

T. Times 191

Chapter 191: During Our First Encounter

Zhao Changhe was dumbfounded for a moment before managing to blurt out, “So your name is also Wang Daozhong...”

As soon as these words came out of his mouth, not only did Wang Daozhong’s mouth hang open in surprise, but even the surrounding Daoist priests turned their heads away, their shoulders shaking with their suppressed laughter. Some of the younger Daoists could not help but burst out into giggles.

Meanwhile, underneath her mask, Vermillion Bird’s face was involuntarily twitching with amusement.

The atmosphere in the Daoist temple seemed to change abruptly, and Wang Daozhong, who had clearly been intending to question and trouble the Daoists due to the presence of someone from the Four Idols Cult, had completely lost his imposing demeanor. Even he could not help but feel a bit awkward, saying, “So, your name is really Wang Daozhong? And you’re also from the Wang Clan of Langya? Which branch are you from? I don’t remember the Wang Clan having branches in Zhao Village.”

“Ahem...” Zhao Changhe finally cleared his throat after a long pause. “Well... Ahem, it seems that I misspoke. What I meant to say was that it was you, senior, who played a significant part in dealing with the barbarian! I merely relied on your reputation. The mere threat of your presence was enough to scare away the barbarian! I am truly in awe!”

Wang Daozhong’s lips twitched slightly, but he managed to force himself into keeping a deadpan face.

If they were to speak honestly, then He Lei had indeed been somewhat intimidated by Wang Daozhong’s reputation. So, should he be proud of that?

To outsiders unaware of the truth, Wang Daozhong’s actions could easily be seen as heroic. The man had come to the aid of his neighbors, driving away the barbarian who had come to cause trouble! Perhaps many would even admire him, praising him as a hero of the nation.

But why doesn't it make me feel good at all? Am I supposed to thank this guy for what he did just now?

The hatred from He Lei's side would likely fall on him. Who knew if that rough and fierce barbarian would even realize anything later on? In any case, in the short term, he would undoubtedly regard the Wang Clan, especially Wang Daozhong, as a great enemy, further tying the Wang Clan to the Great Xia.

The Wang Clan seemed to be placed in an awkward position this time.

Wang Daozhong was not sure if this impostor had considered the consequences of his actions beforehand. In any case, it was not appropriate for him to express his anger toward Zhao Changhe in public, or even to express it at all. He could not just go and say that he had no intention of dealing with the barbarian from the beginning, could he?

Zhao Changhe had indeed thought things through, and he even had more malicious thoughts. He had hoped that the Tome of Troubled Times would help out, perhaps by flashing an announcement stating that Gui Chen and Wang Daozhong teamed up against He Lei. If that actually happened, then it would have permanently maligned the Wang Clan's reputation. Unfortunately, the Tome of Troubled Times was uncooperative.

Stupid tome!

Both sides stared at each other, and in the end, Wang Daozhong chose to confront Zhao Changhe by targeting the Four Idols Cult. "If I'm not mistaken, this mask and this fiery red robe should belong to the Fire Serpent of Yi from the Four Idols Cult, right? May I know what is the meaning behind Young Hero Zhao protecting her?"

Zhao Changhe sighed and said, "Senior, why are you like ordinary people like Xuan Chong, judging people based on their appearance? It's not like this attire is something that only a single person can wear. To be frank, everyone knows that I don't have many quirks, but I do have this particular one. You know, back in Beimang..."

You mean when you had someone disguise herself as Yue Hongling?

This thought crossed everyone's minds, including Wang Daozhong's.

You really enjoy yourself when it comes to this quirk, huh?

In fact, Wang Daozhong did not believe it at all. He wondered if he should just lift the woman's mask to take a peek... But Gui Chen was standing right next to him, watching him closely, so he refrained from doing so.

Moreover, he also knew that Zhao Changhe was just giving him a way out, hoping to de-escalate the situation. Because in the current situation, the Wang Clan was not really willing to provoke the Four Idols Cult for no reason. Suddenly picking a fight with such a force would be utterly inexplicable and might even cause onlookers to laugh at them. After all, the Wang Clan was just intending to test the waters and see if they should declare independence. They had yet to do anything, so if they suddenly rejected the barbarians from the north and exterminated the demonic cults within, acting more loyal to the Great Xia than even Tang Wanzhuang...

They would really be reduced to a laughingstock if such an event were to play out.

Wang Daozhong took a deep look at Zhao Changhe, focusing on Dragon Bird on his back before saying meaningfully, "As expected of a person who can carry such a saber, you are truly outstanding. Seeing is indeed believing."

Zhao Changhe smiled warmly. "This is just a fake saber, but the young lady from the clan that has the real saber is on her way here. Senior, are you not afraid of the exact same thing that just happened to the Taiyi Sect happening to her? I sincerely suggest that you go meet up with her. If something goes wrong, it won't be easy for the young lady of the Wang Clan to get married in the future."

Wang Daozhong remained silent, staring at Zhao Changhe for a long time before suddenly disappearing into the night.

Zhao Changhe breathed a sigh of relief.

From behind, Vermillion Bird keenly noticed that the back of his clothes was slightly damp.

Whether it was due to the pressure from drawing the bow earlier against He Lei or the tension of confronting a prominent figure from the Wang Clan, she could not tell. But either way...he had not even flinched. Not once.

Gui Chen stepped forward and respectfully expressed his gratitude. “The Taiyi Sect thanks you, young hero and...hmm...heroine, for your assistance. If there’s anything you need in the future, please don’t hesitate to let us know.”

Vermillion Bird shifted her gaze away from Zhao Changhe’s back, stepping aside and gesturing for the courtesy not to be extended to her. “I have not done anything, so there’s no need to extend such gratitude toward me.”

Gui Chen glanced at her mask, smiling slightly, and saying nothing more.

The Taiyi Sect was a righteous sect and had clashed with the Four Idols Cult in the past. Although there had never been any deep-seated enmity between the two forces, Gui Chen understood the Four Idols Cult better than others.

That robe isn’t a robe for those at the level of the Twenty-Eight Mansions. Venerable Vermillion Bird, just what are you up to?

Zhao Changhe said, “There’s no need to be so polite. With the incident involving the barbarians, I’m honestly really worried about Yangyang. Whether the Wang Clan sends someone to assist her or not, I would still much prefer to help out myself. Since you’ve got many people, then could you have some of them help me figure out the path that the Cui Clan took?”

“Of course.”

Suddenly, Vermillion Bird remembered something, and her heart skipped a beat. Isn’t it about time for Chichi to face Cui Yuanyang? She wouldn’t actually be planning to kill her, would she?

She became anxious and said quickly, “Instead of going around to investigate the Cui Clan’s whereabouts this late into the night, wouldn’t it be better to go to the city and inquire at our holy cult’s base? We’re more likely to find out her whereabouts there.”

Zhao Changhe was overjoyed and said, “That sounds good. Thank you.”

The two of them hurried down the mountain. Zhao Changhe remembered something as they were moving, “Since you’re under Venerable Vermillion Bird and she sent you to ask me questions, does that mean she is in the city at the moment?”

Vermillion Bird said, “So what if she is? Since she sent me to ask you questions, she certainly would not kill you for no reason”

“What if my answers displease her?”

“Then you won’t be recruited into the cult, what else can happen? As you said, apart from your connection with the saintess, you haven’t offended our holy cult. Even if outsiders call us a demonic cult, we don’t just randomly kill people for no reason.”

“That’s true, but considering the huge gap in cultivation, I can’t help but feel uneasy when facing her. What if she doesn’t play by the rules...”

Vermillion Bird fell silent for a moment, then asked, puzzled, “He Lei and Wang Daozhong are both prominent figures on the Ranking of Earth, yet you dared to confront them. Although Venerable Vermillion Bird is ranked higher than them, it’s not like she’s invincible. Why are you so afraid of her?”

“Well, I actually was really scared just now. I even broke out in a cold sweat.”

“Scared? As if I’d believe that. You merely felt some pressure. If facing someone on the Ranking of Earth while you’re just at the fifth layer of the Profound Gate does not even leave you feeling pressured, then are you still human? In any case, that was not true fear. I doubt that you are actually as afraid of Vermillion Bird as you say you are, much less to the point where you’re even afraid to see her.”

“Well... perhaps,” Zhao Changhe remarked. He thought for a while and added, “It’s just that several characters have left a significant imprint on my mind when I first entered the jianghu. It would probably be difficult for such impressions to fade even for a long time.”

“Who?”

“People such as the gallant and righteous Yue Hongling...Tang Wanzhuang, who is sustaining the empire despite her ailing body, and...Vermillion Bird, who slaughtered and decimated an entire clan. In a sense, Vermillion Bird represents the epitome of strength in my mind, and my impression of her is more tangible than my impression of Xia Longyuan himself.”

The expression under Vermillion Bird's mask was quite strange. After a while, she said, "So, you actually are afraid of her."

"Yeah," Zhao Changhe did not deny it. He admitted somewhat ruefully, "I am indeed afraid of her. So far, she's the one I fear the most."

"Then why do you think she's beautiful?" Vermillion Bird finally took the opportunity to ask.

"It's a kind of beauty, isn't it?" Zhao Changhe chuckled somewhat self-deprecatingly. "It has nothing to do with the face under the mask. That eerie mask, those sensual lips, the severed head in her hand, the dripping blood.... It's the other side of the jianghu, eerie, cruel, and powerful. It is definitely frightening to behold, but one must admit that it is truly beautiful. Well, maybe there's just something wrong with my brain."

Vermillion Bird secretly thought: Did you just learn that from Tang Wanzhuang? Where did this cultured side of you come from?

But then she heard Zhao Changhe add, "You'd better not tell Vermillion Bird about this. If she doesn't ask, then don't mention it. But if she insists that you tell her about our interactions, then do you think it wouldn't be a problem?"

"It should be fine to say." Vermillion Bird then said teasingly, "Just to be honest, aren't you afraid that she'll take it as a kind of pursuit or admiration?"

"No, she won't." This time, it was Zhao Changhe's turn to look at her strangely. He shook his head and said, "Venerable Vermillion Bird's demeanor is far from being so vulgar. Such words are irrelevant to gender, and she should naturally understand that."

You sure are holding me to high standards... Vermillion Bird found it somewhat amusing and asked, "Then why did you say that it would be better not to tell her?"

"I would lose face, you know. And if she thinks that I'm afraid of her and uses it against me, it could lead to unnecessary trouble."

Vermillion Bird did not know whether to laugh or cry. She wanted to say that there was no need to overthink things. Even if he had not said such words, her true self would still hold power over him.

What face do you think you can lose in front of me? If I stand before you with my real identity, do you even have the right to talk to me?

But she then saw Zhao Changhe laugh heartily as he quickened his pace and said, “But I guess that she likely would hold some power over me regardless. She is naturally proud and discerning. Whether you say it or not won’t make much of a difference. I’m curious though, when she truly stands before me, will I still feel the palpitations that I had back then?”

“And if you do? Will you kneel?”

“If I do, then one day, I’ll brave through that pressure and rise again!”

Chapter 192: You Said You Were Afraid

The two of them did not speak much along the way and they soon arrived at the base of the Four Idols Cult in the city.

This was not a branch of the Four Idols Cult but rather a temporary residence, much like the one they had in Sword Lake City. It was a large mansion mainly occupied by Chichi’s subordinates, including Elder You, the Azure Dragon Protector.

When he saw a woman wearing a red robe reserved for Vermillion Bird and a mask meant for the Fire Serpent of Yi bringing Zhao Changhe in, Elder You and the other’s eyes nearly popped right out of their sockets.

Vermillion Bird glared at them, causing them to start sweating profusely. They lowered their heads, not daring to speak.

Vermillion Bird said, “Protector You, are the venerable and the saintess here?”

“...” Elder You wiped the sweat off his brow. “The saintess is out on official business. As... as for the venerable, I believe that she should be in the inner courtyard.”

Vermillion Bird was very satisfied with Elder You’s situational awareness. She turned to Zhao Changhe and said, “You can feel free to ask them about Cui Yuanyang’s whereabouts. I will go to the inner courtyard to report to the venerable. Wait for me to see if she has anything to say to you.

Don't leave on your own, it would be rude. It would not be good for you if the venerable became angry."

Zhao Changhe said helplessly, "Do I look like such a person? Go ahead."

Under the watchful eyes of Elder You and the others, Vermillion Bird quickly disappeared into the inner courtyard. She changed into the Vermillion Bird mask, and then after some thought, she switched out to another set of robes with slightly different patterns before checking herself in the bronze mirror.

The mask for the Fire Serpent of Yi covered the entire face, including her lips, leaving nothing to be seen by others.

Meanwhile, the Vermillion Bird mask only covered half of her face, with the tip of her nose ending in the shape of a bird's beak, while her lips looked as if she had applied a shiny rouge.

"Sensual lips... What a strange description," Vermillion Bird muttered to herself softly. "What does that word mean again?"

No matter what it actually means, it should be a compliment, so I guess it's good. There's no harm in hearing more of such things.

Vermillion Bird admired herself for a while longer before leisurely walking out.

As she entered the hall, she heard Zhao Changhe's raised voice, "Chichi is going to kill Yangyang?"

Elder You said, "Um, we're also worried about the saintess, so we actually came to talk to the venerable about canceling the mission. Cui Yuanyang is currently guarded by many experts. So, unless we're prepared to engage in a full-scale battle against them... but there really isn't a need for that."

"Hm?" Vermillion Bird walked out. Her voice returned to its usual tone—lazy and enchanting but tinged with a biting coldness. "Is it up to you to decide whether such missions are necessary or not, Elder You?"

“Of course not.” Elder You and the others fell to their knees. “We are simply worried about the saintess. Even if the mission is successful, it will be difficult for her to escape. If it must be carried out, we implore the Venerable to go and provide assistance.”

Among the people kneeling, Zhao Changhe remained standing, causing him to stand out. Vermillion Bird’s gaze fell on him, finding his calm demeanor somewhat strange, “You have nothing to say?”

Zhao Changhe was initially startled but quickly regained his composure.

How could Chichi actually do something like that? Besides, the mission is suspicious in the first place. I doubt that Vermillion Bird gave that mission out seriously. It’s likely another test to see how Chichi sees our past relationship.

After hearing Vermillion Bird’s question, Zhao Changhe replied, “I believe that your cult would not want its own saintess to foolishly and knowingly walk into danger. Based on my understanding of Chichi, if the mission cannot be completed, she will naturally give up. So, I personally feel that there isn’t a need to worry too much. If there is anything I want to say to you, then it would be about something else.”

Vermillion Bird said coldly, “Speak.”

“If you sent your cult’s saintess out on such a mission just to test whether she and I still hold our past relationship, all the while disregarding the severity of the situation... then I must say that you have truly disappointed me, venerable.”

Vermillion Bird suddenly wanted to go around him and see if there was any sweat on his back.

Are you seriously having any palpitations? You said that you were afraid of me... yet this is how you act before me? Or is it that because you care so much about Chichi’s safety, your anger clouds your fear even when confronting the person you fear the most?

“I have my own considerations. Don’t assume that everything revolves around you and act so self-righteously,” Vermillion Bird said calmly. “Of course, just in case, I will go to assist her immediately. As for you...”

She paused and said, “The Fire Serpent of Yi told me a couple of things, and I have some questions to ask you. Accompany me and we can talk on the way. Let’s go.”

After saying that, she waved her sleeve and left.

Although her attitude was cold, the outcome was acceptable. Zhao Changhe was, in fact, drenched in cold sweat as he followed her out obediently and asked, “Where is the Fire Serpent of Yi?”

“Since she has completed her mission, then she naturally must have gone off to do something else. Why are you asking about her?” Vermillion Bird flew ahead of him. “Could it be that you have taken a liking to her?”

Zhao Changhe followed after her, feeling speechless. “Not at all. I don’t even know what she looks like, so how could I just suddenly fall in love with her? I say, venerable, I understand that the higher-ups in your cult can’t casually talk about their emotions or relationships. After all, there have been incidents in the past that can make you wary, but there’s no need to be so sensitive about everything, is there?”

Vermillion Bird simply acted as if she had not heard what he said, displaying an attitude that suggested that he had no right to advise her on anything. She instead continued to inquire, “She said that Wang Daozhong was causing trouble for her, and you stood in front of her to confront Wang Daozhong. Why did you do that?”

Zhao Changhe sighed helplessly and said, “She was just tasked with asking me a few questions. She didn’t do anything wrong, so why should she be threatened with violence? Just because of her affiliation with the Four Idols Cult? I don’t see anything wrong with that identity. At least when compared to the Wang Clan, the Four Idols Cult might not necessarily be the villains.”

Finally, Vermillion Bird stopped talking, flying ahead aloofly for a while. Suddenly, she grew impatient and said, “You’re too slow.”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

Vermillion Bird reached out and grabbed the back of his collar. Before Zhao Changhe could even think of resisting, he was already lifted up, and in the next moment, they were already outside the city, moving at an incredible speed.

Vermillion Bird’s cold laughter could faintly be heard in the wind. “You’re so weak, yet you dare to talk so confidently to me!”

Zhao Changhe, now at the mercy of his captor, decided not to struggle and simply crossed his arms, refraining from retorting.

It was true that she was much faster than him. It was better to intervene sooner rather than later to prevent any actual trouble from arising. Thus, he had no concerns about losing some face at the moment.

The disparity in their cultivation was just too vast. Although the movement art taught to him by Tang Wanzhuang had significantly made up for his shortcomings in this area, when compared to someone like Vermillion Bird, it was basically worthless.

Even her grabbing motion had been so swift that he did not have the time to react. She truly was worthy to be the person he both admired and feared the most.

But this time, upon seeing her again, he did not feel as afraid of her as he had before. He was not exactly sure why this was so. Her attitude was obviously still very cold, but for some reason, it felt like she was not looking down on him as much. In the past, her gaze had swept past him as if he were an ant. But now, he at least did not feel like an ant anymore. He felt more like a small cat as she carried him.

Her attitude hasn't changed, and she still has that same disdainful gaze, so is the difference in my own mind?

Could it be because I've gained some fame now? Or is it because of my familiarity with Tang Wanzhuang? Tang Wanzhuang actually even ranks higher than Vermillion Bird, even though she's ill. Once she recovers, she should be much stronger than Vermillion Bird. Is it because I've gotten familiar with someone like her that I no longer feel the same awe I did toward Vermillion Bird?

But then, he heard Vermillion Bird say, "If I were to invite you to join the cult, offering you a top position, would you be willing to join?"

Zhao Changhe came back to his senses and asked curiously, "What kind of top position?"

"There are still vacancies in the Twenty-Eight Mansions. If you become one of the constellations, you can learn the relevant martial arts. Moreover, being one of the Twenty-Eight Mansions not only grants you a high rank in the cult, but also considerable authority."

For example, the position of Fire Serpent of Yi was vacant, and the mask had not been given out to anyone.

What Zhao Changhe thought of when he heard this was Wan Dongliu's sudden strike that was like a venomous snake in the water, and how slippery he had been. Both the offensive and defensive means he used that came from the Four Idols Cult seemed much stronger than the martial arts of the Cao Gang.

But he still shook his head and said, "I'll have to decline your generous offer. I won't join the cult."

He could clearly feel the hand gripping his neck tightening, and the palpable threat coming from Vermillion Bird, "Why? Do you look down on my Four Idols Cult?"

"No, I've already told the Fire Serpent of Yi that I don't really believe in gods. So, logically speaking, you shouldn't even think of me as someone suitable to join the cult."

Vermillion Bird fell silent.

From this perspective, it did seem somewhat inappropriate. However, his other remarks were quite fitting for the cult, especially his long-term goals. They could almost be considered to be completely aligned with the cult's objectives.

However, since he did not have any faith, it was natural for him to not want to join.

Why would a reputable martial artist of the jianghu want to bear the identity of a demonic cult member? It was quite normal.

The question now was what attitude she should take toward him. Forcing him to join was definitely not appropriate, nor was tempting him with benefits. Those who could be bought over were also prone to betrayal, and the cult generally did not engage in such actions with those who were not truly aligned with their cause.

More importantly, the cult preferred quality over quantity, and that was one of the reasons their numbers were much lower compared to the Maitreya Cult. They mainly employed subsidiary and auxiliary forces, the Blood God Cult for instance, to make up for their shortage of manpower. The

core members of the cult had always been few. The reason why they had not readily brought Zhao Changhe into the Four Idols Cult initially was mainly due to this consideration as well, rather than disdain or contempt.

Either way, this matter needed further consideration.

While she was in thought, they caught sight of smoke and dust in the distance.

The Cui Clan's convoy was there, and from afar, two girls could be seen walking side by side with smiles on their faces.

Chapter 193: White Tiger and White Rabbit

Xia Chichi encountered the Cui Clan's convoy not long ago. She had just discovered Cui Yuanyang's whereabouts when He Lei was causing trouble at the Taiyi Sect.

Although Vermillion Bird had assigned her a random mission just to keep her occupied, the fact that she even mentioned such a mission casually reflected some of her inner thoughts. At the very least, it showed that she intended to have Xia Chichi investigate the situation. If, based on the situation, it was actually easy to kill Cui Yuanyang, then it could be carried out.

The doctrinal objective of the Four Idols Cult did not have much to do with worldly affairs and was actually very similar to the goals of martial arts sects. Of course, if the four idols were to come into this world, then they would naturally move to dominate it. Human emperors would mean nothing in their eyes.

Their beliefs were not aligned with those of the imperial court, thus branding them as a bunch of lawless evildoers who needed to be eradicated. However, they did not exactly fit in with the traditional definition of rebels either. Because of that, in specific situations, the two sides might even be able to cooperate.

Chichi's mother had even tried to become family with Xia Longyue... If the Four Idols Cult could become a state religion, then why rebel?

But ever since she was killed by Xia Longyuan, the Four Idols Cult had been united in their hatred against the empire. They began working toward destabilizing the Great Xia Empire and avenging their saintess, essentially becoming true rebels. For them, acts like killing princes only counted as collecting some interest.

From the perspective of true rebels, the more chaotic the Great Xia was, the better. Such as in the current situation, if they were really able to instigate a falling-out between the Cui and Wang Clans, it would be like plunging another vicious knife into one of the Great Xia's major arteries, essentially sealing its ominous fate.

Of course, killing a little girl who was merely coming to attend a banquet might not necessarily provoke a complete falling out between the Cui and Wang Clans. After all, it was not the Wang Clan who was committing the murder. At most, it might cause some tension between the two clans. However, what was certain was that both families would go all out to kill the culprit. This was why Xia Chichi felt that the mission did not make much sense, and why Elder You and the others believed that it was not necessary to force it. Only if it was actually easy to kill the target and the operation could be done without letting others know who had done it would it really make sense to go through with the mission.

This was the reason being low-key did not always mean safety, as doing so could also cause unnecessary trouble. It was only by declaring and proving one's strength that one could truly avoid trouble.

In line with that kind of thinking, Cui Yuanyang did not move quietly. She brought with her the strongest guest elder of their clan, Lu Ya, who was ranked twelfth on the Ranking of Earth. She also brought along a team of bodyguards composed of a captain who was among those ranked in the sixties on the Ranking of Man, and guards that were all experts at the eighth or ninth layer of the Profound Gate. She was displaying the might of the Cui Clan as she moved.

Even the barbarians and the already rebellious Maitreya Cult would choose to avoid confronting such a force, so how many other forces would actually move to target a young girl? It would not be just nonsensical; it would be downright madness.

This was why Xia Chichi had actually pretty much completed her mission by finding out the situation surrounding Cui Yuanyang. She could simply report back to Vermillion Bird. However, Xia Chichi felt guilty. She was not sure if Vermillion Bird was testing her emotional issues. If it was so, then Vermillion Bird was probably observing her in secret, so she felt like she had to do something.

And so, she openly blocked the path of the Cui Clan's convoy and shouted from afar, "Where is Miss Yuanyang? I'm an old friend and I have something to tell her."

The convoy stopped, and a little girl stuck her head out of a carriage window, her big eyes blinking in confusion.

Who is this pretty big sister? I don't think I've ever seen her before.

"Miss," Lu Ya called out softly beside the carriage. "That person's cultivation is not weak, and she seems to have some evil qi. When did you make such a friend?"

Cui Yuanyang scratched her head and said, "I only went out that one time..."

But then they heard Xia Chichi say, "I am Luo Qi from Beimang. I met Miss Cui when she came to the mountain stronghold."

Cui Yuanyang was stunned for a moment, and her face involuntarily turned red. She quickly said, "Ah, so it's Sister Luo! Come here quickly."

The guards did not have an opinion. While they all knew about Xia Chichi, how could any of them know who Luo Qi was? If the young lady said that they knew each other, then they knew each other.

All of them knew that the young lady had made some foolish moves in Beimang and ended up getting held captive. None of them knew which bandits she had encountered back then, but they could not help but wonder since when there were such beautiful female bandits in Beimang.

Regardless, since this involved the young lady's foolish deeds, it was better for them to remain quiet.

In fact, when Cui Yuanyang was caught breaking into the stronghold, Xia Chichi was not in Beimang anymore, but Cui Yuanyang knew the name Luo Qi very well. She had been very meticulous in learning about her brother Zhao's past. When bandits from Beimang were captured later on, she would even specially arrange for them to be brought to the Cui Clan for interviews. Thus, she knew that Xia Chichi of the Four Idols Cult had slept together with him under the alias Luo Qi.

When brother Zhao said that he had a lover at that time, he was probably referring to her...and judging from his attitude, I don't think they ever broke up...

Seeing Xia Chichi getting into the carriage with a smile, Cui Yuanyang subconsciously shrank into a corner, her face burning. For some reason, she felt like a mistress who had been approached by the actual wife.

Boo.... This big sister is indeed really beautiful. No wonder brother Zhao took a liking to her. Unlike me, her face is still round after all this time....

Xia Chichi looked at the blushing Cui Yuanyang with a strange expression. She endured and endured again, but she finally could not hold it in anymore and said, "Little girl, if I came here to kill you, you would already be dead!"

"Ah?" Cui Yuanyang said. "I...Brother Zhao and I, we, we never did anything, at least not yet..."

Xia Chichi facepalmed.

Don't you know that I'm the saintess of the Four Idols Cult? Do you seriously think that I would come here to kill you because of your relationship with Zhao Changhe?

But then she heard Cui Yuanyang say, "You're the saintess of the Four Idols Cult... The Four Idols Cult isn't dumb; why would they exchange the life of their saintess for a comparatively insignificant little girl?"

Huh?

This time it was Xia Chichi's turn to scratch her head. Oh, so she isn't actually stupid, huh?

The two girls looked at each other, and Xia Chichi finally put on a straight face. "That's right, I was just passing by when I saw your convoy and became furious. I came here to deal with a vixen! Young lady of the Cui clan, aren't you supposed to be educated and courteous? How can you just go around snatching another's man? Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

Cui Yuanyang subconsciously wanted to hug her own head again, but then she mustered up the courage to stand her ground and say, "You're one to talk! You want to be a saintess and serve your gods, so you can't even have him yourself. You can't have him, yet you don't want to let others have him? How can you be so unreasonable..."

Xia Chichi felt like her face was slapped but she remained expressionless.

I originally thought you were quite cute, but now you look more and more unpleasant. You're already fifteen years old and you're still pretending to be cute?! You think you know more than me, don't you?

"My cult refuses him, but there is a solution. If he also joins the cult, then we might be able to be together," Xia Chichi said with a straight face. "What's the difference between you and me? Doesn't your clan also refuse him? Otherwise, why would they have a three-year agreement? If he fails to make it to the Ranking of Man in three years, would you be willing to elope with him?"

"I would."

With just two words, Xia Chichi was utterly silenced. Her eyes widened in surprise, and after a long while she could only say, "Anyone can talk."

"Big sister..." Cui Yuanyang sniffed. "Actually, you're right. We're the same, so what exactly are we even arguing about here... I know where he was recently, and that old woman doesn't have the same restrictions we do, and her family even really wants them to.... Well, maybe we're all doomed anyway...."

Xia Chichi blinked again.

By "old woman," is she referring to... Tang Wanzhuang?

Cui Yuanyang muttered to herself, "I haven't actually served the entirety of my house arrest yet. I heard that Wang Zhaoling was inviting prominent figures from the Ranking of Hidden Dragons to his banquet. I'm guessing that he will be there, which is why I pestered my father until he allowed me to go. If we don't meet again soon, he might forget about me..."

What house arrest? What pestering? I'm afraid that Cui Wenjing wanted you to come here as well. Xia Chichi suddenly felt enlightened. How cunning! Before, he did not matter much to you, but now that you saw Tang Wanzhuang personally stepping in to snatch him from your hands, you can't hold yourself back anymore, huh?

Suddenly, she felt like an irrelevant passerby and she chuckled to herself. What am I doing? Am I really going to act like I'm here to confront a vixen? This is just an excuse to pass the time... But when I see this little vixen, I really can't help but get angry, yet I'm incapable of handling her. It's so frustrating...

In reality, in the other party's mind, Xia Chichi had long ceased to be a real competitor. It was Tang Wanzhuang who truly made the Cui Clan feel threatened.

How interesting. I wonder if Cui Wenjing felt a little regretful about the three-year agreement that he made himself after learning that Tang Wanzhuang was stepping in.

On second thought, if Tang Wanzhuang has a predestined relationship with him due to his presumed identity as a prince, well, that identity is actually mine... When Xia Chichi thought of this, she suddenly felt the jade hairpin on her head gleaming brightly.

She became annoyed again and glanced sideways at Cui Yuanyang for a while before saying leisurely, "You're right. Tang Wanzhuang is much older, and she won't be as thin-skinned as a little girl like you. Maybe, they've even done everything already, all the while you're still dreaming of a future with him..."

Cui Yuanyang's little face turned red and bitter once more.

She felt the same way, but what could she do about it?

Chapter 194: Vermillion Bird Shows Her Might

"Let me tell you something though..." Xia Chichi leaned over and said mysteriously. "Although older women might have thicker skin, which man doesn't prefer someone younger and more tender? As long as you're willing to let go of the pretense of being a noblewoman and do what you must to get your big brother Zhao, wouldn't it be simple?"

Cui Yuanyang leaned back slightly. "Are you trying to trick me? How could you possibly help me with getting together with him?"

Xia Chichi was itching with rage and grabbed Cui Yuanyang by her collar. "You were the one who said our biggest enemy is that woman, and now you're suspicious of me? You act like a stupid child when it comes to everything else, so why are you so sharp in this regard? What are they teaching you in the Cui Clan? Courtship tactics?!"

Cui Yuanyang asked, “Then why are you helping me?”

“Because he dares to mess with old women but not you. No matter how flirtatious you are, what will happen to you?!” Xia Chichi sneered. “What a waste.”

Sounds of scuffles came from inside the carriage.

The guards did not dare to eavesdrop on the young lady’s conversation, but they could not just disregard the commotion and rushed over. “Miss!”

Cui Yuanyang was panting and shouted from inside, “Don’t come in. I don’t believe it... Wuwuwu...”

The guards: “...”

Inside the carriage, Xia Chichi flipped Cui Yuanyang over, then slapped her bottom again and again, feeling immensely satisfied as she did so.

You dare act cute, seduce my man, and resist me?!

“Aren’t you a little piece of waste?”

Cui Yuanyang said, “You slept with him. Who isn’t a waste compared to you...”

Xia Chichi: “...”

“What is it like sleeping with a man?” Cui Yuanyang, now limp and helpless, stopped struggling and actually humbly asked for advice. “I heard that sleeping together makes babies. How come you don’t seem to be having a baby?”

Xia Chichi’s tone turned icy, “After all those days you spent on the run with him, camping out in the wilderness, did you never sleep together?”

Cui Yuanyang was puzzled and, after a while, asked, “Lying down on the same bed and quilt doesn’t count, does it? Do you have to be covered with the quilt, like how hens hatch their eggs?”

Finally unable to hold herself back, Xia Chichi burst into laughter.

She leaned down and mischievously blew gently into Cui Yuanyang’s ear. She then watched as the faint red blush that was on Cui Yuanyang’s face quickly spread to her earlobes, making her look extremely cute and adorable.

Xia Chichi then lightly licked her ear.

Cui Yuanyang shuddered, tensing up instantly while her eyes widened in surprise.

Xia Chichi chuckled and whispered softly into her ear, “Next time you see him, just do this and you’ll find out...”

With a playful smile, Xia Chichi jumped out of the carriage, leaving Cui Yuanyang staring blankly, her mind completely empty.

Lu Ya watched her warily as she snorted and turned to leave.

A clear male voice came from the distance, “Brother Lu, I’ve come to assist you. There have been traces of barbarians in our territory. Have you noticed anything unusual on your journey?”

Lu Ya glanced at Xia Chichi before turning to face Wang Daozhong, “Thank you for coming to assist us, Mister Wang. Our journey has been smooth so far.”

Wang Daozhong soon appeared next to the convoy, frowning as he looked at Xia Chichi. “Who is this?”

Cui Yuanyang jumped out of the carriage and quickly grabbed Xia Chichi’s arm. Then, she obediently said, “Hello, Uncle Wang.”

Seeing Cui Yuanyang's attitude, Wang Daozhong realized that there was no need for him to even bother asking, so he nodded and said, "The world has been a mess recently, so do be careful on your journey. I still have other matters to attend to, so I will be taking my leave."

As an elder and prominent figure in the Wang Clan, he certainly would not lower his status to accompany a little niece. He was already showing them great respect just by coming and alerting them personally.

Once he was away, Cui Yuanyang snorted lightly and muttered, "They know that the world is a mess, yet they're throwing a birthday banquet with so much fanfare? Hypocrites."

Lu Ya cleared his throat and said softly, "Be careful of what you say."

"I'm not afraid of him." Cui Yuanyang, holding Xia Chichi's arm, smiled sweetly. "Sister Luo, are you going to Langya too? Let's play together then."

Huh? Who are you going to play with? How are you going to play? What games are you playing?

As these thoughts flashed through Xia Chichi's mind, she suddenly felt a chill run down her spine.

Vermillion Bird's eyes were as bright as stars in the distance, and they gleamed emotionlessly.

I'm done for. Why didn't you come and see me when I was spanking her just now? Of all times, you come now when we're smiling together, was all that acting I did for nothing?

"Watch out!" Lu Ya drew out his longsword and said sternly, "It's the Four Idols Cult's Vermillion Bird! Protect the young—"

Before he could finish speaking, however, Vermillion Bird disappeared.

"What the..."

A short distance away, there was suddenly the sound of energy clashing and Wang Daozhong's roar rang out, "Vermillion Bird! There are no grievances between us, so why are you attacking me?!"

Vermillion Bird's languid and seductive voice spread far and wide, "You bullied my Fire Serpent of Yi. Do you think you can just do whatever you want to my subordinates?"

"I didn't even touch a single hair on her bo—ughhhhh!" A muffled groan followed. It was unclear what kind of injury Wang Daozhong suffered as his voice gradually faded. "You vengeful demon... I will remember this!"

Zhao Changhe stood by the side of the road with his arms folded. He raised his head and looked at the crimson sky in the distance, silently mourning for Wang Daozhong.

Everything had happened so suddenly that Lu Ya had not even decided whether he should go and help or not when the battle already seemed to have ended.

He was secretly shocked as well. Wang Daozhong was a prominent figure on the Ranking of Earth. Although there was a gap in their rankings, they should still have been considered to be within the same level, yet he could not even withstand a few moves against Vermillion Bird.

Vermillion Bird's strength is truly terrifying. If she were to attack us...

Just when he was taut as a stretched bowstring, he saw the young lady, whom he had been anxiously protecting, dart out of the convoy and rush into the arms of a man by the side of the road, "Brother Zhao!"

Lu Ya: "..."

There is no way I'm getting paid by the Cui Clan for this one.

If Vermillion Bird attacks again right now, will the young lady even be able to survive?

To his horror, Vermillion Bird really did appear again. And this time, her cold gaze was fixed on their young lady's back.

Zhao Changhe immediately turned around, holding Cui Yuanyang tightly in front of him and shielding her from harm.

Vermillion Bird stared at his back fiercely. Surrounded by sword lights that flashed like lightning, Lu Ya rushed toward her with his sword in hand. “Venerable Vermillion Bird, don’t tell me you’re here to bully a little girl. Your opponent is me!”

Vermillion Bird’s eyes gazed directly past him, seemingly looking at someone behind him. Her voice was icy as she said, “Is this how you plan to kill her? To have her send herself into a man’s arms and expect her to just die out of nowhere?”

Lu Ya: “?”

Pah!

Vermillion Bird did not even spare him a glance nor draw her weapon. She just slapped his sword aside, diverting the direction he was going in, then simply stepped to the side. It was as if she were merely dealing with a child. “Annoying!”

Then, before the Cui Clan guards could close in, she darted around like a phantom and grabbed the woman who called herself Luo Qi by the neck. Then, they disappeared into the distance.

As Chichi was being carried away, her cursing faintly echoed, “I’ll teach you a lesson when I see you again, you little vixen!”

A moment later, she screamed, “This is a misunderstanding! I even made a move just now, why didn’t you come earlier...”

Zhao Changhe raised his head to watch his lover being carried away, his expression twitching as he could not utter even a single word.

Right, since Vermillion Bird still harbors thoughts of recruiting me into their cult, then Chichi shouldn’t be punished too severely for her old affection toward me... Maybe I might even come to hear some good news?

Cui Yuanyang finally lifted her head from his arms, her eyes shining brightly, “Big brother Zhao, your first reaction was to protect me...”

Zhao Changhe looked at the group of trembling Cui Clan guards, and said helplessly, “You silly girl, do you not value your life? That was Vermillion Bird just now!”

“But...” Cui Yuanyang looked at his face steadily. “As long as you’re here, I don’t see anyone else...”

Zhao Changhe stood there in silence, his heart melting instantly. Any nervousness or embarrassment, any unfamiliarity from not seeing each other for a long time, and any from being surrounded by onlookers all disappeared instantly.

Only the little girl’s watery eyes remained, a gaze that was softer than the moon.

Chapter 195: I've Become Quite Bad

“They’re really staying in Taishan City?”

There was indeed a route that passed through Taishan from Qinghe to Langya. However, it was unclear whether Cui Yuanyang had planned to take this route originally or if she had just decided to stop and rest here. In any case, after meeting Zhao Changhe, it seemed like Cui Yuanyang no longer intended to rush to the Wang Clan anymore. She hurriedly checked into the city close by and refused to leave her big brother Zhao’s side.

They had decided to rest here as Cui Yuanyang had ended up staying outside the carriage together with Zhao Changhe, talking amongst themselves in front of all of the people that the Cui Clan had sent with her. Because of that, the little girl was eager to find a place to rest.

Vermillion Bird, who was similarly staying in this city, was stunned when she got the report from her subordinates.

Are they staying here to provoke us? Do they really think that our Four Idols Cult is just here to play around? They know we’re here, yet they still chose to settle nearby?!

Xia Chichi was punished to kneel by the side and hold her head with her hands. Seeing Vermillion Bird’s annoyed look, she smiled apologetically and tried to persuade her. “That little girl isn’t stupid. She knows that we won’t go all out to kill her. There’s no need for this, is there?”

“Isn’t this all because of you?” Vermillion Bird did not know where her temper was coming from. Nevertheless, she grabbed a feather duster and smacked Xia Chichi on the butt. “I asked you to wait for an opportunity to assassinate her, yet you were smiling and walking alongside her. Now, others are going to start thinking that the White Tiger is a mere housecat, while the Vermillion Bird is nothing but a chicken.”

Xia Chichi shouted, “Although I had the chance to assassinate her, I would not have been able to escape if I did. Do you really want me to exchange my life for hers? She’s just a waste...”

Vermillion Bird knew that her pupil’s words were reasonable. She did not really know why she was so angry, but if there was one moment that had annoyed her significantly, it was when Zhao Changhe held the little girl tightly in his arms, while treating her as a major threat.

One moment, I was trying to recruit you with nice words, and the next, you’re guarding against me so intensely. How am I supposed to control my temper when you treat me so horribly? To think that you even said you were afraid of me.... I should have taught you a lesson by slapping your back to make you cough up blood for ten days straight!

It appeared that Vermillion Bird did not realize that when it came to recruiting people into the cult, she would never really say anything nice. She always carried herself proudly and indifferently, and her demonic flames flared menacingly, intimidating everyone in her presence... It was completely normal for someone to be wary of her. After all, she was not actually the Fire Serpent of Yi.

However, Vermillion Bird felt that as if her good intentions were taken for granted, which was why she was filled with dissatisfaction. These emotions were further magnified when it saw the look on Xia Chichi’s face that seemed to say that she hadn’t done anything wrong and that she would have done the same thing given the chance. Seeing that unapologetic face, she almost broke the feather duster in her anger.

She sneered and said, “Let’s not talk about Cui Yuanyang for the time being. You dare say you’ve already left behind your old feelings, yet this is how you act? Do you take me for a fool?”

Xia Chichi’s eyes darted around. She knew that it would be difficult to argue with Vermillion Bird when it came to this. Although she could spout all kinds of things to try and justify herself, Vermillion Bird was not stupid.

As such, she simply decided to speak with part-truths, “Well, it’s only been about half a year. If I were to have completely cut off all the feelings I had back then, I bet even you would find such a

heartless person too much, right? I admit that I still do have some feelings left, just a little. I think it'll go away in time..."

Vermillion Bird glanced at her pitiful appearance, as she was kneeling there with her hands holding her head. She ultimately just sighed and said, "As you said before, his relationships with other women aren't even clear. Shouldn't you hate him more if you still have some feelings for him? Why are you so soft-hearted toward the other women he's involved with? This... This is why we, women, can't become too emotional. It will only bring us heartache in the end."

Xia Chichi nibbled on her lips, inwardly cursing, If it wasn't for the holy cult having such stupid rules, I could have been with him openly. Which woman would have dared to approach him? If any of them dared, I would have fought them. I would definitely have torn apart that little bitch that's pretending to be cute!

But now? I don't have the confidence, no, more like I don't feel like I have the right to do such things. After all, since I'm the one who can't be with him, then what right do I even have to make him wait for me? Honestly, this is all unfair, both for him and myself...

Vermillion Bird could actually somewhat understand what Xia Chichi was thinking, and she paced back and forth a few times, feeling somewhat awkward herself.

After getting to know him a little, she had actually come to appreciate his ideals, philosophy, combat skills, and character. In addition, his unique identity made her genuinely interested in recruiting him into the cult. However, Zhao Changhe seemed to have slightly misunderstood things. If he were to be recruited into the cult, they could not just let his and Xia Chichi's relationship flourish. On the contrary, having feelings for one another actually made it less appropriate for them to be under the same roof. After all, they could not just let them desecrate the altar.

Therefore, it was impossible for things to turn out as Zhao Changhe was imagining. They would never have Xia Chichi seduce him into joining the cult.

At the same time, Vermillion Bird could not help but admit that since she appreciated Zhao Changhe, she would not just go and kill him because of the old flame he shared with Xia Chichi. Killing him was out of the question, and what was giving her such a headache was figuring out how to reconcile everything.

Then, she realized that Xia Chichi's own ideas were actually most correct.

As long as they let him find another woman, then their relationship would naturally end. At that time, they would have really gotten the best of both worlds.

However, due to Cui Yuanyang's young age, as well as the three-year agreement that Cui Wenjing and Zhao Changh had agreed upon and released to the public, the Cui Clan could not just retract their statement even if they regretted it now. They could not just go back on their word in front of everyone. But then, so should they just wait for three years and see what happens?

There were still two and a half years until the agreed-upon date...

Xia Chichi observed Vermillion Bird's expression and asked, "Venerable, are you interested in recruiting Zhao Changhe?"

Vermillion Bird's face stiffened, and she said, "Don't even think about seducing him or anything like that. There's no way that I will allow it. Regardless of whether I want Zhao Changhe to join the cult or not, I cannot allow our saintess to behave wantonly. Forget about it."

Xia Chichi's joy got stuck in her stomach, almost causing her to whimper.

How old-fashioned!

"The saintess serves the gods. If you continue acting like this, my punishment won't just be limited to smacking you with a feather duster. Don't think that you can keep having it easy."

"..."

Vermillion Bird paced back and forth, muttering to herself, "While the saintess is off-limits, that might not be the case for others. It looks like I can choose someone to make an attempt..."

Xia Chichi muttered, "What were you saying about the Fire Serpent of Yi earlier, has someone new appeared? I recall that there was a vacancy in the spot for the mansion of Yi."

"That's right. We have someone new. Why are you asking?"

“What does she look like? I think that we can let her try,” Xia Chichi said. “Since she’s a serpent, then she must be pretty good at flirting. Also, she’s new, so... Owwww...”

Xia Chichi had no idea why she was getting beaten again. She felt that she was clearly already sacrificing herself by making this suggestion. Afterward, she would even have to prepare a new little bitch into pieces, and it was someone of her own proposal.

She could not understand why the venerable was so unpredictable and quick to anger today.

*

While Xia Chichi was being beaten, in another part of the city, Cui Yuanyang was happily leaning on Zhao Changhe’s chest. The two of them were in the courtyard, admiring the flowers.

Such intimacy was not uncommon back at the riverside by the Cui Clan’s horse pasture. Cui Yuanyang had always found it comfortable to lean on Zhao Changhe in this manner. His broad chest was like a spacious seat where she could nestle her entire self.

This just goes to show that big brother Zhao’s chest was made for me to lie on. It’s a pity that big brother Zhao was in a hurry back then and he leaving soon after he learned to ride a horse properly. He seems to have changed a bit. He seems a little quieter, and it doesn’t feel like he’s in as much of a rush as before. He’s a lot gentler and calmer.

Girls were indeed quite sensitive to these things.

“Big brother Zhao...” Cui Yuanyang nestled in his embrace. She then asked in a soft voice, “Why aren’t you talking much? Is it because you just saw sister Xia?”

“Hm?” Zhao Changhe snapped out of his daze.

He had not actually been thinking about Chichi much. Chichi herself had repeatedly told him to just do whatever he pleased and stop holding himself back. She would probably even think that he was being over-dramatic or pretentious if he kept hesitating.

When he was in Jiangnan, he made his intentions clear to Yue Hongling, and he also acquired an interest in Tang Wanzhuang, although he had not voiced that one out. He knew that they were

already past merely sharing idle talk... Regardless, the once pure Zhao Changhe was long gone, and he had truly and fully turned into a scumbag. He did not even feel awkward while holding Yangyang. In fact, he was even feeling quite happy as he discovered that she had not forgotten about him.

The real reason for his silence was actually Yangyang herself. He used to think that her feelings were just temporary and not true love, but upon seeing her again, he saw that her feelings for him were still strong. In fact, it appeared as if her feelings grew even more intense from the separation. This touched up deeply.

Where else could he find such a wonderful girl?

“Yangyang, you haven’t changed at all. Of course I’m a little awkward when I see you again so suddenly. Don’t you feel a little awkward seeing me? I’ve changed quite a bit since back then, and it’s not just in appearance.”

“A little bit,” Cui Yuanyang smiled and said. “But it’s mostly because your hair was all over the place before, like a lion’s mane. Now that it’s grown longer and you tie it properly, you look a lot more elegant. At first, I almost didn’t recognize you. But then I realized that the person I had in my heart was never a scoundrel or bandit to begin with. Especially...”

She paused and whispered, “Especially when you held me tightly and protected me from Vermillion Bird. At that moment, all the anxiety that I’d been feeling over these past few months disappeared. That was the kind of reunion I was looking forward to, and it was even more joyful than I expected.”

Zhao Changhe could not help but laugh. “Just how many kinds of scenarios had you pictured in your mind?”

“Don’t laugh when I tell you.”

“Don’t worry, I’ve gotten professional training. No matter how funny it is, I promise not to laugh.”

“Then I’ll tell you,” Cui Yuanyang said hesitantly. “Since the Wang Clan was inviting figures on the Ranking of Hidden Dragons to spar with, I was just thinking that when they challenged you, I could just burst in from outside and say, ‘Who do you think you are to challenge my big brother Zhao?! If you want to challenge him, beat me first!’ Then, you would turn around and see me all heroic and

dazzling, and you would be so amazed. Then, while looking at me, you'd think about how heroic I've become. Then, you would be filled with admiration for me and fall for me."

"Pfft..." Without those last few sentences, he would have probably been fine. It could still have been considered a scene from a teenage girl's imagination. But when he heard the last part, Zhao Changhe nearly laughed his stomach out. "No wonder your brother said you did not admire First Seat Tang's elegance at all. It turns out that you want to imitate Yue Hongling."

"I told you not to laugh!"

"Alright, alright, I'll stop laughing," Zhao Changhe said coaxingly, as if he were comforting a child. "There's no need for such a dramatic scene. I've always admired you."

Cui Yuanyang said softly, "But... I know that... I know that the person you truly admire has always been Yue Hongling..."

Zhao Changhe was stunned and fell silent.

He lowered his head and looked at her flushed face. She was looking up at him, her eyes flashing with complex emotions. "Otherwise, why do you always hold me like you're holding a little sister... You've never seen me as a grown woman, right?"

Zhao Changhe took a deep breath, then suddenly whispered, "Little girl, do you know what I was worried about these past few days?"

"Huh?" Cui Yuanyang blinked, puzzled.

"That I haven't sealed the deal in advance." Zhao Changhe slowly lowered his head and leaned over her. "While you haven't changed, I've become quite bad... Back then, I was afraid that you would end up regretting it, since you were too young and ignorant. But now, I just want to take advantage of your youth and ignorance to ensure that you will never have the chance to regret it."

Cui Yuanyang's heart skipped a beat.

But her mind suddenly went blank. She watched as he pulled her closer, lowered his head, then kissed her tender lips.

Cui Yuanyang instinctively grabbed his arm. Her eyes were still wide open, and she was completely at a loss as to what to think at the moment.