

T. Times 116

Chapter 116: A Sword Atop Fourteen Provinces

Yue Hongling, the Second Hidden Dragon!

Many of the people present could not help but hold their breaths in anticipation.

It has already been half a year since Yue Hongling reached second place on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons. Her greatest target when she was training to get stronger was none other than Chi Li!

If Chi Li wanted to humiliate the renowned hidden dragons of the Central Plains, defeating only the top ten would not be able to demonstrate his true abilities. He had to seek out someone from the Ranking of Man or, if he insisted on facing the hidden dragons, he had only two options: Yue Hongling or Cui Yuanyong.

Nobody had ever expected that what seemed like a random gathering hosted by the Cao Gang's young gang leader would ultimately turn into a showdown between top-ranked hidden dragons involving the honor of different nations!

Chi Li had never thought that he would actually meet Yue Hongling here. After the initial shock, his eyes revealed a wild and ecstatic fighting spirit, "Excellent, excellent. I never would have thought that I would actually get to encounter the Setting Sun, Yue Hongling, in this place!"

Yue Hongling calmly asked, "Were you intending to ascend the Ranking of Man?"

"Indeed," said Chi Li with a slight smile. "To be honest with you... as I traveled southward, I encountered some people who claimed to be 'on par with those on the Ranking of Man' or some such. I challenged all of them and killed quite a few of them, but it was all boring. Most of them were just boasting.

"It seems that the Tome of Troubled Times holds some truth. There's a big difference between those who do make it into the rankings and those who don't. Those who claim to be on par with people on the Ranking of Man might not even be able to compare to the top hidden dragons. With that said, I believe that you won't disappoint me, Miss Yue."

The crowd buzzed with excitement.

Over the past few days, many renowned martial artists who were known to be on the verge of ascending to the Ranking of Man had inexplicably died. It turned out that it was actually all Chi Li's doing!

While it was true that many of those claiming to be "on par with those on the Ranking of Man" were mostly touted by others, not all of them were mere braggarts.

Daoist Xuan Chong asked, "Did Daoist Huang He also die by your hands?"

"Yup," Chi Li laughed. "That old daoist talked a big game, but in the end, he was just like the rest. What about it? It was a fair duel. I did not sneak attack anyone. Could it be that the Taiyi Sect is afraid of losing?"

A look of gloom emerged in Xuan Chong's eyes.

That daoist priest had a good relationship with their Taiyi Sect, and in fact Xuan Chong had come here precisely for the purpose of investigating Daoist Priest Huang He's death. He did not expect to solve the case all of a sudden. The bigger problem was that he knew very well that Daoist Priest Huang He was not just blown out of proportion. His strength truly was close to those on the Ranking of Man, and he genuinely had a chance at entering the ranking. His reputation was not just for show!

In other words, Chi Li was actually already at the tail end of the Ranking of Man in terms of strength. All he lacked was a formal challenge against someone on the Ranking of Man... He's only twenty-two years old!

Is he actually going to be able to recreate Xia Longyuan's legend?

Xuan Chong secretly worried about Yue Hongling... She's younger and has less experience than Chi Li. Does she have any chance of beating him?

Yue Hongling remained silent and slowly drew her longsword. She pointed it at Chi Li, and said, "This sword is named Evening Glow. It's three chi, four cun, and two fen long."

Chi Li held his scimitar and responded with a slight bow. “My weapon is called the Fox Spirit Scimitar. It has the ability to bewitch the mind and create illusions. Do be careful.”

Swoosh!

Yue Hongling’s longsword instantly crossed the hall, heading straight for Chi Li.

With just this one sword strike, everyone was moved. Tang Buqi, who was standing behind Zhao Changhe, had sweat pouring down his forehead, fully aware of the vast gap between his swordsmanship and hers!

If his sword could barely be considered as a little flowing spring, then Yue Hongling’s sword strike was like a setting sun casting its radiant glow across the horizon. Regardless of where the river was, the sunset flow enveloped it, dyeing the water with its brilliance.

Tang Buqi knew that he could not block this sword strike. No, forget about blocking, he could not even see the path of her sword clearly. It was as if there was nowhere to hide as long as he was in this hall.

In fact, he even felt as if as long as he was in this world, there was no escaping this sword strike.

He knew it was not that extreme, and it was just a kind of sword intent that had plunged him and the other swordsmen in a profound state of mind, but this meant that his mind had been seized and he had already lost. In other words, he would not even be able to bring himself to block Yue Hongling’s sword strike.

With the landscape of the setting sun casting its radiant glow over the mountains and rivers, a dark red saber shadow suddenly cut through, like a line that divided the autumn water and the endless sky. Thus, the water remained water, and the sky remained sky.

Everyone in the hall could only see the scimitar crossing paths with the longsword, and it felt as if time and space had momentarily frozen.

It seemed like some kind of illusion was invading Yue Hongling’s consciousness, and they did not know what she saw at this instant, but her gaze remained calm, without even a hint of disturbance.

She flicked her longsword, and the scimitar, which had easily caused Xuan Chong to stagger and retreat earlier, could not stop it. The tip of her sword swiftly arrived right before Chi Li's throat!

A look of admiration flashed in Chi Li's eyes. It was hard to tell what kind of footwork he used, but he moved as if he had teleported and was instantly at Yue Hongling's side, his scimitar slashing toward her throat.

Fast, simply too fast... A strange scimitar paired with a strange movement technique!

The sword and saber clashed, and the two of them stopped and turned to face one another.

In that swift moment of their exchange, people could only hear the sharp sounds of metal clashing against metal. Those with slightly weaker cultivation were unable to even perceive the rapid exchange of moves between the two. It was all a blur to them, and they could hardly make out any details.

Even Zhao Changhe had a hard time following their movements.

Yue Hongling had held back quite a lot when they were sparring, but she was not holding back at all now. In the end, she was at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate. It was not a level that he could fully understand while only being at the fourth layer.

However, he could tell that Yue Hongling's hands were trembling slightly as if she was at a disadvantage in terms of raw power during their intense exchange.

Chi Li had probably not reached the ninth layer of the Profound Gate yet, but he was likely on the verge of it. He likely had a bit more accumulation than Yue Hongling...

His reputation as number one on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons was well-deserved. The Tome of Troubled Times never made mistakes in its rankings!

He was the top of the younger generation, in terms of both potential and strength!

Chi Li looked back at Yue Hongling, with admiration flashing in his eyes once again. "Throughout my journey, there were very few who had the same or even lower cultivation that were able to make me feel the threat of death. Miss Yue, you are truly unique. I genuinely admire you."

Yue Hongling said lightly, “Likewise.”

But then, Chi Li’s tone suddenly changed and his next words only reached Yue Hongling’s ears. “But a prominent figure from the Central Plains like you cannot continue to live in this world.”

Following those words, he swung his scimitar once more.

The visual perception of the crowd became distorted once again. There was a strange arc that seemed to circle tens of thousands of li, yet reached its destination seemingly instantly. This bizarre spatial illusion made people feel suffocated and their minds went numb. It felt impossible to comprehend this mysterious and profound circle.

A glimmer of sword light blossomed at the center of the circle, instantly dispelling the mysterious feeling.

The sword emitted a chilling brilliance that eclipsed everything in its path, rendering the world colorless.

Concepts of space and trajectory became completely irrelevant, as the sword’s only goal was to take a life. It was just like in Batu’s battle with Tang Buqi earlier, but reversed. At this moment, it was Yue Hongling who was fighting for her life!

Yue Hongling’s voice sounded in Chili’s ears, and she repeated herself, “Likewise.”

—A prominent figure from the Central Plains like you cannot continue to live in this world.

—A hero from a foreign land like you cannot continue to exist.

Chi Li truly admired Yue Hongling’s bravery and decisiveness. He found it hard to believe that she was actually managing her own against him!

Is she really a woman?

At this critical moment, a violent burst of energy erupted and crashed right in-between the two fighters carrying the force of a mountain.

It was a large saber that was about four or five chi long. It did not matter whether it was the Setting Sun or the Grasslands Fox Spirit, anyone who did not dodge this saber would be cleaved in half.

Clang!

The longsword and scimitar made light contact before flying back in opposite directions. Meanwhile, the massive saber landed precisely between the two fighters, forming a barrier that seemed to span the entire distance between heaven and earth.

Onlookers could clearly see that there was a clear sword wound on Chi Li's ribs, and blood was flowing freely from it.

At the same time, Yue Hongling's left shoulder looked like it had been nearly split apart by the scimitar and was similarly dripping with blood.

Both sides were wounded!

If it had not been for the timely intervention of the large saber, both of the top-ranked hidden dragons might have met their end together!

Chi Li looked at the wound on his ribs and whispered in admiration, "In this vast Central Plains, encompassing fourteen provinces... Only this sword stands out among the younger generation."

Yue Hongling did not reply to him. Her beautiful eyes remained fixed in the direction from which the saber had been thrown.

There, she saw Zhao Changhe with a stern expression.

What's with the grim look on your face? Is it because I was willing to put my life on the line against someone? What's your problem? Don't you realize that with the tension we had there, both of us may have accidentally swung our weapons your way? Do you not fear for your own life?

Chi Li also turned to look at Zhao Changhe, his expression a little strange, “Brother, you are quite courageous. Are you not afraid of death? Oh, could it be because...”

Everyone else also realized what had happened just moments before. Without the timely intervention of the saber, the fight may have resulted in fatalities.

The person who had thrown the saber had displayed remarkable insight, but he clearly did not fear becoming the target of the two fighters. It really did seem like he did not value his own life.

It was only then that people suddenly remembered something.

Specifically, they remembered the rumors of Zhao Changhe secretly having a crush on Yue Hongling...

Chapter 117: You're Too Weak

When they thought of this, everyone could not help but find Zhao Changhe particularly intriguing. He had taken the risk of getting seriously injured, yet he had actually moved to break the fight between the two rather than favoring Yue Hongling.

When Xuan Chong had moved to save Tang Buqi, he had directly struck out against Batu, but no one thought that he had done something inappropriate. After all, why would anyone care about how he went about saving someone on his side? The struggles between nations were of greater importance than minor scuffles between internal forces. In fact, he could be considered magnanimous for not jumping into the battle and cutting down Batu.

However, Zhao Changhe had actually not chosen to throw his saber at Chi Li's head but rather right between the two fighters, preventing the possibility that the two fighters were unable to control themselves and ended up taking each other's lives. This was what the referee of a competition would do. There was nothing wrong with it from any possible perspective.

And precisely for that reason, it was difficult to understand what he was thinking. Even if he wanted to sacrifice his life for honor, or if he was confident that he could severely injure himself to take his opponent down, his family and friends would find it hard to think this way. Due to his actions, those from the foreign race behind Chi Li might even start feeling sympathy for him.

Some people felt that what he had just done was even less appropriate than Xuan Chong.

The action he had carried out was much riskier than simply favoring Yue Hongling. Refereeing was not a job that just anyone could do, any mistakes could mean the wannabe judge being the one ending up on the ground. So, was doing something like that really necessary?

No one believed that Zhao Changhe had acted out of righteousness. Everyone believed that he had done such a thing to prevent the perception that Yue Hongling had received assistance against Chi Li. In this regard, Yue Hongling should be thankful as he would rather take more risks himself.

Just how much does he like Yue Hongling?

People could not help but sneak glances at Yue Hongling, who was quietly applying medicine to herself to stop the bleeding. They could not help but think, Miss Yue, these actions of his are no different than an open declaration of love. By the way, he even got a stronghold mistress who looked just like you, isn't that scandalous? Are you going to do something about it?

We've been waiting to see this moment for a long time...

Yue Hongling did not mention whether or not she was confident in trading injuries for her opponent's life. In the end, her response was as follows, "I am grateful for you stopping our fight at the critical moment. But don't you know that it's very dangerous for you to do this kind of thing?"

Zhao Changhe laughed and replied, "You saved my life back at Zhao Village."

Yue Hongling was speechless.

Zhao Changhe continued, "What's so dangerous about throwing a saber from afar? I just threw my saber because it was faster. If it had been faster to charge over, then I would have done that instead! If you see your savior about to go down in their fight against someone, what is there to hesitate about? If you hesitate, then what's the point in being in this world or talking about chivalry? It would be better for you to just go back home and get drunk on milk!"

Xuan Chong nodded slightly, "He is a member of my generation."

Someone in the crowd muttered, "Is it really just repaying a favor, I wonder... I'm afraid he had something greater in mind..."

Yue Hongling turned her head slightly.

Well, what was supposed to be a heroic act had turned into this corny farce. She could not help but feel sorry for Zhao Changhe.

Zhao Changhe looked around the crowd. He did not know who had just spoken up, and he did not bother trying to find out. He loudly declared, “So what?! The whole world knows about how I wanted to make Yue Hongling my wife. What’s wrong with that? I can’t just bring myself to stand by and watch as this foolish woman, who calls herself a hero, wants to go down with someone. What are you going to do about it?!”

Here it is!

As expected, bandits are direct!

Zhao Changhe simply looked at Yue Hongling. “Anyway, you’ve probably heard about it yourself. Well, I’ll just ask you directly. Do I have a chance, yes or no?”

Countless people eagerly looked at Yue Hongling, as if this question was even more captivating than the earlier intense battle between the First and Second Hidden Dragons. Even Chi Li, who was similarly tending to his wounds, smiled and looked over with interest.

Endless trials and the eternal cycle of life and death could be quite tedious.

Observing such romantic entanglements was an amusing diversion every now and then.

Yue Hongling was looking at Zhao Changhe, and she recalled the discussion they had earlier.

“Should we first discuss how we are going to act when we meet in front of others?”

“So... should I really pursue you?”

“If I reject you, that would be the end of it, right?”

The words he had just said were in accordance with their earlier discussion. This could indeed bring an end to the rumors and gossip that had surrounded their relationship for so long. However, when her turn to respond came, she could not bring herself to say the words that had reached her lips.

Rejecting him publicly, in front of so many people, would make him look pitiful. If she did that, he would become everyone's laughingstock.

But agreeing? She genuinely did not have that kind of sentiment, much less any plans for such relationships for the time being.

Looking into Zhao Changhe's eyes, they remained clear and even seemed to contain a hint of amusement, as if he was saying, "How do you like my script? Is my performance convincing? Come on, it's your turn."

It was unclear how much time passed, perhaps just a few breaths, but amidst the eager anticipation of the crowd, Yue Hongling finally spoke, "My heart still desires to roam the world. I have no intention of choosing a partner for the time being."

Even though he had expected this answer, Zhao Changhe still could not help but sigh a little inwardly. He said, "I understand—"

Before he could finish speaking, Yue Hongling suddenly added, "But..."

Zhao Changhe: "?"

Everyone's ears pricked up.

"If I were to seek a partner, he does not necessarily need to have great strength. Instead, I would want someone with a heart filled with chivalry and courage, who is committed to safeguarding the nation and the people, and who is willing to help the weak and oppose the strong. Only if our hearts align in this way can I bring myself to journey with him to the ends of the world."

The crowd collectively let out a satisfied "Ohhhhh." Indeed, this was very much in character for Yue Hongling. In any case, it was unthinkable for her to ask about dowry or whatever material possessions.

Yue Hongling said slowly, “Brother Zhao, you have the courage... But in the presence of foreigners, who act arrogantly and rely on their strength to bully others, you can’t even bring yourself to stand against Batu. Is it because you see him as stronger than you and are afraid of him?”

Batu: “?”

Why are you suddenly calling me out? I was just enjoying the show from the side here. I’m just minding my own business...

Oh, wait, this actually does seem to be a part of our business. We originally came here to show off our strength and trample the hidden dragons of the Central Plains. We’re enemies. I almost forgot about it while watching the show just now...

Zhao Changhe looked at Yue Hongling inexplicably, as if saying, “This was not what we agreed upon earlier. What are you doing?”

Yue Hongling looked right back at him calmly. It was difficult to tell her true intentions.

Zhao Changhe shook his head slightly, turned to look at Batu, and chuckled, “Of course there is a reason why I haven’t taken action against him.”

Yue Hongling asked, “Oh? Why is that?”

Zhao Changhe took a few steps, stretched out his hand to caress the hilt of Dragon Bird, which was stuck into the ground, and said slowly, “He is too weak. He is only qualified to bully my eldest nephew. He has no value to me, even as a whetstone. Why would I bother?”

Tang Buqi: “...”

Batu: “?”

The crowd looked at each other in shock.

Why would you bother??

Hey, you shouldn't just see Batu as the 99th hidden dragon. Even if he is eleven places lower than you on the ranking and you think you are better than others, he has shown his strength just now. His cultivation has clearly reached the fifth layer of the Profound Gate. Meanwhile, you still haven't even broken through to the fourth layer, right? You may have higher potential than him, but you might not be able to compare to him in combat power right now.

You're both on the same level and challenging someone with higher cultivation than you is a difficult feat. It would be incredibly impressive if you could hold your own against him, yet you dare to say that he is too weak for you to even raise your saber?! Do you think this is the same as when you were sparring over a trivial matter?

Zhao Changhe had indeed been merely acting when he had said this. His original intention for not getting involved had been to observe Wan Dongliu's actions, but unforeseen events had disrupted his plan. With Batu having fun on the side, his plan of observing Wan Dongliu had become moot. Given the current situation, he could not appear cowardly.

Dragon Bird has long wanted to battle Batu... Are you happy?

Zhao Changhe firmly gripped the handle of his saber. "Well, no matter, I might as well go ahead. I'm Zhao Changhe of the Central Plains. Please enlighten me, Batu."

Chiang!

A dragon's roar erupted from the excited Dragon Bird.

Batu had long since become infuriated at Zhao Changhe's words. Veins popping out on his forehead, he stepped forward with his saber. "Alright, let me see what gives you the right to call me weak!"

Zhao Changhe glanced at him and said with a chuckle, "But you really are weak. Go ahead and make the first move."

Chi Li cleared his throat and cautioned, "Batu, be careful. He's provoking you. Don't fall for it..."

But it was already too late, Batu was so angry that smoke seemed to be coming from his head. "All you've ever managed to do was push my saber aside when you saved your little nephew's ass. Do you really think that means you're stronger than me? Take this!"

His loud roar covered up Chi Li's warning. He raised his saber and slashed diagonally, from the upper right to the lower left.

The whistling sound of the saber was like a violent wind, and the terrifying power it brought with it seemed to carry the might to crush mountains!

Even Xuan Chong, who was watching from the sidelines, was secretly astonished. He thought to himself that he would have definitely stepped aside to avoid the direct confrontation if he was in Zhao Changhe's place. He felt that it was impossible to block such an attack with a regular weapon. It was no wonder Zhao Changhe could separate the two fighters, who were in a life-and-death struggle, with a single throw of his saber.

It was truly difficult to directly resist the might of a saber. Of course, it was not impossible to win against such weapons, either. With the flexibility of swordsmanship, defeating such opponents was well within the realm of possibility.

As these thoughts flashed through his mind, a cry of surprise erupted from the crowd.

They saw Zhao Changhe swing his saber from the lower right to the upper left, directly confronting Batu's saber!

Sure enough, they are the same kind of fighter!

Just this single clash of strength had everyone's blood pumping. The battle between Chi Li and Yue Hongling had been too mysterious for many to understand. This clash of raw strength and power was much more exciting and thrilling to spectators!

Fourth layer vs fifth layer! Would Zhao Changhe be able to manage against Batu's strength?

Bang!

An earth-shattering explosion resounded, as expected. Contrary to everyone's expectation, however, it was neither a stalemate nor was it Zhao Changhe being pushed back. Instead, Batu's saber was forcefully pushed aside, leaving him wide open!

With his Dragon Bird in hand, Zhao Changhe only needed to push forward slightly to pierce through Batu's chest!

Fwoosh!

A flying blade suddenly struck, knocking away Zhao Changhe's saber. Chi Li had taken action to save his companion.

Zhao Changhe did not continue attacking Batu. He took a look at the side of his saber that had been hit by the flying blade, and suddenly smiled. "We're even."

Chi Li said calmly, "You're very powerful. I take back my previous evaluation. The Central Plains not only have that sword, but also this saber."

Zhao Changhe turned to look at him. "I hope you don't meet your death too soon in the Central Plains... The next person who confronts your scimitar will be me."

Chi Li said calmly, "I shall wait for when that time comes. Let's go."

With that, the group of formidable foreign hidden dragons, who had arrived with great momentum, found themselves in a rather bewildering situation. Batu was disoriented and Chi Li had sustained a rib injury. The both of them left Bright Moon Tower in a somewhat sorry state.

One had been severely injured by Yue Hongling, while the other had been defeated by Zhao Changhe in a single strike. It felt as if they had just witnessed a mixed doubles match involving a couple.

Everyone exchanged puzzled glances, as most of them could not comprehend why the strength of someone at the fourth layer, like Zhao Changhe, had been able to overpower that of someone at the fifth layer. If he had won in a skillful manner, they would have been able to accept it, but this ending left them perplexed. In the end, the fight only served to confirm what Zhao Changhe had said earlier: "He is too weak."

Chapter 118: Twenty-Eight Mansions

There were only a few people present who understood that the speed of Zhao Changhe's saber had, for some reason, managed to deceive everyone's visual perception.

When fighters engaged in combat and their weapons clashed, there was always an anticipated point of contact. It was at that anticipated point of contact that the strength behind the weapons would be at their peak. It was like how people have an anticipated point where their foot would land when walking, and if they land too early or too late, they are likely to stumble. A more common example would be when walking down the stairs mindlessly and thinking that there is another step when there isn't, and you end up stumbling.

Zhao Changhe's saber had intersected with Batu's saber just a very slight bit earlier than anticipated. At that moment, Batu's strength had not yet reached its peak, but Zhao Changhe's already had.

At that same time, while Zhao Changhe's saber looked like it had engaged in a pure head-on collision, he had secretly incorporated a bit of power dissipation.

He had always solely used his Six Harmonies Art to enhance his Vicious Blood Art, allowing him to challenge opponents of higher cultivation levels. But in this collision, he had diverted a portion of this power to dissipate the other party's power, adding a hint of softness to his extremely forceful strike.

It was as if Batu's saber was a boat moving upstream, but then the stream suddenly turned into a torrent, following which a floating log came crashing straight into him. In the end, he was unable to hold his ground and was forced along the stream.

Moreover, despite the old and rusty appearance of Zhao Changhe's saber, it had some hidden qualities that made it far superior to Batu's saber. The swift and fierce saber qi that surged out of the saber pierced straight through Batu's strength, causing him to involuntarily pull back.

Having wrongly judged the point of contact, the strength of the opponent, and the weapon, how could Batu, who had been in such a rush to prove his strength against Zhao Changhe, possibly win?

This battle had been extremely frustrating for him. He was absolutely certain that he possessed greater strength than Zhao Changhe, but he could not make use of it. He had been inexplicably swept away, causing him to feel like a young bride exposed in front of everyone. Even as he was being taken away by his companion, he remained confused and could not understand what had happened.

Even Yue Hongling did not know how Zhao Changhe had achieved the early point of contact, and how he had managed to use the combination of hardness and softness in his attack. It was all very mysterious to her.

In the crowd, Tang Buqi murmured to himself, “Could it be the Spring Water Sword Art? How is this possible...”

Those nearby who heard what he said gave him strange looks. They all thought it was incredibly unlikely for anyone to be able to use such a large saber to perform the Spring Water Sword Art. It was simply too hard to believe.

However, no matter how Tang Buqi looked at it, he felt that there really was some resemblance to the art, especially the early point of contact. It was as if the saber’s path had deceived everyone’s perception, appearing slightly slower than it actually was

Zhao Changhe’s saber slash did not involve any of the special effects of their martial art, only a slight sensation that made it feel similar to theirs. The path that his saber took was completely different from their sword techniques, and others would definitely not be able to tell. However, Tang Buqi was a hidden dragon himself and a core member of the Tang Clan. How could he not notice something was off?

Damn it, you keep calling me “eldest nephew.” I thought that you were just teasing me, but don’t tell me that there’s actually some truth to it??? If it’s even remotely true, then how dare you pursue Yue Hongling right in front of me? Did you think I wouldn’t get pissed?! [1]!

Meanwhile, Zhao Changhe surveyed the area and noticed that Wan Dongliu was whispering to his subordinates. Soon, more than half of the members of the Cao Gang that had been present in the hall silently left.

Zhao Changhe had a pretty good idea of what Wan Dongliu was planning. He had most likely made the ruthless decision of taking advantage of this time when Chi Li was injured to eliminate the foreign hidden dragons.

If that’s the case, then this guy seems to be... okay? Maybe I was a bit too suspicious of him before?

At this moment, Magistrate Qian suddenly spoke, “This is exactly as it should be! We must show off the might of the Great Xia! Dongliu, bring some people to protect the foreign market, and make sure that no one disturbs our guests. We should show that the Great Xia is magnanimous.”

Zhao Changhe clearly saw the flash of rage emerge in Wan Dongliu's eyes, but he swiftly forced it down and replied in a low voice, "Understood."

Magistrate Qian stood up from his seat with a smile, "I'm getting old, and I can't keep up with you young martial artists. I shall be heading back to rest now. Everyone performed very well today. Good job, all of you." Seeing as he had not even stayed for dinner, it was almost certain that the magistrate had come here to support the foreigners. It was clear that he had no interest in socializing with the young local martial artists.

At this moment, even Yue Hongling's eyes turned cold, secretly wondering to herself if she had another official to add to her list of corrupt officials to be killed.

However, Zhao Changhe gently shook his head at her, indicating not to rush things. Yue Hongling tilted her head in response and said nothing.

Zhao Changhe walked over and said in a soft voice, "I know your intention to challenge Chi Li. He is a person with immense potential who can't be left unchecked. Otherwise, he may become a great threat to the Central Plains in the future, no less formidable than the Khagan of the Golden Horde[2] or the Great Shaman. However, I do not want to worry about things that far ahead. All I know is that I don't want you to die, so please don't blame me for being so meddlesome."

Yue Hongling looked at him for a while and whispered, "You care about my life, how can I not appreciate that?"

"You are two years younger than him, so you have plenty of opportunities to surpass him," Zhao Changhe silently handed her a bottle of recovery medicine. "I swear, every time I see you... You always end up injured..."

Hearing his concerned tone, Yue Hongling found herself somewhat amused.

Although she had suffered many injuries during her adventures in the jianghu, it was not as frequent as he made it sound. Over the past six months, she had actually only been injured twice. The first was when she faced Cui Yuanyong, the Third Hidden Dragon, and now when confronting Chi Li, the first in the ranking. These battles were genuine tests of skill against similarly strong opponents, so preventing injury was just a pipe dream.

What was ironic was that both times she was injured, Zhao Changhe ended up by her side, witnessing her in her weakest moments, as if it was destiny.

What Zhao Changhe had taken out just now was recovery medicine he had gotten from the Cui Clan, and it was actually better than what Yue Hongling had. She did not hesitate to accept it, and she even jokingly said, “Are you using Cui Yuanyang’s things to win me over?”

“Huh?” Zhao Changhe was dumbfounded. “No, no, you... Hey, wait, I haven’t gotten to ask you yet. Why didn’t you follow the script earlier?”

“I just didn’t want to,” Yue Hongling replied with a slight blush. She tilted her head and said, “I can’t just embarrass you in front of everybody. Anyway, I just mentioned my criteria for choosing a partner. I didn’t say that meeting those criteria means that you can immediately become my partner. There are many people who can meet those criteria...”

Zhao Changhe was speechless. “Even if you think so, others might not. At the very least, I’m pretty sure quite a few of them believe that you said what you said because you’re fine with me pursuing you...”

Yue Hongling thought for a while and suddenly laughed, “Well, I have no objection to that at all.”

Zhao Changhe was stunned.

Yue Hongling playfully walked upstairs with her hands behind her back, swaying as she climbed the stairs. “There are plenty of people who want to pursue me. That’s their choice. I can’t control what they do? Anyway, let’s go upstairs for dinner. We did come here to enjoy a banquet.”

Zhao Changhe scratched his head, wondering what she meant.

If you really have no objections, then I’ll really pursue you!

Just as he was about to follow her upstairs, Tang Buqi suddenly appeared right in front of him with a serious expression. “That move you used just now... did it carry the Spring Water Sword Intent? I also had a strange feeling when you blocked my sword that day...”

Zhao Changhe patted his shoulder and replied, “A gentleman does not focus on mere appearances but looks at the essence. There are many things that can give off a similar sensation as the Spring Water Sword Intent. Do you really think that such a move is unique to your clan?”

Tang Buqi said expressionlessly, “You’re right, I didn’t focus on mere appearances. It looked like your saber, but what it was is the Spring Water Sword Intent.”

Zhao Changhe blinked. Hm, looks like this guy isn’t that stupid...

Of course, stealing someone else’s sword techniques was a taboo in the jianghu. If he were to admit it, he would admit it to Tang Wanzhuang later on, not to this eldest nephew of his. Zhao Changhe rolled his eyes and said, “If you don’t believe me, just ask your aunt. Why are you making all these guesses here? I just saved you, and now you’re blocking my way like this?”

Tang Buqi hesitated for a moment and lowered his voice. “I want to invite you to join me in killing Chi Li and Batu. They should be staying in the foreigner district.”

Zhao Changhe was startled and then turned to look for Wan Dongliu, but he couldn’t find him. It looked like the man had already gone upstairs. After some thought, he shook his head and said, “They’re not fools. By now, they’ve probably already gone into hiding. With the magistrate covering for them, it’ll be challenging for brother Wan to find them. By the way, let me ask you something, you’ve been in Jiangnan for quite some time, right?”

“Yes. What is it?”

“Are there any characters in Jiangnan or the Grasslands that wear masks while carrying out missions?”

“...People who wear masks while doing such things are generally associated with the Four Idols Sect, and they are usually of higher rank. Have you encountered them? Oh right, it’s not unusual for such people from the Four Idols Cult to be causing you trouble.”

Zhao Changhe recalled Vermillion Bird’s mask and nodded. “If it’s the Four Idols Cult, do you know who among them wears a blue mask?”

Tang Buqi thought for a moment before saying, “If they’re wearing a blue mask, then they should be related to water or something like that. For example, the Water Leopard of Ji or the Water Leech of Zhen. They should both have blue masks”

“The Twenty-Eight Mansions[3]?”

“Yup. Did you think that the Four Idols Cult only had the four idol saints? They also have people known as the Twenty-Eight Mansions. They are scattered throughout the world, but their identities are very secretive, and no one knows who they are.”

Zhao Changhe pondered for a long time and suddenly said, “Before I arrived just now, did brother Wan or Xuan Chong leave for any reason?”

“Who pays attention to those things? People randomly go out to relieve themselves, right? Why are you asking?”

Zhao Changhe chuckled and said, “It’s nothing, dear nephew. I’ve learned that apart from being a bit naive, you’re not too bad...”

Chapter 119: Nowhere We Can't Call Home

The evening banquet finally began on the top floor of the Bright Moon Tower. At a table were Wan Dongliu, Xuan Chong, Yue Hongling, Zhao Changhe, Tang Buqi, plus a few local “Little White Dragons” from Yangzhou. Despite there being fewer than ten people at their table, half of them were outstanding young talents who were on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons, making it a rare sight even across the years that Wan Dongliu had been hosting gatherings.

The top floor had no walls and offered a panoramic view. A bright moon hung high in the sky, a gentle breeze blew, and the fragrance of flowers was carried along by the wind. Bridges, flowing water, the small boats on the river, as well as the lanterns at the night market by the riverside could all be seen from the top floor of the Bright Moon Tower, creating a splendid night view.

Without the presence of the magistrate, the gathering now had a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Wan Dongliu’s face no longer showed any hint of the anger that had been present on his face earlier. His face now had a look of concern, “Miss Yue, is your injury serious? Shouldn’t you take some time to rest first?”

Yue Hongling shook her head and replied, “The interruption was perfectly timed, so I only got a superficial wound from the scimitar. I did not even get inflicted with any internal injuries from the saber qi. I applied some medicine and now I’m fine.”

Xuan Chong applauded and said, “Brother Zhao, that was truly an incredible throw. The force behind that saber was truly fierce. If it were me, I would also not have dared continue attacking after being met with such a saber, and I would have been forced to retreat. Honestly, I didn’t see it coming. How were you able to tell that they were going for a mutual kill?”

Zhao Changhe chuckled innocently and said, “I just guessed. I just felt like the atmosphere was off.”

Wan Dongliu said, “It seems like you really have developed an extremely keen awareness of murderous intent. It makes sense, considering how many people have tried to assassinate you until now. Amazing, indeed.”

Zhao Changhe glanced at him and realized that what the man said was actually right.

He really did not quite understand the details of the fight between Yue Hongling and Chi Li. It was just his intuition that told him something was wrong. It was not even Dragon Bird—after all, Dragon Bird would only notify him of murderous intent that was directed toward him. He was not sure if this keen awareness was due to his own experiences or if it was an extra sense provided by the Back Eye.

If it was the former, then it was a good thing, as it was a result of his own training and experiences; but if it was the latter, he was no different from a blind man merely being granted the sense of sight, and it was something that did not truly belong to him. Zhao Changhe truly was quite curious about the specific reasons behind his heightened awareness.

However, Wan Dongliu had mentioned that it had been a long time since he had fought anyone, so where did his judgment come from?

Tang Buqi chimed in from the side, “Brother Wan, about the foreigner’s market...”

Wan Dongliu interrupted him with a wave of his hand and said with a serious expression, “I already sent someone to investigate earlier. Chi Li and the others are no longer in the market.”

Tang Buqi’s expression grew even darker. Whether the members of the Tang Clan were indulgent or not, their sense of belonging to the Great Xia Empire was undeniable. They even had plans to have Tang Wanzhuang marry into the imperial family. Among the major noble families, the Tang Clan

was undoubtedly one of the most opposed to foreigners. That was also why Tang Buqi had been the first to take action today, and why he had such a hard time tolerating Chi Li's presence.

Tang Buqi took a deep breath and said, "The northern barbarian tribes have been mobilizing their troops, and there have been many small-scale confrontations on the border. These confrontations have made life unbearable for those living at the border. Although His Majesty has yet to officially ban trade and deals with foreigners, allowing foreign martial talents like Chi Li to train and kill people within our borders is quite strange. If this happened in Gusu, he would have been hunted down long ago, or expelled at the very least. What is the meaning behind Yangzhou's actions?"

Wan Dongliu smiled bitterly and said, "What can we do? There has not been any explicit order from those above to prohibit anyone from entering the territory. Yangzhou believes that it should show the magnanimity of a great nation, so there's nothing that we can do."

Tang Buqi sneered, "That's true, but it seems quite likely that the Maitreya Cult is colluding with the barbarian tribes, doesn't it?"

He paused for a moment, holding back the rest of what he had to say.

Investigating the Maitreya Cult had proven to be an extremely difficult task for the Demon Suppression Bureau. It was like getting caught on a vast sea during a storm while the sailors were rioting, and the Cao Gang was playing a rather unflattering role in this. As a member of the Tang Clan, Tang Buqi was well aware of these matters. There was a great possibility that Wan Dongliu had connections with the Maitreya Cult. Even if their stance toward the northern barbarian tribes differed, Wan Dongliu probably would not fall out with the Maitreya Cult over this.

Of course, the Cao Gang was not easy to deal with, so they could not just arrest Wan Dongliu or his father, Wan Tianxiong, casually. Even Tang Wanzhuang had to take an extremely cautious approach in this matter.

Wan Dongliu, appearing oblivious to what Tang Buqi was referring to, suddenly chuckled and said, "Hey, now that the unwelcome guests are gone, we really shouldn't keep talking about such unpleasant matters. How about we just discuss romance and enjoy a good drink?"

One of the local youngsters chimed in and said, "Speaking of romance, Miss Yue, with what happened earlier, does this mean that Mister Zhao now meets your criteria for a partner?"

Zhao Changhe glanced at Yue Hongling silently. I told you this would come eventually.

Yue Hongling smiled calmly and said, “Yes.”

The crowd erupted into cheers, “Does this mean there’s a romance brewing between you two?”

Yue Hongling cast a sidelong glance at Zhao Changhe with her beautiful eyes and said, “Well, let’s wait and see.”

Wan Dongliu clapped his hands and laughed heartily, “Brother Zhao! Don’t you think it’s time for you to show your affection?”

Zhao Changhe was dumbfounded for a moment before he managed to ask, “How?”

Yue Hongling could not help but laugh silently.

Everyone was taken aback by his question. You’re the one pursuing her? Why are you asking us? How should we know?

Wan Dongliu asked cautiously, “Brother Zhao... Have you never pursued a lady before?”

After some thought, Zhao Changhe admitted, “No.”

He really had never pursued anyone before. Even when he had gotten closer to Chichi, it was because he had spent time with her day and night. Their feelings for one another developed slowly, eventually igniting when they admitted their feelings for one another. If I really had to pursue a witch full of lies, then I really have no idea where to even start. I bet nobody in this world would know where to start. Being played to death by her would be the most likely outcome.

Someone at the side commented, “But what about Cui Yuanyang?”

I never pursued her. She’s the one who took a liking to me... Of course, Zhao Changhe could not say that, so he instead said, “I directly discussed that with the head of the Cui Clan”

The expressions of the people present suddenly changed when they heard what he said. Whoa, whoa, that’s some courage! He actually went straight to Cui Wenjing to discuss marriage? No

wonder he got chased away. Even normal betrothals involve a lot of ceremony and formalities. Did he really think he could snatch a wife from a powerful family just like that?

Does this mean that those rumors about him being entangled with men are actually true? It seems like he's never seriously pursued a girl before. He probably just snatched them from somewhere just like he did with his stronghold mistress.

People glanced at Yue Hongling, who was calmly sipping her drink, unable to discern her thoughts. Wan Dongliu coughed dryly and said, "Well, I don't have much experience in that field either. My marriage is directly being handled by my father. I've never even seen the woman I've been engaged to."

Xuan Chong said, "I am a daoist priest, so don't look at me."

Everyone then turned to look at Tang Buqi. When it came to flirting and courting, this dashing playboy surely has some experience.

However, nobody expected Tang Buqi to suddenly jump up as if he had been poked in the butt and exclaim, "I won't teach him even if I'm threatened with death!"

Everyone looked at him with utter confusion, unable to figure out why he reacted so strongly to the suggestion.

Little did they know that Tang Buqi's thoughts were somewhere along the lines of, Motherfucker, you were using my aunt's Spring Water Sword Intent when you hit me. Am I supposed to teach you my flirting techniques so you can use them on my aunt? How stupid do you think I am?!

Facing the strange gazes from others, Tang Buqi cleared his throat and said, "You're asking me how you should pursue Miss Yue while she's right in front of you? Does she look like a fool to you?"

Wan Dongliu blinked, sighed, and said, "Brother Zhao, Miss Yue is clearly giving you a chance. If you can't demonstrate any skills today, you can't blame me for looking down on you. Are you a man? Are you actually going to wait for Miss Yue to take the initiative?"

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Yue Hongling: “...”

The unfortunate Zhao Changhe felt so embarrassed and anxious as he secretly thought: Sister Yue, what the hell is going on with you today? As long as you put on a stern face, none of this rubbish teasing and flirting will continue. Why are you sitting there in silence, drinking, as if you’re just waiting for me to embarrass myself? Are you actually finding all of this interesting and want to see how I pursue you?

Your attitude is making them think that you’re actually interested to see what I will do! Can’t you see them pushing me more and more?

Seeing that Yue Hongling remained silent and seemed to be waiting to see his performance, Zhao Changhe finally could not take it any longer and thought: Screw it! Chichi already told me to let go of my inhibitions, so why am I worrying so much?

He simply closed his eyes and said loudly, “Miss Yue, you said that your heart still desires to roam the world, and that was why you initially rejected me. However, I similarly desire to wander the jianghu, and explore the farthest reaches of this world! As long as you are willing to walk hand in hand with me, there is nowhere we can’t call home!”

Damn, this guy is so straightforward...

Everyone present looked at Yue Hongling with strange expressions, thinking that Zhao Changhe might have crossed the line with his words.

However, to everyone’s surprise, Yue Hongling did not seem embarrassed or angry. She just looked at Zhao Changhe’s face, which was flushed with shame, with a hint of... confusion?

Chapter 120: Gentle Waves Silent Under the Moon

In fact, Yue Hongling did not want to see Zhao Changhe make a fool of himself, but neither did she want to see how he would pursue her either.

What is there even to watch?

While she appeared to sit there in silence, she had actually been feeling quite anxious because she had no idea how to end the situation gracefully. She had a feeling that if she tried to stop him, he

would only further lose face. After all, Zhao Changhe had garnered a rather chaotic reputation since the very get-go. He was either rebellious or bloodthirsty, either dumped or driven away. He never seemed to mind it much. However, as his friend and a renowned heroine, she genuinely did not want to see her friend constantly tarnish his own reputation without care, becoming the subject of gossip and a laughingstock for others.

Since they had already turned his so-called secret crush into an open pursuit, then why not just let it be? It's natural to pursue someone of the opposite sex that you're interested in. Yue Hongling, with her beauty and the long time she'd spent in the jianghu, had faced countless suitors, both overt and covert. So what if another suitor was added to the list? As long as she did not reject him in public, others would not have anything to laugh about.

So, she truly did "have no objections" to it. Besides, she did not think that he would seriously pursue her.

With that said, she did not know that he would actually be so shy when it came to such matters when he had always made himself out to be a mountain king.

Who knows, in three years, maybe he will actually enter the Ranking of Man. When that happens, he can proceed with the marriage arrangements with the Cui Clan, so our so-called romance won't matter anymore.

They're teasing him now and they're making fun of him, waiting to see how he would pursue me, but he actually never intended to do anything of the sort. It's all good fun for us. Isn't that just fine?

However, under the pressure of the crowd, he had actually gone ahead and done it...

No matter how strong and independent a twenty-year-old woman might be, how could she possibly lack any thoughts about her future partner?

How could she have never entertained the thought of joining hands with someone, supporting one another, and facing the world together?

Unexpectedly, the words that were forced out of Zhao Changhe's mouth hit her expectations right on the mark. Yue Hongling was momentarily bewildered. She had no idea how to respond at all, and she could only stare at him with a vacant expression. It was not until she noticed that Zhao Changhe's eyes were closed and his face was red that she suddenly realized what was happening.

Looking around at the stunned expressions of everyone present, she realized that they were all holding their breaths waiting for her response, looking like a bunch of bewildered birds.

Yue Hongling suddenly burst into laughter and said, “That’s good. Maybe one day it could actually come true.”

What?!

Everyone was shocked and many nearly spilled their drinks.

Zhao Changhe was also shocked and he was practically rendered speechless.

But then, Yue Hongling calmly added, “I’m confident that I’ll make it onto the Ranking of Man in the near future. I doubt any of you question this.”

Everyone said, “Of course, Miss Yue, you already have strength comparable to those on the Ranking of Man.”

Yue Hongling shook her head and said, “To be honest, I still have much to improve... The reason Chi Li has yet to actually challenge anyone on the Ranking of Man is that he thinks he still has shortcomings to correct. Although he might be able to make it onto the ranking, that is not what he wants. He wants a resounding victory; he wants to make it onto the Ranking of Man in the most dazzling way possible. He aims for a placement higher than the bottom of the ranking...”

Tang Buqi asked in surprise, “How do you know that?”

Yue Hongling calmly replied, “Because I want the exact same thing.”

Tang Buqi: “...”

Wan Dongliu added, “But in a year or two, it won’t be a problem, right? Wait... You’re only twenty this year!”

“The goal I set for myself is two years,” said Yue Hongling. A hint of determination shone in her eyes as she spoke. Her goal was to match Xia Longyuan’s age and directly make it into the top

seventy places on the Ranking of Man. She did not want to merely squeeze into the tail end of the rankings.

She did not have any thoughts of disrespecting the emperor, and she even held great respect for Xia Longyuan's martial achievements. However, for that exact reason, she also hoped to surpass him.

Xuan Chong sighed and said, "In two years, you'll only be twenty-two. What great ambition. I'm already twenty-two this year, yet I have not achieved much... Some might even say I've achieved nothing at all."

Wan Dongliu gave him a sidelong glance and said, "I am twenty-three years old, and my ranking is much lower than yours. Are you making fun of me, brother Xuan?"

Xuan Chong raised his glass to apologize and said with a smile, "I misspoke. Also, we shouldn't judge heroes based on mere rankings."

"No..." Tang Buqi was puzzled. "Wasn't the topic just now all about Miss Yue and Brother Zhao? How did it suddenly change to this?"

Zhao Changhe, who had been pretending to be silent all this time, thought to himself, I'll remember this, dear nephew. I just managed to shift the awkwardness away, and now you're trying to stir shit up again?

Yue Hongling simply smiled faintly and said, "This is still related to the previous topic. Although I mentioned that the partner I choose doesn't necessarily need to have great strength... if we are going to roam the world together, he shouldn't be much weaker than me, right? Otherwise, how are we going to move around together?"

Everyone nodded in agreement and said, "That makes sense."

Yue Hongling continued, "If I really do manage to make it onto the Ranking of Man within two years..."

Zhao Changhe scratched his head and said, "Would there be a significant difference? I think I'll be doing pretty well in two years, so the gap shouldn't be too big..."

Yue Hongling tilted her head and glared at him as if to say “Are you serious?”

Zhao Changhe coughed dryly and obediently sat back down.

Yue Hongling said softly, “I do believe that brother Zhao will make rapid progress and may even be stronger than me in the future... But if, within two years, he isn’t far from making it onto the Ranking of Man, would he still choose to chase after me or would he instead put in more effort to get onto the ranking to chase after Cui Yuanyang?”

WTF?

Zhao Changhe was stupefied once again.

You went around such a circle waiting for an opportunity to say that?

Yue Hongling said expressionlessly, “So, brother Zhao, please do let me know after you give it some thought.”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

Are all women this naturally talented on the battlefield of love? She clearly just found a random excuse, but it was a perfect comeback. How the fuck can I say anything now?

Everyone had a look on their face as if they were trying to be polite and professional but they really couldn’t. They were all twitching from suppressing their laughter so much.

“Pfft...” Tang Buqi finally could not hold it in and burst out into laughter, pounding the table as he laughed wildly. “Hahahahaha...”

Zhao Changhe glared at him angrily.

Following Tang Buqi’s laughter, everyone, including even Wan Dongliu and Xuan Chong, similarly burst into laughter. Zhao Changhe’s desire to pummel his eldest nephew was suddenly thwarted, and his face turned the shade of a pig’s liver from all the laughter directed at him.

Yue Hongling looked at Zhao Changhe's face and could not help but want to laugh as well, but then she realized that something was amiss. She had intended to save him from becoming a laughingstock, but the result of that was...

Did I make him into an even bigger laughingstock?

It can't be... I implied that I really approve of Zhao Changhe as a potential partner in the future...

Thankfully, these people don't seem to be the kind who distort the truth and spread rumors. If they were some unscrupulous people, there would probably be rumors tomorrow about me and Cui Yuanyang competing for the same husband!

Yue Hongling bit her lower lip lightly. Her face turned crimson, impeccably complementing her red dress. She did not know whether it was due to the alcohol or something else.

*

The banquet was lively, with everyone but one person enjoying themselves, and that one person had a face the shade of a pig's liver.

In reality, aside from the entertainment of teasing Zhao Changhe, most people at the table did not have much of an appetite. The earlier incident with Chi Li still weighed heavily on all of their minds, causing them to be lost in their own thoughts. As such, the entire banquet turned out like more of a quick dinner, and it did not take long for it to come to an end.

However, everyone felt that the meal had been tasty and the drama absolutely delicious.

As they left Bright Moon Tower, the moon was shining brightly high up in the sky.

Not far ahead was the Twenty-Four Bridge that Zhao Changhe had been wanting to see for quite some time now. The water under the bridge flowed gently, its surface shimmering beautifully in the moonlight. All was silent under the silver glow of the moon.

Zhao Changhe and Yue Hongling walked together naturally, strolling onto the bridge. Wan Dongliu and the others found it entirely normal and showed no signs of suspicion. They each conveniently went separate ways to attend to their own matters.

Isn't this just another chance for her to see what kind of efforts he's willing to make? Who would be stupid enough to be the third wheel?

The two of them stood on the bridge, leaning on the railing as they gazed at the moon's reflection in the water, which rippled slightly with the gentle waves. For a long while, neither of them made a sound as they were each preoccupied with their own thoughts.

In the end, Yue Hongling was the one to break the silence, "It's just the first step."

Zhao Changhe responded with a simple "Mm-hm" to show his understanding.

Yue Hongling let out a sigh of relief, suddenly feeling much more relaxed. She raised her hand to massage her shoulder, and with a smile, she said, "Hm... your medicine is quite effective. It doesn't seem like the injury will affect my movements now."

Cui Yuanyang's medicine... Zhao Changhe always felt that her words were still filled with all kinds of thorns.

All of her verbal jabs have been frighteningly accurate and painful.

Sadly for him, Yue Hongling was not even thinking about anything like that. After checking her shoulder injury one more time, she whispered, "I plan to search for Chi Li's whereabouts a bit later, perhaps at the magistrate's residence. What do you think?"

This was the right course of action. It seemed like Yue Hongling still had thoughts of killing Chi Li. Without relying on a group of people to confront him, the only person who could kill Chi Li was Yue Hongling herself. When Tang Buqi invited Zhao Changhe earlier, how could he possibly go with that fool? Considering Yue Hongling's injuries, Chi Li's injuries were likely no worse, and perhaps even lighter. There was no way he would send himself to his death like that...

Zhao Changhe thought for a moment, hesitating. "You surely don't intend to confront him head-on, right? Are you planning on assassinating him when the opportunity presents itself? But my skills at sneaking around and concealing myself aren't that great..."

This was why, if they intended to roam the world together hand-in-hand, it would make more sense if their strength did not differ too much, as Yue Hongling had said earlier.

Yue Hongling smiled. “You don’t have to force yourself. I usually lurk around and investigate on my own, but I always worry about having no backup if things go wrong. I often hesitate to act even when a good opportunity presents itself because I’m afraid there would be serious consequences if I fail. With you providing me support from the outside, I can act with greater confidence.”

Zhao Changhe turned to look at her profile.

Yue Hongling didn’t make eye contact with him. She lowered her head to gaze at the reflection of the moon below the bridge.

Is this considered an invitation to work together? I’m not sure.

Zhao Changhe suddenly said, “Seeing as you both were wary of my saber when I threw it, it seems like you guys aren’t too outrageously strong, right? I’ll go find a good bow. That way, I can probably do more than just serve as reinforcement in case things go wrong.”

Yue Hongling’s head seemed to tilt a little, and her voice was so soft that it sounded as if she were muttering to herself. “What does what you can do have to do with me?”