

I Am Supreme #Chapter 31 - Read I Am Supreme

Chapter 31

Chapter 31: Concourse of the Underworld

Yun Yang shook his head gently. "It is not yet time."

Lao Mei grew even more confused and bewildered.

Is it still not yet time? If not now, then when? Will it only be the time when you've managed to insult and provoke everyone around you?

"Lao Mei, kindly dig out all that we have on Xie Wuyuan's criminal past." Yun Yang did not bother to explain himself and steered the conversation into another direction.

"Certainly." Lao Mei smiled at his request. "I took the liberty of preparing the records the moment I heard that young master was involved in the ruckus at the Xie family residence.

"Brilliant!" Yun Yang then said cheerfully, "Prepare a copy and deliver it over to Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan."

"Do I still send it over... discreetly?"

"But of course."

Lao Mei lifted his head to look at the sky and said, "I'll go at midnight."

"Duly noted."

With that, Yun Yang turned and walked over to the room on his right, which was still merrily lit. "I guess there is no better time than the present to get things done."

Faalty Jade Sword Fang Mofei had maintained a veil of guarded silence since the day the two of them had guessed each other's identities. He barely spoke and did nothing else other than to practice cultivation, heal his injuries, eat, drink, and sleep each day.

Walking was difficult for him; even if held onto the table as he paced around his room, he found that he would soon be panting, short of breath. While Yun Yang feasted merrily that night, Fang Mofei did not join the young master but cultivated instead. He was waiting – waiting for Yun Yang to eventually seek him out. He knew not how the confrontation would turn out, but he was certain that Yun Yang had his motives for allowing him to stay.

Finally, he heard Yun Yang approach.

This time around, there were no probing questions, no verbal fencing; Yun Yang came in and sat right down.

“Brother Fang, how do you fare?” Yun Yang asked with a friendly smile.

“I am recovering speedily – much faster than I actually thought possible.” Fang Mofei seemed to be surprised by his own healing capabilities as he continued, “In any other circumstance, a man who had sustained injuries as I did would have died if there weren’t a godly physician to intervene and treasured gems of heaven and earth to secure his life-force. With the extent of my wounds, I was surprised that I even managed to regain consciousness. I have, however, examined my surroundings as I lay on my sick bed. These medicines I have consumed were merely ordinary remedies; that I can already stand up now is the result of a miracle.”

Deep in his heart, Fang Mofei was astounded; he had roamed the martial arts world his entire life, but it was the first time he had encountered such a bizarre incident. That it had happened to him and he had no clue as to how it actually occurred made it all the more puzzling.

As Yun Yang enquired about his health, Fang Mofei felt an odd sense of irritation that he had called him Brother Fang. Although I look like a man in his thirties, the truth is that I’ve seen closer to eighty summers. Would it not be inappropriate for a young whelp like you to call me Brother Fang?

It was difficult, however, to voice such petty concerns to the man who had saved his life.

“Regardless of how and why, I would still wish to thank Young Master Yun for his grace.” Fang Mofei nodded his head slightly in acknowledgment of his benefactor’s generosity.

“It was but a slight effort; please do not make further mention of it.” Yun Yang grinned impishly and said, “Besides, if you wished to thank me, what you have brought to me has already exceeded my expectations.”

Fang Mofei’s heart sank as he replied, “Young Master Yun, do you speak of... the Lightning Cats?”

Yun Yang’s smile held volumes of meaning as he replied, “Lightning Cats? Why Brother Fang, if they were Lightning Cats, they wouldn’t be worth the grace that you mentioned earlier.”

Fang Mofei’s lips twitched in barely hidden worry at Yun Yang’s insinuating comments.

“What I wish to know is this; how did Brother Fang, Fealty Jade Sword, manage to get his hands on these... Lightning Cats?” Yun Yang asked with an artfully puzzled expression. “Based on my limited knowledge of these things, Lightning Cats make their homes in the borderless forest. Although they don’t travel into the heart of the area, they are still the ultimate rulers of the outer rim!”

Yun Yang spoke in a tone filled with wonder, “Fealty Jade Sword, Fang Mofei; seventh peak and sixth tier of mystical Qi; he wields an indestructible white Frost Jade Sword. At the tender age of seven, he had already learned the ways of the sword and achieved unparalleled greatness within a decade. He roamed the martial arts world, had been at the thick of countless battles and had reached the seventh peak of mystical Qi at the age of fifty-six. The only known defeat he has ever suffered was at the hands of a masked individual dressed entirely in shades of night, said to be the Saber of Cyclone, Wang Zifu. After being vanquished, Fang Mofei vanished for three whole years, before he made a spectacular comeback into the world at large.

Outwardly, Fang Mofei remained impassive, a solid block of marble. Inwardly, he couldn’t have been more dumbstruck upon hearing Yun Yang’s litany of his impressive achievements.

Ever since his reemergence, all of the information on his battles with friends and foes alike were neatly encapsulated in Yun Yang’s reports. What was even more outrageous was the fact that Fang Mofei had never discovered the identity of the man who had managed to defeat him; this young fellow had just casually revealed the information that he had spent endless days trying to unearth.

Fang Mofei’s voice shook slightly as he nodded in agreement. “Young Master Yun, your information is incredibly detailed.”

“Detailed?” Yun Yang’s chuckle held no humor. “These are simply the facts that are publicly known. There is, however, another set of stories that have always been kept in the dark; would you like to hear about those?”

Fang Mofei was alarmed. “In the dark?”

Like a learned scholar, Yun Yang placed both his arms behind his back as he looked out the window, and spoke as if reciting from a parchment, “Fang Mofei, nicknamed Fealty Jade Sword; the use of the word ‘fealty’, however, might be highly presumptuous. Fang Mofei is not a man who commits heinous crimes, but is unworthy of the word ‘fealty’. In Fang Mofei’s hands, there exists another weapon, lethal once unleashed. Personally, I believe that the secrecy surrounding this weapon is the very reason the term ‘fealty’ could have come about. This weapon is very well concealed indeed.”

Fang Mofei sucked in a cold breath of panic.

“On the outside, Fang Mofei appears to be just an ordinary mystical beast hunter. However, he disappears for periods of half a month if it’s a short duration, and even up to three months if it’s longer... There is nothing unusual about this in itself, as is it a common practice among martial artists.”

“However, each time Fang Mofei disappears, we will always hear news of expert martial artists of the fifth to seventh tiers that end up wounded or dead. They could be the strong and youthful of the martial arts world, or the old and forgotten, even those who had gone into seclusion. After the deed has been done, Fang Mofei would then return to the public’s eyes. In my humble opinion, this would lead me to think that Fang Mofei has another identity...”

Yun Yang did not turn his head but he could sense that Fang Mofei was trembling.

“If my hunch is correct, Fang Mofei’s other identity would be that of an assassin. But from which guild do you hail? Currently, the top three assassin’s guilds that are prominent in the martial arts world are – one, Concourse of the Underworld; two, Hall of Crimson Blade; three, The Merciless Tower. The Merciless Tower offers their services with clear terms and prices; I think that it doesn’t really fit your profile. Members of the Hall of Crimson Blade are fond of using sabers in their trade; we can exclude them as well. The only possibility left would be the Concourse of the Underworld.”

Yun Yang turned away from the window and spoke slowly, looking at the pale Fang Mofei whose eyes were dazed from shock, “There are ten kings in the Concourse of the Underworld. Based on those already deceased within these past few years, they were mostly residing around the Youyan¹ area. This is, of course, the territory of First Court² King Qinguang³ of the Concourse of the Underworld. Fang Mofei’s cultivation base has not yet reached the level of independent execution and also stands below that of King Qinguang. Thus, if my deductions are accurate...”

Yun Yang smiled triumphantly and looked straight at Fang Mofei. “... Fang Mofei should be an assassin under Kings of Ten Courts’ King Qinguang of First Court from the Concourse of the Underworld, the world’s top assassination organization! With reference to Fang Mofei’s cultivation base, he should be one of the most skilled killers within the Concourse of the Underworld. Unfortunately, your ranking within this dread organization could not be established, do forgive me for this lapse.”

Drops of sweat the size of soybeans streamed down from Fang Mofei’s forehead, as he stood staggered under the weight of Yun Yang’s accusations. He felt like he had been starkly exposed, pulled out from the shadows and placed under damningly bright sunlight. He no longer had any secrets left!

“Where did all this information come from?” Fang Mofei felt his heart thumping hard, his voice dry and hoarse.

“From my subordinate. Again, I would have to apologize.” Yun Yang said indifferently, “I had him inquire about Fang Mofei but all he managed to obtain for me were mostly things I had already speculated... Moreover, it doesn’t even reveal the ranking of Brother Fang in First Court King Qinguang’s best assassins. The poor man was so upset, he came immediately to seek my forgiveness.”

Seek forgiveness!

Fang Mofei was a thread away from utter collapse. This set of condemning information had already exposed him entirely, he actually needed his subordinate to seek forgiveness! He even had the gall to say it wasn’t comprehensive enough! Fang Mofei could only feel his brain turning to mush under the extreme anxiety he felt; he panted heavily, about to faint again.

“Of course, there’s still plenty of information I left out.” Yun Yang said, “There are whole portions regarding Brother Fang’s family; when Brother Fang first began showing signs of interest in women, your first contact with fairer sex, when and what caused changes in behavior, so on and so forth. The report also contains information on Brother Fang’s attitude towards your family, an analysis of the possibilities that we could manipulate you through them, and about your children as well, including who’s your favorite child. There are bits of information on those poor souls that Brother Fang killed throughout the years, who these people had offended, who were the most probable parties who had enough money to fork out to have them killed...”

Yun Yang caught his breath in mid-speech, “I have it all here. Does Brother Fang want to take a look?”

“No... There is no need.” Fang Mofei was a man defeated, his eyes the eyes of a soulless corpse. He did not know what to say anymore. Who would have known that just a single incident of being severely injured and comatose would have landed him in the hands of such an evil demon!

“Brother Fang’s life experiences are certainly interesting indeed.” Yun Yang seemed to be genuinely curious about his past, “Of course, everyone has heard of the mighty Fealty Jade Sword... but who would have known that the virtuous Brother Fang is actually a part of the dark and sinister Concourse of the Underworld?”

Fang Mofei was sweating profusely.

“To be honest though, all these are minor details that I don’t care much about.” Yun Yang walked over to the table and poured himself a glass of water, saying, “I am, however, more curious about other things; with your cultivation base, Brother Fang couldn’t possibly defeat an Eclipse Panther. To make matters even more incredible, not only did Brother Fang do just that, he even managed to overpower its mate and seized the opportunity to capture all four babies of the Eclipse Panther!”

Fang Mofei's expression was that of absolute awkwardness. A spiritual creature such as the Eclipse Panther would have first exterminated its own offspring if it faced impending death! This was common knowledge within the mystical beast world. The higher the level a mystical beast was, the more likely it was to behave this way.

"Nonetheless, Brother Fang succeeded in escaping in one piece, and have brought these four babies to Tiantang City." Yun Yang continued, "I would like to hear the story behind these amazing events."

Fang Mofei's expression turned bitter. He sighed heavily and said, "Someone had stumbled across them unintentionally. It was a pair of Eclipse Panthers; the female beast was heavy with child. They had been attacked by another group of high-level mystical beasts and ran away wounded..."

"After we got wind of it, we organized a group of five to head into the borderless forest together."

Fang Mofei's expression then morphed into one of grief as he continued, "The process was smooth as the Eclipse Panthers were indeed heavily wounded. Among the five of us, we only paid the price of four heavy injuries and one death to complete this undertaking."

Yun Yang listened quietly and could not help but smile mysteriously.

"The four of us then started home, holding onto one another. I was the least injured and had two people on both sides. Just as we were about to reach the outer reaches of the borderless forest, I was ambushed. Out of the blue, two swords stabbed into the left and right sides of my back even as they pierced through both sides of my chest. At the same time, I took a heavy blow to the back of my head."

Yun Yang frowned, "That is indeed correct. I saw the wounds on both sides of your back and chest and they looked a little too smooth. The blades met no resistance; it was as if you were caught off guard."

"Those three Hu Brothers..." Fang Mofei was anguished. "We are...we were... sworn brothers for over forty years. Bound by a single oath, we have been by each other's side for dozens of summers, sworn brothers that have faced life and death together, countless times."

Yun Yang gave a soft sigh and spoke quietly, "If you were brothers... why was there a need to be bound by an oath? If you were not brothers, would an oath have any use at all?"

With those words, Fang Mofei felt as if a lightning bolt had struck him full force, with ominous thunder rumbling in the distance.

Translator Note:

1Youyan (幽燕yōu yàn): Name used in ancient China for the present area covering the north of Hebei province and a part of Liaoning.

2First Court (一殿yī diàn): One of the ten courts in Concourse of the Underworld where its concept has been derived from “Ten Courts of Hell” in Chinese mythology, in which hell is divided into ten courts where souls are taken to after death to atone for the sins they committed when they were alive.

3King Qinguang (秦广王qín guǎng wáng): King of First Court; concept derived from “Ten Courts of Hell” in Chinese mythology, in which all souls are brought to the First Court of King Qinguang to be tested for their sins and deeds then sentenced accordingly. If their good deeds exceeded their sins, souls are sent to the Tenth Court to await rebirth while the rest would be sent to Second Court for further judging.

Chapter 32: Staying Square¹ and a Cloud’s² Headache

“If you were brothers... why was there a need to be bound by an oath? If you were not brothers, would an oath have any use at all?”

Yun Yang’s had casually tossed out those words in gentle rebuke, but in Fang Mofei’s ears, they were loud as thunder.

“So, you killed them and escaped with the mystical beast offsprings?” Yun Yang asked.

“I wanted to kill them.” Fang Mofei sighed bitterly, “But wasn’t able to... I couldn’t tap on my abilities anymore. I had just sustained three heavy blows. When I managed to recover from those near-lethal strikes, there were three men charging me. I almost met my end then...”

“So, I had to use ‘fealty’...” Fang Mofei laughed humorlessly. “It is a secret mystical method, and a vile weapon at that.”

“Upon severely injuring the three, my last conscious thought was to run away with the mystical beasts...” Fang Mofei’s eyes were rimmed red; he did not cry, but his anguish at his brothers’ betrayal was apparent. “I depleted my refined blood the whole way, running without a care for my cultivation.”

“To be honest, I don’t even remember how I entered Tiantang City and fainted in front of whatever shop it was...” Fang Mofei sighed with mixed feelings, “Those three... the Hu Brothers, I don’t know how they fared. When I lashed out, I remember holding back and struck only those parts that would not be lethal. ”

Fang Mofei sighed, "As such, they should not be in any critical danger."

"The Three Hu Brothers..." Yun Yang murmured as he lowered his head and thought for a bit. He then asked, "Do you seek revenge? Do you wish to kill them?"

Fang Mofei was in a moral dilemma, the struggle apparent in his eyes.

Tempted by greed, a dozen years of friendship had culminated in two unhesitant stabs and one blow.

Do I wish to kill them?

"You need not answer this question." A hint of satisfaction flashed across Yun Yang's eyes. Fang Mofei's hesitance betrayed the significance of kinship to him. Although they were neither virtuous nor righteous, although they had forgone kin before profit, Fang Mofei was still uncertain about his next course of action.

Yun Yang's tone turned much lighter as he said, "Brother Fang, what future plans do you have?"

Although Fang Mofei had not understood Yun Yang's motives previously, it all became apparent when he heard his question. Did he seek to recruit him? Even after knowing he was an assassin of the Concourse of the Underworld?

"Future? I don't even know myself." Fang Mofei laughed bitterly, "I can feel the obvious damage to my basic Qi after the severe injury. I'm afraid it won't ever recover in my lifetime."

Yun Yang replied calmly, "That is just what you think. But I have a few speculations about Brother Fang's future."

Fang Mofei's curiosity was piqued. "You do? Pray tell."

"You have a few choices. The first would be this; when Brother Fang's injuries are healed, you leave this place and continue roaming the martial arts world, continue trading mystical beasts and be an assassin in the dark. However, this route is full of difficulties and extremely risky. Besides, like what Brother Fang's said, it'd be near impossible to return to the peak once again upon damaging your basic Qi this time. I believe Brother Fang knows deep down that you'll meet your death by the blade one day."

Fang Mofei sighed as Yun Yang finished his words. As a practitioner in the martial arts world, this truth rang true. Sometimes, one could just die without reason; killed for an unknown offense to some unknown person.

“Second, your... sworn brothers; they won’t let you go. Since you had a falling out and they were in the wrong, they would think of ways and means to get rid of you. You should know this already as well.”

Yun Yang spoke slowly, “On one path, you will continue to roam the martial arts world until someone puts an end to you. On another path, you leave the martial arts world and live a life of seclusion. However, now is not the right time to do so... you have an insufficient foundation.”

Fang Mofei sighed in melancholy. That was correct, he had not gathered enough resources yet. Only death would be in wait if he left now.

“There is a third option. Stay by my side and serve me.” Yun Yang’s words were clear. “Let us first disregard all other benefits. Starting with just on your body alone, it could be recovered to how it was, improved, even if you stay. You’ve already experienced this.”

“You can continue to be an assassin identity in the Concourse of the Underworld if you wish to. I won’t interfere, but everything you do has to be done with my permission.”

Fang Mofei’s gaze was focused as he pondered upon his choices.

As he lifted his head and saw the faint smile on Yun Yang’s face, he suddenly let out a humorless laugh and said, “I believe there is yet another possibility that you haven’t spoken of. If I chose not to stay, I probably wouldn’t make it out of the front door alive, would I?”

Yun Yang’s gaze was indifferent.

“There are exactly four ninth level mystical beast babies in Young Master Yun’s hands. Once this news gets out, Young Master Yun would never know another day of peace. I am currently the only one who is aware of this tasty morsel of information,” Fang Mofei said.

“That is right.” Yun Yang’s eyes were half closed as he spoke, “This information is crucial to me.”

“Alright, I’ll stay!” Fang Mofei made his decision without hesitation.

“Young Master Yun has the type of intelligence that could conquer the world and set it in your hands. As a person, you are a critical thinker who delves far and deep; you would definitely be an outstanding talent of our age. Moreover, you have four ninth level mystical beasts that would become forces to be reckoned with in Tianxuan, given time. I’ve roamed the martial arts world my entire life and made nothing out of it. What does it matter if I hand my remaining years over to young master?”

It was neither because Yun Yang might kill him if he left nor because he would face a horrible doom in the martial arts world due to his reduced cultivation base. It was simply because Fang Mofei felt that his state of mind had changed.

The betrayal of his brothers had dampened his spirits; the vigor for life and vengeance when he used to roam the martial arts world and flowed wherever the currents took him, too, had disappeared. He felt only emptiness now.

Perhaps, staying with Young Master Yun was a much-needed break in his life, a turning point. For a brief moment, Fang Mofei was willing to forget the Three Hu Brothers who had betrayed him and had now turned into bitter enemies.

Looking at Fang Mofei who was making his oath, Yun Yang remained impassive as he spoke softly, "Rest and cultivate at home over the next few days. You can help Lao Mei with some of the chores as well. I would have you recover and improve. When your injuries have fully healed, I'll have more important things for you to do."

"Yes, young master."

...

The night was as cold as frigid water.

Yun Yang sat under the canopy of flowers and looked up towards the vault of heaven, his thoughts far away. Fang Mofei's unintentional words almost pushed his train of thought off its tracks – "Young Master Yun has the type of intelligence that could conquer the world and set it in your hands."

This intelligence belongs to the Nine Supremes. It belongs to me and all my brothers.

Three Eclipse Panthers and a Lightning Cat sat by his feet obediently, looking exactly like quadruple twins. The three Eclipse Panthers looked at Yun Yang from time to time, their gazes questioning.

Where did the eldest of us go? Why has it been gone for so many days?

A swoosh sounded as a tiny white silhouette shot in from outside the wall, arriving at Yun Yang's feet like a flash of lightning. It howled softly, the tone actually filled with much suffering.

Master, you just threw me in there like that. That girl almost stroked me to death!

"Even you can feel wronged by her actions. Come over here, I have something for you." Yun Yang placed one of his hands on the tiny ball of fur as a gush of refined air of vitality flowed into it.

The tiny creature mewed happily. This energy is really amazing! It is astounding indeed!

“As for food, go find it yourself.” Yun Yang patted the little critter’s head and said, “You must complete the mission you’ve been given as best as you can. If not... none of this good bounty anymore...”

The small Eclipse Panther nodded obediently and sniffed Yun Yang’s hand with its tiny nose before going over to its siblings and frolicked with them in mock ferocity. A while later, it made a turn and shot out into the night once more.

...

Yun Yang woke up from deep meditation.

Feeling the mystical Qi that had become increasingly stronger in his body, an indescribable glow came from his eyes as he extended a hand, dropping five fingers slowly onto the table top. Without a sound, his fingers drilled clear through the three-inch-thick table, forming five clean holes with sawdust flying all about.

Yun Yang kept his hand on the table and circulated his Qi slowly. Mystical Qi pulsed within him, an image of a mountain materializing faintly on his palm. The mountain was high, the top all covered in fog. However, the view was clear if one were to look down from the heights. Only the peak of the mountain itself was still covered with a thick mist.

“Another day and I will be able to break through to the first peak.” Yun Yang was speaking to himself, “Soon, I will be going through the first heaven in cultivation.”

He took a deep breath and changed his method of cultivation. Gradually, Yun Yang’s body became blurry and dreamlike until it slowly dissipated into a roiling cloud. The cloud then floated around the bedroom, constantly morphing into different shapes. Even if there was a gap that was only a fingernail thin, the cloud could go through it easily. This was the mystical method and skill that was exclusive to Supreme Cloud.

Before long, the cloud shook itself apart as Yun Yang reappeared by the table, sweating profusely. He panted for air, his face pale and wan.

“Three breaths. That’s the longest I can last.” Yun Yang sighed. “There is a form but it is insubstantial. This won’t do at all!”

The Endless Divine Art was powerful; entering the cultivation realm was faster by a thousandfold compared to ordinary cultivation methods. To go from absolutely nothing to breaking through the first heaven by cultivating with normal cultivation methods would require at least the span of a year, no matter how innately gifted one was.

Yun Yang had only used four days but he was still dissatisfied.

“I can’t hold the form long enough!”

Yun Yang sighed, “It looks like I’ll have to mind the time and provide Emmie with some nutrients.”

In his subconscious, Emmie was languidly swaying its tiny body in boredom, flows of refined spiritual Qi poised to gush out in time with its undulations.

Yun Yang felt an impending headache coming on once he thought of providing it with additional nutrients.

Emmie enjoyed great jades, mystical stones, mystical crystals, and other similar treasures. It also meant that Emmie liked anything that was naturally possessed of spiritual Qi, engorged from thousands and millions of years of accumulation.

The problem was, where could he find these items that would cost an astronomical fortune? Emmie had already consumed those that he had won the other time, while the other half had been sold to fulfill certain economic requirements. Now, there were none left

Yun Yang was also disinclined to go on a killing spree just to obtain the air of injustice. He was the Supreme Cloud of the Nine Supremes. It would be unbecoming of him to find fault with crooks every single day. As for his targets, Yun Yang did not currently have enough abilities to ensure that he would be able to survive any encounters!

What a headache!

Yun Yang had been frowning for far too long. He began going through the steps of his plan again.

“Every step is a matter of life and death...”

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Translator Note:

1Square (方fāng): Author’s word play on title; the character方fāng that is the family name of Fang Mofei also means square on its own.

2Cloud (云yún): Author’s word play on title; the character云yún that is the family name of Yun Yang also means cloud on its own.

Chapter 33: A Fate-Sealing Dossier!

Ever since the Nine Supreme's case last year, on the ninth of the third month, Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan had virtually turned into an insomniac. Each night, his thoughts would run wild as ideas and speculations washed over him like the rising tide; he could only sigh in melancholic agony. The death of the Nine Supremes was a scheme of the highest order, so colossally large that his heart pounded with anxiety each time he thought about it. The year-long investigation, be it out in the public or privately, had only yielded a few small fish that barely qualified as an appetizer.

"There has to be a traitor, a powerful figure in the military; the same holds true for the imperial administration. As for the nobles..." Each time the Old Marshal contemplated the situation, his head felt like exploding. "I'm certain there would be conspirators from the other empires as well!"

"Marshal, are you not asleep yet?" Sir Wang came in from under the moonlight.

"With matters as complicated as they are, with the internal issues going on and external forces at play, how could I possibly fall asleep?." Qiu Jianhan gave a heavy sigh and asked abruptly, "Have you made contact with them?"

"No." Sir Wang frowned worriedly. "Those people refused to keep in further contact. Since the rejection of our last attempt to reach out to them, they have all suddenly disappeared; vanished from the very surface of this earth."

The Old Marshal groaned, "If we don't obtain vengeance for the Nine Supremes, these people are highly unlikely to come out in the open."

Sir Wang kept quiet for a few breaths before he said, "Nonetheless, there are quite a number of hints revealing that these people are still actively pursuing their course."

"But of course. They would not forsake the revenge they seek as long as the deaths of the Nine Supremes go unsolved." The Old Marshal was hardly surprised as he continued, "Labyrinth of Nine Heavens Intelligence – they had originally divided their territories into nine segments, each claiming one, but the death of the Nine Supremes has caused these nine heavens to merge into a single iron plate!"

"They won't listen to anyone other than Nine Supremes!" Old Marshal continued, "Their refusal to cooperate now heralds their gradual exit from the imperial court. Slowly, they would become an underground force in the martial arts world; albeit one to be regarded highly in Tianxuan Continent. I really can't say how this will turn out."

Sir Wang looked as if he was about to voice his thoughts, but caught himself at the last minute.

"What does Brother Wang wish to say?" Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan asked.

"I could be wrong," Sir Wang continued, "However, I can't help but feel that the Labyrinth of Nine Heavens Intelligence is still taking orders from someone... still under the control of a strong and powerful force."

"What?" The Old Marshal immediately sat upright. "What proof do you have?"

"Allow me to elaborate. When they were alive, each of the Nine Supremes had a team of their own. These teams had always only belonged to each individual and their intricate crossover was what made the Labyrinth of Nine Heavens Intelligence." Sir Wang continued slowly, "But this Labyrinth of Nine Heavens Intelligence also chooses their own leader within each team, which also means that there are successors after the Nine Supremes."

"If they were without a figurehead, these nine teams would definitely have crumbled and would never have merged into a single slab of iron." Sir Wang spoke, "It is almost like nine different clans. Which clan leader would be willing to take orders from another clan leader? Yet, nobody in these nine teams has done anything foolish or rash. This means that there must still be a force above them that keeps them in check!" Sir Wang's eyes shone with excitement. "They wouldn't have avoided our attempts at contact otherwise."

The Old Marshal's eyes began to brighten with enthusiasm, as his body trembled. "Could it be that the Nine Supremes are not dead yet?"

"Sir, that is impossible." Sir Wang's words robbed the Old Marshal of his momentary hope and he collapsed back into his chair like a deflated balloon. "But there must be another arrangement, I'm absolutely sure about this."

Sir Wang went on speaking, "The most likely explanation has to be that His Majesty the Emperor has assumed control. Yet another possibility would be that they have appointed a general leader after the Nine Supremes. I don't believe there is any other possible explanation other than these two."

"His Majesty the Emperor..." the Old Marshal sighed, "His Majesty has already spat blood and fainted on three separate occasions when it comes to matters concerning the Nine Supremes. Never mind, I will look for a chance to discuss this with His Majesty."

Just as Sir Wang was about to reply, the sound of a fluttering robe suddenly whispered in the air.

Swoosh!

A silhouette flashed across the sky above the marshal's residence.

"Who goes there?"

"How dare you!"

The guards reacted with lightning-fast reflexes; they charged towards the sky in pursuit of the intruder. Within an instant, a large group of people was piled up on the roof.

“Too late.” Sir Wang’s expression was dark. “Whoever, it was, he got away.”

“Marshal, someone threw in a parcel.” A very burly guard made entirely of broad shoulders and a thick waist walked over with large strides. “Looks like there are papers inside.”

“Qiu Dao, open it,” Sir Wang ordered right away.

“Yes, sir.” Qiu Dao tore it open without hesitation and a heavy dossier dropped out.

“The packet isn’t poisoned, and there’s nothing else within.” Qiu Dao quickly gave it the once over.

“Bring it over to me,” said the Old Marshal.

On the dossier was a tiny symbol. Trembles ran through the Old Marshal’s entire being as he took hold of it. The symbol was comprised of nine stars dotted by ink that formed a circle. Right in their center was affixed a strange symbol that looked like a burning flame.

“Nine Heavens Dictum!” Sir Wang almost shouted, his eyes wild with excitement.

“It’s the Flame Dictum of the Nine Heavens Dictum Lords.” Old Marshal Qiu took in a deep breath. “A pity it wasn’t sent by Supreme Flame himself. If it was, the flame would be in red.” The expression on his aged face suddenly took on a razor-sharp edge. “Since the Nine Heavens have sent a dictum, there must be something of great import inside. I shall take a closer look at it.”

The dossier was simple – it was the biography of an official. The Old Marshal had only perused half the document before he began to fume in utter rage.

“Xie Wuyuan! Even if this varlet were to be sliced and diced a thousand times, it wouldn’t be enough to pacify the people!”

Contained within was all the information available on the Deputy Minister of Board of War, Xie Wuyuan. It went into great detail about how he had passed the imperial examination, how he had murdered his own wife and son right after to marry the Grand Tutor’s daughter, how he had framed the innocent and kind, how he had oppressed and intimidated men and women alike and how he had tyrannized the capital. There were already more than a hundred cases of homicide in the document.

It went on further to explain how he had criminally appropriated and resold resources belonging to Empire of Yutang’s military and people for his own personal gain and

more. There were proof and evidence, witnesses and testimonies; all detailed enough to include information on the people who had provided them.

Lastly, there were an array of cases on veterans being harmed and mistreated; at least a few dozen incidents were listed within.

“How could such a person so devoid of heart and conscience be serving in the imperial court?” Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan was in despair. “Tomorrow, I must put this varlet in his place!”

Sir Wang breathed a sigh of relief, he could see the delight in the eyes of the Old Marshal. The Nine Heavens Dictum’s initiative to contact them had given the Old Marshal immense confidence. With the righteousness of the Nine Heavens Dictum behind him, he would have gone all out to confront the vile criminal, even it was the present prime minister himself, what more a mere deputy minister of the Board of War!

...

During the morning assembly of the imperial court the following day, Grand Tutor Liu hopped out with a long face, his voice and expression befitting his dejected look as he complained, “Your Majesty, please restore justice for this old official.”

His Majesty the Emperor was perplexed, “What ails you, Grand Tutor?”

Grand Tutor Liu spoke sorrowfully, “The son of Marquis Yun, Yun Yang, has no regard for the law. He assaulted the officials of the imperial court publicly and inflicted much harm on my son-in-law, Xie Wuyuan’s family. He even broke into the residence and wreaked havoc in the compound! The condition of the Wuyuan’s residence in the aftermath is terribly appalling.”

“Could this be true?” His Majesty the Emperor was shocked. “Could the young master of Marquis Yun be so tyrannical?”

By the side, Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan could no longer stay silent as he stepped out. “Your Majesty, this official has something to report.”

Grand Tutor Liu glared at the old man as he spoke with a frown, “Old Qiu, you should wait until I’m done with my case...”

Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan glared right back at him as he replied, “Actually, I intend to speak about this very same case as well!”

Incorrectly interpreting his intentions, Grand Tutor Liu was utterly delighted. “Old Qiu, are you also unable to stomach anymore of Yun Yang’s rebellious actions?”

“What I can’t stomach is your good ol’ son-in-law!” Qiu Jianhan stared daggers at the Grand Tutor. “Tell me, what sort of scoundrel have you taken as your son-in-law? It can’t be that nobody wishes for you daughter’s hand in marriage; although she’s not all that good-looking and a little fat around the edges, a lot of men in our military would be willing to overlook all that...”

“You ignorant old man!” Grand Tutor Liu exploded in anger, “Hold your tongue!”

Qiu Jianhan continued coldly, “This official wishes to submit a report on the Deputy Minister of the Board of War, Xie Wuyuan. This blackguard has remarried after murdering his wife and son, lusted over wealth and extravagance, and is utterly devoid of heart and conscience. He has also oppressed men and women, slaughtered the innocent and kind, appropriated resources of the military and the people for personal gains and forged treasonous relationships with external forces. All in all, he has committed a total of ninety-eight different crimes! Your Majesty, I beg for your judgment on this villain.”

As he spoke, he passed the dossier over. The military and civil officials present in the imperial court spoke in hushed whispers, feathers clearly ruffled by these revelations.

The corners of Grand Tutor Liu’s lips twitched in fury as he was filled with disbelief. “Old ignorant man, all you do is spew nonsense. My son-in-law would never...”

Qiu Jianhan interrupted him coldly, “Your son-in-law’s crimes were all recorded in this document, complete with witnesses, evidence, and proof. You can take a look at it as well after His Majesty is done with it. If you still think that your son-in-law should be pardoned...”

The Old Marshal’s gaze pierced Grand Tutor Liu like a sharp arrow. His underlying meaning was clear, “If you still dare to speak for him, I’ll have you in your place too!” He did not have to speak out loud though. On his throne, His Majesty the Emperor had only gone through half of the dossier before he was shaking with rage. “Read it out, listen to how well our Board of War’s Deputy Minister has performed his duties!”

All the officials listened with increasingly widening eyes as a eunuch proceed to recite all of Xie Wuyuan’s atrocities. Grand Tutor Liu himself had passed out in a dead faint upon hearing of the first case. “Xie Wuyuan had been wedded with wife and son in his hometown. Upon passing the imperial examination, he had secretly sent people home to murder his wife and child. The bodies were buried at... The middleman was... The witness was... Thereafter, he intentionally approached the daughter of the Grand Tutor...”

Grand Tutor Liu had been deceived by this mountebank for so many years; even his daughter had been thoroughly hoodwinked! The person whom he had helped and supported with all his might turned out to be such an ungrateful bastard.

His Majesty the Emperor spoke only two words in response to the heavy charges laid out.

“Familial extermination!”

He was of the same opinion as Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan; he was certain that Xie Wuyuan’s fate had been sealed once he saw the symbol of the Nine Heavens Dictum on the dossier!

Ever since the death of the Nine Supremes, this would be the first time Nine Heavens Dictum had initiated contact with the imperial court. If nothing had come out of this matter, Nine Heavens Dictum could very well vanish again without a trace. Therefore, even though it would have been prudent to verify the authenticity of the document, it did not even cross His Majesty’s mind to do so!

After dismissing the imperial assembly, His Majesty the Emperor beckoned to the Old Marshal. “Old Marshal.” His Majesty the Emperor gazed at Qiu Jianhan like a hawk. “Go and meet the son of Marquis Yun.”

“Yes, this old official had intended to do just that,” Qiu Jianhan agreed right away.

“Let it be at your residence.” His Majesty spoke up again, “I wish to have a look at him myself.”

The Old Marshal frowned in consternation.

Chapter 34: Of Terrifying Nights, a Kindness Repaid and an Assassination Attempt

On that very same morning, the Board of War’s Deputy Minister Xie Wuyuan was still waiting for the justice he had asked his father-in-law to exact for him. He was in the midst of thinking how he should add insult to Yun Yang’s injuries upon his capture when his residence was surrounded by guards.

With a single order, his entire family had been sent right to prison. Other than his wife, who had been defended by Grand Tutor Liu and brought back to the Residence of Grand Tutor, the rest of them were bound and carted off to be kept under lock and key. The judgment had been declared on that very day – execution after the passing of three days!

These developments had everyone abuzz in shock.

Shouldn’t the perpetrator be the one that was punished? Why was it the one that had been assaulted that got jailed instead?

The incident had immediately become an undercurrent flowing through the families of officials in Tiantang City, its message clear, "The young master of Marquis of Heavenly Clouds is not someone to be trifled with."

It was a terrifying thought.

Whilst all these events were taking place, Ji Ling was stomping her feet violently in Sky Room No.1 of the most luxurious tavern in Tiantang City. "Why wasn't this obnoxious man arrested?!"

There were several other girls in the room lazing around; some of them lounged on Ji Ling's bed, their delicate jade-like feet twitching in boredom, kicking ceaselessly against the bed. These young ladies of the city's influential families looked peerlessly elegant and beautiful in the public's eyes but in front of their best friends, they did not bother to maintain the image they worked so very hard convey outside.

"Oh, what's gotten you so angry, little sister? An obnoxious man?" One of the girls asked in mock surprise. "Since when did Little Sister Ji meet such a man? How has this slipped by us?"

Ji Ling snorted, "You girls wish to know him? If you have seen him, consider him an impostor! That is if he doesn't annoy you until you lose your appetite!"

"Oh, if there's such a person, we sisters must get to know him then." The girl beamed brightly. "How fascinating!"

Ji Ling snorted with a pout and kept rolling her eyes. Fascinating? Just wait until he annoys you to no end. You girls will know what's fascinating then!

Within moments, five or six of the girls threw themselves over.

"What's his name?"

"How tall is he?"

"Is he handsome?"

"Is he good looking?"

"Is he fat?"

"Describe to us his physique!"

"How's his family background?"

Another girl even managed to look charmed as she said, "Wow, I suddenly feel like I'm about to meet my prince!"

Ji Ling smacked her forehead. "There's absolutely no hope for all of you!"

"Tell us! Let us go have a look."

"Yes, maybe we could even find our other halves!"

"This little kitty doesn't wanna share. Everyone, make her tell!"

"Charge!"

"Help me!" Ji Ling screamed in mock indignation as the girls playfully piled on top her. It soon turned into a chaotic scene, with limbs flailing about and cheerful laughter floating on the air.

...

Just as Yun Yang walked out of his room, he saw Lao Mei and Fang Mofei standing by the door.

"Excuse me?" Yun Yang was surprised to find the two men hovering at his portal like silent statues.

What is going on?

It would be alright if it was only Lao Mei standing here. It's already difficult for Fang Mofei stand, let alone wait here, upright as a pole!

"Young master, there is someone called Chen San outside the door. He has been sitting by our door since last night." Lao Mei explained, "He has not left until now."

Yun Yang nodded and replied, "Go on."

Fang Mofei then spoke, "Young master, I am unable to articulate my feelings. When I was cultivating last night, I could faintly feel a number of presences in the residence."

"They were all experts." Fang Mofei looked downright somber as he continued. "They seemed to be looking something. Young master has to be alerted to this."

Poor Fang Mofei had been completely terrified last night. Although he had not known the reason behind his alarmingly rapid speed of cultivation and the recovery of his deific consciousness, Fang Mofei was delighted to use it to survey his surroundings but the result was nothing like what he had imagined.

Goosebumps had erupted all over his skin as he felt the eerie presence of strangers come and go from the Residence of Yun. When one left, another one took its place, some even in groups of three or five. Furthermore, Fang Mofei could intuit that those who had come were mostly experts of the fifth or sixth peak; some of them were even more advanced than he was and there were many of them. These apparitions had come and gone at least fifty to sixty times till late into the night; if it were only one person for every visitation, then there were at least fifty to sixty experts who had traipsed through the residence!

Are they f*cking visiting the market?

Fang Mofei was drenched with sweat from the fright. He had thought that it would be safer and more peaceful in the Residence of Yun. He had no idea that this could have happened. It was even more terrifying than roaming the most dangerous locations in the martial arts world.

Yun Yang smiled faintly. "It's alright, let them be. They can come over all they want, we have a smooth and spacious highway here."

His smile was impossible to decipher.

Fang Mofei blinked in confusion. He wanted to ask, "What are you smiling about? Your own home is being treated as a marketplace by others! It's almost as if they were ready to set up a stall here and start trading!"

Four fur balls followed behind Yun Yang as they rolled out of his room, playfully nipping at each other on the floor. Fang Mofei sighed a breath of relief. He could not help but smile as well.

Those people must have been here to try to locate the so-called ninth level mystical beast babies but they had missed what was right under their eyes, searching like they were in a market. He thought that the young master must have grinned due to how hilarious this would have looked. Fang Mofei returned to Yun Yang a smile of tacit understanding as well.

Fang Mofei had thought wrong, however, as Yun Yang was not smiling about this...

...

Early in the morning, Yun Yang had received five calling cards and an invitation. All four great young masters of East, West, South, and West wanted to come meet Yun Yang to forge a closer relationship, especially Ximen Wandai, who had suffered the greatest loss before he had expressed his wish the most earnestly.

The other calling card was filled with the heady scent of fragrance; it was pink with neat and delicate writing that read, "We have long heard of Young Master Yun's name, and

we sisters have admired Young Master Yun for an inordinate span of time. Thus saying, we would like to pay a visit...”

That was the general gist of it. Yun Yang was surprised at this calling card and pondered upon its possible origins. By the looks of it, was it sisters from a brothel who wanted to come over? What did they hope to achieve by coming over? Yun Yang stroked his face, feeling aggrieved for being so attractive.

The other invitation was direct and straight to the point. Yun Yang was astonished to have received an invitation from the Residence of the Marshal. Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan had prepared a simple feast and had invited Yun Yang to partake of it tonight.

Yun Yang sighed.

“Where are these people who wanted to visit?” Yun Yang continued, “Invite them in.”

Lao Mei looked amused as he replied, “There aren’t here.”

Yun Yang was momentarily speechless. Why give a calling card if you didn’t intend to come in? You held the calling card and passed it through the door, then you would wait outside and only enter upon the permission of the host.

That was how a calling card worked.

It had also meant that since the card was now in the host’s hands, the guest must be outside the door right now. Unfortunately, the guest was nowhere to be found!

“Don’t these fellows adhere to the common code of conduct?” Yun Yang felt somewhat irate at the lack of common courtesy. They were all elite members of influential families, how could they not know? Why did they send the calling card but did not come themselves?

Yun Yang quickly cast these thoughts aside. “I don’t care if you come or not.”

Walking out of the residence door, he stumbled upon Chen San who had been sitting upright at the side of the walkway. His face looked tired and pale, a testament to his tenacity at remaining on the doorstep throughout the entire night.

“Chen San, go home.” Yun Yang spoke gently, “It’s alright now.”

Chen San, however, was adamant on staying. “Young master’s kindness to this lowly one is higher than the heaven and wider than the earth. Young master has even gotten into dire straits for this lowly one. How can this lowly one leave just like that? This lowly one will wait right here. If the officials are here to find fault with the young master, this lowly one knows exactly what to do.”

Yun Yang replied, "The issue has been resolved. Xie Wuyuan's entire family has been seized and placed in prison. Have you not heard of this?"

"Is this true?" Chen San got up to his feet, his eyes shining with pleasure. "That wicked scoundrel who has done everything vile will eventually have his day!"

Yun Yang smiled.

"Since it has been resolved, this lowly one should return home. It will not look good for young master if I linger around here." Chen San continued, "But for young master's massive kindness... if ever young master requests for anything in the future, this lowly one would risk everything, even death, to fulfill it!"

He then kneeled down to bow twice and left.

Yun Yang went after him, pushed a gold bullion into his hand and said, "Live well when you get home." He wanted to say more but words failed him. A military man who once spilled blood on the battlefield was now handicapped and humiliated in his struggles for a living but his dedication to gratitude and kinship had remained.

Chen San could only accept it after repeatedly failing to reject Yun Yang's generosity. He was immensely flustered, his eyes shining in equal parts with moisture and gratitude as his voice shook with emotion. "Thank you, young master! Chen San is filled with immense gratitude towards young master's gallantry! Sigh, during those years when the Nine Supremes were still commanding the world, who in this nation dared disrespect the veterans? Such a pity that God is blind and does not bless the kind. Ever since the Nine Supremes left, us lowly ones..."

He was unable to finish his sentence as two drops of hot tears rolled down his cheeks. He thanked Yun Yang once more, and turned around to leave.

Looking at Chen San's retreating figure, Yun Yang felt a wave of emotions. "During those years when the Nine Supremes were still commanding the world, who in this nation dared disrespect the veterans?"

"We are here, still here, always here," Yun Yang said quietly in his heart.

He returned to the courtyard in low spirits.

"Old Marshal's invitation..." Yun Yang frowned. "It's impossible for him to suspect my identity. What would it be for? Was it because I assaulted Xie Wuyuan yesterday? Xie Wuyuan's case has involved the Nine Heavens Dictum. Looks like the Old Marshal is looking at me as the breakthrough?"

Yun Yang smiled grimly. Whatever the reason, he had to make this trip.

Yun Yang walked slowly inside, entertaining his thoughts with a frown when he suddenly felt a faint tingle of premonition. Acting purely on instinct, he hurled himself to the ground.

Tok! Tok! Tok!

Metallic sounds rang out as three small flying daggers stabbed deep into the plants in front of Yun Yang, like three flashes of lightning preceding the rumble of thunder.

Even as Yun Yang threw himself down, he was already moving like a spirit to the back of a tree. With a twist of his body, he vanished into thin air.

At the same time, Lao Mei catapulted out into the courtyard with an angry roar as his rapid movements left trails of shadow in the air.

It was an assassination attempt!

On the opposite rooftop, a masked man in black peered inside the Residence of Yun with shock, disbelief written in his eyes. Even with his cultivation base of mystical skill that had reached the fifth peak, he had actually failed to hit an ant that was not even at its first peak! Worst of all, he didn't even understand how he could possibly have missed. He was only aware that his target had suddenly dropped to the ground just as he was about to make his move. The space that his target had occupied was already empty when the flying daggers left his hands!

How had this happened?

The masked man in black almost cursed out loud, "Your father has been an assassin for so many years and has never yet encountered such a bewildering incident!"

Chapter 35: Assassins, Dictums and a Terrible Present

Lao Mei charged in like a bull, shadows trailing behind him with a menacing aura. The masked assassin in black leaped out soundlessly, a colorless silk string unwinding from his raised arm. He advanced upon the charging manservant, his left hand strengthened and braced for the impending impact. Lao Mei fell upon him like a roc, palms flashing as he landed a series of blows as loud as thunder strikes. The assassin singlehandedly deflected the attacks, and as Lao Mei attempted to break past his defenses, he soon found that he was hitting nothing but air. The man in black had flitted almost a hundred feet away, ascending to the sky. Lao Mei, caring for nothing but his prey, veered towards the direction of the escaping villain, leaving wisps of smoke trailing from his body. His efforts were wasted, however; the assassin was already a tiny, black dot slowly receding into the heavens. The man in black was obviously prepared; should he miss his target, he would flee far and high.

Lao Mei returned with a sour face. The assassin's cultivation base was clearly weaker than his but the man had managed to escape easily, with the aid of a magical silk string, and he could do nothing about it.

"An assassination attempt!" Yun Yang's purple robe was free from dust as he frowned lightly. "Who would want to kill me?"

Fang Mofei walked over to join the duo with a serious face.

"Old Fang, are you able to deduce the origins of this assassin?"

"Young master, I can confirm that this assassin is not a member of the Concourse of the Underworld," Fang Mofei replied confidently.

"Why would you say that?" Yun Yang questioned.

"Well, if he were from the Concourse of the Underworld, he would have King Yan's Dictum on him. King Yan's Dictum serves as an indicator of a mission in progress and as a reminder to others to stay away and not interfere. This is a commonly known rule for the entire Concourse of the Underworld's assassins, for those in the Silver Rank and above. This person's skills are commendable and he should already be a Gold-ranked killer but I am unable to feel the presence of King Yan's Dictum on him," Fang Mofei explained.

Yun Yang nodded. "This assassin uses flying daggers."

"It is possible that he's not from the Hall of Crimson Blade." Fang Mofei continued, "The Merciless Tower is known to be made up of sword-wielding assassins while the members of the Hall of Crimson Blade are, for the most part, saber-wielding killers but this is not all-encompassing. There are always exceptions to the rule. Besides, the flying dagger is a hidden weapon and not a proper tool of battle."

"This person is most likely to be from The Merciless Tower," Fang Mofei conjectured.

"The Merciless Tower." Yun Yang pondered upon the implications, "An organization with very prominent characteristics. Their terms and prices are clear and transparent. They will only undertake the assignment upon receiving full payment. There is no hesitation, no questions on morality or about cause and effect. Their proof of success is the head of the target, they and will not rest until the mission is complete."

"Yes, that sounds about right." Fang Mofei agreed, "Once The Merciless Tower accepts a mission, it is a machine that will not rest, and will continue to send wave after wave of murderers until the target is killed. The only difference is that the client has to supply an increasingly large amount of fees to support the men that they send."

Yun Yang gave a faint smile and said, "They don't rest until the mission is complete. Despite the circumstances, that is a rather commendable trait, which deserves respect!"

...

Yun Yang retired to his room and when he emerged again, there was already a new Nine Heavens Dictum being issued, moving fast and wide like a spider furiously enlarging its web.

"Nine Heavens Dictum; An Investigation! Who are the assassins of the world, who had recently entered Tiantang, as well as their characteristics and the weapons they carried. Above all, who could have hired assassins to kill the Marquis of Heavenly Clouds' young master?"

As soon as the dictum was sent out, the underground world of Tiantang City immediately fell into a state of turmoil!

"I'm going out for a walk." Yun Yang proclaimed, "Both of you stay at home and look after the house. Fang Mofei, you are tasked to recover from your injuries; the quicker you do it, the better." He turned about to take his leave.

"Young master, allow me to follow you." Lao Mei's pleaded earnestly. "The assassin..."

"There is no need!" Yun Yang adamantly refused the offer. "Lao Mei, you have your responsibilities and I absolutely insist. The more danger that lurks around me, the more adamant I should be."

Before Lao Mei could think about the meaning behind his words, Yun Yang had already gone out of the door and melted into the crowd.

I have my responsibility, you have your stubbornness. Lao Mei thought about it for a long while before managing to come up with a reasonable argument, "But my responsibility is to protect you!"

By the time he managed to come up with this logical repartee, Yun Yang was already long gone. Lao Mei suddenly thought of something. "Young master, the calling cards! What am I to do if those young masters were to come?" There were now crowds of people moving around outside the door; it was impossible to locate Yun Yang to inform him about his impending guests.

Lao Mei turned around speechlessly and was greeted by Fang Mofei chuckling at him. "What are you laughing at?" Lao Mei glared at him with the most intimidating look he could muster. "DO you feel I have failed to fulfill my duties? Why, just give me half a reason, and I'd give you a drubbing right now! Don't think that just because your cultivation base is higher than mine, that I'll be afraid to do it."

Fang Mofei smiled and said good-humoredly, "I wasn't laughing at you not doing your job, I was simply curious. When did the Single-horned Flood Dragon Mei Wenjian who had once commanded the martial arts world become a butler of the Yun family?"

Lao Mei snorted in irritation, "What does it matter to you? Your father is happy to do so!" He stared at Fang Mofei with a scrutinizing eye. "How about being a butler? Hasn't the Fealty Jade Sword also come under the roof of our residence?"

Fang Mofei wanted to chortle.

"I would suggest that you be more humble in the future." Lao Mei glared at him. "It is only wise to respect your immediate supervisor!"

Fang Mofei had no response to that little bit of wisdom.

...

Yun Yang melted into the crowd the moment he stepped out of his residence. When he wanted to be noticed, he could make himself the center of attention even a multitude of people; when he intended to conceal himself, he could stay unnoticed even if he were to walk alone in the middle of the street under bright daylight.

When it came to camouflage, there was no equal to Supreme Cloud's Cloud Veil!

He drifted into the crowd as if aimlessly following the flowing current but he arrived at an alley within a few turns. At the end of the alley was a small hill, and under the hill lay a thick fog.

This was the Residence of the Nine Supremes; it was also the site of the Nine Heavens Demesne. Ever since the downfall of the Nine Supremes, the Nine Heavens Demesne had been mysteriously covered with a thick fog which permitted no one to enter and withstood all efforts to destroy it.

Within the year, hundreds of thousands of people had flocked over to the site, either during the day or in the dark but no one had been able to gain entry. Gradually, the place quieted down and fell still. It was surrounded by neatly arranged candles, the areas bordering the fog swept clean. A group of veterans had scheduled themselves into twelve shifts and they diligently swept the place regardless whether it was day or night. They would never allow the residence of their heroes to be covered in dust or dirt! In their hearts, the Residence of Nine Supremes should always be gloriously spotless!

Yun Yang observed the scene from afar. Numerous single-armed men were cleaning the place meticulously, holding onto their brooms with the single arm they owned. They dropped the broom lightly and dragged it slowly, not a single speck of dust or dirt was whisked into the air throughout the entire process. Their expressions were of utter devotion and reverence.

The Residence of the Nine Supremes, the Nine Heavens Demesne; to these veterans, it was holy ground.

Yun Yang took in a deep breath, keeping his tortured emotions under check. He slowly made his way to a tree and stood quietly under the canopy. Looking at the white fog, Yun Yang could only feel his heart boil as his blood burned. He stood quietly until dusk fell. Throughout that entire time, many of the old veterans had swept past his feet with their brooms but none of them had realized that there was a person standing there.

The Nine Heavens Demesne – the thick fog had locked everything within.

“Perhaps, in the entire world, I am the only one who could possibly enter.” Yun Yang closed his eyes. “But right now, I... dare not do so.”

He could almost see his eight brothers inside, waiting to ask him, “Have you defeated the Four Seasons Tower? Have you avenged our deaths?”

“Old Nine, are you living well now?”

Yun Yang breathed in deeply, the tears that he had bottled up for so long finally flowing freely.

“I have come to see you, my brothers. But now that I am here, I never wish to leave...”

...

Old Marshal Qiu sat alone at the foyer, his expression tinged with anxiety.

It was already dusk but his invited guest had not yet arrived. Sir Wang’s eye twitched nervously.

This was the invitation of the Old Marshal, a summons from the ultimate militant of the Empire of Yutang – how dare this man be late?

“Should I send someone over to call upon him?” Sir Wang asked unhappily.

“There is no need.” Old Marshal Qiu raised his grayed eyebrows. “It doesn’t matter anyway. His Majesty is not here yet either.”

“His Majesty is coming as well?” Startled, Sir Wang immediately sat upright.

“That is correct. His Majesty and I share the same doubts.” Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan spoke softly, “It is not rather coincidental that Yun Yang attacks a person who then immediately becomes the subject of the Nine Heavens Dictum?”

Sir Wang said, “Yes, it does seem rather strange.”

“Furthermore, the Xie family’s father and son duo has been guilty of committing those crimes for a long time now; why didn’t Nine Heavens Dictum arrive then?” Old Marshal Qiu asked in bewilderment.

“Perhaps this is purely happenstance.” Sir Wang said with much difficulty, “After all, this Yun Yang is nothing but a popinjay.”

“Are coincidences so rampant in this world? Even if it were a coincidence, I still believe there is a reason behind it.” Old Marshal Qiu said in all seriousness, “Therefore, this meal today is very important to me. It will be worth it, even if I have to wait but a little longer.”

Sir Wang sighed, giving up on his attempts to persuade the Old Marshal

Old Marshal Qiu glanced at Sir Wang and sighed in his heart as well. Sir Wang had come from a poor background and had managed to make a name for himself by his own hard work. Until this day, he was far prouder that he was a scholar, rather than a member of nobility; he was smart and collected in his thoughts, farsighted and plotted exceedingly well. He could even be considered as one of the world’s best. Unfortunately, Sir Wang had a deep-rooted bias that could not be changed despite the Old Marshal’s many attempts over the years. It was an instinctual stereotype that the entire second generation of nobles, officials, and wealthy businessmen were merely popinjays! In his single-tracked mind, these worthless and incompetent people were good for nothing other than harassing the unfortunate and tyrannizing hapless communities.

The Old Marshal could say nothing regarding Sir Wang’s point of view on this matter. Other than this single failing, he was near-perfect. Sir Wang could clearly see the suspicious circumstances revolving around Yun Yang but he stubbornly refused to consider that it was related to this popinjay. It was infuriating, but Old Marshal Qiu Jianhan could only try to make the best of it.

The guards announced loudly from the door, “Marshal, His Majesty has arrived.”

With a sigh, Qiu Jianhan stood up and went out to welcome the emperor.

...

It was already night when Yun Yang reached the door of the marshal’s residence, carrying a box of fruits in his hands. Lacking a better idea for a gift, he had simply bought the fruits on his way there. The guards by the door looked at him with disapproving glances.

It was an immense honor to be invited by the Old Marshal, and yet this fellow had the cheek to come late, proudly bearing a few bruised fruits!

“Please inform the Old Marshal,” Yun Yang was polite and spoke with an air of elegance, “Yun Yang from the Yun family is present to attend the dinner with a humble gift.” The guard looked at the fruits in Yun Yang’s hands; growing increasingly irritated as he counted the fruits – were there only five peaches? Exasperated, he growled at Yun Yang, “Wait here.”

Translator Note:

1King Yan (阎王 yán wáng): ruler/guildmaster of Concourse of the Underworld; concept derived from Yama, also known as King of Hell or Yanluo, the god of death and ruler of hell.