

## Stranger 241

### Chapter 241: We Don't Resent Nor Hate

"Useless! All of them, useless! Cough! Cough..."

Inside his room, a pale-faced Wang Luori was swearing up a storm after listening to Wen Zilai's report, or at least he tried to before he accidentally triggered his wounds and coughed violently. When he finally recovered, he swore again, "What the fuck is wrong with these brainless idiots? I can't believe they're lining up like a bunch of goodie-two-shoes so that Ye Qing can kill them one by one! Am I crazy, or has the world gone crazy?"

"Please calm yourself, father," Wen Zilai said while wearing his trademark smile.

"How can I? If these idiots continue to attack Ye Qing one by one like the idiots they are, I'd never get the opportunity to ambush Ye Qing as we've planned!"

Wang Luori glared at his adopted son and said in an unfriendly voice, "Is your plan really going to work, Zilai? If not, then stop wasting my time and leave me to my rest already!"

Wen Zilai didn't get angry, however. He replied slowly, "Don't be angry, father. Don't you see? This is happening because of Ye Qing's plot!"

"What do you mean?" Wang Luori frowned.

Wen Zilai answered, "You've fished before, father. That is what Ye Qing is doing right now, except that he's using himself as bait. He's baiting those greedy jianghu warriors into his trap so he could clean them up one by one."

"Don't you find it strange that, instead of surrounding himself with a plethora of Pacification Sentinels or staying inside the Pacification Bureau, Ye Qing would occasionally go off on his own? Even though he knew that countless people were coming for him?"

"Moreover, the timing and place he chose to pull his stunt is very suspicious. It was either the dead of the night where no one was around, or remote places where it was all too easy to ambush him. It's clearly because he wanted to avoid hurting innocents when a fight breaks out."

"Besides that, the locations he chose were very strategic as well. It's either near the Pacification Bureau, or the administrative division, or the Black Feathers Guards' base, or the White Horse Academy. If his enemies turned out to be stronger than expected, then he could escape to these locations and seek shelter."

"A coincidence can happen once, twice, or even five times in a row. But ten? Twenty? It can only be a conspiracy."

Wen Zilai declared confidently, "That is how I know that Ye Qing is fishing."

“These poor fools believe that they’re the fishermen reeling in the delicious prey that was Ye Qing, when in reality it was the other way around. The slightest wag of the bait is enough to make them rush blindly like a bull and become the prey. How pitiful is that?”

“Hmph! What a cunning brat!” Wang Luori exclaimed in realization before growing disgruntled. “What should we do then? Should we wait some more, or...?”

Wen Zilai shook his head. “It would be pointless. It’s been a while since Ye Qing inflicted the wrath of the heavens on those people, and their heads are slowly cooling down as well. Jianghu warriors are bullies who only know how to target the weak. When Ye Qing’s strength had fully imprinted itself on their soul, they would fear, they would compromise, and they would eventually give up on hunting him altogether. No matter how enticing the reward is, they can’t enjoy it if they’re dead.”

“At this rate, these jianghu warriors would leave Luo Shui, and less and less people would attack Ye Qing. In short, our plan would end in complete failure if we do nothing.”

“Dammit! What should we do then?” Wang Luori huffed in frustration. “Are we really just going to give up like that?”

Wen Zilai smiled mysteriously. “Of course not. Why give up when a small tweak is all it takes to set things back on track?”

Pleasantly surprised, Wang Luori urged, “What’s this tweak? Tell me already.”

Wen Zilai replied, “It’s very simple. We simply need to expose the fact that Ye Qing is fishing.”

“Jianghu people aren’t just greedy bullies who prey on the weak. They’re also excessively concerned about their pride.”

“If we expose this fact, the jianghu warriors will be humiliated and furious. Ye Qing is strong, but he’s not so strong that they couldn’t even muster the courage to defend their pride.”

Wang Luori mulled over the plan and found it desirable. He immediately exploded with excitement, “That’s a great plan! Let’s do it!”

But Wen Zilai said unhurriedly, “Calm, father. I haven’t finished yet.”

“Although this would ruin Ye Qing’s efforts, it’s still not enough to push him to the brink.”

“That is why we also need a fire that would burn all of his options into ash.”

Wang Luori frowned. He was starting to realize that smart people weren’t just dirty in the heart, but they also loved keeping their audience in suspense. They could have summarized their whole plan in one breath, but no, they just had to break it down to many segments and drag it out as long as possible!

Noticing Wang Luori's displeasure, Wen Zilai jumped straight into his explanation, "As you say, the Jianghu people are fools. Not only do we need to give them motivation, we also need to improve their strategy a little. If they continue to attack Ye Qing as they are, we'll just be repeating the cycle."

"Instead, we can advise them to disrupt the law and order of Luo Shui and cause public unrest. We'll then blame it all on Ye Qing. When the time is right, we can force the Pacification Bureau to surrender Ye Qing, expel him, or exile him from Luo Shui."

"Of course, the unrest alone isn't enough to force the Pacification Bureau to take action. But we have plants in the Pacification Bureau, the administrative division, and the Black Feathers Guard. There are also many people who disliked the Pacification Bureau in general. We can use them all to apply pressure on Gu Suitang. He will cave eventually unless he wishes to go up against the entire Luo Shui."

But Wang Luori shook his head. "I don't think so. Gu Suitang is a stubborn mule. Forget Luo Shui, the whole world can press him to submit, and it's still a coin flip if he will do so."

Wen Zilai smiled. "That's the point. If there comes a day where the entire world disagrees with Gu Suitang's decision, can Gu Suitang really go up against the will of the many?"

"That said, your point makes a lot of sense. Gu Suitang would most likely not surrender Ye Qing to the dogs. After all, it's not just his pride that's on the line. The Pacification Bureau itself would become a joke if he caved in to his wrongdoers' demands."

"Therefore, he would most likely try to sneak Ye Qing out of Luo Shui instead. After all, this would only end if Ye Qing is gone. This way, he could end this farce and shield Ye Qing from criticism."

"And that will be our opportunity. Once Ye Qing is out of Luo Shui, you'll have all the time in the world to capture him, won't you?"

"Hahaha! That's a magnificent idea!" Wang Luori slapped the table and burst out laughing. "Thank goodness I have you, Zilai."

"I'll leave this to you then. Don't disappoint me."

"Don't worry, father. Everything will go smoothly."

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"Have you heard, Brother Li? A poisoning happened at Chunlai Restaurant just yesterday. Thirty six guests, three employees and the shopkeeper himself were all killed!"

Two waiters were chatting with each other.

“Of course I have. I heard that their bodies rotted so thoroughly that their families didn’t even have a body to bury. It’s terrible,” replied the other waiter with a sigh.

“It’s all that Ye Qing’s fault. No one would be hurt if he hadn’t pissed off those jianghu people. What a bastard!”

“I know right? This is the ninth incident in the past five days. That Ye Qing is literally a harbinger at this moment. Disaster follows him no matter where he goes. Innocents have died, and countless properties had been damaged because of him.”

“That’s not all. I heard that many Pacification Sentinels, bailiffs and Black Feathers Guard have died as well. It’s a shame!”

“Dammit, why must we suffer for his sin?”

“We should just surrender that harbinger to the jianghu people. Heavens only know when this would end otherwise!”

It was at this moment the shopkeeper—an old man with a spotty white beard—stepped out and saw his employees slacking. “What the hell are you two doing? Get off your lazy asses and get to work already!”

One of the waiters complained, “Do what, exactly? We’ve cleaned the tables and chairs so many times it’s practically shining, but not a single customer had shown up so far.”

“Did I give you permission to talk back against me?” The shopkeeper scolded, but he let out a long sigh when he looked at his empty establishment and the empty street outside.

“It’s all that Ye Qing’s fault. No one’s visiting our restaurant because they’re afraid to go out, and they’re afraid to go out because of Ye Qing. At this rate, we’re all going to starve to death,” the other waiter complained.

“What are you talking about?” The shopkeeper rebuked him angrily, “This is anything but Lord Ye’s fault! Lord Ye eliminated the cultists and saved Luo Shui from disaster. We would already be dead if it wasn’t for him! How can you be so ungrateful?”

“If there’s anyone that is to blame in this situation, it’s the Taiping cultists and those so-called warriors who would do anything to achieve their goals!”

“How could you deny a person’s good for the wrongs of an evildoer? How could you resent a good person for the evils of another? That is unfair to Lord Ye and all good people in this world.”

“What difference is there between us and those evildoers if we would commit such an act? Who else in this world would be willing to be good if that’s the case? So don’t resent, and don’t hate.”

“But boss—”

The waiter was going to argue further, but the shopkeeper cut him off firmly, “Enough of this. If you have time to talk, then you have time to work.”

“Don’t worry, this world isn’t that hopeless yet. Good people will be repaid with good. You, me, and Lord Ye will have our due.”

At the entrance, Ye Qing stopped in his tracks and stared at the old shopkeeper who had added a few wrinkles and white hair because of the lack of business for a moment. Guilt and anger began welling in his heart.

He felt guilt because it was a fact that he was at the center of the incident that cost many innocent lives.

And he felt angry because of the unfeeling actions of the jianghu people and the mastermind behind it all.

A few days ago, after the fact that he was baiting his attackers into suiciding themselves into him was exposed, the jianghu warriors were humiliated and angry as a matter of course. They swore they would take revenge against him. They conveniently forgot the fact that they were the ones who attacked him in the first place.

Not only that, they had completely changed their method of attack as well. Before this, they were careful not to cause any harm to their surroundings. But now? They were still cautious, but they were slowly but surely getting bolder and bolder in their attempt. They no longer cared to minimize casualties or property damage. In fact, they actively used the lives of others to threaten him.

If Luo Shui was under control despite the flood of jianghu warriors who entered Luo Shui before, now it was under siege by chaos and disorder. Countless people’s lives were affected, and most of them resented him and him alone.

It was laughable and sorrowful how quickly he went from the hero of Luo Shui to the most hated person in the commandery.

Could Ye Qing fault them for their resentment? Of course not. It was a fact that he was the reason they had lost their homes and become separated from their friends and family, sometimes forever.

If there was anyone who was deserving of his hate, it was those unscrupulous jianghu warriors and the mastermind behind all this, Wen Zilai.

The only other person who knew about his plan was Tang Shi, and there was no reason for Tang Shi to screw himself over.

Therefore, Wen Zilai, the Deceitful Scholar, the bastard who had been watching this whole thing play out from outside the chess board, was the only one who had the means and the motive to pull this off.

Sure, he had no proof. It was all instinct. But he was sure it was Wen Zilai, and no one could change his mind.

“Huh? Lord Ye! Are you here for a drink? Come in, come in. I just opened a few jars of old wine a few days ago. Do come in and enjoy our brew if you’re free.”

It was at this moment the old shopkeeper spotted Ye Qing. He didn't hesitate to walk up to him and welcome him just as warmly and sincerely as ever.

Ye Qing saluted the shopkeeper and politely turned him down. "I would love to, but I still have business at the Pacification Bureau. Perhaps another day."

The old shopkeeper replied, "In that case, I shan't keep you. But please, don't hesitate to pay us a visit if you're free, or if you're dying for a drink."

"My restaurant and wine will always be open for you, Lord Ye."

Ye Qing saluted him again. "Thank you. It's a promise."

The old shopkeeper smiled brightly. "Indeed, it is a promise."

"And Lord Ye? We don't resent nor hate you. Truly."

"I will remember. See you some time."

Ye Qing turned away and took a moment to look at the sky. It was especially bright, clear, and sunny today—just like his feelings.

This incident started because of me. It will end with me not just for those I care about, but also those who care about me.

#### Chapter 242: Echoes of Agreement

Lin Yuhuai stepped into Gu Suitang's room and reported, "Chief, the Flying Dragon Officer Lin Zhao, the Chief Enforcer Ding Bumian, the Administrative Division[1] Right Minister Song Yushu, the Chief Constable Li Lang, the Left Guard Captain of the Black Feather Guards Pang Kun, the Little Commander Xue Shiwu, the Deputy Head of Blood Shadow Palace Jiang Huanjian, and the second patriarch of the Bai Clan Bai Xihu are requesting a meeting."

"Have they finally reached their limits?" Gu Suitang set down his file with a sneer.

Lin Yuhuai said worriedly, "I don't think they come bearing good news, chief."

"Of course not. They wouldn't be here if it's good news."

Gu Suitang smirked and placed his legs on top of his table. He then said lazily, "Bring them in."

Lin Yuhuai left to carry out his order. A moment later, he returned with the eight guests in tow.

"We greet you, Chief Gu," The eight guests saluted Gu Suitang after they came in.

Gu Suitang asked in an uncaring voice, "Why have you come to see me?"

The Left Guard Captain of the Black Feather Guards, Pang Kun was a hot-tempered man about 1.6 meters tall. When he saw how rude Gu Suitang was acting—forget inviting them to take a seat or serving them tea, the guy even put his legs on the table—he said angrily, "You know why we're here. We're here to talk about Ye Qing."

Gu Suitang smiled. "Okay. What's up with him?"

Pang Kun scoffed, "Don't pretend you don't know what we're talking about! One way or another, you will give us a proper answer today!"

Gu Suitang repeated, “No seriously, what’s up with him? Did he raid your food or burn your house or something?”

Pang Kun was just about to blow his top when the Administrative Division Right Minister, Song Yushu took one step forward and stopped Pang Kun from talking. He then saluted Gu Suitang and said, “I’ll be frank, Chief Gu. Luo Shui has been turned upside down in the past few weeks or so because of the incident regarding Ye Qing. Much damage has been incurred, and the people are both terrified and disturbed. At this rate, the consequences would be severe to say the least.”

“Constable Li, would you please report everything that has happened to Chief Gu?”

“As you command,” Li Lang replied reluctantly. Frankly, he didn’t want to come here at all. When the people up top were politicking, those beneath them were usually the ones who suffered the consequences. However, Song Yushu was his boss, and the Administrative Division Right Minister was responsible for regulating behavior and enforcing order in Luo Shui. He couldn’t get out of the position he was put in even if he wanted to.

“On May 3rd, between 7 to 7.30 am, the two siblings, “Ghost Sword” Han Ping and “Soul Saber” Han Ling attacked Ye Qing at Pingan Alley, destroying six civilian residences and three restaurants, injuring fifteen and killing three.”

“On May 4th, between 4 to 4.30 am, the twelve leaders of the Blue Wolf Bandits attacked Ye Qing at Changning Boat, injuring thirty six and killing ten. The property damage is innumerable.”

“On May 5th, between 5.30 to 6 am, the four siblings collectively known as “Death Upon Sight” controlled fifty three civilians using the Spider of Yearning to threaten Ye Qing, seriously injuring seventeen and killing thirty six.”

“On the same day, between 11 to 11.30 am—”

“Enough!” Gu Suitang cut off Li Lang’s report. Not only did he already know this, the Pacification Bureau’s report was far more detailed than the administrative division’s. “These jianghu bastards publicly attacked an imperial official and injured the people. They deserve to die. Why are you wasting your time here instead of apprehending the suspects?”

Li Lang replied awkwardly, “Er... Lord Ye has already killed them all.”

Gu Suitang’s tone turned light and provocative, “I see now! Are you here to thank us for doing your jobs?”

“Like hell we are!” Song Yushu suppressed his anger and said in an even tone, “It’s true that these jianghu warriors broke the law, Chief Gu, but they wouldn’t have done it if Ye Qing hadn’t set up a trap for them. At the very least, they wouldn’t have taken it this far with little regard for collateral damage.”

“That is why Ye Qing is the culprit behind it all.”

Gu Suitang side-eyed Song Yushu imperiously. “Excuse me? Are you kidding me right now?”

“So it’s fine that those jianghu warriors use every dirty trick in the book to kill Ye Qing, but Ye Qing isn’t allowed to lay a trap for his would-be murderers? What kind of logic is that?”

“Also, the true culprit here is the Way of Taiping. They’re the ones who put a bounty on Ye Qing’s head and caused every idiot and their mothers to go after him. If you really want to solve this problem once and for all, you should go and destroy the Way of Taiping!”

“You...” Song Yushu couldn’t say a thing. If I’m strong enough to destroy the Way of Taiping, I would be the next emperor of Chu already!

“You guys do realize that Ye Qing is the one who ruined the Way of Taiping’s plans and saved Luo Shui from destruction, right? That he’s the one who saved your lives? It hasn’t even been a month since that day, and now you’ve all come together to sell him out? Have you fed your conscience to the dogs?”

Gu Suitang started firing spittle at their faces. “A man without a conscience is no different from a Stranger! Is your position really so important to you that you would sacrifice a hero who saved your life, you fucking ingrate?”

“Like I care about my position! I’m doing this for the people of Luo Shui!” Song Yushu argued. “It is true that Ye Qing saved Luo Shui, but it is also true that his presence is causing havoc and ruining people’s lives at this very moment! If we don’t find a solution soon, if the unrest escalates into violent riots, then you and I will be responsible for countless more deaths!”

“Well, Right Minister Song claims he’s doing this for the people of Luo Shui, and to be fair, it is his job to keep the order, his incompetence notwithstanding. But what about the rest of you? Pang Kun, Jiang Huanjian, Bai Xinhui? You’re not about to feed me the same bullshit, are you?”

Xue Shiwu took a step forward and spoke up arrogantly, “Of course we’re doing this for the people of Luo Shui. I—”

Gu Suitang roared, “I wasn’t talking to you! Who the fuck do you think you are to interrupt me?”

“You...” Xue Shiwu turned beet red and pointed a finger at Gu Suitang. He was furious, but he ultimately didn’t dare to say anything.

“You what? Keep pointing that finger at me, and I promise I’ll break all your fingers!” Gu Suitang said coldly, “Even your dad Xue Beikun wouldn’t dare to point his finger at me. Seriously, who the fuck do you think you are?”



“I dare you to lay a finger on the Little Commander, Gu Suitang!”

Pang Kun blocked in front of Xue Shiwu and glared at the deputy chief like a tiger.

“Do you really think I won’t, barbarian?” Gu Suitang sneered and rose to his feet. He looked thin and weather-beaten, but everyone’s heart suddenly skipped a beat as if they were staring at an insurmountable mountain.

“Enough.” Song Yushu waved his sleeve and played the mediator. “Captain Pang, we are here to solve the problem, not cause even more problems for ourselves.”

Jiang Huanjian and Bai Xihu were also persuading Pang Kun to back down.

“Okay then! I’ll talk about Ye Qing!” Pang Kun pushed his companions away. “As soldiers, it is our natural duty to defend our nation and protect the people. Since Ye Qing’s presence is disrupting Luo Shui and costing innocent lives right now, it is my responsibility to stop this from continuing any further than it already has.”

“Besides that, dozens of Black Feather Guards have died because they were dragged into Ye Qing’s mess. As the Left Guard Captain, I must have an answer for their deaths.”

Gu Suitang taunted, “Oh my heavens, since when did the barbarian become literate? You must have practiced really hard to say all that without missing a word!”

“What about you, Bai Xihu?”

Bai Xihu was a short and plump middle-aged man who wore a smile that seemed to be permanently affixed to his face. “I’m a businessman, so I’m just going to speak from my perspective as a businessman. Much of our properties were damaged by Ye Qing’s battles with the jianghu warriors.”

“But of course, this is just a small loss. The real loss comes from the fact that countless people are afraid to leave their houses because of Lord Ye. Already, the decreased traffic is costing us a lot of money. At this rate, the Bai Clan may not be able to recoup our losses. That is why we wish for this matter to be settled as quickly as possible.”

The Bai Clan and the Luo Clan were both major clans in Luo Shui, but unlike the Luo Clan, the Bai Clan’s main businesses were restaurants, gambling dens, brothels and so on. It was a fact that the decrease in traffic would damage their businesses greatly.

Gu Suitang didn’t give him an answer. He turned to Jiang Huanjian and asked, “What about you?”

The Deputy Head of Blood Shadow Palace was a thin but hale man who was dressed like a Taoist. He carried a sword behind his back and looked very serious.

Jiang Huanjian saluted Gu Suitang and answered, “Chief Gu, our reasoning is more or less the same as Bai Xihu’s. Blood Shadow Palace can’t operate on empty stomachs, and Lord Ye’s presence has damaged much of our businesses and properties. That is why I have no choice but to come here.”

“Very well.” Gu Suitang and swept his gaze across the crowd. “What would you have me do then? Do you want me to kill Ye Qing? Surrender him to those jianghu warriors? Or give him to you?”

“That would be going too far, Lord Gu. Of course we couldn’t surrender him to those jianghu people, much less kill him.” Song Yushu shook his head. “Ye Qing had made a major contribution to Luo Shui and Chu after all.”

“And here I thought you’ve forgotten all about it,” said Gu Suitang with a sneer, but everyone pretended not to notice this remark.

Xue Shiwu gave Pang Kun’s sleeve a tug, and the Left Guard Captain spoke up, “If we can’t kill him or surrender him to those jianghu warriors, then why don’t we exile him from Luo Shui? Those jianghu warriors will leave if he leaves, and peace will return to Luo Shui.”

Song Yushu disagreed. “That’s unacceptable. If we exile Ye Qing from Luo Shui, then that means we’re submitting to those heartless bastards. This would damage both the Pacification Bureau and Chu’s name. Unacceptable.”

Pang Kun said impatiently, “What the hell can we do then?”

Song Yushu fell silent for a moment. “Your plan isn’t good, but there is one thing you’re right about. If Ye Qing leaves Luo Shui, then our troubles would leave with him, and Luo Shui would regain its peace.”

“How about this: We’ll send Ye Qing away by transferring him to another location or sending him on a mission. We’ll keep this a secret for a few days before making an announcement. When the jianghu warriors realized that Ye Qing truly had left Luo Shui, they would have no choice but to leave the place.”

“This way, we’ll be able to protect Ye Qing, defend the imperial court’s honor, and return peace to Luo Shui. It would be killing three birds with one stone.”

“What do you think, Chief Gu?”

Instead of answering him immediately, Gu Suitang looked at the others. “What does the rest of you think?”

“It sounds like a great plan,” Bai Xihu nodded.

“It’s acceptable,” Jiang Huanjian agreed.

“I don’t have an opinion,” Pang Kun answered without thinking.

Xue Shiwu frowned but didn’t say anything. He was disappointed that he couldn’t push for Ye Qing’s death, but the final outcome was acceptable. His objective would be achieved so long as Ye Qing was out of Luo Shui.

“What about you two?” Gu Suitang looked at the Flying Dragon Officer Lin Zhao and the Chief Enforcer Ding Bumian. The two men hadn’t said a word since entering the

room. "You're members of the Pacification Bureau. Do you agree with their suggestion?"

The two men exchanged a glance with each other, and Ding Bumian started, "Ye Qing is a member of the Pacification Bureau, and his service could only be described as exemplary. Logically, we have a responsibility to keep him safe. We—"

"Cut the crap and get to the point already!" Gu Suitang interrupted rudely.

Ding Bumian took a moment to swallow his unsaid words back into his stomach. Then, he said, "However, it is a fact that Ye Qing's presence had cost many Pacification Sentinels' lives, and it's gotten to the point where we can't even carry out some of our daily activities."

"So yes, we agree with Lord Song's suggestion."

Chapter 243: I Will Be The One To End This

"Since you're all in agreement," Gu Suitang's mouth slowly curled into a smirk as swept his gaze across the crowd, "I disagree."

"That's gr—wait, what?"

Song Shuyu looked flabbergasted. He wasn't expecting Gu Suitang to disagree at all. "You... disagree? Why, Chief Gu?"

Pang Kun straight up cursed the deputy chief, "The hell do you mean by that, Gu Suitang?"

Gu Suitang glared at them. "It means that everything you say is bullshit to my ears. It means that I do not and will not compromise in any way."

"But why?" Song Shuyu blurted in confusion and disbelief.

"Why, you ask? Because Ye Qing is a member of the Pacification Bureau, because he had served Chu well, and because he had bled for the people. Also, I'm the one who should be asking why you lot are shitting your pants just because some irredeemable fucks decide to escalate things, so much so that you're going to sacrifice your fucking savior to appease them. You might be shameless, but neither the Pacification Bureau nor I, Gu Suitang can stand for such dishonor!"

"Slander, Gu Suitang! When have we been afraid of opposition and resistance? We are doing this for the stability of Luo Shui and the safety of the people!" Song Yushu argued.

Gu Suitang snorted out loud. "For the people? Cut the bullcrap already. You're growing pimples on your face, but instead of trying to treat it, your plan is to cover it up with powder. But even if you dump a kilogram worth of powder on your face, it won't change the fact you're now a pockface because you didn't bother to cure the disease. It's like trying to scratch an itch on your foot without taking off your boots—completely useless."

“Do you want to hear the real solution? The real solution is to mobilize the Black Feathers Guard, search every household, and exterminate every rat that’s hiding in Luo Shui to the last! They’re already causing trouble, so we might as well destroy them right here and now. It’s such a simple thing to solve, and yet you just had to find the most convoluted way to go about it. Do you take off your pants before you fart as well?”

“Solving murder with murder is not the right way. Stopping violence with violence is only going to make things worse and earn us the ire of the entire jianghu!” Song Yushu argued.

Gu Suitang snorted again. “It will only make things worse? Bullshit! That’s because you didn’t kill enough of them! Back then, our founder mustered an army of millions and crushed anyone and anything who dared to stand in his way. Countless sects were slaughtered, and rivers of blood were bled. Did any sect dare to challenge his rule? Did any jianghu warrior so much as fart in the wrong direction?”

“Besides that, you do understand the saying, ‘indulging your enemy will only bring trouble’, right? If you bow your head to your enemies today, they will stick a finger up your nose the next day and piss on your head the day after! Forget the imperial court’s dignity, we would have lost everything when all is said and done!”

“There is only one way to handle this, and that is to kill them until they’re afraid; kill them until they etch the consequences of antagonizing Chu into their souls. Only then will glory belong to Chu!”

Song Yushu frowned deeply. “Chief Gu, the benevolent should be filled with love. It is precisely because this country was founded atop a mountain of corpses that we must defend it with benevolence. What difference is there between you and those heartless jianghu warriors if you do this?”

“At the very least, I wouldn’t be a coward who pisses my pants every time someone threatens me!”

Gu Suitang scoffed. “At the very least, I wouldn’t be a scholar who pissed away all of Chu’s glory and honor with your so-called ‘benevolence’!”

“How dare you slander the Way of our sages, Gu Suitang?” Song Yushu grew angry for the first time since he entered this room. “You are a barbarian who can’t be negotiated with!”

Gu Suitang laughed. “That’s right. I am a barbarian. When I’m angry, blood is the only thing that can appease my rage! It does come with some caveats, I admit, but at least I have bigger balls than you lot. Also, you think I can’t be negotiated with? I don’t even want to talk to you scaredy cats.”

“Anyway, if anyone lays a finger on Ye Qing, they’re dead. It’s that simple. Now get out of my sight!”

“You uncultured barbarian! You make no sense whatsoever!” Song Yushu yelled in anger. Pang Kun, Jiang Huanjian, Bai Xinhui and everyone else looked angry as well.

“Oh? Is that a threat I hear? I am perfectly happy to send you out on a stretcher if that is your wish.”

Gu Suitang sneered. “The Pacification Bureau doesn’t welcome you. Get the hint and get the fuck out already.”

“You would threaten us, Gu Suitang?” Pang Kun roared and released his killing intent. It was thick and unsettling as expected of a captain who had killed his way to the top.

“Why wouldn’t I?”

But as soon as Pang Kun finished his sentence, Gu Suitang abruptly appeared in front of him and punched him right in the chest. The captain let out a muffled groan as he crashed through the door and landed in the courtyard.

“You—” Pang Kun had just opened his mouth when his senses caught up to him. Every bone in his body felt broken, and his vigor was churning chaotically like a storm. He spat out a mouthful of blood.

Pang Kun was angry, but he was even more shocked and afraid. Not only was he a late-stage Spirit Purifier, his cultivation was built atop a mountain of corpses. He was far, far stronger than those useless Spirit Purifiers who had come into their power through cultivation pills. However, he couldn’t even take a single hit from Gu Suitang.

“You dare attack a fellow colleague, Gu Suitang?!” Song Yushu and the others hurriedly rushed out of the building. They sighed in relief only after they confirmed that Pang Kun was fine, relatively speaking.

Gu Suitang crossed his arms and said coldly, “What did you think I just did? Waste any more of my time, and I will punch out every tooth in your mouth. Get. Lost!”

“This is how it’s going to be, Gu Suitang? Very well! I will be reporting this to the governor! We will see what he has to say about this!” Song Yushu turned around and left after that.

“I won’t forget this, Gu Suitang. Let’s go!” Pang Kun also took his leave after shooting Gu Suitang a fierce glare.

Jiang Huanjian and Bai Xinhui were gone as well.

After everyone was gone, the only two people who were left, Lin Zhao and Ding Bumian, looked at Gu Suitang and tried to explain, “Chief, we’re only doing this for the Pacification Bureau—”

Song Yushu and the others could just pat their bums and leave, but they could not.

“I don’t want to see you two either. Out!” Gu Suitang interrupted them.

Knowing that Gu Suitang was pissed right now, they didn't say anything and took their leave just like that.

Outside, Song Yushu's group had just exited the Pacification Bureau's gates when they saw an unexpected face. "Ye Qing?"

Ye Qing stared at the ashen-faced group and the bleeding Pang Kun with a strange expression. Did these guys butt heads with the deputy chief or something?

"Do you know your crimes, Ye Qing?" Song Yushu snapped as soon as he realized that another opportunity had presented itself.

"What crimes?" Ye Qing had never met Song Yushu before, but he had read his profile. He even knew that he was good friends with Li Yuechun.

Song Yushu immediately launched into a righteous tirade, "You laid a trap for the jianghu warriors and pissed them off. That is why they are damaging properties, killing innocents, and generally making life difficult for everyone in Luo Shui. How can you not know about your crimes?"

"I see. What are you going to do about it, Lord Song? Are you going to capture me or kill me?" Ye Qing crossed his arms smilingly.

Song Yushu choked a little, but he quickly recovered himself and said, "That is going too far. Why would we ever do such a thing?"

"However, it is a fact that the people of Luo Shui will continue to suffer so long as this matter isn't resolved."

"In my opinion, you should leave Luo Shui as soon as possible. This farce would resolve itself once you're out of Luo Shui."

"Oh?" Ye Qing said thoughtfully, "That's not a bad idea. If I'm gone, my troubles would leave with me. Luo Shui would be safe, and the rest of you can rest easy as well."

"Will you leave Luo Shui then?" Song Yushu and the others exclaimed in pleasant surprise.

But Ye Qing cocked his head to one side and chuckled. "It's not a bad idea, but why should I agree to it?"

"Your lives are valuable, the people's lives are valuable, but what about my life? Are you saying that my life deserves to be trampled?"

Xue Shiwu sneered. "You're the one who brought this on yourself. Shouldn't you suffer the consequences of your own actions?"

"Hah! Someone conveniently forgot the fact that my action is the only reason you're still standing and breathing right now!"

Ye Qing clicked his tongue tauntingly, "I already knew this, but some people only look like humans on the outside. In that case, why not just surrender to your instincts and act like the dogs you are?"

“The fuck you just said!?” Xue Shiwu looked furious.

“I’m saying...” Ye Qing smiled. “That the blame is not mine to bear, and I don’t care to listen to the barks of dogs.”

“Goodbye!”

Ye Qing stepped past them and entered the Pacification Bureau just like that.

“Barbaric! How barbaric!”

Song Yushu flew into a rage, but his expletives were seriously lacking in variety. He could only repeat the same words over and over again. They weren’t expecting Ye Qing’s response to be more or less the same as Gu Suitang’s.

“What do we do, Lord Song, Captain Pang?” Bai Xinhui looked to Song Yushu and Pang Kun for directions.

Pang Kun answered, “I’m going to report this to the commander.”

Song Yushu added in an equally irritated voice. “Me too. I’m going to ask the governor to step in and have a deep discussion with Chief Fang. Ye Qing’s matter must be taken care of as soon as possible. He must leave in order to return peace and order to Luo Shui.”

.....

Gu Suitang asked smilingly after Ye Qing entered his room and told him what happened at the entrance, “You ran into them on your way in? What did they say?”

Ye Qing shrugged. “They told me to leave Luo Shui.”

“Yes, that was what they ‘suggested’ to me as well. Aren’t you curious what my answer is?”

Ye Qing smiled. “You turned them down, of course. Their faces wouldn’t be as colorful as they were, and they wouldn’t have stopped me to give me their spiel or try to guilt me into leaving Luo Shui otherwise.”

Gu Suitang rebuked him good-naturedly, “Smartass. Don’t worry. So long as you’re still in the Pacification Bureau, they will never be able to oust you. Plus, they aren’t just targeting you. They’re targeting my Pacification Bureau as well.”

“Thank you, chief.” Ye Qing saluted Gu Suitang before adding, “But I would like to handle this myself.”

“Oh? And how are you going to handle this?” Gu Suitang asked curiously.

“Easy. I’m just going to kill them all.” Ye Qing bared his teeth. “I’m going to kill them until they’re thoroughly terrified of me, until the mere mention of my name is give them nightmares. The problem will resolve itself then, don’t you agree?”

Gu Suitang looked surprised for a second. Then, he burst out laughing and slapped Ye Qing across the shoulder repeatedly, “Well said, well said! That is how the Pacification Bureau became what it is

today, and that is how its members should carry themselves! Compromise? Understanding? It's all bullshit! It's our way or nothing!"

"Do whatever you must to solve this. Put a hole in the sky of Luo Shui if you have to. No matter what happens, I will always be there to defend you."

"You don't need to hit me that hard." Ye Qing rubbed his numb shoulder but felt much better than he was before. "Thank you, chief. I would like your full cooperation then."

"No problem!" Gu Suitang withdrew his hand and asked, "Now tell me: what is your plan?"

Gu Suitang frowned and fell into thought for a moment after listening to Ye Qing's plan. He asked, "Are you sure you want to do this? Don't you think it's too dangerous?"

Ye Qing looked at Gu Suitang calmly yet unwaveringly. "This matter started because of me. It's only natural that I should be the one to end it. I don't want those who don't resent me for what I've brought to shoulder any more burden than they already have."

"Very well. You may do as you please." Gu Suitang chuckled. "Don't worry, I'll make sure you'll live to tell the tale at least."

Ye Qing: "... That... doesn't sound like a blessing.

"I'm counting on you, chief. I'll see you later."

Ye Qing saluted Gu Suitang and left. The sun was strong, bright, and shining through the entrance. It cast a long, long shadow that promised woe to all who would dare to wrong him.

"Chief, this is getting a little out of hand, don't you think?"

After Ye Qing was gone, Lin Yuhuai stepped out of the back hall and asked.

"That's precisely what I was hoping for."

Gu Suitang was smiling, but the look in his eyes could only be described as chilly. "If this matter hadn't gotten as ridiculous as it was, the clowns wouldn't have shown themselves, would they?"

"If it wasn't for this matter, I wouldn't know that there are traitors in the Pacification Bureau, I wouldn't know that there are so many officials who are colluding with outsiders, and I wouldn't know that there are so many people in Luo Shui who are displeased with us."

"The Great Levee is ruined by an ant nest. This would be a good opportunity to exterminate these roots and leeches."

"Plus, the Pacification Bureau is a blade that slays all demons and Strangers, upholds the emperor's authority, and protects the people. We are no one these people could trifle with."



“It is time we test our blade against those who do us wrong.”

Chapter 244: I Will Face Them Alone

“Something big is happening! We need to go now!”

“What? What is it?”

“You haven’t heard? Lord Ye is challenging everyone who wishes to kill him to face him in an arena! He promises that the Pacification Bureau will not pass judgment on anyone who manages to kill him fair and square in the arena!”

“You’re not kidding me, are you? Would Lord Ye really risk his life like this?”

“It’s one hundred percent real! It’s confirmed by Deputy Chief Gu himself!”

“Huh. Lord Ye is a real man after all. Well, what are you waiting for? Lead the way!”

“This way!”

.....

The commandery hall, the Hall of Thought.

“What on earth is Ye Qing planning, and what on earth is Gu Suitang thinking? Why would he allow Ye Qing to pull a stunt like this?”

Song Yushu voiced his doubts before looking to the commandery governor of Luo Shui, Jiang Muiyang for instructions. “Should I round up the men and stop this, my lord?”

Jiang Muiyang was a scholarly man in his forties. He had a thin figure, a long beard, and a gentle temperament. One might say that he lacked the sharp, intimidating presence that most leaders would have.

Jiang Muiyang set down his book and looked at Song Yushu. “Yushu, an official must never allow their personal grievances to affect their work.”

“The Pacification Bureau and the administrative division are two sides of the same coin. If they are united, then they are strong. If not, then they are weak. What you did yesterday was impulsive to say the least.”

Song Yushu hurriedly defended himself, “My lord, I’m doing this for the people of Luo Shui!”

Jiang Muiyang’s expression was still gentle, but his voice was unquestionably stern. “Yushu, I know that you are good friends with Yuechun, and I know that you have connections to Xue Beikun. However, they shouldn’t be a concern in your duties. If you allow your private interests to get in the way of your public duties or worse, use your position to fulfill your private interests, then you may be executed for your crimes.”

Song Yushu broke out in a cold sweat when he heard this. “My lord... I...”

“You don’t need me to tell you if what I say is true.” Jiang MUYANG cut him off before he could explain further. “The administrative division will not be doing anything regarding this matter. We will simply wait and see what happens.”

“As you command, my lord.”

Defiance and fear waged a war in Song YUSHU’s heart, and in the end, fear won out.

.....

At the main camp of the Black Feather Guards, Pang Kun asked a tall, muscular man clad in black armor who exuded a bloody aura, “Commander, what do you think those two fuckers are plotting?”

The man was Xue Beikun, Commander of the ten thousand Black Feathers Guards of Luo Shui. Xue Beikun was currently sitting on the floor and eating a rare leg of lamb. His mouth was clearly tinged with blood.

Xue Beikun took a bite from the leg of lamb and chewed it slowly, blood trickling down his lips and creating a bloody stench. However, Xue Beikun didn’t seem to notice it. He looked like he was having the time of his life.

Xue Beikun answered after he finally swallowed the chunk of meat, “Who cares what they’re plotting? All we need to do is to keep applying pressure on the Pacification Bureau.”

“But it’s not going to work, is it?” Pang Kun asked, puzzled.

Xue Beikun answered, “That’s not the goal. The goal is to check out the Pacification Bureau’s stance on this matter and take them down a peg if possible. If the Pacification Bureau compromised, then they would be the laughingstock of Luo Shui. If not, then they would be painting a bullseye on their back.”

“No matter what happens, the Pacification Bureau will be the loser of this battle.”

“Should we do anything with this arena nonsense?” Pang Kun asked.

Xue Beikun answered, “No. It doesn’t matter what they do. It is as futile as lighting a lamp for a blind man.”

“See, if the jianghu warriors managed to kill Ye Qing, then the Pacification Bureau’s reputation would suffer a huge blow. If not, nothing would change. Ye Qing and the Pacification Bureau would still be the object of Luo Shui’s ire.”

“So we don’t need to do anything. We simply need to wait for the results.”

“As you command, commander,” Pang Kun replied firmly.

“Oh right, I want you to bring a message to Wang Luori and Wen Zilai. I don’t mind cooperating with them, but if they use my idiot son for their schemes again, then I will make them regret everything.”

“Also, execute the traitors who collude with outsiders by chariot splitting. The Black Feather Guards have no need for traitors.”

“You may leave. I would like to enjoy my food in peace.”

By the time Pang Kun left the tent, his back was already drenched in cold sweat.

.....

“Well? What are you waiting for? I’m right here.”

At the center of Luo Shui river, there was a Luo Shui Arena where famous songstresses, performers and courtesans of the Eighteen Boats performed for all to admire. But today, it had become the place where Ye Qing would soon challenge the warriors of jianghu.

Ye Qing was crossing his arms and staring at the massive crowd surrounding both sides of the river and the bridges with a disdainful smile on his face. “I thought you guys were going to kill me? Well, I’m here now. You may attack me to your heart’s content.”

“Why isn’t anyone showing up? Oh, I know! It’s because you guys are cowards who can only defeat an opponent who’s weaker than you, or a prey who’s caught in your trap. You’ve never won a fair fight, and you never will.”

“Trash! Useless! Garbage! You should go home and suck on your mother’s tits if you’re this scared!”

Suddenly, a monotonous, listless voice cut through the air. “Hmph! Do you think we’re stupid? We all know that this is a trap you and Gu Suitang had set up to catch us all in one fell swoop!”

Ye Qing looked. The speaker was an ordinary old man in his sixties. Judging from his blank eyes and monotonous speech, it was obvious that he was being controlled by someone.

Ye Qing pulsed his spirit. He quickly discovered the jianghu warrior who was controlling the old man. He was hiding amidst the crowd and holding a doll. Every time the doll made a move, the old man would move as well.

“Relax. I, Gu Suitang, am beneath such tactics, and I would never put the Pacification Bureau’s reputation at risk.”

Gu Suitang leaped onto the arena and swept his stern gaze across the area. “As long as you don’t harm innocents, and as long as you keep to the jianghu code and fight fair and square, you have my word that the Pacification Bureau would not interfere.”

“If you are strong enough to kill Ye Qing in a one on one, then you deserve the kill. I am not so petty that I would take revenge against the warrior who defeated him fair and square.”

Gu Suitang left after saying that.

After Gu Suitang was gone, Ye Qing swept his gaze across the crowd, “So? Do you believe me now? Unlike you people, the Pacification Bureau does not go back on their promises or break their code whenever it suits them.”

Ye Qing waited a while longer, but still no one stepped forth to challenge him. So, he started taunting, “Still nothing? I’m literally delivering myself to your doorsteps, and still no one would

accept my challenge? See, I knew you guys are chickenshits. Even my grandma can beat you up in a fight!”

“You know what? You should all change your names to Mouse. In fact, you don’t deserve human names. Just call yourself Dog Balls or Cucked Dogs or something. You guys act like mice and dogs anyway, so why not?”

“Cease your arrogance, Ye Qing! I’ll face you!”

A short, thin, and gloomy-looking man finally couldn’t handle the insults any longer—or maybe he just wanted to be the first—and leaped onto the arena. “I am the “Five Tigers Saber” Peng San, a middle-stage Astral Refiner. Show me what you’re made of!”

Ye Qing side-eyed him imperiously. “Spare me the introductions. I have no interest in a dead man’s name.”

“You will regret your boast!” Peng San snarled in anger. But as soon as he finished, Ye Qing’s silhouette abruptly grew transparent.

“An illusion?” Peng San’s eyes widened in shock. He tried to react, his fingers had just wrapped around the hilt of his saber when his neck hurt, and his vision rapidly turned black. A moment later, he was dead.

Ye Qing withdrew his arm and kicked Peng San’s headless corpse into the river. There wasn’t a single drop of blood on his hand. He clasped his hands behind his back and snorted. “What did I say? Trash. Next!”

“My turn.”

The next moment, a huge, muscular man wielding an equally massive shield let out a might roar and leaped high up into the sky. Such was his strength that the bricks beneath his feet shattered like tofu. When he had reached the highest point, he inclined downward and fell toward Ye Qing with his shield in front of him. It looked like he was planning to squash the young man like a meteor.

“Well met!”

Ye Qing let out a bark of laughter and leaped into the air as well. He slammed his elbow into the guy’s shield like a hammer and exploded it into pieces just like that. Then, he slammed into the man and turned him into a shower of blood and gore as well.

Ye Qing landed lightly on the arena looking like he just squashed a fly. Then, he grinned at the audience and said, “Trash. Next!”

“Heavens...”

The jianghu warriors hiding amidst the crowd gasped at the outcome of the battle. Peng San was famous for his fast saber and his saber art, the Five Tigers Soul Severing Saber. He was supposed to be as fast as the wind and could cut both humans and ghosts like nothing. However, Ye Qing had killed him before he could even draw his saber.

Of course, one could argue that Ye Qing had attacked Peng San by surprise. In fact, many of them thought exactly that. The same couldn’t be said for the shieldbearer, however. The shieldbearer’s

name was Wang Dun, and he was a middle-stage Astral Refiner who was born with supernatural strength. He had crushed countless enemies with his shield and brute strength, and he was so strong that some late-stage Astral Refiners didn't dare to clash against him head on. However, Ye Qing had shattered both his shield and his body in one strike. Just how strong was the young man's body?

"Look at him showing off. He's already famous, but after today? The entire realm is going to know his name," Chu Nianjiu joked.

At the top floor of a restaurant, Chu Nianjiu, Lin Yuhuai, Wei Yueshan, Xu Banren and more were sharing the same table and observing the fight from above.

Wei Yueshan looked both impressed and envious. Most people wouldn't know the intricacies, but he was a body-tempering warrior himself. He knew exactly how powerful Ye Qing's body was. His toughness wasn't the only factor either. The way he manipulated his force during the clash was so exquisite that most warriors wouldn't be able to replicate it.

"Xuanlang, Runyu, Feiyu, you came?"

It was at this moment a couple more people joined them. Fang Xuanlang and An Runyu were none other than the two warriors who had assisted Ye Qing during the zombie outbreak incident, and Luo Feiliu was one of the Four Gentlemen of Luo Shui.

"How can we miss a show like this?" The first thing Fang Xuanlang did after reaching the table was to grab Chu Nianjiu's wine jar and take a deep gulp. "Delicious!"

An Runyu greeted everyone cordially before voicing his worry, "I've only met Brother Ye once, but he didn't give off the impression of a reckless fellow. Why would he take such a terrible risk this time?"

Lin Yuhuai smiled, but didn't give him an answer. Chu Nianjiu snatched his wine back from Fang Xuanlang and snorted. "What can a bunch of mice do to Joyless? They could attack him together, and he can still defeat them all with one punch."

"Now that's an exaggeration if I ever heard one."

Chu Nianjiu had just finished talking when a cold hmph came from the stairs. The next moment, Xue Shiwu, Wen Zilai and Xu Wushang<sup>[1]</sup> stepped into view.

"What are you doing here, Xue Shiwu?" Chu Nianjiu said in a displeased voice as he set down his jar.

"Is this restaurant yours? No? Then why can't I be here?" Xue Shiwu sneered. "Also, this is the perfect spot to enjoy the death of a certain idiot."

"Haha! You can't defeat Ye Qing, so you're hoping that someone would do your dirty work for you? Yes, that's exactly what I expect from a chickenshit like you," Chu Nianjiu taunted. "Your pipedream is going to remain a pipedream though. I could've slain these mice by myself, much less Joyless!"

“We will see.” Xue Shi hmphe<sup>d</sup> again before taking a seat on the opposite table. Wen Zilai greeted the group cordially, but their response was indifferent at best and hostile at worst. He paid it no heed and sat down beside Xue Shiwu.

“By the way, where is Brother Chen?” Fang Xuanlang asked.

“How would I know? I’m not his nanny.” Chu Nianjiu shrugged while leaning against his armrest. “That guy is obsessed with training, so I bet he’s practicing his sword somewhere. I also heard that he’s still investigating his younger brother’s<sup>[2]</sup> death.”

“Let’s not get into details though. Look! Another guy is about to commit suicide.”

Chapter 245: Attack Me Together

Tap, tap...

A blind old man carrying a bamboo stick slowly stepped out of the crowd. As he tapped the ground, the crowd automatically opened up a path as if the sound of his taps was magical.

Tap, tap...

The old man walked very, very slowly as if his legs were damaged, but there was some sort of special rhythm behind his footsteps and taps. It drew one’s attention almost like music.

“Blind Old Man? I wasn’t expecting to see him here.” A hint of seriousness entered Chu Nianjiu’s lazy expression when he saw him.

“Blind Old Man? Is he famous?” Wei Yueshan asked.

Lin Yuhuai answered, “Very much, and he deserves his reputation. The Blind Old Man normally operates around Hejian and Guangping<sup>[1]</sup>, and he’s a famous killer who would kill anyone for money. Not much is known about his killing methods, only that his victims’ foreheads normally have a red dot on them. That is why he is also known as the ‘Red Dot’. He shouldn’t be here, but I guess greed is a powerful motivator.”

“Is he really that strong?” Wei Yueshan muttered to himself before looking at the old man. After the Astral Refiner had reached the shoreline, he surprised everyone by stepping on the water and continuing forward as if he was walking on solid ground.

When Blind Old Man tapped the water with his bamboo stick, eighteen water swords suddenly appeared in the air and shot toward Ye Qing. Ye Qing easily swatted them out of existence with a casual wave of his hand, but Blind Old Man ignored the failure and continued what he was doing. First it was eighteen swords, then it was thirty six. Seventy two swords followed afterward, and then it was one hundred and eight.

“The Thousand Change Gui Water Qi and the Water Manipulation True Sutra,” Fang Xuanlang commented after seeing this.

The Thousand Change Gui Water Qi was one of the seventy two average grade astral qis and a type of Gui Water. As its name might suggest, it could be transformed into anything.

The Water Manipulation True Sutra was the Water Manipulation Palace's ultimate art. It could control water like one's limbs and fingers.

"Is Blind Old Man a disciple of the Water Manipulation Palace?"

"I don't know." An Runyu shook his head.

In the arena, Ye Qing either slapped or swept the endless rain of water swords with his sleeves. Not a single one managed to get within one meter of him before they were evaporated by his Burning Wind Qi. The shockwaves of his defense even caused a wave to swell in Blind Old Man's direction.

Still, Blind Old Man paid it no heed. He stepped over the wave like it was nothing more but an obstacle. When he finally set foot on the arena, Blind Old Man abruptly crossed thirty meters of distance in the blink of an eye and thrust the bamboo stick straight toward Ye Qing's forehead.

The attack was sharp and swift as lightning. The attack was simple, but it was unstoppable. It sliced through the water mist and even the thick astral qi surrounding Ye Qing as easily as tofu.

Blind Old Man's greatest martial art was neither the rain of swords nor the Water Manipulation True Sutra. It was the simple thrust he had practiced countless times in his life.

A human only lived once. Just the same, one hit in the right place was all it took to take a person's life. That was why he had practiced one and only one move since he picked up the sword: the straight thrust. He didn't include any unnecessary changes or movements to the attack. There was only speed, accuracy, sharpness and ruthlessness.

"What a swift and potent attack! No wonder his victims only had a single red dot on their forehead!"

The audience gasped in shock when they saw the attack. Most of them didn't think they would be able to stop the attack from connecting, and even if they could, they would have to pay a severe price to do so.

What shocked them even more, however, was the fact that Ye Qing had stopped the bamboo stick dead in its tracks with just two fingers. It was like he was catching a strand of noodle. It refused to move forward no matter how hard Blind Old Man pushed.

Crack!

Ye Qing squeezed and crushed the bamboo stick with his fingers. The thin sword hidden within the stick also shattered into pieces.

The second the thin sword shattered, Blind Old Man immediately backed away from Ye Qing. He was moving even faster than when he suddenly charged toward Ye Qing in a sudden burst of speed. Unfortunately...

Swoosh!

He had just reached the edge of the arena when he suddenly wobbled on his feet. It was because a red dot had appeared on his forehead just like all the people he had killed until now. Even more ironic was the fact that he was killed by his own sword. Ye Qing had flicked a metal fragment at him. It was as pitiful as it was ironic.

Ye Qing sneered without even looking at Blind Old Man's corpse. "Another trash. Next!"

For a time, there was only dead silence inside and outside the Luo Shui River. After waiting for a bit and finding no more willing victims, Ye Qing engaged his taunt mode once more.

“Is that it? Is this really the extent of your strength and courage? And you shit eaters thought you could kill me like this? How disappointing!

“You know what? Fine. I give you permission to attack me many-on-one. Now come get me!”

Ye Qing crossed his arms and bent his head forty five degrees toward the sky. His expression was carefully arranged into a look of abject scorn and arrogance as well. It was super effective.

“The arrogance!”

“You are courting death, boy!”

“He thought he could look down on us just because he killed a few people?”

“You dare underestimate the warriors of jianghu? Get him, brothers and sisters!”

Maybe it was because Ye Qing’s attitude and words were too insulting, maybe Ye Qing’s permission spurred them into thinking that they stood a chance if they attacked him together, or maybe it was both. Regardless, at least a dozen jianghu warriors launched themselves toward Ye Qing from every direction.

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“The Crying Boy, Lady Pear Blossom, Growth and Wither, Ghastly Willow...”

At the restaurant, Chu Nianjiu and the others turned pale. “Has Joyless gone insane!?”

Every name he recited was a famous and powerful late-stage Astral Refiner in Tian Yong. While the rest of the group were weaker, even the weakest of them was an Astral Refiner. Forget an Astral Refiner, even a Spirit Purifier would have to get out of harm’s way.

With that in mind, what the hell was Ye Qing thinking? Did his victories get into his head, or were the attackers hired actors or something?

Lin Yuhuai, Fang Xuanlang, An Runyun and more all looked worried and puzzled.

“Hahaha! He thought he’s invincible just because he killed a few useless pieces of trash!” On the other side, Xue Shiwu let out a bark of laughter. “He overestimates his power[2]!”

Wen Zilai looked like he was smiling, but the veins popping on the back of his hand betrayed his true feelings. He wanted Ye Qing dead, but only if Wang Luori was the killer. If Ye Qing died in another person’s hands, then Wang Luori would surely punish him for it.

What the fuck is wrong with this guy? Is he really so reckless and arrogant that he couldn’t recognize the sheer folly of his actions?

Some people were happy, and some people were worried. Ye Qing himself was perfectly calm, however.



He opened his mouth and spat out Lightning Bolt. One of the attackers were immediately crushed into bits.

While Lightning Bolt was cutting through the air, Ye Qing charged toward his opponents and grabbed the head of a swordsman, crushing it like a watermelon.

That was all he managed to do before a spear, a halberd, a hook and a battle axe attacked him from four different directions.

The spear was known as the Sorrowful Spear. The wind howled mournfully as it thrust toward Ye Qing.

The halberd was known as the Joyful Halberd. When it cut through the air, it sounded like someone was laughing on top of their lungs.

The hook was known as the Parting Hook. It was shaped like a crescent, and it was both fast and unexpected. One second you were saying goodbye, and the next your head had already left your shoulders.

The battle axe was the Union Axe. The axe style was fluid and majestic.

The four attackers were the four famous brothers, Sorrow, Joy, Parting and Union. They were also quadruplets. Their cooperation was perfect because they shared a sixth sense with each other, and their combined attack cut off any possible retreat for Ye Qing.

However, Ye Qing's silhouette flickered in multiple directions as if it was splitting apart before four Ye Qings appeared behind the four brothers. A swing of the saber later, and all four brothers were beheaded just like that.

"Haha... trash!"

Ye Qing flicked his blade once before splitting into even more afterimages. They appeared up, down, left, right, behind someone, beside someone, or even above their heads. For a time, it looked like they were fighting an army of Ye Qings. One thing for certain, every time his saber flashed, someone would drop to the ground and died.

And so everyone watched in astonishment as Ye Qing cut down his attackers like they were nothing more but wheats. Luo Shui was packed with people, but now only a handful of them were still standing. The rest had collapsed on the ground or into the river, dying the bluish green waters red.

"He can't have much energy left! Let's get him together!"

Crying Boy, Lady Pear Blossom, Growth and Wither, and Ghastly Willow hadn't participated in the attack because they didn't want to appear dishonorable in public, but now? Now, there was no time to consider such things. Someone growled out the order, and Ghastly Willow attacked first by waving his willow branch and growing multiple willow trees on the arena.

The willow trees were grayish black in color, and their twisted branches looked like snarling faces. It was the Hatred-class Stranger, the Ghost Willow. When the trees dissolved into nothing, their branches and leaves were scattered all over the place.

Amidst the willow leaves, Lady Pear Blossom danced as elegantly as a celestial from the moon. The way her limbs twisted and turned with supernatural grace, her sleeves flew elegantly across the air,

and the pear blossoms clinging to her curvaceous body all combined into a potent poison that could easily suck out the soul of a weak-willed man.

“Sky Demon Dance”

But Ye Qing was neither weak-willed nor unprepared for a mental attack. While visualizing the “Emperor Fuxi Visualization Method” to protect his mind from her influence, he made a beeline for her. All the willow branches and leaves in his path were crushed with insulting ease.

The Ghost Willow’s strength lay in its willow branches and leaves. It could turn intangible, pass into a person’s body, and fill up their insides to suffocate them. It was an excellent assassination tool, but not so much against someone who was prepared against it.

When Lady Pear Blossom saw that Ye Qing was rushing her, she twirled on her feet and surrounded herself in layers upon layers of force. When Ye Qing entered its range, he suddenly felt like he was wading through a swamp.

“Hoo...”

Ye Qing didn’t back down, however. Sucking in a deep breath, he focused his qi, essence and spirit and threw a punch. No one and nothing could stand in his way!

“Break Through”

The punch force punched through both the layers of force and Lady Pear Blossom’s torso. It was like they were made of paper!

Chapter 246: Like Winter Killing A Plain

Ye Qing’s vigor was temporarily spent after unleashing that punch. It was at this moment a Ghost Willow behind his back suddenly withered to reveal an old man with hair that was half-black and half-white, and a face that was half-full and half-aged. He landed a palm strike against his back, and the healthy half of the old man’s body abruptly started withering at a rapid rate. A rotten, withering energy poured into Ye Qing’s body and withered his flesh and blood as well.

“The Growth Wither Palm? You’re Growth and Wither?” Ye Qing staggered a little as he asked.

“It is I. Allow me to send you to the king of hell,” Growth and Wither answered. As it turned out, his voice was half youthful and half ancient as well. It was odd to say the least.

“Don’t forget me! Kekeke...”

A boy wearing a red burial shirt and a white burial hat appeared on top of Ye Qing and struck him with a mourning stick. He was Crying Boy.

Bang!

Ye Qing struggled to regain his balance as his mind wobbled, and his consciousness grew dim. At the same time, Growth and Wither seized the opportunity to launch another palm strike at Ye Qing’s head.

It was at this moment Ye Qing's eyes suddenly erupted with brilliant light. He caught Growth and Wither's arm before the attack could land and pulled him toward him. While the old man was stumbling toward him, Ye Qing slammed his elbow into his chest and ripped his arm right off the socket. While Growth and Wither was screaming in pain, Ye Qing swung the arm at Crying Boy's head—the Astral Refiner was attempting to ambush him from behind—and burst it like a watermelon. His body flew back and hit the ground with a dull thud.

“Pooh!”

Ye Qing spat out a blood spittle and grinned. “Clearly, your head isn't as tough as mine.”

After Crying Boy was dead, Ye Qing looked at Ghastly Willow slowly backing away from him with a look of utter shock on his face. “Would you like to test the hardness of my head as well?”

Ghastly Willow was a pale-looking young man in the first place, but now he looked as pale as a ghost. After giving Ye Qing a smile that looked uglier than a cry, he abruptly turned around and took off like a rabbit.

“Hahaha! Cough! Cough...” Ye Qing laughed maniacally even as he coughed up blood. He looked as fearless as he was unrestrained.

“Is there anyone else? Cough! Cough! Bunch of trash. I already look like this, and still you didn't dare to attack me. I truly feel ashamed for y'all.”

Ye Qing laughed wantonly and arrogantly. “Chickenshits like you should go back home and feed the pigs instead of staining the jianghu with your presence!”

“What the hell is he doing? Is he actually suicidal?” Chu Nianjiu exclaimed in shock and worry.

“He's obviously on his last legs. Let's get him together, people!” Someone shouted all of a sudden, and Ye Qing purposely stumbled to add fuel to fire. It was enough to spur even more jianghu warriors to act. An even bigger group from before leaped over to the arena and filled it with no time. Ye Qing looked like a grain of sand that was about to be washed away by the tidal wave of people at any moment.

“KILL!”

It was at this moment an explosive roar and a flood of bloodthirst erupted from the middle of the crowd. A flash later, every single warrior in the arena abruptly split into two. It was like the winter engulfing a plain and killing every flora and fauna in it.

BOOM

The light slammed into the river and kicked up a tidal wave that was over fifty meters tall. When it settled, Ye Qing was the only one still standing on the platform. Everyone else was as dead as a dodo, and some of the weaker ones were annihilated so thoroughly that they didn't even leave a body behind.

“What the...?”

For a time, no one could say anything. They could only stared at the man wearing a bronze mask in stunned silence. It was an understandable sentiment. How could anyone form the words to express their shock right now? If anything, speechlessness was probably the truest expression of their feelings.

“Cough cough...” Ye Qing took off the Bronze Tiger Head and asked with bloodshot eyes, “Dogs and chickens, all of them. Can’t even take a hit from me.”

“Is there anyone else who would like to face me?” “ANYONE?”

Ye Qing slowly swept his gaze across the crowd. Everyone who met his eyes shivered and subconsciously backed away from him.

“Is there no one? Hehehe...”

Every time Ye Qing’s blood dripped onto the Bronze Tiger Head in his head, it would evaporate and turn into an invisible yet unstoppable ripple of bloodthirst. Combined with the countless bodies in the arena, it made Ye Qing looked like a god or demon incarnate.

“I’m grievously injured, my vigor is stuttering, and true qi is mostly depleted right now. All in all, I am already at my limit. Are you sure you guys don’t want to give it another go?”

“Who knows? Maybe the next jianghu warrior will be able to kill me?”

“Think about it. If you kill me, the Spirit Purification stage martial art, pill and Hatred-class Strange Artifact will all go to you. Oh, I have a lot of good stuff on my person as well. I have many Astral Refinement stage martial arts, Hatred-class strange Artifacts and more. If you kill me, then it will all become all yours.”

Ye Qing kept enticing the shitless jianghu warriors like a bonafide demon. “Are you tempted? Come get me then. You won’t get a better opportunity than this. What are you waiting for? Come get me!”

“Wow, you guys are bores. If you guys aren’t going to attack me, then I’m just going to leave.”

“I’m taking a step! I’m taking another step! Oh no, the edge is getting closer and closer!”

Fucking leave already! Do you really think we’re stupid enough to fall for the same trick twice? Just quit trying to trick us and leave already!

Everyone rolled their eyes at Ye Qing’s antics, but some people were tempted to test their luck. What if he really was on his last legs, right?

Buzz...

Suddenly, every sword in the vicinity—the ones lying on the ground, the river, the scabbard and even those that were being held—started shaking unnaturally.

“What’s going on?”

“Why is my sword reacting on its own?”

Everyone exchanged confused glances with each other. The next moment, the swords abruptly soared into the sky and formed a metallic bridge that connected the shore to the arena.

A young man wearing a blood red robe and carrying a blood red sword stepped out of the crowd. When he stepped on the bridge, the swords immediately vibrated like they were welcoming his arrival.

“What the hell is he doing?” Chu Nianjiu abruptly shot to his feet. “He can’t possibly be...?”

“The Sword Gentleman!”

“It’s the Sword Gentleman!”

“Why is Chen Cang here?”

“He... wants to kill Ye Qing? But why? Is he aiming for the bounty as well? Or does he have some other objective?”

A cacophony of chatter filled the restaurant then. Chen Cang, the Sword Gentleman, was a legendary figure in Luo Shui as a matter of course. Despite his humble beginnings, he was an Innate Immaculate Swordmaster who was born to wield the sword in both mind and body. The head of the Blood Shadow Palace himself had discovered him and taken him as an inner disciple.

Obsessed with the sword, he lived his whole life with only the sword as his companion. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that he lived and died for the sword. He was also praised as a once-in-a-century genius in the Way of the Sword.

Chen Cang was incredibly difficult to find not just because he was reclusive, but also because he spent most of his time training in the mountains. Naturally, he rarely mingled with the masses, much less took part in a noisy event like this, which added to the mysticism surrounding his person. No one except maybe Fang Xuanlang expected him to show up for this showdown.

“Excuse me. I’m going to ask him what the hell he’s plotting.”

Chu Nianjiu slapped the table and tried to leap off the building. However, Xue Shiwu blocked his way as soon as he made a move. “I can’t let you do that, Lord Chu.”

“What is the meaning of this, Xue Shiwu?” Chu Nianjiu frowned deeply.

Xue Shiwu replied calmly, “I’m doing this for your own good, Lord Chu. Chief Gu himself had given his word that the Pacification Bureau won’t interfere with this showdown in any way. You’re not going to break his word and besmirch the reputation of the Pacification Bureau, are you?”

Chu Nianjiu wanted to say something, but Lin Yuhuai pulled him back and said, “Calm down, Nianjiu. Let’s wait and see what happens.”

The Wine Gentleman grunted but returned to his seat. Xue Shiwu let out a boisterous, arrogant laugh.

“Sword Gentleman Chen Cang?” Ye Qing was a bit surprised to see him here. There was no reason for the man to be here unless... Is he here for his brother, Chen Zheng?

Chen Zheng was the one and only intersection point between him and Chen Cang. Otherwise, they had never even met each other until now. Considering Chen Cang’s temperament, he probably wasn’t the type of person to let others do his dirty work, meaning that he was most likely here for Chen Zheng.

But how did Chen Cang figure out that he was behind Chen Zheng’s death? It was the perfect crime!

Chen Cang asked with a cool, icy expression, “I am Chen Cang. Are you Ye Qing?”

Ye Qing: “...” You’re stepping on this platform when you don’t even recognize me?

“Are you from August Hill Village?” Chen Cang continued before Ye Qing could answer.

Ye Qing’s heart skipped a beat as he hurriedly denied, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Chen Cang replied slowly, “There’s no point denying it. I know that you’re Ye Qing of August Hill Village.”

“I investigated August Hill Village’s household register before, and there is a Ye Qing in it. You appeared in Anyang not long after a disaster befell August Hill Village. It’s quite the coincidence, isn’t it?”

Ye Qing chuckled. “Ye Qing is a great name, but it’s hardly an uncommon name. Luo Shui alone probably has a couple hundred Ye Qings. What on earth makes you think that I am Ye Qing of August Hill Village? Don’t you think that your deduction is a little too flimsy, Brother Chen?”

Chen Cang remained expressionless. “That is why I made a point to visit Little August Village. The village was destroyed, but Little August Hill is still around. That is why I went there and interrogated a few intelligent Strangers. And guess what? Some of them have seen you before. They even drew me a portrait so I can identify you.”

“You are a perfect match with the man in the portrait, so you must be Ye Qing of August Hill Village.”

Ah shit, I can’t believe I forgot about that! Ye Qing rubbed his nose before asking, “So what if I hail from August Hill Village? Is that a crime?”

Chen Cang nodded. “Your admission is all I need. I have a younger brother named Chen Zheng. He’s dead.”

“So? What does it have to do with me?” Ye Qing shrugged.

Chen Cang said coldly, “According to Windcatcher Chu Nianjiu, you were with my brother when he passed away. But somehow, you’re still alive. Do you think that’s fair?”

Ye Qing couldn't be bothered to defend himself at this point, so he taunted, "What do you mean 'that's fair'? I lived because I was lucky, while Chen Zheng died because he was unlucky enough to run into a powerful Stranger. It's that simple."

Chen Cang shook his head. "I don't know if Chen Zheng was killed by a Stranger. All I know is that he's dead, and you are still alive."

"Whether or not you're telling the truth, you were there when he died. Therefore, you should've died with him."

"The reason I'm here is to rectify that mistake!"

"Heh... they shouldn't have named you the Sword Gentleman. Crazy Bastard fits you much better!" Ye Qing sneered. "Come get me then. From the moment you set foot in this arena, there is only life or death!"

Chen Cang didn't get angry despite Ye Qing's taunt. He replied indifferently, "This is how my Way and sword is, and I don't think I am wrong. So, die."

Chapter 247: Rising To The Clouds, Challenging the Gates Of The Sky

"Ye Qing... is that Ye Qing?!"

Ye Qing and Chen Cang hadn't tried to keep their conversation private, so everyone could hear it as clear as day.

Most people looked confused due to the lack of details, but not Chu Nianjiu. He was the only one who knew exactly what the duo were talking about. He was having trouble equating this Ye Qing to the goodie-two-shoes he encountered back at August Hill Village though.

When he met Ye Qing at August Hill Village, he was still a no-name Qi Invoker. Not even a year had passed, and the young man was now a famous hero in Luo Shui. Who would believe him even if he told them the truth?

This was the reason Chu Nianjiu thought that Ye Qing looked a bit familiar, but never put two and two together. It made him feel really stupid, so stupid that he didn't recover even though the duo were already clashing against one another.

In the arena, Chen Cang was thrusting his sword toward Ye Qing. It was neither fast, urgent, unpredictable nor treacherous like the sword style the disciples of Blood Shadow Palace normally practiced. That wasn't to say that Chen Cang's attack was lacking, however. Quite the contrary, his sword qi was washing out of his body like an inferno, and they carved through the tough stone of the arena as easily as tofu.

Chen Cang's astral qi was one of the thirty six superior grade astral qis, the Taibai Gengjin Sword Qi. It fell under Metal of the Five Elements, and it was sharp enough to cut through anything.

The Taibai Gengjin Sword Qi didn't possess any other qualities besides unparalleled sharpness, but this alone made it one of the most suitable astral qis for a swordsman.

After all, a swordsman wielding a sharp blade was all that was needed to cut the sky and divide the earth!

Even with Ye Qing's physique, he couldn't help but feel chilled all over as Chen Cang's impossibly sharp astral qi washed over him. It easily shredded his Burning Wind and left dozens of flesh wounds on his body.

The good news was that it only looked bad. None of the wounds were deep enough to impact his ability to fight.

The arena was only so big, and the sword qi was blowing everywhere. It made it impossible for Ye Qing to use "Illusionist's Grace". But he wasn't planning to. Since he came to this world, he had never been afraid to engage an enemy in a battle of brute force.

While bleeding like a pig, Ye Qing threw punch after punch at Chen Cang. Strong as a dragon elephant and possessed by rock solid determination, Ye Qing kept marching forward each time his fist force shattered a swath of sword qis.

However, his momentum came to a halt when he was about three meters away from Chen Cang. From an outsider's perspective, it looked like he was being pushed hard by a strong gale. But from Ye Qing's perspective, it felt like he was trying to push through a mountain. The sword qis were so dense they were practically solid, and there were zero weaknesses that he could spot. The only way to continue forward... was to break through the mountain of sword qi by force.

"He's... strong!"

At the restaurant, Chu Nianjiu, Lin Yuhuai and more were staring at the clash of sword qi and fist force with varying looks of astonishment. It felt like a disaster was taking place at the center of the arena, not a fight.

Both Ye Qing and Chen Cang were late-stage Astral Refiners, and yet their clash didn't look like it at all. They would have believed it if their senses were blocked, and someone told them that it was a clash between Spirit Purifiers.

A short while later, Chu Nianjiu said with a frown, "Joyless is in danger."

"Why? They're still locked in a stalemate, aren't they?" Wei Yueshan tore himself away from the magnificent battle and looked at Chu Nianjiu, puzzled.

Chu Nianjiu replied, "I've sparred with the sword maniac many times in the past, so I know exactly how strong he is."

"Chen Cang's vessel augmentation is perfect, so his reservoir of astral qi is greater than most. He currently cultivates a cultivation art called the 'Five Green Peaks' that uses the weight of five hills to nurture one's sword qi. As a result, the thickness and volume of his sword qi is several times greater than your average Astral Refiner. It excels in prolonged fights and could supposedly keep the practitioner in tip-top shape even after three days of fighting."

"However, Joyless just fought a terrible battle, so he is exhausted both physically and mentally. It hasn't been long since he entered the late-stage of the Astral Refinement stage either. On the other hand, Chen Cang is an endurance-type warrior and a



veteran late-stage Astral Refiner. He has spent several years honing himself at this cultivation level and could be counted as a Half-Step Spirit Purifier.”

“You can see why I say that Joyless is in danger.”

As if on cue, the flood of sword qi started pushing Ye Qing back little by little. And every time he took a step back, Chen Cang would push forward, and the sword qi would grow just a little thicker.

Three steps later, the sword qi converged into one giant cloud in the sky, and Chen Cang thrust his sword forward. Like water pouring out of a broken dam, the sword qi gushed toward Ye Qing like an unstoppable tide.

“Five Blue Peak: Rush”

After unleashing the attack, Chen Cang withdrew his sword and watched quietly as the flood of sword qi threatened to overwhelm Ye Qing. A cold glint flickered behind his eyes.

It’s over.

Honestly, he wasn’t expecting Ye Qing to be able to force out his full strength despite all the battles he had fought earlier. It would be a good death if nothing else.

Ye Qing’s eyes flickered with inspiration as he stared at the river of sword qi surging toward him. He abruptly stopped in his tracks, clenched the energies inside and outside his body, and gathered his aura. Then, he punched the ground in front of him. A whole chunk of the arena floor flipped into the air and divided the stream of sword qi at the center.

“Divide”

Then, the torrent of sword qi poured back to Chen Cang faster and more furious than before.

Boom!

Caught off guard, Chen Cang wasn’t able to defend himself before his own sword qi slammed into himself. The mountain of sword qi protecting him immediately shook unsteadily.

As soon as the flood of sword qi ended, Ye Qing ran up to Chen Cang and threw a punch.

“Break Through”

If his fist could punch through formations, then of course it could break a mountain as well.

“Break Through” only had one move, but that was enough. It emphasized on focusing all of one’s strength and spirit into one point to shatter anything and everything in its path.

If the mountain of sword qi hadn’t suffered a powerful blow earlier, then maybe it could’ve blocked this attack. As it was, Ye Qing’s fist force pierced right through and was headed straight toward Chen Cang’s chest.

To Chen Cang’s credit, his reaction speed was top-notch. He raised his sword and was able to block the fist force at the last second. Despite this, Ye Qing’s dragon elephant strength and enormous force still shook his whole body like a drum and sent him stumbling backward.

Every time he took a step, his complexion would redden just a tad. His energies were jumping all over the place, and he was steaming like a kettle.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

While Chen Cang was busy stabilizing his energies, Ye Qing rushed forward like a river and landed a powerful punch on Chen Cang's stomach. He followed up the attack with many, many more punches until Chen Cang finally flew over the edge and crashed into the river. The wave he kicked up was just as tall as the one caused by the Bronze Tiger Head earlier, though the water evaporated into mist before it could fall back into the river.

Plop!

A few breaths later, a man jumped out of the river and landed on a nearby rooftop. He was none other than Chen Cang. Drenched, weakened, and severely injured, he looked like he needed medical attention even more than Ye Qing.

"I underestimated you, Ye Qing, so this is my loss. However, I must have revenge for my younger brother, so wait for me. I will see you again."

With that said, Chen Cang left without looking back.

"He... lost? The Sword Gentleman lost!"

"Chen Cang actually lost to Ye Qing!"

"How is this possible?"

Everyone felt like they were dreaming. This wasn't a random jianghu warrior they were talking about. Chen Cang was one of the four Gentlemen of Luo Shui and strongest warriors in the younger generation of Luo Shui. Despite this, Ye Qing still managed to defeat him with one decisive strike.

It wasn't like Chen Cang was undeserving of his reputation. The fact that he managed to walk away alive proved that he was a cut above all the others who had fought Ye Qing before him.

"The sword maniac is hurt! Grievously hurt!"

At the restaurant, Chu Nianjiu was beyond astonished as well. He was in Ye Qing's corner as a matter of course, but he never thought that Chen Cang would lose considering the circumstances. Moreover, Chen Cang was a man who would never give up on his objective unless he had no other choice. He was as stubborn as he was obsessed with the sword. The fact that he gave up and ran away proved that he was truly pushed to his limits.

"Lord Ye... what a formidable man he is!" Fang Xuanlang praised and sipped his wine, eyes burning with fighting spirit.

On the other side, Xue Shiwu was ashen-faced with anger, hatred... and wariness. Ye Qing's prowess had exceeded everyone's expectations.

Wen Zilai was hiding a sigh of relief even though he was the one who indirectly caused all this.

A shame. If only he is as stupid as he's insane! Ye Qing thought in disappointment. He could have forcefully pushed through Chen Cang's sword qi at the beginning, but he decided to play up his

weakness so that the swordsman would underestimate him. He was hoping that the element of surprise would be enough to seal Chen Cang's demise.

Unfortunately, Chen Cang was stronger than he looked. Not only did he withstand the barrage, he didn't hesitate to book it as soon as he realized that he would not be able to win. It was almost unimaginable that this was the same guy who wanted to kill him just because he happened to be at the same place and time as his brother.

Well, his unexpected interference is helpful though, so I shan't resent him too much.

Ye Qing's lips curled into an evil smirk.

"So? Is there anyone else who would like to kill me?"

He wiped the blood on his mouth and bared his teeth. "You can attack me together or try and tire me out one by one. I don't mind. Come get me!"

"No one? Well, there's still time, so don't hurry on my account. I need to collect my loot anyway."

He then bent down and started looting the bodies as if there wasn't an entire throng of crowd watching him from all sides. You could practically smell the jealousy and awkwardness as they watched him putting away the Nature's Shell, Strange Artifacts, martial arts manuals and more.

When Ye Qing had looted all the bodies, he wiped his hands on a corpse's shirt and stood up. Face arranged into an expression of abject disappointment, he asked, "Will no one give me the defeat I so sought? How disappointing!"

"Jianghu, they say... hehehe..."

"Warriors, they claim... tsk tsk..."

Ye Qing clasped his hands behind his back and slowly circled the arena as he bared his disdain for all to see.

"I suddenly feel like punching him myself," Chu Nianjiu rolled his eyes when he saw this. His sentiment was shared by everyone at the table.

"It's impressive though, isn't it?" Lin Yuhuai smiled. "Didn't we all dream of becoming a warrior like this someday?"

"To challenge it all with courage higher than the heavens,

To drink blood and wine, slay evil and end unwanted ties,

To rise to the clouds and challenge the gate of the sky,

And to be known as a warrior and a hero of the ages.

If this isn't the dream, then what is?"

"The dream indeed! This deserves to be celebrated with a full cup of wine!" Chu Nianjiu, An Runyu and the others smiled widely as they echoed in agreement. They looked as happy as Xue Shiwu was furious.

“I can’t stand that brat. Do you wanna go teach him a lesson, Brother Zhou?”

“Yeah, Brother Zhou. That kid must be way past his limits after so many battles. If you jump in now, you might just be able to lob off the fucker’s head. When that happens, the Way of Taiping’s reward will go to you, and you’ll be known as the man who defeated the infamous Patrolman. What’s not to like?”

Inside a boat, a couple of jianghu warriors were trying to goad a man wearing dirty, tattered robes into attacking Ye Qing. He looked very youthful despite his grayish white hair, and he was dozing off on his chair right now.

“Oh really? Why don’t you guys go get him then? Do you think I’m stupid?” The dirty-looking man yawned. “Even Chen Cang, the Sword Gentleman is no match for him. Even in his current state, he could absolutely eat me for breakfast.”

“I, Zhou Mengdie, am an expert in killing someone in their sleep, not dreaming so hard that I would confuse it with reality.”

“What about you, Lei Zhao? You were cheering on your fellow idiots pretty hard just now. Why don’t you try throwing your Thunder God Bomb onto the arena. Who knows, it might just be the last straw that kills him.”

Lei Zhao was a quiet man with a square, honest-looking face. He shook his head and immediately started bullshitting, “I didn’t bring my bombs today. Why don’t you go, Ghost Whisperer? You recently reached the adept level in the ‘Ghost Whispering Sutra’, didn’t you? Just invoke a Ghost King and annihilate the brat.”

Ghost Whisperer was a small, thin man with a massive, millstone-sized head. While shaking his head from side to side, he replied in a strange voice, “Nah. I checked the calendar this morning, and it says that my luck is bad today. It would be embarrassing if I went on stage and failed to invite a Ghost King, wouldn’t it?”

“Tsk. You can’t even come up with a convincing excuse, and you think you can goad me into fighting Ye Qing? Eat shit, you fuckers.” Zhou Mengdie clicked his tongue disdainfully before shutting his eyes once more.

Meanwhile, Ye Qing was still taunting everyone in the arena, “Tian Yong is such a big place, and yet there isn’t a single person out there who can kill me? Chickens and dogs, all of you!”

“What an absurd jianghu this is! Hahaha! Just absurd!”

When the time was right, Ye Qing taunted the crowd one last time before leaping off the arena. The people subconsciously opened up a path and stayed well out of Ye Qing’s way. Not a single person dared to make so much as a squeak as the young man slowly walked toward the distance.

Ye Qing was about halfway down the road when suddenly, he turned limp and collapsed on the floor, unconscious.

Chapter 248: End Murder With Murder

“Not good!”

“We need to save him!”

Chu Nianjiu’s table was silent for an instant. Then, they shot to their feet and tried to rush to Ye Qing’s rescue. However, Xue Shiwu’s table “coincidentally” got in the way and prevented them from getting to Ye Qing in time.

At the same time, three jianghu warriors suddenly pounced toward unconscious Ye Qing with every intention to kill him.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

They had just reached Ye Qing when a man suddenly appeared over the Patrolman and waved his hand casually. The attackers immediately exploded into showers of blood and gore.

He was none other than Gu Suitang.

Gu Suitang lifted Ye Qing by the scruff of his neck and cast a cold look at the surrounding people. “You were given every opportunity to kill him just now, but you were too scaredy-cat to meet in the arena. Now that he’s out of the arena and unconscious, you guys immediately jumped on him like a pack of hyenas. Spineless cowards, that’s who you are.”

“What happens in the arena stays in the arena, but what happens outside the arena falls under the Pacification Bureau’s jurisdiction. Starting now, I will tear anyone who so much as lifts a finger in the wrong direction to pieces. Just try me.”

The only response he got was dead silence.

“Hmph.”

Gu Suitang left with the unconscious Ye Qing after that.

After he returned to the Pacification Bureau, Gu Suitang dropped Ye Qing on the ground and said lazily, “There’s no one around. You can stop pretending now.”

“Come on, chief. I’m hurt from head to toe, you know?” Ye Qing grimaced as he climbed back to his feet and sat down beside a nearby chair.

“You brought this on yourself.” Gu Suitang rolled his eyes at him. “Anyway, are you really going to leave Luo Shui? The blame doesn’t lie with you, you know. So long as you are still in the Pacification Bureau, I, Gu Suitang, swear on my name that no one can lay a finger on you or force you to do anything you dislike.”

Ye Qing chuckled, but it sounded mirthless and resigned. “It’s fine. I know I’m blameless, but the people of Luo Shui are also innocent. Right now, I’m a typhoon who puts everyone around me in trouble whether I like it or not. The only way to protect the people... is if I leave this place.”

“Plus, I’ve already taken out my frustration on my wrongdoers and squeezed them for all their worth. There is no need to play with these idiots any longer. I just need to leave Luo Shui and wait a year or two for the matter to die down, and Luo Shui will be open to me once more.”

“Fair. Unnecessary risk is unnecessary.”

Gu Suitang nodded. “But are you sure you want to leave tonight? Isn’t that a little too soon?”

A smirk crossed Ye Qing’s lips as he leaned lazily against the chair. “Oh no, it’s just right.”

“Everyone saw me falling unconscious in public today. They would never think that I would leave Luo Shui tonight. By the time they caught on to our ruse, the trail would’ve turned cold a long time ago.”

“Heh. You’re playing all of Luo Shui and the jianghu like a fiddle. I have no doubt you’ll become a man to be reckoned with if you survive this tribulation, Joyless,” Gu Suitang praised from the bottom of his heart.

Ye Qing shrugged. “I don’t really care about that, but I do know that I’m an exceptionally narrow-minded person. When I’m strong enough, I’m going to murder every single one of these chickenshits to the last person.”

“Hmph! You sure dream big for someone so young. Let’s focus on your survival first, shall we?” Gu Suitang shook his head before saying, “Go rest up in our secret room. I’ll make the announcement and arrange your departure.”

“Thank you, chief,” Ye Qing said before following Gu Suitang into the Pacification Bureau’s secret room.

A silhouette outside the window disappeared after they were gone.

.....

Inside the secret room, Ye Qing asked, “Are you sure the spy will send the message, chief?”

Gu Suitang confirmed, “He definitely will. He’s the one who leaked what you did at Sky Gate Abyss to your enemies. I see no reason why he wouldn’t do the same this time.”

“Are you sure you want to do this though? It’s even riskier than your crazy arena idea!”

Ye Qing smirked a smirk that didn’t reach the eye. “Hey, I’m not the one who started this. If they want to play, then I’ll play. It’s the only way to end this farce once and for all.”

“This isn’t enough though. I need to go and make some preparations. Please cover my exit, chief.”

Gu Suitang slapped him on the back of his head and rebuked him jokingly, “Who do you think you are? I’m your boss, dammit!”

Every time I take one of these slaps, I feel like I lost more than a few brain cells. No wonder Wei Yueshan is so dumb.

Ye Qing grumbled internally as he put on a cheeky smile. “I can’t help it that you’re so capable, chief! Plus, I’m doing this for the Pacification Bureau!”

Gu Suitang sneered. "Sure, keep telling yourself that. Anyway, do whatever you want. It's not like I can stop you once you've set your mind on something. Just make sure you don't accidentally throw away your life in the process."

Ye Qing rubbed his nose. "Oh, don't you worry about that. I cherish my life more than you think."

.....

Inside a small diner, Tang Shi exclaimed in surprise, "Lord Ye? You're not dead?"

Ye Qing had donned a disguise before he exited the Pacification Bureau, but Tang Shi had very sharp eyes. He saw through the disguise practically the minute he saw him.

"No. But you might be dead if you don't control your mouth," Ye Qing glared at the stall owner. He was this close to saying fuck it and murder the guy.

"Ahem. Sorry." Tang Shi coughed to cover up his embarrassment. "It's just that everyone and their mothers said that you're dead. Some people said that you died before you returned to the Pacification Bureau because of the wounds you took from the Sword Gentleman, some said that you were in a deep coma, and it's uncertain if you'll ever awake, and some even said that the Pacification Bureau is in the process of preparing your funeral..."

Ye Qing: "... Old Gu sure is a fast and efficient worker.

Obviously, Gu Suitang was the one behind this. It was so that they could carry out the next step of their plan.

"Are you... truly fine, Lord Ye?" Tang Shi looked Ye Qing up and down like he was looking at a monster. And how could he not? Ye Qing had killed at least dozens of late-stage Astral Refiners and even defeated the famous Sword Gentleman Chen Cang, and yet the man was sitting opposite of him and drinking tea like he was perfectly fine.

"I'm fine." Ye Qing sipped his tea to wet his throat before continuing, "And let's cut to the chase. I came to ask for your help with something."

"Okay? What is it?"

"I'm leaving Luo Shui tonight."

"What? You're leaving Luo Shui?" Tang Shi blurted.

"I dare you to scream that again." Ye Qing rolled his eyes at Tang Shi before confirming, "Yes."

Tang Shi let out an awkward laugh even as he realized that he wasn't acting like himself. Thank goodness this diner was mostly empty and somewhat out of the way, or this would be a very awkward conversation indeed. He lowered his voice and said, "That's a good idea. Although you

managed to intimidate the jianghu for now, the human heart is a fickle thing. Who knows when these people would find their courage and try again?"

"But why are you telling me this? Wait, you're not planning to..."

A terrifying possibility suddenly occurred to Tang Shi. He's not planning to silence me, is he?

Tang Shi broke out in cold sweat as he grabbed a talisman. He looked like he might take off if Ye Qing so much as twitch in the wrong direction.

"Are you stupid?" Ye Qing realized what Tang Shi was misunderstanding and rolled his eyes. Do I look like the type who kills anyone without reason?

"I want you to spread the fact that I'm leaving tonight."

"You what?" Tang Shi felt like his surprise was neverending. "I apologize for what I'm about to say, but have you gone mad?"

Ye Qing replied in an indifferent tone, "No, I'm not crazy. In any case, all you need to do is to spread the rumor."

Tang Shi wrestled with the insane idea for a bit. Then, realization struck him like thunder. "Are you plotting something bad again, my lord?"

Ye Qing rolled his eyes again. Why do you have to make it sound like that? I'm just trying to save my own life, okay?

"Just focus on what I want you to do, okay? This is your reward."

Ye Qing tossed three Malice-class Strange Artifacts into Tang Shi's hands and rose to his feet.

"There's something else I need to do, so this is where we part ways."

"Also, you're footing the bill."

.....

At the central hall of the Heavenly Heart Clinic, Feng Qingyou poured a cup of tea and smiled at Ye Qing. "You're not dead, Joyless?"

Ye Qing: "... Did Tang Shi teach you that? He totally did, didn't he?"

"No time for jokes, Qingyou. I came to ask for a favor."

"A favor?" Feng Qingyou handed the tea to Ye Qing while smirking. "But you're the man who defeated the warriors of the jianghu singlehandedly. What can this humble doctor possibly do to help you?"

"Warriors? More like the rabble!" Ye Qing scoffed. "Seriously though, I really need your help with something."

Feng Qingyou finally stopped joking and asked, "What can I help you with?"

Ye Qing answered, "May I know what cultivation level is Uncle Feng? Is he a Spirit Master at least?"



“Hmm?” Feng Qingyou shot him a meaningful look. “You must be plotting something bad, aren’t you?”

Ye Qing: “...” Okay, she definitely learned that from Tang Shi.

Ye Qing sighed. “Yes, I am. I’m planning a big heist tonight. I’m going to rob everyone and anyone who wants to kill me of their lives.”

“Interesting. And how do you plan to do that?” Feng Qingyou asked curiously.

Ye Qing replied, “It’s like this. I’m going to leave Luo Shui tonight, but not for real, of course. I’m putting myself out there as bait so that I could draw them all in one place.”

“I’ve already done the necessary preparations and spread the rumors. I’ve already humiliated the jianghu warriors during the day, but now I’m faking weakness and plotting to escape from right under their noses as well. What do you think they’ll do when they hear this?”

“These so-called warriors have no skill but plenty of excess pride. I have no doubt that they’ll come after me when they learn that I’m playing them like a fiddle. Add to the fact that I’m not protected by the Pacification Bureau outside of Luo Shui, and I have no doubt that they’ll come out in full force. The mastermind behind all this would definitely show themselves as well.”

“I’ve already communicated my plan with Chief Gu. He will follow me in secret and join in on the fun when the time is right. We’ll crush all the dissidents and unsavory elements in one fell swoop.”

This was Ye Qing’s true plan, the upgraded version of his original plan so to speak. At the beginning, he was just catching the small prey. Now, he was fishing for the big ones. Everything he did until now was in preparation for this ultimate plan.

The reason he challenged the jianghu warriors at the Luo Shui Arena wasn’t just to fan the flames, but also to make sure that they would come after him when he pretended to leave Luo Shui. The part where he killed his attackers and profited from their deaths were just the side benefits.

He and Gu Suitang had purposely discussed their fake plan out in the open to trick the traitor into bringing false information back to the mastermind, namely Wen Zilai and Wang Luori. However, he didn’t just want to catch the two bastards. After all, it felt unsatisfactory to end things with just Wang Luori and Wen Zilai’s deaths after all the trouble he had gone through.

Why fish with a fishing rod when you can catch them all with a net?

Also, acting was far more tiring than people thought. If he could minimize the number of times he had to put on an act, then why not?

That was why he told Tang Shi to leak the fact that he was leaving Luo Shui tonight to the jianghu warriors. There was no way they wouldn’t come after him after realizing that he had played them like a fiddle, and he would be able to catch all the fishes in one go. Only then could he resolve this farce once and for all.

The thought of running away had never crossed his mind.

The only true way to end this, was to kill everyone who would do him harm.

Chapter 249: The Calm Before The Storm

“Good idea.”

Feng Qingyou complimented him smilingly, “You’re planning to kill dozens or even hundreds of people with just the two of you. Your courage certainly deserves commendation.”

“Hahaha! I know it’s risky. That’s why I came to borrow Uncle Feng!”

Although Gu Suitang promised that nothing could go wrong, Ye Qing still didn’t feel very secure. That was why he decided to seek out Feng Qingyou.

He might be a bold man, but he was infinitely cautious when his life was on the line. It was always better safe than sorry.

The reason he sought out Feng Qingyou was because the only champions he knew in Luo Shui were Gu Suitang, Fang Xiaoman, and Uncle Feng.

Of the three, Uncle Feng was the only one whose strength he couldn’t fathom at his current level. If he wasn’t mistaken, Uncle Feng was probably stronger than Gu Suitang, which was why he decided to seek out Uncle Feng.

“Can you tell me what cultivation level Uncle Feng is, Qingyou?”

Feng Qingyou side-eyed him and sipped her own tea. “He’s quite strong.”

“Oh? And how strong is he, exactly? Is he stronger than even Chief Gu?” Ye Qing’s eyes lit up.

Feng Qingyou smiled. “He is. He is more than enough to be your bodyguard.”

“That’s wonderful!” Ye Qing slapped his thigh and rubbed his hands. “So, can I borrow Uncle Feng for the night?”

She caressed her jade cup elegantly as she answered, “I’m afraid I can’t make the decision for Uncle Feng. You’ll have to ask him yourself.”

“Uncle Feng? Can you come in please?”

As soon as she said this, Uncle Feng abruptly appeared inside the hall. He gave her a bow and greeted, “Miss.”

It was like he was a ghost. Ye Qing hadn’t sensed his presence from the start until the end. The guy could be shadowing right behind him, and he would never notice until he turned around.

“You have something to ask Uncle Feng, right Joyless?” Feng Qingyou jolted Ye Qing out of his reverie.

“Right!” Ye Qing looked at the old man who seemed no different from your friendly elderly neighbor and started, “It’s like this...”

After Ye Qing had finished narrating his plan, he said, "And that is why I'd like to ask for your help, Uncle Feng."

"You don't need to show yourself from the start. Just stay hidden until the pressure is too much for me, or if something unexpected happens."

"Of course, I won't ask you to work for free. When this matter is settled, I'll treat you to five jars of thirty years old Pear Blossom wine. What do you say?"

Ye Qing knew that Uncle Feng loved drinking wine. It was why he always brought at least one or two jars of wine and enjoyed a drink with Uncle Feng whenever he visited the Heavenly Heart Clinic.

To Ye Qing's surprise and disappointment, Uncle Feng shook his head. Just when he thought Uncle Feng was going to turn him down, the old man said, "Five isn't enough. I want ten."

Ye Qing exclaimed in delight, "That's fine! It'll be a riot!"

Uncle Feng shook his head again. "Are you going to drink with me? If so, then that is unacceptable. After all, it's still going to be five jars if we split it half-half."

Ye Qing smiled. "Let's make it twenty then."

Uncle Feng grinned and revealed his yellowed teeth. "Good."

"Thank you for your cooperation, Uncle Feng." Ye Qing smiled widely. "Now, all that's left to do is to wait for the fishes to take the bait."

.....

"Father, our spy in the Pacification Bureau just sent word saying that Ye Qing is planning to leave Luo Shui tonight!" Wen Zilai reported as soon as he rushed into Wang Luo's room.

"Ye Qing is leaving Luo Shui? But why? Isn't he grievously injured and in a coma right now?" Wang Luori opened his eyes and voiced his puzzlement.

Wen Zilai explained, "That's because it's a ploy Ye Qing and Gu Suitang concocted. By putting on an act and convincing everyone that he's incapacitated, no one would think that he is really planning to sneak out of Luo Shui tonight."

"That cunning brat! He almost fooled us all!" Wang Luori slapped his table angrily. "That old fucker is no better than his underling."

"I want all eyes on the Pacification Bureau and Ye Qing, Zilai. As soon as Ye Qing leaves Luo Shui, I'm going to rip him into a million pieces."

.....

"My lord, that brat is planning to leave Luo Shui tonight."

"Is he now? Send someone to keep an eye on him. When the time is right, kill him. Yuechun was my schoolmate and a close friend, but this brat ruined his life and his reputation. There is no way I will stand for this!"

"Yuechun will have his vengeance, and his death is the only thing that will solve Luo Shui's plight once and for all and appease the people."

.....

"He's leaving Luo Shui? What wonderful news! As soon as he leaves Luo Shui, I'm going to make him wish he was dead. Pang Kun, gather the men. We're going to leave the city immediately and lay in ambush. I must have this bastard's skin to appease this rage in my chest!"

"At once. And do not worry, Little Commander. He won't escape."

"Speaking of which, we need to disguise ourselves as jianghu warriors. It's still not yet time to go to war with the Pacification Bureau. This way, we would be able to kill Ye Qing, humiliate the Pacification Bureau, and give ourselves an alibi."

"Hehe. A wise decision, Little Commander."

.....

"A plot? You're saying that everything that happened today is a plot? Ye Qing is planning to book it?"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I spent a lot of money to buy this information. There can be no mistake."

"That cunning sonuvabitch! He's playing us like a monkey! We need to tell our brothers and sisters, no, everyone about this. We're going to kill Ye Qing as soon as he leaves the city!"

"Yeah! Who does he think he is? I'm gonna dice his corpse until there's nothing left of him!"

"Everyone's talking about him right now. If we managed to kill him, then we would gain both fame and fortune. What's not to like?" "Hahaha..."

.....

Similar scenes were taking place all over Luo Shui. Be it for fame, profit, vengeance, hatred, or pure curiosity, everyone began to mobilize. It was the calm before the storm.

When nighttime arrived, a middle-aged man with waxy yellow complexion and perfectly ordinary appearance rode a carriage out of the city. He was completely inconspicuous just like all the other ordinary people who were leaving the city.

Once out, the middle-aged man casually steered the horses onto a marked route and went to heavens-no-where at a trotting pace. From time to time, he would sing an off-tune folk song and startle countless birds.

The man, the carriage and the birds cast a long, long shadow under the dying rays of sunset. It looked positively dreamlike.

However, the middle-aged man didn't seem to notice that a ton of jianghu warriors in disguise left the city not long after he did. He also didn't notice the suspicious silhouettes hiding amidst the shadows where the sunset rays couldn't reach. Their weapons gleamed like the teeth of Strangers in the darkness.

The sunset was very beautiful, but beautiful things tended to disappear quickly. Just five kilometers later, the last ray of light bade goodbye to the world and left behind only pitch black darkness.

Man, these guys are way too cautious. I'm more than far away enough from the city, and still they're not attacking me, thought the middle-aged man while swinging his horse whip in boredom. He was none other than Ye Qing in disguise.

It wasn't like he didn't understand their worries. They were afraid that the commotion would draw the Pacification Bureau's attention. However, they were over five kilometers away from Luo Shui already. At this rate, he was going to get lost before they attacked him.

Swoosh!

As if on cue, a whistling sound suddenly entered his ears. Ye Qing immediately waved his horse whip and caught a throwing knife that was flying straight toward him. A swing later, the throwing knife flew back where it came even faster than before.

"Hmph!" A muffled groan came from the darkness.

Beneath the carriage, there was a man clinging to the bottom like a spider. More accurately, he was clinging to a thick and massive spider web.

There was no telling when the man or the spider web had appeared, only that they harbored malicious intentions for Ye Qing. The man's cheeks inflated and deflated as he spat out what looked like a black egg onto the spider web. He would repeat this until the entire web was covered in black eggs.

Crack crack crack...

When he spat a mouthful of black qi onto the eggs, they immediately hatched into small, black spiders. They climbed up the carriage and swarmed toward Ye Qing like a stream.

"What is this? Spiders?"

Two or three breaths later, Ye Qing exclaimed in surprise and released a surge of Burning Wind. It instantly turned the swarm of spiders into ash.

Beneath the carriage, the man climbed out into the open and crossed his arms. Countless spider silk flew out from his back and surrounded Ye Qing from every direction.

"Black Spider?" Ye Qing threw a punch and burned the spider silk into ash, but Black Spider was able to make an impossible twist and dodge the fist force by a hair's

breadth. Like a phantom, he landed on a nearby tree and chuckled. "Kekeke... you won't escape, Ye Qing."

Ye Qing pretended to flinch and shake his head. "Who's Ye Qing? You got the wrong person."

"Kekeke. It's pointless to deny it. You are Ye Qing." Black Spider cackled. "You must think you're so smart playing us like a fiddle. This time though, you overreached yourself."

"Today is the day you die."

"Hah! You think you can kill me alone?" Ye Qing harrumphed in disdain.

"Of course not. But I'm not alone, am I?" Black Spider grinned from ear to ear.

"No you're not."

A dwarf-sized man who was a little over one meter tall but incredibly buff stepped out into the open.

"I am here."

A middle-aged man with a blue snake encircled around his tall hat followed.

"I'm here too."

A strange old man with unkempt hair and tattered robes walked out from the shadows as well.

"Don't forget about me."

A woman with an hourglass figure sashayed out to greet Ye Qing. Strangely, she didn't have a head.

"Amitabha..."

A monk carrying Buddha beads emerged. He looked even stranger than the woman because his lower half was completely devoid of flesh.

.....

More and more people stepped out of the shadows. Some looked strange, some looked fierce, and some looked demonic. They all shared one commonality, however. They all hated Ye Qing and wanted him dead.

Chapter 250: The Show Has Just Begun

"Vajra Boy"

"Snake Whisperer"

"Old Man Hemp"

"Headless Maiden"

"Bone Monk"

.....

Ye Qing whispered some of the names he recognized under his breath. Every single one of them were infamous criminals and late-stage Astral Refiners. Besides that, there were many, many more middle-stage Astral Refiners, early-stage Astral Refiners, Vessel Augmentors and more. There had to be at least a hundred of them.

“Do you think we have enough numbers to kill you now?” Black Spider chuckled darkly.

“Impossible. How did you all know that I’m leaving the city tonight?” Ye Qing uttered in a grave voice.

“Hehe. It’s a bad habit that you’re the only smart person in this world, and you’re a little too young to fool us veterans,” Snake Whisperer sneered. The blue snake on his hat also hissed and added to the horror.

“Impossible! My plan was perfect! There is no way this could happen!” Ye Qing growled like a cornered animal, eyes bloodshot and limbs shaking with fury and fear.

“Perfect? The fact that you think that there’s such a thing as a perfect plan proves that you’re an idiot,” Old Man Hemp said with a grin. “You thought you were being smart, but it was a mistake to leave Luo Shui and the Pacification Bureau. Today is the day you die, Ye Qing.”

“The Pacification Bureau? That’s right! The Pacification Bureau! Someone in the Pacification Bureau must have leaked my plans! Who told you about this? Who!?” Ye Qing roared.

“Amitabha. You are an incredibly insolent and reckless man, benefactor[1]. You must have offended someone and are now suffering the consequences of your actions.”

In short, it was karmic justice.

Bone Monk performed a deep bow before taking a step forward. “Besides, your hands are stained with blood. You have killed so many people that the only way to cleanse your sins is to repent in Avīci[2], and so I shall.”

As he finished his sentence, Bone Monk’s mouth abruptly split open and revealed rows and rows of sharp teeth. He also had a forked tongue that was clearly tinged in blood even in the darkness. He looked far more demonic than he was human.

Headless Maiden spoke up with a giggle, “You can kill him, but make sure you don’t hurt his head. I love heads, and he has a smart and tough head on his shoulders. I think it’ll be a good fit for me.”

Headless Maiden suddenly grabbed a female servant’s head and ripped it right off her shoulders. Then, she placed it over her own neck. Countless scarlet flesh buds immediately reached out and connected the head to the neck.

Headless Maiden shook the head left and right, and for a moment it looked like everything was normal. But a few breaths later, the servant’s head suddenly started rotting and pitting at a visible rate. It wasn’t long before the head had become completely unusable.

“It’s no use! Give me your head, Ye Qing! Give me your head!”

Headless Maiden abruptly ripped off the head and shrieked shrilly at Ye Qing. There was now a note of urgency in her voice.

Everyone else looked eager to get the action started as well.

“So, you’re all here to kill me.” Ye Qing slowly swept his gaze across the crowd, and everyone who met his bloodshot eyes felt an uncontrollable chill creeping up their spine. “But have you figured out how many lives you’ll need to bury me?”

“Is it ten?”

“Fifty?”

“A hundred?”

Every time Ye Qing said a number, his grin would widen just a little further. His face was full of scorn and disdain when he ended with, “Or all of you?”

“I think it’s worth it if I can take you all to the grave with me, actually. What do you think?”

Everyone: “...”

It might be worth it for you, but it sure as hell isn’t worth it for the rest of us.

Regardless, the crowd was intimidated. The fact that Ye Qing had killed over a hundred jianghu warriors and still managed to defeat the Sword Gentleman Chen Cang was still fresh in everyone’s eyes.

“I can see you don’t want to die. To be honest, I don’t want to die either.”

“The reason you’re targeting me is because you want my cultivation manuals and Strange Artifacts, right? I have plenty of those. Why don’t I give them to you, and you let me go? That way, you don’t have to die, and I don’t have to die either. It’ll be a win-win for everyone, don’t you agree?”

His suggestion was tempting. They claimed that the reason they chased Ye Qing out of the city was to defend their honor, but really, the value of honor could be quite fluid depending on the circumstances. The one thing that wasn’t fluid was their greed for Ye Qing’s head and his valuables.

Suddenly, a simple and honest-sounding voice broke the silence, “He’s right, master! If we do as he says, then we’ll get something out of this without having to fight him.”

“Lower your voice, idiot!” rebuked a somewhat ancient voice. “And right my ass! When will you grow a brain inside that empty head of yours? That boy is incredibly cunning. Who can say that he isn’t trying to trick us?”

“What if he gave us fake, useless stuff and ran away while we weren’t looking? What if his plan is to provoke us into fighting and killing each other?”



The speaker was an old Taoist wearing a set of tattered robes. He was standing at the farthest edge of the group, and he was only a Vessel Augmentor. His disciple was a young man with a muscular stature but a dumb, innocent-looking face. He too was just a Vessel Augmentor.

The old Taoist had lowered his voice to a whisper, but the large majority of the jianghu warriors around him were Astral Refiners. Naturally, they had caught onto every word.

Vajra Boy, Old Man Hemp and more couldn't help but glance at Ye Qing suspiciously after hearing this. In response, Ye Qing looked up at the sky and pretended he couldn't hear anything. On the inside though, he was swearing and shelving his Plan A.

Meanwhile, the old Taoist was still reprimanding his disciple, "Also, what if he poisoned the items? And even if he's telling the truth, what if he returns in the future and hunts us down one by one? He never said he wouldn't take revenge against us, did he?"

The more the old Taoist spoke, the uglier the jianghu warriors' expressions became. Even Ye Qing was glaring at the old Taoist as well. Are you the fucking worm in my brain, mate? Or a Detective Conan who must expound every part of the whole conspiracy for everyone to hear?

In fact, he had poisoned the items he was planning to give to his attackers. It was a complementary part of Plan A. Unfortunately, it was snuffed out before he could even execute it.

The Old Taoist still wasn't done, however. "Though to be fair, these jianghu warriors are incredibly stupid. I can hardly believe how easily they were thrown off the track by the boy. They had gathered a small army to kill him, and they thought this could be settled peacefully? Dream on! If they're stupid enough to let the boy go tonight, I'm willing to bet my meager possession that he will take it all back plus interest by tomorrow!"

"Also, did they forget that killing him would give them everything he has plus the Way of Taiping's reward? Why settle for less when they could get so much more?"

"Master, we're jianghu warriors as well. Are you also saying that we're stupid?" His dumb disciple asked, puzzled.

"I said all that, and that's what caught your attention!?" The old Taoist jumped on his feet and smacked his disciple on the back of his head, hard. "Of course we're not the same as these dumb shits! We're above them!"

This time, Ye Qing wasn't the only one who looked like he would strangle the old man. Who the fuck you're calling a dumb shit, old man? We can totally kill you first before we kill Ye Qing, you know?

His dumb disciple didn't even look like he felt the blows, however. "You're right, master. What would you do if you were them?"

The old Taoist immediately did a one-eighty and raised his head arrogantly. "Now that's a good question. If it was me, I would agree to the boy's suggestion and wait until he relaxes his guard. Then, I'll rush him before he can enact any one of his cunning plans."

Ye Qing's expression immediately turned a shade darker than it already was. Just how dirty is his heart? I can totally kill you first before I kill the others, you know?

“But something doesn’t feel right. The boy doesn’t feel like the type to give up without a fight. He must be plotting something, but what?” The old Taoist scratched his nose as he tried to figure out the source of his unease.

“It probably has something to do with your face turning black, master!” His dumb disciple answered honestly while staring at his master’s face. “Your face looks so black it’s like the bottom of a frying pan. Or did you learn a trick or two from an opera actor? I love operas!”

“My face is... black?” the old Taoist touched his face in confusion before realizing something. “Your face is completely black as well!”

“Is it poison? Are we poisoned?” “We are poisoned! Someone is trying to kill us with poison!”

“Poison?”

This caught everyone’s attention. When they looked around, they realized that the old Taoist and his disciple weren’t the only ones who had pitch black faces. The stronger ones still looked okay, but the weaker ones had already turned completely black in the face. It was just that the night was too dark, and they were putting most of their attention on Ye Qing and not themselves. If it wasn’t for the old Taoist’s discovery, they would still be in the dark even now.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

As if on cue, some Qi Invokers and Vessel Augmentors collapsed to the ground and died.

“Pwack! This poison is horrifying!”

Some people tried to channel their cultivation art to expel the poison, but the second they mustered their true qi, their blood vessels exploded as if they couldn’t withstand the pressure.

“Ye Qing! You’re the one who did this?!”

Old Man Hemp, Bone Monk and everyone else’s faces had turned a shade darker as well. They glared at Ye Qing with fury as they channeled their martial arts to suppress the poison.

They were stupid, but they weren’t that stupid that they would mistake the culprit behind the poisoning. Only one person would benefit from this, and that person was Ye Qing.

“Hehe. Yep! It was me.” Ye Qing broke into a grin. “You realized it too late.”

This was his true trump card and the reason he even bothered to waste his breath on these people.

The poison afflicting the jianghu warriors was the Hundred Poison of Blue Demon Hand. Although it was only a Red-class strange Artifact, the Hundred Poison was still an incredibly potent weapon. It was colorless, odorless, and extremely deadly. Even an Astral Refiner would take huge damage if they inhaled too much of it.

From the moment he was surrounded, Ye Qing had unleashed the Hundred Poison and bought time for the poison to accumulate.

The reason he wanted to incite the jianghu warriors into fighting themselves was to accelerate the poison's effects. They wouldn't even find out that he was the one behind the poison because anyone could've released it at that point. Ideally, he could've destroyed them all without too much effort. Unfortunately, his grand plan was ruined by the Taoist who was too smart for his own good.

It was fine though. The Hundred Poison was just the appetizer, and the show had just begun.