

Stranger 461

Chapter 461: I Regret Nothing

Although the elite cavalymen were already dead, they continued to travel toward Duan Zipao due to inertia. They slammed full force into him and sent him flying through the air.

His consciousness was flickering, and blood was spilling through his lips. Before Duan Zipao could recover his wits, a gigantic silhouette reached him with surprising agility and swung its palm. The silhouette was, of course, Ye Qing.

Red lotuses began appearing in Duan Zipao's headspace. Demonic hellfire burned his mind and seeped out of his pores.

Unfortunately, Duan Zipao was a late-stage Spirit Master who had forged his Yin God. There was a burst of spiritual power, and the Ghost Leopard of Winnowing Waters let out a mighty roar. Both the red lotuses attempting to take root in his mind and the hellfire spreading throughout his body were annihilated in an instant. At the same time, Duan Zipao snapped back to reality.

That wasn't the only move Ye Qing had prepared for him, however. The second he regained his consciousness, Duan Zipao found a slender saber flying straight toward his neck. It was as red as it was lethal.

Pssh!

Blade sank into flesh, and for a moment, it looked like Ye Qing had won. However, the young man's expression darkened. It was because the killer move that should've beheaded Duan Zipao was blocked. Somehow, the Leopard Commander's armor had melted into streams of liquid and blocked his attack.

"Hahahaha! You think you can kill me?"

Duan Zipao let out a mad laugh, but his eyes were overflowing with murder and just a hint of fear.

At this point, even he had to admit that Ye Qing possessed outstanding intelligence, cunning, and adaptability. First, he used the fog to obstruct his spiritual senses. Then, he tricked him into killing against his own cavalymen and incurring some serious damage as a result of it.

Although he was a Spirit Master, he wasn't a body-tempering warrior. Not even he could take the cavalry charge of a guard of elite cavalymen[1] head on.

As if that wasn't enough, Ye Qing had launched his ambush right after his energies were scattered, and before new energy was born. His planning, his decision-making, and his timing were definitely praiseworthy. If it wasn't for the fact that the armor he was wearing was a Strange Artifact called Black Water, he could very well be dead already.

Anger and fear joined together to form a sea of bloodthirst. Duan Zipao's palm abruptly turned as black as ink, and he aimed a cold, vicious, and destructive palm strike at Ye Qing's chest.

Bang!

There was a low, dull sound of impact, and the yin and yang energies protecting Ye Qing were completely destroyed. Not only that, the palm continued forward and struck Ye Qing right on the chest.

Pop pop pop!

Ye Qing's insides began popping and cracking incessantly like fireworks. Duan Zipao was surprised for an instant before he burst out laughing, "You actually took my Black Sky Divine Palm head on? What a fool!"

He just wanted to force Ye Qing away when he executed the move. He never thought that Ye Qing would choose to bear the attack. An ultimate technique of the Black Sky Divine Palace, the Black Sky Divine Palm was an insidious, vicious palm strike that injected soft, cold poison into the target's body. It spread quickly throughout the body and broke the bones, destroyed the internal organs, damaged the bodily points, and threw one's pulse into complete disarray.

Depending on how tough the victim was, Black Sky Divine Palm could literally destroy a person's bones and internal organs in one hit. It was best used against warriors with a tough body.

The palm force was incredibly difficult to remove as it seeped deep into one's body, and as if that wasn't evil enough already, it also inflicted long-term, unbearable pain upon its victims. The pain would not disappear until the palm force was fully eradicated, and it was bad enough that even a tough-as-nail warrior couldn't endure it for long.

This was why the Black Sky Divine Palm was known together with the Three Splits Mind Killing Palm, the Absolute Yin Hand, the Finger That Castrates, the Insect Feast Palm and more as some of the most insidious and brutal palm arts in the entire world.

Duan Zipao didn't expect Ye Qing to take the Black Sky Divine Palm head on, nor did he understand why the young man would make such a foolish choice. Regardless, he didn't hesitate to rotate his palm half a circle and pushed a tidal wave of black palm force into Ye Qing's body.

The palm force swiftly spread throughout Ye Qing's body from the chest. In just the blink of an eye, Ye Qing's complexion had turned a shade of black, and black blood was pouring from every orifice.

Ye Qing was smiling, however. While Duan Zipao was busy injecting as much palm force into his body as possible, he flipped his hand and caught the commander's wrist in a death grip.

Realizing that he was in danger, Duan Zipao tried to withdraw his hand only to realize that his opponent was as immovable as a mountain itself. The next moment, an even bigger force pulled him uncontrollably into Ye Qing's lap.

Duan Zipao blanched. He was currently spent because he had injected all of his energies into Ye Qing earlier. He hurriedly sucked in a deep breath in an attempt to gather new energy inside him.

He was too late. Ye Qing grabbed his left arm as well and headbutted him[2].

Although his armor blocked the headbutt for him, it couldn't stop the anomalous burst of spiritual power invading his headspace. It instantly destabilized his mind and dimmed his consciousness. As a result, the energy he was channeling immediately crumbled into nothing.

Before Duan Zipao could regain his wits, Ye Qing tightened his grip into a bear hug and jumped. The ground shook, and they both shot toward the walls of Tian Yong like an arrow.

BOOM!

A massive pit with spreading cracks on the fringes appeared on the wall. The next moment, Ye Qing clenched his fists and began punching Duan Zipao's stomach.

The armor was still protecting the Leopard Commander, but Ye Qing didn't care. He kept throwing punch after punch with wanton abandon. Every time Duan Zipao regained his consciousness and got ready to launch a counterattack, Ye Qing would headbutt him and execute "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul" to break his train of thought.

Although Duan Zipao was a late-stage Spirit Master with a Yin God, the cavalry charge from earlier had done him a serious amount of damage and drained much of his spiritual power. Not only that, Ye Qing's "Hellfire Red Lotus Saber Art" also damaged his Yin God. Finally, Ye Qing's "Heavenly Demon Captures The Soul" was nothing like Duan Zipao had ever encountered, so he wasn't able to counteract it immediately.

Like a tireless blacksmith, Ye Qing pounded Duan Zipao with his fists again and again. A dozen or so punches later, the armor finally exceeded its limit and exploded into smithereens.

The second the armor exploded, Ye Qing threw his left elbow forward and struck Duan Zipao squarely in the neck. It was such a powerful strike that the commander's neck sank a full meter into the wall. Not done yet, Ye Qing raised his right arm and landed two quick strikes on Duan Zipao's elbows. There was a bloodcurdling scream, and the man's bones ripped right out of his flesh.

Now that the man was mostly disabled, Ye Qing no longer had anything to be afraid of. He began pounding away Duan Zipao's stomach like a drum once more.

Debris flew everywhere as Duan Zipao sank deeper and deeper into the wall. His eyes were bulging, blood was pouring out of every orifice, and his energies kept growing weaker and weaker.

Dozens of punches later, Ye Qing abruptly stopped his assault. As if on cue, his energies suddenly plummeted like an avalanche.

If someone were to look at the exposed parts of his arms and neck, they would notice that his skin had turned bluish black in color. His eyebrows and hair were also frozen as if he was standing in the coldest winter. His aura was beyond chilly, and a pool of ice was spreading underneath his feet.

"Cough! Cough!"

Ye Qing covered his mouth and coughed a little. Despite this, he couldn't stop a trickle of black blood from pouring through his fingers. Every part of his body was hurting like a bitch.

Duan Zipao's palm strike hadn't just jolted his internal organs out of position, broke his muscles and bones, and damaged his veins. The insidious palm force had also spread throughout his body and made him feel like he was standing naked in the coldest winterland. To say he was beyond uncomfortable would be the understatement of the century.

Even so, Ye Qing didn't regret taking the palm strike. Everything he had done until this point was to kill Duan Zipao.

Duan Zipao was the greatest obstacle standing between him and freedom. He could never escape unless the commander was taken out of the picture. That was why he had been searching for a way to kill Duan Zipao from the moment he used the Child of Blood Demon.

First, he used the original fog to obstruct his enemies' senses and pit them against each other. While Duan Zipao was at his weakest state, he would ambush the commander and hopefully kill him.

Everything had gone perfectly until Duan Zipao's armor suddenly came to life and blocked what should've been a killing blow. The lull gave Duan Zipao just enough breathing room to unleash the Black Sky Divine Palm.

Ye Qing could've dodged the attack, but he knew that Duan Zipao just wanted to drive him away and buy himself even more time to recover. That was precisely why he couldn't back off.

If he retreated, Duan Zipao would be able to recover his strength, and as a late-stage Spirit Master, the commander had all the tools he needed to turn this into a battle of attrition. There were only two possible outcomes if the fight did turn into a battle of attrition. One, he runs out of strength and dies. Two, reinforcements show up, save Duan Zipao and kill him.

Duan Zipao could afford to drag out the battle, but not him. That was why he could only bear the attack head on and fight with his life on the line. Moreover, Duan Zipao wasn't a body-tempering warrior. His astral qi and spirit were powerful, but his body was perfectly average. He of all people feared trading wound for wound, life for life.

Ye Qing was the opposite. His body was strong, but his astral qi and spirit were weaker than Duan Zipao's.

In a battle between warriors, the only path to victory was to attack the enemy's weakness with your strength. Besides, Ye Qing was confident he could take the Black Sky Divine Palm and still defeat Duan Zipao.

In the end, he won, and Duan Zipao lost. So, he regretted nothing.

Chapter 462: Intimidation

"Cough... It's your victory."

Viscous, bright red blood dripped down Duan Zipao's lips as he coughed. His aura was so weak it felt like a breeze could snuff it out.

There was no fear on the Leopard Commander's face, however. He said, "You won't kill me though. After all, I'm your only ticket out of this mess."

Ye Qing too was coughing incessantly because of the Black Sky Divine Palm. He was trying to heal his injuries using his powerful vigor and vitality, but the effects were minimal.

"If you kill me, you won't escape. But if you keep me alive, there are many ways I can be useful," Duan Zipao declared. "Release me, and I will help you escape Tian Yong."

"You're... right." Ye Qing covered his mouth and coughed again.

An arrogant, disdainful smile appeared on Duan Zipao's face. That was his final expression before a thin red line appeared on his neck.

The Leopard Commander's head fell right off his shoulders and rolled several times on the ground like a watermelon. When it came to a stop, his widened, frozen eyes were staring straight at Ye Qing.

"But I don't need you."

Ye Qing never even bothered to look at Duan Zipao. With the wave of his hand, he withdrew the original fog back into his body.

When the fog cleared, and weak sunlight through the clouded sky, a field of corpses greeted countless eyeballs.

Most of these people were just obeying orders.

Most of them were perfectly innocent.

But they tried to kill him, so he killed them in return.

That was all there was to it.

There was no such thing as an innocent enemy.

Clatter clatter clatter!

It was at this moment companies of men filed out of the city gate. They looked as numerous and endless as the sea itself.

It wasn't long before they skidded to a halt, however. Why?

Because everyone on the battlefield except one was dead.

Because so much blood was pooling on the battlefield that it looked like a lake of blood.

Because Duan Zipao was embedded deep within the city walls, headless.

And because standing opposite of them was a pale-looking young man whose spine stood as straight as a sword.

Veteran or greenhorn, the blood drained away from everyone's face. Words couldn't describe how they felt at this moment.

"Ye Qing..." A white-faced commandant asked the young man slowly.

"That's me."

Ye Qing slowly focused his gaze on the commandant and caused him to grow even whiter.

"Did you... kill them?" The commandant asked with a shiver.

This wasn't the first time he saw a field of corpses, but never from the loser's perspective. This was definitely the first time he lost so many comrades.

It was an unfamiliar, infuriating, and terrifying feeling.

"I did. And not just them. I killed your Leopard Commander as well," Ye Qing declared with a smile. He looked like a white flame in a dark night; pale but brilliant.

"You cannot escape. Surrender and die."

The commandant was the commandant for a reason. He slowly suppressed his emotions, found the killing intent nesting within his heart, and growled, "Draw your weapons, men!"

His order snapped the shocked and terrified soldiers out of their reverie. They hurriedly unsheathed their weapons as per ordered, but their movements were disjointed, and some of them even broke out in whimpers.

It was clear they were shaken by what they saw.

“I don’t think so.”

Ye Qing’s eyes slowly turned red and translucent like amber. He raised his right arm and made a grabbing motion.

In that moment, every drop of blood on the battlefield slowly floated into the sky and formed a literal river of blood. As the river kept growing, the bodies slowly shrank, and the ground returned to its natural color.

What happened next was something that would haunt their dreams for many, many years to come. Ye Qing opened his mouth, and the river of blood poured into his stomach.

He, a mere man, had devoured an entire river.

Ye Qing’s aura shot through the roof. If his presence was a candle flame before, now it was a forest fire that dyed everything within several hundred meters of him red.

The Hengshan soldiers felt suffocated in mind and body. Their blood was bumping against their blood vessels as if it had a mind of its own, and their energies were all over the place.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

Those weak in cultivation or willpower even collapsed to their knees or blacked out on the spot.

“You wouldn’t follow me if you know what’s good for you.”

The corners of Ye Qing’s curled into a bright, refreshing smile. But because of the hellish background, it looked like the smile of the most horrendous demon.

“But if you did, I would welcome you with open arms. I can always add more bodies to my grave.”

A light chuckle escaped his lips, and the unholy light churned like a tidal wave. His hands clasped behind his back, Ye Qing turned around and slowly walked away.

They didn’t give chase. They didn’t even dare to make a sound. They simply stared at Ye Qing’s back as if they weren’t watching a human, but a demon.

The Hengshan Army was famous for their discipline and fearlessness, but right here and now, they looked like a broken quail.

The commandant gripped his saber so hard that veins were popping on the back of his hand. His lips were quivering as if he was desperate to open his mouth.

In the end though, he didn’t raise his saber, nor did he say the words he thought he wanted to say.

When Ye Qing was completely gone, and the red space enveloping the world finally faded away like a mirage, every soldier let out a sigh of relief and collapsed on the ground. They felt weary beyond imagination despite not having done anything.

The commandant slowly closed his eyes and let go of his weapon. When he sighed, it looked like he had aged a decade in an instant.

He couldn't believe it, but Ye Qing had intimidated them all. They outnumbered him several hundred to one, and even the greenest among them was a war veteran who would not hesitate to throw their lives away on the battlefield. And yet Ye Qing still managed to scare them into inaction with just words.

What a joke!

It was at this moment three silhouettes dashed out from inside the city. They were none other than Chu Qingge, Granny Ghost and Grandpa Wasp.

"Did... Did Ye Qing do all this?" Grandpa Wasp exclaimed in disbelief when he saw the field of corpses. His eyes widened even more when he saw Duan Zipao's headless torso and wide-eyed head. "He killed even the Leopard...?"

"Yes." The commandant nodded stiffly.

"What happened to the bodies?" asked Granny Ghost with a small quiver in her voice. She noticed that every corpse on the battlefield except Duan Zipao's head had shriveled as if their blood was sucked dry.

Was it a coincidence? Or did Ye Qing skip Duan Zipao's head on purpose?

"The 'Blood Demon Sutra'?" Chu Qingge mumbled while furrowing her brows a little.

The others might not know what martial art Ye Qing had used to drain the bodies dry, but not her. She was there when he received the inheritance after all, and as far as she was aware, it was the only martial art he possessed that could perform such a feat.

Ye Qing had told her that he only received a small portion of the Blood Demon's inheritance, but now, it would seem that he hadn't told her the truth.

"What did you say, Your Highness?" Grandpa Wasp snapped out of his daze and asked.

"It's nothing." Chu Qingge shook her head and asked the commandant, "Where is Ye Qing?"

The man answered woodenly, "He left."

He didn't escape. He left.

"He left?!" Grandpa Wasp erupted in anger and disbelief. "What are you waiting for then? Let's pursue him already!"

The commandant simply bowed his head and said nothing.

"When did Ye Qing leave?" Chu Qingge asked, "Which direction did he go?"

The commandant pointed and answered, "He left just a short while ago."

“The Yong River? Is he trying to escape by water?” Chu Qingge’s voice gained a note of urgency. “Grandpa Wasp, Granny Ghost, let’s go!”

The commandant hesitated for a moment before saying, “Your Highness, Ye Qing is a formidable foe. Even the Leopard Commander had perished in his hands. I would strongly urge you to wait until the general has arrived before you go after him.”

“It’s fine. Ye Qing couldn’t have defeated the Leopard Commander without suffering some grievous injuries. I doubt he has the strength to handle all three of us combined,” said Chu Qingge while glancing at the commandant. Then, she took off in the direction Ye Qing had left while Granny Ghost and Grandpa Wasp were following closely behind.

“Grievous injuries?”

The commandant wouldn’t stop repeating the words like he was ill even after Chu Qingge was long gone.

Chapter 463: Waiting

A faint mist was brushing against the shores of Yong River, but it wasn’t nearly thick enough to obscure the endless expanse of blue stretching from end to end. Embedded in between two mountainous terrain, it looked like the world’s biggest and prettiest blue ribbon.

The Fog Demon was floating beside Ye Qing and sighing, “We finally arrived. Well done, boy.”

Honestly, there was a moment—quite the long moment, in fact—where the Fog Demon honestly thought that they were going to die in the city. However, Ye Qing had ultimately defied all odds and escaped alive. It was such an impressive feat that even it had to pay him a sincere compliment; a rare thing coming from its kind.

Ye Qing didn’t say anything. When the Fog Demon looked, it suddenly noticed wounds appearing on Ye Qing’s skin like cracks on a porcelain vase. Blood was seeping out of them.

“Are you okay, boy?” The Fog Demon asked urgently when it saw this.

“Relax. This won’t kill me,” Ye Qing replied with a smirk. Unfortunately, he used a little too much force and caused a wound on his cheek to split wide open like the Joker. A stream of bright red blood jetted out of the wound so hard that it left a hole on the ground.

“I just consumed a little too much blood, that’s all.”

Earlier, he had consumed several hundred bodies’ worth of blood using the “Blood Demon Sutra” including the blood of the late-stage Spirit Master, Duan Zipao, to cow the Hengshan Army into submission. As a result, the power of those blood was spilling out of his body like a flood bursting out of a broken dam.

It would’ve been very difficult for him to keep this amount of power contained even if he was in tiptop condition, and right now his body was afflicted by Duan Zipao’s Black Sky Divine Palm. It

was a miracle he hadn't exploded into a shower of blood and gore. Like a performer with a sword inserted all the way into his stomach, a single misstep might see him torn to shreds.

He didn't let go of the power, however. He still needed it for now. A dangerous weapon could definitely harm its wielder, but it would harm his enemies so much more.

The Fog Demon relaxed when it saw that Ye Qing was calm enough to crack a joke. "Heh! You and your undying passion for theatrics!"

"If it wasn't for my theatrics, how am I supposed to cow those people into submission?" Ye Qing chuckled. "If it wasn't for my theatrics, I doubt I would be able to make it here alive."

"What is your plan now?" The Fog Demon asked.

"We wait," Ye Qing said calmly, "we wait for our ride and for some people to show up."

By ride, he was referring to the Corpse Ship, of course. The Boat of Longing, a.k.a the Corpse Ship, was his final trump card.

Leaving the city wasn't enough to keep him alive. Not even close. Even leaving the prefecture altogether was just a start.

He had killed the Harmony King's son and a prince of Chu. There was no doubt that this matter would reach the emperor's ears. There was a reason people said that the Son of Heaven's wrath could kill millions, and he wouldn't be surprised if he ended up having to leave Chu altogether.

Of course, this *might* be an exaggeration. The imperial court was lofty, but the *jianghu* was far and wide. No matter how powerful the emperor was, there was no way he could oversee the entire realm all the time.

He would definitely die if he stayed in the regions where the emperor wielded the most power though, and Tian Yong was definitely one of those regions. That was why he needed to get the hell out as soon as possible.

Without help, it would've been nigh impossible for him to leave Tian Yong behind. But with the Boat of Longing, it was practically trivial.

The Boat of Longing was an Anomaly that specialized in concealment. Few people could perceive its existence, and not even Grandmasters could navigate its fog without being misdirected. It also possessed the ability to traverse any body of water such as rivers and lakes.

He was a partial owner of the Boat of Longing, so he could summon it to his side at any body of water. Besides that, Longing, Hua Mei and Jue Yan owed him a favor. Therefore, leaving Tian Yong wasn't an issue.

He could've left the city at Yonghe Lake, but the Boat of Longing's appearance at Yonghe Lake had greatly embarrassed the Pacification Bureau. Furious, they set up a Dust of Falling Blue Great Array that could isolate any and all Strangers. As a result, he was unable to perceive the Boat of Longing from Yonghe Lake. That was why he had to leave the city.

The good news was that the northside of Tian Yong was close to the famous scenic spot, the Yong River. This was the real reason he tried everything in the book to leave the city through the northern gate.

The process had been convoluted and fraught with difficulties, but thankfully, he made it in the end. He had summoned the Boat of Longing as soon as he neared the Yong River. Now, he only needed to wait for it to show up.

“We’re just going to... wait?”

The Fog Demon repeated Ye Qing’s words like a confused child. *Shouldn’t we hide ourselves at least? Are you sure it’s a good idea to stand out here in the open? What would your pursuers think if they saw you like this? Shouldn’t you care for their fragile hearts?*

“Who are you waiting for?”

“Someone I owe,” Ye Qing stared at the calm waters with equally calm eyes—or was it? Was that a lightning storm brewing behind those deceptively calm windows to the soul? “And another who owes me.”

Dozens of breaths later, Ye Qing slowly turned around and said, “They’re here.”

Before he even finished, Chu Qingge, Granny Ghost and Grandpa Wasp entered his view.

“We finally caught you, you murderous rebel!” Grandpa Wasp’s eyes widened with delight the second he caught sight of Ye Qing. A swarm of venomous wasps immediately flew out of his body and toward Ye Qing like a storm. “Now die!”

The wasps he raised were named the Poison Wasps. Although it was just a Red-class Stranger, what it lacked in quality, it made up for it with quantity. The barb of a Poison Wasp was highly venomous and could inflict massive pain upon its victims. If enough toxin was injected into the victim’s body, then it could even melt their flesh and blood into a pool of screaming goo.

Right now, Ye Qing looked like a broken vase that was stitched together with glue. It proved that he had sustained grievous injuries during his battle against Duan Zipao. Grandpa Wasp was confident that he wouldn’t be able to stop his Poison Wasps.

His expectations were defied immediately. The black cloud that was the Poison Wasps didn’t even manage to get close to Ye Qing before he clenched his fist. The air around the swarm abruptly let out a deafening pop, and every single Poison Wasp died just like that.

“Ahhh! My babies!” Grandpa Wasp let out a bloodcurdling scream. His shock was greater than even the pain of losing his wasps, however.

Anyone could see that Ye Qing wasn’t in a good condition. Not even close. So how did he still possess so much power? The power he used to destroy the Poison Wasps intimidated even him, a Spirit Master. Sure, he was less of a warrior and more of a waspkeeper, but he was still a Spirit Master!

“Cough! Cough!”

Suddenly, Ye Qing covered his mouth and let out a couple of violent coughs. Pitch black blood spurted through his fingers, and the cracks on his body abruptly widened and spilled even more blood.

Grandpa Wasp saw this as a good sign. He immediately released more wasps while shouting, "He's on his last legs, old hag! Let's attack him together and take revenge for the prince!"

Granny Ghost wordlessly stepped forward and discharged a ring of ghastly energy. It quickly took the form of a small ghost. Then, she bit off half of her tongue and spat both the tongue and her blood essence onto the ghost.

The blood essence spun in the air for a bit before transforming into an evil-looking talisman. When the talisman pressed itself on the little ghost's forehead, power swiftly spread throughout its body and made it many, many times stronger than it was before. Even its aura had become anomalous and imperceptible.

The next moment, the ghost abruptly appeared atop Ye Qing as if it had teleported and clung to his skull with a death grip. Then, it sucked in a deep breath.

Rich vitality immediately poured into the little ghost's mouth. At the same time, tendrils of black qi seeped into Ye Qing's flesh.

It was at this moment blood qi suddenly erupted from Ye Qing's body like the sun. It was so forceful that even the sky above his head was dyed red. Like a snowball that was thrown into the frying pan, the little ghost screamed and disintegrated into nothing just like that. The same thing happened to the Poison Wasps as well.

"Pwack!"

The death of the little ghost caused Granny Ghost to spit out a mouthful of fresh blood. At the same time, a bizarre-looking, bright red rune enveloped her whole body and seemingly subjected her to an unimaginable amount of pain. Considering that she hadn't batted an eyelid when the little ghost was feasting on her flesh earlier, one could only imagine what pain she was suffering right now. Her complexion was pallid, and her ancient back grew even more crooked than before.

Her pain was nothing compared to her shock, however. She had executed a secret art called the Ghost Curse, and anyone who was cursed by it would be haunted by vicious ghosts. It was a powerful curse not even a Spirit Master could remove easily. However, Ye Qing had dispelled it and inflicted a rebound on her like nothing.

How is a grievously injured man this strong? How is it even possible for a Spirit Purifier to display such power?

What a monster!

Grandpa Wasp didn't know what to do either. His Poisonous Wasps were the one and only weapon he possessed in his arsenal, and Ye Qing just slew them all.

For a time, it was so quiet that one could hear a pin drop.

Then, Chu Qingge broke her silence and slowly walked toward Ye Qing.

Chapter 464: Can't Go Back

“Stop, Your Highness! I’m not sure how, but his power far exceeds that of a Spirit Purifier right now! You mustn’t let your anger overtake you!”

“He’s right, Your Highness! Don’t tempt Ye Qing’s ruthlessness and brutality! Run while Grandpa Wasp and I hold him back!”

“Your Highness, please stop! Come back!”

Grandpa Wasp and Granny Ghost turned as pale as a sheet when they saw Chu Qingge walking toward Ye Qing.

Chu Qingge wasn’t deterred, however. She assured them, “It will be fine,” before resuming her walk toward Ye Qing.

Ye Qing smiled. He never attacked her even as she got closer and closer. A moment later, he began, “I didn’t think you would catch up to me first... unless you’re the one who saw through my escape plan?”

“It was me,” Chu Qingge confirmed as she stopped three steps away from Ye Qing. Her expression was calm, and her eyes looked as clear as a mirror.

... No, there was something lurking behind those clear eyes. A hint of an indescribable, indecipherable emotion, like white clouds and invisible wind stirring what was a perfectly blue sky.

A cloud didn’t understand the meaning of sorrow, and the wind was everchanging.

“Why?” Chu Qingge asked.

“Would you believe me if I told you I didn’t do it?” Ye Qing didn’t answer immediately.

“I would.” Chu Qingge fell silent for a moment. “So, did you do it?”

I believe you didn’t do it, but did you do it?

Did you betray my trust?

“It wasn’t me,” Ye Qing declared. “Or rather, I did kill your brother, but I wasn’t myself at the time. I was set up.”

“You may not know this, but about two weeks ago, I nearly died inside the Corpse Ship. Someone had purposely led me to the Anomaly so it would kill me, and that person had disguised himself as a waiter of Wine Are Songs Boat. That is why Lord Hong had the place shut down.”

“A few days ago, I almost died again because Zhao Lan somehow consumed the Hanba’s blood essence and temporarily gained the power of a Half-Step Grandmaster. But according to Lord Hong’s investigation, Zhao Lan never had the Hanba’s blood essence until someone gave it to him a day before our match. Clearly, the same person tried to have me killed through Zhao Lan.”

"I survived both assassination attempts only because I was incredibly lucky. This time though... my luck finally ran out."

Rare shock crept onto Chu Qingge's face. "Do you know who this killer is?"

Ye Qing shook his head bitterly. "No."

There were just too many people who wanted to see him dead.

Chu Qingge stayed quiet for a moment. "I trust you, so please come back with me. I promise I will right the wrongs that have been done to you, and give my father and my brother the proper closure they deserve."

A sardonic smirk crossed his lips. "I'm sorry, Qingge. I can't go with you."

Chu Qingge asked slowly, "... You don't believe me?"

"Not at all. I trust you more than most." Ye Qing began slowly, "But would Zhou Hengshan believe you? Would the Harmony King believe you? Would the imperial court believe you?"

"Besides, I just killed several hundred people including Duan Zipao to escape. Zhou Hengshan would never let this go, and I doubt that the imperial court could overlook such a challenge to their authority either. More importantly, the mastermind behind all this would never stop until I'm dead."

"If I go back with you, I will die. I would also be dragging you into my mess."

"I wish it wouldn't turn out this way, but... I can't go back anymore."

Chu Qingge fell silent. She knew that Ye Qing was speaking the truth, and the truth was often harsh and unchangeable.

"That's why you must run," Chu Qingge said.

"Yes," Ye Qing admitted. "I can neither prove my innocence nor give you the proper answer you seek if I'm dead. So I must run."

"Will you place your trust in me, Qingge? Will you give me the time I need to give you and your family the answer and closure you deserve?"

Chu Qingge stared at him with a complicated expression on her face. "Is this why you stayed behind when you should be focusing on escaping Tian Yong? To tell me all this?"

Ye Qing nodded. "I believe that both you and the Harmony King deserve to know what's going on—and when the time comes, receive the answers and closure you deserve."

"Okay. I believe you," Chu Qingge replied. "I believe you will give me a proper answer."

"Thank you... for believing in me."

It was like an invisible weight was lifted from his shoulders. When Ye Qing smiled again, it was far brighter and carefree than before.

Rumble!

It was at this moment a thunderclap erupted from the distance. The wind howled, and black clouds rolled in with surprising speed and blotted out the clear, sunny sky in just a few breaths.

A giant hand emerged from the dark clouds. It was like a god had decided to descend judgment upon the sinner. Ye Qing felt as tiny and powerless as an ant as the giant hand moved straight toward him.

“General Zhou, stop!”

A shocked and furious cry cut through the air, followed by a sword beam that pierced through the heavens. The sword beam was bright yellow in color and exuded great nobility. It was also overbearing and brimming with power as if the Son of Heaven himself had arrived.

The sword beam struck the giant hand in full force, but it was unable to stop its descent in the slightest. A moment later, it disintegrated into nothing.

All the while, the giant hand continued to fall toward Ye Qing, unstoppable and inescapable.

Despite this, Ye Qing remained calm and collected. It was almost as if he couldn't perceive the attack.

It was at this moment a draconic roar filled the sky. The world shook as a golden dragon descended from above, crushed the storm of black clouds, and slammed head first into the giant hand.

The sword beam had failed to slow the giant hand a little, but the golden dragon was able to smash it into pieces. The scattering force whipped across the landscape like a gale and returned sunlight back to the world once more.

The next moment, three people appeared at the rivershore at the same time. The first one was a stout and angry man brimming with bloodthirst. He was Zhou Hengshan.

The second person was a man wearing a golden robe and a golden mask. He was Chu Hao.

And the third person was a tall and muscular man whose very presence screamed indomitable power. He was Hong Jianglong.

The second Zhou Hengshan appeared, he immediately pounced toward Ye Qing at top speed. His jump caused the origin qi in the air to quiver, and the earth to shake like an earthquake.

Unfortunately for him, Hong Jianglong moved faster and blocked directly in front of his path. As if on cue, they both took half a step to the side and locked shoulders with each other.

Bang!

The golden dragon swimming around Hong Jianglong's body disintegrated, and the ground behind him undulated unnaturally like a tidal wave.

Zhou Hengshan stumbled backward three steps before he managed to catch himself, and each time he took a step, his fat would shake like crazy, and the ground beneath his feet would crumble into dust.

“What is the meaning of this, Hong Jianglong? Are you trying to defend the killer?” Zhou Hengshan glared at Hong Jianglong hatefully.

“It is still too early to decide if Ye Qing is the killer.” Hong Jianglong inhaled an insane amount of air into his abdomen and returned to peak strength in an instant. “Also, Her Highness is standing next to Ye Qing. Are you trying to kill her as well?”

“Are you trying to kill our princess, General Zhou?” said Chu Hao in an unfriendly voice while glaring at Zhou Hengshan. Thank the heavens that Hong Jianglong was here, or he could only imagine the consequences that would follow.

“You misunderstand, Commander Chu.”

Zhou Hengshan shifted his glare to Ye Qing. “I simply lost my cool when I saw the bastard who killed my battalion commander and my men right in front of me. It’s my mistake, and I promise that I will pay the Harmony King a visit and apologize to him later. But right now, we should kill this bastard and take revenge for the prince first.”

“You don’t have the power to decide if Ye Qing is the one who killed the prince,” Hong Jianglong said disdainfully. “Also, you seem to be in a little *too* much hurry to kill Ye Qing. Are you sure you don’t have a confession to make?”

“What the hell are you talking about? First, there are dozens, maybe even a hundred witnesses who saw Ye Qing killing the prince with their own eyes. Second, the bastard killed *my* men and *my* battalion commander. To say that his crimes are unforgivable would be an understatement!”

Right now, Zhou Hengshan was so angry that his body fat was quivering non-stop like the tide. It wasn’t an act. He truly hated Ye Qing to the bone.

When he first heard about the incident, he thought it was an opportunity to kick the Pacification Bureau down a notch and regain some of the face he lost to Hong Jianglong earlier. He thought for sure that everything would go smoothly without a hitch. Instead, he lost several hundred soldiers and even his Leopard Commander to Ye Qing.

This was bad enough, but the damage this failure would do to his reputation was worse. He would become the first general ever to lose his battalion commander and hundreds of soldiers to a single *jianghu* warrior in recent history. Unless he somehow covered up for this failure with a greater achievement—which was nearly impossible to do during peacetime—he would be remembered his whole life as a joke. He might never be able to stand tall in the imperial court or the *jianghu* again.

As a general, he was naturally thick-skinned. However, there was a difference between ignoring the occasional barbs and having your worst mistake being laughed at your whole life.

So yes, he absolutely wanted to tear Ye Qing from limb to limb. He wanted to scatter his ashes so he might never be reborn. If he could somehow implicate Hong Jianglong for Ye Qing’s crimes and ruin his life as well, then even better.

“Why are you defending this reprehensible criminal, Hong Jianglong? Are you really going to break the law?”

Chapter 465: I Will Handle My Own Problems

Reprehensible criminal? Break the law? As if you know a thing about the law! Hong Jianglong scoffed. If I didnt know better, I would think that youre the one who wrote them!

First things first, Ye Qing hasnt been trialed by the Three Judicial Offices and the Imperial Clan Court[1]. Until he is convicted, he is just a suspect.

Second, it was entirely your own fault that your men died in Ye Qings hands. He isnt convicted yet, and yet you accused him of treason and dispatched your whole fucking army to kill him. Of course he was going to defend himself!

You Zhou Hengshan couldnt say anything against that because it was true, and that caused his blood pressure to rise even more than it already was. This argument is pointless. Im just going to ask you one question: Are you getting out of my way, or not?

Ooh, Im so scared! Hong Jianglong sneered. No. What are you going to do about it?

So be it! A terrible power emanated from Zhou Hengshan. His aura shot through the heavens and seemingly warped his very surroundings into a cold, merciless battlefield. It almost felt like armies would pour in at any moment.

The rage of a Grandmaster could literally change the world.

Hah! Like Im scared of you. Hong Jianglong laughed as his aura began skyrocketing as well. Ive been wanting to test your Men of War. Today is the perfect opportunity to do so!

Ill keep Hong Jianglong busy. You go kill Ye Qing, Commander Chu, Zhou Hengshan ordered.

Although Chu Hao was displeased with Zhou Hengshans earlier action, he knew that capturing Ye Qing took priority. That was the task the Harmony King had entrusted to him.

I dare you to make a move, Chu Hao.

But before the shadow guard commander could make a move, his heart suddenly skipped a beat. Hong Jianglongs energy had locked onto him, and it felt as if someone had pressed a sword to his neck.

Are you seriously going to fight the two of us together, Hong Jianglong? Zhou Hengshan scoffed. He and Hong Jianglong were more or less at the same level, and while Chu Hao wasnt a Grandmaster, he was only half a step away from entering that stage. Therefore, there was no way Hong Jianglong could win against them.

Also, my men will be arriving any moment now. There is no way you can protect him, Hong Jianglong. Just surrender him already so we may be done with this farce.

Hong Jianglong wasnt intimidated in the slightest. No, you shut up and come at me, he declared as his energies stirred the surrounding air and origin qi like a golden dragon.

Are you really going to make an enemy out of the Harmony King and the imperial family, Lord Hong? Chu Hao asked in an unfriendly tone as well.

Do I look like a pushover to you?

Hong Jianglong declared in a tone that would accept no rebuke. If you wish to kill him, then you can go through the official process. If, and only if the Three Judicial Courts and the Imperial Clan Court determine that his crimes are punishable by death, then you may kill him. Until then, he is still a member of the Pacification Bureau, and you have no right to lay judgment on him.

You're the one who insists on shaming yourself, Hong Jianglong! Zhou Hengshan roared with bloodshot eyes, and the noises of war grew louder.

Right back at you, fatty. Hong Jianglong sneered. Stop peeing in your own face. It's unsightly.

Heaven and earth began to stir ominously. A great battle would soon break out between two Grandmasters.

It was at this moment Ye Qing took a step forward and declared, Please stop, my lord. There is no need for this.

Chu Qingge also looked at Chu Hao and ordered, Uncle Chu, stay your hand.

Hong Jianglong looked back at Ye Qing and said, Don't worry, Joyless. I swear I will get to the bottom of this and clear your name. Until then, no one will harm a hair on your person.

I am eternally grateful for your trust, my lord, Ye Qing replied with wholehearted sincerity. He didn't expect Hong Jianglong to defend him even when things had come to this. He would be lying if he said he wasn't moved by it. But that was precisely why he couldn't drag Hong Jianglong down with him.

He knew very well that he was in deep shit. The crime of killing Chu Qingli was unforgivable, but he also killed hundreds of Hengshan soldiers and a battalion commander. Although he was set up, there was no way he could have absolved without some consequences even if he had all the evidence he needed to clear his name, which he didn't, not to mention that neither the evidence nor the truth always mattered.

No business was too insignificant, and no slight was too slight when the Son of Heaven was involved.

Hong Jianglong might be able to protect him for a time, but the price was his own life and maybe even the Pacification Bureau itself. At the very least, the consequences would be severe and far-reaching.

The Pacification Bureau had been nothing but good to him. How could he possibly repay kindness with suffering?

This was neither his style nor his way.

He would not and could not become the reason Hong Jianglong was brought low.

That was why he looked at Hong Jianglong and said seriously, But it's fine. You don't have to help me.

What do you mean, Joyless? Hong Jianglong furrowed his brows. If you're worried that I'm not strong enough to protect you, don't.

He glanced meaningfully at Zhou Hengshan and Chu Hao as he declared, I, Hong Jianglong, fear nothing and no one.

You dont have to tell me that, Ye Qing said with a gentle smile on his face. However, there are some things in life that only I can do. I dont wish to borrow anothers hand or entrust my life to another.

What are you trying to say, Joyless? Hong Jianglongs confusion only grew at Ye Qings puzzling words.

Im saying that I will clear my own name, claim the vengeance I am owed, and handle my own problems by my own hands.

Ye Qing looked at Hong Jianglong and declared firmly, I officially resign from the Pacification Bureau. From now on, my actions and behavior no longer have anything to do with the Pacification Bureau, and the Pacification Bureau no longer holds any power over me. So please, dont meddle in my affairs any longer, Lord Hong.

Hong Jianglong shuddered. That was how shocked he was to hear Ye Qings sudden declaration. Joyless, you

Hahahahaha! Zhou Hengshan interrupted the conversation with a crazed, ridiculing laugh. See, Hong Jianglong? He doesnt appreciate your kindness at all! How does it feel to waste your feelings on an ingrate!?

What do you care? Its my business! Hong Jianglong retorted.

Trye. I couldnt care less about you. Zhou Hengshans laugh subsided into a sinister grin. So you best stay out of my business as well.

As soon as he said this, a deafening boom rocked the world, and Zhou Hengshan abruptly pounced toward Ye Qing. For someone so fat, he moved as fast as a lightning bolt.

Hong Jianglong was going to block the generals way again, but this time Chu Hao predicted his movement and fired a violent, storm-like sword beam from his fingers. Although Chu Hao was just a Half-Step Grandmaster, the attack wasnt something he could just ignore. So, he turned his palm around and pressed toward the ground.

Hong Jianglongs palm was only several inches long, but it was like an entire world was contained within it. Inside that world was a golden dragon that opened its mouth and absorbed every wisp of the storm-like sword qi. As powerful as the attack was, it could not harm even a hair on his person.

The Pacification Commissioner took a step forward and blew Chu Hao away like a cotton in the wind.

Chu Hao was stunned. He knew he was no match for Hong Jianglong, but the gap was far bigger than he expected. The man had defeated his sword qi with a single palm, and pushed him back in a single step.

That wasnt to say Chu Haos hindrance was useless. Try as he might, Hong Jianglong ultimately was one step too late to cut in front of Zhou Hengshan. The general swiftly closed the distance between himself and Ye Qing.

Zhou Hengshan! You dare?! Hong Jianglong roared.

Hahaha! Why wouldn't I?! Zhou Hengshan laughed savagely while overflowing with murderous intent. I'm going to kill him right in front of you! What are you going to do about it?

It was at this moment Chu Qingge took a step forward and released a tremendous amount of purple qi. As the Son of Heavens imposing silhouette took form in the sky, she declared, General, please wait and listen to me.

Zhou Hengshan didn't expect this reaction from Chu Qingge, and with so many eyes watching him, he didn't have the courage to kill the princess. He was forced to withdraw the large majority of his energies.

As a Grandmaster, he could release and withdraw his energies as he pleased. Any other warrior below this stage would have suffered at least some damage.

How dare you use the princess as your shield! Princess, watch out! Zhou Hengshan shouted so loudly that no one could hear what Chu Qingge was saying. At the same time, he grabbed her shoulder, sealed her energies so she couldn't resist, and tossed her out of the way like nothing.

With Chu Qingge out of the way, Zhou Hengshan continued to advance toward Ye Qing.

Chapter 466: My Name Is Ye Qing, And I Always Keep My Promises

You killed the prince, and now you're plotting to kill the princess as well? Audacious, reprehensible criminal! You deserve death!

The first thing Zhou Hengshan did after removing Chu Qingge from the equation was to slander the crap out of Ye Qing. Then, he threw a punch faster than the eyes could blink. The flames and smokes of war rose to the sky, and the battle cries of men filled the ears. It felt like they were in the middle of a war zone.

It is easy to find a stick to beat a dog, Ye Qing sneered despite his pallid complexion and tearing flesh. Then, an unbelievable amount of blood and qi poured out of his wounds. They felt as terrible and forceful as Zhou Hengshan's Men of War.

As Ye Qing became taller, and iron-like fur grew out of his skin, the wounds too widened until they looked like cracks on a wall. One could see clearly into his body and his bright red blood roaring swiftly like molten lava. Right here and now, he resembled a human-shaped volcano.

When Ye Qing threw his own punch, it was like a volcano was erupting. The heavens turned crimson, and the ground tore itself asunder. Then, the powers clashed. Red and black dominated one half of the sky like yin and yang, evening and twilight.

Although Chu Qingge's sudden appearance forced Zhou Hengshan to withdraw the large majority of his energies, and he was in so much hurry to kill Ye Qing that he didn't bother regathering his power, he was still a Grandmaster. Just a few breaths later, the red energy began crumbling and receding toward Ye Qing.

Boom!

There was a loud explosion, and the red energy abruptly shattered into smithereens. The resulting shockwave tossed Ye Qing backward as helplessly as a rag doll.

You think you can fight me with your heretical magic? Foolish scum. Zhou Hengshan sneered disdainfully after sending Ye Qing flying.

He was a Grandmaster and a war veteran, so of course he recognized that Ye Qing had temporarily boosted his power using some sort of heretical art. He didn't care though. No matter how bright the firefly shone, it could never compare to the moon.

Zhou Hengshan rushed forward to finish the job, but he had just taken a single step when his sixth sense suddenly warned him of danger. Before he could identify what it was, a pair of explosions even greater than the one earlier erupted directly beneath his feet. Like glass, everything within hundreds of meters of the general abruptly shattered into pieces.

This was just the beginning, however. A greater power burst out of the earth and transformed the whole place into a sea of fire and molten lava. Unlike a normal fire, this one was filled with the aura of death, epidemic, desolation and more.

Hong Jianglong and Chu Hao took no damage because they were standing far enough to react to the sudden explosion. They hurriedly shielded Chu Qingge, Granny Ghost and Grandpa Wasp from harm and withdrew to safety.

However, Zhou Hengshan was caught off guard and standing right at the center of the explosions. He was engulfed before he could react in any way.

The Hanbas blood essence?

Chu Hao blanched a little as he identified its source. If it was him standing at the center of the explosion instead of Zhou Hengshan, he didn't think he would live to see tomorrow's sun. At the very least, he would be grievously wounded for months, maybe even years to come.

How did Ye Qing come by the Hanbas blood essence?

The same question crossed everyone's mind, but no one could answer it. They could only stare at the sea of fire and lava with varying expressions on their faces.

A shame, Hong Jianglong suddenly spoke up and shook his head with regret.

Shame, what? Chu Hao asked, puzzled.

Hong Jianglong answered, The explosion generated by two drops of Hanba blood essence would've been powerful enough to kill you, but that fatty? It is not enough.

As Hong Jianglong said, a furious roar suddenly broke out from the center and scattered the sea of flame and lava in an instant. When Zhou Hengshan came into view once more, he looked as black as a charred piece of meat. Judging from how his aura was fluctuating up and down uncontrollably, it was clear that he had taken some serious injuries.

He couldn't care less about that at the moment, however. He might have dispel the Hanbas insidious flames with his power, but it failed to quell the towering rage burning inside his heart one bit.

I will tear your limb from limb and scatter your ashes, Ye Qing!

Get in line. You're hardly the first person who wants me dead.

Ye Qing was currently standing on top of the river. He was covered in blood, but he paid no attention to his sorry state. While staring at the fuming Zhou Hengshan, he shook his head regretfully and said, A shame that wasnt enough to kill you, you fucking fatty.

The two drops of Hanba blood essence he used to ambush Zhou Hengshan came from Zhao Lan, of course. After he slew the warrior, he had taken his Natures Shell because one, he was hoping to find some clues that might lead him to the mastermind, and two, it was his rightful loot.

He didnt find any clues, but he did find two drops of Hanba blood essence. The mastermind mustve given Zhao Lan three drops of Hanba blood essence in total as insurance[1], but the warrior had died before he could consume the remaining drops. As a result, he was the one who benefited in the end.

The Hanbas blood essence was notoriously unstable. It could only be preserved using a special container. Otherwise, it was liable to explode at the slightest jolt of impact. In that sense, it was similar to a Sky Thunder or Thunder Bomb.

Before Chu Qingge and her subordinates showed up, he had buried both droplets and one Thunder Fire Talisman in the ground precisely to ambush Zhou Hengshan. Of course, it didnt have to be Zhou Hengshan. He was perfectly happy to send the generals commanders such as Fei Chuan to the next life as well.

He knew that his enemies would do everything in their power to kill him, no matter the cost. That was why he had prepared this gift for them.

First, he borrowed Chu Qingges presence to keep Zhou Hengshan from being able to unleash his full power. Then, he attacked him to further deplete his energies.

While Zhou Hengshans energies was at a low point, he detonated the Thunder Fire Talisman to destroy the container holding the Hanbas blood essence and trigger them to explode.

One might argue that he was risking Chu Qingges life with his ploy, but he wasnt worried. He was certain that Zhou Hengshan wouldnt kill Chu Qingge, and that he would throw her as far away from him as possible so she wouldnt get in his way. On the off chance his prediction was off, he could just not detonate the Thunder Fire Talisman.

Thankfully, everything went according to plan.

In fact, Ye Qing knew that two drops of Hanba blood essence wasnt enough to kill Zhou Hengshan even when his guard was down. It probably wouldve been better if he saved the blood essences instead of wasting it on an ambush that was doomed to fail.

He didnt want to though. He wanted to retaliate against his evildoers at least once.

He didnt do anything wrong, so why must he suffer being hunted like a helpless criminal? Why must he run all over the place to escape his pursuers and hide like a frightened mouse?

Was it the weaks fate to suffer in the hands of the strong? Could he not put up even a token of resistance without receiving the capital punishment?

He refused to believe that was the truth. He rejected it wholeheartedly.

He wanted Zhou Hengshan and the mastermind who had been watching from behind the curtains all this time to know that he, Ye Qing, was no ill cat they might toy as they pleased. No, he was a tiger. A man-eating tiger.

Ye Qing!

Zhou Hengshan uttered through gritted teeth and slowly made his way toward Ye Qing once more. When he planted his right foot on the waters, it slowly climbed taller and taller into the sky.

Ye Qing paid it no heed, however. As Zhou Hengshan came closer and closer, Ye Qing smiled and declared strongly, I once swore that I would make all my evildoers pay their dues.

This is just the down payment, Zhou Hengshan. One day, I will make you pay for everything.

Remember this well. My name is Ye Qing, and I always keep my promises.

You think you have a future?

Zhou Hengshan raised both hands, and the blue waves stood parallel with the sky itself.

You wont have a future. You wont even have a next life!

Zhou Hengshan brought his arms down, and the waves finally crashed down on Ye Qing.

Sorry to disappoint you then.

Smirking, Ye Qing took one step backward and disappeared into a white fog. When did the fog appear? The waves crashed down on the spot where Ye Qing was a moment ago like a tsunami, but it was unable to scatter the thick fog.

Hmm?

That wasnt all. Zhou Hengshan realized with a frown that he was unable to peer through the fog with his eyes or his senses, much less locate Ye Qing.

Suddenly, a swarm of corpses entered his view. They slowly floated on the river, eerie and unsettling.

Fog? Corpses? Could it be the Corpse Ship?! Zhou Hengshan realized something and exclaimed in shock.

The next moment, he felt the fog slowly receding toward the distance.

Chapter 467: Dividing A River

“He’s going to escape!”

There was no time to figure out why the Corpse Ship was here and how Ye Qing was connected to it. All Zhou Hengshan knew was that his cooked duck was moments away from flying out of his grasp[1].

If Ye Qing really was involved with the Corpse Ship, then he might actually escape this place alive, and that was one outcome he absolutely couldn’t and wouldn’t tolerate.

Eyes bulging with shock, disbelief, and volcanic fury, Zhou Hengshan rushed headlong into the thick fog. However, he wasn’t able to find anything besides a field of corpses.

“I thought you want to kill me, Ye Qing? I’m right here!” Zhou Hengshan shouted while running across the waters like it was solid ground. Every time he took a step, the river surface would cave inward like silken fabric, and dull thunder would resound from the bottom of the river.

In just a few breaths, he had checked every space within the fog. However, he clearly missed something because he still couldn’t see the Corpse Ship or Ye Qing.

“Come out, Ye Qing! Come out here right now!”

Zhou Hengshan’s eyes were bloodshot as he raised his hand and roared, “To me!”

Buzz...

There was a strange buzz, and space itself was split apart like it was made of fabric. A gigantic saber was literally cutting through the sky and zooming straight toward Zhou Hengshan.

The saber had a broad blade that was bony white in color. Its flat sides were also covered in hooked barbs not unlike a spinal cord. In fact, it was the spinal cord of a Stranger.

The moment the white saber appeared, the weather grew violent, and what felt like the veil of death itself converged upon the saber, violent and bloodthirsty. The world fell as silent as death as it streaked toward Zhou Hengshan, shrinking until it was finally small enough to fit in the general’s hand. Its aura hadn’t diminished in the slightest, however. On the contrary, the scent of death grew even purer, and blood leaked out of the blade as if it was just barely keeping its own power compressed in such a tiny form.

The saber’s name was the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand. It was Zhou Hengshan’s main weapon and a Phenomenon-class Strange Artifact.

If you killed a fellow human, then you are just a murderer. But if you kill ten thousand humans, then you are known as a hero. The Slaughterer of Ten Thousand, as its name implied, was a vicious saber that had slain at least ten thousand humans.

The Slaughterer of Ten Thousand was forged from the spinal cord of a Rakshasa of The Dead of War, and a Rakshasa of The Dead of War was a Phenomenon-class Stranger that was born from the wastelands created by war. It ate the flesh of the dead, drank their blood, and puppeteered their souls for its own use. Whenever it appeared, the Hundred Ghosts Parade would come to life, and deadly plagues would reap all those who were living. Any country unfortunate enough to be haunted by it would suffer unending wars and other calamities.

The Slaughterer of Ten Thousand was created after the spinal cord of the Rakshasa of The Dead of War was used to slay ten thousand people so it might feast on their flesh and soul. The day the saber attained perfection, the sky wept blood, and thousands and thousands of ghosts roamed the land of the living. It was one hundred percent a cursed saber.

Zhou Hengshan had used the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand to suppress the Southern Sea Rebellion and massacre several countries with the weapon. It was how he permanently cemented his name in infamy. Without the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand, Zhou Hengshan might never become what he became today.

As he gripped the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand, Zhou Hengshan's murderous aura grew so powerful that it shot through the heavens like a column of black light, stirring heaven and earth alike. Then, he swung the weapon with all his might.

"KILL!"

The Slaughterer of Ten Thousand was the deadliest manslaying weapons in the world. In just one stroke, he split the world in front of him into two. A gigantic crack had opened up in the middle of the Yong River, and the waters poured into the bottomless chasm. The river had literally been divided in half, and every living creature in the river—the fish, the shrimps, the plants, the Strangers and more—perished to the saber's deathly aura.

Just like that, a river stretching tens of kilometers were divided in two.

Just like that, millions and millions of living creatures were dead.

It took a dozen or so breaths before the river water finally filled up the gap and seemingly returned to normal. However, the creatures living inside the river were utterly extinct, and it would be three to five years before any life finally returned to the river.

That was how potent the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand was.

Zhou Hengshan didn't look happy, however. His weapon arm was shaking, his forehead was bulging with veins, and his eyes were bloodshot with anger.

His attack had split the Yong River and annihilated all living creatures living inside its waters, yes, but... he wasn't sure if he killed Ye Qing.

It was because the Corpse Ship's unnatural fog was still rolling away from him at high speed.

He didn't give chase. He knew he wouldn't be able to catch up to it.

If he could, the Corpse Ship Incident would've been resolved a long time ago.

A few breaths later, not even a speck of the fog could be seen anymore. Zhou Hengshan finally looked away from the river, walked up to Hong Jianglong, and glared at the man with savage, bloodshot eyes. "You owe me an explanation, Hong Jianglong."

"Excuse me? You already killed Ye Qing, and I haven't lifted a finger to stop you from start until the end. I don't see how I owe you anything. Did your saber's aura damage your brain or something?" Hong Jianglong scoffed.

"Dead? You know better than I do if Ye Qing is dead," Zhou Hengshan said coldly. "Ye Qing is obviously cooperating with the Corpse Ship. He's going to use its power to escape the prefecture. Ye Qing is a member of the Pacification Bureau, and yet he's colluding with an Anomaly. As his superior, don't you think you owe me an answer?"

"First things first, I have no idea what you mean. I thought you have full confidence in the power of the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand? In fact, you *have*

killed every living creature in the Yong River with that strike. I don't understand why you think that Ye Qing would somehow survive it."

“Second, you claim that Ye Qing is colluding with the Anomaly, but where is your proof? Also, it’s not like Ye Qing’s the only one on the river. You were there too. Who knows, maybe *you’re* the one who’s colluding with the Corpse Ship. There is also the chance that it has always been in the area until your battle jolted it into action.”

Hong Jianglong continued in a disdainful tone, “And don’t tell me that the proof is Ye Qing disappearing as soon as the Corpse Ship appears. Everyone knows that the Corpse Ship kidnaps people from time to time. It is entirely possible that Ye Qing just happened to be its target this time.”

“Finally, I must remind you that Ye Qing is no longer a member of the Pacification Bureau. So what if he’s colluding with an Anomaly? It’s no longer my or the Pacification Bureau’s business. If you want Ye Qing this badly, then you can look into the Corpse Ship yourself.”

“Wait, what am I talking? Ye Qing is already dead. The only way you can meet him now is to slit your own throat. If you get to work now, you might still catch up to his ghost before it departs!”

Zhou Hengshan could barely control his rage. “What a load of bullshit. Just you wait. I will definitely report this matter to the imperial court and request the emperor to lay his judgment!”

Hong Jianglong folded his arms over one another and replied uncaringly, “Do whatever you want. This is no longer a Pacification Bureau business anyway.”

He then looked at Chu Hao and Chu Qingge and said, “Qingge, the murderer of your brother, Ye Qing is dead. I assume that your father and your brother have obtained the closure they seek. If there’s nothing else, let us return together and speak with the Harmony King.”

“This matter isn’t settled though. I will continue to look into the true reason behind the prince’s death. I promise I will find the truth for you and the Harmony King.”

Chu Qingge nodded. “On behalf of my father and my brother, thank you.”

“Is Ye Qing truly dead, Lord Hong?” Chu Hao asked.

It sounded like there was a bigger conspiracy behind Chu Qianli’s death, but Chu Hao didn’t care about that. He only cared about fulfilling his duty, and right now that duty was to capture or kill Ye Qing.

Hong Jianglong replied uncaringly, “Why are you asking me? The fatty over there would know better than me.”

Zhou Hengshan’s eyes were still bloodshot. In fact, they were redder, darker and more violent than before. “I beg to differ. Ye Qing is a member of the Pacification Bureau, and all members of the Pacification Bureau are required to leave behind a soul imprint in a Soul Lamp so that the organization could check in on their status from time to time.”

Due to the risky nature of the work, everyone serving in the Pacification Bureau was required to leave a soul imprint in a Soul Lamp. If the lamp was lit, then the person was still alive. If the lamp went out, then the Pacification Bureau would know that they had died and respond accordingly.

“You’ll have to pay to Luo Shui Pacification Bureau a visit. We don’t have Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp.” Hong Jianglong shrugged.

“Apologies, Your Highness, but I need to dispatch some men to the Luo Shui Pacification Bureau and check if Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp is still lit,” Chu Hao said immediately. “I’ll see you later, Lord Hong, General Zhou.”

Chu Hao leaped into the sky and quickly vanished into the distance.

Chapter 468: The Soul Lamp Burns No More

“Time to go, Qingge.”

After Chu Hao was gone, Hong Jianglong beckoned Chu Qingge to follow him and turned toward the city. He was just about to take off when suddenly, Zhou Hengshan blocked his way and declared, “You can’t leave yet.”

“Zhou Hengshan, you’re really starting to piss me off.” A storm came over Hong Jianglong’s face. “Do you actually think I won’t beat the shit out of you?”

“Of course you would,” Zhou Hengshan replied neutrally, but it was clear from the fact that he was still holding the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand that he had no intentions of moving out of the way. “But please wait.”

“Fatty, oh fatty...” Hong Jianglong dragged out his voice like someone dragging a sword across the floor. It was chilling to say the least.

Clop clop clop!

It was at this moment the sound of hooves came from the distance. Soon, the Hengshan Army appeared from the horizon with swords and sabers, grim-faced and just about ready for anything.

Two people were leading the army. The one to the left was a stern, gritty-looking man wearing a set of white tiger armor. He was the battalion commander of the Tiger Battalion, Zhao Peihu. The one to the right was a harsh, cruel-looking man wearing a set of blue wolf armor. He was the battalion commander of the Wolf Battalion, Fei Chuan.

This also meant that the army following behind them was the Tiger Battalion and the Wolf Battalion.

When Zhang Peihu and Fei Chuan came to a stop in front of Zhou Hengshan, Hong Jianglong and Chu Qingge, the army behind them came to a stop as well. The two battalion commanders dismounted and saluted their general respectfully, “General.” The rest of the troops also dropped to one knee without saying anything. The sounds of their armor pieces clanging against one another resonated throughout the whole plains.

Zhou Hengshan paid them no heed, however. He simply stared at Hong Jianglong and repeated his words, “Please wait here, Hong Jianglong.”

“Hmph. You think you can intimidate me?” Hong Jianglong narrowed his eyes slightly while sneering. “I know what you’re thinking. You’re worried that I would try and mess with Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp, right? Fine then! I’ll wait. I have done nothing wrong, and I have nothing to be afraid of.”

To be honest, Hong Jianglong wasn’t sure if Ye Qing was alive or dead either. That was why he wanted to rush back to the Pacification Bureau and notify Fang Xiaoman or Gu Suitang to check up on Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp. If it was extinguished, then Ye Qing was dead. Everything would be over, and there would be nothing to worry about. If it was lit, then he would order them to extinguish the lamp. After all, Ye Qing was far better off “dead” than alive right now. Assuming he was still alive, his only chance of escaping his pursuers’ attention was to fake his death.

It was why he repeatedly emphasized that Ye Qing was dead. It was also why he wanted to head back and tamper with Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp as soon as possible. Unfortunately, Zhou Hengshan saw through his ploy and stopped him, and now it was too late. Knowing Chu Hao’s abilities, it would take the man less than half a teatime to gain the information. Even if he managed to force his way out—and that was a big if considering that he would have to fight the Hengshan Army as well—it was impossible to do so without harming the Hengshan Army. His enemies would have the perfect excuse to accuse the Pacification Bureau of corruption and drag them into a right mess then.

If he was just Hong Jianglong, a Grandmaster with no ties to anything whatsoever, then he wouldn’t hesitate even a second to do what was necessary to protect those he cared about. However, he was the Pacification Commissioner of the Pacification Bureau. Everything he did represented the will of the Pacification Bureau, and he couldn’t act without considering the ramifications and consequences to his faction first.

Furthermore, he would be wasting Ye Qing’s efforts to draw a line between himself and the Pacification Bureau. It was a lose-lose scenario no matter how he looked at it. So, he had no choice but to wait as per Zhou Hengshan’s demand.

About half a teatime later, a shadow guard belonging to the Harmony King showed up. After saluting Hong Jianglong, Zhou Hengshan and Chu Qingge, he reported, “The commander ordered me to inform you that Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp went out exactly half a teatime ago.”

Zhou Hengshan narrowed his eyes. That was the moment he used the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand and split open the Yong River. Was Ye Qing truly dead then?

Hong Jianglong’s hand trembled a little when he heard this, but he maintained his composure and looked at Zhou Hengshan. “Hmph. Can I leave now, fatty?”

“Do as you please.” Zhou Hengshan stepped out of the way.

It looked like the matter was finally over, but Zhou Hengshan suddenly spoke up again after Hong Jianglong had taken a few steps. “You know, you don’t look saddened at all.”

Anyone with eyes could tell that Hong Jianglong cared deeply for Ye Qing. Just now, he was going to fight the entire world to defend him. However, he neither reacted nor pressed the shadow guard for answers after hearing that Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp was extinguished. Was it because he knew that Ye Qing was still alive?

Right after Zhou Hengshan said that, he suddenly raised his saber as if sensing danger. However, a hand grabbed the hilt of the weapon and forced it down before he could react, and Zhou Hengshan himself stumbled backward. Each time he planted his foot on the ground, the earth would shake. Nine steps later, he finally caught himself and stood still at the rivershore. Behind him, a massive wave suddenly surged from the dead waters of Yong River and rolled toward the opposite shore.

“General!” “General!”

Zhang Peihu and Fei Chuan hurriedly charged Hong Jianglong when they saw this, but they slammed into some sort of invisible wall and were flung back even faster.

Still grabbing the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand and standing right in front of Zhou Hengshan, Hong Jianglong stared into the general’s eyes and said coldly, “Don’t mistake my tolerance for fear, Zhou Hengshan. I told you that Ye Qing is no longer a member of the Pacification Bureau. Provoke me and the Pacification Bureau again, and I will kill you. Understand?”

Hong Jianglong let go of the saber and turned away. When he saw that the Hengshan Army was blocking his way, a hint of disdain flickered in his eyes. “Are you going to stop me?”

He infused his power into the last word, and every Hengshan soldier trembled like they were facing down a demon god.

“Enough!” Zhou Hengshan grunted and broke Hong Jianglong’s spell over his soldiers with a shout. “Let him go.”

When the Hengshan soldiers came to, they realized that their undershirt was soaked through, and their armor felt cold because of their sweat. No one dared to say a thing. They meekly opened up a way and allowed Hong Jianglong to leave the scene with Chu Qingge. He never even favored them a single glance.

“Pwack!”

After Hong Jianglong was gone, Zhou Hengshan abruptly spat out a glob of blood. The bony white Slaughterer of Ten Thousand suddenly turned a shade of bright red, and blood began pouring profusely down its edges. The saber also emitted a strange buzz that sounded like a ghastly wail.

“General! Are you... alright?”

Zhang Peihu and Fei Chuan hurried forward, but they turned as white as a sheet when they got too close to Zhou Hengshan. They felt like Zhou Hengshan had suddenly turned into an avatar of hell itself, brutal and terrifying.

“Bring them,” Zhou Hengshan uttered shakingly. His eyes were bloodshot, his whole body was shaking, and it strained him greatly just to say a single word.

“Bring me the death row prisoners.”

Zhang Peihu looked at a deputy general, and the man waved over a troop of Hengshan soldiers escorting a group of death row prisoners. They numbered at least several hundred.

As soon as he laid his eyes on the death row prisoners, Zhou Hengshan immediately rushed forward like a thirsty man who found an oasis in the desert. As soon as he reached the nearest prisoner, he raised the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand and cut them in half.

Crimson blood splattered across Zhou Hengshan's face, but not only did he not feel disgusted by it, he actually licked them off his lips with a satisfied, intoxicated look on his face. He immediately moved onto the next prisoner and beheaded them, cut off the limbs of the third, eviscerated the fourth...

Just a moment later, every death row prisoner on the scene was killed. Their heads littered the floor like trinkets at a market stall, and their blood ran freely like a river.

It was only then the unnatural redness covering Zhou Hengshan's eyes faded. The Slaughterer of Ten Thousand also stopped shaking and returned to normal.

"Are you okay, general?" Zhang Peihu asked.

"I'm fine." Zhou Hengshan put away the weapon and shook his head.

Just now, he was suffering from the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand's rebound. As an infamous, deadly tool of slaughter, the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand was as powerful as it was cursed. For starters, the wielder was constantly beset by bloodthirst and the desire to kill for as long as they wielded the weapon. Second, it must slay a certain number of people after unleashing its power to quench its bloodthirst. If not, the consequences were severe.

Usually, Zhou Hengshan could wield the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand without paying any price. His power was enough to keep him in check. However, Ye Qing's trap had injured him somewhat, and his attempt to kill Ye Qing using the Slaughterer of Ten Thousand had further depleted his energies. The hit from Hong Jianglong was the final straw. Unable to suppress the saber's rebound anymore, he had no choice but to kill a couple hundred death row prisoners to finally vent both his and the saber's bloodthirst.

Zhou Hengshan then looked at Zhang Peihu and ordered in a harsh voice, "Peihu, message Wugou and have him return to Tian Yong this instant. I want him to mobilize the Black Dog Brigade and search along the Yong River until Ye Qing and the Corpse Ship are found. I will have that bastard's corpse if it's the last thing I do."

Chapter 469: Hey There, Black Fatty

"Didn't the Harmony King's shadow guard say that Ye Qing is dead, general?" Fei Chuan asked after a moment of hesitation.

The Black Dog Brigade was the elite of the Dog Battalion. They were stronger than his Azure Wolf Guards, Duan Zipao's elite Black Water Cavalry, and Zhang Peihu's Tiger Defense Force.

Every member in the Black Dog Brigade was highly trained in tracking, investigation, and stealth. They were the best scouts in the entire Hengshan Army. However, the Black Dog Brigade was usually deployed only during extremely important missions, and Fei Chuan really didn't think that a dead man—one as insignificant as Ye Qing no less—counted as a matter of grave importance.

Zhou Hengshan abruptly spun on Fei Chuan and said coldly, "The shadow guard said that his Soul Lamp is out, yes, but just because the Soul Lamp is out doesn't mean that the person linked to it is

dead. There are plenty of ways in this world to fake one's death, and I do *not* want a Ye Qing who is only pretending to be dead, understand?"

"I understand." A bead of sweat formed on Fei Chuan's forehead.

"You understand? If you really do understand, then you wouldn't have allowed Ye Qing to escape the city!" Zhou Hengshan abruptly stepped forward and slapped Fei Chuan in the face. Caught completely off guard, the Wolf Commander hit the ground hard and rolled twice before he caught himself. The bruised half of his face looked so bloody it was like he had been hit by a horse.

Fei Chuan paid his wound no attention, however. He quickly sat up and crawled up to Zhou Hengshan on all fours, begging, "I beg your forgiveness, general."

"Forgiveness? You dare beg for forgiveness when your incompetence shamed me so that I could barely lift my head before Hong Jianglong?" Zhou Hengshan kicked Fei Chuan on his back before stomping on his chest, breaking it and causing the commander to spit out a glob of blood.

"Never in my life have my pride been trampled so, and it's all because of you!"

He didn't mind losing Duan Zipao. He didn't mind losing most of his Black Water Cavalry either. Their failure proved that they were worthless trash, and trash deserved to be thrown out. Plus, the one thing this world didn't lack was people.

What he couldn't stand was his pride and reputation being dragged through the mud.

"Mercy... general... it is true... I have failed my duty... I... am willing to... accept my punishment..." Fei Chuan wheezed.

"General, Commander Fei's carelessness had ruined your plans and your reputation. You have every right to punish him for it." Zhang Peihu dropped to one knee.

"However, it is also true that Ye Qing is a cunning trickster. It isn't completely Fei Chuan's fault that Ye Qing was able to slip past him and the Wolf Battalion."

"Commander Fei had served you faithfully and tirelessly for many years. Can you please forgive him on account of everything he has done for the Hengshan Army? Give him a chance to redeem himself?"

A long time later, Zhou Hengshan finally withdrew his leg and grunted. "You're lucky I cannot recall a single moment where you were disloyal to me. Otherwise, I would take your life for sure."

"Thank you, general." Both Zhang Peihu and Fei Chuan bowed their heads deeply.

"You may not die, but you will atone for your crimes. When you return to your battalion, you will receive eight hundred blows of flogging and be demoted three ranks."

“As you command.” Fei Chuan nodded and finally allowed himself a sigh of relief. His back was completely drenched in cold sweat. For a moment there, he really thought that Zhou Hengshan was going to kill him.

“Fei Chuan, have some men clean up this mess. Peihu, take the rest back to their respective camps,” Zhou Hengshan ordered before flying away.

Zhou Hengshan didn’t return to his headquarters immediately after flying back to Tian Yong. Instead, he went to the Harmony King’s residence. Everyone with an important post attached to their name was already gathered at the main hall.

There was Tu Yulei, the Chief of the Tian Yong Pacification Bureau,

Hong Jianglong, the Pacification Commissioner of the North,

An Yifang, Regional Inspector of the Tian Yong administration division,

Tie Wuying, one of the two legendary constables of the Tian Yong administration division and a fourth rank Blue Shirt Constable,

And finally, Lei Xiaodan, Judicial Commissioner of the Tian Yong Intelligence Department.

“General Zhou,” Lei Xiaodan greeted the man after he stepped into the main hall. Everyone else paid him no attention whatsoever.

Zhou Hengshan gave Lei Xiaodan a nod of acknowledgement. Then, he looked at the Harmony King—the old man was currently sitting at the seat of honor and looking drained in every way possible—and clasped his hands in apology. “I have come to apologize for my crimes, Your Highness.”

“Have you not slain the murderer of my son, Ye Qing? What crimes are you talking about?” A trickle of energy returned to the Harmony King’s eyes when he looked at Zhou Hengshan.

The general replied, “There are two. First, I had nearly injured the princess in my eagerness to capture Ye Qing. Second, I’m not actually sure if Ye Qing is dead.”

“What did you say?” The Harmony King straightened up and stared at Zhou Hengshan intently. “Chu Hao has already confirmed that Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp is out. That is clear proof that he is dead, isn’t it?”

Zhou Hengshan shook his head. “The Soul Lamp is the Soul Lamp, and Ye Qing is Ye Qing. Just because the Soul Lamp is out doesn’t necessarily mean that Ye Qing is dead.”

“There are many ways to fake death and deceive the Soul Lamp. We cannot disregard the possibility that someone had snuffed it out on purpose to conceal Ye Qing’s survival either. Therefore, I cannot in good conscience say that Ye Qing is certainly dead!”

“Did you just suggest that the Pacification Bureau purposely extinguished Ye Qing’s Soul Lamp to protect him, fatty?” Hong Jianglong glared at him angrily.

“I’m just stating facts,” Zhou Hengshan replied.

“Stating facts my ass! I think you just want to slander the Pacification Bureau, and this is hardly the first time you’ve done this! Do you really think you can toy with us as you please?” Hong Jianglong shot to his feet and strode toward Zhou Hengshan.

“Stand down, Jianglong.” Tu Yulei raised a hand to stop him. “Ye Qing was a member of the Pacification Bureau. Considering the severity of the crimes he committed, it’s perfectly natural for someone to suspect that foul play was involved.”

He then turned to Zhou Hengshan and stared him directly in the eye. “That said, an accusation like this is quite severe, General Zhou. Do you have proof? If you do, then I am perfectly willing to accept our due punishment. But if you don’t, then don’t blame me for bringing this up to the emperor and accuse you of slander!”

“The Pacification Bureau will not tolerate any besmirchment to its good name!”

Zhou Hengshan flinched. Tu Yulei was a model scholar who valued promises and obeyed the rules to a fault. Generally speaking, he always meant what he said. The Pacification Bureau was the designated right hand of the Son of Heaven, and the emperor valued their opinions greatly. If Tu Yulei brought this up to the emperor, and the emperor decided that his crime was true, then he was going to be in deep shit to say the least.

Lei Xiaodan hurriedly played the mediator. “General Zhou is a straightforward man, and he is simply eager to confirm if the prince’s murderer has been executed. He didn’t mean to slander the Pacification Bureau. Please forgive him on account of the Harmony King and my presence.”

“General Zhou, what are you waiting for? Apologize to Chief Tu already.”

“Forget it,” Tu Yulei interrupted before Zhou Hengshan could react. “This is your first and final warning. If you make the same mistake again, then I will take the appropriate measures.”

“Xiaodan. Is Ye Qing truly still alive? Cough! Cough...” The Harmony King asked urgently.

“I can’t say at the moment,” Lei Xiaodan replied, “but I have brought a Strange Artifact that might resolve this conundrum.”

“What is it?” The Harmony King asked.

“Renhe!” Lei Xiaodan called out, and Chu Renhe stepped in with a bronze box in his hands. The young man bowed his head in salute.

“Greetings, Your Highness, my lords,” said the inspector general before he finally handed the box to Lei Xiaodan.

After Lei Xiaodan received the box, he sent away the servants and maids before saying, “Before we start, I must say that this Strange Artifact is an unusual one. You may find yourself offended by whatever comes next. I would urge you not to.”

“Pretentious bastard,” Hong Jianglong muttered under his breath.

“It will be fine. Let us begin,” Tu Yulei replied, and everyone else had no qualms with this either.

“Very well.” Lei Xiaodan nodded and performed a hand gesture. He then struck the bronze box lightly and caused the runes on its surface to light up slowly. A second later, the box slowly flipped open to reveal its contents.

“Wahaha! We meet again, two-faced tiger! How’s your dad? Your mum? Your second uncle’s wife’s sister’s husband’s older sister’s distant relative? And what other questions do you have for me?”

The second the blue box opened a crack, a prattling voice immediately emerged from within. When the box was finally open, they saw that the speaker was a little person just a little over three inches tall. It had two faces—literally, one half of its face was rosy and healthy, while the other half was withered and dead—and its arms and legs were spread out and nailed to a wooden cross. It looked odd to put it mildly.

“Oho? It’s not just you this time! Look at the crowd!”

The little person didn’t seem to have a neck bone because its head kept spinning round and round in excitement. “Nice to meet you, black fatty! Has anyone ever told you that you look like a pig? Oops, sorry, I usually speak before I think. What I really mean to say is, to call you a pig would be an insult to pigs because there are no pigs in the world who are as fat as you, seriously! How the hell are you so fat, man?”

Zhou Hengshan’s face darkened. There was only one person in this room who fit the little person’s description, of course.

Chapter 470: Tattletale

“Oh, you pitiful child. You must have been an orphan when you were younger not because your parents didn’t want to raise you, but because you ate so much of their food that they had no choice but to let you go. That was a mistake though. Clearly, you had no problems inconveniencing others to fatten yourself!”

“If I was your dad, I would have dropped you inside a latrine pit and saved the world from a fatty-induced famine. Looking at you now, I can say with absolute certainty that you were a waste of good food.”

Zhou Hengshan was so angry that his face was purple, and veins were bulging on the back of his hands. Tu Yulei, An Yifang and more were desperately trying to hold back their laughter as well. They were scholars who studied the texts of the sages after all. It would be unbecoming of them to laugh at another’s misfortune—unless they couldn’t hold it in, of course.

Hong Jianglong had no such qualms, however. He laughed boisterously and without restraint.

“What are you laughing at, boy? Hells, it looks like your cheeks are split from side to side.”

The little person wheeled its head and stared at Hong Jianglong. “Do you think you’re better than the black fatty? In terms of spirit, the two of you are practically peas in a pod!”

Hong Jianglong’s laughter abruptly cut short.

“What are you looking at? Yes, I’m talking about you, you shit-for-brains. You’re pretty big, but it doesn’t take a genius to know that you’re all brawns and no brains. In fact, I personally think that you’re shittier than that black fatty. He’s a waste of food and space, but at least he has a brain on top of his shoulders, peanut-sized it might be. You? Your head is massive alright, but there’s absolute nada inside it. It’s literally taking up space for nothing! What a failure of a human being you are!”

The little person’s remarks were impossibly scathing. Hong Jianglong clenched his fists so hard that the joints popped.

Zhou Hengshan was the same. *You could’ve called him names without dragging me into it!*

Deeply pleased with Hong Jianglong’s expression, the little person taunted, “Oh? You want to hit me? Come on then! Beat my little ass! If you don’t come, then I’m your daddy!”

“Lei Xiaodan? Do I have your permission?” Hong Jianglong uttered through gritted teeth. He was seriously about to blow his top here.

“Calm down, Brother Hong.” Lei Xiaodan said with a bitter chuckle.

“Yeah, Jianglong. There’s no point getting offended by a Strange Artifact.”

“It’s just harmless words. Just brush it off.”

Tu Yulei and An Yifang also chimed in.

“Heh. Did I ask for your help? No? Then why are you getting involved, you sanctimonious, pretentious hypocrites?”

The little person didn’t appreciate their interference at all, however. It began attacking them as well, “He’s just a severely disabled idiot with a hollow head. I can tie my hands *and* legs behind my back and still headbutt the shit out of his asshole!”

Tu Yulei: “...”

An Yifang: “...”

Did I say I was a scholar? Jianglong, bite!

It was such an amusing scene that even the Harmony King had temporarily forgotten his sorrow. He poked Lei Xiaodan in the arm and asked in a hushed voice, “Ahem... what on earth is this thing, Xiaodan?”

“You are a thing! Your whole family’s a thing!”

Although the Harmony King did his best to control his volume, the little person still heard his question. “Also, are you a man or what? A man should speak loudly and clearly instead of whimpering like a bitch! Are you sick or something?”

“Oho, you look like the type to overindulge in carnal pleasures. That would explain why you’re such a weak bitch.”

“You must be seventy or eighty years old, aren’t you? You don’t look strong enough to cross a street without someone to support you, so I wonder if you can even still indulge your lower head. I bet you can’t get it up even when the prettiest woman in the world is presenting herself to you, am i right?”

If you ask me, you should just do us all a favor and buy yourself a coffin already. Leave the plowing and sowing to youngsters like us, kay old man?”

Everyone in the room gasped at nearly the same time. This little person wasn’t just sharp-tongued, every word it breathed was a deadly barb that pierced right through the heart!

The Harmony King turned beet red in an instant. If not for Lei Xiaodan holding him back, he would be pounding on the Strange Artifact right now. “Argh! Don’t stop me, Xiaodan! I swear I’m going to wreck this piece of trash if it’s the last thing I do!”

“Ahem... calm down, Your Highness. Let’s not forget what we’re here for, shall we?” Lei Xiaodan sighed. It took him a while before he finally managed to calm the Harmony King.

“If I’m not mistaken, this is Tattletale, right?” Tu Yulei suddenly spoke up.

“Heh, you’re an old man flaunting a young face like a pervert, but at least you have a good pair of eyes on you. That’s right! I am Tattletale!” The little person in the box declared proudly.

“What’s a Tattletale?” Hong Jianglong asked.

Before Tu Yulei could answer, the Tattletale wheeled on Hong Jianglong with shock and disbelief, “You haven’t heard of my name? You really do have shit for brains!”

“On second thought, why am I expecting a shit-for-brains to know anything? It’s not your fault you’re born a retard, so I forgive you.”

“Tell him who I am, pervert. Show him the light that is me!”

He was referring to Tu Yulei, of course. The Chief of Bureau sucked in a deep breath and slowly moved his hands behind his back so he wouldn’t be tempted to follow in the Harmony King’s footsteps. “Tattletale is ninth rank Disaster-class Strange Artifact of the twelve in the possession of the Intelligence Department. It is said to be capable of peering into the heavens, deciphering yin and yang, and knowing all there is to know in this world.”

“A Disaster-class Strange Artifact?” Everyone exclaimed in surprise before shooting the little person a strange look. It sure didn’t look like it.

No wait, its mouth is definitely Disaster-class. I can’t even imagine the havoc it would cause if it’s released into the world.

“You motherfuckers! How dare you look down on me!” Tattletale suddenly erupted in anger as if it could sense their disdain. “Black fatty! When you were nine, you peeped on your neighbor’s widow while she was bathing. When you were thirteen, you abandoned your companion and caused his death to escape a tiger when the two of you were foraging herbs in the mountains. When you were eighteen, on your very first year you joined the army, you backstabbed your companion again so you can claim his merits as your own—”

“Enough!” Zhou Hengshan exploded as if Tattletale had exposed his deepest secrets.

“Tsk tsk, you’re such a vile man, black fatty. I adore people like you.”

Tattletale didn’t press further and turned to Hong Jianglong next. “It annoys me, but I must admit that you’re a righteous man. Generally speaking, you have never done anything that went against your good conscience.”

“But of course! I’m as moral as my back is straight, unlike a certain pus who should’ve been eradicated ages ago!” Hong Jianglong declared proudly.

“That said, a year ago you got kicked out of Little Phoenix Celestial because you used ate their food, drank their wine, and fucked their prostitutes without paying. The very next day, you went right back like nothing had ever happened and even called yourself Lei Xiaodan. I couldn’t have come up with the idea of freeloading under another person’s name, so truly, you are the example we should all strive for! Also—”

The grinning Tattletale still had more to say, but Hong Jianglong cut him off immediately. “Enough! You’re the boss! I shouldn’t have questioned you, so stop it already!”

Tu Yulei and An Yifang shot Hong Jianglong disdainful looks, but on the inside they were quite impressed. *You can do that? Why didn’t I think about it first?*

On the other hand, Lei Xiaodan was far less impressed. A year ago, there was a rumor claiming that a man named Lei Xiaodan had used Little Phoenix Immortal’s services without paying a single coin, and for a time he couldn’t use his real name without having people giving him strange, judgmental looks. At the time, he thought that it was a plot against him—and he was right! What kind of despicable scumbag would do such a thing? This one!

“Ahem... it’s just a misunderstanding, Lord Lei. Just a misunderstanding.” Hong Jianglong smiled awkwardly when he noticed Lei Xiaodan staring daggers at him.

The Judicial Commissioner harrumphed but didn’t press further.

Tattletale turned to Tu Yulei and An Yifang next, and both men immediately clasped their hands respectfully. “You really do know everything, Tattletale. We are most impressed.”

A scholar who doesn’t know when to submit to circumstances is a failure of a scholar.

“Hmph! You better!” Tattletale huffed with its nose high.

“Can we start now, Lord Lei?” An Yifang coughed. At this rate, everyone’s dark history was going to be laid bare.

“Let’s. But before I start, I must warn you all about something.” Lei Xiaodan surveyed the crowd once before saying, “Although Tattletale can find out just about anything and everything, it requires a hefty price to do so.”

“What price?” Everyone turned serious.

Lei Xiaodan took a moment to choose his words. “As you know, it is said that one must never attempt to decipher the threads of fate. Those who do would be punished by the heavens.”

“To put it in more secular terms, everyone in this room will receive some sort of misfortune every time we ask Tattletale a question. That is the punishment we will receive for learning something we shouldn’t learn.”