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Chapter 291: Ying Five

Originally, Zhao Changhe thought that a high-ranking figure like Ying Five would be elusive and, should he appear, would exude a cold and imposing aura. Unexpectedly, Ying Five not only came to visit him in person, but even spoke in a cheerful tone with him, showing no airs at all.

Zhao Changhe instantly took a liking to him. “I would not dare trouble the fifth lord. Please come in.”

The door opened, and a kind-looking, smiling middle-aged man stepped in. He even bowed first before saying, “Young Master Zhao, in this battle at Yanmen, your might shook the world. Such a young and outstanding talent brings joy at first sight. If only people like Sha Seven could learn to be even just half of you!”

Zhao Changhe blinked. The demeanor of the other party came off to him like that of a friendly businessman, smiling and offering high praise on their first meeting.

Yin Five was a bit chubby but had a handsome face, which made him seem rather cute and endearing.

Is this really the person ranked eighth on the Ranking of Heaven? Could this just be Sha Seven in disguise?

Well... We at least have the same view on Sha Seven. Great minds do think alike.

Ying Five, infected by Zhao Changhe’s blinking, also blinked and then smiled. “Young Master Zhao, do you think I appear like a businessman?”

“Erm...”

“Well, why wouldn’t you think I could be one?”

Zhao Changhe scratched his head. “Because... I thought you would be more mysterious? Also, being on the Ranking of Heaven makes you seem quite intimidating.”

Ying Five casually sat in the chair Cui Wenjing had just vacated. He leaned back comfortably and said leisurely, “But no matter how mysterious a businessman is, he’s still a businessman. We just deal in different trades than others... Putting on a stern face isn’t exactly good for business.”

Zhao Changhe smiled and said. “That makes sense.”

No wonder everyone from Sha Seven to Lady Three, including Jin Nine, the head of the gambling house in the capital, did not put on stern faces. It seemed that this approach came from the top, subverting his own understanding of intelligence organizations.

Right, his business really does span nations. He even collaborates with the temple to look for secret realms.

Thinking of this, Zhao Changhe knocked his head. “Fifth lord, you’re here for the secret realm in Rocky Mountain, right? The entrance is actually at—”

Ying Five waved his hand. “No rush, I’m just here to visit you. I did not come here to demand anything from you. That would be rather unbecoming, wouldn’t it?”

“Uh... My injury is really nothing serious. I just need a few days of rest.” Zhao Changhe did not take the polite words at face value and quickly reported the formation halfway up the mountain.

After all, Yin Five mentioned having some good medicine different from the Cui Clan's, and he claimed to be selling it for just one coin. But so far, he had not taken anything out. Just because he was smiling did not mean that he was easygoing. He clearly was not going to sell anything without seeing a down payment first.

“Big Dipper Formation, Black Tortoise Stone...” Ying Five listened to the location described by Zhao Changhe and was very satisfied. The story seemed perfectly credible. He stared at the ceiling for a long time, then suddenly chuckled. “So something belonging to the Four Idols Cult was inside, no wonder Lady Three was so concerned and invested in it.”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

It seemed that Ying Five was well aware that Lady Three was a member of the Four Idols Cult.

It appeared that as their goals might not necessarily conflict, they simply turned a blind eye to each other.

Nobody on the Ranking of Heaven was easy to deal with. Thinking they were easy to fool was a fatal mistake. Lady Three probably knew this well, given her and Vermillion Bird's cautious natures. They knew to treat Ying Five with caution, maintaining a tacit understanding.

Ying Five suddenly said, “Earlier, I mentioned our business is quite unique... Perhaps you don't know, but we're actually quite similar.”

“Huh?”

Brother, you look like a chubby shopkeeper. How are you anything like me? Are you referring to our connections to the Four Idols Cult?

But then Ying Five continued leisurely. “A long time ago, a few brothers and I started the business from scratch without any capital. Does that not align with your mountain bandit days? We’re both like bandits, aren’t we?”

Zhao Changhe was speechless.

“Later on, as we fought for secret realms and pursued martial arts, we gradually shifted from treasure hunting to seeking ancient secrets, with our footprints all over the north and south. Isn’t that similar to the path you’re on now?”

Zhao Changhe secretly thought that this was not entirely accurate. It was just that the ultimate pursuit of martial arts led to similar goals. Their indifferent attitude toward worldly affairs actually resembled Xia Longyuan’s, if anything.

Ying Five continued, “Perhaps you think we are neutral, selling information to whoever has money. This is a bit of a misunderstanding. Our bases in Saibei, including Lady Three’s, have never sold military intelligence about Great Xia to the barbarians, let alone military supplies. On the contrary, we’ve supported Great Xia the entire time. You yourself have benefited from this, so you should understand.”

This actually surprised Zhao Changhe. “Fifth lord, don’t tell me that you actually have a sense of belonging to Great Xia?”

Ying Five laughed. “What do you mean by belonging... Considering Xia Longyuan’s actions, does he deserve our loyalty?”

At this point, his eyes finally showed a hint of disdain. Criticizing the number one in the world openly, especially when he could be the father of the person he was speaking to... This revealed the inherent arrogance of someone who had risen to the Ranking of Heaven from a background that put him on the same level as a mountain bandit.

But he quickly restrained himself and began smiling again. “When the ruler views the people as grass, the people view the ruler as an enemy. That’s all there is to it. Belonging? What an irritating word. Don’t mention it again.”

Zhao Changhe was speechless for a moment, and then asked, “Then what is your stance?”

“Humans are human because we have emotions.” Ying Five's expression softened as he spoke. “We brothers started from nothing, so we will always be brothers. Just like Lady Three is the sworn sister of her late brother. Whatever she chooses to believe in is her business. I don’t mind. If she wants to leave, we part on good terms.”

Zhao Changhe’s expression changed slightly.

Is this really someone on the Ranking of Heaven? I have never met anyone on the Ranking of Heaven who seemed so human, not even Old Cui, who prioritizes his family’s interests above all else, and he’s quite indifferent in other aspects.

On the other hand, Ying Five claims to be a businessman, the kind of person who prioritizes profits over loyalty, yet his values are so different from that...

Zhao Changhe almost doubted himself. Could this all just be sweet talk?

But he could not see why an individual on the Ranking of Heaven would need to perform such an emotional act in front of him.

“We were born on this land, so naturally, we would be averse to helping outsiders. Humans are emotional beings, it’s a simple as that.” Ying Five leaned back in his chair comfortably. “In the internal struggles among the people of Great Xia, I remain a neutral observer. Intelligence is sold to the highest bidder. It matters not to me whether they are the emperor or a rebel. You seem to think I resemble Xia Longyuan; I think it would be more accurate to say I resemble Bo[1]. The shamans of the temple have a similar attitude toward the tribes of the Grasslands.”

Bo was the shorthand for Bo'e, which was much more awkward to say casually. This was the title for the great shaman, not a name. In the language of the Grasslands, the profession was called Bo. Ordinary shamans were also respectfully called Bo, but there was only one that was the Bo'e.

Second on the Ranking of Heaven, Great Shaman Bo'e.

In this sense, they did bear some resemblance, although they were essentially still different.

“Alright, enough small talk.” Ying Five smiled. “I feel that you find it incomprehensible why I would come here to say all this... But remember, we are businessmen. Saying these things is merely to establish a baseline of understanding for future cooperation. Once you discard your preconceived notions about those on the Ranking of Heaven, this just becomes a normal business deal.”

Zhao Changhe finally snapped out of his daze. “Do you mean to say that you’ve got a big deal for me?”

“Exactly,” Ying Five said with a smile. “Speaking of intelligence organizations, we do not really count as one. It is just that our pursuit of secret realms requires a lot of information collection, and during this process, we accumulate a lot of information unrelated to secret realms but still valuable. We exchange this information for other needed information or monetary resources, which we then use to buy information about secret realms, creating a positive cycle that has led to our current state. But at our core, we are still focused on secret realms.”

Zhao Changhe nodded and said, “I more or less understand that.”

This also explained why Ying Five and those of his organization did not come across as stern or sinister like other intelligence agents. It was because they were fundamentally not intelligence operatives.

“So our real business is information about secret realms, or even buying the secret realms themselves,” said Ying Five. “Young Master Zhao, from Ancient Sword Lake to Huangsha Market, you have shown interest in treasures from secret realms but not in the ownership of the realms themselves. We are the opposite: we can forgo the treasures or maybe just require a specific item or another. What we truly want are the secret realms themselves.”

Zhao Changhe understood. “So then you believe that we can establish a long-term cooperation.”

Ying Five smiled and said, “Isn’t it a match made in heaven?”

Zhao Changhe was curious, “But I’m just one person, how many secret realms can I possibly find? A vast organization such as yours really sees value in cooperating with me?”

“Everyone has his or her own fate and affinity. Some people have a special affinity for women, some for wealth... I see that you have a particular affinity for secret realms. If I’m not mistaken, you also found a secret realm in Beimang, right? The number of secret realms you’ve encountered just in the past year may be more than most people see in a lifetime. Not cooperating with you would be foolish, don’t you think?”

Actually, Zhao Changhe felt that he had a special affinity for women. But as he thought about it, he realized that he indeed seemed to have some fate with this world’s secret realms.

Or rather... a penchant for ancient secrets and mysteries.

It was normal, considering his transmigration to this world was related to this.

From this perspective, his pursuit of ancient secrets made it sensible to establish a long-term cooperation with Ying Five. In fact, what he was after was primarily not the treasures in general but specific items and the ancient knowledge within these secret realms. As for the secret realm itself, what would he even do with it?

Thinking of this, he could not help but ask, “What do you intend to do with these spaces? Do you mind telling me?”

Ying Five said leisurely, “In your opinion, what is the biggest difference between now and ancient times?”

Zhao Changhe instinctively thought of the severed lineages leading to disconnected heritages. For most people, finding secret realms was about inheriting and succeeding those lineages. But then he connected it to the topic at hand, and his heart skipped a beat as he thought of something. “Do you mean to say that the biggest difference between now and then is that the current world is incomplete?”

Ying Five clapped his hands, clearly pleased. “Exactly! In fact, even ‘incomplete’ is an understatement of the current state of the world. According to my estimates, the world is at most 60% complete. Many spaces are unknown, and there might even be large tribes inhabiting these missing or lost spaces. If we could have those spaces rejoin the world and have the world return to 80% or even 90% completion, don’t you think the path of ancient gods and demons might be revealed?”

Chapter 292: Busy City

Zhao Changhe wondered how Ying Five would “obtain” these spaces.

He couldn’t just station people in them, right? And even if they do “obtain” them, how are they going to reconnect them or rejoin them with the world? It’s not like they can just piece the spaces together like building blocks. Well... maybe they have their unique methods, and I’m guessing he won’t divulge them.

Looking at the reasons for the cooperation alone, it really did seem like there was no problem with going through with it. Zhao Changhe said, “What exactly are we going to be cooperating on? Will I have to share the information I obtain about secret realms? If I provide you with information, does that mean I can use your intelligence freely?”

“As long as it’s intelligence related to secret realms, we are happy to share all of it with you. Moreover, if you’re interested, you may even visit the secret realms we’ve previously acquired.”

Zhao Changhe clapped his hands and said, “Fifth lord, you’re really straightforward.”

Ying Five chuckled. “But I see that you don’t seem that interested in merely visiting. Any treasures or secret manuals we found have long been taken away from the secret realms, so they are now mere empty spaces, and you don’t really seem to see any value in them in such a state. Unfortunately, Young Master Zhao, the treasures we acquired in the past aren’t up for grabs.”

“Those are things you found, so I naturally would not have the audacity to ask for them. As for the spaces themselves, there might indeed come a time when I will have to trouble you to let me visit them.” Zhao Changhe was in a good mood and asked, “You’ve explored so many places, so you should know about ancient secrets better than anyone else, right? Could you share some of that knowledge?”

“Those secrets are indeed our unique advantage over other forces. Whether we share them with you depends on how our relationship develops in the future.” Ying Five smiled brightly. “If we become true friends, everything is negotiable. Even if there’s a conflict over specific treasures, we can discuss it. So, sharing some secrets would be no issue.”

Naturally, despite Ying Five’s cheerful demeanor, their cooperation was still in its early stages, and there was not enough trust between them to share anything of consequence. Zhao Changhe found this quite reasonable and agreed readily. “A gentleman’s word is his bond. I am in favor of this cooperation.”

Ying Five’s smile grew even wider, his eyes almost squinting shut at this point. Suddenly, he brought out a blood-colored token and handed it to Zhao Changhe. “Here, a small token of our friendship.”

As the token was taken out, the room was instantly filled with vicious blood qi. The vicious qi in Zhao Changhe’s body was influenced by this as well, and his eyes nearly turned red.

He immediately suppressed the surging qi and took a deep breath. “Is this what you were referring to earlier?”

“Exactly. The Cui Clan, being nobles, would not have such bloodthirsty and malevolent items, but we businessmen deal in everything,” said Ying Five leisurely. “Cui Wenjing can help you with the recovery of your injuries. He can also provide you with some guidance on reaching the ninth layer of the Profound Gate and perhaps even help you get a glimpse of the Profound Mysteries. However, he can’t provide you with the vicious blood qi you need for your Vicious Blood Art. Are you prepared for the vast energy and vicious blood qi you require to break through from the eighth layer to the ninth?”

Zhao Changhe looked down at the blood-colored token. Its aura was similar to the bead he had obtained from Maitreya, but this token was clearly of a higher grade and had much more concentrated vicious qi.

If the bead that Maitreya had was just a peripheral part of the Blood God Array Plate, then this token was likely a core component.

This item was indeed crucial for him.

Only someone like Ying Five, who treated various secret realms as his living rooms, could casually bring out such an item. Not even Xia Longyuan would have as wide an array of peculiar items as him, let alone Cui Wenjing.

He raised his head and glanced at Ying Five, who was still smiling at him. Ying Five said, “What do you think?”

Zhao Changhe unceremoniously pocketed the token. “This item is indeed very useful to me, so I won’t be polite with you.”

Ying Five laughed and stood up to leave. “I’ll make sure that in the future, whenever Young Master Zhao visits our establishments, information will be shared with you directly without you having to play any guessing games. Well, let’s leave it at that for now. I’m looking forward to the results of our cooperation. Farewell for now.”

“Hey, wait a minute.” Zhao Changhe called out and stopped him. “Have you ever heard of something called the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng?”

Ying Five grew interested. “I’ve indeed heard of it. However, I have never seen it. It’s said to be an item of the ancient era that does not exist anymore in this era. If you need it, you’ll have to search in some secret realms. Doesn’t that fit perfectly with our cooperation? I didn’t know where to start, but now we have a perfect direction for you to explore.”

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, “Alright. It seems that there will be many times when I’ll need to trouble you in the future.”

Ying Five waved his hand and left leisurely.

Once he had gone some distance from the guest courtyard, Sha Seven, who should have been in Sword Lake City, appeared at his side. “Fifth lord, this cooperation seems like a loss for us. No matter how lucky he is with finding secret realms, how many can he possibly find? We should at least set a benchmark, like having him find a certain number each year, right?”

Ying Five was speechless. “Do you think that finding secret realms is comparable to giving you guys a target for gambling house profits?”

“Well, I just feel like we’re losing out...”

“In business, besides buying and selling, there’s something called investment. Have you heard of it?”

“What’s that?”

“It’s the kind of thing that’s easiest for an emperor who unifies the world to do. But Xia Longyuan not only does not look for these secret spaces, he even actually prefers them to remain fragmented and have everyone fight over them. This is why he obstructs us rather than aligning with our goals. But can’t we place our bets on the next emperor?”

Sha Seven tilted his head in confusion.

“I’m not looking at his current ability, but rather what he can achieve in the future. If we wait until he has already established himself before striking a deal with him, we might have to sacrifice too much to establish cooperation with him, or he might not work together with us at all, as he would have no reason to.” Ying Five said and glanced beyond the corridor where Huangfu Yongxian was approaching. “Look at who’s coming.”

Sha Seven turned around and took a glance. “This is Huangfu Yongxian’s territory, so of course he’d come to see his guests. Oh, by the way, fifth lord, I’ve heard that you used to fancy Vermillion Bird. Have you ever thought that his daughter might be her?”

Ying Five took a deep breath, and veins popped out of his head. “Is that something I asked you to think about?”

Sha Seven replied, “Is it not? Speaking of which, you’re almost a full generation older than Vermillion Bird. Does it matter who she is anymore? She wouldn’t be interested in you with how much older and fatter you are...”

“...” Ying Five was silent for a moment. “How has your sword training been going?”

“Not quite hitting the mark...”

“Then switch to a dagger, it might suit you better than the sword.”

“Why? I’ve been practicing with a sword for so long.”

“Because if you use the dagger, then you can call yourself Sha Dagger[1].” Ying Five walked away. “Find an excuse by yourself for the Snow-Listening Pavilion. Our reputation isn’t something to be played with. If this happens again, it won’t just be a demotion but a beheading!”

Sha Seven thought silently for a moment, realizing that whether he was called Sha Dagger or not, it was best for him to avoid getting axed.[2]

Meanwhile, Huangfu Yongxian knocked on Zhao Changhe’s door. “Young Master Zhao, are you resting? I apologize for coming late. I had to handle a lot of matters related to the war. How are your injuries?”

Zhao Changhe had just climbed back into the bed and was studying the blood token when he had to get back up again to greet Huangfu Yongxian. “General, you’re too kind. Please, come in.”

This room seems as busy as a marketplace, people just keep on coming in and out. Can’t they just let a wounded man rest?

But while he might have been able to refuse Ying Five, he could not bring himself to do so to Huangfu Yongxian. A dedicated and loyal general like him, who defended the border with his entire family and his very life, commanded great respect.

Moreover, his daughter was the Fire Serpent of Yi.

As Zhao Changhe pondered how to win over the old general, he thought of Huangfu Qing, the imperial noble consort. In the eyes of the Four Idols Cult, she was of great significance for keeping an eye on Xia Longyuan’s state and actions and for political maneuvering. And to

Huangfu Yongxia, she probably held political significance. But in reality, her position really did not carry much significance.

Zhao Changhe wondered if he could discuss putting an end to the farce with the old general. Otherwise, with her identity as the imperial noble consort, even if Xia Longyuan was just watching the show from afar, she could never truly be with him

As he was deep in thought, Huangfu Yongxian entered, helmet in hand. He knelt down on one knee and lowered his head. "Greetings, Your Highness."

Zhao Changhe couldn't process his words.

His mind went blank for a moment, and he quickly jumped up from his seat. "Please, don't! I'm really not!"

Huangfu Yongxian kept his head down and said, "Letting Your Highness venture alone into the dragon's den, risking life and limb, was my failure as a subject."

Zhao Changhe felt his head splitting. He could not tell if Huangfu Yongxian was being loyal or just afraid of Xia Longyuan's wrath.

Accompanying a king to war is like accompanying a tiger to hunt. Even if you catch the prey, let alone getting a piece of it, you might well be eaten yourself.

Zhao Changhe hurriedly helped him up. "If I tell you I'm not, then I'm not! Xia... I guarantee that he won't fault you for this!"

Even though he used all his strength to try and help Huangfu Yongxian up, he discovered that the old general was as immovable as a mountain.

Huangfu Yongxian was formerly ninth on the Ranking of Earth, moving up to the eighth ranking after He Lei's death. He was far from a frail, dying old man.

Yet as Zhao Changhe finished speaking, the old general's eyes revealed a smile. He stood up on his own and said softly, "Since Your Highness guarantees it, I trust your word."

Zhao Changhe realized that he had fallen into a trap.

If he were not the prince, then how could he make such a guarantee? Since he dared to give such a guarantee, he basically implicitly confirmed his identity.

You fucking old fox.

Admitting to the identity or not was no longer the issue. The real problem now was that if the old general believed he was the prince, what about his dream of being together with the imperial noble consort?

Chapter 293: To Fulfill the Emperor's Grand Designs

Huangfu Yongxian sat opposite him. His expression was serious and respectful as if they were in a meeting.

Zhao Changhe found himself preferring Cui Wenjing's attitude, where he would be threatened with a slap every now and then—but maybe he was just a glutton for punishment.

Huangfu Yongxian then asked, "Your Highness... Or um, Young Master Zhao, is there any special reason as to why you refuse to acknowledge your identity? Is it due to the resentment from being abandoned?"

That would be Chichi's issue...

Actually, the reason Zhao Changhe did not want to admit to the identity was much simpler. Firstly, he did not want to acknowledge someone else as his father; secondly, he did not want to get involved in court politics. Just thinking about having to deal with all the nonsense in the imperial court made him gag.

Ever since he realized that his path differed from Xia Longyuan's, he became even more reluctant to admit to the identity. Calling someone like Cui Wenjing father-in-law because of a relationship was acceptable, but anything else was out of the question.

However, these were not reasons he could easily explain to Huangfu Yongxian. After thinking for a while, Zhao Changhe found another way to put it, "Ever since I entered the jianghu, I've fought my way through with my own strength. While I may have indeed benefited from some connections, I've also taken equivalent risks. With that, I can consider my achievements my own. Even if people call me the Bloodthirsty Asura, which I don't find quite pleasant, I accept it willingly because it's a name I've earned myself and has nothing to do with anyone else. This is far from being referred to as some highness, which shows respect for Xia Longyuan and not Zhao Changhe."

Huangfu Yongxian's eyes revealed a hint of surprise. He did not expect to get such an answer.

He pondered for a while and then asked, "Then, why did you risk your life fighting behind enemy lines to relieve the siege of Yanmen?"

Zhao Changhe said calmly, "For the same reason as you, general."

Huangfu Yongxian's eyes widened in astonishment but also with growing delight.

He still asked, "With the turmoil the world is under, you have the status and ability to change many things, yet you continue to play around in the jianghu. Are you not wasting what you've fought for?"

“Because it’s pointless,” said Zhao Changhe. “You don’t understand Xia Longyuan at all. The plans all of you have made are laughable in his eyes. Besides, I can tell you right now that he won’t die, at least not anytime soon, and he certainly does not need a crown prince. Just do what you need to do, and don’t overthink things.”

Huangfu Yongxian fell silent.

Zhao Changhe wanted to talk to him about Huangfu Qing but did not know how to broach the subject. Should he say that everyone knew her status as the imperial noble consort was just a title, and that she could easily be swapped out? He was at least confident that Xia Longyuan would not care.

But if he did that, his intentions would be clear as day, and Huangfu Yongxian would likely go mad on the spot.

Besides, Huangfu Qing herself felt the position was meaningful, so what good would it do to talk to her father about it?

Zhao Changhe did not dare to assume that Huangfu Qing was Vermillion Bird, and even Ying Five and others only dared to speculate. The most problematic thing about that assumption was that Vermillion Bird’s cultivation was even higher than Huangfu Yongxian’s, and she was ranked higher. This also added to why people would not speculate in this regard. If anything, the mainstream speculation was that Vermillion Bird might assassinate Huangfu Yongxian.

Ying Five and his organization had searched through countless possibilities without being able to pinpoint who Vermillion Bird really was, leading them to speculate, jokingly, about Huangfu Qing, who was once as famous as Tang Wanzhuang. However, they had no concrete evidence and could only make light-hearted remarks.

In reality, Huangfu Yongxian could not control what Huangfu Qing did. She had long since asserted her independence, almost to the point of completely disregarding him.

Huangfu Yongxian sat in silence for a long time, unsure of what to say. Before coming to visit, he had envisioned Zhao Changhe playing the role of a humble and wise leader, talking about national affairs and expressing his willingness to serve, leading to a pleasant conversation where Zhao Changhe would subtly hint for his approval. This would then result in their army in the north becoming a stable political support for him.

Instead, Zhao Changhe was obviously tossing the responsibility away, and Huangfu Yongxian found himself trying to persuade him to take the reins.

Does he want the Northern Border Army or not? Hmm... But he's right. As long as Xia Longyuan is still alive, any of these thoughts or plans are nothing but a joke.

Huangfu Yongxian seemed to age another decade, slumping wearily in his seat. After a long pause, he said, "Your Highness... Er, Young Master Zhao, do you realize that what you want does not matter anymore? Your situation is more dangerous than ever, even more so than when you first emerged in Beimang. The Wang Clan will now stop at nothing to kill you. Moreover, it's not just them. The entire empire is in turmoil, with more and more people moving to seize power and set up their own states. They will all try to kill you. Wandering the jianghu now means facing dangers at every turn."

Zhao Changhe smiled, "Then let them come. I'm still looking for strong opponents to sharpen my skills, including Snow-Listening Pavilion—they better not back down."

Huangfu Yongxian, exasperated yet amused, shook his head before bringing up more practical matters. "Batu's allegiance will certainly be accepted unless His Majesty deliberately refuses it..."

After saying this, he paused, as if unsure whether or not Xia Longyuan might act capriciously. Then, he continued, "Once the alliance is established, Batu will have stable control over the entirety of Monan north of Yanmen, and he will serve as a shield. Since he is now at odds with the temple, he must rely on our support. In the short term, relations will be very harmonious. In fact, I believe that as long as you are still in the Central Plains, Batu would not dare act against us."

Zhao Changhe interjected, "I doubt it. Don't be fooled by his simple demeanor; he's actually very cunning."

Huangfu Yongxian shook his head and said, "When I met with Batu, he was constantly looking around to see if you were there. When he realized that you weren't, he seemed to stand taller, his voice even grew louder. It's clear that Batu is afraid of you. You may not realize your influence, but to both sides, you are a formidable presence, an individual who has truly shaken Saibei."

"So what are you suggesting?"

"Huangsha Market remains an extremely important trading hub. Now, our stance is that we must have a stake in it. We can't let Batu control it alone. Otherwise, what benefit do we get from the war? We should station troops there to at least have a joint military presence in the area. However, stationing troops in such a key area in their territory is quite a sensitive matter, so we might need you to negotiate with Batu personally."

"There's no need for that," said Zhao Changhe. "I'll just recommend someone to serve as the administrative head of Huangsha Market."

"Who?"

"Let Third Lady Yuan be the commander of Huangsha Market. Both sides can station troops, and Lady Three can coordinate and balance things. They are already stationed nearby to develop the secret realm, so Ying Five will be very satisfied with this arrangement. Also, Lady Three loves money, and having such an advantageous position will definitely make her very happy. Even if she does not want to stay later on, she can find someone else to replace her. With Ying Five behind her, Batu would not dare object."

Huangfu Yongxian asked curiously, "You're letting someone from the jianghu take charge? Can you trust this Third Lady Yuan?"

From the perspective of Great Xia, she isn't someone who can be trusted. She is basically its sworn enemy, just like your daughter. But from a personal standpoint, of course, she can be trusted... just like your daughter.

Zhao Changhe obviously did not say that out loud, and he simply replied, "Trust me, it will work out."

Huangfu Yongxian said, "If Batu views Lady Three as Your Highness's representative, there might indeed be no problem."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Huangfu Yongxian showed a smile. "Alright, since that is your arrangement, then I shall obey."

Zhao Changhe said, "General, you've been running around non-stop. Aren't you tired? Go get some rest, I'll be resting as well."

Huangfu Yongxian leaned back in the chair with a bit of weariness on his face. He softly murmured, "To fulfill the emperor's grand designs..."

Hair turns white while time slowly reaches its end.

Zhao Changhe stared at Huangfu Yongxian's white hair, lost in thought, remaining silent for a long time.

Their conversation ended there. Zhao Changhe could not bring himself to talk about Huangfu Qing, and Huangfu Yongxian could not bring himself to pledge the army's loyalty to the prince.

Everything that needed to be said had been said.

“Young Master Zhao, have a good rest,” Huangfu Yongxian said as he left. Shortly after, a flash of red appeared, and Yue Hongling quietly entered the room, locking the door behind her.

Zhao Changhe pulled her into his arms with all his strength. “Big sister, let’s find somewhere else to heal. I don’t want to stay here anymore. I’m so tired.”

Yue Hongling patted his back gently, speaking softly as if soothing a child, “Alright, where do you want to go?”

“In this cold northern winter, with snow falling and mountains covered in white, don’t you feel like revisiting certain places?”

Yue Hongling was stunned, reminiscing about the time at Beimang, the trap in the snow, and the stronghold mistress by Zhao Changhe’s side.

She lifted her head slightly and saw the eager sparkle in Zhao Changhe’s eyes, unable to resist smiling herself. “You’re such a child.”

Zhao Changhe protested, “I’m just nostalgic.”

“Mm,” Yue Hongling’s heart softened, knowing that he truly was nostalgic. His deep sentiment and attachment made her heart swell with joy.

She leaned gently against Zhao Changhe’s chest and softly asked, “You haven’t been calling me big sister much lately, acting all responsible with me, eh? Why are you calling me big sister again now?”

Zhao Changhe found himself lost in thought.

Maybe it was the fatigue from his injuries or perhaps from the endless stream of people and decisions he had to make.

Only when he was with her did he feel that he could let go of everything, knowing that his big sister was there.

Only Yue Hongling could give him this feeling. Even in the later stages of the battle, she followed his lead, almost like a little wife... But just seeing her now brought him an inexplicable sense of peace.

It was a reliance rooted in their first meeting in this world.

But instead of expressing this, he leaned in and whispered in her ear, "I don't want to just call you big sister, I want to also hear big sister's moans."

Yue Hongling's cheeks flushed deep red, reaching her ears. She stomped on his foot viciously and said, "You're just itching for it, huh? Come on, follow me into the room!"

Chapter 294: Revisiting an Old Place

At sunset.

Cui Yuanyong kicked open the door to Zhao Changhe's room. "You've been recuperating from those minor injuries for an entire day. Isn't that enough? Get up and—"

The room was empty, with no luggage in sight.

“What the...?” Cui Yuanyong was dumbfounded. “Wasn’t he just lying down like a dead dog? He left without even saying goodbye? Didn’t he know we wanted to have a celebratory toast with him?”

He then realized who else was missing. “Damn, he’s all about girls now. Why wasn’t I able to see that he was such a person before?! If I don’t go back and badmouth you to Yangyang, my surname isn’t Cui!”

Cui Yuanyong angrily stormed off to the martial artist camp, where a raucous celebration was in full swing.

Deep down, he also knew that Zhao Changhe was exhausted and really wanted to avoid going to such an event, but...

Damn it, we could have at least had a private drink or two just between us! Fuck... Never mind.

Cui Yuanyong begrudgingly grabbed a drunken man and said, “You’re already drinking? Why didn’t you wait for me?”

The man, barely coherent, slurred, “The battle, the battle is over. Who the hell are you? Do you really think we give a damn about your Cui Clan...”

“Damn it,” Cui Yuanyong was infuriated, almost vomiting blood from anger. He did not want to argue with them, so he asked, “Where is Situ Xiao? Did he really run off to find Xue Canghai?”

Despite the man’s drunken state, he actually still respected Cui Yuanyong a fair bit and answered honestly, “I don’t know, but someone said he left the city.”

What would he head out for? To eat dirt?

Cui Yuanyong was confused. He ran to the top of the city walls and looked out. The sky was darkening, and indeed, there lay Situ Xiao, sprawled out on the half-snow, half-sand ground, holding up a wine gourd and chugging it down.

The battlefield was still littered with unburied corpses, scattered weapons, broken shields, and vultures circling above, painting a somber and tragic scene against the setting sun.

Cui Yuanyong shouted, “What the hell are you doing?”

Situ Xiao replied, “Drunken on the battlefield~ Don’t laugh at me... This is the fighting spirit of ancient times...”

“Did you fight this whole war just for this moment?”

Situ Xiao drunkenly raised his wine gourd and called out, “Brother Cui, you really know me well! Come, have a drink with me!”

“Drink with you, my ass! What the hell is with all this nonsense?!” Frustrated, Cui Yuanyong turned back to the city, only to have his ear grabbed.

So fast! Which expert is it?!

Cui Yuanyong turned quickly, only to see his father’s stern face. “Head back home and stay inside the ancestral hall for three months. You can come out when you stop cursing. Otherwise, your mother will really show you what a mother is.”

Cui Yuanyong, one of the heroes who stood against the barbarians and became an expert on the Ranking of Man after defeating the Golden Horde’s Prince head-on, received no celebratory

drink after the war. Instead, he was dragged home by his father to be confined for three months, rewarded with a stack of scholarly texts, and a vaguely sentient Qinghe Sword.

The most tragic part was that the sword's spirit remained elusive. It was uncertain if it would ever truly acknowledge him.

*

A few days later, in Beimang.

The mountain stronghold still stood, and interestingly enough, so did its people.

After Zhao Changhe cut people down and left, those imprisoned by Cui Yuanyong were locked up by the county magistrate until winter and then released.

Given that these bandits had not really committed any serious crimes under their former stronghold master, it seemed excessive to execute or exile them. But on the other hand, keeping them jailed and fed through winter was wasteful, so the county magistrate, seeing the shortage of food, decided to release them.

Upon being released, they found themselves aimless. They did not know anything other than banditry. When they realized that there were still supplies at the mountain stronghold, they naturally regrouped there only a few days after their release.

They did a headcount and funnily enough, other than their stronghold master and stronghold mistress from back then, not a single one was missing.

None of them had returned to normal life. It was a complete failure in rehabilitation.

Even their viciousness had not diminished. The first thing they did was to fight over who would be the new stronghold master, splitting into factions and making a huge fuss for days. It was only today that they finally agreed to hold a decisive duel.

They decided to hold the duel in the large training ground, where an infamous pit, once used by their stronghold mistress to capture the young lady of the Cui Clan, still stood as a notable landmark.

The two factions that had formed among the bandits were still hurling insults at each other, preparing to fight, when a voice suddenly echoed from outside the arena. “Hey hey~ A drinking challenge? Alright! Not a bad idea at all! You guys split into groups. I’ll add a reward. The winner gets money and the loser has to drink!”[1]

Everyone froze. The voice sounded awfully familiar, and the words were even more so, as if they had heard the exact same words before...

They turned to look at the source of the voice. Flickering firelight illuminated the figures of their former stronghold master and stronghold mistress by the pit. They were looking at them with smiles on their faces.

For a moment, their minds seamlessly brought forward past memories, not realizing anything was amiss. A collective cheer erupted, “Since the boss said so, let’s start fighting! What’s the holdup? We shouldn’t embarrass ourselves in front of the mistress... Eh...”

The noise gradually died down, and silence took over.

Then, confusion ensued.

“Nice job on finding those oil-lit torches. Where’d you find them?” Zhao Changhe asked with a smile.

Someone replied naturally, “We had some left in storage, the county officials didn’t take everything.”

Zhao Changhe tossed a gold leaf and said, “Go buy more supplies from the city, I’ll make sure you all get through the winter.”

“Long live the boss!” The crowd surged forward, ignoring the two who were about to duel on stage.

No one remembered Zhao Changhe had actually abandoned them back then.

“We watched you climb the rankings from inside the jail every day, boss!”

“When the people in the jail heard we used to follow you, Boss Zhao, the looks they gave us were just... wow.”

“We always knew you were fucking amazing, boss!”

“Boss, boss, so our stronghold mistress really is Yue Hongling, right?”

Yue Hongling, who had been quietly smiling from the side, finally put on a stern face and said, “I’m fake.”

If it were not for you lot causing trouble, my relationship with Zhao Changhe would not have become so ambiguous, nor would it have... Well...

Yet, oddly, she did not feel much irritation. Instead, the feeling of reuniting across time and space was deeply moving, almost giving her a faint sense of enlightenment.

It was as if their journey had been plucked out of time for a year, only to seamlessly reconnect as if nothing had changed.

Zhao Changhe also pondered whether what Ying Five was searching for was something like this. And if he could find a way back home, choosing to return at the right moment, would he have the same feelings he had now?

It was profound and intriguing.

“Alright,” Zhao Changhe clapped his hands. “Has my hut been cleaned?”

The two who had been about to fight on stage sighed and said, “Actually, we just cleaned it. The bedding is all fresh, untouched. We were fighting over who was going to be the new leader, but it seems like fate knew that you’d come back and just had us prepare for that. Oh, and the stronghold mistress’ hut from before has not been touched yet.”

“What other hut?” Zhao Changhe glared as he wrapped his arm around Yue Hongling’s waist. “From now on, we share one hut!”

Bam!

The stronghold master was viciously thrown over the shoulder by the fierce stronghold mistress before being dragged into the stronghold master’s hut at the mountaintop.

Her scolding voice could be vaguely heard amidst the snow and wind. “You think you’re the boss? Tonight I’ll show you what it means to truly hold down a stronghold!”

The mountain bandits looked at each other and then burst into laughter.

The world truly was strange and amazing.

Inside the hut, the bedding was fresh, and the candlelight was warm. Even the furnishings had not changed.

Yue Hongling seemed lost in thought as Zhao Changhe, still being dragged by her, took the opportunity to break free and embrace her.

“What are you doing?” Yue Hongling pouted.

“In my hometown, people often get married in private first, then hold a ceremony with friends and family when they have time. Don’t you think this seems exactly like that?”

Yue Hongling thought that it really did feel that way.

Especially with the new bedding and lit candles... If someone told her that Zhao Changhe had come back early to set all this up, she might believe them.

But she knew that he hadn’t, and this was all just fate in play. Zhao Changhe’s sudden whim to revisit the mountain stronghold seemed to create a ceremony for the two of them.

Yue Hongling felt a bit strange.

She was willing to be with him in deserted secret realms, willing to wander the world hand in hand, but as a heroine, she had never thought about such traditional things as a wedding ceremony witnessed by friends and family.

That was completely different from the dark, desolate secret realms.

She lowered her head slightly and said softly, “What wedding? My sect doesn’t even know about us.”

Zhao Changhe leaned closer to kiss her and said, “Then shall we just come back and hold a ceremony when we have the time?”

“In your dreams.” Yue Hongling pushed against his chest, pretending to resist his kiss. “When did I say I’d marry you?”

Before she could finish her sentence, Zhao Changhe tightened his grip around her waist, lifted her up, and carried her toward the bed.

Although Yue Hongling spoke harshly, she did not struggle. She let him lay her gently on the bed, and muttered, “Fine, I’ll help you heal your injuries through dual cultivation. Traveling so many days while injured, you’re really silly.”

She made up her mind to not make a sound tonight.

He wanted to hear her moans? He could listen to ghosts instead

As the night deepened, the moon and stars faded.

A bird flew over the roof, hearing the suppressed sounds of some creature inside the hut.

The sound grew louder and louder, until it finally transformed into a voice of exasperated fury. “Change positions! I want to hold down the stronghold now!”

Chapter 295: Wait for Me

Just as the sun was rising, Yue Hongling lazily got up to wash, glancing over at the man sitting cross-legged on the bed, meditating and cultivating. She felt both exasperated and amused at the sight.

It was indeed hard to understand what was going on in the head of a man who, despite being injured, refused to rest properly and insisted on dragging his lover hundreds of li away to find a romantic spot for dual cultivation.

If she were to think on the bright side, Zhao Changhe's trust and reliance on her were truly unparalleled. He did not care about his injuries, as if he felt that he had absolute safety as long as he had her by his side. She honestly wondered where he got such confidence.

However, this trip back to the place they used to stay did bring her a pleasant surprise. It was a very interesting feeling.

What's the point of having a rigid man? I'd much rather have a man like this who's always full of surprises. Life is much more interesting that way...

Looking down from the mountain, she saw that the bandits had actually gathered themselves in the training ground, diligently practicing martial arts. She found it quite remarkable. Yue Hongling did not believe that they were this diligent when they were released from jail. She believed that it was probably because of Zhao Changhe's arrival that they suddenly became like this.

It was as if they had regained their spirit.

Perhaps Zhao Changhe's year of making waves on the rankings had spurred them, these people who had the same origins and were of similar age. Now, their stronghold master was at the top of the Ranking of Hidden Dragons, famous throughout the lands, but what about them? And

even so, they might not have been all that motivated before, but seeing Zhao Changhe in person, with the real Yue Hongling at his side, must have stirred their hearts.

Was it too late for them to start working hard now?

In fact, it was not too late at all... Of course, as long as they did not compare themselves to Zhao Changhe. He was a genius, incomparable to most in the world. If it was not for the restrictions brought about by his meridians, he might have already ascended the heavens by now. If their goals were set at reaching the level of Instructor Sun or Fang Buping, it was entirely achievable.

Moreover, if their stronghold mistress decided to give them some pointers when she was in a good mood, her guidance would definitely allow them to advance faster than Instructor Sun's guidance back then.

When she thought of these things, Yue Hongling found herself chuckling a bit. She could not help but feel some surprise.

Such thoughts as staying in one place and supporting her husband while educating the "children" had never appeared in her mind in the past... Was she really going to assume the role of a stronghold mistress now?

Lost in thought, she was startled by footsteps behind her. Zhao Changhe's familiar arms wrapped around her from behind. "What's on your mind?"

Yue Hongling asked, "How are your injuries?"

"They're pretty much all good now. There are still some that need more time to heal, but it is what it is. Vulture Beak's true qi is truly formidable. It's latched onto my body like a bone-eating parasite, and it's extremely difficult to eliminate. This might be the most troublesome injury I've ever had. Without our dual cultivation, I might have been bedridden for a long time."

Yue Hongling's lips curled into a smile. "Even if you don't count Vulture Beak as someone on the Ranking of Earth, he was still undeniably ranked first on the Ranking of Man. Even I would not dare to provoke him, yet you actually dared to face him head-on. You criticize Batu for being fearless out of ignorance, but you're not much different."

"That was the battle formation. Someone had to step up."

"What if you died?"

"In moments such as that, you don't really think about that stuff. Once people start having such thoughts, no one will step forward."

Yue Hongling smiled slightly. "You're a hero."

"Well, how else could I become your man?"

After a moment of silence, Yue Hongling asked, "With things as they are now, have you considered forming a small faction?"

Zhao Changhe shook his head. "It's a nice idea, but it's impossible for me to stay here and be a leader. I'm not someone who can stay put."

Yue Hongling seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, then she smiled and said, "If you leave after your injuries are all healed, I feel like they'll lose their spirit again."

Zhao Changhe shrugged. "I don't need to be responsible for them... But as their former stronghold leader, I can point them in the right direction."

“Do you plan to have them join the army? They won’t agree to that.”

“Don’t worry about it. If they need to remain bandits for now, so be it. We’ll see later.” Zhao Changhe then changed the topic. “Now that we’re back here, do you feel a sense of space-time having shifted?”

Yue Hongling nodded. “Yes, it’s quite interesting.”

“I’ve been thinking about something...” Zhao Changhe briefly recounted his conversation with Ying Five, then added, “Ying Five mentioned that the greatest difference between the ancient era and now is the completeness of the world. I did not get to really delve deep into this matter with him. I immediately shifted our discussion to our cooperation. We had only just met, and I didn’t want to show too much interest in front of him. But in fact, I was really interested in it.”

Yue Hongling’s eyes sparkled with interest. “You have so many thoughts swirling in your head. It doesn’t match your stinky bear looks.”

“You’re talking about Batu, right?”

“Haha, so funny.”

“Do you think Ying Five is after the enlightenment from the lost space-time, seeking a path to reach the same level as the ancient gods and demons through these spaces? Or is he simply trying to rejoin the spaces to allow the spirit qi[1] of heaven and earth to become richer, elevating everyone’s cultivation?”

Yue Hongling thought for a while. “Probably a bit of both. He seems to be working something grand, and he doesn’t seem to only be doing what he’s doing for one reason. He also wouldn’t be so selfless as to work so hard just to elevate everyone’s cultivation.”

“Mm... If reconnecting those spaces with the world does lead to richer spirit qi, it’s more likely to end up letting the ancient gods and demons awaken. Xia Longyuan might be avoiding dealing with these spaces because he doesn’t want a flood of ancient beings to awaken and cause trouble. I wonder if there’s a god or demon backing Ying Five...”

Zhao Changhe was organizing his thoughts when he suddenly wondered if this was what the blind woman wanted to achieve, something that Xia Longyuan opposed or refused to do.

Of course, the blind woman might not only be aiming for the completion of the world; she had at least one other goal: the completion of the Heavenly Tome.

Xia Longyuan was clearly aware of the Heavenly Tome’s existence, and he might even possess a page himself, yet he never showed any intention of completing the Heavenly Tome. Otherwise, he would have asked about it during their conversation.

This at least indicated that he was not interested in collecting all of the pages, whereas Zhao Changhe did feel a certain desire to do so.

This was likely why the blind woman was not too concerned about his dissatisfaction with her. She knew that he was doing exactly what she wanted to see, albeit at a slower pace.

Zhao Changhe knew this as well, but he could not avoid it. Only by following this path could he hope to uncover the secrets of space-time.

Yue Hongling said, “You seem to be keeping some things to yourself... Do you find it hard to talk about them?”

“Well... It’s actually more that I don’t know where to start. Also, I’m worried that involving you in these things, which might not originally concern you, could be dangerous. There are some things neither you nor I can handle right now.”

“So you act as if there’s a tiger chasing you, and that has been urging you onward relentlessly.”

“Yes.”

Yue Hongling smiled slightly, turned around, and gently caressed his cheek. “You know... You haven’t really considered me as family. Like me, your heart is that of a wanderer.”

“That’s not it... Why don’t you say it’s because men have to bear their burdens silently?”

“Well, whether you are a wanderer or not, I am one,” said Yue Hongling. “Before the decisive battle at Yanmen, I already told you that I wanted to leave for the southwest after the war. I stayed because of your injuries, but now that you’re almost healed, it’s time for me to go.”

Even though Zhao Changhe was mentally prepared, he still felt a deep reluctance and clung to her sleeve. He then pleaded, “Big sister...”

“Your big sister has already satisfied your ears. What more do you want?”

“...”

Yue Hongling glanced at the bustling training ground, knowing that her sudden departure was a bit abrupt. She should have at least waited until Zhao Changhe had fully recovered, but she was suddenly afraid.

She was afraid that if she stayed a bit longer, she might not be able to bear leaving his side. She might really end up taking on the responsibilities of managing a household and various other affairs.

“Alright, all good things must come to an end.” Yue Hongling gently stroked his cheek and gave him a soft kiss. “You said it yourself, there are some things that neither you nor I can handle right now. Let’s not be greedy for momentary comfort. We need to keep moving forward. When the day comes that you think I can handle whatever it is, I will be waiting for you to tell me. I, your big sister, will help you.”

Zhao Changhe said nothing, he just held her tightly and kissed her deeply.

Yue Hongling closed her eyes and reciprocated the kiss.

On the snowy mountaintop, the couple embraced and kissed passionately. Below, the people training stopped one by one, their expressions blank.

Boss Zhao isn’t human! Before, he at least had the decency to keep this kind of thing behind closed doors, away from us brothers. But now, he’s openly flaunting it!

Now that they realized that the woman he was with was the legendary Yue Hongling, the feelings they felt were especially indescribable.

But as they looked, they had to admit that they made a great couple, and it was indeed a beautiful sight.

Perhaps only a hero like Boss Zhao is worthy of taking such a formidable woman as his wife...

As these thoughts filled the minds of the bandits, Yue Hongling gently pushed Zhao Changhe away and whispered, “Then, until we meet again?”

“Yes, until we meet again.” Zhao Changhe took a deep breath. “I hope that the next time we meet, I will have broken through to the Profound Mysteries. Perhaps then, I will have something to tell you”

Yue Hongling smiled softly. “Mm, I’ll wait for you.”

After saying that, she turned and walked into the courtyard. She brought out her red horse, mounted it, and rode away.

The bandits were left with their mouths wide open.

Boss Zhao got dumped again!

Chapter 296: Multifaceted Messenger

Having mentally prepared himself, Yue Hongling’s departure did not cause him much turmoil this time, but it did inevitably fill him with a sense of melancholy and reluctance.

Zhao Changhe knew all too well that her heart was not one to settle just yet. But this departure seemed hasty, as if she were avoiding something.

Looking at the people on the training ground, Zhao Changhe had a sudden realization and a faint smile appeared on his face.

Who said she had no desire to stay? Nah, this is a sign. She’s afraid of that very thing coming true.

Zhao Changhe’s mood suddenly improved. He waved his hand and said, “Brothers, how about I teach you a few moves?”

Everyone was overjoyed. “We’ve been waiting for you to say that!”

Zhao Changhe casually picked up an ordinary saber, weighed it in his hand, and then smiled. “You should all be familiar with the Vicious Blood Saber Art. I’ll teach you something even more special, the Yellow Sand Saber Art[1] of an expert on the Ranking of Man. It harnesses the power of the wind and sand, creating a storm when it erupts, with wind and clouds swirling and a sandstorm raging. In the midst of a sandstorm, your blade blends in with the wind and sand, becoming silent and invisible, omnipresent and elusive. It is a top-tier saber art. Once you master it, I suggest spreading it across the world so everyone can learn it.”

If Hu Lie were here, he’d probably crawl over to bite Zhao Changhe’s throat before succumbing to death.

But in reality, Zhao Changhe was not targeting the down-and-out Hu Lie. Rather, he had discovered that the martial arts of the tribes of the Grasslands and Huangsha shared a number of characteristics. For example, Chi Li’s Fox Spirit Saber Art and Hu Lie’s saber art were extremely similar. This could be extended to many similar tribes. Letting the martial artists of the Central Plains familiarize themselves with these techniques would be beneficial for the future.

Zhao Changhe only had a superficial understanding of the Yellow Sand Saber Art, but with his breadth of martial arts knowledge, he could already create a complete saber art based on the characteristics and saber intent he had witnessed in techniques that he had come across. The process of organizing and teaching the saber art was also a way for himself to become more familiar with the Yellow Sand Saber Art.

He had acquired many sword arts but very few saber arts. Thus, this saber art was a very beneficial addition to his arsenal, providing more inspiration for the saber intent of his Hell on Earth.

During this time in Beimang, he had made up his mind to spend some time accumulating and settling down, honing his saber art and digesting what he had gained beyond Yanmen.

Tang Wanzhuang’s advice to slow down was essentially about balancing periods of action and reflection. After his turbulent exploits in the north, it was time to settle down and reflect.

Additionally, he was waiting for someone, and he had a premonition that she would come.

*

The group of bandits actually had a pretty solid foundation.

They did all have the same teacher, after all.

They were initially a bunch of misfits, giving Instructor Sun quite a headache and making him especially favor the smart and hardworking Zhao Changhe. Nevertheless, despite the differences in individual talent, comprehension, and effort, Instructor Sun remained dutiful, taking up the responsibility of ensuring that each of them had a solid foundation, whether it was in their practice of the external cultivation art or the basic saber art. They all practiced with decent form, without any major deviations.

Having roamed the jianghu for so long, Zhao Changhe had seen countless people far worse than them.

After guiding them on the saber for about five or six days, Zhao Changhe's injuries gradually recovered, and he felt that his understanding of the saber arts had deepened. Even better, many of the bandits experienced breakthroughs.

In the past, some had already reached the first layer of the Profound Gate, and now, two of them, the ones who had been preparing to duel on the stage, had reached the second layer. Those who had yet to break through to the first layer were also showing signs of being very close.

The half-year they spent in prison had also served as a period of accumulation and reflection. It helped soften their restless hearts, allowing them to settle down, which was naturally beneficial for cultivation.

The widespread breakthroughs greatly improved Zhao Changhe's mood. A large group of first and second-layer Profound Gate practitioners would be considered elite troops in the army. He indeed intended to train this group a bit—they were, after all, his “minions.” As for where they would be sent in the future? Definitely not the army, but rather the Blood God Cult.

Although the barbarians had retreated, the Central Plains was far from peaceful. In fact, it had become even more chaotic. In these troubled times, Cult Leader Xue, having ascended to the Ranking of Man, would surely make his move. These bandits were theoretically also members of the Blood God Cult, and they would be needed.

When the time comes, they would prove their worth.

Cult Leader Xue could not be underestimated. In spite of his repeated losses, he could definitely not be regarded as a clown. He was the brutal and cruel leader of a demonic cult. Zhao Changhe had never taken him lightly, and even now, he did not dare confront him directly.

“Well, well!” A fragrant breeze blew by, accompanied by a playful voice. “What do we have here? Over a hundred elites!”

The training ground was instantly in disarray. The heads of those practicing the saber almost twisting off from how quickly they turned.

Where did this hot lady come from? Damn, I've never seen someone with that kind of mature lady charm. Just how many mistresses does the boss have?!

Zhao Changhe, however, seemed to have expected this, and he didn't even turn his head. “Focus on your training. Where are you looking? Want a woman? When you reach the eighth layer of the Profound Gate, you'll easily be able to get one yourselves.”

“Fuck... Boss, if you want to curse us to be single for life, just say so.”

“Although I appreciate you all for setting things up for me and Hongling back then, I need to clarify this time. This lady is not my woman. I don’t have the right to touch her. Now, stop staring like a bunch of cows at a freshly-painted gate.”

After Zhao Changhe finished his motivational speech, he finally turned around and smiled at the visitor. “I’ve been expecting you, Lady Three. I thought your intelligence network would have an easier time finding me in Beimang, I didn’t expect it to take this long.”

Lady Three looked intrigued at Zhao Changhe’s clarification to his subordinates, but then she shrugged and smiled. “I had other matters to attend to. Do you really think I have nothing better to do than keep tabs on you? How presumptuous.”

“Alright then.” Zhao Changhe gestured invitingly. “Shall we have a drink inside?”

Lady Three glanced at the eager faces of the bandits and laughed. “Aren’t you afraid of being misunderstood by inviting me inside?”

Zhao Changhe said, “I’ve already explained things to them, but I can’t control what they think. Besides, there’s not just a single room inside. I’m the stronghold master. I have a whole courtyard to myself.”

Lady Three burst into laughter: “Yes, yes, the mighty stronghold master of Beimang, how impressive.”

“Of course, it can’t be compared to the commander of Huangsha Market.” Zhao Changhe led the way. “Please.”

Lady Three followed him in with interest, watching as he brought out a bottle of wine, some dried beef, and a plate of peanuts. “This time, I’m truly hosting you. The stronghold’s conditions are modest, but I hope you won’t fault me for it.”

“I’m happy as long as someone’s treating me.” Lady Three sipped her wine gracefully and smiled. “You knew I would come?”

“The collaboration between Ying Five and me has only just started, and we haven’t really gone into the specifics. We ended up talking about Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng. I guessed that he went to look for clues. Once he found something, he would naturally send a messenger to inform me. Who would be more suitable than you to be that messenger? Especially since I recommended you for the position at Huangsha Market.”

“Indeed,” Lady Three said leisurely. “But the problem is, with this arrangement, Batu might think I’ve already chosen a side. So, should I thank you for your recommendation or give you a beating?”

Zhao Changhe was speechless. “I made a proper recommendation. What others speculate is none of my business.”

“So why bother explaining things to your subordinates? Why not go and clarify things with Batu?”

“...Who would go out of their way to clarify such things? It would just look even more suspicious.”

“I heard that all the women who get involved with you end up with a worse reputation.”

“That’s not necessarily true. At least Vermillion Bird’s reputation seems to have remained intact.”

Lady Three blinked, almost bursting into laughter. After a while, she said, “Well, speaking of being a messenger, I actually think I’m more suited to act as the messenger between you and someone else. While you say Ying Five, you really mean Huangfu Qing, right?”

Zhao Changhe asked, “Did the Fire Serpent of Yi have a message for me?”

“No,” Lady Three replied expressionlessly. “I’m one of the Four Idols, while she is one of the Twenty-Eight Mansions. How could she send a message through me? Who does she think she is? In fact, I went back and gave her a good beating. I made her kneel and repent for having an inappropriate relationship with a man outside the cult!”

“Hey! She’s not a saintess, and she’s not directly under your command. What does it matter to you? You’re meddling too much!”

“Why can’t I?” Lady Three said. “You think Vermillion Bird wouldn’t beat her? If she were not the imperial noble consort, Vermillion Bird might have killed her already.”

Zhao Changhe said angrily, “You cultists are just... stupid.”

Lady Three said seriously, “Actually, since we’re so familiar with each other now, it’s not like I couldn’t help you out a bit. If you want to snatch the Fire Serpent of Yi away, I wouldn’t mind. If Vermillion Bird gets angry, I can hold her off for you. Consider it a thank you for your recommendation. What do you think?”

Zhao Changhe actually hesitated for a moment, then sighed. “Thanks, but there’s nothing between me and the Fire Serpent of Yi. Don’t misunderstand... She might have a bit of liking for me, but it’s far from what you’re implying.”

“There’s no misunderstanding at all. When I told her to repent for her inappropriate relationship, she didn’t deny it.”

Zhao Changhe’s eyes lit up. “Really?”

Of course not, you dumbass. Lady Three burst out laughing internally, but she maintained a serious expression on the surface. “Of course it’s true, I’m Black Tortoise. Why would I lie to you?”

Chapter 297: The Four Idols Cult Is Not a Brothel

Zhao Changhe was truly deceived by her words, and his heart was filled with joy.

He had a great liking for the Fire Serpent of Yi, but her attitude had always been ambiguous. Sometimes, he could sense her affection, but other times, she felt distant, as if she was playing a game from a higher dimension.

It was one of life’s greatest illusions and wonders, perhaps.

He recalled their time in Sword Lake City, the two of them running hand in hand through the foggy, rainy streets. She seemed genuinely happy back then.

But after they arrived in the capital, their relationship became awkward. It was as if she had taken off one mask only to put on another.

But now, here was Black Tortoise solemnly telling him that she liked him!

Zhao Changhe almost pumped his fist and cheered, but he held it in. He did, however, pour Lady Three a drink with extra enthusiasm. “Hm, but her identity...”

“Other than the difficulty for you in sneaking into the palace, what’s the big deal? The agreement with Huangfu Qing was made with the fake Xia Longyuan, taking advantage of the real one’s disappearance to settle matters directly. Huangfu Qing mentioned this to you, right?”

“Yes, she did. She said the fake one wanted to lay some groundwork for a potential coup, making deals with you guys. I thought at the time that the fake was quite daring, and it seemed like he wasn’t afraid of death at all. But honestly, I feel like you guys are just as fearless.”

“We were testing the real Xia Longyuan’s reaction at the time. We wanted to see if he was really in control. If he was, he would not tolerate an additional consort and the sudden emergence of an influential family in the military. He would certainly have put a stop to either one, and nothing would have come of our plans. If he did not do anything to stop our plans, then that meant that he was either extremely weak and had lost control or could not be distracted. Either way, having someone of ours placed in the palace is extremely useful.”

Zhao Changhe said, “I understand your thoughts! But are you not afraid that he might just be temporarily absent? That he is only letting things be for the time being, intending to return to kill both the fake and Huangfu Qing once he returns?”

“Of course, we’ve considered that.” Lady Three smiled faintly. “Huangfu Qing didn’t tell you, did she? She actually wants to be ‘killed by a foolish emperor,’ which would then force Huangfu Yongxian to rebel. But in reality, we would secretly take her away...”

Zhao Changhe held his forehead in dismay. “Damn...”

In fact, Lady Three had nearly revealed too much.

Only someone like Vermillion Bird, a leader figure of a powerful force, could truly be confident in her ability to escape even from a weakened Xia Longyuan. It was only someone of such caliber who would take such a risky step to infiltrate the palace. If Xia Longyuan did not appear, she could indeed gain significant benefits from her position. If he did, she would escape, forcing her loyal father to rebel. It was a well-calculated plan.

No matter how clever the plan was, only someone like Vermillion Bird could truly pull it off. If it were the Fire Serpent of Yi instead, someone who was only at the ninth layer of the Profound Gate, it was basically a death sentence. Black Tortoise’s revelation clearly suggested that Huangfu Qing was Vermillion Bird.

Back then, Huangfu Qing did not dare to reveal so much to Zhao Changhe precisely because she feared that, with how clever he was, he would figure everything out.

However, it was difficult for Zhao Changhe to spot this flaw precisely because he knew Xia Longyuan's power and held it in high regard. In his mind, Xia Longyuan was ranked first on the Ranking of Heaven only because that was the highest rank available. He believed that, in actuality, there should only be two different rankings on the Tome of Troubled Times: Xia Longyuan and everyone else. Therefore, whether it was Vermillion Bird or the Fire Serpent of Yi in the palace, he saw their actions as no different from courting death. Xia Longyuan's lack of reaction was simply because he was detached from the world and enjoying the show.

Yet, Zhao Changhe could understand the Four Idol Cult's logic in this matter. Their plan was reasonable within conventional thinking. Just like how He Lei, despite being a top-ranked warrior on the Ranking of Earth, did not dare to show his face in front of a group of soldiers in Sword Lake City after being injured. And when he did reveal himself, he only ended up getting beaten up. Given Xia Longyuan's prolonged seclusion and how he had allowed a fake to take the throne, it all seemed like he had a problem and was no longer a threat.

Who would think that Xia Longyuan was not only in perfectly good health, but actually much stronger than before? Everyone else was in a wuxia story, while he alone was in a xuanhuan.[1] They were fundamentally not on the same level, so all the plans people had that involved Xia Longyuan were mistaken by default.

However, he could not say this outright. Xia Longyuan had not met up with him so that he could broadcast his actual condition to the world. So, he just waved his hand and said, "I suggest you not make assumptions about Xia Longyuan... It's best to withdraw as soon as possible and stop playing around, really."

But to Lady Three's ears, his words simply sounded like he was saying that he did not dare to sneak into the palace to snatch anyone, suggesting that they meet outside instead.

She thought for a while, then shook her head. "The real Xia Longyuan has never appeared. We've finally managed to infiltrate the central power after so much time and effort. We can't

just leave without getting anything in return... How about this: if you don't dare to sneak into the palace, I can arrange for her to meet with you secretly. How about that?"

Zhao Changhe yelled angrily, "It's not that I don't dare sneak into the palace. I'm saying that she's genuinely in danger in the palace, and you don't understand anything! You bunch of fools!"

Lady Three was stunned by his yelling. She pointed at her nose and said in disbelief, "You... actually yelled at me..."

Zhao Changhe sighed. "I'm sorry, I got too worked up. Yelling at you is pointless. I should go yell at her instead."

Lady Three's face was expressionless. I was clearly yelled at just now, but why did it feel good to hear him so passionate? Go yell at her, please. If you don't yell at her, you're not a man!

Zhao Changhe thought for a moment. "By the way, since you're here, can you pass a message to Chichi for me?"

Lady Three maintained her stern face. "go ahead."

"I once visited an old acquaintance on her behalf to check on their condition. Tell her that they're very healthy and full of life."

Lady Three was stunned for a moment. Then, she said thoughtfully, "Have you ever considered that this so-called acquaintance might just be a ruse?"

Zhao Changhe was stunned too, suddenly grasping their logic better.

Well, that's not entirely impossible.

"Alright," said Lady Three as she leisurely sipped her wine. "Although you yelled at me, I can see that it was because you were worried and cared deeply about someone. I won't hold it against you. But if you want me to help you sneak someone out, that's not happening."

Zhao Changhe muttered, "I'll do it myself. If she really likes me, what do I have to fear?"

Heh... Lady Three's mood improved instantly.

With one keeping a stern face and the other smiling mischievously, they drank a few more cups in silence before Zhao Changhe finally asked, "How has Chichi been lately? Can she come out?"

"Hey!" Lady Three was incredulous. "Enough already! We're the Four Idols Cult, not a brothel."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

Lady Three continued, "But speaking of which...Chichi was first, right? The Fire Serpent of Yi should call her big sister then, right?"

Zhao Changhe said helplessly, "There's nothing between me and the Fire Serpent of Yi yet."

"I'm just asking. If it happens, wouldn't it be that way?"

"...It would, probably."

Lady Three's eyes sparkled and she could barely restrain herself from urging him to hurry up. She was really eager to see what would happen at that time.

However, relationships truly were taboo for saintesses within the cult, so even the lawless Lady Three was cautious, though her cheeks were slightly flushed.

Zhao Changhe said, "Why do I feel like your saintesses can graduate? Vermillion Bird and you, for instance, should have been saintesses before becoming venerables, right? So, when Chichi becomes Venerable Azure Dragon or Venerable White Tiger, won't all these issues go away?"

"It's not quite the same," said Lady Three. "We were indeed saintesses, but it was just a transitional phase, selecting the best to become the representatives of the four idols, in turn becoming venerables. But Chichi is special. She embodies two idols, which is unprecedented. To us, she's being groomed to be the leader, not just a venerable. Hence, the strictest standards apply to her. Someone destined to be the master of the stars can't start off by defying the cult's teachings, right? It would spell disaster for the cult. The followers would lose faith, and the teachings would be ignored."

Zhao Changhe: "..."

It does seem that way. Everyone would think the cult has no future.

"Who's in charge also makes a big difference. The previous generation of the Four Idols Cult was not this strong. It was only because of several geniuses like us that the cult has developed into what it is today. In the past, even if we broke some rules, it wasn't a big deal. But now there's a strict overseer. The cult has mostly been able to develop this well thanks to her. I've been hands-off most of the time, so I must respect her decisions."

"Vermillion Bird?"

"Yes."

Zhao Changhe stroked his forehead. “I thought you were older than her. In the hierarchy of the four idols, isn’t she the youngest as well?”

“The four idols are equals; there are no rankings between them. It seems you’ve misunderstood them a bit. Also, even if there were rankings, between the one wielding real power and someone like me who’s mostly hands-off, it’s obvious who calls the shots.” Lady Three began to fake cry. “If she punishes me for anything, I’d have to obey her, uwahh....”

“Not necessarily...” Zhao Changhe sipped his wine and said leisurely. “Anyway, why do you love money so much but dress so modestly? Is it because during the cult’s difficult times, you were in charge of raising funds and everything you earned was given to the cult for its development? And now, you’ve just kept to that habit?”

Lady Three stared at him silently, her eyes narrowing.

“You guys are truly remarkable, really,” Zhao Changhe said sincerely. “Although some of your actions seem rash to me, you have to take risks to achieve great things.”

Lady Three said, “Your tone doesn’t seem to say that you’re giving up on Chichi, though.”

“Based on what you said, there’s no need to rush. Either she’ll become the leader, or...”

“Or? She might become the leader in twenty or thirty years. Do you think you’ll still be up for it then?”

Zhao Changhe looked at her incredulously.

“Ahem.” Lady Three coughed to cover her embarrassment. “Instead of waiting for her to become the leader, maybe you should focus on whether you can defeat Vermillion Bird. Then you could boldly demand to marry Chichi, and see what she does.”

Zhao Changhe looked at her sincerely: “Shelly[2], you really are something. The Four Idols Cult is really lucky to have picked you up...”

“What did you just call me?”

“Nothing, nothing, that was just an expression...”

Lady Three snorted. “But I don’t think you can do it. Do you know what giving us the Black Tortoise Gemstone will lead to?”

“What?”

“Tang Wanzhuang already peered into the third layer of the Profound Mysteries, but she was too anxious, causing damage to her lung meridian. Seeing what happened to her, we decided to wait for an opportune moment... And now, that moment has arrived.”

Zhao Changhe was stunned for a moment, then he suddenly realized.

Does this mean that Black Tortoise and Vermillion Bird could potentially genuinely reach the level of those on the Ranking of Heaven?

Is the Four Idols Cult going to rise to the heavens?

Chapter 298: The Secret Missed From the Beginning

“Are you really confident? Be careful not to end up like Wanzhuang...”

“Oh, how affectionate. Wanzhuang~”

“Can you focus on the main point?”

“I’m fairly confident... About seventy or eighty percent confident, in any case. No one can ever say that they are a hundred percent confident, even for the first layer of the Profound Gate. Having this much confidence is very solid.”

“Mm-hm...” Zhao Changhe asked, “Is there anything I can help you with?”

“No need. What can you even do?”

“...”

Lady Three smiled and said, “You’ve already done a great job in this matter. Your words were really nice to hear. Even though you obviously recruited me to deal with Ubalu, you made it sound like it was especially good for the Four Idols Cult, as if you were giving us a gift.”

Zhao Changhe sighed. “That was the truth. Even if I had not given you the gemstone, I could still have recruited you to deal with Ubalu. You were already trying to get him killed anyway. Who are you trying to fool here?”

Lady Three fell silent.

It was true that Zhao Changhe’s act of giving her the Black Tortoise Gemstone was not motivated by anything else; it was purely to help the Four Idols Cult.

Or it could be said that he did not want the Four Idols Cult to trouble him. After all, he had given the space to Ying Five. If she entered and found nothing left, not even the jelly, she would naturally come looking for him to demand things, and that would mean falling out.

He did not want their relationship to turn hostile, and since he did not covet the gemstone, he simply gave it away as a favor. At least that way, he could keep the storage ring he obtained, and they would not feel justified in asking for it back since the secret realm was found by him, after all.

After they got the gemstone, Vermillion Bird also remained silent. Even if she now knew he was probably not the heir of the Night Emperor, it was still hard for her to make up her mind to kill him now.

If he had used the Black Tortoise Gemstone as a betrothal gift to propose to Xia Chichi or ask to marry the Fire Serpent of Yi, it would have been quite amusing. But he had asked for nothing; he had truly given it away for free.

No matter how much of a demonic cult they were, they still had to recognize favors. This was why Lady Three was especially nice to him now.

Zhao Changhe suddenly smiled. "Alright, it's good if you can improve. I'm looking forward to the day the Four Idols Cult steps into the Ranking of Heaven."

Lady Three said, "Then it will be even harder for you to defeat Vermillion Bird."

Zhao Changhe did not seem to care. He changed the topic, "The Four Idols Cult and I have too many personal ties. If we start talking about that, it will never end. How about we discuss something serious instead? I want a Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng. Did Ying Five find any clues as to where I might be able to get it?"

"Yes," replied Lady Three. "In the far west, you can find the Kunlun Heavenly Pool. In the records from the previous era, the item is mentioned. However, it has not been seen in this era. It could be due to the changes in the environment or excessive human interference that the blood ginseng has not appeared in this era. If you can find any ancient secret realms in that area, you might be able to find some of the leftover blood ginseng from ancient times. Of course, the chances are slim. Secret realms aren't exactly easy to find, and even if you do find

one or two, they might not contain blood ginseng. Are you willing to travel thousands of li just to try your luck?”

Zhao Changhe was silent for a moment, then sighed, “What else can I do? I can only try. Since I don’t really have a fixed place I call home, it doesn’t matter where I go.”

“Alright, our people will assist you when the time comes.”

“Your people? Do you mean those from the Four Idols Cult or Ying Five’s organization?”

Lady Three smiled slightly. “Both, of course. But be careful. There are powerful forces over there, and even Ranking of Heaven experts.”

Zhao Changhe remained unfazed. “Got it. I’m not going there to cause trouble, so it doesn’t really matter if there are Ranking of Heaven experts there or not. They won’t kill someone just for being there. In fact, having major forces around could be beneficial. They might have the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng, and I could negotiate a deal with them.”

“I feel like you’re taking things too lightly,” Lady Three said expressionlessly. “That place is a haven for exiles and criminals. It’s a paradise for evildoers. Many demons who can’t survive in the Central Plains end up there, including those who are wanted or who have offended powerful enemies. It’s full of all kinds of unsavory characters, be it scammers, thieves, and worse. Countless heroes from Central Plains have vanished there without a trace. Even Tang Wanzhuang’s people don’t dare venture there lightly, and our Four Idols Cult does not dare to expand our influence there carelessly. If you, a stranger, were to show up, your head might just be taken before you even have a chance to make a deal with someone.”

“Then I’ll keep a low profile. I can even go and pretend to be Wang Daoning again.”

Lady Three’s jaw dropped.

In fact, she felt things were rather strange. Some things really seem to be just preordained by fate.

Chichi is heading to train there as well. The west aligns with the White Tiger. She's working on unlocking the first layer of the Profound Mysteries there. It's very likely that Vermillion Bird will also be going there, both to secretly protect Chichi and to prepare for her own breakthrough to the third layer of the Profound Mysteries.

And now, this guy, seeking the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng, is also heading there. I haven't even mentioned this to Vermillion Bird and Chichi yet because it's a part of Ying Five's plan. Who knows what sparks will fly when all of them meet there.

Lady Three thought about this and felt reluctant to return to Huangsha Market.

What fun will there be in Huangsha Market now? There's no way it's going to be as exciting as watching everything unfold at Kunlun...

Unfortunately, I need to check out the Black Tortoise Secret Realm. It's likely beneficial for my cultivation, so I can't just leave for the time being. It truly is a pity.

"Oh, right..." Zhao Changhe knocked on his head. "Speaking of thieves, do you know where the Thieves Guild is located?"

"Why are you asking about them?"

"I just have a feeling that they'd like that kind of place. They just came to mind."

"Yes, the Thieves Guild should be located somewhere there. No one knows their exact location. For all you know, what looks like an ordinary store could be their headquarters."

“That’s enough of a lead for me.” Zhao Changhe felt a lot of his questions were answered, and he raised his cup in a toast, feeling quite pleased. “Lady Three, you truly are my lucky star.”

Lady Three clinked her cup with his with a smile. “Same to you. When do you plan to go?”

Zhao Changhe did a quick internal check.

Over the past few days, while teaching everyone, his injuries had indeed healed. Through the page of the Heavenly Tome, he had spent several days refining his saber arts and pondering on the blow from Vulture Break. He felt that he had made considerable progress.

As for breaking through to the ninth layer of the Vicious Blood Art... Upon some study, the blood token he got from Ying Five seemed to offer a possibility for breaking through to the ninth layer if he extracted the vicious qi within it. However, according to Cui Wenjing’s theory, relying solely on such a method would result in him becoming a half-baked ninth-layer martial artist. If he wanted to properly reach the ninth layer, he required further tempering and insight, so there was no rush.

The token could be regarded as a foundational piece. When the right moment came, he would not have to worry about where to find vicious qi to absorb; it would already be ready in advance. The downside was that he was carrying more and more items, and that wasn’t exactly convenient. His first task in the west might not be finding the blood ginseng but locating the Thieves Guild.

Thinking this, he said, “I could leave at any time... But before I go, could I ask one more favor from you?”

Lady Three looked puzzled. “What is it?”

“Could you have my subordinates here in the mountain stronghold over to the Blood God Cult? If you introduce them to the Blood God Cult, there shouldn’t be a problem, right?”

Lady Three gazed at him meaningfully for a while, then smiled and said, “Little brother, you aren’t being honest with me, huh? Are you planning to take over the nest?”

Zhao Changhe just smiled back, saying nothing.

“I’ll write them a letter of introduction. Xue Canghai has to at least give me face.” Lady Three lazily stood up and stretched her body, creating a mesmerizing sight.

Zhao Changhe kept his eyes on his drink.

“Since you’ve added a request, I’ll add one as well.” Lady Three turned to leave. “Take me to see the Azure Dragon Pool.”

The Azure Dragon Pool, at the cave behind the waterfall.

That was the place where Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi had solidified their bond. After Xia Chichi left with Vermillion Bird and Zhao Changhe became the leader of the mountain stronghold, he rarely came here, and when he did, it was to prepare for battle.

This was because when he did visit this place, it would bring back memories of Xia Chichi, affecting his progress in martial arts for some time.

Now, it was already the Beginning of Summer, and this was no longer an issue. Zhao Changhe wanted to visit the cave behind the waterfall again, to see if there was anything they might have missed back then.

He thus brought Lady Three to the small cave, which was every bit as cramped as he remembered. The central area housed a small altar meant for the Azure Dragon Seal, with nothing else around. The overall layout was very similar to the small space within the Black Tortoise Cave, indicating that it was part of the same system.

However, in the Black Tortoise Cave, the altar could be moved, revealing an exit underneath.

What about here?

Lady Three's eyes also fell on the altar. Seeing that Zhao Changhe seemed to be about to push it away, she suddenly stopped him. "Don't move it."

Zhao Changhe was puzzled.

Lady Three frowned, staring at the altar for a long time before saying, "This place gives me a strange feeling. The energy here is a bit abnormal. In such a peaceful and ordinary place, I actually feel a sense of dread... You were lucky not to mess with it last time. If you had really pushed it back then, it's likely the entirety of Beimang would have been decimated..."

Zhao Changhe took a sharp breath of cold air.

Could the reason Beimang moved north of the capital be hidden here? Does this mean that the big secret was actually hidden in the novice village?

Lady Three circled the altar repeatedly for a long time, then relaxed her frown. "Oh, it's not that exaggerated. Ordinary people can't even move it. Let me see..."

She gently rotated the altar, changing its position.

Zhao Changhe could hear a rumbling sound from beneath the ground, as if the gears of a massive mechanism were being engaged.

“The ancient Azure Dragon, the legacy of the Human Emperor...” Lady Three turned to look at Zhao Changhe, her eyes gleaming. “What do you think? Should I kill you and take the treasure for myself?”

Zhao Changhe replied dryly, “If I’m not mistaken, there should just be a tomb inside, and there’s probably someone in there trying to crawl out.”

Chapter 299: Dragon Bird of Great Xia vs. Ancient Sword of the Dragon Emperor

The Four Idols Cult had once dug up a tomb here.

It was the underground tomb where Fang Buping and his men conducted their ritual. Over a decade before, it had been cleared out under the direction of the previous White Tiger Saintess, leaving behind an empty pit. When Zhao Changhe first arrived, he spent some time in it and found nothing of interest. Later, when he became the stronghold master, he repurposed the place as a storage area.

A place that had been thoroughly explored and stripped clean by the cult, leaving no stone unturned, was unlikely to have anything left behind even deep underground.

The gold, silver, treasures, and martial arts manuals obtained from the tomb should have significantly bolstered the Four Idols Cult back then, and the ancient records they obtained were also likely very meaningful. According to Lady Three, the previous generation of the Four Idols Cult was not very strong, but their rapid development over the past decade or so was likely closely linked to this discovery.

They had probably found records of the Azure Dragon Seal back then as well, just that those records did not precisely say where it was. The White Tiger Saintess then likely later passed this information to her daughter. The Four Idols Cult, having already harvested and reaped substantial rewards, did not think that there was anything left of value here. It was not until many years later, when new clues emerged, that they suspected there might be another treasure hidden here and organized the Blood God Cult to search for the Azure Dragon Seal.

This was the origin of Zhao Changhe and Xia Chichi's relationship; they were both key players in this story.

If you were to take history into consideration, the area had already been thoroughly searched twice. Despite that, neither the Four Idols Cult nor Zhao Changhe, who had lived there as a stronghold leader, thought that there could still be a main tomb hidden below!

"They truly spared no expense in creating this elaborate decoy tomb," said Lady Three somewhat defensively. "The tomb we excavated earlier was indeed very wealthy... It had the hallmarks of a genuine tomb, and we greatly benefited from it."

Zhao Changhe asked, "Was there a body?"

"Yes, there was the remains of a powerful man," admitted Lady Three, knowing what he was getting at. "However, he was not at the level of the ancient Azure Dragon. If it truly were him, there should have been an intact body rather than just a pile of bones. But back then, our understanding of the previous era was not as refined as it is now. We thought that even the fact that those bones had stood the test of time was already impressive."

Zhao Changhe nodded. It was normal for their perceptions to be limited by their knowledge. Back then, he himself had been much less knowledgeable. He had lived here as the stronghold master for quite some time, but he had never thought that there would be something hidden below. Who really was to be laughed at now?

"I actually think that aside from the main tomb being slightly shifted, most of the valuable items were taken by you guys. The main tomb here probably only contains powerful traps and maybe a body. The Azure Dragon was quite meticulous, leaving all the valuable items up for taking to make it so that few would persist in searching."

Lady Three nodded. "It's likely that besides the remains and the traps, there isn't much else. But we can't just rely on assumptions. I have to go down and check it out myself. You're not strong enough, so it's best you don't go down with me. I might not be able to protect you."

Zhao Changhe hesitated for a moment. “Honestly, I’d suggest that you don’t go down either. We should seal this place back up first. You can just come back after you’ve made a breakthrough.”

Black Tortoise was on par with Tang Wanzhuang, and this ancient Azure Dragon was likely on the same level as the Sword Emperor. Judging from the specifications of the Sword Emperor’s tomb, Tang Wanzhuang decided to only explore the outskirts of the tomb and leave the core sealed due to the dangers it posed.

Here, the so-called “outskirts” had long been emptied, and now this main tomb below was the core.

Lady Three, having never witnessed the might of the Sword Emperor’s tomb, would not be able to resist exploring for the sake of the cult and her own curiosity. Their relationship was not strong enough for her to immediately heed Zhao Changhe’s advice.

Reluctantly, Zhao Changhe could only watch as Lady Three ventured into the passage, feeling uneasy as he paced above.

If even a top-ranking expert on the Ranking of Earth could not handle it, his presence would only add to the trouble. It would be foolish to go down and make things worse.

He hoped that Lady Three would sense the danger and retreat instead of forcing her way through.

Just as he was thinking this, tremors from below shook the ground, accompanied by explosive clashes of energy. It seemed that Lady Three had already engaged in battle.

Zhao Changhe’s anxiety grew as he paced back and forth.

Dragon Bird, which was usually dormant, began to shake again, reminiscent of its reaction to the sword phantom at the Sword Emperor's tomb.

Zhao Changhe said angrily, "Stop shaking. You didn't react when Xia Longyuan showed up, but now you do?"

Dragon Bird continued to shake.

Perhaps it was due to Zhao Changhe's proximity to the threshold to the Profound Mysteries, but he unexpectedly comprehended more nuanced emotions than mere excitement and displeasure from Dragon Bird this time. It seemed to say, "I no longer have an interest in him. Why should I react when he appears?"

Zhao Changhe's interest was piqued. This is quite intriguing...

Dragon Bird's personality resembled Xia Longyuan's. They were both domineering and arrogant. They were proud and always eager to prove themselves against others. But this was just on the surface. Its core nature was that of an imperial saber, its domineering nature was aligned with the emperor's will, and its pride stemmed from the notion of a single sovereign ruler. Xia Longyuan's recent actions, while still domineering, no longer embodied the true essence of an emperor.

The saber's spirit, sensing this discrepancy, no longer recognized Xia Longyuan as its rightful master.

If its fate had been like that of the Qinghe Sword, its spirit might have entirely faded by now, but it had fortunately gotten to stay with Zhao Changhe.

While Zhao Changhe's actions did not exactly align with the will of an emperor either, they did seem to at least align with Dragon Bird's nature.

Cui Wenjing mentioned that it was time he considered letting Dragon Bird recognize him as its master.

Dragon Bird conveyed another message, "There's a lively one down there. I want to fight it."

In daily battles, Zhao Changhe rarely used Dragon Bird's power—it usually did not even listen to him. Occasionally, it would begrudgingly use its power, but normally, Zhao Changhe could only use it as a regular weapon. He remembered that during the battle at Tiger Hill against the sword phantom, it was entirely Dragon Bird's power that had dispelled the phantom. He had not done much, he had pretty much just been an accessory for Dragon Bird.

In other words, if there was another sword spirit or sword phantom down below, Dragon Bird could definitely join the fight.

Just as he thought this, he heard Lady Three's muffled groan come from below, indicating that she was at a disadvantage.

Zhao Changhe could no longer hold back and swiftly descended into the passage.

The scene before him was indeed very similar to the Sword Emperor's tomb. A divine sword was attacking Lady Three, who was standing next to the central jade coffin. Lady Three had pulled out a whip from somewhere and used it to form a protective barrier around her that resembled a tortoise shell. The barrier was blocking the sword's attacks.

Back then at the Sword Emperor's tomb, the sword phantom had been entwined with vicious blood qi, and the only characteristic it displayed was one of violence. This proved that the Sword Emperor had been deeply resentful at the time of his death. The judgments that Sisi and Tang Wanzhuang made were based on the belief that once the Sword Emperor was revived, it would inevitably lead to a catastrophe in the divine land.

The divine sword this time, on the other hand, was much more vibrant, emanating a green glow with golden dragon-shaped markings on its blade. It was so lifelike that it almost looked like a real sword... No, it really was a sword, it was not some phantom!

This sword was slightly wider and thicker than common swords, and it had an ancient design to it. It was not violent; instead, it exuded majesty and dignity, with a hint of vitality and rejuvenation. These were the characteristics of the Azure Dragon.

This was the personal sword of the ancient Azure Dragon. Zhao Changhe had seen this sword on the waist of the man in the imagery at the Ancient Sword Lake!

Azure Dragon's sword!

As for Lady Three... Zhao Changhe did not know why her weapon was a whip. Could this be the true meaning of tortoiseshell binding?[1]

In any case, while such a weapon was certainly effective against people, it was at a huge disadvantage when facing nothing but a literal sword. Zhao Changhe could imagine that with the Black Tortoise's tortoise-snake duality, Lady Three's strategy involved maintaining a sturdy defense while waiting for an opportunity to strike with her whip like a snake and deliver a fatal blow to the opponent.

The problem here was...where was the opponent?

There was no one there at all! How was she supposed to fight?

With only defense and no offense, her only option might be to use the whip to wrap around the sword. However, the material that the whip was made of was definitely inferior to the sword's, so it was risky to try and wrap the whip around the blade. But then targeting only the hilt was extremely difficult. All of this placed her at a significant disadvantage.

Adding to the difficulty, with each clash, the ancient sword emitted scattered sword qi that occasionally penetrated her protective whip barrier, leaving her in a tight spot. Fortunately, being the Black Tortoise, her defense was incredibly strong. If it had been an ordinary person in her place, they would have long since fallen.

The muffled groan Zhao Changhe heard was from when Lady Three was grazed by sword qi, sustaining a minor injury to her arm.

All of these impressions occurred in an instant. Seeing him come down, Lady Three shouted, “What are you doing down here? Go back quickly! I can’t protect you!”

Before she finished speaking, she saw Zhao Changhe raise Dragon Bird, leap forward, and slash directly at the ancient sword. “Did no one tell you that I have a lot of experience fighting sentient weapons?”

Lady Three was flabbergasted.

Clang!

Dragon Bird excitedly struck the ancient sword, producing a clear, resonant sound.

A tremendous force surged through Zhao Changhe, sending him flipping back, his palm numbing from the impact. He realized that this time, Dragon Bird seemed unable to overpower the ancient sword.

After all, last time, it had been merely a sword phantom—this was an actual sword. So was it that the weapons of the current era were inferior to those of the previous era, or was Xia Longyuan’s power lower than that of the ancient Azure Dragon?

“Ugh...” Zhao Changhe staggered backward, his feet dragging long marks on the ground as he barely managed to stop himself from falling. Meanwhile, Lady Three’s whip was already dancing wildly, entangling the ancient sword once more.

Now, however, Lady Three no longer tried to drive him away. She was quite surprised that he could engage the ancient sword head-on without getting injured. With his help, they might actually stand a chance.

As she thought this, she heard Zhao Changhe slapping and scolding his saber. “You’re so excited, acting all proud and twitchy, but when it comes to the actual fight, where’s your damage output, huh? Where is it?!”

As he spoke, the broad saber flared up in a rage, almost transforming into a streak of blood-red light as it charged straight at the ancient sword.

In Lady Three’s eyes, the blood-red light seemed to carry the phantom of a dragon, with a hint of a vermillion bird spreading its wings. As for Zhao Changhe, who was being dragged along by the blood-red light, he looked purely like an accessory.

Lady Three’s heart stirred slightly. Before she could think further, the ancient sword abandoned her and turned to face Dragon Bird.

It was like a collision between a blood dragon and a golden dragon. Sword qi and saber qi erupted instantly, filling the entire space.

Lady Three was one of the top experts in this world. How could she miss such an opportunity? She flicked her whip, accurately wrapping it around the hilt of the ancient sword.

It was an extremely shameless two-on-one fight. The ancient sword struggled, but it could not break free. Lady Three was not someone to be trifled with.

Dragon Bird seemed very displeased and itching to slash at Lady Three. Zhao Changhe gripped onto its hilt tightly, almost begging the saber to give him some face.

Dragon Bird twitched a couple of times but eventually went silent, as if saying, "It's enough that you know how awesome I am. I can't be bothered to argue with you."

Lady Three held the ancient sword and found that, like other divine weapons, as long as someone held the hilt, the ancient sword would calm down.

The inexplicable battle ended just as inexplicably. Lady Three let out a sigh of relief and looked at Zhao Changhe happily. "Not bad, little brother, you actually were helpful..."

Zhao Changhe did not respond. He silently planted Dragon Bird into the ground and began taking off his clothes.

Lady Three tilted her head in confusion.

She watched as Zhao Changhe took off his outer garment and tossed it over to her. "Put it on."

After saying that, he turned his back and faced the entrance of the passage without saying a word.

Lady Three instinctively caught it, then realized what was going on as she looked down.

The area around her chest had been struck by sword qi, causing her clothes to split apart and expose her skin. There were plenty of holes in her clothing, leaving patches of bare skin showing.

Lady Three glanced at his back. Without saying anything, she put on his coat very naturally and said with a smile, "Shall we check out the coffin?"

Zhao Changhe then turned back around, acting as if nothing had happened. "Do you think he'll come back to life?"

"Probably not," said Lady Three. She then peered into the jade coffin and muttered to herself, "The ancient four idols may all be... truly dead."

Chapter 300: Fundamental Law-Level Magical Technique

Zhao Changhe felt a weight lift off his shoulders.

He had worried that when she asked if he wanted to check the coffin, she was implying he should find one to lie down and die in. It seemed that a charming and experienced woman did have her pros. She would not make a fuss over such a trivial matter as a young girl might. It was clear that the task at hand was more important.

However, his Back Eye had inadvertently caught a clear view of her.

So big and so white.

If she found out about this, she might really look for a coffin to dump him into.

Pretending as if nothing had happened, Zhao Changhe stepped closer to take a look at the coffin.

The coffin was made of jade and it was completely sealed, making it impossible to see inside or sense anything inside it. However, with how much certainty was in Lady Three's voice, it seemed that she was sure that the person inside was dead. It seemed that her spiritual sense

could detect the internal aura, and it was then easy for her to determine if what was within held any life left.

Lady Three sighed. “He might have set up many contingencies, including even moving the location of Beimang, but he still could not escape death in the end.”

Zhao Changhe realized that this might be a bit of a blow to the faith of the Four Idols Cult. In some sense, one of the gods they worshiped lay inside this coffin, and he was dead.

If the god you worshiped turned out to be truly dead, would that not shake your faith?

However, the ancient four idols were subordinates of the Night Emperor. Their deaths did not necessarily mean the Night Emperor was dead, so their faith would not just completely collapse. Additionally, Lady Three and her peers had essentially taken on the roles of the four idols themselves. In actuality, it would probably be more troubling if the original four idols were still alive.

Nevertheless, Lady Three’s expression still showed a bit of melancholy. Zhao Changhe did not know how to comfort her. He asked, “You don’t plan on opening the coffin, do you?”

Lady Three pondered for a moment. “It still needs to be opened...”

Zhao Changhe quickly advised, “Who knows what kind of traps or protective measures might be triggered by opening it? I suggest that you take the whole coffin back to your Four Idols Cult’s headquarters first. Once you’ve brought it back, you can use the collective power of your cult to study it slowly. Archaeological excavations can take decades, you know? There’s no need to be so hasty.”

Lady Three said, “I don’t plan to open it right now. Do you really think I’m that reckless?”

Zhao Changhe squinted at her. “I can’t tell. Who was the one who went down and fought a sword like an idiot just now?”

“Because this sword is something I wanted!” said Lady Three angrily. “How else could I get it without triggering the protective mechanism?”

Zhao Changhe said, “I thought it was for Chichi...”

Lady Three’s eyebrows shot up. She felt a surge of frustration.

I risked my life and you think it was all for your little sweetheart? Am I just a tool to you?

Zhao Changhe took half a step back and raised his hands to shield his face.

Peeking under the cover of his arms, he saw Lady Three wrapped in his large coat with just the tips of her fingers poking out of the sleeves. Her face was puffed up in annoyance and she looked unexpectedly cute, much like Yangyang.

Lady Three gritted her teeth as she considered the situation. Despite her irritation, she could not completely lose her temper; he had helped her earlier, after all. Forcing a smile, she said, “This sword is neither for Chichi nor for myself... Chichi has Iceheart, which is no less powerful than this sword. This sword is a significant treasure tied to our cult’s heritage. Whether Chichi becomes the cult leader or not, she will at least become Venerable White Tiger. The position of Venerable Azure Dragon will remain vacant and can be succeeded by the most deserving in our cult. This sword will be theirs in the future.”

Zhao Changhe had to admit that a large cult required a collection of treasures, especially those connected to its lineage.

Lady Three might claim to be hands-off, but she was always thinking about the cult's future. Her efforts in securing funds and treasures had significantly contributed to the cult's growth over the years.

Zhao Changhe said, "I feel like the Fire Serpent of Yi might be a good candidate. Dragons and serpents are quite similar, maybe she could become Venerable Azure Dragon?"

Lady Three gave him a strange look and said, "You'll have to discuss that with Vermillion Bird. Fire Serpent of Yi is directly under her. Vermillion Bird would have to formally suggest a test at a high-level cult meeting."

"Aren't the highest-ranking members of the cult just you and Vermillion Bird?"

"Now, there's Chichi as well," Lady Three added with a mischievous smile. "Are you sure Chichi will support your other woman?"

Zhao Changhe's face turned pale and he quickly changed the subject. "Vermillion Bird would not bring this up out of the blue. Can't you help by suggesting it informally?"

"You want me to tell them 'Zhao Changhe likes the Fire Serpent of Yi and strongly recommends her for the position'?" Lady Three smiled again. "Are you sure? Do you want Vermillion Bird to kill the Fire Serpent of Yi, or do you want to kill the Fire Serpent of Yi, or do you want Chichi to come after you?"

"Can't you find another reason to recommend her? Like her strategic position or her strong cultivation..."

Seeing how seriously Zhao Changhe was considering how to support the Fire Serpent of Yi, Lady Three almost burst out laughing. "Alright, alright, I'll help you talk to them."

Zhao Changhe grinned. "You're the best."

Lady Three smiled playfully. “Speaking of which, how about letting you be Venerable Azure Dragon? Would you accept it?”

Although she said it in jest, there was a hint of sincerity in her words.

The only reason he did not want to join the cult was that he did not want to be subordinate to others. If his position was equal to the others’, he might be interested. Moreover, with Chichi being his lover, she likely would not mind and might even be happy about it.

The only issue was that the position of venerable could not be given out easily. Chichi had received the Azure Dragon’s legacy, so anyone else taking the position would require a reasonable explanation. They would have to first at least convince Vermillion Bird.

Zhao Changhe pointed at himself: “Me as Azure Dragon? What connection do I have with Azure Dragon? If you’re saying that because my little brother is quite similar to a...”

Lady Three’s expression suddenly turned serious.

Zhao Changhe instantly shut his mouth.

“The Azure Dragon corresponds to celestial phenomena and has specific attributes, but in the mortal world, he is generally regarded as the Human Emperor. As for you...” Lady Three sized him up for a moment, then said, “Come here.”

Zhao Changhe, puzzled, followed Lady Three to the foot of the coffin. The surface of the coffin was covered in intricate carvings that appeared incomprehensible.

In fact, the entire coffin was adorned with such carvings. Without knowing their significance, one might dismiss them as mere decoration.

“These carvings have a purpose,” Lady Three explained. “They are part of a spell meant to sustain the body inside and possibly even revive it one day. While it seems that he’s truly dead and the spell did not work, it does not mean that the spell itself is useless. Anyway, why don’t you try to understand it? Just see if you can.”

Zhao Changhe said, “These carvings are too abstract. They don’t even have a concrete form. How am I supposed to understand them? Can you give me any hints?”

Lady Three crossed her arms. “Just consider it a test to see if you’re truly destined for our cult. Learning this will help counteract the backlash of your vicious blood qi, heal your own hidden injuries, extend your lifespan, and even offer a glimpse of immortality. As a healing technique, it could be incorporated into your dual cultivation technique. Also, if you need to heal a man, you can’t exactly use dual cultivation, can you? Well, it’s up to you if you want to learn it.”

Putting aside the idea of healing men, the potential to extend one’s lifespan was enticing to anyone. Plus, it might be useful for Tang Wanzhuang.

Zhao Changhe could not decipher the abstract carvings, but he had a trick up his sleeve.

Feigning contemplation, he reached out and gently traced the carvings with his fingers.

At the same time, his mind connected with the golden foil. Soon, a VR-like scene emerged, and he could see large characters in his mind. “Rejuvenation Art[1]. Spring returns to the earth, flora grows once more, and everything is revived. Of the five elements, it belongs to wood, representing the Azure Dragon of the East. It is a fundamental law-level magical technique of the world and is currently beyond your comprehension. You can grasp the basics, but forcing a deeper understanding without having reached the third layer of the Profound Mysteries could harm your foundation.”

Zhao Changhe was speechless.

What a generic name. It sounds like something you'd find on the street. But it's actually at the level of the fundamental laws of the world! Anyway, I'm actually not skilled enough to learn it...

The carvings were not explained in detail by the golden foil, it only provided him with an extremely profound translation of the consciousness. Information on the consciousness flooded his mind, and he seemed to understand something but could not truly grasp it. When he tried to capture it forcefully, it only caused his head to throb with a splitting pain.

Zhao Changhe staggered back a step, sweating profusely and panting heavily.

Lady Three immediately supported him and curiously asked, "What happened?"

"Well... It's something called the Rejuvenation Art... This is the first time I've come across the concept of spells or magical techniques," said Zhao Changhe while holding his head in discomfort. "But I can't learn it. Well, I might have grasped the basics at least, I guess?"

Lady Three's eyes widened in shock.

He actually understood it?

This was clearly something that would usually require at least a decade of meditation and research within a cult to figure out. It was much more difficult than normal archaeological decoding. She originally hoped that he might just have a vague sense of it, needing long-term research to properly understand it, and that would have already been impressive and comparable to her own progress.

But in the end, he actually just touched it a few times, and now he was telling her that he had already grasped the basics?

Lady Three did not believe him, so she rolled up her sleeves, revealing the tiny wounds that had been scratched by the sword energy of the ancient sword: “Don’t brag, if you’ve grasped the basics, you should be able to heal this small injury, right? Come and try.”

Zhao Changhe hesitated. “I can’t do it from a distance...”

Lady Three stared at him intently. “What’s the big fuss? Just touch it if you need to. Stop making excuses.”

“...I’ve never heard such a request.” Zhao Changhe sighed and placed his hand on the wound.

Her skin feels delicate, warm, and smooth... Wait, what am I thinking? I should focus on how to use the basics of the spell. Will true qi be compatible with magical techniques? Will I need to go to the Taiyi Sect and try to learn some of their Daoist scriptures?

As he tried to channel the true qi of the Six Harmonies Art inside his body, Zhao Changhe was pleasantly surprised to find that it worked.

The versatility and adaptability of the Six Harmonies Art shone through once again. It could convert into vicious blood qi needed for the Vicious Blood Art, and it could also transform into something resembling “magical energy,” specifically of the wood element.

Lady Three felt his rough hand rubbing her arm. Her face flushed red and she was just about to get angry, but then she felt a sudden itching sensation from the wound.

It was not the itch one would feel when being touched, but rather the characteristic itch when a wound was healing.

He really can heal such minor injuries! He’s really learned the basics of the Rejuvenation Art!

Lady Three forgot to pull her hand back, letting him continue to touch it. Her mind was filled with self-doubt. Does he really have no connection to the Night Emperor?