

## T. Times 301

Chapter 301: Fire Pig of Shi

Who was she?

She was the renowned Black Tortoise!

Not only was her cultivation among the best in the world, but her understanding of the four idols was only rivaled by Vermillion Bird's. Even she could barely deduce the nature of the engraved spell; fully deciphering it would have required her years of painstaking research. Yet, Zhao Changhe actually just touched it a few times and understood it just like that?

His understanding of the Azure Dragon even surpassed hers?!

Seeing her dazed expression, Zhao Changhe did not dare continue taking advantage of her. He cautiously withdrew his hand and waved it in front of her. "Hey..."

"Ah..." Lady Three, still somewhat stunned, unexpectedly blurted out, "So fast?"

Zhao Changhe was confused. "?"

Lady Three suddenly came back to her senses, her eyes darting around before she giggled. "Pretty good, ten seconds is quite impressive."

Zhao Changhe was even more confused now.

Lady Three nudged him, "Hey, how did it feel?"

Zhao Changhe replied in annoyance, "What do you want me to say?"

It was nice to touch, do you want me to say that?

Lady Three also realized that her words were a bit ambiguous and cleared her throat, “I mean, how did you do it? Didn’t your head ache? How’s the consumption?”

“Yeah, comprehending this power gave me a splitting headache, it felt like having a spike driven into my soul. I nearly couldn’t bear it. As for the consumption, it isn’t too bad, probably because your wound was so minor.”

Lady Three looked down at her arm. The wound had indeed just been a superficial cut, and there had barely even been any bleeding. The wound would have healed on its own in a few days. But after his treatment, it was smooth and unscarred. There was not a trace of the wound having even existed.

Even if it was just a paper cut, a technique that could heal it like this could be considered a divine technique. This technique alone could convince a crowd to kneel in awe and in a much easier and effective manner than Maitreya’s tricks.

Lady Three hesitated.

This was the Azure Dragon’s forbidden technique, one of the Four Idol Cult’s core pursuits. She wondered if he would be willing to share it with them.

But then she heard Zhao Changhe say, “Let’s go to the stronghold. I’ll write down my insights for you... though I’m not sure how useful they’ll be. It’s simply too mysterious and difficult to put into words. Regardless, I’ll do my best.”

After saying that, he headed back toward the passage and said, “If you want to take this coffin away, I can get the guys in the stronghold to help. There’s still strength in numbers.”

Lady Three stared blankly at his back.

He’s going to give it to us just like that?

This was no longer just about him gifting them something valuable; of greater concern was the naturalness of it all, as if he was merely doing something he was supposed to.

Lady Three looked down, seeing herself still wearing his coat.

This guy really is quite a gentleman. He didn't take advantage of the situation at all.

All of this left her unable to vent her embarrassment at being seen. All she could do was pretend as if nothing had happened.

And it really did feel like nothing had happened now.

Lady Three pouted and followed him out. "Hey, why are you in such a hurry? Wait for me!"

Fwhoosh!

The two of them emerged from the cave behind the waterfall. They sealed the entrance, and walked out of the pool.

By the pool, a group of bandits were about to strip their clothes to go into the water. Just as their hands were on their belts, they stared wide-eyed at the man and woman emerging from the waterfall.

Zhao Changhe was also stunned. "What are you guys doing here?"

The bandits stammered, "W-we, we're taking a bath, boss. W-what are you doing here?"

We were just about to take a bath, we aren't even undressed yet. You suddenly came out wearing just your underwear, and now you're asking us what we're doing??

The air was still for a moment, and then all their eyes fell on Lady Three.

Zhao Changhe's coat wrapped around Lady Three's graceful figure, hiding all her curves.

The bandits' gazes gradually turned to ones of understanding, but at the same time, indignation and heartache.

Yep, the boss just isn't human. It is what it is. He truly is just something else.

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Lady Three did not stay overnight.

That same day, back at the stronghold, Zhao Changhe wrote a set of abstract formulas that might or might not help others learn the technique. While he did that, Lady Three wrote a letter introducing the bandits of the mountain stronghold to the Blood God Cult.

They exchanged letters without a word, like schoolchildren passing notes to each other in class.

After exchanging letters, Zhao Changhe called over one of the bandits. “Liuzi! Come here!”

The bandit scurried over, sneaking a glance at Lady Three’s stern face before whispering, “What do you need, boss?”

“It’s too cold here in winter. This place isn’t suitable to live in. I’ll be leaving soon, and no one will be here to guide you all on your martial arts. You guys shouldn’t waste your prime years. I’ll be giving you some money. Bring everyone south to Wushan and look for Cult Leader Xue to join the Blood God Cult. Take this letter. As long as you give him this letter, they will take you in and even give you some good positions.”

Liuzi skeptically took the sealed letter. “Boss, since when has your face carried such sway with Cult Leader Xue?”[1]

Zhao Changhe sternly replied, “Are you saying that my face doesn’t carry enough weight now?”

Liuzi did believe that Zhao Changhe, who was now famous throughout the world, did have some face. He also believed that Cult Leader Xue would be happy to accept their group that already had a close relationship with the Blood God Cult. As for the supposed good positions Zhao Changhe said they would be given, Liuzi assumed that his boss was just exaggerating.

Liuzi sheepishly took the letter and asked, “So where are you going in this freezing winter, boss?”

“Anywhere under the sky can be my home.”

“Boss, it’s one thing to fool your brothers, but don’t fool yourself. We brothers know you quite a bit now. You’re getting dumped by your new mistress again...”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

Lady Three: “...”

Zhao Changhe, with a darkened expression, said, “Before you go, pick four dark-skinned guys to help you with a task.”

“What do we need to do?”

“Carry a coffin.”

No one understood why carrying a coffin required dark-skinned guys, not even Lady Three. As a confused Liuzi went to pick the men, Lady Three sighed and said, “I finally understand why Vermillion Bird is always thinking about killing you.”

Zhao Changhe rubbed his forehead and said, “If you have something to say, then say nice things. You really shouldn’t take from that fierce woman.”

Lady Three said lazily, “I’m naturally lazy and not that violent. Anyway, don’t use that tone with Vermillion Bird. She spared you before because of your star chart, but now, who knows? If she’s in a bad mood, she might just take your head. Save your jokes for the Fire Serpent of Yi. Don’t mess with Vermillion Bird.”

Zhao Changhe did find Lady Three to be quite tepid. There were several times when he expected her to get angry, but nothing happened. It seemed that it was not that she was not annoyed or angry with him, just that she was too lazy to do anything. She was not exactly placid. It was just that by the time she felt like getting mad, the moment had already passed.

She really is a tortoise.

Although he had seen her erupt in violence during their first meeting at Huangsha Market, that was likely necessary for intimidation and maintaining her persona. Otherwise, given her laziness, it seemed like she would procrastinate on severing the neck of a barbarian commander even when it was placed right in front of her.

Lady Three complemented Vermillion Bird really well. Vermillion Bird managed personnel and warfare, while Lady Three handled the finances, rituals, and other things. She often shirked responsibilities by hiding in Huangsha Market under the pretense of searching for the Black Tortoise Secret Realm. Vermillion Bird probably got a headache every time she wanted to discuss something with her sister.

Zhao Changhe even wondered if Vermillion Bird's fierce temperament was the result of the behavior of this laid-back sister of hers. It was possible that she had not always been so fierce and brutal.

Lady Three then asked, "Do you know what benefits this final breakthrough of the Azure Dragon Secret Realm will bring to me and Vermillion Bird?"

Zhao Changhe said, "It lets you recover what the Four Idols Cult lost?"

"It's more than just that," replied Lady Three. She then explained slowly, "The five elements counteract and complement each other. The four idols aren't completely separate in nature; they often intertwine. For example, the Dipper Mansion of Black Tortoise, also known as the Six Stars of the Southern Dipper, governs life. This is similar to the Rejuvenation Art you just deciphered, and they can validate each other. Likewise, Vermillion Bird is primarily related to death, but it is reborn through fire, symbolizing life as well. Your discovery benefits both of us. If I can step into the third layer of the Profound Mysteries, you will have played a significant role in it."

Zhao Changhe scratched his head, not quite sure why Lady Three was explaining this to him.

Lady Three then took out a fire-red pig-faced mask. "This is the mask for the Fire Pig of Shi[2]. Don't think that everything with the attribute of fire is under Vermillion Bird. This one is under my direct subordinate."

Zhao Changhe was puzzled.

Lady Three placed the mask in his hands. "You don't have to join the cult if you don't want to, but I'm giving you this identity for you to use whenever and wherever you wish. You don't need to take

orders from anyone and you will have certain conveniences. If you get in trouble and you're in a situation where it's useless to disguise yourself, use this identity and the Four Idols Cult will back you up."

She winked. "If you want to pursue the Fire Serpent of Yi, this identity will make it easier to approach her, right?"

With that, she regained her playful demeanor. She placed her hands behind her back and sauntered away. "I heard that you two wore pig masks in Sword Lake City, so this can be considered fate, hehe."

## Chapter 302: The Long-Awaited Blind Woman

Lady Three left.

Zhao Changhe returned to his room to rest, his head aching.

The Rejuvenation Art was not something he could handle at the moment. The mental pain caused by attempting to grasp the concept of a fundamental law had still not subsided. It had left him with no energy to talk with Lady Three, let alone flirt with her; and neither of them was in the mood for that.

On the other hand, this art was an unexpected gain that did not seem to directly improve his strength, but it held immense future potential. The only troublesome point was that it did not quite fit his style or meld well with his system of martial arts.

A berserker with a healing skill really just does not make much sense...

His current state was overly mixed. Even though he tried to integrate everything into a single coherent system, it was still a chaotic collection of techniques in the end.

To step into the first layer of the Profound Mysteries and become what people called a "master," it was clear that it was not just about breaking through in terms of strength.[1] It required a thorough understanding and organization of one's martial arts; it required one to create something uniquely their own.

For someone like Hu Lie, it was his scimitar merging with the sands. For Vulture Beak, it was the meteors falling upon the battlefield. For Yue Hongling, it was the setting sun reflected upon the river.

They had their unique styles, and their martial paths had a distinct essence and spirit.

Most of the other half-baked ninth-layer practitioners were unable to connect the bridge between heaven and earth, and it was because they were lacking in this specific aspect. They merely mimicked others, following the book, lacking their unique insights, and failing to create something of their own. They blindly increased their strength, but doing just that did not make them worthy of being recognized as a master.

Being challenged and defeated by opponents of lower cultivation was due to this lack of depth.

However, for Zhao Changhe, this chaotic mix was not exactly a bad thing. It represented breadth. It was only by experiencing a wide range of knowledge that one could cross-check and adopt the strengths of different options, ultimately making something of their own and returning to simplicity, returning to that singular vertical and horizontal slash.

For instance, this Rejuvenation Art... it could at least demonstrate how to influence another's body and blood flow, and this was an important point of reference for the Vicious Blood Saber Art.

When the Vicious Blood Saber Art was practiced to a high level, beyond instilling fear, its most important effect was actually to cause the target's blood flow to go crazy, leading to a horrible death from within. Zhao Changhe had never fully understood how to achieve this until now.

Under the moonlight, Zhao Changhe stood outside the courtyard holding Dragon Bird in his hand. He stood silently for a long time before suddenly swinging his saber.

The saber moved silently; the moonlight cast no shadows.

This was Hell on Earth, now incorporating the Yellow Sand Saber Art.

Hell could be noisy, and it could be silent. In the past, Zhao Changhe did not know how to swing a saber silently, always opting for fierce and violent strikes. But after the battle with Hu Lie, he understood how to strike soundlessly, perfecting Hell on Earth, which proved crucial during his assassination of the envoy in Batu's army. That had been his process of verification.



A noisy hell was brutal and fierce, with flames raging everywhere, instilling fear.

A silent hell was oppressive and hopeless, shrouded in utter darkness, equally fearsome.

Different approaches, the same result, adapted to varying environments.

And then...

The soundless saber qi shot straight to the treetop, reaching a sparrow before it even sensed the danger and could fly away.

The bird felt its blood surge wildly, and even before the saber qi reached it, its blood had already burst out, causing it to die an extremely gruesome death.

This was Hell on Earth.

Hell on Earth was now perfected.

It was no longer just a saber art at the eighth layer of the Profound Gate... it was now at the level of the Profound Mysteries, peeking into the extremely subtle and mysterious door of martial arts.

Cui Wenjing, Tang Wanzhuang, and many others had said that the Vicious Blood Saber Art was excellent. It would have been easy for any of them to find Zhao Changhe a good saber art, yet they had not done so, reflecting just how excellent the Vicious Blood Saber Art was. Now, its brilliance was evident once more. At the level of the Profound Mysteries, the Vicious Blood Saber Art was no less impressive than other saber arts.

Of course, it still depended on who used it.

Zhao Changhe breathed a sigh of relief, sheathed his saber, and went back inside to rest.

His mind had yet to recover, and the saber practice made his head hurt even more. Leaning against the bed, Zhao Changhe soon fell asleep.

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Several times he had expected the blind woman to appear, yet she never had.

This time, he had not thought about it at all, falling asleep in utter exhaustion, but she finally appeared.

Unlike at the beginning, when she stood before him without hesitation, or the recent times when she deliberately stayed further away from him, this time the blind woman hung on a treetop outside the window, where the sparrow had just been. She was neither too close nor too far, and it finally no longer felt awkward as it had been before. The distance between them felt like a much more natural distance for conversation.

Zhao Changhe sighed. "You're here?"

The blind woman seemed to choke up as well. After such a long time without facing each other, suddenly appearing before him made her unsure of how to start the conversation. After a while, she finally said, "You have peeked into the doors of the Profound Mysteries. I sensed it, so I came to see you... Is there nothing you need clarification on?"

Zhao Changhe said calmly, "Besides not really knowing who you are, there isn't really anything I need to ask you."

The blind woman said, "Because you have integrated into this world, living your life with its joys and sorrows. You now also have your own understanding and path of exploration for martial arts and the previous era. Now, whether I am here or not makes no difference, unlike when you first arrived in this world and wanted guidance for everything."

Zhao Changhe nodded. "Perhaps."

Indeed, seeing her now did not stir up any emotions within him. The resentment and discomfort he felt before had faded a lot, and he really did feel that it made no difference whether she was around or not.

Unless she started causing trouble, in which case there would be no end to it.

The blind woman concluded, “You are now a person of this world.”

Zhao Changhe was silent for a moment, then asked with a strange expression, “Did you do all this just to achieve this result, always flattering me just for this?”

The blind man was puzzled. “When did I flatter you?”

“The Tome of Troubled Times is practically a book of flattery. People have long since begun to suspect that I have a relationship with the spirit of the tome. Did you really not realize it?”

The blind woman laughed. “Stop trying to figure out my identity. It’s meaningless... The Tome of Troubled Times is an embodiment of the Heavenly Dao. It only gives the evaluations it considers important. Your actions deserve that evaluation, and it has nothing to do with me.”

“Is that really the case? Then how do you explain its expectations that seem to come from my perspective?”

“It’s because the Heavenly Dao stands from everyone’s perspective. If someone else had done what you did, they would have received the same evaluation.”

“Alright.” Zhao Changhe originally wanted to ask her opinion on Xia Longyuan, but he found himself in a situation just like Lady Three’s—some time had passed and the anger had faded, so it did not seem worth asking anymore.

After thinking for a long time, Zhao Changhe realized he truly had nothing to ask the blind woman. As for deeper matters like specific events of the previous era, which gods and Buddhas were still lurking around, where they were, and what their purpose was, he knew that such questions would not be answered even if he asked, so why bother asking?

In the current situation, it might even be better if she did not exist. If that were the case, he would likely feel much more comfortable and free.

After thinking for a while, he asked a very direct question, “It feels like completely unsealing the golden foil is a distant goal. Does it require any treasures that I can go find?”

The blind woman replied, "It does not need that. What it requires is the spirit qi of heaven and earth, and... completeness."

"Similar to what Ying Five is working toward? A complete world?"

"That's one way. The key is that it itself is not complete."

"The golden foil is incomplete? Why don't I seem to have noticed?"

"The page is whole, but it's still only one page."

Zhao Changhe understood. To fully unseal the golden foil, he would probably need to collect all the pages of the Heavenly Tome, or at least most of them.

He asked directly, "How many pages are there in total?"

"Nine, nine is the number of extremes."

"Do you have any clues you can give me on the other pages' whereabouts?"

"None. It's impossible for them to exist in the mortal world. They would be in various ancient secret realms, some of which are formed precisely because of the existence of a page of the Heavenly Tome."

"Is it because heaven and man are separate? Is that why they wouldn't fall in the mortal or human world?"

"You could say that."

"Has anyone ever found any of them, such as Xia Longyuan?"

The blind woman was silent for a moment, then slowly said, "Maybe."

Maybe... Zhao Changhe frowned, carefully scrutinizing the blind woman.

If she were the tome spirit, she could be unaware of other things, but not knowing where the pages of the Heavenly Tome are makes no sense. Could she really not be the tome spirit? Was my beauty cream wasted on her?

Or perhaps Xia Longyuan, with his great power, isolated her perception? Hm, that seems more likely. The feeling of being watched at all times was probably something that Xia Longyuan could not tolerate. He should have figured out a way to prevent himself from being surveilled all the time.

Zhao Changhe suddenly wondered, Can the blind woman watch when I'm having sex?

"Alright." Zhao Changhe suddenly felt a lot better in a very self-deceptive way and smiled. "Anyway, what brought you here today? If you have something to say to me, just say it. There's no need for small talk, we're not exactly strangers to one another."

The blind woman felt like she had lost her mystique, but she really had to get involved this time. The matter she had come to talk about was of extremely great importance, and it was not something she could play coy about. Besides, she could not hide it from Zhao Changhe anyway. He was truly quite smart.

She was silent for a long time before finally saying, "When you go to Kunlun, don't just aim to get the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng. There will be many things of value there..."

"For example?"

"A page of the Heavenly Tome."

Zhao Changhe almost laughed out loud, but he managed to hold it in. "Alright, I understand."

This was the actual reason why blind woman had come to meet him after so long.

Everyone feared the unknown. People fear those they do not understand, those who do not seek anything, and those who purely seek pleasure or entertainment.

Now that he knew what she was after, she was much less frightening... Although he valued the Heavenly Tome greatly, and it seemed like the blind woman was providing him with some guidance on how to find more pages, was she not just essentially asking him to do her bidding?

Were they not all just people? They all had human desires and human needs... What need was there to pretend to be some god or Buddha!

### Chapter 303: Kunlun

Early the next morning, it snowed heavily.

Snow-Treading Crow tread the snow and they left Beimang.

The last time Zhao Changhe left Beimang, he was just beginning his journey in the world of martial arts, setting out to test his saber.

This time, his departure was much anticipated, and he left to seek the path of a master.

Heading south from Beimang, it only took a few days to reach the capital. Zhao Changhe gazed at the massive city looming in the snowy distance but did not approach it.

Word has it that the situation in Jiangnan was deteriorating, and Tang Wanzhuang had left the capital and gone to Gusu. As for the Fire Serpent of Yi, he had no idea if she was still in the palace. Given her nature, she would not be confined to the palace if she did not want to be—she would just leave as she pleased.

Apart from them, there was nothing that could draw Zhao Changhe to the capital.

The city was like a whirlpool. It was the center of politics and the core of the battle between the human emperor and the gods and demons. It was all fine if you were ignorant, but once you were in the know, you would have to avoid it.

If he could bridge the gap between heaven and earth and become a master, he wondered if that would be enough to qualify him to return here again.

How strong would he have to become to avoid leaving in haste like last time?

And how strong would he have to be so that he could confidently tell Xia Longyuan that he disagreed with what he was doing?

Zhao Changhe stared for a long time, then turned his horse away and set off.

The journey to the western frontier was indeed quite long. With no Yue Honling riding alongside him this time, the winter journey felt particularly lonely and desolate, with snow covering his bow and saber.

He even found himself somewhat missing the days when he had to worry about ambushes from the Blood God Cult and the assassins of the Snow-Listening Pavilion. Those days, though filled with danger, were at least not boring.

Actually, where did the assassins from Snow-Listening Pavilion go?

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Said assassins were at Yanmen Pass.

“Zhao Changhe? He’s long gone,” the men from the jianghu who were still lingering in the commandery told a white-robed swordsman. “What are you doing here so late? The battle ended quite a while back? What are you even here for at this point?”

Ying Shuang asked, “Do you know where he went?”

“How are we supposed to know? He left right after the war. I heard that even Cui Yuanyong couldn’t get him to enjoy a celebratory drink with him.”

If Zhao Changhe heard this, he would have realized how unreliable the idea was that wandering martial artists were always too easy to assassinate. Assassins did not just have to consider their target’s strength. If their target’s movements could be tracked, they could always find a way to ambush them. The real headache came when a target was constantly on the move and could not be located. By the time they received news of their whereabouts and rushed over, their target would already be long gone.

In fact, many evildoers also roamed free for the exact same reason. With the flow of information during ancient times, it was just too difficult to accurately know where certain people were.

At this time, Ying Shuang was not the only one who wanted to kill Zhao Changhe. Wang Daozhong, who had been tasked by the family head with handling the matter, was even more furious. He had previously heard that Zhao Changhe was in the capital. When he rushed there, he was a step too late. When he learned that Zhao Changhe had become famous in Saibei, he planned to have the members of the Wang Clan in Yanmen take action, but by then, Zhao Changhe had already left.

Ying Shuang was in the same boat.

Unable to get any information from bystanders, he had no choice but to head toward a casino in Yanmen Commandery.

Their Snow-Listening Pavilion often cooperated with Ying Five's organization to exchange information. Everything had always gone smoothly in the past, but this time, for some reason, their reputation for reliability suddenly faltered. Their pavilion master had already gone to negotiate with Ying Five on Ying Shuang's behalf, and it was said that Sha Seven had been demoted. However, word had it that Sha Seven was the son of one of Ying Five's old brothers, so Ying Five would likely protect him. A demotion was just a minor punishment, and he would probably be reinstated in another position soon enough.

On second thought, maybe this all happened due to the reckless behavior of a young master like Sha Seven. If a responsible person were in charge, things would not have become such a mess. It seems like it's still the best option to go ask around at the gambling house.

Opening the door of the gambling house, Ying Shuang was just about to ask for the person in charge when his eyes widened in disbelief.

Sha Seven, with a face full of enthusiasm, was sitting at the dealer's position, shaking dice. "Place your bets! Place your bets now!"

Seeing his enemy made Ying Shuang's blood boil. Having wandered around Jiangnan for three months, he was furious. He rushed over, grabbed Sha Seven by the collar, and shouted, "Sha Seven! How dare you be here!"



Sha Qi, even angrier, retorted, “What the fuck are you talking about?! I was transferred from the perfectly fine Sword Lake City to this godforsaken place because of you! And you have the gall to come and scold me?”

Ying Shuang almost laughed in disbelief. “Because of me?”

“Of course!” Sha Qi said, full of righteousness. “Zhao Changhe headed south when he left. You asked me where he went, I told you where he went. I never sent anyone to follow him! Your Snow-Listening Pavilion chased after him in the past, so how did you not figure out that he might take a detour and head elsewhere? You’re the ones targeting him, you should be familiar with his habits! In the end, he set a decoy and slipped away, causing me to be punished by the fifth lord. Am I not being wronged here?!”

Ying Shuang clearly knew that the other party was being plain unreasonable. If Zhao Changhe had really gone south, there would have been clues along the way, not a complete blackout. If he had gone north at the time, he would have easily been able to figure out that Zhao Changhe had gone to the capital. So with that being the case, how could there have been no clue as to where Zhao Changhe had gone?

But Ying Five was obviously protecting the other party, and the Snow-Listening Pavilion did not want to entirely fall out with Ying Five yet. As such, Ying Shuang could only say coldly, “What about this time? Which way did he go?”

Sha Seven was genuinely surprised. “You caused me so much trouble and you still expect me to tell you?”

Sure, sure, I caused you trouble. Ying Shuang maintained a blank expression. “Did I give you all that money for nothing?”

“Oh, that’s true.” Sha Seven sighed. “Well, for the sake of the money you gave me, I won’t argue with you. This time, Zhao Changhe went to Beimang. This information is absolutely certain. However, if you go there and can’t find him, don’t blame me for pointing you in the wrong direction.”

Ying Shuang turned to leave coldly. “If there’s another mistake, the relationship between our two factions is over!”

“Wait.” Sha Seven called him back and handed him a dagger. “Let’s not allow this misunderstanding to sour things between us. Here, take this as a gift and let’s continue being friends.”

Ying Shuang hesitated for a moment, unable to keep up with Sha Seven’s erratic train of thought. In the end, he took the dagger with a resigned sigh. He noticed its fine quality and faint, chilling gleam on the refined edge. He could not help but admire it a bit and asked, “What’s the name of this dagger?”

Sha Qi solemnly replied, “Sha Dagger.”

Ying Shuang did not have the time to ponder the significance of the name and hurried off to Beimang.

Upon arriving at the mountain stronghold at Beimang, he indeed found traces of habitation. In the stronghold master’s hut, there were old clothes discarded by Zhao Changhe, confirming that he had indeed been here recently.

Unfortunately, the entire stronghold was deserted. Not only was Zhao Changhe gone, but even his underlings had vanished, leaving no one for him to interrogate. The stronghold was blanketed in snow and deathly silent.

Ying Shuang trudged through the thick snow, searching for any clues. Suddenly, the ground gave way beneath him and he fell into a pit.

Fortunately, as an assassin on the Ranking of Man, he had his own tricks. Before he fell to the bottom of the pitfall, he managed to change his position mid-air and narrowly avoided an almost frozen urine trap.

“Who the hell digs pits next to a training ground? Zhao Changhe, are you fucking crazy?” Ying Shuang shouted to the sky, “You better not let me find you!”

At this time, Zhao Changhe was already nearing Longyou...[1]

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Kunlun in Chinese mythology is not the same as the present-day Kunlun Mountains.

But in this world, there were not that many differences. The Kunlun Mountains that spanned the western part of the world were essentially the same as the legendary Kunlun.

Of course, when people mentioned Kunlun, they were not actually referring to the entire vast mountain range, but specifically Yuxu Peak and the surrounding peaks.

There was a city at the foot of the mountain.

As Lady Three had said, this was a chaotic city.

Zhao Changhe led his horse into the city, observing the scenery and reflecting on the fact that he had actually been to quite a few so-called chaotic cities. Sword Lake City was chaotic due to the lack of governmental control, while Huangsha Market was chaotic due to being in the wild lands beyond the borders.

However, the factions of Sword Lake City were relatively weak, making it easier to maintain some semblance of balance. Huangsha Market had Ubalu to keep things in check, not to mention that trading required certain laws in the first place or otherwise it was plain impossible. Thus, both places had limits to their chaos and operated under a set of rules, albeit very loose ones.

As for this place outside Kunlun, which claimed to be a haven for almost all evildoers, where even a random vendor might be a murderer who had escaped from the Central Plains and remained anonymous, Zhao Changhe wondered what kind of rules governed this place.

Zhao Changhe did not believe in a place of complete chaos, especially where there were top-ranked experts such as those on the Ranking of Heaven to enforce order. He believed that even though the place appeared chaotic, it had to have some underlying order.

While he was looking around, a man with a sharp face and monkey-like features ran up to him, smiling from afar. “Hey there, outsider! Need a guide? This city is so big that you’ll get lost without someone to guide you.”

Zhao Changhe asked, “How much?”

“Depends on how long you need my services,” the man said with a sly grin. He moved closer and whispered, “Whatever you’re looking for, this place has it all...”

Zhao Changhe wore an expression that seemed to be smiling but not at the same time.

From an almost ethereal perspective, like the moon reflected in water, Zhao Changhe clearly saw the man’s hand stealthily drawing a dagger as he whispered. The man was silently aiming for Zhao Changhe’s ribs.

This really is a place of chaos. The lawlessness here is beyond anything I experienced before. In those places, no one would try to kill me so directly and with no reason.

Suddenly, Zhao Changhe’s hand shot out, grabbing onto the man’s wrist, and twisting it back.

A blood-curdling scream akin to the screams of pigs being slaughtered resounded through the long street. “Help! He’s attacking me! An outsider is attacking me!”

Immediately, a large crowd of people swarmed around Zhao Changhe. They glared at him menacingly. “Who do you think you are to cause trouble here?! Let him go!”

With a casual smile, Zhao Changhe twisted the man’s arm even further, applying even more force.

Crack!

With a sickening snap, the man’s entire arm now hung limp. It was now barely attached to his shoulder.

The man’s screams reached new heights, his vocal cords seeming like they were about to burst.

The expressions of those surrounding Zhao Changhe changed. They were surprised at the strength and ruthlessness of the outsider.

A burly man stepped forward and asked in a deep voice, “Who are you? Do you dare say your name?”

Zhao Changhe looked around nonchalantly, his face calm as he replied, “Wang Daozhong of Langya. I have come to pay a visit to Kunlun.”

#### Chapter 304: Wang Daozhong Shakes the Valley of the Wicked

In the past, when he used the name Wang Daozhong, he had done so in an ambiguous manner. He left people guessing whether he was the Wang Daozhong from the Wang Clan of Langya or just someone with the same name.

This time, he was much more direct, explicitly adding “Langya” to his false identity.

One had to admit, the effect was astounding.

The Wang Clan of Langya! Someone on the Ranking of Earth!

No matter how much Zhao Changhe antagonized the Wang Clan, it was still one of the most powerful clans in the world. Their influence spanned multiple regions, and they had countless experts.

Zhao Changhe’s casual demeanor around Ranking of Heaven and Ranking of Earth experts could make one easily forget the fact that these experts were still the strongest fifty individuals in the entire world. Such figures commanded unparalleled respect and fear among ordinary people.

A dragon from Langya entering Kunlun could truly shift the power dynamics. Facing such a powerful figure, how could these small street gangs possibly even dare to make a move?

The crowd fell silent instantly, even the man who had his arm broken off stopped screaming like a pig. He feared that this Ranking of Earth expert might just kill him on the spot with a casual slap. He knew that if such an event were to take place, no one would even entertain the thought of avenging him.

Zhao Changhe himself was surprised by how much of an effect his claim had. He wondered if maybe he had been interacting with high-level people too much, to the point where he failed to realize just how much prestige the words “Wang Daozhong of Langya” had toward ordinary people.

The burly man wiped his cold sweat and said with an apologetic smile, “So it’s Mister Wang, our eyes must have been failing us that we failed to recognize you. I’m sorry for earlier...”

Zhao Changhe said coldly, “Whatever my identity, what reason do you have to attack a stranger upon your first meeting?”

The burly man apologized and said with a smile, “Well, it’s just that your horse is too eye-catching... We wondered who could own such a handsome steed and dared to come to Kunlun alone... Now that we know that it’s yours, it all makes much more sense...”

That’s it? Without saying a word, they directly tried to kill me just because of my horse? This place is much more brutal than I thought. At least those bandits I encountered on the road made it clear that they were out to rob me. But here, they just launch their attacks out of nowhere. This place truly deserves its reputation as a land of extreme evil.

To Zhao Changhe, the word “Kunlun” carried a certain divine connotation, making this stark contrast rather difficult to accept.

But in the end, twisted though it was, there was still some logic behind killing for a horse. It was not a completely irrational act.

Knowing the reasoning behind the attack, Zhao Changhe knew how he was to handle the situation. He sneered and said, “Well, I don’t think ignorance is enough to pardon you, don’t you think so?”

The group trembled in fear. The burly man glanced at the man with the broken arm, and his eyes suddenly revealed a fierce gaze. He drew his saber and beheaded the man before the other party could even let out a scream.

Holding the severed head in his hand, the burly man bowed deeply and said, “It was this man that offended you, sir. I have executed him for you.”

Zhao Changhe glanced around at the crowd, who all seemed to take this as completely normal. No one spoke up for the dead man. Internally, Zhao Changhe was shocked by the atmosphere here. Compared to this place, Sword Lake City and Huangsha Market were as pure as white flowers.

Outwardly, however, he nodded calmly and said, “You’re quite sensible. I’m new here and need some people to do my bidding. It’s good that you’ve come to me.”

The burly man was delighted. “We are willing to serve you to the best of our abilities, Mister Wang! We run this carriage business and inn. If you don’t mind, you can rest here. We can tell you about whatever you want to know!”

Zhao Changhe swaggered over. “Lead the way!”

They really did run a carriage business and an inn. They fed horses and provided meals, though the conditions were very simple. These people did not seem like they were actually running a proper business. Instead, it seemed it was all a front for more nefarious purposes, and it was possible that they were even serving food made with human meat.

Zhao Changhe did not care, casually tossing the reins of his horse to someone nearby. “Feed my horse.”

The man was overjoyed, profusely bowing as he said, “Yes, sir! I’ll take good care of your horse.”

He could clearly see the group behind him exchanging glances and making gestures. None of them dared to whisper, fearing that the Ranking of Earth expert might hear them and kill them.

In fact, Zhao Changhe did not need to hear them to know what they were plotting. They were thinking of either feeding his horse some croton seeds[1] to make it fall in the middle of the road, or simply stealing it and running away. They might even be contemplating whether to test if he really was Wang Daozhong or just an impostor.

However, he knew these people did not dare do anything too extreme. As long as they were not certain they could kill him, they would not dare to tamper with the horse or test him. They would genuinely take good care of him, as what had happened to the thin man earlier served as a warning.

In a place where fists did all the talking, Zhao Changhe simply needed to play his identity as a Ranking of Earth expert convincingly. He could not show any timidity or fear.

No one could tell another’s true cultivation level just by looking at them. They could not see through him to determine if he really was someone on the Ranking of Earth, and he could not gauge their levels either. For all he knew, the burly man could be a hidden Ranking of Man expert. It was best to avoid fighting if possible. If a fight broke out, the outcome was uncertain, and it might attract the attention of other forces, ruining his purpose for being here.

Furthermore, he had a rough idea of the thin man's strength after their brief encounter. That guy had been at the third layer of the Profound Gate. In the Blood God Cult, having such a cultivation level meant that he could live as a vice branch master and live a life of luxury. But here, he was just a lowly servant. Moreover, it was not like in the case of the assassins of the Snow-Listening Pavilion, who were merely disguising themselves as servants to have a better chance to kill their target; he was truly just a servant.

This was the highest-level area Zhao Changhe had come to so far. The standard for strength here was so high that it no longer felt like he was still in the mortal world.

The reason was that this place was not a normal area to begin with. This place was a refuge for fierce criminals who could not survive in the Central Tribes or among foreign tribes. It was a magnified version of the Valley of the Wicked.[2]

But then that begs the question—why do so many wuxia or xuanhuan worlds have such places? How are such places any safer for criminals? They could die here just as easily, if not easier, than in the Central Plains or wherever they lived before. If they really want to live, they would probably be better off hiding in some remote village where no one could find them. Why come to such a treacherous place, competing and scheming against other martial artists of considerable strength? Even those at the third layer of the Profound Gate have to act as lowly servants here, are they all masochists?

There has to be an incentive.

Maybe Kunlun has many treasures? And maybe if you're lucky enough to find something, you might be able to make a comeback.

But Kunlun has Yuxu Temple, and Daoist Yuxu is ranked fourth on the Ranking of Heaven. Can he not just monopolize the area and prevent others from searching for treasures?

Or is it simply that Daoist Yuxu is the one sheltering these criminals, leaving the officials of the Great Xia powerless and Tang Wanzhuang unwilling to focus her efforts here? This possibility seems more likely. But why would Daoist Yuxu do this? If he's sheltering them, why not establish rules that would allow him to use them rather than letting them kill each other freely?

Zhao Changhe really could not figure it out. Lady Three did not seem to know either, as she had spoken of matters here very vaguely. The Four Idols Cult's influence did not extend to the area, and even Ying Five's people likely did not have it easy here, leaving them with incomplete information.



While he was thinking, the burly man served wine and meat. He stood at the table with a placating smile. "Please enjoy, sir."

Zhao Changhe lifted the wine cup, inspecting the wine as if appraising it. He then glanced at the burly man with a faint smile. The other party chuckled sheepishly and said, "I swear there's no poison, sir. You can rest assured."

Only an idiot would poison the wine at this time. The right time to poison you would be when your guard is down.

"Actually, a bit of poison isn't so bad," Zhao Changhe said with a slight smile. "For example, the arsenic<sup>[3]</sup> hidden under your fingernail. If it weren't so filthy, it might make a good seasoning."

The burly man's face turned pale, and he said hurriedly, "Sir, you've misunderstood... It's for the claw technique that I practice. It's not to poison you..."

How did he know I had poison under my fingernails without even looking?

"Ha..." Zhao Changhe sipped the wine leisurely and said casually: "This wine is a bit sour. If you add some heartbreak grass<sup>[4]</sup> juice, it can reduce the acidity and astringency. You should try it sometime."

The burly man was now sweating profusely. "We, we don't have your strength that would allow us to just use poison as seasoning..."

In reality, Zhao Changhe had never experimented with such flavors, nor did he have any intention to. In any case, seeing that he had successfully intimidated the other party, he calmly asked, "You are certainly not some random nobody in the Central Plains. Who are you?"

The burly man hesitated a little, but he ultimately dared not lie. In a low voice, he said, "I'm Yang Qianyuan."

Zhao Changhe's eyes flickered slightly.

This man was not an expert on the rankings of the Tome of Troubled Times, but he was certainly infamous. The reason for his notoriety was simple—his face was plastered on wanted posters everywhere, just like his face had been a year ago.

Yang Qianyuan, the bastard son of a concubine of the illustrious Yang Clan of Hongnong, had poisoned and killed three legitimate brothers over several years in a bid for the family inheritance. When his last attempt was caught by a sister-in-law, he raped and murdered her before fleeing a thousand li.

Suddenly, the Yang Clan became a laughing stock, and Yang Qianyuan's infamy spread across the world.

This land of villains really lives up to its name. Bumping into someone here meant running into individuals on Tang Wanzhuang's must-kill list.

Zhao Changhe had met Yang Bugui of Hongnong during the sword conference at Langya. At that time, Yang Bugui had been Xia Chichi's opponent. He was a man of few words but decent manners. It was said that Yang Bugui had not always been so silent, it was just that the events that took place in his clan had had a big impact on him.

He had assumed that Yang Qianyuan had gone into hiding under a false identity, but it turned out that he had actually just gone to Kunlun and led a carriage business.

The wanted posters of Yang Qianyuan still showed him as a young noble, but at the moment, he was a rough-looking brute. He was truly unrecognizable from his posters. This made Zhao Changhe wonder about the effectiveness of those wanted posters.

Chapter 305: Are there any... Huh?

Although this was his first time meeting Yang Bugui, Zhao Changhe spoke as if they were close, "So it's you... Not long ago, I met with your brother Zhixing, and he mentioned you."

Yang Zhixing was the head of the Yang Clan, and Wang Daozhong was definitely someone to have connections with such a figure.

Yang Qianyuan assumed that "Wang Daozhong" would be familiar with his appearance, which was why he did not dare hide his identity. Little did he know, Zhao Changhe had never bothered to pay

much attention to those wanted posters, so how could he possibly be that familiar with his appearance?

On the contrary, Zhao Changhe felt somewhat nervous at the moment. What if Yang Qianyuan had seen Wang Daozhong before? His disguise was just the usual yellow-faced man. He mainly covered up his scars, resulting in him looking like a young man. His appearance was vastly different from the actual Wang Daozhong.

However, how could an illegitimate son born from a concubine such as Yang Qianyuan be qualified to meet Wang Daozhong? Although he thought that this “Wang Daozhong” did look a bit too young, he simply thought that perhaps top-tier experts such as those on the Ranking of Earth had some way to maintain their youthful appearance. Furthermore, no matter how doubtful he was, he did not dare to act rashly and could only offer a flattering smile, “Since it’s someone like you who came here, I would not dare hide anything. Actually, most people here hide their identities. Most of us don’t know who anyone actually is. For all I know, a passerby on the street could be a once-famous demon whose name shook the world.”

Zhao Changhe scoffed, “I already told you, there’s nothing to be afraid of. Rest assured, I’m not here to capture you.”

“Of course, of course. The Yang Clan does not have the right to trouble someone like you to travel so far to catch someone for them,” said Yang Qianyuan. “But it really is rare to see someone of your caliber coming to a place like this...”

Zhao Changhe said, “Why? Is this place just a refuge for people who can’t make it elsewhere? Kunlun has always been a legendary place since ancient times. From what I know, many people throughout history have come here seeking treasures. The Yuxu Palace can only manage the nearby peaks. They can’t control the entire area, can they?”

“People used to come here more often, but it’s become less and less frequent lately. In a place full of demons, who dares to come easily. Initially, we thought you were one of those who come here to look for treasures. But with who you are, you wouldn’t need to personally come here to seek treasures... Could you perhaps be looking for someone?”

“Why can’t I be here to seek treasures?”

“First, someone of your stature has plenty of people to command, so you wouldn’t need to risk coming here yourself. Second, with your status, you could directly visit Yuxu Palace. Why would you need to come to this transit city at the foot of the mountain?”

“Transit...” Zhao Changhe asked, “What do you mean by that?”

“It’s easy to fool Great Xia, but Tang Wanzhuang is a whole different story. With her running the Demon Suppression Bureau, who would dare to be careless? For instance, one common trick they use is making a trusted subordinate look like a runaway criminal and use them as a spy. In the past, someone got close to a notorious villain, earned their trust, and then tricked them into leaving, leading them right into a trap set by the Demon Suppression Bureau. By the time Daoist Yuxu found out about it, they were already hundreds of li away.”

Zhao Changhe was speechless.

Yang Qianyuan sighed. “That’s why not just anyone can enter Kunlun. New refugees must stay in the city and undergo observation to have their identities confirmed before being allowed into the mountains.”

Zhao Changhe nodded and said, “I see... That’s interesting. It’s hard to find out about these things without coming here personally.”

“Every place has its own doorways. It’s normal for those of the outside world to not know about it,” said Yang Qianyuan. “Actually, over time, as more people gather in the city, it becomes less necessary to enter the mountains. Life in the city is convenient, and you can fulfill pretty much any desire you have. And with so many villains gathered here, neither the authorities nor their enemies dare to come here easily, so why bother going into the mountains? Most refugees just stay in the city now.”

“It’s still a bit different, isn’t it?” said Zhao Changhe. “If everyone entered the mountains, they would pretty much become a part of a unified force. The whole point of accepting criminals in the first place is to create this force. If you guys just kill each other indiscriminately in the city, what does Daoist Yuxu stand to gain?”

“Actually, the city really is somewhat similar. Even if outsiders are not treated as people here, once they settle in the city, they won’t be attacked out of nowhere. Everyone needs a place to stay. Of course, no one has ever officially established the rules here. It’s just what the people here have come to accept. But if someone tries to take over the city, Daoist Yuxu cuts off their head that same day. That’s his bottom line. Otherwise, he doesn’t interfere with whatever goes on in the city. He just collects taxes and resources, and he sometimes forces people to do some work. He’s just like a king.”

“I see...” Zhao Changhe mused. “But why does Daoist Yuxu bother? He could openly declare independence. If he does, what could Tang Wanzhuang even do?”

Yang Qianyuan seemed to have understood something. “So you came here to work together with Daoist Yuxu.”

Zhao Changhe was taken aback but inwardly appreciated the convenient explanation. He would never have thought of making up such an excuse for being here. This reasoning made Wang Daozhong’s presence here make much more sense.

He maintained a dignified expression and said, “Indeed, that’s my intention. I’m just resting in the city for now.”

Yang Qianyuan said, “In the past, Xia Longyuan’s influence made Daoist Yuxu cautious. But now that Xia Longyuan’s power is waning, Daoist Yuxu has not done anything different. We don’t know what he’s afraid of. I might just not have been in the mountains long enough to understand.”

Zhao Changhe frowned slightly. “In that case... If I go directly into the mountain, I should be able to meet him, right?”

Yang Qianyuan smiled apologetically and said, “I wouldn’t know. I’ve never been in the mountains.”

Zhao Changhe nodded, “You seem to be doing well here, though. You haven’t been here for long, right? Yet it looks like you’re already a leader of sorts.”

Yang Qianyuan laughed and said, “Oh, I’m no leader. I offered the Yang Clan’s cultivation techniques to the Jinqian Gang[1] based in the east of the city for protection. The leader of the Jinqian Gang saw that I had some skills and gave me a small business to manage. But as I said, there are hardly any outsiders here, so the business can’t really do well. Sometimes, I’m unable to even earn enough to eat.”

Zhao Changhe asked as if he were a wise elder, “So you’re just running an unremarkable business day after day. Do you ever think that it might have been better to stay at home? Do you regret coming here?”

Yang Qianyuan's expression remained neutral. "Every action has its price. I simply accept this as the price for the actions I've done. Anyway, it's not like this is the end of the road for me. If I manage to catch Daoist Yuxu's eye and learn a technique or two, who knows? Maybe one day I can fight my way back. Thirty years on the east of the river, thirty years on the west; every dog has its day."

Zhao Changhe chuckled and said, "Interesting. For now, I'm your guest. Arrange a guide for me and serve me well. If you do that, you'll at least have food for the month. If I meet Daoist Yuxu, I might even put in a good word for you."

After saying that, he flicked his wrist and slapped a piece of silver onto the table... or rather into the table. It was embedded just deep enough to be flush with the tabletop, and it looked as if it was part of the table.

Yang Qianyuan's last trace of suspicion dissipated.

While he could do the same, he was not able to do it anywhere near as effortlessly. More importantly, he had immediately recognized the move to be the Wang Clan's Heavenly Sea-Suppressing Palm.

Yang Qianyuan said with greater respect than he had offered before, "Senior, would you like to take a walk around the city? Where would you like to go first? I'll lead the way."

Zhao Changhe thought for a moment. "Are there any brothels here?"

Yang Qianyuan smiled knowingly, "Of course there are. Please follow me."

In reality, Zhao Changhe was not looking for a brothel but a gambling house. However, he did not want to be too straightforward and preferred to take a roundabout approach. Most of the time, brothels and gambling dens were located close to each other; where there were brothels, gambling dens were usually nearby.

Naturally, he wanted to find where Ying Five's influence reached. He did not see listening to Yang Qianyuan's words to be enough. He needed to verify things through another source. Moreover, he could not reveal his true intentions to Yang Qianyuan. Yang Qianyuan was merely a stepping stone to find more trustworthy people.

The main challenge was that Ying Five's people might not be openly running a gambling house here. Daoist Yuxu was no fool. While he might accept criminals because they could be of use to him, he would not welcome another powerful force like Ying Five's to compete with him.

Even if the Ying Five's people were here, they would likely be operating under a different guise. The fact that Lady Three did not tell him exactly how to find them likely meant that, back then, she still did not trust him enough to tell him such a secret.

But on the other hand, if he showed up riding Snow-Treading Crow and carrying a broad saber, it would not take long for Ying Five's people to recognize him. If he made a show of looking for a gambling den, he should be able to draw the attention of Ying Five's subordinates.

While he was in thought, they arrived at a brothel.

Immediately, a swarm of alluring women surrounded him, each trying to entice him, "Sir, come with us..."

"Sir, don't listen to her. Our skills are much better..."

"We have a girl who's available for her first time tonight. Would you like to take her, sir?"

Zhao Changhe looked around, his face expressionless.

He had not seen a single gambling den. The entire street was filled with brothels, with women pushing themselves onto him, their ample bosoms nearly suffocating him.

Barely managing to escape the onslaught, he grabbed one of the women at random, "Stop pushing! You, come with me!"

Just as the words left his mouth, he froze.

At the corner of the street, a young man dressed as a nobleman was holding a fan and leisurely entering another brothel. He was surrounded by a group of prostitutes and his relaxed demeanor made him look like a seasoned regular.

Like hell she's a seasoned regular.

Zhao Changhe recognized the young man instantly.

It was none other than Xia Chichi.

### Chapter 306: "Caught in the Act"

Xia Chichi had not noticed Zhao Changhe as he had disguised himself. Furthermore, the chaotic street was filled with women soliciting customers. It would be difficult for her to recognize him at a glance. Lost in thought for a moment, Zhao Changhe saw Xia Chichi enter the brothel, vaguely hearing someone welcoming her from inside, "Oh, Mister Luo, you're here again! We especially saved heaven room one for you."

Damn, she's a regular? How long has she been here?

Lady Three said that the Four Idols Cult had no influence here, and that was indeed the case. The brothel Xia Chichi had just entered was not under the Four Idols Cult's control. Zhao Changhe could not fathom what Xia Chichi was planning by becoming a regular customer here.

With Xia Chichi here, there's no need to play along anymore... Zhao Changhe unceremoniously pushed away the random prostitute he had grabbed and strode into the brothel Xia Chichi had entered.

Behind him, Yang Qianyuan hurriedly to catch up after him, utterly confused. "Sir, sir?"

"Oh." Zhao Changhe turned, smiling, and tossed him a piece of silver. "This place looks good. Enjoy yourself. I don't have the habit of visiting brothels with company."

Yang Qianyuan took the money and looked at Zhao Changhe, who was eagerly heading into a brothel, with a strange expression.

Weird, he clearly wasn't showing any interest in the brothels earlier. He even looked quite bored. But the moment he saw that handsome nobleman, his eyes lit up.



Oh, wait, of course! With him being someone of such a high position from the Wang Clan of Langya, he's definitely seen plenty of beauties, so these common brothel girls definitely wouldn't be able to interest him. After becoming bored with women, he must have developed a taste for men.

That makes perfect sense.

Yang Qianyuan weighed the silver in his hand, deciding against finding a brothel for himself. He pondered for a moment, then suddenly ran straight to a large mansion somewhere outside the street.

A burly man in a purple robe sat high in the hall, glaring coldly at him as he asked, "Are you certain that man is Wang Daozhong?"

"I can't be sure... I know that Wang Daozhong is a middle-aged man, and I would have thought that he would have an elegant appearance and a beard. But beards can be shaved off. Although this yellow-faced man has a rather sallow complexion, he's still quite handsome and speaks well. His demeanor has the air of an elderly master, and he doesn't seem to be feigning it..."

Of course, Zhao Changhe was known for his ruggedly handsome looks that even a scar could not fully obscure. He had not mastered the kind of complete facial transformation that Sisi had, so his disguise was still based on his own features. Despite his efforts to look ordinary, he was still considered to be quite handsome. Some people had the rigid belief that one could not shave off their beard because it was part of the body given by their parents, but that was not widespread here. Furthermore, even if it was a common belief, martial artists would probably not adhere to something so rigid.

As for his bearing, having been undefeated in countless battles, his confidence was naturally not faked at all. Even when conversing with Xia Longyuan, he did not feel intimidated, and someone like Yang Qianyuan was far inferior to Xia Longyuan.

Yang Qianyuan hesitated for a moment before adding, "And he is quite strong. I've seen my clan's head, Yang Zhixing, and this man is at least as strong as him... No, even stronger. Yang Zhixing could sense what I was doing behind him, but this man could even tell what was beneath my nails. It was as if he had eyes behind his head."

Gang Leader Qian mused, "That's the typical sign of someone who has reached the Profound Mysteries. Such detailed perception can't be achieved by those who are still at the first layer of the Profound Mysteries. He must be someone high up on the Ranking of Earth. It seems that the rumors that He Lei was injured by him might have some truth to them."

Yang Qianyuan lowered his head and said, “Indeed, and his Heavenly Sea-Suppressing Palm... from my limited understanding, it appeared genuine.”

“In that case, he might really be Wang Daozhong. Well, whether it really is him or not, he is definitely formidable. It’s best not to provoke him.” Gang Leader Qian pondered for a moment, then muttered, “If we could enlist his help, Tian Lingzi would be doomed...”

Yang Qianyuan remained silent, internally sneering.

Whether he’s Wang Daozhong or not, such a figure wouldn’t bother with minor gang conflicts in a small city like this. At the very least, he certainly wouldn’t move for a small gang in the eastern part of the city.

Isn’t it the best course of action to do nothing and wait for him to leave? Why possibly make things more complicated? But if you plan to complicate things, maybe I can use this to my advantage.

\*

Leaving the scheming of the villains aside, Zhao Changhe followed Xia Chichi into the brothel. Xia Chichi, a “regular customer,” quickly embraced an “old flame” and entered a private room. Before Zhao Changhe could follow, a group of women swarmed around him. “Hey, handsome, is this your first time here?”

Zhao Changhe felt like he was trying to catch someone in the act. Amused, he grinned and slipped a piece of silver into the collar of the madam next to him. “Bring me your best girl.”

As a newcomer, he had no way of knowing who the brothel’s best girl was. Predictably, the madam picked an available one at random. “This is our top girl, Qianqian. Qianqian, take good care of this gentleman.”

Zhao Changhe could not be bothered to confirm if this truly was their top girl, nor did he care what she looked like. “Take me to heaven room one.”

Qianqian hesitated and said, “Heaven room one is already taken...”

“No big deal, then take me to room two.”

Qianqian brightened up, finding him very easy to talk to. She leaned closer to him and said in a sweet voice, “Right this way, sir...”

“Hey, wait a minute.” Zhao Changhe noticed that they were heading the opposite direction of where Xia Chichi had gone and was confused. “Why is heaven room two over there?”

Qianqian looked at him, puzzled. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

Zhao Changhe decided to be straightforward. “Aren’t room one and room two supposed to be next to each other?”

“Who says that they have to be next to each other?” Qianqian’s eyes twinkled with realization, and she giggled. “Sir, you’re here for Young Master Luo, aren’t you?”

Feeling like a fool, Zhao Changhe silently slipped another piece of silver into her hand. “You guessed right. He’s exactly who I came here for.”

“Then be careful, sir. Someone else tried to go for him a few days ago, and their head was cut off by him and hung at the corner of the street,” whispered Qianqian. “Otherwise, how could he possibly secure heaven room one despite having only been here for such a short time? This is simply how heroes are respected here in Kunlun City.”

Respect for heroes? More like respect for the strong.

It seems that Chichi has integrated well and become quite well-known here. Is she planning to stay here for a while?

Zhao Changhe smiled and said, “Don’t worry about me. Just take me to the room next to his.”

Luckily, the room next to Chichi’s happened to be unoccupied. In fact, business at this brothel was not doing too great, and many rooms were empty. Qianqian led Zhao Changhe inside and cheerfully offered him some wine with a smile. “Would you like to drink and listen to music first or would you like to enjoy me?”

“You know what I’m here for, so just play some music. I’ll pay you well.”

Happy to earn money without having to whore herself out, Qianqian gladly started playing the guqin. Zhao Changhe pretended to drink but was actually listening to the activity next door.

Having the Back Eye not only enhanced his sight but all his senses. His hearing had long surpassed that of his peers, and after Yue Hongling’s guidance on the Profound Mysteries, his perception had improved dramatically, far beyond what Yue Hongling imagined he would be able to achieve with her guidance.

Despite the sound of the guqin right next to him, it felt like it flowed past his ears without disturbing him.

Instead, the faint sounds from the next room became clearer and clearer, gradually seeping into his ears.

“Oh, Young Master Luo, you’re so naughty~ Where did you learn how to handle people like this? It’s so rough...”

Luo Qi’s neutral voice could be faintly heard, “I learned it from a bandit. It’s not something you would know. Well, even if it’s quite rough, doesn’t it feel good?”

Zhao Changhe: “...”

“Young Master Luo, you’re so annoying.”

“Alright, alright. I still want to hear more of the story. Yesterday, you spoke of the volcanic eruption that burned the Kunlun Mountains, engulfing and destroying both stone and jade. What happened next?”

“There is nothing after that, really. An eruption just took place at Fiery Kun Ridge after so many years. Now there’s just colored mud all around. With the snow covering the peaks, it looks just like any other mountain range. If you’re thinking there might be some treasures there, forget it. Many have thought the same and found nothing.”

So Xia Chichi is gathering intelligence by chatting with brothel girls?

Zhao Changhe had initially assumed that since the west was associated with the attribute of metal, Chichi came here to find a path to advance. But from the discussion about a volcanic eruption, it seemed that she was either assisting Vermillion Bird in locating some treasure or seeking a specific place. Logically speaking, though, shouldn't things that benefit Vermillion Bird be found in the south?

Then again, while Black Tortoise being in the north made sense, the Azure Dragon was not strictly in the east. The distribution of the four idols isn't rigidly aligned to the traditional directions, especially since the ancient four idols didn't die according to predetermined positions.

However, volcanic eruptions are normal. What kind of secrets could be hidden in such events that would be widely known?

But then Xia Chichi laughed and said, "If that's the end of that story, then move on to the next story."

"Oh, my dear Young Master Luo, you've listened to stories spanning from a hundred years ago to ten years ago. There's really nothing new, just a lot of fighting."

"Those also count as stories. For example, can you tell me about which notable figures have entered Kunlun recently?"

"They all hide their identities..."

"Those who try to enter the mountains need to prove their identities, don't they? Hiding their identities is only something they do after settling in the city, right?"

"That's true... I don't know about further back, but in the past year or two, there's the infamous Tarantula."

"The one who poisoned an entire town? The one ranked fifty-eighth on the Ranking of Man?"

"Yes, he entered the mountains... And then there's Yang Qianyuan. They say he didn't manage to enter the mountains and stayed in the city, but no one knows who he is or if he's even alive..."

Zhao Changhe suddenly had a hunch.

Chichi was not just hiding and training within the cult. She was a little witch causing chaos in the world. During the time he had been in the north, Chichi must have been carrying out various tasks for the Four Idols Cult.

For example, her initial conflict and subsequent small friendship with Yang Bugui might have laid the groundwork for her real mission, which could be targeting Yang Qianyuan for the Yang Clan of Hongnong.

### Chapter 307: How Did This Witch Train

If that were all it was, though, Zhao Changhe felt that Chichi's choice of going to a brothel to gather information was the wrong way to do things.

After all, this was a city of criminals.

The women in the brothel might not really be prostitutes. The woman she was talking to could very well be a vicious female criminal with her identity hidden. At the very least, the owner of the brothel had to be something of the sort, and these women appeared to all be trained subordinates of some powerful expert. For example, Qianqian was easily able to tell that he had designs for the nobleman next door and was eavesdropping on them, but she did not show any sign of concern. To them, such things were probably very common.

Does she really expect these women to give her any genuinely useful information? Does she really think these women will help her? Is she trying to use the same strategy she used to find Ruyan in Yangzhou?

No, no, Chichi almost never tells the truth. She must have other intentions. She's most likely just pretending to be a newbie as she probes for information at the start. It's even possible that her target is the brothel itself and she's just misleading others into thinking that she's after other information.

Just as this thought flashed through his mind, he heard the woman who was with Xia Chichi ask, "Young Master Luo, if you truly have a target, you can just tell us directly. If we can help, we might be able to cooperate..."

Xia Chichi said with a smile, “Oh, you’re dropping the act? Don’t you think it’s a waste for you to suddenly drop the act after pretending to be weak and acting so seductively for so many days?”

The brothel girl replied, “Young Master Luo, you’ve been beating around the bush yourself for several days. You’ve only been touching me but not sleeping with me. Are you that afraid I’d suck you dry?”

Xia Chichi just smiled. “Shouldn’t I be?”

The brothel girl added, “Actually, all this really isn’t necessary. Many outsiders who aren’t familiar with this place often come to us for information. Young master, you’re being overly cautious.”

Nicely put, if Xia Chichi happened to be someone on opposing sides with the brothel madam, then she might just end up dead in this den of beauties. Thus, there really was nothing wrong with being cautious. In fact, both parties had been probing each other the entire time.

Xia Chichi had been playing her role for several days, and only now had she managed to fully convince the other party that she had no connection with them. It was also only now that they began revealing their true intentions.

“Since that’s the case, I’ll be straightforward with you.” Xia Chichi smiled sweetly. “I’m indeed here to hunt someone down, but how can I guarantee that after I reveal their name, you won’t suddenly turn on me?”

Apart from those seeking refuge, Kunlun was also full of people who had come here seeking revenge. However, most of the latter end up returning empty-handed, unable to find their target or silently dying at the hands of unrelated people. Nowadays, very few dared to come to exact revenge, but that did not mean that there were none. Occasionally, there were still some stubborn ones, such as this “Young Master Luo.”

The brothel girl laughed upon hearing this, “If you put it that way, then we’re at an impasse... Why not take a gamble? Alright, let me put it this way: if you’re looking for someone from a renowned family who came here long ago, I truly can’t say whether or not it would clash with our interests. But if you’re looking for someone who arrived here recently, they really would have nothing to do with us. And even if they did, they would not matter much to us. As long as the price is right, we can talk.”

“Yang Qianyuan has been here for less than a year. Does he count as someone who’s only arrived here recently?”

“Sure enough, you really are looking for Yang Qianyuan. We did guess that a refined gentleman such as yourself, who could stir up such a storm, probably had something to do with the Yang Clan of Hongnong...”

“Since you had such an opinion of me, would Yang Qianyuan think so as well?”

The brothel girl laughed heartily, shaking with mirth. “With how big the city is, how many people could he possibly recognize on the streets in a year? Even if he saw you in person, how would he know for sure if you’re an outsider of a local? As long as we don’t reveal it to him, he surely wouldn’t know.”

Xia Chichi smiled and said, “Then do you really know his whereabouts?”

“I personally don’t know. You would have to ask our madam.”

“Then can’t you go and ask her? Or better yet, can’t you have your madam come and meet me? I might want to purchase other information as well. If I had to have you relay messages between us every time, it would be quite inconvenient.”

The door to the room opened, and the brothel girl went out to find the madam.

The room fell silent.

Zhao Changhe was now eighty percent sure that Xia Chichi’s target was the madam.

She had spent a few days putting on a facade so as to lower their guard and meet the boss behind the scenes, and then strike when the opportunity presented itself. Only someone like him, who knew Xia Chichi really well, would think this was a possibility. It was very unlikely for others to guess her true intentions.

As for finding Yang Qianyuan, he was not sure if it was just a decoy or if there was some truth to it. It was possible that she would deal with him along the way if she could.



Chichi's quite impressive, but I'm honestly more impressed by that brothel girl at the moment.

Aside from the sound of the door opening, he had not been able to hear her footsteps at all. Even now, as a set of footsteps approached from afar, presumably the footsteps of the madam, there was only a single set of footsteps. The brothel girl's steps made nary a sound.

In fact, a movement art of this level was not at all extraordinary to Zhao Changhe. It was likely that Chichi's movement art was even superior to this. However, it was the brothel girl's habitual stealth that was a point of interest. It had inadvertently become a giveaway. After all, did it make sense for a mere brothel girl to be more skilled than the brothel madam?

I wonder if Chichi noticed. If not, she might fall into a trap.

At this point, Qianqian had already played through several songs. Seeing Zhao Changhe still leaning against the wall and drinking, she could not help but feel a little annoyed. "Sir, my hands have already gotten numb from playing for so long. You've been listening for ages at this point. Why don't you say something or just launch a sneak attack and be done with it?"

Zhao Changhe came back to his senses and said with a casual smile, "Well, would you like to do something else instead? How about playing the flute then?"

Qianqian's gaze turned flirtatious. "How would you like me to blow your flute, sir?"

In the other room, the door had already opened. Hearing this, Zhao Changhe gripped the hilt of his saber.

The laughter of a middle-aged woman could be heard. "Young master, you're looking for Yang Qianyuan?"

Xia Chichi smiled and said, "Indeed, do you have any clues on where I might be able to find him?"

"Of course, I do. Before that, though, I'd like to know how much you're willing to pay."

Xia Chichi's actions were almost identical to what Zhao Changhe had done earlier. She took out a gold ingot and casually stuffed it into the brothel madam's cleavage. "Is that enough?"

This move was too common among patrons, so the madam did not find it strange at all, allowing Xia Chichi to stuff the gold into her cleavage with a smile on her face.

However, just as the gold was about to slip into place, Xia Chichi's hand stopped, and she asked with a smile, "Where is Yang Qianyuan?"

The madam, still smiling, replied, "He's a part of the Yukun Gang in the east of the city, under Tian Lingzi."

"Okay, thank you." Xia Chichi let go and the gold ingot slid into place.

But just as her hand emptied, a knife suddenly shot out from her sleeve, plunging straight into the madam's chest!

Having succeeded in acquiring the information she wanted, as well as in getting within range, Xia Chichi was like a seemingly harmless tiger cub that suddenly bared its fangs. She struck viciously and swiftly!

The madam was actually a very strong expert herself. She managed to move backward even under the sudden attack. As she dodged, she kicked at Xia Chichi's abdomen in an attempt to force her back.

At the same time, the brothel girl's expression changed, and she struck at Xia Chichi's neck, her palm emitting a strange pink mist that was clearly poisonous.

Despite their quick reactions, they could not avoid Xia Chichi's lightning-fast surprise attack. The knife pierced the madam's heart without suspense. At the same time, Xia Chichi smoothly abandoned the knife, spinning to dodge the madam's kick.

The spinning motion also scattered the pink mist from the brothel girl's hand. And as she spun, Xia Chichi's left hand shot out, clashing with the brothel girl's strike.

Seemingly unable to withstand the brothel girl's strike, Xia Chichi used the momentum to gracefully exit through the window. As she left, she said, "I really never thought Tarantula's skin would be so smooth. I had a lot of fun touching you these past few days. Thank you for your hospitality. Farewell."

The brothel girl really is Tarantula! And Chichi knew the entire time!

Zhao Changhe chuckled in amazement, finally relaxing from his tense state.

She had managed to assassinate her target right under the nose of the figure ranked fifty-eighth on the Ranking of Man.

After a long time apart, Xia Chichi had mastered the art of deception and become much more cunning. She had grasped skills befitting a femme fatale. In many stories, such a woman would be a long-term enemy of the protagonist, with possible romantic entanglements.

Zhao Changhe mused over his unique fate. To think his first love turned out to be someone like her!

The window shattered as the white-clad young master elegantly exited. He was so dashing that the prostitutes who saw him were star-struck, including Qianqian, who even gasped and said, "So handsome..."

Suddenly recalling the patron who was into the nobleman, Qianqian turned around to look at him. However, the yellow-faced man who had been sitting right there just a moment ago was now nowhere to be seen.

Tarantula leaped out of the window with a furious expression, swinging her sword in rage. "Who are you?! What grudge do you have against us?!"

Clang!

Iceheart was drawn. Xia Chichi turned around and deflected the strike, using the force from the impact to propel herself over the courtyard wall. "I have no grudge against you personally, but the same can't be said about the madam. The Four Idol Cult will stop at nothing to execute traitors. Whoever stands in my way shall die!"

Shadows flickered as the brothel's guards swiftly scaled the wall and blocked Xia Chichi's escape.

Just as she finished speaking, she swung Iceheart, and frost spread.

Amidst the gently falling snow that filled the air, countless streaks of sword light emerged and mixed with the snow. All of a sudden, the gentle snowflakes transformed into lethal blades. Wherever the snow brushed past, throats were slit and blood was spilled.

Tarantula's sword relentlessly pursued, and Xia Chichi, standing atop the wall, exchanged a series of blows with her.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

At this point, she felt a bit of a headache. She knew that she was weaker than Tarantula, but she also knew that their movement arts were on par. As long as she managed to put some space between them, she could escape.

The problem was, this was Tarantula's territory. She did not have much say in the space between them; she had to think of another weak point she could make use of.

While she was stressing her brain out trying to think of a way out, she noticed something out of the corner of her eye.

A smile formed on her lips, and she abruptly changed the direction she was going. She leaped from the wall toward a narrow alley.

Seeing this, Tarantula was secretly pleased.

Does she really think she can escape by running into that alley? I have people lying in wait there. As long as they delay her for a moment, she won't be able to escape.

However, as she hurriedly chased after Xia Chichi, she saw that the other party moved completely unhindered. Xia Chichi stepped lightly on the eaves, somersaulted into the treetops, and vanished in the blink of an eye.

Tarantula was utterly bewildered.

Looking down, she saw that the alley, which should have been filled with her subordinates, was littered with bodies. Her men had been taken out, silently and efficiently, making it so that they could not hinder Xia Chichi in the slightest.

Her subordinates immediately caught up. “Madam...”

In fact, each of them was secretly shocked. Tarantula was renowned for her use of poison, and while her capabilities in direct combat and her movement arts were not top-notch, they were still nothing to scoff at. Her use of poison alone made her an incredibly formidable opponent. Many even believed that she deserved a higher rank than fifty-eight on the Ranking of Man. But now, a young man had humiliated her and made her look extremely pathetic. The other party managed to carry out an assassination right under her nose, and they even managed to escape gracefully.

With no proper chance to use her poison, she was made to look utterly useless in actual combat.

Tarantula’s face turned grim. She took a deep breath and said coldly, “Does he really think that he could avoid my poison just because he’s been cautious these past few days? Hah, I already gave him a slow-acting toxin. There is no one other than me who can cure it in this world. He’ll eventually come crawling back to me asking to be saved. At that time, I’ll turn that handsome face of his into mince!”

#### Chapter 308: Old Woman, You Will Face Retribution

When Xia Chichi came to Kunlun, it was very different from when she had gone traveling before. This time, she did not bring a large group of elite subordinates.

However, to say that she did not have any support from the Four Idols Cult here was also not factual, and this went on to show that Lady Three had not been telling the whole truth.

Well, it was also possible that Lady Three was not that involved in the affairs of the Four Idols Cult, and so she was just unaware of how much effort Vermillion Bird had put into expanding their influence.

It was difficult for any organization to avoid traitors. It appeared that after betraying the Four Idols Cult, the brothel madam fled to Kunlun. Vermillion Bird, having a lot of matters to attend to, did not

have the time to waste going around searching for these traitors. Therefore, she had sent her trusted general, Earth Deer of Liu[1], to act as a vanguard in Kunlun and collect relevant information.

Even Tang Wanzhuang had sent people to infiltrate the city. She had even gone so far as to create an entire persona of a notorious criminal to allow them to fit in. Of course, a demonic cult like the Four Idols Cult had it much easier; half of their members did not even need a persona like those of the Demon Suppression Bureau, as they were already wanted criminals. Sending a trusted member to scout out Kunlun was a logical move.

The Earth Deer of Liu, an expert at the ninth layer of the Profound Gate, had established a base here for the Four Idols Cult.

A city would always require various living necessities, trade, and production. With the cult's resources supporting him, the Earth Deer of Liu gathered a group of people and set up a business that sold fabrics. He controlled the business to be moderate—not too large so as to attract envy, but big enough to support his people and let them live fairly comfortably.

Even now, his subordinates did not know that their boss was a part of the Four Idols Cult.

But correspondingly, such a model only allowed him to establish a presence and be somewhat informed about what was going on in the city. The base he had set up was enough to host visiting cult members. As for gathering intelligence, he could only investigate specific key matters secretly. He was unable to organize a comprehensive intelligence network like Ying Five did.

Nevertheless, even though it was slow, it was sufficient.

It took the Earth Deer of Liu several years to finally discover that someone who had betrayed their cult was running a brothel in the eastern part of the city. He reported this to Vermillion Bird a few days ago.

This information was what had brought Xia Chichi out west.

From the beginning, she aimed to kill that madam. Unable to get close initially, she had to spend five to six days acting before finally succeeding today.

The traitor had become complacent. She had not expected the cult to still be out to get her after so many years.

Xia Chichi knew that the entire street of brothels likely had a common boss behind them, but even Earth Deer of Liu had not identified who it was. Who would have thought that the mastermind would personally be working as a prostitute and be the very one Xia Chichi happened to pick!

The level at which she hid her identity was simply extraordinary.

What initially seemed like a simple assassination mission suddenly became immensely more complicated. At first, she had not even realized it.

It was not until the third day of contact that she suspected the brothel girl she was with to be stronger than herself. Yet, she showed no fear, pretending not to know anything. She continued to play along and acted according to plan until she ultimately managed to complete her mission.

After all, she was also hiding her identity, and the other party merely thought that she was someone from the Yang Clan who had come to seek revenge on Yang Qianyuan. Both had biased perceptions, so she still had a clear shot at successfully carrying out the mission.

And in the end, she succeeded.

But no matter how carefully she calculated, she never expected the brothel girl to actually be Tarantula, a master of poison.

Xia Chichi had already been very cautious. She had not eaten anything, nor had she drunk tea or wine. By doing so, she made it difficult for common poisons to take effect. However, pretending to be a man as she visited the brothel, it was inevitable that she would make physical contact. Who would actually expect the prostitute they were with to be laced with toxins herself, and ones of extremely high level at that? The poison that Tarantula had on her skin was extremely slow-acting and hard to detect, and it gradually seeped into Xia Chichi's body with every touch.

It could only be said that the evil in this place was truly without reason. It was simply unimaginable anywhere else for a prostitute to use her body to spread a slow-acting poison, purposely ensuring that everyone who slept with her or even just touched her would eventually die.

This irrationality ultimately caught Xia Chichi off guard. During the subsequent battle, although the pink mist had been scattered away by her true qi, a minimal amount still made contact with her, triggering the latent poison within her.

As Xia Chichi stealthily moved through the alleys, she arrived at the back entrance of the Liu Fabrics Shop. just as she leaped over the courtyard wall, she stumbled and almost fell.

A gust of wind brushed past her and she directly fell into a familiar chest.

Xia Chichi smiled faintly, leaning comfortably against the familiar chest.

Zhao Changhe whispered, “You’ve been poisoned? I didn’t see you injured or get poisoned just now. When did you get poisoned?”

Just as Xia Chichi was about to reply, footsteps sounded in the courtyard. Earth Deer of Liu led a group toward them. Earth Deer drew his sword and pointed it at Zhao Changhe. “Who are you? Let go of him!”

Xia Chichi said, “Stand down.”

Earth Deer of Liu: “?”

Enduring the strange sensation within her body, Xia Chichi looked up with a playful smile at Zhao Changhe, who had returned to his original appearance. “Not bad, Boss Zhao. You’ve learned to frequent brothels after all these years in the jianghu, huh?”

Zhao Changhe watched as the bewildered Earth Deer of Liu retreated, his face stern. “Same to you.”

Xia Chichi smiled and said, “I was on a mission”

Zhao Changhe retorted, “So was I.”

“Oh? And what mission were you on?” Xia Chichi teased. “What kind of service was it that you asked for? Something along the lines of someone playing the flute?”

Zhao Changhe was amazed. “You still had the attention to spare to listen to what was going on next door?”



Xia Chichi smiled and said, “Someone entered the room next to mine and did nothing while the girl he was with simply played the guqin. Do you really think your senior brother is a complete idiot? Did you think I wouldn’t have found it strange?”

Zhao Changhe said sincerely, “You really are amazing.”

Not only was she vigilant and sharp, but more importantly, this showed that even though Xia Chichi had not broken through to the Profound Mysteries just yet, she was already at the doorstep. She was just one step away from breaking through. Otherwise, she would not have such keen hearing.

His cultivation had advanced quickly, but Xia Chichi, with the resources of the Four Idols Cult supporting her, had not fallen behind either. Even after having advanced so fast, she was still stronger than him.

No wonder she was able to escape from the grasp of someone on the Ranking of Man without much effort... Speaking of which, Tarantula didn’t seem to have broken through to the Profound Mysteries. The fact that she’s ranked fifty-eighth is probably due to her poison techniques. Her cultivation doesn’t seem to be much better than those at the bottom of the Ranking of Man; at the very least, it’s much worse than Hu Lie.

“It’s just that I didn’t realize it was you,” said Xia Chichi. Her eyes gradually became hazy, and her voice turned into a murmur, “Do you know how surprised I was when I saw you flash by in the alley when I was struggling to escape? Was it fate that brought you to me from across the world to save me right when I was in danger?”

Although he had come here under the suggestion of Lady Three, the fact that they ended up in the same place did seem like fate. It seemed to be even more so with how he saw Chichi entering a brothel as soon as he arrived. Because of that, he had even gotten to witness her current prowess, which was even greater than before.

Zhao Changhe couldn’t help but feel a bit emotional. He whispered, “Yes, this is the fate between you and me, it seems.”

“Then...” Xia Chichi’s eyes became even hazier, and her cheeks flushed as she leaned against his body and began to writhe around slightly. “Would you like me to blow your flute...”

Zhao Changhe: 凸

Xia Chichi chuckled. “Look at you... I’m still dressed as a man, yet you got so excited.”

Damn it! Do you think I’m excited because of that?!

Zhao Changhe suddenly said, “The poison in you must have an aphrodisiac!”

“Yeah,” Xia Chichi replied nonchalantly. “Originally, it would have been quite troublesome to deal with. With it being a poison from Tarantula, I’m afraid it would have been hard for me to resolve, but heaven just so happened to send me a human antidote, hehe.”

She stood on her toes and kissed him directly. “With such a good excuse, even the venerable would have to let us be. We must really thank Tarantula when we see her again, hehe.”

Zhao Changhe kissed her back passionately, silently thanking Tarantula.

As they kissed, Xia Chichi murmured, “Take me inside, to the room on your right.”

Zhao Changhe swiftly lifted her in a princess carry and kicked open the door to the room she pointed out. As soon as he entered the room, he practically leaped onto the bed.

Bang!

Unfortunately, what met them was not the softness of a freshly-made bed, but a transparent yet unbreakable wall of qi.

The couple slowly slid to the ground.

Feeling dizzy from the impact, they looked up only to see Vermillion Bird, masked and with arms crossed, sitting on the edge of the bed. Her voice was devoid of any emotion as she said, “You guys had quite the plan, huh?”

Xia Chichi was fully under the effect of the aphrodisiac, but she almost felt it dissipate from the shock she felt from seeing Vermillion Bird. “V-v-venerable, why, w-why are you here too?”

“What? Are you annoyed that I’m interrupting your perfect excuse?”

Xia Chichi stammered, “...I, I’m really poisoned.”

Vermillion Bird leisurely took out a bottle of medicine. “Do you really think that the pathetic poison of a pathetic wannabe spider can match up to our holy cult?”

Xia Chichi deflated completely.

Zhao Changhe exclaimed in frustration, “Old woman, if you disrupt the heaven’s arrangements, you will face retribution!”

Chapter 309: The Renewed Vermillion Bird

Vermillion Bird pursed her lips.

See these pursed lips? Do you see these lips clearly? Who’s the old woman?!

These are the luscious lips that made you picture Vermillion Bird as someone extremely beautiful!

How dare you call me an old woman! Hmph! You said I was pretty, called me big sister, clinked drinks with me, and now you’re jumping into bed with my disciple?!

Chichi thinks she’s being wronged? Well, I feel like I’m being wronged even more! Chichi knows nothing! The aphrodisiac she’s been afflicted with won’t be resolved just by having intercourse with a man! If she does sleep with you, then she’ll be placed under your control! That’s one of the ways that Tarantula places people under her control. Of course, she might think it’s fine to be controlled by you, but there’s no way in hell I can accept that! How can a dignified saintess, a candidate to become the leader of the cult, become a sex slave?!

Damn it!

Unfortunately, Zhao Changhe could not understand her hints from her pursed lips. In the end, she decided to simply speak coldly, “Zhao Changhe, do you really think that I don’t dare to kill you?”

Zhao Changhe jumped up. “I gave you the Black Tortoise Gemstone from the Black Tortoise Secret Realm, and I even helped Black Tortoise with the Azure Dragon’s coffin. I’ve been regarding your Four Idols Cult as family because of Chichi, yet all you know is kill, kill, kill!”

Xia Chichi was so scared her face turned pale. She tugged at Zhao Changhe’s sleeve and tried to prevent him from going too far, “Hey, hey...”

Vermillion Bird knew she was in the wrong, but she forced herself to say, “So what? Do you have some misunderstanding about demonic cults?”

Zhao Changhe crossed his arms and said coldly, “Do I? I’m pretty sure that you don’t dare to kill me at all.”

Vermillion Bird replied coldly, “Hah... We’ve already confirmed that your star chart has nothing to do with the Night Emperor, so why wouldn’t I dare to kill you?”

“Because killing me could ruin all your arrangements at Yanmen. If you kill me, then good luck achieving any kind of long-term cooperation between Lady Three and Batu. The consequences of me dying at the hands of your Four Idols Cult are simply not something you can afford nor predict,” Zhao Changhe said calmly. “Venerable Vermillion Bird, I’m no longer someone who you can control at will. I have the power to negotiate terms with the Four Idols Cult.”

Vermillion Bird remained silent with a stern face.

She knew that he was speaking the truth. She really did not dare to kill him. Furthermore, there were even more reasons why she could not just kill him. If she really did kill him, Chichi would be estranged from the cult, and even Lady Three might have some strong opinions. And even if she did not consider others’ reactions to his murder... her own sentiments for him were already preventing her from killing him.

Without realizing it, Zhao Changhe had become a pivotal figure within and outside the Four Idols Cult.

But the truth was, she never really intended to kill him!

Since you were rude to me and called me an old woman, can't I just threaten you a little bit?! Just back down and let it go. Why do you have to make things so difficult for me? Don't I, Vermillion Bird, deserve some respect?!

You want Chichi? Not happening!

Vermillion Bird took a deep breath and decided not to argue about whether she dared to kill him or not any longer. Instead, she slowly said, "Chichi is at a crucial point in unlocking the door to the Profound Mysteries. She came to the western frontier for her final training before breaking through. The assassination of the traitor is just a part of her training. She did not come here just to complete a mission.

"In the situation earlier, she was not at a dead end, and her potential was yet to be fully stimulated. I was secretly protecting her, so why do you think I neither intervened nor let her know I was there? It was all to ensure that she would be pushed to her limits and have a better chance at gaining insights and breaking through. After all those preparations, all that time and effort, you just come out of nowhere and clear her path for her. Now, do you think you were really helping her?"

Zhao Changhe did not expect her to bring this up, and she had a valid point. For a moment, he found it hard to argue.

Although Xia Chichi and Vermillion Bird did not have the title of master and disciple, in practice, they were just that. Ever since she joined the cult, Xia Chichi had been learning under Vermillion Bird. When a master was training their disciple, they had their own plans, and blindly interrupting their plans could result in some very major consequences.

If there really was danger, a Ranking of Earth expert such as Vermillion Bird would have easily been able to save Chichi. There really had been no need for him to interfere.

But how could he just stay back and watch? He had no idea that she was there, and he had only done what was natural for him to do.

Seeing his expression, Vermillion Bird slowly said, "I've heard about you and Yue Hongling riding side by side, sweeping through Saibei, invincible against thousands. Why didn't the two of you stay together?"

Zhao Changhe was speechless.

The reason he and Yue Hongling separated was that he wanted to hone himself as well. He had previously thought that being by her side would easily make him become dependent on her, and that would have been detrimental to his progress in martial arts.

Seeing him hang his head in silence, Vermillion Bird felt a surge of satisfaction. She leisurely crossed her legs and began swinging her lower leg. “A saintess must remain pure to serve the gods, that’s one; a candidate for the cult leader must be disciplined and not act recklessly, that’s two; pursuing breakthroughs in martial arts requires one to not be too obsessed with emotions, that’s three; preserving one’s virginity is incredibly important to smoother breakthroughs in innate martial arts, that’s four. Don’t you dare say that I’ve just been breaking up two lovers. If that were the case, then you two would never have had any chance to mess around.”

Are you the principal enacting your school’s rules on disallowing puppy love? You’ve really got a whole set of reasons.

Zhao Changhe was racking his brain for a response when Xia Chichi, who had been silently meditating to detoxify herself after taking the medicine, suddenly raised her hand with a blushing face. “Venerable...”

“Hm?” Vermillion Bird, in a good mood, looked at Xia Chichi. “What is it?”

Xia Chichi said, “The medicine you gave me isn’t able to completely remove the poison.”

Vermillion Bird paused.

Zhao Changhe turned his head away and suppressed his laughter.

You had all those arguments and reasons, but it turns out your medicine can’t even deal with the immediate problem at hand. Pfft.

Vermillion Bird was in disbelief. “How is that possible? How could our cult’s medicine fail to neutralize Tarantula’s poison?! You’ve even practiced the Azure Dragon’s cultivation technique, so your poison resistance should be far superior to ordinary people! Stretch out your hand; let me examine you!”

Xia Chichi extended her hand with her face still flushed. Her body squirmed around involuntarily.

Vermillion Bird checked her pulse for a while and her brow furrowed tightly beneath her mask.

It was true: the poison had really not been fully neutralized.

The reason for this was simple: the poison had been lurking inside her for a while and had already somewhat taken root in her body.

The Four Idols Cult had inherited various arts and information related to vitality, so they could naturally produce potent medicine, but without having fully mastered the Rejuvenation Art, they still had a long way to go in this regard. They were far from reaching the peak. Tarantula, who was famous for her poison, often used poison to fight above her level, and she was definitely not some pushover. Even if their strengths canceled each other out, the deeply-rooted residual poison could not be eradicated just like that. Xia Chichi would need to continue taking medicine and resting in seclusion for a period of time to slowly and completely remove the poison.

However, Xia Chichi had many tasks to complete. She could not afford to go into seclusion right now. Why would she have come to Kunlun in the first place if she had the leisure to go into seclusion?

As Vermillion Bird pondered on what to do while checking her pulse, Zhao Changhe stealthily grabbed hold of Chichi's other hand and examined her. Finally, he sighed and said, "Venerable, there's something I don't know if I should say..."

Vermillion Bird said casually, "Speak."

"I actually have a way to quickly cure Chichi... Hey, don't give me that glare, it's not like that."

Vermillion Bird retorted, "Aside from dual cultivation, what else can you do to cure her from the poison?"

"Did Lady Three not get a chance to tell you? I really can cure her," said Zhao Changhe. "Come on, we can't just sit here and do nothing. With the residual poison lingering in her body, even if you

aren't worried for Chichi, I am. What if it causes long-term damage by sitting in her body too long?"

Vermillion Bird was silent for a moment, and then she said, "Then go ahead."

"Now?"

"Now."

"Well, you said it."

Zhao Changhe suddenly pulled Xia Chichi into his arms and kissed her.

Xia Chichi stole a glance at Vermillion Bird. Then, with a hint of defiance in her eyes, she reciprocated the kiss.

Vermillion Bird's eyes widened, her legs uncrossing as she abruptly stood up. "This is your treatment?!"

She was so furious that she grabbed Xia Chichi's wrist and tried to pull them apart. However, as she touched Xia Chichi's wrist, she felt a surge of vigorous vitality flourishing within her, gradually crushing the residual poison at its root.

He's really curing her?! What the hell?!

Strange... This isn't a dual cultivation technique; dual cultivation techniques don't have such strong effects. What technique is this? Why does it align so well with the principles of the four idols? Just which one of us here is really from the Four Idols Cult?!

Vermillion Bird found herself immersed in the new sensation of vigorous vitality that she momentarily forgot that she had just come forward to interrupt the passionate kiss between the young couple.

The shameless pair kissed noisily right in front of the "school principal."



Xia Chichi even let out a deliberate moan, clearly enjoying herself.

Vermillion Bird could not be any more flabbergasted.

Something about this feels awfully wrong... Who am I? Where am I? What am I doing...

When Vermillion Bird came to her senses, the residual poison within Xia Chichi had truly been eliminated. At this moment, however, Vermillion Bird felt like her lungs were about to explode with rage.

Zhao Changhe, you did this on purpose, didn't you? With the technique you used, you could have achieved the same effect with just hand-to-hand contact. There was no need for you to administer it mouth-to-mouth!

Doing this right in front of me, deliberately trampling on my dignity! You licentious pair! Mark my words, Zhao Changhe! You've got no chance with the Fire Serpent of Yi!

#### Chapter 310: Dumb Luck

Zhao Changhe had always been honest about his fear of Vermillion Bird, and even now, he was still quite afraid of her.

Lady Three might be ranked higher than Vermillion Bird, but Zhao Changhe never felt any fear toward her. However, he continued to fear Vermillion Bird to this day.

Perhaps it was because Vermillion Bird was so fierce while Lady Three was always smiling. Or maybe it was the intense memory of blood-soaked slaughter from when he first entered this world, a memory that lingered and would not fade away. Not to mention that deep down, he subconsciously believed that rankings did not represent everything. Considering their "aura," he felt that, in a real fight, Lady Three might end up overpowered by Vermillion Bird.

But the more he feared her, the more exhilarating this moment was. It gave him a sense of overcoming fears, making him feel immensely liberated.

Xia Chichi also felt a mixture of fear and excitement. She was far more aware of Vermillion Bird's ruthlessness than Zhao Changhe, to the point where she did not dare breathe loudly around her. In

the past, she could never have imagined passionately kissing a man right in front of Vermillion Bird without her master losing her temper.

To both of them, those few moments felt amazing...

The two of them separated, and each quietly stole glances at Vermillion Bird.

With the mask covering her face, they could not read her expression. They could not tell if she truly did not care or if she was concealing her emotions deep within. Her words, however, were calm. "I had been secretly protecting you, and as it was a secret, I naturally could not let you know in the first place. I did all that so you would not develop a sense of dependency and lose the will to fight for your life. But in the end, I had no choice but to reveal myself because I feared that you would lose yourself in lust. Now that I've revealed myself, it's time for me to truly leave. Don't assume that I'm always around when you're facing difficulties. Doing so will only serve to hinder your cultivation. As for whether you indulge yourself in lust after I'm gone, that's up to you."

Xia Chichi felt a bit ashamed, realizing that Vermillion Bird truly had her best interest at heart.

She lowered her head and said, "Venerable, about the volcanic eruption..."

"Just because a volcano erupted doesn't mean anything significant. Don't bother to exaggerate it into something grand. If you insist on investigating it, then I'll instruct the Fire Serpent of Yi, the Fire Tiger of Wei[1], or some others to check it out. Matters related to fire have nothing to do with you. Focus on your own path; don't get distracted."

"I understand."

Vermillion Bird gave Zhao Changhe a deep look and said calmly, "Don't let your desires control you."

With that, she disappeared in a flash.

Zhao Changhe was actually drenched in cold sweat. Seeing Vermillion Bird take her leave, his shoulders slumped as he exhaled with relief. He turned around and saw that Chichi was just as tense. They exchanged looks, both of them displaying an expression of relief from having just narrowly escaped death.

Xia Chichi, with her shoulders slumped as well, said, “Being in front of the venerable always feels so stressful.”

Zhao Changhe replied, “You say that, yet you dared act all coy earlier.”

“I’m a little witch. What kind of witch would I be without some nerve? What about you, though? Weren’t you afraid?”

“I’m a bandit. What’s a bandit who fears death?”

“Pfft... You’re risking your life for lust.” Xia Chichi smiled and took his hand. They sat on the edge of the bed. With their shoulders against each other, she whispered, “The venerable is already very angry. We better not push it.”

“Hah, do you really think that was the only thing I was after?”

“Wasn’t it?”

“Of course not!” said Zhao Changhe. “I asked Lady Three to pass a message to you, but it seems that you were already on your way to Kunlun by then. Because of that, she might not have had the chance to tell you. At the very least, it seems that she did not have the time to tell you that I learned the Rejuvenation Art.”

“So it really was the Rejuvenation Art...” Xia Chichi muttered. “Your relationship with the four idols is really strange.”

Zhao Changhe grinned and said, “After all, the Azure Dragon Saintess is my wife.”

“Who’s your wife?!” Xia Chichi snapped. “And why do you seem to be so familiar with Venerable Black Tortoise? How come you keep calling her Lady Three?”

Zhao Changhe tilted his head and said in exasperation, “She’s Lady Three.”

“Even I don’t call her that.”

“...Everyone in Huangsha Market calls her that.”

“Okay, okay,” Xia Chichi conceded with a laugh. “She really didn’t have time to tell us anything. Now that you’re here, you can just tell me everything directly. Are you going to teach me the Rejuvenation Art?”

“I don’t know how to teach it to you. I’ll write down what I can later, and then you can try and see if you can get anything from it,” said Zhao Changhe. “But what I really wanted to tell you is that your father isn’t gravely injured as people think. In fact, he’s very much alive and kicking.”

Xia Chichi was stunned.

Zhao Changhe then recounted everything about Xia Longyuan and what his “father” had told him. He then concluded with, “The reason the jade pendant and the Six Harmonies Divine Art would have been passed down to a son but not a daughter is not what we initially thought. He actually cared about you deeply... and he even recognizes me as his son-in-law.”

Xia Chichi remained silent for a long time before saying softly, “Regardless of his original intentions, he still abandoned me. I won’t forgive him.”

“Mm-hm,” Zhao Changhe agreed. He was not going to persuade her otherwise. The facts were clear—Xia Longyuan really had abandoned her in the end. He added, “In any case, his strength far surpasses our original assumptions. Any plans against him must be reevaluated. This rebellion is not something to take lightly. Do not act recklessly.”

“I know.” Xia Chichi’s mood visibly worsened as she sighed. “I don’t want to talk about him anymore. Let’s talk about something else. We can just leave those matters to the venerable and the others to consider.”

When she thought that Xia Longyuan was on the brink of death, Xia Chichi felt a twinge of familial bond and sadness, wanting to visit him. But now that she knew that he was not only alive but extremely well, she felt unhappy toward him again. Now, she was unwilling to talk about him any further.

Such was human nature.

Zhao Changhe did not press the matter. Instead, he asked, “Besides eliminating the traitor, what other important tasks did you come to Kunlun for? Does capturing Yang Qianyun count as one of them?”

“Yes, Yang Qianyun is indeed one of my missions. Ideally, we want to capture him alive, which would highlight our influence. We could even use him to negotiate with the Yang Clan. Killing him outright serves no purpose; the Yang Clan might not even recognize it if we did that. We are not looking to please them, but rather to take advantage of them,” said Xia Chichi. “I’m planning to investigate that Tian Lingzi from the Yukun Gang tonight.”

“There’s no need for that. Yang Qianyun isn’t with the Yukun Gang. Tian Lingzi must have offended Tarantula at some point. She’s probably just trying to kill him with a borrowed knife.”

Xia Chichi asked curiously, “How do you know? The Earth Deer of Liu has been investigating for a while, but even he has not found anything.”

“In such a large city, finding someone who’s gone into hiding is indeed incredibly difficult.” Zhao Changhe showed a smug grin. “But some people just have fate on their side, such as your big brother Zhao here.”

Xia Chichi rolled her eyes. “Who’s the big brother? Call me senior brother.”

“Senior brother...” Zhao Changhe scooted a bit closer.

For some reason, that term had a bit of a flirtatious undertone between them, sparking a bit of emotion whenever it was mentioned.

Sometimes, Zhao Changhe wondered if there was something wrong with his own sexual orientation. After all, he seemed particularly stimulated by Chichi’s male disguise.

Xia Chichi pushed his face away and scolded, “And you said your mind wasn’t filled with that!”

“Ahem... Anyway, I do know where Yang Qianyun is, but don’t do anything just yet. I still have some use for him.”

Xia Chichi asked in intrigue, “What use could you possibly have for him?”

“I need to gather some information from him. I’ve just started getting close to him, and I haven’t had the chance to really dig into certain secrets yet.”

“What information do you need that’s so important?”

“I want to find clues about the Thieves Guild and the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng.”

Xia Chichi smiled and said, “Are you deliberately trying to avoid owing the Four Idols Cult a favor, or are you just outright stupid? Yang Qianyuan has only been in Kunlun for so long. What could he possibly know? Why not just ask Earth Deer of Liu directly?”

Zhao Changhe scratched his head. “Because when Lady Three sent me here after I told her what I was after, she did not have the specifics, which suggests that Earth Deer of Liu doesn’t have any information on these two things either. After all, he’s primarily focused on investigating matters relevant to you. He might not have extensive knowledge about other things.”

Xia Chichi rolled her eyes. “Lady Three doesn’t even know Earth Deer of Liu is here. Her information probably came from Ying Five’s network. You really are a dummy sometimes.”

She jumped off the bed and dashed out the door. “Wait here, I’ll ask Earth Deer of Liu for you.”

After a moment, she returned with a strange expression, “He has no information about the Dragon Elephant Blood Ginseng, but he does have some information about the Thieves Guild.”

Zhao Changhe asked, “What’s with that look on your face? Is there something wrong with the Thieves Guild?”

“No,” replied Xia Chichi. “Earth Deer of Liu said that, if his guess is correct, Tian Lingzi might be the manager of the Thieves Guild here responsible for fencing stolen goods. He mentioned that the goods sold by the Yukun Gang are just too inexplicably diverse compared to others.”

Zhao Changhe suddenly realized something.

The Thieves Guild was never really supposed to be hard to find. They've got to have a direct link on the surface.

Otherwise, Sisi, who had just escaped from the Ancient Spirit Tribe's secret realm and was completely clueless about the outside world, would not have been able to join the Thieves Guild. If the Thieves Guild is in Kunlun, then there must be a point near the city's entrance where they would be easy to encounter. Sisi must have stumbled upon them. It makes a lot of sense now.