

## T. Times 141

### Chapter 141: Mirror Image

Tang Buqi was equally baffled by this sudden request. You're someone who roams the jianghu. What are you going to bring a maid with you for? Wouldn't bringing her be more of a burden to you? I just said yesterday that I should not have brought maids with me when I left home, yet here you are today asking to take one of my clan's maids. Are you actually planning to switch roles with me like you said?

But for Tang Buqi, a maid from the guest house who he could not even recognize truly wasn't much of a concern. In the end, he could not be bothered to think about it too much. He just waved his hand and said, "If you want her, then she's yours. It's not a big deal. I'll just inform the steward later to arrange for her to be transferred to you."

Zhao Changhe winked at Sisi, implying that she should now address him as "young master."

Sisi kept a straight face and did not say anything.

This was troublesome. None of this bode well for her. If Tang Buqi were to actually go to the steward and ask her to be transferred, they would then find out that there had never been anyone named Sisi employed in the guest house, or anywhere else for that matter.

What on earth is this man doing? What does he need a maid for?

Fortunately, Tang Buqi did not seem to really care that much about this matter. He did not order anyone to handle the transfer. Instead, he sat in the guest house and said, "I've arranged for breakfast to be brought over. Let's eat together. Later, we can go for a stroll to the Lu Clan at the southern part of the city."

Sure enough, servants soon brought over pastries and porridge for breakfast. Tang Buqi wasted no time and immediately dug in. "After a hangover, porridge really is the best."

Zhao Changhe picked up a bowl and handed it to Sisi, then he passed her a piece of pastry, "Sit down and eat, why are you standing there like an idiot?"

Sisi: "?"

“You are my maid now, do you understand? As long as I’m here, you won’t go hungry.”

“...”

Zhao Changhe completely ignored her reaction and he got his own bowl of porridge. He then asked Tang Buqi, “Why do you seem to be more concerned about this vicious qi matter than me? You even came to me so early in the morning despite being hungover. Have you always been this diligent? Or could it be because you want the treasure of vicious qi? Or is it because I want it?”

“It’s because Lu Shaoxiong can be considered a friend of mine. I would naturally want to go and see him after returning. If the root cause of the issue really is related to that treasure of vicious qi, and you’re the expert who caught that ghost of a monk, why not take advantage of the situation to show off and gain some prestige?”

Zhao Changhe said in admiration, “It seems that you really are an expert in showing off.”

“You didn’t find anything in the sword pond yesterday, right?”

“Nope, nothing. I’ll have to go take another look when I have the time. I feel like I need to explore its surroundings a bit more to get a better feel for it.”

Tang Buqi was speechless. “I already told you that there’s nothing there. You should really stop wasting your time on it. Are you cultivating vicious qi or stupidity?”

Grinding his teeth, Zhao Changhe retorted, “Are you looking for a beating?”

Tang Buqi took a sip of his porridge, then said, “I just gave you a maid, and this is how you repay me?”

“...” Zhao Changhe thought to himself: God knows what this woman is here for. Maybe I’m actually saving your stupid ass and you don’t even know it.

Of course, he did not actually say that out loud. Zhao Changhe finished the porridge in a few mouthfuls, then grabbed his saber and stood up. "Alright, alright, to repay you for giving me a maid, I'll help you catch the ghost of the Lu Clan."

Sisi hesitated for a moment, unsure whether she should follow him or not. Zhao Changhe turned around and said, "Follow me. You're mine now. Or do you still want to stay here and keep serving guests?"

Sisi: "..."

She remained silent and followed Zhao Changhe out the door with a peculiar expression on her face.

Zhao Changhe did not want her lingering around the Tang Clan, fearing that she might cause trouble when she was out of sight. However, Sisi precisely wanted to investigate the mystery of the vicious qi. She was debating whether stubbornly tagging along with him might cause confusion, but then Zhao Changhe unexpectedly invited her to follow him, as if handing her the very opportunity she wanted on a silver platter.

Does he really regard me as one of his own? Sisi felt very strange and almost scratched her head in confusion.

The two of them were not on the same channel, each pursuing their own objectives. Meanwhile, Tang Buqi, who was oblivious to everything, idly tapped his folding fan against his palm and said, "You seem quite fond of this girl, huh? It's really strange. Since you already have your sights set on someone as stunning as Yue Hongline, how can you still become interested in such an ordinary maid? Apart from her figure being similar to Yue Hongling, what else does she have that compares to Yue Hongling?"

Zhao Changhe could not be bothered to answer him.

Tang Buqi clapped his hands as if he had a sudden realization and said, "I got it! You must have gotten carried away last night because you were drunk, right? What exactly happened? Tell me. Hehe~"

"Right, right," Zhao Changhe replied irritably. "It seemed like you were making some progress last night, but now your mind has reverted to thinking about these things, eh?"

“What? I can’t even talk about the things you’ve done now?”

Watching the two men bickering, Sisi suddenly remembered a rumor.

All the women who have gotten involved with Zhao Changhe end up with worse reputations, and there had not been an exception so far. Even Tang Wanzhuang, who was a person of great honor in her own right, had her reputation affected when he said “Clean yourself and wait for me.” Because of that, there was now some gossip surrounding her. As long as Zhao Changhe, who made the comment, was not arrested by the Demon Suppression Bureau, the gossip would not stop.

Sisi really did not know how Tang Buqi had such a big heart. He was actually making friends with someone who had made such rude remarks to his aunt, even going as far as bringing Zhao Changhe to his home and letting himself be called “eldest nephew” so affectionately.

Although she was internally complaining, her mind did not wander. Seeing a fork in the road ahead, with Tang Buqi intending to bring Zhao Changhe to the Lu Clan, Sisi suddenly called out to Zhao Changhe, “Young master...”

Zhao Changhe did not react, but Tang Buqi turned his head, “Huh?”

The corners of Sisi’s mouth twitched, and she cautiously said, “I wasn’t talking to you. You just gave me away to someone else, so you aren’t my young master anymore.”

Tang Buqi: “...”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

He suppressed the awkwardness he felt from being called “young master” for the first time, cleared his throat twice, and then he turned around and said, “Since I’m the eldest here, you have to call me master.”

Tang Buqi snorted. “You really are full of it.”

Suppressing her laughter, Sisi said, “Master, we’ve taken the wrong path. The young master of the Lu Clan doesn’t stay at the Lu Clan’s estate anymore. He has been moved to the Tranquility Hall over there, I heard they wanted to help him calm down and dispel the vicious qi.”

Zhao Changhe glared at Tang Buqi angrily, and after a while, Tang Buqi stammered, “Oh, I knew that, I just forgot for a moment. The Tranquility Hall is just close by. Follow me.”

The Tranquility Hall actually used to be a temple called the Tranquility Temple. However, due to Gusu’s strong opposition to the Maitreya Cult under the dominance of the Tang Clan, all the local temples were searched one after the other, making it difficult for them to operate. They either became deserted, with very few worshippers, or they simply changed their appearance and purpose to no longer worship religious figures.

Nevertheless, they still served vegetarian meals and recited scriptures daily, with the sound of the morning bell and evening drum still playing on time. There was also still the clacking of wooden fish[1] and the scent of incense that lingered within them. This environment provided some peace for the residents and attracted some poets and scholars seeking inspiration.

Now, however, there were no visitors in the Tranquility Hall as it had been wholly rented out by the Lu Clan. Countless burly men stood guard at the entrance door, and inside were the former nuns of the temple, reciting scriptures nonstop, in hope to help the deranged young man who was held within.

Tang Buqi’s arrival was unexpectedly blocked by the burly men. “Young Master Tang, please forgive us for our rudeness. No weapons are allowed inside. Your sword and that... fuck, what is that saber?! Anyway, that thing definitely can’t be brought inside.”

Tang Buqi was furious. “Do you think I’m here to assassinate your young master?”

“Young Master Tang, please forgive us. It’s not that we’re afraid of anyone assassinating our young master, but that weapons generally contain vicious qi. I’m afraid that they are simply not suitable to be brought in, lest they irritate our young master.”

“Rubbish! Sabers and swords are but dead objects. Also, this is the Azure Waves Sword. It’s renowned for purifying the soul and it should even be beneficial to your young master. What the hell do you know?”

“Uh... Young Master Tang, please don’t make things harder for us. We’re just following orders...”

“Enough! I’ve seen this kind of trick of adding something to orders many times. That’s definitely not what your master said. Your supervisor probably added something, and then when it got to you guys, the order was probably completely changed. Do you think I’m stupid? Get out of the way!”

Tang Buqi forced his way past the big guard and walked in proudly with Zhao Changhe, fully leveraging his status. The burly men guarding the gate exchanged looks and dared not stop them. Although Gusu did not belong to the Tang Clan, the young master of the Tang Clan was still not someone anyone could afford to offend.

Zhao Changhe silently followed behind him, Dragon Bird still on his back. He quietly gave his eldest nephew a thumbs up.

In fact, what the guy at the entrance said was not entirely without merit. While it might indeed be fine if Tang Buqi’s Azure Waves Sword was brought in, Dragon Bird was a saber that had paved a blood-filled path for the founding of the empire. Countless people had died to it, and it was truly full of vicious qi. There was a non-negligible probability that it would actually affect the condition of the young master of the Lu Clan.

However, ever since Dragon Bird had first joined him in his journey in the jianghu, it has been quite obedient, only really acting on its own to prompt him of incoming dangers. It had never lost control, whether it was due to the special treatment from Cui Wenjing because he had deliberately followed Han Wubing’s advice and refrained from using Dragon Bird’s special powers.

He hoped that it would not cause any complications in this place full of vicious qi.

Just as he was thinking this, he felt Dragon Bird quiver excitedly on his back.

Following the qi, he soon saw a temple ahead of him where the sounds of iron chains rattling could be heard coming from inside. There were occasionally also some low, bestial roars. At the same time, scriptures were being recited and wooden fish were being struck, seemingly in an attempt to suppress the rattling and the roars.

Tang Buqi’s expression grew solemn as he slowly ascended the steps with his hand on the hilt of his sword.

Zhao Changhe and Sisi followed behind him, and upon reaching the top, they saw a young man bound by iron chains. His once handsome face was now contorted into a beast-like grimace. His eyes were filled with madness and savagery, bloodshot.

The way he bared his teeth and let out those guttural roars, he truly resembled a wild beast, or perhaps even a real demon.

Tang Buqi instinctively glanced at Zhao Changhe, whose expression was equally grim.

To an outsider, this state, especially due to the color of his eyes, looked terrifying similar to the frightening look that Zhao Changhe had when he used Scattering the Gods and Buddhas.

However, Zhao Changhe himself knew even more clearly that this state was not like when he was using Scattering the Gods and Buddhas, but was more like when he used No Man's Land. At this moment, it was as if he was seeing a mirror image of himself from back then.

Such an appearance could frighten an experienced warrior to the point of being petrified, and they would probably run for their life right after. It was perhaps even the reason why Cui Wenjing had mobilized his killing intent. The only one who did not mind staying and helping him wake up from such a state was Yangyang.

This was what it looked like when the vicious blood qi invaded one's soul. This was the appearance of someone who had cultivated Vicious Blood Art to its maximum power. As for whether this "perfect form" allowed the user to unleash any other ultimate skills, that was another matter.

This Lu Shaoxiong has definitely been invaded by a massive amount of vicious blood qi... Where did such a serious vicious blood qi come from in such a peaceful place like Gusu? Is this even something that can be transmitted from person to person? And if it is, then why does everyone else seem unaffected?

## Chapter 142: The Mystery of Vicious Blood

"Benefactors, please leave," said an elderly nun, lowering her head. "The vicious qi has already entered Young Master Lu's mind. He has lost his rationality. We fear that he may bring harm to others. Moreover, the two of you have brought a saber and sword, which could serve to exacerbate the situation. Please do not come any closer."

Tang Buqi hesitated for a moment. In fact, when he saw Lu Shaoxiong's bestial appearance, he began reconsidering his actions. It was not that he was afraid, but rather he wanted to figure out

what was going on with the young master of the Lu Clan, and he wanted to do so by communicating with him. But with the other party in such a state, how were they to communicate?

He turned his gaze to Zhao Changhe, wanting to see his opinion, but he was stunned by what he saw.

Zhao Changhe had unstrapped the saber on his back and held it tightly against his chest. It looked as if he was struggling in a tug-of-war. “Don’t make a mess! Damn it, you’re still shaking? If you shake again, I’ll smack you!”

However, Dragon Bird only began shaking even more vigorously.

Tang Buqi: “...”

Sisi, who was standing beside them, stroked her forehead as she sighed inwardly. She had barely been a maid for a short while, but not only had she changed masters once, both her old and her new master were fools.

Clang!

Zhao Changhe grabbed the saber tightly, but Dragon Bird unexpectedly slipped out of its scabbard on its own. This startled Zhao Changhe, and he hastily grabbed its hilt and shoved it back into its scabbard. He then tightly held onto both the hilt and the scabbard before turning around and running away.

“Be good! Don’t cause trouble! You’ve been so good this entire time. Next time I see that old Emperor... Ah, I mean Old Yellow[1], I’ll praise you nicely in front of him, okay?”

“Roar!”

A furious roar came from behind him, along with the loud clang of the iron chains being torn off. The young master of the Lu Clan had broken free from his restraints and came barreling through the nuns who tried to stop him. Then, he threw himself fiercely at Zhao Changhe.

Zhao Changhe shot a swift roundhouse kick and sent the crazed young man flying back into the hall. He crashed through the doors and windows along the way, raising a cloud of dust.

Tang Buqi and Sisi were stunned.

Why did it look as if Lu Shaoxiong was trying to fight Zhao Changhe's saber, and Zhao Changhe was in the middle trying to break up the fight?

No, wait, it was more like he was joining the fight!

Lu Shaoxiong was kicked away, but it seemed that he was not hurt at all. He jumped up frantically, and then he attempted to lunge forward. But the next moment, Zhao Changhe's huge sole suddenly appeared before his eyes, kicking him back into a corner.

A group of nuns rushed over, pressed Lu Shaoxiong firmly to the ground, and said urgently, "Benefactor, please leave quickly!"

With his hand on the hilt of his saber, Zhao Changhe vanished in a flash, shouting, "Can one of you come out with me? I've got something I want to ask!"

It was not until they were three or four li away from the Tranquility Hall that Dragon Bird finally calmed down. However, it seemed slightly resentful and aggrieved.

Zhao Changhe was speechless. No wonder they said that Dragon Bird could replace the Qinghe Sword, which was a sword that could actively kill evil... I never knew what that really meant, it didn't seem like it could actually move on its own and kill people, but now I understand.

When he had faced Iceheart at the Ancient Sword Lake back then, Dragon Bird never acted on its own, nor did it show any signs of dissatisfaction or desire to fight against Iceheart. Because of that, Zhao Changhe felt as if Dragon Bird's spirituality was inferior to that of Iceheart.

Unexpectedly, its first outbreak had occurred here. It appeared that not only was it sentient, but it was actually capable of actively attacking people as well. It was not much inferior to the Iceheart in this aspect.

Dragon Bird is the weapon of this era, right? It was created by Xia Longyuan, and its full name is the Dragon Bird of Great Xia. On the other hand, Iceheart is a divine sword of the previous era.

Does this prove that Xia Longyuan has actually already touched upon the power of the gods and buddhas of the previous era?

But it's really strange... Dragon Bird does not actively respond to vicious qi. Otherwise, when I use No Man's Land, it should attack me right away, no? It seems particularly sensitive to killing intent, and it reacts when it feels "offended" by it. But why does this indiscriminate madness born from vicious qi seem to trigger it and make it shake like this...

Zhao Changhe squinted his eyes and looked at Dragon Bird thoughtfully.

"What's wrong with your saber?" Tang Buqi flew over behind. "I told the guards at the entrance that there was no way that our weapons would cause any trouble, and here you are, slapping me in the face."

Zhao Changhe looked at Tang Buqi's face and then at his own hand that was holding his saber. He felt a sudden itch in his palm.

Tang Buqi took a step back.

Sisi, accompanied by an elderly nun, ran over panting, "Master, I've come with the abbess."

Zhao Changhe was amused by Sisi's performance, nodded, and said, "Well done, Sisi."

Sisi lowered her head shyly, "I am merely trying to take some burden off of you, Master."

Tang Buqi's teeth felt sore. He shook his sleeve in frustration and asked the old nun, "Have you gotten him back under control?"

"He's indeed back under control," replied the old nun, gasping for air. "This kind of madness born from vicious qi leaves someone bereft of the sensation of pain. They fear neither blades nor spears, and their acupoints are incredibly tough. It truly is very troublesome to keep him under control. However, he has not been able to break free from the iron chains until now. I don't know what triggered him today that he suddenly managed to break free from the chains that bound him..."

As she spoke, she glanced at the saber in Zhao Changhe's hand. Tang Buqi and Sisi also looked at the saber. Regardless of how the saber suddenly triggered that outburst, it's already out of the question that it can move on its own... It's a really great treasure, isn't it?

Zhao Changhe felt helpless. He had not expected that Dragon Bird, which had concealed its spirituality for so long, to expose itself in such a situation. To be fair, he could only blame his own negligence. Judging from the looks these people are giving, it's probably only Tang Buqi who doesn't really care about my saber that much. His family probably has similar things hidden away anyway.

On the other hand, Sisi's eyes seemed to be glowing right now, and he was rather concerned about her. He had no idea what was going through her head, and he could not predict what she would do in the future.

He could only forcefully change the topic and ask the old nun, "I have some understanding of vicious qi. While it can indeed amplify a person's strength, the amplification is still limited by how strong that person originally was. It is impossible for someone to suddenly become superhuman from such amplification. Since he even managed to break the iron chains, just how strong exactly was the young master of the Lu Clan originally?"

Tang Buqi commented from the side, "So it really is vicious blood qi? It isn't something else?"

"Yes, I'm almost absolutely certain. Although it's a bit different from the type I cultivate, it's essentially the same thing."

Tang Buqi continued, "But isn't it strange for the vicious qi to have also strengthened his muscles and bones to such an extent? From what I recall about Lu Shaoxiong, he barely managed to reach the third layer of the Profound Gate with the help of piles of medicine. So how could he have reached a level where he could even tear apart iron chains barehanded?"

The old nun nodded in agreement. "Indeed, Young Master Lu is at the third layer of the Profound Gate, and he is a cultivator of internal arts. He has never practiced external arts, so he should have no way of breaking the chains. He was fairly manageable before..."

Zhao Changhe fell silent. He could not help but think that if someone had secretly sawed the chains, then it would be the nuns who would be suspicious, and so there would be no point in asking them about it. He had a feeling that this accident was, in fact, not purely an accident. There seemed to be some human factor involved.

After pondering for a moment, he asked, “During Young Master Lu’s confinement, has he done anything unusual?”

The old nun shook her head. “No, he just occasionally went into fits of madness, roaring and attempting to break free, but he was unable to. During this time, even the master and mistress of the Lu Clan did not dare to visit. Even if they did come, there wouldn’t be anything they could do. Madam Lu could probably only cry. We have been reciting scriptures to help him calm his mind...”

“Don’t bother reciting those scriptures. If it really is vicious qi that’s caused him to go mad, you guys buzzing around like flies will only make it worse. If someone was reciting scriptures right by me when I’m under the influence of vicious blood qi, I would only get more furious.”

“...Our scriptures are different from others. They have an effect not unlike cultivation arts. And indeed, Young Master Lu’s episodes of madness have become much less frequent in recent days.”

Zhao Changhe was taken aback, thinking to himself that if their Buddhist cultivation techniques were really effective, he might consider becoming their disciple. However, he decided not to mention this for now and instead asked, “I heard that Lu Shaoxiong happened upon a madman attacking people at the southern part of the city, intervened, and then became afflicted himself. Is that true?”

The old nun nodded and said, “That’s indeed true.”

“Then where was the madman buried? His body was not just left to rot in the wilderness, right?”

“He was buried right behind our temple. There is a graveyard there specifically dedicated to corpses that have no family to recognize them.”

Zhao Changhe said, “Okay, take us there. I want to take a look at the body and see if I can find anything... Hey, nephew, where are you going?”

Tang Buqi slowly backed away, “This isn’t my area of expertise, and I won’t really have anything to contribute, so you guys go ahead. No need to take me with you, haha...”

As he spoke, he suddenly turned around and darted away.

“Fuck, a coward like that still has thoughts of exploring the jianghu?!” Zhao Changhe spat, but he noticed strange looks from the old nun and Sisi. Both of their faces were somewhat pale.

Sisi gulped and said, “Master, that man has been dead for at least half a month. His body is probably rotten and smelly by now... It’s different from someone you just hacked to death...”

Zhao Changhe’s expression stiffened. However, he managed to force himself to bravely say, “What’s there to be afraid of? Abbess, please lead the way.”

Sisi turned around and bolted, but Zhao Changhe managed to grab her by her collar. Sisi ran in place for a few moments before letting her head hang with tears in her eyes. “Master, please let me go. I am just a little maid from the outer courtyard. What great sin have I committed...”

#### Chapter 143: The Calm Before the Storm

The old nun carefully led Zhao Changhe to the graveyard, pointed out the specific location of the grave, and then hastily lifted the hem of her robe and rushed away.

In fact, even up to this point, the old nun had no idea why she had brought this person she did not know to examine the body. Was it to give face to Young Master Tang?

But then, Young Master Tang had not come himself, nor had he even introduced this man, who had a saber that could move on its own.

Nonetheless, it felt as if ever since this man arrived, everything was naturally falling into place under his direction. It felt as if everything that was happening was meant to be.

Ignoring the old nun, Zhao Changhe squatted by the grave mound and gently inserted his hand into the soil, then carefully released a trace of his own vicious qi.

There was no response.

Zhao Changhe gritted his teeth. He pulled out Dragon Bird and began to shovel the soil.

Dragon Bird: “...”

Sisi's little face twitched uncontrollably. She did not know whether to be afraid of the rotten corpse inside or lament the fate of such a precious saber.

In Sisi's eyes, Zhao Changhe began to look a bit terrifying at this moment. She was already regretting why she had gotten involved with such a lunatic in the first place. She felt that she should have never provoked such a freak...

Thinking about how she had even kissed a person like him on the mouth, she wished she could just rip her own mouth off at this moment.

Little did she know that Zhao Changhe was also gritting his teeth right now. This kind of thing was completely different from killing someone. No matter how many corpses he had seen, this was not the same... However, the anomaly of vicious blood qi in Gusu was likely to be crucial to his own cultivation of vicious blood qi. Even if he had to hold his nose, he had to get to the bottom of it. —He was thinking that if the other party had truly experienced the invasion of vicious blood qi, then their corpse should not emit a foul smell... He had to verify it.

Skrr!

Dragon Bird struck the edge of a straw mat.

Zhao Changhe sheathed his saber and carefully scraped away the soil. He then frowned at the putrid smell coming from the corpse.

The corpse had already decomposed to the point where its face was unrecognizable. Even the original wounds that they had led to their death were no longer discernible. It was nauseating, but accepting this reality seemed to be his only option... The problem now was that Zhao Changhe had never studied forensics. Any traces on the corpse were of no use to him. He had only come here to check if there was any vicious qi.

However, there was simply no vicious qi coming from the corpse at all.

This did not make sense.

In the Profound Gate, Zhao Changhe dared to say that nobody understood the power of vicious blood qi better than him, not even Cult Leader Xue. This was because the main members of the Blood God Cult did not use the Vicious Blood Art as their fundamental martial art. As for those who did cultivate the Vicious Blood Art, whenever they encountered the invasion and outbreak of vicious blood qi, they would use the Blood Settling Pill to counteract it directly. Later, when they switched to the Blood God Art, their exposure to vicious blood qi would be reduced.

Their endurance, resistance, and understanding of vicious blood qi would naturally not be on the same level as Zhao Changhe's.

Why did Zhao Changhe think that the corpse might not emit a foul smell? Well, based on his experience with vicious qi, it was an energy that was incredibly violent and aggressive, to the point where it would even attack its own host, and it should not completely disappear with the person's death. There should have been residual vicious qi lingering around the corpse, causing the soil to dry up and the nearby organisms to perish. Creatures like maggots could not have survived in such an environment.

Even though over ten days had indeed passed since this guy died and the vicious qi may have gradually dissipated since then, possibly causing the standard decomposition process to begin, this corpse seemed to have genuinely been decomposing for half a month. From how the corpse looked to the area surrounding the corpse, there was not a single sign or trace of vicious qi.

Could it be because all of the vicious qi has already entered Lu Shaoxiong's body? Then is it really vicious qi or a vicious spirit?

Or perhaps... there was never any transferral of vicious qi to begin with. This guy may have never had any vicious qi from the very beginning!

"Urghhhh!" The sound of someone retching snapped Zhao Changhe out of his thoughts. He turned and saw Sisi vomiting violently right beside him. She looked extremely miserable at the moment. "Master, please spare me. This is too disgusting..."

"Is that so..." Zhao Changhe then asked curiously, "Then why are you leaning in to get a better look?"

Sisi froze for a moment, realizing her mistake. Oops... Should I just tell him that I'm also looking for the treasure of vicious qi?

She pretended to continue retching, panting as if she was out of breath, before coming up with an excuse, “I was just taking a look out of curiosity. It stinks...”

“Alright,” said Zhao Changhe as he shoveled the soil back into the pit. He then stretched his body and said, “Let’s go, there’s nothing here.”

Sisi followed him, complaining, “I told you that there was nothing interesting to see at a rotting, putrid corpse. Why did we have to come here?”

“Hmm.” Zhao Changhe looked around, listening to the faint, distant roars. He chuckled, “So they let us see for a reason.”

Sisi: “?”

“Hey, Sisi...”

“Huh?”

“You should have been with the Tang Clan for a long time, so you should know the power distribution in Gusu, right? What level is the Lu Clan?”

Sisi awkwardly hung her head. What do you mean “been with the Tang Clan for a long time?” I was kissing you just a few days ago.

Fortunately, she had arrived in Gusu two days earlier than Zhao Changhe, and she had a rough understanding of the power distribution in the area. “The Lu Clan is the second largest clan after the Tang Clan. Lu Shaoxiong is just one of its young masters. The Lu Clan has many experts, and the head of the Lu Clan is even a master at the ninth layer of the Profound Gate.”

“I don’t seem to recall seeing anyone surnamed Lu on any of the rankings.”

“...Well, doesn’t the Tang Clan also only have First Seat Tang on the rankings? And she isn’t even home,” said Sisi. Worried that Zhao Changhe would start asking questions about other clans, she quickly added, “I’m just a little maid. If you want to know the specifics, it would be better to ask Young Master Tang. It’s likely that each clan has hidden experts, and in that case, what would a little maid like me know?”

“No one knows whether each clan really has hidden experts, but if I’m not mistaken, there might soon be more madmen emerging in the city due to vicious qi soon...”

Sisi was stunned for a moment. But just as she was about to ask him for more details, someone ran through the streets, shouting, “Have you heard? The third young master of the Gu Clan has gone mad!”

The street erupted with chatter, with many people asking about what happened. “Really?! Could it be that Gu Clan’s young master went to visit Young Master Lu and got infected?”

“I don’t know. But if that were the case, then why didn’t those nuns get infected? Even if it’s the person that the young master of the Lu Clan killed before, there must be a source, right?”

“Was there another place where people got infected? Where did the third young master of the Gu Clan go before this?”

“What other places do those young masters go besides those where they can indulge in pleasure? Don’t tell me that this is actually just a case of disease born from debauchery...is that actually the case?”

“Who knows!”

As Sisi and Zhao Changhe slowly made their way through the streets, listening to the lively discussions around them, Sisi looked at Zhao Changhe as if he were a deity. “Master, how did you know?”

“Oh, isn’t it obvious? If there’s a first person who’s infected, then there’s definitely going to be a second. And if we haven’t found the source of the issue, then it’s bound to continue spreading, right? Why is your brain like Tang Buqi’s?”

Sisi: “...”

She did not believe that Zhao Changhe had made that judgment solely based on that reasoning. He must have discovered something.

Sisi was annoyed. We've both been looking at the same things, so how come I didn't seem to notice anything? Hasn't he failed to figure out my identity? Doesn't he think that I'm really just a maid? Is it because I'm a maid he just acquired that he doesn't trust me to share more?

She composed herself and put on a flattering smile. Then, she said in a sweet voice, "Master..."

Zhao Changhe looked at her with a smirk. "Yes?"

"Where are we going now? Are you tired, master? Would you like me to give you a shoulder massage? I give really good massages..."

"Hm, I don't need a massage for now," Zhao Changhe said leisurely. "We just dug up a grave, don't you think it's a bit ominous? I need to go back and take a shower, would you like to help me with that?"

Sisi stood there dumbfounded.

Then, as if remembering something, she sneakily glanced at the Dragon Bird on Zhao Changhe's back, blushing and lowering her head as she said, "That is simply my responsibility."

Zhao Changhe almost burst out laughing. He held back a smirk as he sped up his pace.

"Master, wait for me!" Sisi chased after him, getting more and more into character.

Zhao Changhe suddenly stopped, causing Sisi to nearly run into him. She quickly skidded to a halt and turned to look at him in confusion, only to see Zhao Changhe drawing Dragon Bird and swinging it toward her.

A black shadow made a very elegant arc, avoiding the saber, and landing on the nearby eaves. Startled, the figure said, "Brother Zhao, I mean no harm. I was not even coming for you. Your vigilance is honestly a bit... excessive."

It was Ji Chengkong.

Zhao Changhe sheathed his saber calmly and said, "Going around jianghu with your guard lowered is asking for death. Brother Ji, what exactly is it that you intend to do by suddenly approaching my maid?"

Ji Chengkong glanced at Sisi thoughtfully and said, "From behind, she looked like someone I knew, so I came over to take a closer look... If you say she's your maid, I must have mistaken her for someone else. My apologies."

Sisi's heart raced, but Zhao Changhe merely waved his hands indifferently. "Since it's a misunderstanding, then forget it. What brings you to Gusu?"

Ji Chengkong said angrily, "I actually went to Yangzhou and now came to Gusu to look for someone. It's just that I have a penchant for stealing things, which led me to fall into Wan Dongliu's hands."

Zhao Changhe asked, "I wonder what the rules of your guild are? Do you steal things based solely on personal preferences, or do you also take on tasks? For instance, what if I were to hire you to steal something?"

Ji Chengkong chuckled and said, "First, it depends on whether the employer is agreeable. Second, it depends on whether the item to be stolen is interesting. If a random passerby asked me to steal something as boring as money, then I might as well steal his money first to have some fun."

Zhao Changhe found his response quite amusing. "What about me?"

"You..." Ji Chengkong looked him over and said with a smile, "Based on the few words we exchanged on the road the other day, you're fine. It just depends on what you want stolen."

Zhao Changhe looked around and whispered, "How about stealing information from the Lu Clan? Such as whether they have a heavily guarded forbidden area and, if so, whether entry requires a token, a password, or just a familiar face... Would you be interested in such information?"

Sisi listened with her ears open, but Zhao Changhe casually pushed her aside.

Sisi: "..."

Ji Chengkong pondered for a moment before replying, "I am interested in uncovering secrets, but the Lu Clan is a bit boring... What interesting things can a clan that is not even considered top in the region have?"

"Well, what if I told you that there might be a young master in the Lu Clan sneaking around to steal from his stepmother?"

Ji Chengkong slapped his thigh excitedly and said, "I'm in!"

Zhao Changhe smiled and handed him a silver note. "Consider this a down payment. Whether or not you can uncover information, this is yours. If you do find something, come to the Tang Clan to find me. I'll have more rewards ready for you."

#### Chapter 144: Dragon Bird Moves

Back at the Tang Clan's guest house, Tang Buqi was nowhere to be found. Instead, a steward approached Zhao Changhe and said, "Young Master Zhao, the young master said he sent you a maid, but he could not recall her name. Let me see which one it is... Oh, it's..."

Zhao Changhe interrupted, "There's no need for any of the formalities or whatever. Just transfer her to me and be done with it."

The steward said, "Then she might be disobedient."

Zhao Changhe patted Dragon Bird on his back and said, "I have a saber."

"..." The steward glanced at Sisi sympathetically and secretly thought that she might as well stay at the Tang Clan, at least the clan was fairly refined.

Sisi kept her head lowered, afraid to face the steward directly. She then mumbled, "I shall go and fetch water for your bath, master."

Seeing Sisi scurry away, Zhao Changhe lowered his voice and said to the steward, "Check every nook and cranny of your guest house to see if anyone has been tied up somewhere. Be quick, or you may end up leaving them to starve. Remove her from the records as compensation."

The steward: “?”

Zhao Changhe patted him on the shoulder and said, “If you find anything, don’t make a scene of it. If you’re unsure, simply ask your young master, he will understand.”

The steward went off to carry out his orders. Zhao Changhe turned to look at Sisi busying herself in the distance. He stretched lazily and returned to his room.

All of his previous doubts were resolved as soon as he encountered Ji Chengkong and heard him say that he had come to Yangzhou and, later, to Gusu to look for someone. He no longer had any doubt that the maid was undoubtedly the fake celestial maiden, as well as the person that Ji Chengkong was looking for. Otherwise, how could such a coincidence come about?

This girl is quite evil, so she probably did not even stop to consider the fate of the real maid that she’s impersonating, leaving her to face a tragedy similar to the flower-picking celestial maiden. Fortunately, since I’ve basically confirmed her identity, I can have the real maid saved before anything else. As for that wicked girl... I wonder what her true purpose is for infiltrating the Tang Clan this time. Anyway, while I figure out her goal, I should teach her a lesson.

On second thought, she either has a face similar to that of Yue Hongling or of an ordinary little maid. Regardless, it seems that I’ve never seen her true appearance... Now that I think about it, the only similarity between the two faces are those lively eyes.

Her skill in disguising herself is much better than whatever Chichi used to conceal her lady bits. I really want to learn how she does it. It would make things much more convenient for me when I wander the jianghu.

You’re plotting against me, so why can’t I do the same to you?

“Master, the water is ready.” Sisi ordered two servants to carry hot water buckets into the house before quickly dismissing them. “Allow me to assist you with your bath.”

Zhao Changhe, who had always dismissed the maids back at the Cui Clan, now stood there motionless, smiling slyly as he observed Sisi.

A blush crept up Sisi’s cheeks as she shyly approached him and reached out to undo his clothing. Naturally, the first thing she took off was the scabbard on his back. “Master, isn’t it uncomfortable

to carry this scabbard on you all the time? You carry it even when you enter the water. Isn't it heavy?"

"Well, my schoolbag during primary and middle school wasn't any lighter. There's a reason why I left it to rot when I got older."

Sisi: "?"

While he spoke, Sisi finally managed to untie the scabbard off of his back. It dropped heavily into her hand, and it nearly slipped from her grasp. She secretly marveled at its weight. Just the scabbard must weigh at least forty to fifty jin. How is he able to wield the saber so effortlessly with just a single hand? Whenever he swings it, he makes it look like a stick.

She did not dare to show any special interest in the saber and set it aside. She then shyly moved to undo his belt.

As she loosened his belt, his shirt opened up, revealing his robust chest and abdominal muscles. The intense visual impact caused Sisi's breathing to become heavier instantly, and her hands, which were undoing his clothes, began to tremble.

She had to admit that such a physique truly was tempting... Since men could have reactions when they saw a woman's body, it was perfectly normal for women to also have reactions when confronted with a male physique like Zhao Changhe's. It was all the same.

She could not help but compare her own chest to his, wondering if her chest was as big as his... In terms of their shape, hers were definitely fuller, but in terms of total mass, she might just lose out to him.

Standing before such a physique naturally brought a feeling of overwhelming pressure and vulnerability. It made her feel as if he could overpower her at any moment and she would not be able to resist.

"Hey, how much longer are you going to touch me? The water will get cold soon," Zhao Changhe's voice, half amused and half teasing, sounded in her ears.

Sisi snapped out of her daze, withdrawing her hand as if she had just received an electric shock. She cleared her throat and said, “Um, about your pants, would you mind taking them off yourself, master?”

“Um...you want me to take them off while you watch?”

Absolute silence suddenly befell the room.

At this moment, Zhao Changhe was a bit bewildered, and so was Sisi.

Neither of them knew how a real maid served her master during their bath; neither of them had seen it before...

Sisi nearly lost her mind at this moment. Just looking at his chest, abs, and biceps had already caused her heart to beat faster. Was she now going to watch him take off his pants?

Zhao Changhe glanced at her, unsure of what she was thinking. But in his mind, Sisi was a very open-minded and carefree girl who even kissed him without reservation. So what if she watched him take off his pants?

He had been standing there long enough for a bath. If it was not for him wanting to figure out what she was up to, he would have kicked her out a long time ago. What a waste of time.

Without further ado, Zhao Changhe took his pants off and jumped into the tub with a splash.

He turned his head to look at Sisi, who was still in a daze, and waved his hand in front of her face.

“Hey! Are you still there? Didn’t you say that you would massage my shoulders? What are you doing daydreaming there?”

“Ah? Ah...” Sisi shook herself awake. Then, she quickly ran to his back and obediently began massaging his shoulders without saying a word.

That thing just now... Maybe it was a good thing that we were interrupted that day. If we had really gone through with it, would I have died back then? Is that thing really something that a human can

bear? Maybe it would be better to just let someone as powerful as Yue Hongling take something like that... Wait, why am I thinking about that...

Her mind was in utter chaos. Sisi did not know what she was thinking anymore. “You dare say that you’re good at giving massages?” Zhao Changhe’s voice resounded in her ears. “Have you not eaten?”

Sisi came back to her senses and said angrily, “I ate breakfast, but I vomited everything back out.”

“...”

“Besides, your muscles are so tough, which woman can even massage them! Young Master Tang said that you’re close with Yue Hongling, right? Then maybe you should go find her to give you a massage!”

“Hey, is that something a little maid should say?”

Sisi said angrily, “I don’t care. My slave contract has already been torn apart, right? I’ll massage you and be done with it! You either take it or leave it!”

“Where are you massaging?”

The room fell silent once again, and Sisi’s eyes widened.

“...” Zhao Changhe wanted to teach the little maid a lesson, but now flirting with her felt even more awkward. After a while, he waved his hand and said, “Forget it, you can either go eat something or take a bath. Do whatever you need to do. I’ll wash myself.”

Sisi quickly withdrew her hand and went to pretend to tidy up the clothes she had taken off of him as if she were going to help him wash them.

Zhao Changhe said lazily, “Stop messing around over there. I’ve got spares. I’ll just throw away those old clothes later.”

“Oh...” Sisi did not suspect that there would be anything valuable in his pockets. Instead, her gaze shifted to Dragon Bird, and she ultimately could not resist touching it while still pretending to tidy up. “Master, what’s the name of this saber? It looks very impressive.”

Zhao Changhe turned his back to her, but he could clearly see everything behind him. After some thought, he decided to see what her reaction would be if he directly said its name, “Dragon Bird.”

Sisi’s reaction was one of astonishment. She muttered to herself, “Nonsense. Is that the name of a saber or is he just referring to what he wanted me to massage earlier?”[1]

Dragon Bird: “?”

Zhao Changhe: “?”

Dragon Bird suddenly became furious and swung itself, together with the scabbard, toward Sisi’s face.

Even though Sisi knew that the saber could move on its own, she never thought that it would suddenly do so at this moment. Caught off guard, she could not dodge in time and nearly got struck right in the face. She suddenly felt someone grip her hand and forcefully pull her, causing her to topple over into the bathtub with a loud splash.

Her face did not get hit by Dragon Bird, but she did get hit by something in the tub...

Sisi found herself questioning her life choices while she was in the water.

If there was a chance to start over, she would rather die than take on the role of this miserable little maid.

## Chapter 145: This Game

Dragon Bird had not managed to smack her, but seeing Sisi in such a sorry state seemed to satisfy it, so it went back to lying flat.

You brought that upon yourself for what you said about me earlier.

Zhao Changhe had instinctively tried saving Sisi. But now, he could only stare in stunned silence at Dragon Bird that lay back down and then at Sisi, who was upside down in the water.

That feeling just now... Hmm...

Plop!

Sisi's head popped out of the water, and she glared at Zhao Changhe.

Zhao Changhe assessed her face, but even after being submerged in water, there were no signs of her disguise coming off. Her disguise technique really is impressive. However, her summer clothes aren't as good at concealing her. Now that she's in the water, I can basically see everything. Her little dudou is quite cute, and that fresh and tender skin...mmm.... Those undulating waves make for quite a sight.

Seeing her glaring at him, Zhao Changhe could not help but feel amused. Why had she not been this fierce when they were kissing? Was it because they had been somewhere else?

"Why are you glaring at me? I just saved you, you know? Would you really have rather gotten hit by Dragon Bird?"

Sisi gritted her teeth and said, "I would rather have taken a hit from Dragon Bird than have to have gone through what happened just now."

"...Your words are like a feast for my ears," replied Zhao Changhe with a smile.

Anyway, he still believed that this girl was very open-minded, and this look of hers was all an act. Given their situation, where they were both in a bathtub together, any man would feel a bit tempted. He felt no need to restrain himself, so he simply pulled her into his embrace. "Since we're already enjoying a bath together, why not cuddle a bit?"

In the cramped bathtub with no escape, Sisi was firmly embraced by Zhao Changhe. She felt resigned as she gritted her teeth, her mind racing.

In the original script that she had in mind after having assumed the identity of an innocent and virtuous maid, she should have adjusted her behavior when Tang Buqi gave her to him. She had

planned to ingratiate herself with her new master and resist his advances while secretly tempting him, leaving him itching for more but unable to have what he wanted. Then, she would seize opportunities to coax him.

However, thanks to the saber, the script had fast-forwarded to them frolicking in the water together. In this situation, any master would have pulled her into his arms. How many gentlemen would actually throw her out? She wondered how she should behave appropriately in such a predicament.

Finally, Sisi made up her mind. She relaxed her tense body, and leaned gently against his chest, whispering softly, "I am already yours, and it is but my duty to serve you..."

Unexpectedly, Zhao Changhe, who had remained indifferent earlier, responded with a thoughtful "Hmm..."

Tha coquettish tone, that shy and soft demeanor, and then the direct switch from "following my master's orders" to "I am yours..." Zhao Changhe dared to say that very few could have resisted her charm at this moment.

Sisi sensed the change in him and chuckled softly, "But I have only been with you for less than half a day... I have always known that you are a hero. Not long after you started to tread the path of martial arts, you already managed to achieve a high rank among the Hidden Dragons. Are you really going to devour a maid you just met? The heroic master in my heart would not do such a thing..."

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, "Oh? And what would he do?"

Sisi, with a look of mock annoyance, glanced at him and said softly, "He would at least wait until we were a bit more familiar with each other. That way, it would be much more romantic... I will be yours sooner or later, so there's no need to rush..."

Seeing that Zhao Changhe seemed about to say something, Sisi placed her index finger on his lips, leaned closer to his face, and then gently nibbled on his earlobe. Then, she softly said, "Shall I bathe you, master...?"

As she spoke, her delicate hands began to slowly rub his body, this time truly washing away the dirt on him.

Zhao Changhe's whole body softened and he melted against the edge of the tub and stopped talking.

Even though he knew that this was all an act, he could not help but entertain the thought, If there were really such a maid, any man would desire her... But alas, this is all an act.

Just listening to her following words emphasized the insincerity of it all.

“Master...”

“Hm?”

“Why does that Dragon Bird attack people on its own? Are there really such sentient saber in this world?”

“Yes, there are, there are many more,” said Zhao Changhe. Giving Dragon Bird some credit, he continued, “Of course, ones as powerful as Dragon Bird are rare.”

Dragon Bird: “...”

“Then...” Sisi continued rubbing his body as she whispered softly into his ear. “Is it because of Dragon Bird that you have become so skilled in martial arts in such a short time, master?”

Zhao Changhe sighed.

I see now. The reason she approached me and she even tried to control before, was probably that she found my progress unbelievable... She probably even saw me practicing the Maitreya Cult’s cultivation technique that night from afar outside the window. At that time, she probably found me even more unbelievable, considering it was a cultivation technique that I had just obtained from the Maitreya Cult’s secret passage that very day, yet I had somehow already mastered it. After all, such a feat is not something that an ordinary person could achieve just by reading a secret manual. She likely believes that I am hiding a great secret.

Perhaps she could not see the golden foil from a distance and could only make blind guesses. Initially, she may have thought that it was the best time to see if she could control me as I was merely a newbie to the Pure Bliss Art. She probably thought that if she managed to place me under her control, then she would be able to uncover all of my secrets. But in the end, her plans were

thwarted. Now, she was throwing out all sorts of guesses. Right now, she might actually think that Dragon Bird is the reason for everything.

However, regardless of whether it's the Maitreya Cult or the Tang Clan, she probably came with her own agenda that was completely unrelated to me. It just so happened that she ran into me on both occasions.

In addition, it's quite obvious that she doesn't actually have much information. Even Tang Buqi would have recognized Dragon Bird if I directly said its name, but she did not. She has no idea what Dragon Bird means or how much power it possesses.

She definitely doesn't have a great background... Why is she so desperate? Initially, I thought that she's related to the Thieves Guild, but her lack of knowledge fails to match that assumption.

Maybe... I should find an opportunity to ask Ji Chengkong. I might be able to gain some insight from him.

Even with these thoughts swirling in his mind, his expression only showed a little detachment from whatever was in front of him. A few moments later, Sisi heard him say, "Dragon Bird indeed is very important to me. But..."

Sisi listened intently, expecting him to take advantage of the situation to touch her inappropriately. She had prepared to endure it, but to her surprise, he did not make any inappropriate advances. Instead, he sighed and said, "Sisi, you practice martial arts too, right?"

Sisi knew that she could not hide this fact, so she answered, "I have indeed practiced a little."

"If you've practiced martial arts, then you should know that there's only one path that suits you best... You may have noticed this morning when I was practicing with my saber, I used to utilize many different saber and sword intents., but I gradually abandoned them and only kept the parts that suited me best. Tang Buqi's Azure Waves Sword may also be a valuable sword, but I would find it cumbersome if he offered it to me. The same principle applies to Dragon Bird... So your enthusiasm for a broad saber such as Dragon Bird is meaningless. Why don't you tell me what you've practiced, and I can offer you some advice."

Sisi could not help but lean her head back a bit and look up into his eyes.

Zhao Changhe's gaze was very serious.

Sisi pursed her lips, then sniffed and turned her head slightly. "We poor maids don't have the luxury to choose from various saber and sword intents like you, master. So, whenever we see something nice, we can't help but want to ask about it..."

This was her way of avoiding the topic of what she had been practicing. Zhao Changhe looked at her steadily for a moment, knowing that it was not yet time for them to reveal everything, so he did not press further. Instead, he said, "I still need to explore the secrets of vicious blood qi this afternoon. Will you accompany me?" After a moment of hesitation, Sisi gritted her teeth and said, "If you could explain why you suspect that there might be more people who are tainted by vicious blood qi, then I could be of more help..."

"There's no need for that," Zhao Changhe interrupted her. He got out of the tub. "That is merely a speculation of mine. I would rather not say too much for fear of being slapped in the face in the case that I'm wrong. Right now, I'm just waiting for Ji Chengkong's response. Once I have made my final judgment, I'll tell you everything. As for this matter of you trying to tease things out of me... You're my maid. If there's anything important, we can discuss it openly. There's no need for us to play mind games over trivial matters like these."

Sisi stared blankly at his back as he dressed himself, biting her lower lip before falling silent.