

Chapter 149: Seeing You Again

Ye Qing sighed and channeled his spirit and energy. The Blue Demon Hand and Lightning Bolt were shivering in anticipation as well. Go big or go home, right?

It was at this moment the soothing sound of a qin came from outside the window. Like a cool night’s breeze, it gently blew away the irritation, the tension, the bloodthirst and the promise of death.

The unnatural redness in Xue Shiwu’s eyes gradually faded away. His crimson hair and sharp fangs slowly shrank until they were completely gone as well.

Lin Yuhuai and Chu Nianjiu looked completely entranced by the musical performance. Even a thug like Wei Yueshan was closing his eyes and looking relaxed.

When the performance finally ended, and the Wen Zilai couldn’t help but praise, “What a beautiful tune! It’s almost too good for this mortal coil!”

Lin Yuhuai nodded in agreement. “Indeed. It’ll be the balm to my soul for at least a good while.”

Chu Nianjiu took a sip from his gourd and shot the two scholars a disdainful look. “Hmph! Scholars and their pretentious-sounding words! I’ll grant you the tune is very good though. At the very least, it’s far better than what the two of you can play, right Joyless?”

He waited for a response but heard nothing. When he turned around, he noticed that Ye Qing was nowhere to be seen.

“Lord Ye left just now claiming he needed to use the toilet, Lord Chu,” Xu Banren explained expressionlessly, “He also said that he’s leaving the aftermath to you and Lord Lin.”

“The toilet?”

Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai exchanged a glance with each other. *Toilet break my ass, he’s paying us back for dumping everything on him earlier!*

“Ye Qing? Where is he?” Xue Shiwu demanded after breaking out from the entrancing music and discovered that his hated foe was nowhere to be seen.

Chu Nianjiu sneered, "He's using the toilet. If you're fast enough, you might be able to catch him mid-pee!"

"You think you're funny, Chu Nianjiu?" Xue Shiwu squinted at Chu Nianjiu dangerously, but the madness that gripped him was far milder than it was before.

The Windcatcher shook his gourd at Xue Shiwu and said in a disdainful tone, "Dude, you are such a mad dog. There is literally no one you wouldn't bite. If you want, I can beat the madness out of you!"

Xue Shiwu burst into a crazed laugh before baring his teeth at Chu Nianjiu. "Did you only realize that now, Chu Nianjiu? I *am* a mad dog. Anyone who offends me will suffer a fate worse than death!"

"Don't try to be a hero, Chu Nianjiu. Everyone and their mothers know that heroes die young! Just because you survived last time doesn't mean you're going to survive this time!"

Something cold and steely shone out of Chu Nianjiu's lazy, casual eyes then. "I knew it was you two."

Cold, white air started pouring out of the Windcatcher's body. It felt cold enough to turn the world into ice. Lin Yuhuai had taken a stance and stood off against Wen Zilai as well.

"Customers. The Cuiwei Boat is a place of comfort and leisure, not violence."

It was at this moment a crisp, cool voice reverberated from somewhere. "Cuiwei welcomes you if you are here to enjoy our music and dances, but if you are here to settle a score, then please kindly move elsewhere!"

As soon as she finished, countless talismans lit up and submerged the entire interior with power. While the other guests were only mildly pressured, Xue Shiwu, Chu Nianjiu, Lin Yuhuai, Wen Zilai, Yue Weishan and Xu Banren felt their hair standing on end, and an uncontrollable panic climbing up their throats.

"Calm down, Nianjiu!" advised Lin Yuhuai as he gave the Windcatcher a pat on the shoulder.

Wen Zilai also walked up to Xue Shiwu and whispered, "We have time, Little Commander!"

The Cuiwei Boat was named after its master, Cuiwei. Although Cuiwei was a woman, she possessed an extraordinary background and a wealthy amount of connections. Not only that, she was a powerful warrior in her own right.

When Cuiwei first came to Luo Shui, countless people had taken an interest in her and her business. Many of them hailed from dangerous gangs and powerful clans as well. However, every single one of them had failed in their mission, and Cuiwei was able to deal them a crippling blow at best, or wipe them from the surface of Luo Shui at worst.

Since then, every faction in Luo Shui stayed well out of Cuiwei and the Cuiwei Boat's way. Not even powerful sects like Sunset Hill or White Horse Academy were willing to make an enemy out of them.



Technically speaking, the Pacification Bureau did not fear Cuiwei. If she dared to attack the bureau, the bureau would flatten her and her boat the next day. That said, the Pacification Bureau generally stayed out of *jianghu* business because their main focus was on the Strangers. It was also a fact that they were causing a huge scene in the Cuiwei Boat, and the battle between four Astral Refiners would certainly damage the ship. Rationally, killing Xue Shiwu wasn't worth risking Cuiwei's wrath.

In the end, Chu Nianjiu and Lin Yuhuai took their leave first. Xue Shiwu glared daggers at their backs as he let out a dark shuckle. "The Four Gentlemen of Luo Shui, my ass. One day, I will crush them all beneath my feet."

"As for that Ye Qing, my name isn't Xue if he doesn't beg me to end his life by the time I'm done with him!"

Wen Zilai replied with a warm smile while fanning himself, "The day will come, and it will be sooner than you think!"

"Tsk. The kid was lucky he escaped tonight!" Xue Shiwu clicked his tongue angrily. "But it won't be so easy next time!"

"Ye Qing doesn't know we're targeting him. Ye Qing is already dead, he just doesn't know it yet!"

Wen Zilai looked out of the window with an inscrutable look. "In the end, insects cannot withstand the winter!"

.....

In a suite at the top floor of the Cui Wei Boat, Ye Qing stared awkwardly at a young woman and mustered his courage, "Miss Goddess?"

The young woman looked to be twenty five or twenty six, and she possessed a cool demeanor that reminded him of a winter flower. The woman shot him an indifferent glance before answering, "You've gotten the wrong person, customer. I am Cuiwei, master of the Cuiwei Boat."

"Oh... sorry!" Disappointment filled Ye Qing's eyes immediately. Her answer aside, it was clear from her voice that she wasn't Miss Goddess.

When he heard the qin performance earlier, he was certain that Miss Goddess was the one who played it. Overflowing with surprise and joy, he did not hesitate to ditch his pals and rush to this suite where the music was coming from. He thought he could finally meet his savior in person, or at least chat with her a little. Unfortunately, it would seem that he was mistaken after all.

Ye Qing let out a long sigh and saluted Cuiwei, "My deepest apology for disturbing you, Miss Cuiwei. I shall take my leave now."

He turned away and was just about to leave when the bead curtain, and a teasing voice tickled his ears. "Do you have poor eyes on top of a poor singing voice? How did you mistake Cuiwei for me?"

“Miss... Goddess?” Ye Qing’s eyes widened like saucers as he stopped in his tracks. As if he was afraid he was hallucinating, he slowly turned around until his eyes caught someone stepping out of a room that was covered by a bead curtain.

The young woman looked to be in her early twenties. She wore an ink dark dress with embroidered flowers and possessed a stunning countenance that stole his breath away the second he laid his eyes on her. Her eyes were bright and clear, her smile was warm and comely, and her long hair resembled a cascading waterfall. She looked like a goddess who had stepped out of an ink wash painting.

“Who else?” The young woman smiled before walking over to Cuiwei and placing a jade plate with three bottles of medicine on it in front of her. “I made these restoratives myself. For ten days, you will take one pill from each bottle every morning and night. You ought to recover then.”

“Remember to rest even after you’re healed, however. Otherwise, you may experience a relapse.”

“Got it!” Cuiwei nodded.

Finally, Ye Qing snapped out of his daze and exploded with joy, “It really is you, Miss Goddess! It’s so nice to finally meet you!”

“And why’s that?” The young woman asked smilingly while picking a teapot from a red mud stove and filling up a jade cup. A faint yet invigorating scent began permeating throughout the room. She then offered him the tea.

Ye Qing accepted it and took a sip, enjoying the hot yet soothing flavors that were spreading through his mouth. Feeling a lot calmer, he answered, “It’s because I can finally thank you properly for saving my life, of course!”

She smiled. “I did save your life, didn’t I? You best remember it then. I may call upon that favor one day.”

Ye Qing replied matter-of-factly, “Of course I will. I won’t forget it for as long as I live.”

“Do you know each other, Qingyou?” Cui Wei asked suddenly.

“Qingyou?” Ye Qing’s eyes lit up. “Is that your name, Miss Goddess? ‘Like a dream that lasts all autumn’? It’s a wonderful name, Miss Goddess!”

“Like a dream that lasts all autumn... huh?” The woman paused as her eyes grew long and distant. For a moment, it was like she was looking through space and time itself. Then she smiled and popped the illusion like a bubble, leaving behind only fall-like silence and calm. “My last name is Feng, and my first name is Qingyou. You may call me Qingyou.”

“Okay, Qingyou!” Ye Qing gladly addressed her by her first name. “I told you before, but my name is Ye Qing, and my moniker is Joyless. You may call me Joyless.”

“So... you live here, Qingyou?”

He was going to ask if Qingyou was working for Cuiwei Boat, but he changed his mind at the last second. Although the Cuiwei Boat was clearly a cut above its peers, there were some people who would take serious offense for being associated with an establishment like this. Just in case, he decided to go about his question in a more roundabout fashion.

Unfortunately, he did not account for another variable that was sitting right in this room. Cuiwei turned sharply in his direction and asked in a scathing voice, “Is that a hint of scorn I detect, customer?”

Ye Qing: “...” *That’s not what I mean, sister. Also, I like you much better when you were roleplaying an ice queen.*

Ye Qing shrugged and rubbed his nose. “Of course not! Everyone is equal in the entertainment industry!” *And as a man, this is easily my favorite place, so cool your jets, alright?*

His platitudes did nothing to placate Cuiwei, however. She snorted in disbelief and continued to eye him coldly and critically.

Ye Qing continued to rub his nose. For whatever reason, he felt like Cuiwei was displeased with him.

Feng Qingyou smiled and saved him from his predicament. “I am a doctor, and I’m a close acquaintance of Cuiwei. I’m currently staying at a clinic called Heavenly Heart Clinic. I came here today because Cuiwei has been feeling sick, and she invited me over to treat her ailment.”

Ye Qing exclaimed in realization and admiration, “You’re well-versed in the art of music and healing as well, Qingyou? That’s incredible!”

More importantly, Feng Qingyou was staying in the Heavenly Heart Clinic. Ye Qing immediately engraved the information into his brain.

“Fawner!” Cuiwei set down her tea cup and hmped again.

Ye Qing: “...”

What did I do to deserve this treatment?

“You’re lucky you’re an acquaintance of Qingyou!” Cuiwei said suddenly, “Now listen well, because I’m not going to repeat myself. Wang Luori once saved Wen Zilai’s life, and Luo Shen was a pawn Wang Luori planted in the Luo Clan.”

Ye Qing immediately turned serious and stared at Cuiwei. “What? How did you know about that?”

Cuiwei’s tone turned mocking again, “Did you not know that brothels, theaters, restaurants, gambling dens and more are places where information flows the freest?”

Clearly, Cuiwei was still miffed that Ye Qing had insulted the Cuiwei Boat earlier.

Chapter 150: Conspiracies, Conspiracies Everywhere

“Man oh man...”

Ye Qing resisted rolling his eyes. Since ancient times, women and schemers had been the bane of heroes across all ages. One of them was sitting across from him, and another was scheming in the shadows. *Truly, I am the protagonist.*

Of course, he didn't take Cuiwei's info as gospel. Not even the Pacification Bureau knew about these secrets, so how did a pleasure boat of all things find out about it? Clearly, the Cuiwei Boat was more than it seemed.

Ye Qing didn't prod her about her source or question the validity of her intel though. She had already done him a huge, potentially life-saving favor by giving him such critical information. He would absolutely be crossing a line if he questioned her integrity now.

"Thank you so much for giving me such an important piece of intel, Miss Cui!" Ye Qing rose to his feet and saluted her respectfully. "I had already guessed that Luo Feibai's death was a plot against me, and now I know for certain it is true."

"Oh, you've figured it out already? How?" Curiosity and surprise replaced some of Cuiwei's coldness.

Ye Qing nodded and explained, "Because this whole incident had been a little too coincidental from my point of view. Xue Shiwu's strange behavior and Luo Shen's strange death are quite suspect as well..."

Ye Qing told her everything he deduced earlier and added, "The only thing I couldn't figure out was why Xue Shiwu and Luo Shen were targeting me. Like come on, today is literally the first day we met. I have a couple of theories, but they all seem flimsy at best."

"But it all makes sense if Wang Luori is the one behind this. That old coot really is sparing no effort to kill me."

Wang Luori had asked Wen Zilai to kill him, and Wen Zilai had used Luo Shen to set up a trap. The plan was to blame Luo Feibai's death on him.

Xue Shiwu had made a timely appearance to give Li Lang the courage to stand up against the Pacification Bureau. At the very least, he wanted to make sure that Li Lang wouldn't back down just because Chu Nianjiu and Li Yuhuai were covering for him.

Had he followed Li Lang to the commandery hall, he would be beyond the Pacification Bureau's protection. Wang Luori would have the opportunity to kill him then.

Even better, the old coot could easily pin his death on the commandery hall. The Pacification Bureau would never know that he was the real murderer, or at least, they wouldn't have the proof to charge him with anything. He would be killing two birds with one stone.

Even if Wang Luori chose not to attack him in the commandery hall because it was too risky or something, that didn't mean he was out of the woods. Wang Luori most likely had several ways to ensure that the murder charge would stick no matter what, meaning that Luo Feibai's family, the Luo Clan would be coming after him. He would have made a powerful enemy through no fault of his own.

The trap was exquisite, multi-layered, and completely unexpected. By all rights, he should be in deep shit right now. Unfortunately, they misjudged his knowledge and thought he wouldn't

recognize the Nameless Hair, an extremely rare Stranger that most people weren't aware of. This one mistake allowed him to identify the true killer, clear his name, and even turn the tables on them temporarily.

Ideally, Wen Zilai wouldn't have to reveal himself, but he had to because he needed to silence Luo Shen. If Luo Shen were to fall into the Pacification Bureau's hands, it would expose their plan and land them in hot waters to say the least. It was probably why he was here at the Cuiwei Boat at all, to make sure that the worst case scenario wouldn't happen even if the plan went awry.

No one knew about his relationship with Wang Luori or the fact that Luo Shen was Wang Luori's pawn anyway, so no one would think that he had killed Luo Shen to silence him.

Ye Qing had to admit that the plot was intelligent, well thought out, and bold. Few people would think to use Luo Feibai as bait.

Unfortunately, no plan survives contact with the enemy, and their flawless plan had ended in total failure just shy of the worst case scenario.

It was at this moment Feng Qingyou spoke up, "Wang Luori is a brutish, hot-tempered man who'd rather solve his problems with his fists and intimidation. There is nothing he loathes more than having to come up with a scheme to obtain what he wants. In short, he is all brawn and no brains. Therefore, he could not be the one who came up with such a devious, multi-layered plan."

"If it wasn't Wang Luori..." Realization flickered across his features. "Are you saying that Wen Zilai is the one who came up with this scheme?"

Feng Qingyou didn't respond, but her meaning was as clear as day.

"Wang Luori... Wen Zilai..." Ye Qing rubbed his chin while his lips curled into a diabolical smile, "So, they thought they could toy me as they pleased, hmm? I should give them a taste of their own medicine then!"

Feng Qingyou smiled, "You're going to tell Luo Chunchao about Wang Luori and Wen Zilai's scheme, aren't you?"

"You know me well, Qingyou!" Ye Qing replied with a smile that didn't reach the eye. "They're the ones who used a tiger's cub as bait. Why shouldn't they suffer the consequences of their actions?"

Feng Qingyou caressed her jade cup thoughtfully. "Luo Chunchao had begun from humble beginnings, and he is as shrewd as he is paranoid. If you truly wish to sic the Luo Clan against Sunset Hill, I would advise you not to divulge the whole truth. Just tell him what ties Wang Luori, Luo Shen and Wen Zilai together, and he should be able to figure out the rest on his own. Otherwise, he would overthink it and suspect that someone is trying to sow discord."

"You're right!" Ye Qing agreed after mulling over her suggestion. Luo Chunchao was a smart man. All he needed was a starting point, and he would eventually find out the whole truth on his own. Besides, a truth he had to work to uncover would be far more convincing than one he heard from another's mouth.

“Alright. There’s no time to lose, so I’m going to visit Luo Chunchao right now,” said Ye Qing as he rose to his feet.

He saluted Cuiwei first and said, “Thank you for your service, Miss Cui.”

He then turned to Qingyou and shot her a sunny grin, “I gotta go, Qingyou. I’ll see you at Heavenly Heart Clinic sometime!”

For most people, revenge was a dish best served cold. But for Ye Qing, revenge was three meals a day with a slice of dessert.

“Very well!” Feng Qingyou smiled back.

With that, he gave them one final nod and left the room.

After Ye Qing was gone, Cuiwei asked suddenly, “Why did you ask me to divulge Wang Luori and Wen Zilai’s plan to Ye Qing, Miss Feng?”

Feng Qingyou looked down on her tea as she replied in a warm, soothing voice, “Joyless is the main reason we succeeded in implanting the Dream Seed in Xue Shiwu’s mind without a hitch. Telling him Wang Luori and Wen Zilai’s plan is my way of repaying him.”

“Besides that, ninety percent of Tian Yong’s wealth comes from Luo Shui, and all of Luo Shui’s wealth comes from the Luo Clan and White Horse Academy. If the Luo Clan does have a fallout with Wang Luori and Xue Beikun, it may benefit our plans greatly.”

Cuiwei frowned in puzzlement, “But how, exactly? I just can’t see how we might benefit from this.”

“The world is like a game of go. Anything can happen, perfection is unlikely, and there are some things you cannot change no matter what you do. That is why we must deliberate every step and plan for even the most insignificant of things. Think of it as an effort to build up more pawns, more tricks, more flexibility and more room to maneuver. Only then can victory be assured.”

“As you say, pitting Luo Chunchao against Wang Luori and Xue Beikun does not benefit us in the short run, but who can say what the future holds?”

Cuiwei nodded. “Thank you for the lesson. But are you sure Luo Chunchao would fall out with Wang Luori and Xue Beikun?”

Feng Qingyou shook her head. Her eyes looked like a starry night sky, infinite and unfathomable. “He will, but not openly. He wouldn’t try to solve things with violence either.”

“Luo Chunchao is a cautious and paranoid man. He also excels at forbearance. On the surface, he would pretend as if the death of his son is but a splash in the pond, but under the surface, it would be a different story altogether. For example, Luo Chunchao controls many parts of the Luo Shui River. Therefore, it would be logical to assume that Sunset Hill and the Black Feather Guards’s river transportation businesses would be suffering greatly from now on.”

Cui Wei nodded in agreement and suggested, "Should we add some fuel to the fire?"

Feng Qingyou shook her head. "No. To go too far is as bad as not to go far enough."

Cuiwei nodded obediently. "I understand."

Feng Qingyou let out a small cough and said, "You may leave now."

"Catch some rest soon, miss!" Cuiwei advised before leaving the room.

After Cuiwei was gone, Feng Qingyou chanted to herself, "Like a dream that lasts all autumn, like a reflection that breaks at the slightest touch..."

"Is that what I am? A mirage?"

"If that is true, then I reject this fate!"

The qin began playing once more underneath the bright moon.

.....

"Dammit, just how cowardly is this Luo Chunchao? Why isn't he doing anything even though his son is dead?"

Ye Qing sighed deeply at the courtyard of the Pacification Bureau's Inspection Department. Last night, he had leaked Wang Luori, Wen Zilai and Luo Shen's relationship to Luo Chunchao thinking that he would be able to enjoy a good show first thing in the morning. Unfortunately, reality was a harsh mistress. Forget declaring bloody vengeance against Wang Luori, the Luo Clan hadn't even announced Luo Feibai's death. Now that it was almost noon, he was certain that the dog-eat-dog show he was anticipating wouldn't happen.

"You should've just ended your own life on a piece of tofu, coward!" Ye Qing complained to no one in particular. He had a feeling this might happen when he learned of Luo Chunchao's personality from Feng Qingyou, but foreknowledge wasn't enough to keep him from feeling disappointed.

Had Luo Chunchao chosen to go to war with Wang Luori, the sect master would not be able to spare the energy to attack him in the short term. It would've bought him some much needed time to grow stronger.

"That said, a biting dog doesn't bark, and Luo Chunchao would definitely bite Wang Luori when the time is right. It's going to be oh-so-bloody. At best, Wang Luori was going to regret picking Luo Feibai as his bait for a long time to come, and at worst... he won't live to regret his decision."

Ye Qing immediately felt better when he arrived at this conclusion. He might not be able to watch a dog-eat-dog show today, but it was an acceptable sacrifice if a dragon-versus-tiger battle was on the horizon!

Luo Chunchao was not a person to be trifled with, and he was a forbearing man. He would never let Luo Feibai's death go, he just wouldn't act until he was sure it would deal Wang Luori a severe

blow. When he did make his move, it would be like a thunderstorm or a landslide had struck Luo Shui. This was definitely a good thing from a long-term perspective.

“Patrolman, we have an incident at Cockcrow Alley!”

Ye Qing had just taken a sip from his wine jar when Xu Banren strode into the courtyard with a stern expression on his face. Ye Qing rose to his feet and asked seriously, “What happened?”

A Patrolman was responsible for monitoring and patrolling the region they were charged with and protecting it from Strangers. Since Ye Qing was the Patrolman of Luo Shui, this meant that he was responsible for monitoring and patrolling not just the commandery, but all counties and villages under Luo Shui’s jurisdiction as well. If, for example, a village was threatened by a powerful Stranger that it could not possibly defeat, then it was the Patrolman’s responsibility to mobilize the troops or handle the threat themselves.

This was why Patrolmen possessed a lot of hard power in the Pacification Bureau. A Patrolman was granted their own office in the Pacification Bureau and could command up to six Lieutenants, twelve Guardians, and three hundred and sixty Pacification Sentinels. It was a force to be reckoned with to say the least.

However, the Inspection Department was usually empty because most of its members were out on patrol. So far, Xu Banren was the only Lieutenant he saw in his office.

As the Patrolman, his main responsibility was protecting Luo Shui from all Stranger-related threats. If, for example, a Lieutenant had a run-in with a Stranger they couldn’t defeat, then it was his responsibility to travel to their location and eliminate the Stranger as well.

To put it simply, he was the Superman of Luo Shui. He would go wherever Luo Shui needed him!

“There’s been deaths in Cockcrow Alley,” Xu Banren kept things as succinct as he could, “We suspect that a Stranger is behind it.”

“That’s a little *too* succinct, brother!” Ye Qing rubbed his nose. “Give me some details to work with.”

“Early this morning, a man named Li Zhou noticed that there was a bloodstain on his shirt. At first he paid it no mind, but the bloodstain kept growing bigger and bigger until Li Zhou noticed something was wrong.”

“Li Zhou tried to take off his shirt, but he died the second he touched the fabric. Worse, everyone who made contact with Li Zhou now has a bloodstain on their shirt as well. The bloodstains are also growing.”