

T. Times 211

Chapter 211: Body of Gods and Demons

The premise of this alliance was somewhat awkward...

Both parties were “rebels,” and unlike the Maitreya Cult, there were no doctrinal or religious conflicts. Logically, this alliance seemed quite natural. The only thing that really needed to be discussed was how the profits were to be shared, such as whether the Four Idols Cult could become the state religion after the Wang Clan succeeds, and so on.

However, what ended up being mentioned instead was whether or not what they gave to Zhao Changhe would truly be useful.

Wang Zhaoling was still thinking that they would eventually have to kill Zhao Changhe, so he did not find much significance in what they were giving him.

Wait... Is Xia Chichi really saying that our attitude toward Zhao Changhe is a condition to the alliance?

Wang Zhaoling frowned and asked, “Does Venerable Vermillion Bird also acquiesce to that condition?”

Xia Chichi smiled and said, “Of course, if the venerable did not say anything, how could I represent the Holy Cult in making such grand decisions?”

Wang Zhaoling nodded. “Please come inside to meet with my father and further discuss the details.”

Xia Chichi looked at him deeply, said nothing, and followed him deeper into their residence.

In reality, even if the Wang Clan agreed on the surface and assassinated Zhao Changhe in secret, nobody would know. Even if they did, there would be no evidence. As more people began to suspect Zhao Changhe's identity, the number of parties who wanted him dead would only increase.

Once their two sides allied with one another, this unsubstantiated matter was unlikely to affect the bigger picture.

Therefore, this condition could only be considered a form of pressure, urging the Wang Clan to be cautious in their actions. At the very least, they could not allow anyone identifiable as a member of the clan or collaborating with them to go out and kill Zhao Changhe recklessly. This indirectly filtered out a large number of experts from the Rankings of Heaven, Earth, and Man, reducing the pressure on Zhao Changhe considerably.

Meanwhile, Xia Chichi was quite puzzled as to why the venerable wanted to protect Zhao Changhe...

Standing in the distance, Vermillion Bird felt quite helpless. Of course she had to protect Zhao Changhe. After all, they had not yet figured out the meaning behind Zhao Changhe's peculiar interaction with the star chart, so how could she allow for him to be killed so easily?

Given the situation, those unaware might think that the Four Idols Cult and Zhao Changhe already have some secret agreement.

No one was as anxious as Vermillion Bird right now. Although she knew who and where Black Tortoise was, the journey was long, and the area where Black Tortoise could be was vast. She had already instructed some people to contact Black Tortoise urgently, but it was proving to be too difficult to reach that stubborn reptile quickly. In the end, she had no choice but to focus on keeping Zhao Changhe safe for the time being.

Vermillion Bird was even worried that something might happen to Zhao Changhe while he was enveloped in that marine clay, feeling more nervous for him than she would have been for her own child.

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Zhao Changhe, in the meantime, was quite fine. In fact, he was even feeling great.

While his entire body was wrapped in marine clay, he experienced a sensation of harmony and relaxation. It was as if countless small hands were massaging his body, providing him a refreshing coolness that nourished and repaired his hidden injuries.

To describe it more mystically, it felt a bit like returning to a mother's womb... Well, Zhao Changhe did not really know what it felt like to be in the womb, nor did he know why his mind came to think this thought.

Under careful introspection, he discovered that he had accumulated injuries from his past battles and bursts of vicious qi, realizing that there were actually many minor issues in his body that were nigh-impossible to see. But with the help of the marine clay, they were slowly being repaired.

Just this process alone made the experience worth it.

As for his meridians, they were not actually being forcefully widened. Rather, it was more like they were being repaired, giving them a slightly healthier and more robust feeling.

Therefore, as Wang Zhaoling said, the effect that the marine clay had in expanding the meridians could only be regarded as minor, but due to how low his expectations were, he found himself surprised by the supposed "slight" improvement the marine clay brought.

To put it in perspective.... Suppose the meridians of proud geniuses such as Yue Hongling were as thick as a finger. In that case, Zhao Changhe's were more like a toothpick.

Therefore, even though he was cultivating using a peerless divine art, Zhao Changhe's internal cultivation remained extremely difficult as the capacity of his meridians was just too small to accommodate the amount of true qi he could cultivate. This was why he had to rely on the method from the Four Idols Cult to even just break through to the fifth layer of the Profound Gate.

Worse still, the further he progressed, the more challenging it would become. While the clever technique of the Four Idols Cult allowed him to take shortcuts, it still required him to have a certain foundation. If things continued as they were, he might never break through to the eighth or ninth layer of the Profound Gate.

Meanwhile, Yue Hongling, who was younger than him and likely had a worse cultivation technique than he did, could reach the ninth layer of the Profound Gate at just twenty years old even though they had similar aptitude when it came to cultivation. This vast difference was solely due to the difference in breadth of their meridians.

If a finger were to grow by the size of a toothpick, then the improvement would indeed be regarded as slight, but if a toothpick were to grow by the size of a finger, that was a whole different story.

Zhao Changhe had never felt his internal true qi surge like this before. This is what it truly means for a river to flow vigorously, as opposed to the stagnant ditch that I had before!

He could now be certain that with his meridians now "doubled" in size, his internal cultivation could break through to the sixth layer of the Profound Gate without relying on the technique from the Four Idols Cult. All he needed to do now was accumulate enough true qi to reach the threshold.

While the poor condition of his meridians affected his output, including bursts of power in combat and breakthroughs, it did not hinder the speed at which he could accumulate true qi

using the Six Harmonies Art at all. In regard, he had always been fast. It was very likely that in barely any time, he would be able to break through to the sixth layer without any assistance.

Zhao Changhe was almost in tears.

What kind of miraculous substance is this marine clay? Right, can the Heavenly Tome analyze it?

Zhao Changhe's mind turned to the golden foil on his chest.

The golden foil isn't reacting... What a pity. This page of the Heavenly Tome should just be related to martial arts rather than miraculous substances. There must be another page of the Heavenly Tome that corresponds to such substances.

Wait...

Zhao Changhe was surprised to find that the energy in the marine clay seemed to be "repairing" the Heavenly Tome as well. The previously dull and unremarkable golden foil began to emit a faint glow.

Is the seal going to loosen up a bit? Wait, if this thing IS unsealed, is it gonna kill me?

Not long after, golden light shone brightly, and three words emerged in the manner of a VR display: "Innate Dao Body."

That was all.

Zhao Changhe pondered silently. Considering that this page of the Heavenly Tome was only related to martial arts and cultivation, these words likely indicated that the ultimate goal of this

kind of body modification and repair was a level of cultivation called Innate Dao Body. However, since this clump of marine clay was so basic, the Heavenly Tome could only interpret a name, without providing any specific methods of cultivation.

This concept was quite intriguing because Zhao Changhe had never heard any mention of concepts such as Dao Bodies or Demon Physiques, which were found in various fantasy works in the modern world. Now, it appeared that such concepts had in fact existed in the previous era, but were now lost to the annals of history.

Could it be that the greatest divide between the two eras lies in this aspect? When it's said that Xia Longyuan, Wang Daoning, and others unlocking the three great Profound Mysteries is not the end of cultivation, is this the next step? When the body transforms into another kind of body, is that the boundary between humans and gods or demons?

Just as he pondered this, a faint ice-blue energy seeped out from the golden foil, as if it were repelling something.

It seemed to absorb the energy and partially lift some of its seals, but it also expelled the residue, as if saying, You are not qualified to merge with me.

Then, a new message appeared on the VR display: "It is recommended to prevent the infiltration of special energy related to the Sea Clan."

Zhao Changhe's heart skipped a beat.

In other words, the marine clay had two purposes. It could help improve one's body, but at the same time, they might be infiltrated by some kind of foreign energy. It was then possible that the infiltration of that energy could lead to them being controlled or assimilated.

Zhao Changhe immediately made use of the poison resistance quality of the Six Harmonies Art to scan his body for any unusual energy. Sure enough, he soon detected traces of ice-blue energy lurking in his dantian, meridians, and even cells. It was almost indistinguishable from

his own internal energy, and he would not have noticed it if not for the warning of the Heavenly Tome.

Zhao Changhe broke out in a cold sweat. He carefully and slowly expelled the energy, then heaved a sigh of relief.

Thank goodness for the Heavenly Tome...

Judging from Wang Zhaoling's attitude, they probably don't know anything about this, and it did not seem like they were plotting anything, at least not in this manner. Either way, I wonder about the urgency in the Wang Clan's actions. Could this be somehow related to it? Perhaps the Wang Clan has unknowingly been infiltrated by this energy, but they're just unaware?

Zhao Changhe wiped off the marine clay from his face and opened his eyes to see Cui Yuanyang sitting in front of him with her knees against her chest. She was gazing at him with sparkling eyes and a gentle expression.

Zhao Changhe's heart softened. The little girl was really sitting there motionless in the bone-chilling ice cave, guarding him like a loyal sentry.

Seeing the way he poked his head out, Cui Yuanyang could not help but smile and ask, "Are you all good?"

"Mm-hm." Zhao Changhe shifted around, causing the marine clay to scatter in all directions. The energy contained in it had now completely dissipated, rendering it nothing more than meaningless and unappetizing ice cream.

He gently embraced Cui Yuanyang, "How long was I wrapped up? Are you cold?"

With her cultivation reaching the fifth layer through the Qinghe Purple Qi Art, how could she be afraid of the cold in a mere ice cave... But instinctively, Zhao Changhe still saw her as the trembling little rabbit from that rainy day, so he naturally came to ask her such a question.

“It’s been over an hour,” Cui Yuanyang snuggled into his embrace. Her eyes darted around mischievously as she said sweetly, “I’m cold. Can you hold me?”

The big bear dared to ask, and the little rabbit dared to answer.

Neither of them realized that if they were cold, they could just leave. Their minds were both preoccupied with holding each other tighter.

And then, as they cuddled, Zhao Changhe could not help but lean in for a kiss.

A triumphant gleam flashed in the little rabbit’s eyes.

This feels so nice. Ever since that kiss the other day, I’ve been wanting to kiss him again...

Chapter 212: Tiger vs. Rabbit

While the little tiger was busy in a meeting with a bunch of old lions, the little rabbit was sneakily stealing food.

Xia Chichi was in a secret meeting with the head of the Wang Clan, Wang Daoning. They briefly discussed some preliminary views on the alliance. Apart from thoroughly avoiding the topic of Zhao Changhe, they were very much pleased with the considerations made by the other side.

For the Wang Clan, the Four Idols Cult was a very appropriate external aid. Its reputation was not as lowly as that of the Maitreya Cult, nor was it as unpleasant as colluding with foreigners

like the barbarians. There was no conflict in their goals, and their objectives were similar. They were very suitable allies.

Looking at the smiling faces of both parties, it was as if Wang Daozhong sustaining injuries from facing Vermillion Bird had not happened at all.

“If Venerable Vermillion Bird is in Langya and is available, she is welcome to have a drink at our Wang Clan,” Wang Daoning personally escorted Xia Chichi out. He sighed as he said, “The venerable is truly cautious...”

Xia Chichi smiled and said, “It’s not that the venerable doesn’t trust the Wang Clan, she just has a lot of matters to attend to.”

“Alright then, shall I have Daozhong or Zhaoling pay your Four Idols Cult a visit as well?”

“I’ll first relay our discussions to the venerable and see what her opinion is. As the head of the Wang Clan, you don’t need to send me off. There’s no need for so much courtesy.”

Wang Daoning accepted and instructed his son, “Escort the saintess out.”

Wang Zhaoling smiled and made a gesture of invitation.

An old man watched Xia Chichi leave the inner hall, then whispered to Wang Daoning, “If we’re to talk about survivors from the Luo Clan, Xia Chichi seems to be the most likely one to actually be the offspring of His Majesty. After all, she even has the surname Xia.”

Wang Daoning sighed and said, “You know, when it comes to evidence, the surname is the most meaningless. Anyone can have the surname Xia. Besides, if it were true, she would not claim to have the surname Xia...the way Zhao Changhe does not recognize the surname. The more openly and boldly one portrays themselves to have the surname Xia, the less likely it is to be true.”

“What if everyone is just overthinking?”

“It’s possible, but it’s already meaningless. It seems you still have not understood the root of the matter. The root lies in how many people are willing to recognize what is true and what is false. With Tang Wanzhuang and Cui Wenjing recognizing Zhao Changhe as such, it becomes the truth even if it were false.”

“But if His Majesty himself has not spoken, what’s the use of them recognizing Zhao Changhe?”

“Have you forgotten that the crux of everything taking place lies in the passing of His Majesty? Otherwise, why do you think Cui Wenjing and Tang Wanzhuang have chosen to sit back and let Zhao Changhe roam the jianghu rather than try to bring him back to the capital? While Zhao Changhe’s unwillingness is one aspect, their desire to wait until His Majesty’s passing is much more crucial.”

The old man clicked his tongue and said, “But Xia Chichi is also quite a peculiar character, isn’t she?”

“Hmm?”

“She defeated Yang Bugui with just a single move, and even when Zhaoling tried his best to gain the upper hand, he only managed a slight advantage. She has boundless prospects. Zhaoling’s marriage has yet to be discussed, so....”

Wang Daoning sighed. “I’ve also thought about this. However, regardless of whatever the Four Idols Cult thinks or knows about Xia Chichi’s identity, they would never agree to have their saintess be used for marriage. This matter must not even be mentioned, otherwise it will harm our alliance.”

“These cults are truly ignorant of how the world works.”

“Is that really the case though?” Wang Daoning whispered to himself. “Perhaps what they believe in is the truth...”

The old man: “?”

Wang Daoning shook his head and changed the subject, “Since Zhao Changhe is unwilling to cooperate, then we cannot allow him to stay here. However, we cannot have him die here, nor let our people lay a hand on him. We must sever and prevent any ties between him and our Wang Clan. With that in mind, contact the Snow-Listening Pavilion. Once Zhao Changhe leaves Langya, have them make their move.”

“Yes.”

Meanwhile, Wang Zhaoling escorted Xia Chichi out. Before they could walk far, Xia Chichi asked, “Is Zhao Changhe alright?”

Wang Zhaoling checked the time, “He should be about done by now. Miss Xia, do you want to see him? How long has it been since you parted?”

Xia Chichi pretended not to care. “I’m just asking.”

Wang Zhaoling did not know how to react, “Then come with me.”

A hint of regret flashed in his eyes.

While he truly did have no interest in Cui Yuanyang, he did feel somewhat attracted to Xia Chichi.

During the martial arts competition, at the moment when her breathtaking beauty underneath her mask was revealed, not only Wang Zhaoling, but many others as well were stunned by her beauty. Wang Zhaoling dared to say that Xia Chichi would definitely have many suitors after this.

Unfortunately, there were too many things that he had to consider. His birthdays were not simply birthdays, and the martial arts meet that he organized was not simply a martial arts meet. Even something like admiration or attraction toward a girl was not something that he could just express.

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Inside the ice cave, Zhao Changhe did not kiss Cui Yuanyang for long before he pulled away.

Just a short embrace and a kiss were enough. After all, this was still enemy territory. How could he be in the mood for anything else while being in such a place?

Cui Yuanyang bit her lower lip, feeling a little disappointed. In her eyes, the Wang Clan was not really enemy territory, and she had come here to discuss her brother's wedding. This dark and secluded place, with just the two of them, actually brought her a feeling of anticipation. But before she could even have enough of kissing him, he pulled away, actually wanting to leave already.

Just as Zhao Changhe was about to sit up straight and move Cui Yuanyang aside, the little rabbit suddenly wrapped her arms around his neck and whispered softly in his ear, "Big brother Zhao..."

"Huh?" Zhao Changhe said, "This is the Wang Clan's territory. We should leave first... Huh... Eh?"

She gently licked his ear.

Zhao Changhe's whole body shivered, and he was utterly dumbfounded.

Seeing how intense his reaction was, Cui Yuanyang found herself amused and nibbled on his ear.

Zhao Changhe took a deep breath. "Are you... are you looking for trouble, little brat?"

Cui Yuanyang blinked her eyes innocently.

In the next moment, her timid big brother Zhao suddenly turned into a fierce tiger, wrapping her up in his arms, and fiercely taking her lips.

He was much rougher this time. Previously, he had been gentle and kissed her with closed lips, but this time, he went straight through, prying the little rabbit's mouth open.

Cui Yuanyang's mind exploded, and she once again experienced the dizzying sensation she felt before. She felt even more suffocated and dazed than back then. The surge of heat from within seemed to burn the coldness of the icy cave away.

He did not stop there. He did not hesitate to explore other areas of the little rabbit that he had not tested before.

This little rabbit has really grown up quite a bit...

Zhao Changhe never thought that Yangyang would be the one whom he made the most progress with besides Chichi.

The allure hidden beneath her cute appearance made one forget her age completely.

She actually was not that young, in fact. In this world, many girls her age would have been married already, and many of them would even have a child or two.

“Big brother Zhao, Zhao... Mmf...” Cui Yuanyang finally began to push him away in a bit of panic. He’s not going to take me in a place like this, would he? I’m not ready yet...

Zhao Changhe, panting heavily, backed away slightly. “You little troublemaker, don’t you know that there are some areas you shouldn’t tease like that?”

“I, I’ve never been licked like that by anyone as fierce as you...”

Zhao Changhe almost exploded. “What?! Someone has licked you like that? Who?”

Cui Yuanyang paused for a moment, then suddenly burst into giggles.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door from outside. “Brother Zhao, are you done?”

Zhao Changhe shouted loudly, “Just a moment!”

Seeing how urgently he reacted, Cui Yuanyang hugged him again with a mischievous smile, “It’s big sis Chichi...”

Zhao Changhe immediately softened, feeling drained. “You little...”

Bang!

The door was kicked open, and Xia Chichi stormed in angrily, “Just a moment? What do you mean by that?!”

The two quickly separated, Cui Yuanyang lowered her head to straighten her messy clothes. Xia Chichi was furious and lunged forward. “I knew it! You’re dead!”

The ice cave shook as the sounds of their battle echoed.

After a moment, Zhao Changhe fled out of the door with his head in his arms. Wang Zhaoling stood far away with his hands tucked in his sleeves, watching him from a distance. He said coolly, “Don’t you need to mediate the fight inside?”

Zhao Changhe felt that Wang Zhaoling, who had always been quite classy, was being unfriendly toward him for the first time... Am I just being too sensitive?

He did not dwell on it too much, feeling embarrassed. “I tried, but Yangyang just ended up hitting me too.”

Wang Zhaoling: “...”

“Well then...” Zhao Changhe changed the subject, “Umm, according to my analysis, this Profound Ice Marine Clay isn’t actually for expanding one’s meridians, but for healing the hidden ailments in one’s body.”

Wang Zhaoling was startled. He nodded and said, “No wonder... Since the substance has always been used by those with congenital deficiencies, they would naturally have unhealthy meridians, so we ended up assuming that it was to be used for expanding meridians, but it seems that its uses are more extensive than just that.”

Zhao Changhe took the opportunity to ask, “Are there specific locations where you search for this substance? Or do you just search for it aimlessly?”

“There is a certain area where we have found greater success. We have islands in the sea where we mine some minerals and search for this substance at the same time,” Wang Zhaoling said. “Do you intend to go and search for some yourself?”

Zhao Changhe asked, “Can I?”

Wang Zhaoling pondered for a while before shaking his head and saying, “I’m sorry, but since you aren’t going to cooperate with us, you are an outsider. It would not be suitable for you to visit our mining sites.”

“Then forget it.”

As they were talking, Xia Chichi strode out of the room, defeated rabbit in hand. She gnashed her teeth and said, “The young lady of the Cui Clan has been kidnapped by our Four Idols Cult! If someone surnamed Zhao has the guts, then come and rescue her!”

After saying that, she leaped over the wall and disappeared into the distance in the blink of an eye.

Chapter 213: The Renewed Rabbit

Zhao Changhe chased after her, but before he could get two streets from the Wang Residence, a flash of red appeared before him, accompanied by a fragrant breeze.

Vermillion Bird was blocking his path.

“...The Four Idols Cult isn’t actually kidnapping Yangyang, right?”

Vermillion Bird said calmly, "Hold out your hand and let me check if there are any sequelae from your contact with the marine clay."

Zhao Changhe was stunned.

Seeing his dumb expression, Vermillion Bird impatiently reached out and directly pointed her finger at the point between his eyebrows.

After a moment, she withdrew her finger with some surprise. "Your meridians seem to have truly improved, and it appears that some of your hidden injuries have been alleviated... It looks like it was greatly beneficial to your situation."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Are you really here to verify whether I've been cheated?

Vermillion Bird pondered for a moment and said, "By refusing to cooperate with the Wang Clan in their martial arts competition, you've earned their ill will. However, they do not seem to care that you used their treasure, suggesting that they may already see you as a dead person. Being in Langya actually keeps you safe, as they would not dare to act so blatantly here. It will only be after you leave that you will have to be extra cautious. It's best to set up some traps and conceal your movements."

Zhao Changhe's expression became increasingly strange, and it took him a while to respond. "I understand. Thank you for your concern, Venerable."

Vermillion Bird said coldly, "Who said I'm concerned about you? Until your situation is clear, your life belongs to my Four Idols Cult. If it's proven that certain speculations are wrong, I will personally kill you."

Zhao Changhe nodded like a chicken. "Yes, yes."

“What’s with your attitude?”

“Nothing, nothing. It’s just that my future wife was abducted by your cult’s saintess, and I need to go rescue her.”

Vermillion Bird said, “Chichi acted rashly in the martial arts competition and revealed her true face in front of others. Although there have been no actual consequences to this, her identity cannot really be hidden anymore. You should know that her actions were driven by her emotions and were highly irrational. It can be said that regardless of any of the cult’s restrictions, relationships like yours that are driven by passion are detrimental to cultivation and decision-making.”

“...But I thought Chichi was really cool, just like when I first met her.”

Vermillion Bird ignored his comment and continued, “I will have her reflect on her actions, and you should reflect on yours too. Both of you have grand ambitions, so you should not indulge in such trivial matters. This is well-intentioned advice.”

Zhao Changhe was silent for a moment, then bowed and said, “Thank you for your kind intentions, Venerable.”

“From your tone, it sounds like you know you’re wrong but you would do the same thing given the opportunity.”

“I just feel that since your esteemed cult honors the four idols, why avoid the principles of the two polarities? Following the will of heaven and accommodating the people is the embodiment of the four idols.”

Vermillion Bird chuckled dryly. “You should save those words for when you’re truly qualified to discuss the purpose of the Four Idols Cult with me. The way you are now, your arguments are nothing but a joke.”

Zhao Changhe fell silent.

Vermillion Bird floated away. “You have half an hour to bid farewell. Chichi has other important matters to attend to. Her cultivation is much more important than being entangled in such trivial matters.”

Zhao Changhe watched as her graceful figure departed and scratched his head.

Vermillion Bird still maintained her stubborn attitude, but this time Zhao Changhe felt that her concern for Chichi was more like that of a senior who cared about her protégée rather than just due to the constraints set by the cult.

She even showed a hint of concern for him.

Suddenly, the terrifying image that he had of Vermillion Bird in his mind changed, and for some reason, he started seeing her as a caring guardian of the bride’s family....

He found it particularly puzzling.

At the end of the day, Zhao Changhe also knew that Vermillion Bird’s caring attitude toward Chichi was genuine, while her attitude toward him was purely due to the peculiar incident with his star chart. If she were to find out that he had nothing to do with the Four Idols Cult, then forget about helping him, she might turn even more ruthless than the Wang Clan toward him.

But what exactly had happened back then? He did not know either... If the Heavenly Tome could even analyze the changes in his physique and the ultimate goal of that lump of ice cream, why could it not analyze that cultivation technique?

His head hurt.

The headquarters of the Four Idols Cult in Langya was easy to find. Vermillion Bird and Xia Chichi were the only two people there.

Zhao Changhe traversed the rooftops and walls nearby, passing by one lit-up room after the other. He soon found Xia Chichi's room. As he glanced inside, he was dumbfounded.

Inside, Cui Yuanyang was bound to a chair, writhing and struggling. Her movements highlighted her modest curves in an exquisite manner due to the rope that bound her to the chair. She suddenly became even more alluring as a result.

Her mouth was not sealed, and she was cursing, "You always only bully me! If you're so tough, then why don't you go and fight Tang Wanzhuang! Being at the seventh layer of the Profound Gate isn't that impressive! Let me practice for a few more months and I'll beat you up! Wuuuu..."

Xia Chichi crossed her arms and said, "I've never even seen Tang Wanzhuang, what does she have to do with me? But you, do you know that I watched him escort you home back then?"

Cui Yuanyang shut her mouth.

"To be honest, I can't blame him for finding someone else afterward. After all, I told him to go find someone else myself."

"What??"

"But you!" Xia Chichi grabbed Cui Yuanyang's collar. "Are you, the young lady of the Cui Clan, trying to lose all your dignity?"

Cui Yuanyang's lips twitched and she actually felt like laughing.

It's really fun to be around this big sis.

Actually, they had already argued in the carriage previously, and now she was just looking for another subject to argue with her about. She was clearly just triggered by jealousy over what had happened back in the Wang Clan.

But wasn't what I did something you taught me yourself? Why does she suddenly feel a bit pitiful...

No, wait... She's the White Tiger Saintess, a prominent figure among the younger generation. She wouldn't do something as trivial as tying someone up for being jealous and just to give them a lesson. There must be a deeper purpose behind it.

Just as he was about to formulate a question, there was a faint knock on the window. Xia Chichi immediately let go of Cui Yuanyang's collar and straightened her clothes. "Come in."

Zhao Changhe slipped in through the window and said helplessly, "Why did you have to tie her up..."

Xia Chichi asked in surprise, "Why did you come so late? I was worried that I'd run out of things to talk about with this little brat."

Cui Yuanyang: "..."

Zhao Changhe said helplessly, "I was stopped by Venerable Vermillion Bird."

Xia Chichi became nervous. "Did she give you a hard time?"

“No, she was actually strangely nice.... Actually, I feel that she genuinely cares about you.”
Zhao Changhe chattered on while sneakily trying to untie Cui Yuanyang.

“Stop!” Xia Chichi pulled him back abruptly.

Zhao Changhe was speechless. “What are you—mmmmf...”

Xia Chichi tiptoed, wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him passionately.

Cui Yuanyang’s mouth dropped open in shock.

So you tied me up here just to do this in front of me?! So that you could see how I would feel?!
I actually felt a bit sorry for you just now, but you’re just outright evil!

Cui Yuanyang struggled violently. “Witch! You shameless witch!”

“Umhf...” Zhao Changhe flailed his arms, feeling that it was indeed cruel to be doing this in such circumstances. Tragically, however, he simply did not have the ability to beat Chichi...

In less than a moment, Xia Chichi subdued him and threw him onto the bed. Even his acupoint manipulation technique was rendered useless before her.

Cui Yuanyang said, “You witch, if you actually dare, your venerable will beat you to death!”

Xia Chichi said leisurely, “I’m not really doing anything, little brat. Just watch closely and treat this as a lesson.”

Cui Yuanyang watched helplessly as Xia Chichi teased his ears while her hand reached down to find something.

Admittedly, the tigress was truly enchanting and alluring. Even as a woman watching from the side, her breath quickened. She did not know what she looked like back in the ice cave, but she imagined it was worse than this.

Refusing to admit defeat, she said angrily, "I'll do it ten thousand times after you leave, just to spite you!"

"As long as I can't see it, what's there to be angry about? See, you're the one who's angry now, aren't you?"

Cui Yuanyang almost felt like she was going to have a breakdown right then and there.

Xia Chichi was feeling smug, but she did not notice that Zhao Changhe, who had been enduring everything silently, had quietly unsealed his acupoints while she wasn't paying attention. He then countered with a swift two-finger technique to subdue her.

Xia Chichi was stunned. "I know I took account of your acupoint manipulation...."

Zhao Changhe's face was expressionless. "That was then, this is now."

Xia Chichi finally realized what was going on. "Your meridians have expanded... at least doubled!"

She had not exerted a lot of strength on his acupoints, as she knew that his meridians weren't particularly strong and too much force could damage them. It had flitted past her mind that he had just expanded his meridians. In the end, the first time it came to be of use was not to cultivate or trick an opponent but to get back at her.

“The tables have turned!” Zhao Changhe brushed his hand over her, sealing her acupoints while stripping her down.

The little tiger who had made a tactical error was tragically stripped bare.

Whether Zhao Changhe had forgotten or intentionally did not release Cui Yuanyang from her bindings. Oddly, however, she no longer seemed angry and even watched with great interest despite still being tied to a chair.

Whoever was in control made all the difference!

Look at this little witch being held up by her legs, hmph... She’s still only at the seventh layer of the Profound Gate, and she’s just the sixth hidden dragon, and yet she thinks she’s all that great? Hmph...

So this is how it’s supposed to be, huh?

The little girl felt like she was attending the most important demonstration class in her life.

“Do you still dare?”

“Uwaaahhh, I was wrong...”

Hearing Xia Chichi’s sobbing voice, which rather than turning furious from having the tables turned on her became even more alluring, Cui Yuanyang pursed her lips. She’s truly a witch of a demonic cult!

After who knows how long, the commotion finally ceased.

“Have you been holding it in for a long time?”

“Mhm...” Zhao Changhe’s voice was extremely content.

“Hey, what are you doing? Why are you using that to wipe?”

Cui Yuanyang leaned over to have a look, only to see Zhao Changhe using a golden foil to wipe something...

“Oh, it’s nothing. I’ve always wanted to give it a touch-up, but unfortunately, there was no stock. Now that I finally have some, I can’t neglect it...”

Chapter 214: I Have My Saber and I Have Wine

The Heavenly Tome had a spirit. It could be like Dragon Bird, just having some spirituality but not actually alive. Or it could be a true living being, in which case Zhao Changhe was about eighty percent sure that the blind woman was the spirit. The threat of him being the first it killed after being unsealed sounded like a toothless bite.

Of course, Zhao Changhe was still holding back a lot of anger toward the blind woman who had inexplicably dragged him into this world. If he could not defeat her, could he not at least outsmart her from another angle?

If she really was the spirit of the Heavenly Tome, she probably had a very important purpose, and she could probably endure such provocations.

Furthermore, Zhao Changhe did not quite believe that the Heavenly Tome would start unsealing itself due to some humiliation it experienced... There were some things that were simply set to happen in the first place. If you, for example, don’t know certain concepts in

math, can you suddenly grasp them just because someone makes you feel embarrassed? Of course not. If that claim was merely an excuse made up by the blind woman, then perhaps the truth was that smearing the page did have some use.

Regardless of whether his speculation was correct or not, he had to try again.

If he was completely wrong, and an angry little girl jumped out of the Heavenly Tome after it was unsealed and stabbed him to death, then so be it.

Zhao Changhe nervously watched the golden foil. It remained calm and unresponsive, just like the first time he had smeared it in such a way.

He sighed and washed it again with water, then carefully placed it back into his chest pocket.

The two women watched him as if they were watching some performance art, utterly puzzled and perplexed.

“Ahem.” Zhao Changhe went to release Cui Yuanyang, and Cui Yuanyang, now freed, did not explode in anger as he initially expected. Instead, she just sat there with a flushed face, stretching her body that had fallen a bit numb from being bound to the chair for some time.

Just moments ago, she had watched everything with genuine curiosity without thinking too much about it, but now her face was burning with embarrassment. She felt that she had just witnessed something a little bit beyond her tolerance level.

Big brother Zhao is a baddie. He deliberately made me watch everything... After witnessing that, it's as if I've completely accepted my fate as being his...

Meanwhile, Zhao Changhe simply went back to the bed and embraced the little white tiger, whispering softly, “I feel like with Venerable Vermillion Bird's attitude, there aren't as many obstacles between us as before. There's still hope. I'll try my best...”

Xia Chichi chuckled and started to put on her clothes. Cui Yuanyang just realized that she did not even notice when Chichi's acupoints had been unsealed—had she willingly participated since the beginning?

Xia Chichi lazily remarked, "Don't underestimate the venerable's stubbornness when it comes to our doctrine. If she's being a bit nicer to you now, there is definitely a reason for it, and it's most likely superficial. Don't think that she's changed out of nowhere. I'm afraid that the person who might want to kill you the most in the end is her.... That is also why I've never dared to truly give myself to you. I am truly afraid of crossing her bottom line. Do you blame me?"

Zhao Changhe shook his head. "I can only blame myself for not being strong enough."

Xia Chichi smiled slightly and gently kissed him. "You're already very strong. You're especially impressive to me, because I've known you from the beginning. It's like I'm witnessing the rise of a miracle. Changhe, do you know..."

"Hm?"

„

"A man's strength is also a kind of aphrodisiac... If you were weak, it's possible that I would have already abandoned you. And even if I didn't, I would probably only care for you condescendingly, and I would never let you play with me like this. Do you think I'm shallow for this?"

Zhao Changhe shook his head. "Isn't that normal? If I was really that weak, let alone whether or not you would abandon me, I doubt I would even be able to face you myself."

Xia Chichi stroked his hair and whispered softly, "If you become strong enough, not only might the venerable's thoughts change, but even if you enjoy that sly little rabbit who's eavesdropping on us, her father would not say a word of protest."

Cui Yuanyang's jaw dropped.

“Aren't Tang Wanzhuang and Yue Hongling both looking at you expectantly while being in condescending positions? To be honest, in my eyes, they aren't even qualified... How dare they act so high and mighty?”

Zhao Changhe was speechless.

“If we're to talk about being expectant, only I, as your senior brother, can look at you expectantly. I look forward to the day when Tang Wanzhuang kowtows and prostrates herself in worship and Yue Hongling acts all submissive toward you. What a scene that will be, hehehe.”

As Xia Chichi spoke, she finally finished adjusting her attire. She gracefully got out of the bed, then casually pinched Cui Yuanyang's face. As Cui Yuanyang glared at her angrily, Xia Chichi turned around with a light smile. “The venerable just sent me a message. I must go now, but I'll be waiting for the day you boldly stride into the Four Idols Cult and openly ask for my hand in marriage.”

As soon as her words fell, she left through the window.

Clad in white, with a sword at her side, she walked away under the moonlight.

Where in the world did that flirtatious enchantress from earlier go? What's with her suddenly looking like a proud swordswoman?

Cui Yuanyang watched her leave blankly, feeling that this might be the big sister that she knew the best, yet also the least.

Not to mention Cui Yuanyang, even Zhao Changhe felt that he did not fully understand Xia Chichi.

After all, the experiences of their youth were far different from one another. He could not even distinguish which side of himself was the real one, let alone understand Chichi's true nature.

Right, doesn't this little rabbit also have different sides to her?

Noticing his gaze, Cui Yuanyang subconsciously shrank. She forced a smile and said, "I'm still young..."

Zhao Changhe said angrily, "Huh? Do you think I'm planning to do anything to you?"

"You aren't? You deliberately left me tied up so that I would watch everything..."

"Hmm, I was just giving you a lesson so that you won't be fooled in the future."

Cui Yuanyang turned red and spat out, "You're clearly enjoying being obscene."

Zhao Changhe pinched her cheeks. "I was never a good person to begin with. I warned you before, but you didn't listen. Now, even if you want to run, I won't let you."

Cui Yuanyang let him pinch her and stared at him steadily. After a while, she said, "Big brother Zhao..."

"Hm?"

“In fact, me going on this trip was pretty much my father intentionally arranging for us to meet. He does not want you to forget about me, and neither do I. So I took the initiative to...get close to you. Do you think I’m scheming?”

Zhao Changhe smirked. “You’re scheming? I think it’s your father who’s truly scheming with how he’s playing both sides. But considering that you’re from the Cui Clan, it’s understandable.”

Cui Yuanyang remarked, “Since the last time we met, you’ve been showing that you don’t like aristocratic families.”

“Mm-hm...”

“Does that include the Tang Clan?”

“Yup.”

Cui Yuanyang breathed a sigh of relief, then continued, “Actually, even if you don’t like them, you could have still lied to the Wang Clan and made peace with them. There are many benefits to doing so. Why refuse them so directly? You’re only putting yourself in danger that way.”

Zhao Changhe looked at her with some surprise and said with a smile, “Flattering the powerful, deceiving others, and ingratiating myself to the strong? That’s simply not who I am. Would you really like me if I was like that?”

Cui Yuanyang tilted her head and thought for a while before saying, “I don’t know, but as long as it’s you, I should be fine with it. Besides, if you were such a character, the first one you’d pander to would be my family. We’d be the first to benefit, so why not? There’s no way that the Wang Clan would stand to benefit first.”

Zhao Changhe chuckled helplessly.

“If I were in your position, not to even mention inheriting the throne in the future, it would be a very simple matter to seize some power and directly proclaim myself a king. But it seems like you don’t even consider that an option, huh?”

Zhao Changhe rubbed her small, round face. “I have my saber and I have wine. I have no need to become a king.”

Cui Yuanyang let him rub her face, her serious gaze gradually turning soft.

Xia Chichi said that a man’s strength was a kind of aphrodisiac.

But Cui Yuanyang felt that this wild and untamed nature was her aphrodisiac. It had been so since the day they met. It was completely opposite to the environment she grew up in, and it thus exuded a fatal attraction to her.

“I feel like running away from home again,” Cui Yuanyang slowly buried her head in his arms and muttered. “I won’t be able to stay out for long this time. I have to go back to negotiating my brother’s wedding with the Wang Clan. But it feels like I haven’t gotten to do anything yet. I’ve only just gotten to meet up with you again, and I still wander around the jianghu with you, go and see Mobei, as well as Jiangnan.”

Zhao Changhe rubbed her head gently, “Winds are rising to the north in Yanmen, while Maitreya is running rampant in Jiangnan. The world is already changing.”

Cui Yuanyang felt all her romantic ideas shattered. But she did not say anything more. She simply leaned against him, enjoying his company.

The world may have changed, but he hasn’t. That’s good enough for me.

“If you want to leave Langya, I can ask Uncle Lu Ya to help you set up some diversions for you. By the time you’re a thousand li away, the Wang Clan won’t even know where you are. Or you can go back with my convoy and take a detour through Qinghe. Nobody will be able to find you there,” Cui Yuanyang suggested, her eyes showing a hint of anticipation. It would be great if he could go back with her to Qinghe. They could have a lot of fun there.

“No need.” Zhao Changhe grinned. “I’ll stay here for a few more days. There are still some things I need to take care of.”

Chapter 215: Aftermath

Cui Yuanyang did not know what it was that Zhao Changhe was still planning on staying here for. Either way, after everything that happened, it was nearly dawn, and no matter how brave she was, she did not dare to be seen spending the night at the inn with a man. Taking advantage of the faint light of dawn, she hurried back to the Wang Clan’s guest house.

Meanwhile, Zhao Changhe did not even check out of the room. He leisurely stayed inside, studying the golden foil.

There was no further movement from the golden foil for the time being. Based on the experience he had from the last time it supposedly unsealed itself, he knew that he would have to wait until the next day to see if anything happened. At this time, Zhao Changhe was reviewing the replay of the match between himself and Situ Xiao that took place back at the banquet hall of the Wang Clan.

This was very important to him. It was the most crucial leverage for him to catch up with others’ years of accumulated understanding and insights of martial arts within a short period of time. No one else in the world possessed such unique advantages.

Situ Xiao’s practice mainly focused on external arts, or in fantasy terms, body tempering. According to rumors, their Divine Brilliance Sect had obtained a complete ancient inheritance, which corresponded to the recent information he acquired regarding a Dao Body.

From this perspective, the inheritance that the Divine Brilliance Sect possessed might not actually be complete. If it were complete, they might truly have been able to break through the limits of this world, and their sect master, Li Shentong, would not only be ranked fifth on the Ranking of Heaven. Of course, there was also the possibility that the inheritance was complete, yet they lacked some auxiliary treasures that prevented them from fully tempering their body.

Regardless of what exactly was the case, this material he had on Situ Xiao was worth studying.

Situ Xiao claimed that his palm art was not particularly fierce... and he was not lying. A careful review revealed that although he tempered his body, although he used a heavy sword, and although he emphasized explosive power, Situ Xiao's art was indeed not exactly fierce. It was more accurate to describe it as stable.

All of his techniques had a sense of stability, maintaining defensive positions and launching counterattacks in a timely manner. He would only unleash an explosive force right at the moment when he attacked as he aimed to defeat his enemy in one fell swoop.

If the Wang Clan's palm arts were like surging waves, Situ Xiao's style was like an immovable mountain.

What was interesting was that Situ Xiao also practiced the Drunken Fist. His stumbling and staggering postures, the immovable nature of his moves, and his casual and heroic temperament were all very intriguing.

His iron body was built upon using parts of his body to repeatedly strike hard objects, thereby strengthening it over time. In this manner, he was able to make those parts of his body so strong that he was not even fazed when he used his head to knock the gate wide open. Zhao Changhe seriously doubted whether ordinary swords and sabers would even be able to leave a mark on him. He could not help but wonder just how Situ Xiao's master, Li Shentong, who was ranked fifth on the Ranking of Heaven, would compare. He wondered if even Dragon Bird would have difficulty leaving a mark on such a person.

This seemed like the prerequisite to standing against an entire army on one's own.

Zhao Changhe contemplated Situ Xiao's techniques. He first studied the essence of stability, then tried imitating the drunken movements, where his lower body would remain stable, while his upper body swayed like a willow, allowing him to evade attacks.

These were the aspects lacking in Zhao Changhe's martial arts, and through continuous battles and reviews, he sought to improve himself and fill in the gaps.

In fact, even without the assistance of the Heavenly Tome, Zhao Changhe could truly be considered a genius. It was just that its assistance further sped up and improved his progress.

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While plans and schemes took up the majority of the Wang Clan's focus during the night, Zhao Changhe enjoyed the company of those dear to him, while Situ Xiao and the rest simply enjoyed each others' company.

Most of them were peers with similar talents and understanding of martial arts. Even if there were differences in their practices, this only made them more suitable to act as each other's sparring partners. It was rare for all of them to gather together in such a manner where they could drink and discuss martial arts with one another. For them, being granted such a great opportunity was exhilarating.

In the eyes of the outside world, this could be considered an event worthy of being recorded in the annals of martial arts history. In fact, the glory of this night would surely be widely spread, allowing people to truly take note of the names that had only briefly flashed above their heads in the Tome of Troubled Times and better understand just how powerful and excellent each of them was.

Wang Zhaoling was elegant and calm, his Heaven-Suppressing Sea Palm fierce and unmatched.

Xia Chichi was beautiful but aloof, just like her Iceheart, and her power was outstanding.

Cui Yuanyang was cute and adorable, yet her Qinghe Purple Qi was vast and majestic.

And that heavy sword that moved across the hall, colliding with a broad saber, shattering political schemes using the spirit of martial arts, leading to a night of martial fervor, laughter, and drinking...

No one knew where Zhao Changhe went afterward, but it was clear that he explicitly refused to participate in the martial arts competition arranged by the Wang Clan. Many sighed inwardly, feeling that the martial arts gathering was missing a special touch without him.

In any case, the events of the night spread far and wide, becoming a topic of discussion in the jianghu for a long time after.

The Wang Clan had also succeeded in their goals.

Not only did they form a secret agreement with the Four Idols Cult, but their previous arrogance was also mostly forgotten by many. Instead, they were praised for organizing such a grand event for the world of martial arts.

The impression of the Wang Clan as the leader of the martial arts community unknowingly took root in many people's hearts, while they also managed to convey two messages.

First, the imperial court was losing importance.

Second, the Wang Clan—the family of the empress, who was most familiar with Xia Longyuan's situation—daring to do such a thing essentially implied that Xia Longyuan's status might be more serious than initially thought.

Not only did the momentum for the Wang Clan's separatist movement begin to gather, but their actions also spurred the schemes of other ambitious individuals, causing the world to only become more chaotic.

It was a game where everyone, from the organizers to the participants to the spectators were delighted. The only casualty was the imperial court, with their damaged prestige.

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A thousand li away in Jinling.

Tang Wanzhuang stood on the city wall, looking at Maitreya's camp from afar, her eyes as calm as water.

"Bureau chief..." A subordinate from the Demon Suppression Bureau hurriedly came to report. "We've received news by carrier pigeon that the Langya Martial Arts Conference has concluded."

"Oh? Who emerged victorious?"

"It was said that Situ Xiao and Zhao Changhe influenced the direction of the event, somehow turning it into a friendly exchange without rankings. The hidden dragons present all enjoyed themselves, and they were all able to properly display their various styles of martial arts," the subordinate reported. "Those present at the event said that this was the most enjoyable martial arts gathering in recent years."

Tang Wanzhuang revealed a hint of a smile for the first time in nearly a month, softly repeating, "Situ Xiao... Zhao Changhe..."

The subordinate was stunned for a moment. He scratched his head in confusion, then continued with the report, "Since there were no longer any rankings, the momentum that the Wang Clan

intended to build up was somewhat diminished. After all, imposing rankings and giving out prizes would truly instill a sense of submission within the hidden dragons... The hidden dragons are unruly, and the situation turned out as expected. What was surprising was that Zhao Changhe did not participate in the martial arts competition, only enjoying a match between himself and Situ Xiao. He displayed extreme resistance to the plans of the Wang Clan.”

Tang Wanzhuang smiled and said, “It’s not that most hidden dragons are unruly... There are truly only a few who are unruly and are bold enough to act out, such as Zhao Changhe.”

“Hm, perhaps,” the subordinate said. “But the Wang Clan has basically achieved what they intended. They have already begun appointing and dismissing officials on their own. Magistrate Ma Zhang was dismissed under some pretext... Regardless of whether the pretext is true or false, how can they have the authority to appoint and dismiss officials? This is clearly an act of rebellion!”

Tang Wanzhuang’s smile faded as she sighed softly. “We should have known from the moment they began inviting people to the birthday banquet.”

“What do we do now?”

“What’s the point of asking me? I don’t have the authority to mobilize troops,” Tang Wanzhuang said calmly. “Neither Maitreya nor I are military leaders. We won’t be able to keep this stalemate going indefinitely. He will return to their main altar in a few days to oversee other matters, while I will return to the capital to address other issues as well.”

Her voice trailed off into a murmur, almost as if she was speaking to herself, “I should go and see His Majesty again... Just what on earth is he thinking...”

“No...” The subordinate hesitated. “If the Wang Clan is merely trying to seize some power, then it’s tolerable for the time being. But what if they actually raise an army and march south to work together with the Maitreya Cult...”

“Everyone has their own hidden agendas. How can they so easily form alliances? The Wang Clan only began scheming after the uprising of the Maitreya Cult. There has not been any communication between the two sides before. If they were to reach such an agreement, there would first have to be envoys going back and forth. The fact that the saintess of the Four Idols Cult attended their event suggests that she might be one such envoy, so it’s actually likely that the Wang Clan is aiming for an agreement with them rather than the Maitreya Cult.”

The subordinate thought for a while, then nodded. “Indeed. I was wondering why the Four Idols Cult would be willing to have one of theirs attend such an event...”

Tang Wanzhuang said calmly, “The Four Idols Cult and the Maitreya Cult are not on good terms. Once the Wang Clan and Four Idols Cult ally, common sense dictates that they would not even consider the Maitreya Cult. After all, the natures of the Four Idols Cult and the Maitreya Cult are incompatible, while the Wang Clan likely does not hold the Maitreya Cult in high regard.”

“Zhao Changhe’s unexpected victory over Fa Sheng disrupted the Maitreya Cult’s plan. With their plans having been disrupted, isn’t it possible for them to send envoys north to contact the Wang Clan for assistance? It is still possible for them to make some extravagant promises.”

Tang Wanzhuang gazed toward the north, her eyes a bit melancholic. After a long pause, she said, “They should have already set off.”

“Then should we intercept them?”

“It would be pointless. How are we supposed to look for a random passerby?” Tang Wanzhuang suddenly smiled. “Also, I don’t think that there is any need for us to intervene. The envoys of the Maitreya Cult are going to have it rough once more....”