

The Quest 471

Chapter 471: The Lu Family (1)

The ore from the Lu Family was from a Corpse Mine, which concealed zombies.

The five Mining Cultivators who had disappeared earlier had met with a gruesome death, eaten by the zombies in the mines.

Zhang Quan killed people, bought corpses, refined zombies, and delivered the refined zombies to the Lu Family.

And the Lu Family hid these zombies in the mines.

They also laid down a tight Formation, sealing the zombies away so that no one would notice them.

Mo Hua frowned.

What exactly did the Lu Family want to do?

And what exactly was the identity of that traitor within the Lu Family?

Mo Hua glanced at the tightly guarded mine.

To mobilize so much manpower and resources, to set up a Formation, to guard the mine, that traitor in the Lu Family must at least be a real power-holding Elder, or perhaps a revered Guest Elder.

As long as that traitor was pulled out, everything would be resolved easily.

"But who could this traitor be..."

Mo Hua had no leads for the moment and kept thinking about it after returning.

Even during meals, he was somewhat distracted, daydreaming while eating.

Bai Zixi nudged him with her elbow and said softly,

"Eat your food properly."

"Oh," Mo Hua came back to his senses and nodded.

Bai Zisheng then leaned in and asked quietly,

"What are you thinking about?"

Mo Hua looked up at Mr. Zhuang, saw that Mr. Zhuang was drinking on his own without bothering to listen to their whispers, and then also spoke softly,

"I'm thinking about the Lu Family's matter."

"What matter?" Bai Zisheng's eyes lit up.

Mo Hua hesitated for a moment, but feeling that there was no need to hide it, he told Bai Zisheng about the traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect, the Lu Family's mines, and the cultivation of zombies.

Bai Zisheng smacked his lips, "I told you, the Lu Family is no good."

Then his brows furrowed again, doubting himself,

"Our Bai Family wouldn't also... "

Bai Zixi said helplessly, "The Bai Family was established on military achievements."

Bai Zisheng was stunned, then heaved a sigh of relief.

Well, military achievements were still acceptable...

That meant earning them through legitimate combat on the battlefield.

Bai Zisheng then asked Mo Hua, "What do you plan to do?"

"I want to find the traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect hidden within the Lu Family."

Mo Hua mused, "The complete Spiritual Pivot Formation must be in his possession; the one who bought the zombies from Zhang Quan is probably him; the one directing the Lu Family to hoard zombies and establish the Corpse Mine should still be him..."

"Need help?"

Bai Zisheng was eager to try.

Bai Zixi also looked at Mo Hua, the implication clear.

Mo Hua hesitated for a moment, then nodded,

"Okay."

It takes a good fence to make good stakes, just like it takes good comrades to support a hero.

He indeed couldn't handle this matter alone; with the help of his Junior Brother and Junior Sister, it should go much smoother.

Mr. Zhuang, drinking his wine, glanced at his three little disciples huddled together, murmuring and discussing something, his expression somewhat gratified.

Then, a hint of nostalgia arose in his heart.

For a moment, he even saw his three little disciples from years past, gathered together, cultivating and playing.

But in the blink of an eye, all was gone, like smoke dissipated.

Time flies, things change, and people change.

Mr. Zhuang looked melancholic and let out a slight sigh...

...

After the meal, the three of Mo Hua set out separately to gather information about the Lu Family.

Mo Hua first went to find the Housing agency workers.

That is, the articulate and seemingly clever Housing agency worker who sold the cave dwelling to him.

When that Housing agency worker saw Mo Hua, his expression was respectful but tinged with a bit of fear.

The Housing agency worker was a bit troubled when Mo Hua mentioned his name,

"Young gentleman, how about you choose someone else?"

Mo Hua wondered, "Why?"

The Housing agency worker chuckled nervously.

Last time he took Mo Hua to see the cave dwelling, Mo Hua's keen eyes found more than a dozen flaws, declared the Formation worthless, and cut the price almost in half.

Now, seeing Mo Hua's clear yet somewhat profound gaze, he felt a bit intimidated.

Although Mr. Zheng didn't blame him for this, it still made it impossible for him to lift his head in front of his colleagues.

Now they had given him the nickname "Half-Cutter."

It meant that when negotiating with him, one should start by cutting the price in half.

The Housing agency worker thus declined politely, "My abilities are insufficient, I'm not..."

Mo Hua slipped two Spirit Stones into his hand and consoled,

"I'm just looking around, not buying."

The two Spirit Stones warmed the Housing agency worker's heart.

The Housing agency worker hesitated for a moment but then anticipated, "You're really just looking and not buying?"

"Mhm, mhm," Mo Hua answered sincerely, with an innocent look.

The Housing agency worker couldn't resist Mo Hua, and of course, he couldn't resist the Spirit Stones in his hand either.

Besides, Mo Hua had said he wasn't going to buy anything.

Not buying was good.

If he wasn't buying, he wouldn't haggle the price...

"Alright."

The Housing agency worker agreed cheerfully.

So, he took the lead, guiding Mo Hua through North Street in South Yue City, strolling among some houses.

These houses were all part of the Lu Family's estate.

Mo Hua also took the opportunity to inquire about some news concerning the Lu Family.

As he was asking, the housing agency worker began to sense that something was wrong.

But he didn't dare to ask directly, so he could only hint subtly,

"Young gentleman, are you, by any chance, holding a grudge against the Lu Family?"

"There's no grudge..."

Mo Hua pretended to be somewhat embarrassed, "It's just that... the Lu Family Head wants me to marry a girl from the Lu Family, and I... I'm unfamiliar with this place, so I just wanted to discreetly inquire about the Lu Family's situation..."

Marry a girl from the Lu Family?

Marry into the family?

The housing agency worker's expression showed both admiration and pity.

For the Lu Family Head to personally speak out and propose a marriage, this young gentleman must really be something.

But what a pity that it's just about marrying into the family.

In this day and age, which competent cultivator would be willing to marry into a family?

The housing agency worker actually held Mo Hua in some esteem.

Although Mo Hua had hurt him deeply when it came to bargaining.

The housing agency worker wrestled with his thoughts for a moment before advising,

"Young gentleman, these words may not be pleasant to hear, but the Lu Family... is not exactly a good place. If you intend to join the Lu Family, it's better to be cautious..."

Mo Hua's gaze flickered, then he sighed and said, "I don't really want to, but..."

Mo Hua's face turned slightly red, "The young lady from the Lu Family is truly... quite beautiful."

The housing agency worker was stunned, then he frowned and nodded.

"Indeed."

Being beautiful is unquestionably a solid reason.

For the sake of a pretty girl he fancies, marry into the family then.

Mo Hua appeared naïve and innocent.

The housing agency worker did not doubt his sincerity.

He even became more enthusiastic; now, without Mo Hua asking, he spilled everything he knew about the Lu Family as if pouring beans out of a bamboo tube.

"The most powerful person in the Lu Family is the family head. It is said he has already reached the Qi Foundation Middle Stage..."

"Below the family head, there are some elders with real power. One or two at the Qi Foundation Middle Stage, while the rest are mostly at the Foundation Establishment Initial Stage, all considered to be the family head's confidants and part of the main Lu lineage..."

"If you were to marry into the family, you should choose among these branches..."

"It's best to pick one related to the Lu Family Head. That way, you'll be favored by the family head, and your future will be brighter."

"Besides them, there are also some guest elders."

"They hold an aloof status, with varying degrees of power, mostly tied by blood or marriage to other clans or sects."

"Of course, among these guest elders, there are some who keep a low profile and stay out of the public eye."

"If you have a good eye and can form a marriage alliance with one of them, and marry under their name, you might find an unexpected fortune, inheriting some top-secret legacies."

"Below the powerful elders, there are some ordinary elders."

"The regular, powerless elders; members of side branches with only a thin blood connection; fringe guest elders; supporters without much ability, and so on."

"These are not worth attaching yourself to..."

"Especially for a young gentleman such as yourself, a Formation Master."

"Of course." The housing agency worker paused, then added, "Unless it's their younger female cultivators of exceptional beauty, capable of toppling empires and cities; that's a different story."

After pondering for a while, the housing agency worker advised,

"Even so, in my opinion, it's still better not to marry into any family."

"Beauty cannot fill the stomach, and you shouldn't lose your way over it..."

"If you're to marry into a family, do it for power and benefits, and don't act impulsively based only on looks..."

The housing agency worker spoke eloquently and sensibly.

Suddenly he looked at Mo Hua, feeling it was a shame, and asked:

"Young gentleman, have you considered your Junior Sister?"

Mo Hua was taken aback, "Consider what?"

"Marrying, of course."

At this, Mo Hua's face truly reddened, his expression slightly irked, he said indignantly:

"She is my Junior Sister!"

The housing agency worker mumbled to himself, "What's wrong with a Junior Sister, isn't she the best match..."

Raised in the same sect, childhood sweethearts.

And she is indeed very beautiful.

Both dignified and lovely.

Together, they looked like a match made in heaven, one with fine features and clear eyes, the other with bright eyes and white teeth, like a golden boy and a jade girl.

But these words were only muttered internally.

Afterward, Mo Hua asked about some other things related to the Lu Family, and even jotted down the elders, guest elders, and supporters he had learned about on a piece of paper.

He planned to go back and scrutinize who was most likely to be the traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect.

The housing agency worker thought Mo Hua was pondering the marriage proposal and was filled with regret.

Latter, Mo Hua went to the Nanyue Inn to find Qinglan.

After the incident at the Hundred Flower Tower, Situ Fang asked the female brothel keeper for Qinglan's deed of sale and took her out, settling her into the inn.

Qinglan helped with cleaning and cooking at the inn, becoming independent.

She came from a poor Miner Cultivator background, down-to-earth and hard-working. Having left the Hundred Flower Tower and no longer having to ingratiate herself or serve others sexually, her spirit improved greatly.

When she saw Mo Hua, Qinglan was both grateful and happy.

She personally brewed tea and served pastries for Mo Hua to enjoy.

Mo Hua then asked, "Sister Qinglan, may I ask you some questions? About the Lu Family."

Qinglan was slightly taken aback, then nodded and replied:

"Sure, you can ask. I'll tell you everything I know."

After thinking for a moment, Mo Hua started asking questions beginning with Jinhua Street.

Having spent a lot of time on Jinhua Street and having encountered many cultivators, Qinglan must have heard plenty of news.

Qinglan pondered for a while, then slowly began to speak:

"The matters of Jinhua Street have to start with the now deceased Lu Family Old Ancestor..."

Chapter 472: Capitalist Lu (1)

"The Lu Family Old Ancestor, who went by the nickname 'Capitalist Lu'..."

"Capitalist Lu?"

Mo Hua was startled.

Qinglan nodded, "It means that he is greedy and selfish, extracting from mining cultivators ruthlessly as if he's peeling off their skin."

Qinglan sighed, "This is what my parents told me... when they were still alive..."

"At that time, I was young and took it as nothing more than a story, not understanding the heartache behind it..."

"It is said that several hundred years ago, the Lu Family was just an ordinary clan, owning a few mines, neither too powerful nor too weak, holding a position in South Yue City. But there were several other families more influential than the Lu Family, so the Lu Family wasn't much..."

"Until the Lu Family Old Ancestor came into power."

"After he came into power, he collaborated with several other mining families to formulate the Spirit Pact, advancing and retreating together, collectively suppressing the compensation of the mining cultivators."

"It used to be one five-part Spirit Stone per day..."

"The Lu Family established rules and nitpicked flaws, leading to the mining cultivators receiving fewer and fewer Spirit Stones, gradually depressing it to three parts, one part, and eventually only one Spirit Stone per day..."

"The mining cultivators' lives became even harder..."

"But the Lu Family earned more Spirit Stones."

"Having earned Spirit Stones, they then wanted to indulge in pleasure."

"South Yue City was desolate with few places for entertainment, so the Lu Family Old Ancestor thought of building his own..."

"Thus Jinhua Street came into being."

"Capitalist Lu, also known as the Lu Family Old Ancestor, dabbled in eating, drinking, whoring, gambling, so the gambling dens and brothels in Jinhua Street had everything one could wish for."

"This is how they squandered the Spirit Stones earned through the life-risking work of the mining cultivators in the gambling dens and brothels..."

The thought of her parents working hard to their deaths from starvation brought Qinglan to tears, her fingers turning white from clenching them so tightly.

Mo Hua also frowned deeply as he listened.

Qinglan composed herself, eyes red, and continued:

"Opening Jinhua Street, getting food and drinks, setting up gambling dens were easy..."

"But to open a brothel, they lacked girls."

"The women of the families would never do such a thing; they wouldn't sell themselves in brothels, at least not openly."

"So the Lu Family set their sights on the mining cultivators."

"They mistreated the mining cultivators, didn't fix the Formations, didn't cleanse the Filthy Qi, and the Spiritual Artifacts for mining were also old and worn, all for the sake of causing injuries to the mining cultivators, or even their deaths."

"Injuries need to be treated, and the dead need to be buried, all requiring Spirit Stones."

"Without Spirit Stones, they could only borrow."

"The Lu Family then lent money at high interest rates, making the mining cultivators incur heavy debts of Spirit Stones."

"When the mining cultivators couldn't repay their debts, they had no choice but to use their children to offset the debt, selling them to the Lu Family."

"Boys would be made servants or attendants."

"Girls were thrown into brothels, dressed up, and sent to... entertain clients..."

Qinglan found it difficult to continue, as tears welled up in her eyes again.

Mo Hua felt a touch of heartache as well.

He had not anticipated that the bustling prosperity of Jinhua Street was built on the suffering of the mining cultivators.

The women of the brothels look joyous and smiling, yet beneath their façades flow tears of blood.

The harder the mining cultivators' lives, the more extravagant Jinhua Street became.

Mo Hua asked again, "Do the other families do these things too?"

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Qinglan nodded and then shook her head, "At first, the Lu Family and a few other families did it together..."

"But the other families weren't as ruthless as the Lu Family, not as extreme in their methods, and gradually, they were either absorbed or had to sell their mines to the Lu Family and move to other cities..."

"Gradually, the Lu Family became the sole power in South Yue City..."

Mo Hua frowned and said, "Such actions by the Lu Family, they must have violated the Taoist Laws, hasn't the Taoist Court ever intervened?"

Qinglan nodded, "They did, but to no avail."

"The previous Court Leader, who hated evil as if it was his enemy, simply couldn't compete with the Lu Family."

"The Lu Family bribed the right people, and had him transferred away."

"The successors at first made a show of action, but after frequenting the Lu Family brothels for several days and receiving a few chests of Spirit Stones, they ended up in collusion with the Lu Family."

Mo Hua understood.

This Court Leader must be the current Court Leader Qian.

In league with the Lu Family.

Mo Hua remembered something else and asked, "Has the Lu Family Old Ancestor passed away?"

Qinglan nodded, her expression somewhat pleased, "Dead!"

"It is said that he committed too many evils and indulged in his pleasures without restraint, which bred wicked thoughts, leading to a mishap during his cultivation and he died after living more than two hundred years."

"On the day he died, the mining cultivators took their money for food and bought fireworks instead, setting them off for the whole day..."

"The Lu Family couldn't stop it."

This old bastard had a fitting end, dying amidst such clamor...

Mo Hua thought to himself.

But having lived more than two hundred years before dying was already letting him off lightly.

Mo Hua thought for a moment, then asked, "After the Lu Family Old Ancestor passed away, was it Lu Chengyun who became the next Family Head?"

"Yes," Qinglan nodded.

"Is Lu Chengyun bad?" Mo Hua asked.

Qinglan furrowed her brows, pondered for a while, and then said:

"So-so, I suppose. Not particularly good, but compared to other members of the Lu Family, he could be considered a 'good person'."

"He wasn't so harsh on the Mining Cultivators."

"If a Mining Cultivator died, he would still have the Lu Family compensate with Spirit Stones."

"Many things weren't as excessive as the Lu Family Old Ancestor."

"Although life was still hard for the Mining Cultivators, since they had always been suffering, they were used to it, so not many people cursed him."

"Unlike the Lu Family Old Ancestor..."

Mo Hua nodded slightly.

This was almost identical to his impression.

Lu Chengyun was gentle and refined, but his schemes ran deep, taking the Lu Family's interests as a guideline, acting stably without going too far, yet he would not forsake the benefits of the family mines to treat the Mining Cultivators kindly.

Mo Hua asked further, "Sister Qinglan, have you ever seen the Elders of the Lu Family in the Hundred Flower Tower?"

Qinglan nodded, "I've seen a few."

"Do you think among them, is there anyone particularly suspicious?"

Qinglan frowned slightly, "What kind of suspicious?"

"I mean..." Mo Hua thought for a moment and said, "Someone who understands Formations but doesn't seem like a person from the Lu Family, or someone who sneaks around, with a different way of doing bad things than others..."

After pondering for a while, Qinglan shook her head:

"I wouldn't know, I've only looked from a distance and haven't really interacted with them."

Then she added, "But since you mentioned suspicious, that Elder from the South Yue Sect who brought you here last time is actually quite suspicious..."

Mo Hua was startled, "The South Yue Sect? Elder Su?"

"Mhm mhm." Qinglan nodded, "His surname is Su."

Mo Hua asked curiously, "What's suspicious about him?"

Qinglan said with puzzlement, "He clearly is a regular, yet he insists on pretending to be unfamiliar, isn't that very suspicious?"

Mo Hua's eyes shifted as he asked softly:

"Is Elder Su a regular of the Hundred Flower Tower?"

"Yeah, he used to come often, almost treating the Hundred Flower Tower as his own home..."

Mo Hua was astonished.

He guessed Elder Su was familiar, but he hadn't thought Elder Su would be THAT familiar...

Truly... appearances can be deceiving.

Qinglan glanced at Mo Hua and seemed conflicted, hesitating for a moment before finally lowering her voice and saying:

"I'm telling you this, and you mustn't tell anyone else..."

Curious, Mo Hua quickly nodded.

Leaning closer, Qinglan whispered:

"That Elder Su, he once had a close relationship with Sister Shuixian in the building. He even wanted to buy her freedom at one point."

"Later I heard that Sister Shuixian... was even pregnant with Elder Su's child..."

Mo Hua couldn't help but open his mouth wide.

He hadn't expected Elder Su to have such a "romantic affair".

"What about the child?"

Qinglan shook her head, "I don't know."

"What about Shuixian?"

Qinglan sighed, "She died."

Mo Hua furrowed his brows.

Qinglan felt regretful and a bit sad, "Sister Shuixian was a good person, beautiful, skilled with her hands, and treated people kindly..."

"But somehow, she ended up dead."

"It seemed Elder Su was heartbroken for a while, wanted to investigate something, but in the end, it led nowhere..."

"It's likely that nothing was discovered."

Qinglan lowered her head, "People like us, our lives are cheap, dead is dead, the Taoist Court won't care, the Lu Family don't mind, and the brothel keepers will just regret losing a body that could earn Spirit Stones..."

"Whether we live or die, they don't take it to heart, and in this world, no one will take it to heart..."

Qinglan's voice got lower and lower, and her expression increasingly forlorn.

Mo Hua felt a discomfort in his heart as well.

Qinglan kept her head down. After a long while, seeing that Mo Hua also seemed downcast, she was startled, wiped away her tears, and said with a smile:

"Young master, forgive me, I shouldn't have talked about these things."

After saying that, she expressed her gratitude:

"Without the young master, I probably couldn't have escaped this abyss of misery..."

"I might still be in the Hundred Flower Tower, forcing a smile, serving men with my body, and then one day, dying without knowing it..."

"Now I need not care about other people's opinions, I can support myself, which is already better than anything else."

Qinglan's gaze was frank, her tone sincere.

Though her eyes were red, her gaze was very determined.

Mo Hua felt somewhat relieved in his heart.

After leaving the inn, Mo Hua walked on the street.

Looking south, there were the mines.

Looking north, there was the resplendent Lu Family residence, and come nightfall, Jinhua Street would light up, a world of glitz and debauchery.

Mining Cultivators toiled for them, their children became slaves and courtesans for their pleasure, tools for earning Spirit Stones.

They also became bargaining chips for bribing the Taoist Court officials and wooing other powers.

A cold light flickered faintly in Mo Hua's eyes.

Chapter 473: Clues (1)

Mo Hua finished gathering information and returned to the cave abode of the four disciples and their master.

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi had also come back, and they shared the clues they had discovered with Mo Hua.

Bai Zisheng had visited the bustling places like the market towns, teahouses, and restaurants, where he mostly heard about the Lu Family's misdeeds and scandals.

Bai Zixi, on the other hand, had visited some female cultivators and cultivator's wives in South Yue City, and she mostly learned about the Lu Family's gossip and rumors.

Mo Hua began to summarize the information and then listed the suspects.

And he calculated, within the Lu Family, who was most likely to be the traitor?

But the Lu Family was large, and the clan relationships were complicated and intertwined, making them difficult to investigate in a short time.

There were not only native elders of the clan but also guest elders from outside.

Some of the clan's native elders were not actually considered part of the clan, while some external guest elders might be distantly related by marriage...

Mo Hua looked at the bewildering array of relationships and couldn't help saying,

"This is so chaotic..."

Bai Zisheng nodded and said, "That's how clans are, the larger the family, the more complex the bloodlines, interpersonal relationships, and affections..."

"The Lu Family is still manageable, but if it were our Bai Family, it would be even more complicated."

"Even during festivals and holidays, the rituals and gift-giving involved a whole lot of etiquette."

Mo Hua felt tired just listening and shook his head helplessly.

Bai Zisheng glanced at the pile of Lu Family relationships in front of him and asked,

"Do you have the Lu Family's genealogy? If you have their genealogy, it would be clearer to understand. Otherwise, it would be just a wild guess regarding who is related to whom, who was born to whom, and who shares the same father..."

"The Lu Family genealogy... Outsiders should not be able to get their hands on something like that..."

Mo Hua frowned, then suddenly paused.

He remembered that the Family Head of the Lu Family, Lu Chengyun, seemed to have given him a special "genealogy".

It was a genealogy that Lu Chengyun had secretly given to Mo Hua in an attempt to lure him into marrying into the family.

Mo Hua opened his Storage Bag and searched through a pile of Formation Books and Formation Diagrams before he found the "genealogy."

Bai Zisheng exclaimed in surprise, "You actually have it?"

"Yes," Mo Hua nodded, "it's only a part of it, but it might help us sort things out."

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Mo Hua spread out the genealogy.

The three of them gathered close together and looked at it.

As they examined it, Bai Zixi realized something was amiss and looked up at Mo Hua with puzzled eyes, saying,

"Why does this genealogy only list young girls?"

Bai Zisheng also nodded in agreement, "And they all seem rather beautiful..."

Mo Hua's face turned slightly red, "Lu Chengyun gave it to me; I didn't know."

Bai Zixi's gaze became skeptical, "Really didn't know?"

"Yes, yes," Mo Hua nodded repeatedly.

Bai Zixi scanned Mo Hua's face, saw the honest look in his eyes as he met her gaze, and slightly nodded, not pursuing the matter further.

For some reason, Mo Hua felt relieved.

Afterward, the three began sorting through the relationships within the Lu Family.

This genealogy was quite simple, only introducing the main lineage, collateral branches, and other women related to the Lu Family, detailing their blood relations and degrees of closeness.

It also included portraits of the women.

At the same time, it briefly introduced their Spiritual Roots and talents.

These details would likely be considered family secrets.

Had Mo Hua's talent for formations not been so exceptional, already achieving the rank of a first-grade Formation Master at a young age,

Lu Chengyun would probably never have given him this genealogy.

The genealogy was not complete; it only contained part of the Lu Family's clan relationships.

But even this part was enough for the three of them to unravel the thread by thread, simplifying the clan's relationships among the cultivators.

From it, Mo Hua eventually isolated five names:

Lu Huaiyi, Lu Huaisheng, Lu Huaiyi, Pei Cai, and Jiang Long.

The three with the surname Lu were all men who had married into the family.

Moreover, each had at least a basic understanding of formations.

They were quite valued within the Lu Family, wielded real power, and had all managed mines at some point, even occasionally overseeing them to this day.

Pei Cai and Jiang Long, both with differing surnames,

One a revered contributor and the other a guest elder,

Both held distinct positions within the Lu Family.

One had married a woman from the Lu Family but was not considered to have married in,

While the other taught formations within the family.

All five appeared very much like the traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect.

Mo Hua said, "Let's start by thoroughly investigating these five individuals."

Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi both nodded in agreement.

Thereafter, they spent a month shadowing, following, and inquiring with no significant results.

Lu Huaiyi, Lu Huaisheng, and Lu Huaiyi, despite the fact they had married into the family, had clear and traceable backgrounds before their marriage.

There hadn't been much change in them, either.

They had been meek before marriage but became arrogant and domineering afterward.

This type of change was consistent with human nature and was not considered abnormal.

As for Pei Cai and Jiang Long,

One practiced cultivation quietly, minding his own business without concerning himself with worldly affairs,

While the other taught formations by day and enjoyed himself on Jinhua Street at night, corrupted by the Lu Family's decadence yet indulging willingly.

These men did not seem like the type to have deep schemes.

There were no strange or bloody signs to detect.

Mo Hua grew puzzled, "Could I have guessed wrong?"

In the days that followed, there were no further developments.

Until this day, Elder Su sent another invitation, asking Mo Hua to have tea.

Mo Hua thought for a moment, felt a slight stirring in his heart, and agreed.

Elder Su was on good terms with the Lu Family and had a deep relationship with Lu Chengyun.

Before uncovering the traitor of the Lu Family, it was better to have fewer dealings.

But with no progress at the moment, Mo Hua thought, why not go have tea with Elder Su and see if any clues might emerge.

Mo Hua had an inexplicable intuition.

He felt that Elder Su might be vaguely hiding some critical information.

Mo Hua furrowed his brows.

Ever since he learned Divine Sense Calculation and used it to deduce Formation principles, occasionally he'd get a premonition that something would emerge within the depths of his mind.

There was also an indescribable intuition in his heart.

This intuition was very clear.

But when he pursued it in detail, there was no thread to follow...

It felt similar to when Mo Hua grasped the Taoist Meaning within Formations.

It was like touching upon something faintly but separated by mountains and rivers, hazy and elusive, difficult to comprehend.

Mo Hua remembered Mr. Zhuang once said that all things in heaven and earth converge with the Tao.

If Formations conform to the Tao, and all things conform to the Tao, do Cultivators' actions and deeds also conform to the Tao?

If so, by comprehending the Heavenly Dao, could one perhaps predict the future to a certain extent, attract fortune and avoid disaster?

Mo Hua believed that Mr. Zhuang occasionally acted in a profoundly unfathomable manner.

It seemed like a kind of premonition of the Heavenly secret.

But how could one achieve such a thing?

Keep studying Formations, keep understanding Formation Principles, keep using Calculation to penetrate the Great Dao?

To discern the nature of things, predict fortune and misfortune, seek benefits and avoid harm...

If he truly learned it, wouldn't he become a "little religious con man"?

Mo Hua mulled over it continuously in his heart.

It wasn't until he arrived at Su Mansion, took a seat in the pavilion, and sipped Elder Su's fine tea that he was still somewhat lost in thought and not entirely present.

Elder Su poured tea thoughtfully and asked, "Young gentleman, are you troubled by something?"

Mo Hua snapped back to reality and nodded, "Just a bit, thinking about something."

Elder Su nodded in approval:

"Whether you walk, stand, sit, or lie down, whether you eat or drink, you never forget to ponder and meditate on Formations... it's no wonder you, at such a young age, possess such profound expertise in Formations. Truly admirable..."

Mo Hua felt that Elder Su's praise was a bit awkward.

And it wasn't quite right.

But after all, he was praising him, and Mo Hua didn't want to say so outright.

Moreover, even if the praise was off, being complimented still made him very happy.

So Mo Hua returned the compliment:

"Elder Su's Formation skills are also very impressive! And moreover..."

Mo Hua thought of a word, saying, "...very in tune with life."

Mo Hua still remembered his dalliances at the brothel, treating Hundred Flower Tower as if it were his home...

But Elder Su, unaware of what Mo Hua was thinking, stroked his beard, exceedingly pleased, and kept insisting:

"Drink tea, drink tea! This tea is a treasure I've kept hidden away for a long time, I wouldn't offer it to just any guest..."

The tea indeed was excellent.

The two drank for a while, and even when the tea was finished, they still felt a sense of longing.

Elder Su then asked his disciple to brew another pot.

The disciple who brewed the tea was the one who always followed Elder Su closely, a youth with a handsome appearance and a certain gentle elegance, though still carrying a touch of youthful stubbornness.

Having visited frequently, Mo Hua was quite familiar with him.

But this time, Mo Hua felt he looked even more familiar.

After the disciple prepared the tea, Elder Su nodded and instructed:

"Shuisheng, you may leave now."

Shuisheng?

Mo Hua was startled.

He scrutinized the disciple more closely.

The disciple's talent for Formation was actually mediocre, and he didn't show much respect to Elder Su, sometimes even being clumsy, so why did Elder Su always keep him by his side?

Mo Hua looked at him a few times more.

It was then he realized that the disciple bore some resemblance to Elder Su's features, and their Spiritual Power auras seemed to have some connection.

Shuisheng...

As Shuisheng walked away, Mo Hua continued to stare at his retreating figure.

Elder Su noticed Mo Hua gazing at his disciple, his eyes growing brighter and brighter, and felt a bit jittery inside.

"Young gentleman, what... are you looking at?"

"I'm looking at your young disciple."

Elder Su laughed awkwardly:

"Just a young disciple, what's there to see..."

Mo Hua silently gave Elder Su a glance, then quietly asked:

"This young disciple, he wouldn't happen to be your illegitimate son, would he..."

Elder Su choked on a mouthful of tea, coughed a few times, and hurriedly feigned composure with a self-deprecating smile: "You jest, young gentleman."

Mo Hua whispered quietly:

"Shuixian..."

Elder Su's hands trembled, knocking over his cup, and he looked incredulously at Mo Hua:

"How... how did you know?"

Mo Hua's eyes narrowed slyly like a little fox, thinking to himself that it was indeed so.

Chapter 474: Shuisheng (1)

Elder Su quickly looked around him.

Mo Hua then said, "Elder, rest assured, there's no one around, even Shuisheng isn't here..."

Only then did Elder Su breathe a sigh of relief. He looked at Mo Hua, wanting to say something but hesitating. He couldn't understand how Mo Hua knew about Shuixian's affair.

Mo Hua didn't mention Qinglan but vaguely said:

"I heard it by chance at the Hundred Flower Tower."

Elder Su was startled and then nodded helplessly. Afterward, he seemed somewhat lost in thought.

The name Shuixian, like a thorn piercing Elder Su's heart, rid him of his usual easygoing demeanor. He stared blankly, as if immersed in the past, overwhelmed with emotion, unable to extricate himself.

"Elder Su?"

Mo Hua called out to him.

Elder Su didn't respond.

"Elder Su!"

Mo Hua raised his voice a notch, and Elder Su finally came back to his senses, his face showing apologetic, "Sorry, I was lost in the past just now, somewhat entranced."

Mo Hua hesitated for a moment, then asked tentatively:

"Could you tell me about those past events?"

Elder Su looked at Mo Hua with puzzlement, "Why do you... want to hear about this?"

Mo Hua replied, "I'm curious."

Elder Su immediately shook his head.

How could he share his love life, especially one that is so painful to look back on, with a child...

Mo Hua then said, "It has a use for me."

"What use?"

"I can't say just yet."

Elder Su also gave a perfunctory response, "They are all trivial matters of the past, it's not convenient for me to speak of them."

Mo Hua thought for a while, then said:

"How about this, if you tell me, consider it a favor owed to you."

Elder Su chuckled, "What use is a child's promise of a favor for me... it couldn't be..."

Elder Su stopped mid-sentence, suddenly freezing.

This favor could be of great use!

A favor personally promised by a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old First Grade Formation Master!

Moreover, Mo Hua was serious, there was no sign of jest.

Although everyone was a First Grade Formation Master and Mo Hua was still in the Qi Refinement stage, while he himself had already achieved Foundation Establishment.

But precisely because he was in the Qi Refinement stage, this favor was even more precious.

Qi Refinement First Grade, after a decade or two, who's to say he wouldn't be Second Grade?

Second Rank Formation Masters are rare as phoenix feathers and unicorn horns in a Second-Grade Prefecture Border.

Even in a Third-Grade State Boundary, they wouldn't be considered insignificant.

Elder Su pondered for a moment, somewhat hesitant.

Mo Hua then said, "It really is a favor, I mean what I say!"

Elder Su was tempted and, after feigning indifference for a while, finally nodded and said:

"Alright."

Although it was a regrettable part of his past, and perhaps even a tale of amorous exploits, it wasn't an unspeakable secret.

Elder Su took a sip of tea, then began to speak slowly, telling Mo Hua everything about Shuixian.
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He included how he met Shuixian, how they fell in love, how he wanted to redeem her from the brothel, and how Shuixian eventually died, leaving behind a child whom he took by his side and named "Shuisheng"...

Of course, he omitted some content not suitable for children.

After finishing his story, Elder Su felt thirsty and took another sip of tea.

Mo Hua, upon hearing this, said in surprise:

"Were you and the Lu Family Head visiting brothels together?"

"Shush!" Elder Su looked around again before whispering:

"Yes, but that's an old story. Now he's the Family Head, and you mustn't talk recklessly about this matter, lest it ruins his reputation."

"Oh," Mo Hua nodded, thinking to himself:

No wonder Elder Su and the Lu Family Head have such a good relationship.

It turns out they used to visit the Brothel together when they were young.

After a pause, Mo Hua then asked with some sympathy:

"How did Sister Shuixian die?"

Elder Su's expression turned melancholic, and he shook his head:

"Beauty is often ill-fated, I suppose. Her health was never good, and after suffering at the Hundred Flower Tower, she developed a chronic illness. Later, when she was with me, I had a Pill Master treat her, but it was merely symptomatic treatment..."

"During that time, it was also because of me..."

"I would say that I wanted to redeem her, but I was also hesitant."

"I... after all, am an Elder of the South Yue Sect and a Formation Master. Although not boasting of a lofty status, I am indeed a person of some influence in South Yue City."

"In South Yue City, even clans and sects from other state boundaries have proposed marriage alliances."

"Those who sought my hand for their daughters were all talented and well-bred, with respectable origins and excellent Spiritual Roots, ensuring that our offspring would be gifted."

"Compared to them, Shuixian was just..."

Elder Su bittered a smile, "Perhaps Shuixian guessed what was on my mind and purposefully distanced herself from me, seemingly reluctant to trouble me."

"But in her heart, she must have resented me. Whether she hated me, I do not know..."

Elder Su sighed deeply.

"Under the weight of her grievances, her old ailments resurfaced, and then she was gone..."

"Back then, I was angry, convinced that Shuixian had been victimized, so I investigated for a long time but ended up finding nothing."

After a pause, he added, "Later I realized that Shuixian... actually died at my own hands."

"I was afraid of my own guilt, of regretting and feeling remorseful, so I shifted the blame."

"I hoped someone had killed Shuixian; then I could hate someone else, avenge her, and alleviate some of my guilt..."

"But no one had..."

"Her life was like a duckweed, hoping for solace from me."

"But I broke faith, and so, she drifted away with the wind..."

Elder Su's face bore a thick bitterness.

Mo Hua felt saddened as well and asked:

"Throughout these years, haven't you taken a Dao companion?"

Every time he visited this cave dwelling, aside from one or two maids boiling water and making tea, he hadn't seen any other female cultivators.

Elder Su shook his head, saying with resignation:

Chapter 475: Shuisheng (2)

"Over these years, I've also wanted to marry a Dao companion and forget Shuixian."

"But people are just cheap..."

"No matter what, I can't forget..."

"Thinking of a Dao companion isn't so bad, but as soon as I do, my heart is filled with the shadow of Shuixian."

"Later, I came to realize it didn't matter anymore. I had given all my affection to her in this lifetime. It was owed to her, and upon her death, that affection went with her..."

Mo Hua had not expected Elder Su, who used to frequent brothels, to have such a painful and melancholic past.

He had not expected Elder Su to be such a sentimental person.

Indeed... one can't judge a book by its cover.

Mo Hua patted Elder Su on the shoulder but didn't say a word, offering silent comfort.

With Mo Hua's pat on the shoulder, Elder Su suddenly shivered.

That's not right!

Why had he revealed everything?

Although he planned to tell Mo Hua his past, he hadn't intended to divulge all these grievances and sorrows.

He intended to rot these thoughts in his heart.

Elder Su took another look at Mo Hua and felt a chill in his heart.

This child was too deceptive in appearance.

With an innocent face, friendly and lovable, one is unwittingly compelled to tell the truth.

Before he knew it, he had poured out his heart...

But what's done is done, what could he do now?

Elder Su could only thicken his face and act as if nothing had happened.

Seeing that Elder Su's mood had recovered, Mo Hua asked again:

"So Shuisheng is the child of you and Shuixian?"

Elder Su was taken aback for a moment, then nodded helplessly: "Yes."

"After Shuixian's death, I kept the child by my side as my direct disciple, thinking that with my protection, the child could live safely, learn some formations, and, upon achieving success in his studies, his mother's spirit in heaven would be consoled..."

"When his mother was still pregnant with him, she hoped that he could become a Formation Master like me, to stand out from the crowd..."

Elder Su said this, and again, he became somewhat angry.

"But this child, apart from resembling me a bit, is completely different in all other aspects. His talent for formations is lackluster, he refuses to work hard, is clumsy in his actions, and his temperament is not as gentle as his mother's..."

Elder Su listed a slew of faults before suddenly falling silent again. After a long while, he said despondently:

"But his brows and eyes, his expressions... they look very much like his mother..."

Mo Hua also sighed upon hearing this.

It's often after a loss that one learns to cherish.

Especially when it comes to emotions.

For a time, both Elder Su and Mo Hua looked somewhat despondent.

Elder Su's mood stemmed from memories of the past.

Mo Hua, young and without any romantic history, was simply making groundless sighs...

Shuisheng walked in and saw the mood was a bit somber, suddenly unsure of what to say.

After a moment, he finally spoke softly, "Master, the Lu Family Head has arrived."

"The Lu Family Head?"

Elder Su was startled and quickly looked at Mo Hua, whispering:

"The things I just told you, you mustn't speak of them to anyone."

Mo Hua was momentarily puzzled, "What things?"

"It's just..."

Elder Su gestured to himself and then pointed outside, making a gesture towards the Lu Family Head.

Mo Hua understood that it was about their joint visits to the brothel.

"Don't worry, I won't tell!" Mo Hua assured.

Only then did Elder Su feel relieved.

Before long, Lu Chengyun entered, paid his respects to Elder Su, and then greeted Mo Hua with a refined and genteel manner.

Lu Chengyun's arrival did not surprise Mo Hua.

When Elder Su invited him for tea, Lu Chengyun would occasionally come to visit.

Having seen each other a few times, they were not strangers.

The group drank tea together, chatted about formations, and then talked about the affairs of the South Yue Sect and the Lu Family.

Drinking tea was fine, and so was discussing formations.

But when it came to the internal affairs of the sect and the clan, Mo Hua found it inappropriate to listen in.

Although he was very interested in eavesdropping, as there might be clues regarding the traitor of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect,

There were certain basic courtesies to be observed.

Mo Hua then stood up and said:

"Lu Family Head, Elder Su, please continue your conversation; I'll take a walk in the garden."

Elder Su said, "Young Gentleman, please feel free."

Since Mo Hua often visited here, he was already quite familiar with the place and thus did not stand on ceremony.

However, Mo Hua was not here just to stroll around for fun.

Seeing that Elder Su and the Lu Family Head were engrossed in conversation, he stealthily made his way to Elder Su and Shuixian's secret child, the disciple known as "Shuisheng."

Shuisheng was reading a book at a small table by the garden bridge.

Shuisheng was somewhat older than Mo Hua and also taller.

Mo Hua quietly approached him and asked,

"What are you reading?"

Startled, Shuisheng hurriedly put away the book and was about to get angry, but upon seeing it was Mo Hua, he respectfully bowed and said,

"Young Gentleman."

Although Mo Hua was young, he was a guest of honor for Elder Su and was treated as an equal.

Naturally, Shuisheng did not dare to offend him.

Mo Hua sat next to him and patted the stool, saying,

"Sit."

Shuisheng did not dare to sit.

Mo Hua glanced at him. Enjoy more content from empire

Feeling awkward, Shuisheng then sat down.

As he did, Mo Hua caught a glimpse of the book in his hands.

It was a text explaining the basics of the Five Elements Formation Patterns.

Mo Hua was surprised; according to Elder Su, his disciple wasn't very diligent, and his skills at formations were not good.

But now it seemed somewhat different.

Mo Hua asked, "Do you have any questions about this book?"

Shuisheng was taken aback for a moment, then stuttered,

"I'm not very good at drawing..."

He opened the book and pointed at a few Golden Series Formation Patterns.

Mo Hua glanced at them; they were very basic patterns.

He then began to explain to him how to draw these patterns, how to use the brush, how to use the ink, what the layout should be, how to wield Divine Sense, and what to do when Divine Sense was insufficient...

As Shuisheng listened, he couldn't help but gape in awe, looking at Mo Hua with great admiration.

These issues had troubled him for a long time; he could not figure them out no matter how he tried, but to his surprise, Mo Hua clarified them with just a few words, causing him to have a sudden realization.

Mo Hua's inner world, however, remained undisturbed.

This was, after all, the Five Elements Basic Formation.

It was a very, very simple technique.

Mo Hua was puzzled, "These things, you..."

He was about to say "your dad," but at the last moment he changed his words:

"...didn't your master explain them to you?"

Shuisheng shook his head, "Master didn't explain. He thought these were all too simple, the kind of things one would understand with a thought. When I asked him, he would just look at me with disappointment, as if I had failed to meet his expectations..."

"Over time, I stopped asking him and tried to figure it out on my own, to learn as much as I could on my own, and to let go of what I could not grasp..."

Mo Hua shook his head.

How could one learn formations like this?

Elder Su probably had too high expectations for his only son.

Once they were not met, disappointment would ensue in his heart.

But people are different.

Anyone learning formations has different conditions; they must progress step by step, and cannot subject others to harsh criticism because of their own excessive expectations or disappointments.

Formations are inherently difficult; Elder Su's excessive expectations born out of his deep love for his son could, in fact, leave Shuisheng feeling at a loss.

Mo Hua sighed, thinking that since he had drunk Elder Su's tea and owed him a favor, he then continued to teach Shuisheng for a while.

A short while later, Shuisheng looked at Mo Hua with even more respect and gratitude.

Young in age yet with high proficiency in formations, frank in interactions, lacking pretension, and willing to teach him.

He seemed so much better than his own master...

Shuisheng thought to himself.

The two of them thus became more familiar with each other.

After thinking for a moment, Mo Hua suddenly asked:

"Shuisheng, do you know who your mother is?"

Shuisheng was taken aback, bowed his head, and nodded slightly.

"Then do you know who your father is?"

Shuisheng looked at Mo Hua with some surprise and then also slowly nodded.

Mo Hua felt a stir in his heart.

It seemed that the boy named Shuisheng knew everything...

Chapter 476: Secret (1)

Mo Hua asked, "What kind of person was your mother?"

Shuisheng looked somewhat defensive, glanced at Mo Hua, saw his clear eyes and gentle demeanor, no ridicule, no mockery, then he slowly said:

"My mother, she... she had a low status..."

It was somewhat difficult for him to talk about his mother being a woman from the brothel.

"I know that, born in poverty, she had no choice..." Mo Hua continued, "What else?"

Shuisheng was caught off guard, then he relaxed, and his face showed a smile mixed with yearning:

"My mother treated me very well!"

"She made Hundred Flower pastries and crystal pork hocks for me to eat."

"She had a lovely smile, spoke very gently, liked to stroke my head..."

...

Shuisheng talked about many bits and pieces from life with his mother.

This might have been his only warm memory from childhood.

So when Shuisheng spoke of his mother, his face was smiling, innocent and full of longing.

"And your father?"

The expression on Shuisheng's face instantly fell, and there was a trace of disdain in his look.

It was as if his father couldn't even be compared to his mother.

"I... my master, he..."

He didn't even want to call Elder Su "father."

Shuisheng said, "He was pretentious..."

"He knew everything, but he never told me, thinking I didn't know."

"I actually knew everything, but since he didn't say anything, I didn't say anything to him either..."

Mo Hua thought to himself:

These two really are father and son...

Both pretending to be confused when they understood everything, each knowing in their heart but refusing to speak.

"Master also wants me to learn Formation..."

Shuisheng looked down and said, "But I... with my low status and no talent, Formation isn't something people like me should learn..."

"Moreover, Formation is very difficult, and I simply can't learn it well."

"Among Master's disciples, I am the slowest learner, what they know, I don't; what they understand, I don't; the Formations they can draw, I can't draw..."

"Master would scold me, the worse I learned, the angrier he became."

"But he values me highly, always keeps me by his side, the worse I learn, the more effort he puts in."

"The other disciples, when they look at me, there is envy and rejection in their eyes..."

"I don't like staying here..."

Shuisheng's expression was somewhat downcast.

Mo Hua nodded, showing understanding for Shuisheng's difficulties, and asked:

"Do you want to learn Formation?"

Shuisheng hesitated for a moment, then nodded, "I do."

"It doesn't matter to me personally, but I want to make my mother happy. Her wish was for me to become a dignified Formation Master like my... master."

"That way, no matter my background, no one would look down on me."

"My mother is gone, I can't see her anymore, but whenever I am learning Formation, whenever I think of becoming a Formation Master, I feel like my mother's spirit in heaven is silently watching over me, being with me..."

Shuisheng choked up a bit, his eyes reddening.

Mo Hua thought of his own mother as well.

Even though he was now drifting, unable to eat the meals made by his mother or stay by her side,

His mother was still waiting for him.

After his journey, after mastering Formation, he could still go back and see his mother.

But it was different for Shuisheng; he would never see his mother again in this lifetime...

Mo Hua felt a little emotional, then patted his shoulder, encouragingly saying:

"Don't worry, you can learn Formation well."

Shuisheng was grateful and felt undeserving of such encouragement, stammering:

"I, my talent is too poor..."

"Elder Su's talent wasn't much better than yours," Mo Hua whispered.

Shuisheng's eyes widened, "No way... my master is a top-tier Formation Master."

Mo Hua whispered, "You're father and son, how different could your talents be? If he can become a top-tier Formation Master, surely you can too."

Shuisheng wouldn't have believed this statement normally.

Even among fathers and sons, talents can differ greatly.

But coming from Mo Hua, who became a top-tier Formation Master in his teens, the credibility suddenly shot up.

Shuisheng looked forward with some hope, mumbling:

"I... can I really become a top-tier Formation Master?"

Mo Hua nodded, "Yes, but your foundations are weak, you need to work harder, take more time..."

"If not in twenty years, then in thirty years; if thirty years are not enough, then fifty years; if not in fifty, then a hundred years..."

"As long as you stay focused and keep going, you will definitely become a top-tier Formation Master, and your mother's spirit will be happy."

"Top-tier Formation Master..."

Shuisheng's eyes began to shine.

"Yes." Shuisheng nodded earnestly.

Mo Hua smiled with satisfaction.

Shuisheng's talents, compared to Elder Su, were indeed lacking somewhat.

But not to the extent that he couldn't learn Formation.

Moreover, he had a master and father who was a Sect Elder with Foundation Establishment cultivation and a top-tier Formation Master.

With inheritance and guidance, as long as he put a lot of effort and hard work into it, it wasn't too difficult to become a top-tier Formation Master in the future.

The problem with Elder Su was that he was too eager for his son's success, and therefore lost his equanimity, which inevitably led to some overly aggressive teaching methods and improper education.

As for Shuisheng, he was just a bit reclusive and stubborn.

With a poor foundation and relentless rote learning without asking questions, it's natural that one would not learn well.

This father and son have made simple matters complex, and that is why they are displeased with each other.

Elder Su has a relatively clear mind, but when it comes to his only beloved child, it's inevitable to be trapped within the situation without realizing it.

Mo Hua thought for a while and then instructed:

"Just remember, focus on learning the Formation, and do not concern yourself with anything else."

"Whether your master praises you or scolds you, you don't need to mind either."

"If there's something you don't understand, ask. If he's unwilling to explain, keep asking. Don't feel embarrassed; keep asking until you understand."

"If he nags, complains, or reproaches you, take it as the wind by your ear."

"The most important thing is just one, and that is, you must learn to master the Formation!"

Shuisheng suddenly saw the light and looked at Mo Hua, nodding solemnly.

Seeing that he had understood, Mo Hua also narrowed his eyes and smiled.

A moment later, Mo Hua thought of something, reigned in his smile, and said slowly:

"Shuisheng, I want to ask you a question."

Shuisheng smiled and said, "Gentleman Mo, feel free to ask me anything you want to know."

Mo Hua, with a hint of apology, asked:

"How did your mother die?"

Shuisheng was stunned; his smile disappeared from his face, and his expression turned gradually to pain, then firmly said:

"My mother was murdered!"

Mo Hua frowned slightly, "Have you told your master this?"

Shuisheng nodded, "I've said it many times. I've always told him that my mother was murdered."

"At first, he believed it, but gradually, he stopped believing..."

Mo Hua's eyes narrowed slightly, "Do you know who killed her?"

Shuisheng shook his head, his expression one of disappointment, "I don't know..."

Then his gaze became hateful, "But I know it must be the Lu Family!"

Mo Hua was slightly shocked, "The Lu Family?"

"It's the Lu Family!"

Shuisheng said with a sad expression, "Hundred Flower Tower is run by the Lu Family, not just my mother; many of the aunties and sisters there have sold themselves to the Lu Family."

"The Lu Family would hit and scold them whenever they wanted."

"Even if someone was tortured to death, the Taoist Court wouldn't care."

"My mother, like the other aunties and sisters, definitely died at the hands of the Lu Family!"

Shuisheng's eyes were red, his anger growing as he spoke.

Mo Hua, feeling sympathy, then asked, "Did you see it with your own eyes?"

Shuisheng shook his head.

"Then do you have any evidence?"

Shuisheng dropped his head, also shaking it silently, "I have no evidence, and I don't have the ability to look for any. The master also forbids me from looking..."

Elder Su was probably afraid he would face danger.

Mo Hua frowned in contemplation.

The Lu Family built Jinhua Street, compelled the Mining Cultivators to sell their daughters, and established Hundred Flower Tower, not only for their own pleasure and to earn Spirit Stones, but primarily to use sexual bribes to pull Cultivators from various powers to their side.

The powers they enticed included the Taoist Court, the South Yue Sect, and other Clans and Sects.

In this way, they were all in the same boat.

Shuixian was just a bargaining chip.

And Elder Su, being a Sect Elder with real power in the South Yue Sect, a Foundation Establishment Cultivator, and a first-grade Formation Master, was naturally a target for their enticement.

It's just that it was unexpected for Elder Su to be so deeply in love.

And yet Shuixian also met her fate due to her beauty.

But is that really all there is to it?

Could it be that Shuixian knew some secret of the Lu Family, which led to her death?

Mo Hua thought for a while and then took out several portraits.

These portraits were of the people Mo Hua suspected were the traitors from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect.

Lu Huaiyi, Lu Huaisheng, Lu Huaiyi, Shen Cai, and Jiang Long.

"Do you recognize these people?"

Shuisheng looked at them and frowned, "They seem vaguely familiar, but I don't know them..."

"Is there one that particularly stands out to you?"

Shuisheng looked again for a while, then shook his head, "No..."

He asked in confusion:

"Gentleman Mo, what's the issue with these individuals?"

Mo Hua said, "Someone committed a serious crime, and all of these men are suspects. I want to investigate further."

Shuisheng asked quietly, "What did they do wrong?"

Mo Hua replied, "It's dangerous, something I can't discuss with you."

"Oh," Shuisheng nodded.

Suddenly Shuisheng looked puzzled again, "These people don't seem to be of the same sort, so why are they all suspects?"

Mo Hua thought for a moment, then said:

"Basically, they all understand the Formation, have married into power, hold positions within the Lu Family, and have overseen mining operations..."

Shuisheng nodded, muttering softly:

"Oh, just like the Lu Family Head..."

Mo Hua's heart skipped a beat.

Just like the Lu Family Head?

He asked swiftly, "In what way are they similar?"

"It's just that... they're almost all alike," said Shuisheng, counting, "understanding the Formation, marrying into power, holding status, controlling the mines..."

Mo Hua drew in a sharp breath, his face filled with disbelief:

The Lu Family Head, married into the family?!

Chapter 477: When the Map Ends, the Dagger Appears (1)

How is that possible?

How could such a large family as the Lu Family allow a son-in-law who joined through marriage to become the family head?

And Mo Hua had never heard any rumors about this before.

Mo Hua asked, "How do you know this?"

Shuisheng replied, "My mother told me."

Mo Hua felt a slight shock in his heart.

Shuixian knew about this...

"Does anyone else know?" Mo Hua quickly asked again.

After thinking for a while, Shuisheng said, "In the Hundred Flower Tower, Aunt Xuefang and Sister Danxiang seem to know as well."

"Then they..."

Shuisheng sighed, "They are all dead."

Mo Hua's gaze slightly hardened, "Have you told anyone else about this matter?"

Shuisheng shook his head, "No. I don't have many friends, and I'm not on good terms with my fellow sect members. I haven't even mentioned it to my master..."

Mo Hua relaxed slightly, but then his expression grew serious again as he cautioned:

"Don't ever talk about this matter with anyone else, it's best to forget it and never bring it up again."

Although Mo Hua was not very familiar with the clan, he knew that it is generally taboo for a family head to be someone who had joined the family through marriage.

Once this gets out, even Shuisheng could be killed to silence him.

Shuisheng didn't understand, but seeing Mo Hua's serious expression, he nodded earnestly.

Suddenly, something occurred to him, and he asked with a frown:

"Is my mother's death... also because of this matter?"

Mo Hua shook his head, "Not necessarily..."

Though he said this, Mo Hua estimated in his heart that Shuixian's death was very likely related to the Lu Family Head as well.

Mo Hua looked at Shuisheng and gave further instructions:

"During these days, stay at the mansion, follow your master, do not go out, do not speak indiscreetly, and concentrate on learning Formation techniques."

"Mastering Formation techniques is the most important thing; your mother would be pleased at that."

Shuisheng fell silent for a moment, then slowly nodded his head.

However, Mo Hua's gaze gradually turned colder, and his expression still showed some disbelief.

The Lu Family Head... Lu Chengyun.

Joining through marriage...

If it was true that he had joined the family through marriage, then this Lu Chengyun was very likely the traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect!

But the question is, how is it possible?

The Lu Family is so extensive, with numerous legitimate heirs, why would they do such a thing?

Let someone who joined by marriage become the family head?

Or perhaps...

What did Lu Chengyun do to be able to go against all opposition and successfully become the head of the Lu Family?

This matter is more complicated than previously thought.

If the traitor from Minor Hidden Spirit Sect were merely an Elder or a sponsored guest, once exposed by Mo Hua, he could even use Lu Chengyun's hand to eliminate him.

But now, this traitor could very well be the Lu Family Head himself.

From what it looks like now, being enemies with Lu Chengyun is equivalent to being at odds with the entire Lu Family.

Being enemies with the Lu Family...

Should he take down the entire Lu Family?

Mo Hua furrowed his brow, "This is a bit troublesome..."

Mo Hua was lost in thought for a long time, then suddenly remembered that right now Lu Chengyun was at the Su Mansion, ahead, discussing affairs with Elder Su over tea.

"I need to run first!"

Mo Hua made a decisive decision in his mind.

Lu Chengyun's cultivation was profound, barely short of the middle phase of the Foundation Establishment stage.

Not to mention he was the traitor from the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect, he also understood Formation techniques, and was the Lu Family Head. Even if his Cultivation Technique and Taoist Skills weren't as sophisticated as those of his juniors born into noble clans, they certainly wouldn't be lacking.

Being alone, it is better not to take risks when unnecessary; the best thing to do is to make a clean getaway.

But he must not appear too anxious, lest he raise suspicion from Lu Chengyun.

After reminding Shuisheng a few more times, Mo Hua got up and left, heading to the front courtyard, and took his leave from Elder Su with great composure:

"Thank you for your hospitality, Elder Su. I've had my fill of tea and should return to study Formation techniques, so I won't disturb you any longer."

Elder Su stood up and said:

"Gentleman, you may come and go as you please, I won't see you out."

Mo Hua bowed respectfully and said, "Elder, you may stay."

He then bowed to Lu Chengyun and said, "Excuse me."

Lu Chengyun also bowed with a smile, "Gentleman, you're too courteous."

So Mo Hua, pretending to understand nothing, left Elder Su's dwelling.

Watching Mo Hua's small figure leave, Elder Su couldn't help but smirk and shook his head in jest:

"Although he's already a First Grade Formation Master, he's still a child at heart. He's probably tired of playing and thinking about going back..."

Lu Chengyun smiled gently as well.

But halfway through his smile, his expression suddenly stiffened, the smile lingering on his cheeks, while his eyes had lost all traces of mirth.

Once out of Su Mansion, Mo Hua began his trek back.

Although it looked slow, he was moving quickly.

Along the way, Mo Hua started planning his next steps.

He needed to find a way to confirm whether Lu Chengyun really joined by marriage.

If he did, then he was certainly the traitor from Minor Hidden Spirit Sect.

Then, he'd have to think of a way to call forth people to take down the Lu Family.

From his side, his master and Old Kui would probably not make a move.

That left only him, his Junior Brother, and Junior Sister.

At the Taoist Court, there was also Situ Fang.

Behind Situ Fang, stood the Situ Family.

But to stand against a force as powerful and deeply-entrenched as the Lu Family, the Situ Family might not be willing.

Even if they were willing, it's unlikely they could mobilize enough cultivators at the Foundation Establishment stage within the second-grade Minor Wilderness State Boundary.

Besides, the Court Leader in South Yue City has been corrupted by the Lu Family, taking the same side as them.

If he acted, he would definitely face their obstruction.

Appealing to the Taoist Court to call upon Taoist Soldiers would be a good method.

But this was not Tongxian City.

The Court Leader wasn't on his side, so he expected difficulties.

"If all else fails..."

Mo Hua glanced at the Lu Family and silently thought:

"Should I use Formation Collapse to send the entire Lu family to heaven?"

But Mo Hua shook his head again, feeling that this was also not an ideal solution.

Once the Formation collapsed and the spiritual power reversed, everything would be annihilated, and likely no one from the Lu Family would survive.

Such killing was too heavy a sin.

The Lu Family deserved death, but not every clan member did.

Besides, his master had instructed him not to collapse Formations unless absolutely necessary.

Even if he did use it, he should ensure no one saw.

Mo Hua heaved a sigh.

It seemed he could only go back and make new plans.

Find a way to investigate Lu Chengyun's background, figure out how he rose to power, why he wanted to buy zombies, store corpses in the mines, and what his schemes were.

Then find a way to plot his demise.

Take the Spirit Pivot Formation Chart from his hands!

Fetch revenge for Instructor Yan, settle the grudge with the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect, learn the complete Spiritual Pivot Formation, and master the true First Grade Twelve Pattern Ultimate Formation, comprehend the central structure of spiritual power, and further enhance the prowess of Divine Thought Manifestation...

Mo Hua was making meticulous calculations, walking and pondering at the same time.

But as he walked, Mo Hua suddenly froze.

He hesitated for a moment, then took a different path, making a big detour.

After walking for a while, Mo Hua stopped short again.

Then he turned left and circled another big round.

But after several detours, Mo Hua realized that no matter how much he circled, there was a Foundation Building Cultivator waiting for him ahead.

And unbeknownst to when, an Expose Shadow Formation had been set up all around him.

In the spots without the Expose Shadow Formation, Foundation Builders blocked the way, holding a compass-like Spiritual Artifact.

Mo Hua was not familiar with such a Spiritual Artifact.

But he guessed it was probably used to detect Hidden cultivators.

Eight Foundation Builders, more than ten Expose Shadow Formations, six sets of detection Spiritual Artifacts...

Mo Hua, reading the situation, refrained from using the Concealment Technique.

The street remained lively, with the surrounding cultivators oblivious to everything.

Mo Hua gritted his teeth and continued walking forward.

After a while, he saw Lu Chengyun not far ahead, sitting at a roadside tea stall, dressed in fine clothes.

Lu Chengyun was calmly drinking tea, with two Elders standing behind him, both of whom were at the Foundation Establishment stage.

Mo Hua brazenly pretended not to see him and walked forward on his own.

Even as he passed by Lu Chengyun, he didn't so much as glance at him.

Lu Chengyun put down his tea cup and said somewhat helplessly, "Young Gentleman."

Mo Hua continued to pretend he hadn't heard.

Lu Chengyun had no choice but to shake his head, and the two Foundation Builders behind him blocked Mo Hua's path and politely said:

"Young Gentleman, the Family Head requests your presence."

Mo Hua was startled, "Family Head?"

He turned around, pretending to have just noticed Lu Chengyun, and expressed surprise:

"Lu Family Head, what brings you here? Weren't you having tea with Elder Su?"

The acting was somewhat clumsy.

Lu Chengyun didn't quite know what to say.

Mo Hua must have noticed him a long time ago. That was why he had taken such long detours, forcing him to circle around several times and set up several Expose Shadow Formations.

Lu Chengyun didn't make an issue of it but instead chuckled:

"Young Gentleman, you don't want to see me?"

Mo Hua feigned confusion, "Why would the Lu Family Head think that?"

"You're avoiding me."

"How could that be? Didn't we just meet?"

"Just now..."

"Oh, just now I suddenly remembered I had forgotten to buy some things, so I took a different route to go shopping."

Mo Hua's hands were empty, but he lied without even blushing.

Lu Chengyun gave up.

This young gentleman was very shrewd and a bit of a cheeky rascal.

Continuing this back and forth with him here, he probably wouldn't get a single serious word until evening.

Lu Chengyun decided to be straightforward:

"I'd like to ask the Young Gentleman to do me a favor."

Mo Hua tactfully said, "The Lu Family is vast, and you, Family Head, have considerable cultivation. I'm just a minor cultivator, I'm afraid I can't be of much help to you."

Lu Chengyun shook his head, "This favor cannot be done without the Young Gentleman's help."

Mo Hua knew he couldn't dodge any longer, so he said:

"Alright, what favor would you like me to help with?"

Lu Chengyun's gaze turned cold as he calmly said:

"I'd like the Young Gentleman to help me with Corpse Refinement!"

Mo Hua blinked, "Refine stone?"

He nodded immediately, "Sure, what kind of stones are there on the mountain that you need my help with using a Formation to refine?"

Lu Chengyun was taken aback.

He really hadn't expected that Mo Hua, despite his young age, could be so impudent.

Lu Chengyun sighed, "Not refine stone, refine corpses."

"Refine what?"

"Corpses."

"Corpses?" Mo Hua continued to feign ignorance, "What corpses? I don't know what you're talking about."

Lu Chengyun said, "You're being too modest, Young Gentleman. You stole an Iron Corpse, dismantled it to study the Formation, how could you not know what a corpse is?"

Mo Hua inwardly panicked, realizing Lu Chengyun knew everything.

He likely couldn't bluster his way through anymore.

Mo Hua could only say, "I only learn proper Formations, I don't know how to refine corpses."

"No matter," Lu Chengyun chuckled, "It's easy to learn. With the Young Gentleman's talent, you'll get it in no time."

Mo Hua felt helpless.

It seems having too much talent can be a nuisance too.

No wonder they say a person dreads fame as a pig dreads fattening; once you're known, you become a target.

Mo Hua pondered for a moment, then puzzled, "But if it's an Iron Corpse, you, Family Head, can refine it yourself. You shouldn't need my help."

Lu Chengyun fell silent for a moment, his graceful demeanor suddenly twisted into a sinister smile, revealing a row of white teeth, his eyes gleamed with chilling ambition:

"Not an Iron Corpse..."

"It's a corpse that stands above the Iron Corpse... a stronger Zombie!"

Chapter 478: Helping Zhou (1)

Mo Hua's heart chilled, and he asked with a frown:

"Above the Iron Corpse... is it the Copper Corpse?"

Lu Chengyun did not confirm or deny, but just smiled inscrutably and asked:

"Junior Gentleman, what do you think?"

Mo Hua did not answer but furrowed his brows in thought before asking in return:

"Lu Family Head, how did you know that I knew?"

Mo Hua's words were somewhat convoluted, but Lu Chengyun still understood and chuckled lightly:

"Your eyes."

Mo Hua was taken aback, "My eyes?"

"Indeed," Lu Chengyun said, "When you see me on regular days, although you are polite and courteous, there is much caution in your expression, and your gaze also carries some doubt..."

"But today, it's different..."

"Before I came here, your attitude towards me was the same as usual."

"When you left, however, your look at me was unusually composed."

Lu Chengyun mocked himself, "Ordinary people might not notice anything, but I am naturally suspicious, and I take any trace to heart."

"The difference in your gaze before and after made me suspicious."

"I thought about it and then I understood."

"Your composed gaze indicates you no longer suspect me."

"Not suspecting could mean you trust me, but it could also mean that you've figured out my secrets, so there's no need for suspicion."

Lu Chengyun looked at Mo Hua, his smile tinged with ambiguity, "I needed to confirm."

"So I excused myself from Elder Su earlier and waited for you on your way back, as I wanted to have a private chat with you."

"But you took a longer route, seemingly not wanting to meet me."

Lu Chengyun sighed, "I'm quite disappointed and then I understood."

Mo Hua was speechless inside.

This Lu Chengyun, indeed a son-in-law who had married into the family, had such a suspicious and sensitive mind to this extent.

Even a slight difference in his gaze could make Lu Chengyun suspicious.

"Then what if I had left Elder Su's residence without saying goodbye and sneaked away?" Mo Hua asked him.

Lu Chengyun's eyebrows rose, "Wouldn't that be even more suspicious?"

"What if I didn't take the longer route?"

"If you didn't take the longer route, wouldn't it be the same as now?" Lu Chengyun said with a light smile, "You and I would sit down for tea, and I would ask the junior gentleman to lend me a helping hand."

Meaning, there was no escape either way...

Mo Hua sighed and said with an innocent face:

"Why must Lu Family Head focus on someone like me, a young cultivator with low cultivation, weak strength, a basic understanding of formations, and no ill intentions, just thirteen years old?"

Lu Chengyun's eyelid twitched.

In that sentence, probably only "thirteen years old" was true.

The rest were lies no one would believe.

Lu Chengyun poured a cup of tea and took a sip, saying slowly:

"Junior Gentleman, I knew of your arrival in South Yue City the moment it happened."

Lu Chengyun shook his head, quite nostalgic, "At such a young age, a first-grade Formation Master, even having lived so long, I've never seen with my own eyes. You truly broadened my horizons."

"There are always mountains beyond mountains, and people beyond people..."

"This Cultivation World, indeed, has all kinds of talents."

"A thirteen-year-old first-grade Formation Master, I knew your background must be no small matter, and you must have had a purpose in coming here."

"You inquired everywhere for an Instructor named Yan."

"To be frank, this Instructor Yan also has some acquaintance with me, and he has clues to an extremely secretive formation on him."

"You, being a Formation Master, inquiring about his whereabouts, it must be for this formation."

Mo Hua neither confirmed nor denied.

Lu Chengyun smiled faintly again, "I didn't care much at first, but you kept digging deeper, learning more and more."

"You investigated the mines, found Zhang Quan, even followed the trails to the Corpse Walking Stronghold, and together with the Situ Family, you eradicated the stronghold..."

"Meanwhile, you also discovered the formation on the zombies, and boldly took one back to study..."

"I could only activate the formation, letting the Iron Corpse go berserk, forcing you to destroy the formation..."

"And now, you've peeled away the layers and discovered the person behind Zhang Quan is me..."

At this point, Lu Chengyun sighed, saying with resignation:

"I've lived so many years, but I've never met a Formation Master as clever and troublesome as you."

Mo Hua's mind whirled quickly and he reviewed everything succinctly:

In Lu Chengyun's mind, he was a formidable young Formation Master with a significant background, inquiring about Instructor Yan to find the Spiritual Pivot Formation.

Investigating the mines, capturing Zhang Quan, destroying the Corpse Walking Stronghold, and in the end finding out that the cultivator behind Zhang Quan was him, the Lu Family Head.

All of it for the sake of the formation.

In other words, he didn't know about the relationship between himself and Instructor Yan, nor was he aware that he already knew about the past of the Minor Hidden Spirit Sect or that he was the son-in-law of the Lu Family...

Mo Hua breathed a slight sigh of relief.

It seemed that Lu Chengyun, who was merely astute, relied on the Lu Family's power to be fully aware of the movements in South Yue City.

But he didn't know everything.

Now there was a way to deal with this...

Seeing Mo Hua's eyes rolling around, Lu Chengyun wondered what he was thinking and asked:

"Junior Gentleman, have you made your decision?"

"What?"

"Are you willing to refine corpses for my Lu Family?"

Mo Hua spoke righteously: "I am a serious cultivator; I don't engage in such crooked and evil deeds."

Lu Chengyun replied with gentle and refined manners:

"On the surface, I too am a serious cultivator."

Mo Hua frowned slightly.

Lu Chengyun continued: "It is only convenient to carry out crooked and evil deeds when one appears respectable on the surface."

Mo Hua felt there was some truth to this.

He then asked, "What if I still disagree?"

The expression on Lu Chengyun's face gradually turned colder.

Mo Hua asked: "Does the Lu Family Head want to kill me?"

Lu Chengyun was momentarily stunned, then smiled warmly:

"Gentleman Mo is too talented for me to bear killing."

Now truly curious, Mo Hua proceeded to ask:

"Then, if I really don't agree, what does the Family Head plan to do?"

Lu Chengyun smiled and said:

"The best outcome, of course, is for Gentleman Mo to lend me a helping hand. Feel free to state any demands you might have."

"If you desire a title, I am willing to make you the actual power-bearing Elder of the Lu Family; you can act as you please, without restraint;"

"If you desire profit, I will give you a share of the mine's output, handfuls upon handfuls of Spirit Stones, ensuring a carefree path onwards;"

"If you desire combat power, you can command thousands of zombies; with a single command, enemies will be devoured to death, unmatched by anyone at the same level;"

"If you have a tender heart, yearning for the love of women, the female cultivators on Jinhua Street await to share your bed; you can also choose a lady from the Lu Family that pleases your heart, to be united in marriage and spend your life with..."

Lu Chengyun spoke fervently.

Mo Hua felt himself swayed.

With such a silver tongue, deceiving others would indeed be as easy as pie.

Lu Chengyun then changed his tone and said:

"If Gentleman Mo feels that our paths are different and cannot work together, then that's very unfortunate."

"Gentleman Mo comes from no ordinary background, and I would not wish to make an enemy of you."

"The best course of action would be to ask Gentleman Mo to leave and never set foot in South Yue City again, not meddling with the affairs of South Yue City."

"What you know should rot in your heart, never to be revealed."

"Let us part on good terms, and my Lu Family will even present you with a modest parting gift as a token of our sentiment."

"But if Gentleman Mo neither helps us nor leaves, then you are deliberately making things difficult for the Lu Family."

"When it comes to clan interests, no matter how influential Gentleman Mo might be, my Lu Family would have no choice but to fight to the bitter end."

Lu Chengyun sighed:

"If it comes to life and death, we won't be able to sit down and enjoy a cup of tea together anymore..."

There was regret and pity in Lu Chengyun's expression.

But to Mo Hua, it seemed insincere.

Lu Chengyun, a man who was outwardly gentle but inwardly profit-driven, surely wouldn't consider any emotional ties or feel any regret.

Mo Hua furrowed his brows.

At this point, he had to consider his options.

Falling out with the Lu Family was not a wise decision.

Leaving South Yue City would mean losing access to the Spiritual Pivot Formation.

Moreover, once he left, reentering would become troublesome.

After leaving, countless Mining Cultivators might die within the mines, and more Walking Corpses would likely arise;

On Jinhua Street, who knows how many tears would be shed amidst the paper-thin splendor...

After a moment of contemplation, Mo Hua nodded and said:

"I can agree to your request, but I have one condition."

Lu Chengyun's eyes brightened as he hastily responded, "Please speak, Gentleman Mo."

Mo Hua's gaze sharpened, revealing a fierce edge:

"I want that Formation! The one etched into the heart meridian of the Iron Corpse, the one that controls the Walking Corpses!"

Lu Chengyun was momentarily taken aback, then his smile grew even broader:

"Fine!"

Looking at Mo Hua, Lu Chengyun's eyes showed even greater appreciation:

"Fame and worldly profits are but passing clouds, and beautiful women are merely skins;"

"To a Formation Master, the Formation is the foundation of their existence and the Great Dao to immortality!"

"Gentleman Mo, capable of maintaining your Taoist Heart amidst worldly desires, it's no wonder you have achieved so much at such a young age..."

Lu Chengyun was generous with his praise.

Mo Hua pretended to be nonchalant.

Lu Chengyun said with a bow, "Please, Gentleman Mo!"

Mo Hua returned the gesture, "After you, Lu Family Head!"

Lu Chengyun was very pleased and led the way.

Mo Hua followed close behind him.

One moment, Mo Hua was considering wiping out the Lu Family, and the next, he transformed into a Junior Formation Master who was "helping the tyrant" and followed behind Lu Chengyun.

Chapter 479: Bad Thing (1)

Mo Hua followed Lu Chengyun to the Lu Family.

On the surface, Lu Chengyun treated Mo Hua very well, considerate and meticulous, but he didn't allow Mo Hua to leave the Lu Family, and there were various other restrictions—it was essentially "soft imprisonment."

So Mo Hua found Lu Chengyun and said he wanted to return home for a bit:

"I'll be right back, just to let my Junior Brother and Junior Sister know, so they won't worry."

Lu Chengyun took out paper and pen, "No need for such trouble, Little Gentleman. Write a letter, and I'll have someone send it over."

Mo Hua repeatedly waved his hands, "A written letter might not convince my brother and sister, it would be better if I went back personally."

Lu Chengyun shook his head:

"Little Gentleman, you have many ideas, and I must be cautious. Writing a letter is better."

Mo Hua muttered, "Is the Lu Family Head being too cautious..."

"It's good to be cautious." Lu Chengyun looked at Mo Hua and slowly smiled:

"This time, it was I who set up the Expose Shadow Formation and mobilized several Foundation Establishment Elders, only then could we invite the Little Gentleman..."

"If we let the Little Gentleman go back with preparations made, I really might not be able to find you again, much less invite you."

Mo Hua helplessly said, "Alright then, I'll write the letter."

Thus, Mo Hua picked up the pen and wrote a letter on the stationery provided by the Lu Family, addressed to Bai Zisheng and Bai Zixi.

The letter didn't say much, only that he was invited by the Lu Family Head to be a guest for some time and that they should not worry, to have meals on time, but they would have to cook for themselves.

Mo Hua didn't mention Mr. Zhuang's matter.

Because he noticed that Lu Chengyun seemed unaware that the three of them were traveling with their master.

Mo Hua even speculated that in Lu Chengyun's perception, there possibly wasn't even a person like Mr. Zhuang.

Such a thing was quite baffling, but it seemed his master could indeed do such a thing...

After the letter was written, he handed it over to Lu Chengyun.

Lu Chengyun didn't even look at it and promptly called over his servants, instructing them to deliver the letter to Mo Hua's cave dwelling.

It seemed as long as they retained Mo Hua, it didn't matter what was written in his letters.

Afterward, Mo Hua stayed at the Lu Family for a few days.

Lu Chengyun provided for Mo Hua with fine food and drinks.

The ones serving him were all young and beautiful maidens.

Mo Hua would also sit next to Lu Chengyun at some of the Lu Family's evening banquets.

During the banquets, some of the Lu Family women, glamorous and painted, each outstanding in her own way, cast alluring glances at Mo Hua.

Mo Hua openly returned their gazes.

After looking around, Mo Hua silently compared them in his mind and felt that none were as good-looking as his Junior Sister; then he lost interest and started eating on his own.

To be fair, the meals at the Lu Family were very good.

Only, the thought that all these delicacies were exchanged for the lives of mining cultivators for the Lu Family's enjoyment made the food lose its taste in his mouth.

Even while eating cooked meat, he felt there was a bloody smell.

Several days later, one evening, Lu Chengyun found Mo Hua, his figure concealed in the night, his expression indiscernible and his tone indifferent:

"Little Gentleman, I'm taking you to a place."

Mo Hua couldn't help but ask:

"Where to?"

Lu Chengyun smiled faintly, yet it seemed he didn't smile at all, "A place you wish to go to."

Mo Hua was puzzled but still followed Lu Chengyun out.

Lu Chengyun led the way, with Mo Hua following him and two Foundation Establishment Elders behind Mo Hua.

Mo Hua still remembered these two Foundation Establishment Elders.

In their hands, they had compass spiritual artifacts used for reconnaissance and concealment.

The group left the Lu Family, exited South Yue City, and arrived at the Lu Family's mine.

It was the same mine where the five mining cultivators had died tragically.

It was also the mine where a dark and stormy incident occurred at night.

It was also the mine so tightly guarded by the Lu Family that Mo Hua had previously tried to sneak in but failed.

If Mo Hua's guess was right.

Within this mine, there were zombies hidden.

All of Lu Chengyun's conspiracies and schemes were also hidden within this mine.

Of course, the complete Spiritual Pivot Formation Chart must also be inside this mine.

The mine was still guarded by Lu Family cultivators.

Lu Chengyun arrived at the mine's entrance but didn't go in; instead, he led Mo Hua around the perimeter of the mine and finally stopped at a desolate place by a giant rock.

It was now deep into the night.

The dark and eerie silence of the mountains and the chilling mountain breeze blew around them.

The giant rock stood tall and imposing, emanating a cold corpse Qi.

Mo Hua was taken aback.

Could this giant rock be the door?

Mo Hua looked around and frowned. The giant rock appeared to be a natural formation without any marks of carving; it didn't seem like a door.

He then released his Divine Sense to probe.

There were no illusion arrays nearby.

At that moment, Lu Chengyun took out a sinister-looking bell, pitch black in color, neither wood nor iron in appearance.

He gently shook it, and its sound was deep, lacking the clarity of metal, but rather dull, like the heartbeat of the dead.

As the bell rang, after a moment, the large rock trembled.

Mo Hua watched in shock.

This giant rock seemed to have been lifted by a tremendous force, revealing a gloomy passageway behind it.

Behind the passage, the corpse Qi was even heavier, as thick as it could drip.

Lu Chengyun glanced at the shocked Mo Hua, smiled slightly, and said kindly:

"Little Gentleman, please."

Mo Hua came back to his senses, nodded, and followed Lu Chengyun towards the dark depths.

The stench of decay and the dizzying, suffocating corpse Qi hit Mo Hua for a moment.

After a short while, the intense smell dissipated, and the space in front of him suddenly opened up.

Mo Hua fixed his eyes and was even more stunned.

Behind this giant rock was a mine shaft.

Chapter 480: Bad Stuff (2)

...

However, this mine shaft is a Deadman's Mine.

Within the mine shaft, coffins were everywhere, casting an aura of death and decay.

Mo Hua then turned back to look at the entrance.

This natural boulder acted as the gate, with thick chains fixed to it, wrapping around and extending to an iron turntable.

By the iron turntable stood two tall Iron Corpses.

It was these two Iron Corpses who, under the control of the black Corpse Controlling Bell, pushed the turntable, pulling the chains and lifting the huge stone gate.

Mo Hua frowned deeply.

The boulder was massive and heavy; for the two tall Iron Corpses to push the turntable and lift the gate, their strength must be immense, and thus their lethal potential was also extremely high.

Yet such powerful Iron Corpses were used by Lu Chengyun simply to open the gate.

Was it because there were an extremely large number of Iron Corpses inside the Corpse Mine, rendering these two superfluous in battle strength?

Or was it because the gate was of utmost importance?

Within lay forbidden territory, strictly off-limits to outsiders and impermissible for their discovery or unwarranted intrusion.

After a few people entered the mine shaft, Lu Chengyun shook the bell again.

The two Iron Corpses, at his bidding, began to reverse the turntable.

Behind Mo Hua, accompanied by the creaking of iron chains, the stone gate slowly descended, completely sealing off the inside from the outside.

Even the cold moonlight could not find this silent Corpse Mine.

Mo Hua was also left within this closed and silent mine shaft.

An elder of the Lu Family lit a lantern.

In the pitch-black mine shaft, there was now a faint yellow light.

The light of the lantern cast Lu Chengyun's face in a fluctuating, indistinct light.

He looked at Mo Hua, his eyes faintly betraying a sinister ambition, his voice also suppressed with excitement:

"Little gentleman, this mine shaft is the heart's blood of I, and the great enterprise of the Lu Family!"

Mo Hua was shocked, but still furrowed his brow and asked:

"Lu Family Head, what exactly do you want me to help you with?"

"No rush," Lu Chengyun said with a faint smile, "Before that, let's meet an old friend first."

"An old friend?"

The Lu Family elder, holding the lantern, led the way.

Mo Hua followed Lu Chengyun through the pitch-black mine shaft, slowly moving forward.

They walked until they reached a cavern.

The cavern had a door, on which were carved layers of Formation Patterns that were unclear, but under the light of the lantern, they appeared faintly blood-colored.

Mo Hua knew right away that this was an Evil Formation.

Lu Chengyun took out a stone talisman, inserted it into the lock, and disengaged the Formation.

The Lu Family elder pushed open the stone door, and everyone entered the cavern.

The cavern was much brighter inside, with many stone chambers, each adorned with the Bright Fire Formation.

Inside the stone chambers, there were also some Cultivators, all wearing gray robes, pale-faced, and carrying the scent of Corpse Qi. They all seemed to be corpse cultivators.

These corpse cultivators, upon seeing Lu Chengyun, all bowed their heads in salute.

Lu Chengyun nodded slightly, leading Mo Hua all the way to a large hall inside.

In the center of the hall was a stone table, but it was carved much more exquisitely.

The furnishings around were complete and carefully selected, with skulls, bones, coffin nails, all exuding a kind of somber and deadly beauty.

The hall was eerie, with coffins around, and in the middle sat a Cultivator, gaunt and covered with scars, clearly wounded and unhealed, his complexion pallid and sallow.

It was Zhang Quan.

Indeed, he was an "old friend" of Mo Hua.

Mo Hua thought to himself: "As expected."

Zhang Quan wasn't dead!

The centipede wriggles even in death.

Mo Hua had felt that Zhang Quan wouldn't die so easily.

Moreover, the Zhang Family had a legacy, generations of expertise in Corpse Refining Techniques, which to Lu Chengyun, was also a rare "talent."

Lu Chengyun would not let him die so readily.

Upon seeing Lu Chengyun, Zhang Quan got up and bowed respectfully, his attitude reverent.

After finishing his salute, just as Zhang Quan was about to say something,

The fire in the hall flickered, and with a hurried glance, he suddenly saw the diminutive Mo Hua at Lu Chengyun's side.

He thought he had seen wrongly.

Zhang Quan blinked, and once he recognized Mo Hua's small face, his eyes bulged out in anger.

He pointed at Mo Hua, trembling, "Lu Family Head, this..."

Lu Chengyun introduced him:

"This little gentleman here is a remarkable Formation Master named Mo Hua."

Zhang Quan needed no introduction.

Mo Hua's eyebrows and every smile, like a branding iron, were seared into his Sea of Consciousness, the mere recollection of which stirred in him a tormenting blend of fury and pain.

The sole wish of his earlier life was to refine an unrivaled zombie.

For the latter half, it was to let this zombie devour Mo Hua.

Zhang Quan, having hidden here for so long, thought daily of killing Mo Hua.

Never in his wildest dreams had he expected that he could personally lay eyes on the lively and bouncing Mo Hua here in the Corpse Mine.

Zhang Quan, unable to hold back, glared with fury, ready to lash out and slay Mo Hua there and then.

Detecting Zhang Quan's murderous intent, Mo Hua immediately hid behind Lu Chengyun, poking his little head out, and sticking out his tongue at Zhang Quan.

Zhang Quan nearly fainted from anger again.

...

His mind slipped from his grasp, and he could bear it no longer, a palm striking toward Mo Hua.

The force of the palm was solid, with spiritual power materialized, aiming to put Mo Hua to death.

Yet this palm, halfway through its course, was blocked by Lu Chengyun.

"Brother Zhang, don't be impulsive,"

Lu Chengyun's expression was mild, but his tone was ice cold.

Zhang Quan, filled with dread, finally calmed down, but with lingering rage barely subsiding, he said fiercely:

"Family Head, this brat... he... "

Lu Chengyun said indifferently: "I know, you have grievances, but that's all in the past now..."

Zhang Quan said in disbelief, "Why?"

Lu Chengyun slowly said:

"Because our grand endeavor requires the help of the little gentleman, the current Mr. Mo is our honored guest, and hence must not be offended."

Mo Hua also nodded and added:

"Exactly! Exactly!"

Zhang Quan was infuriated, but helpless all the same.

He glanced at Lu Chengyun, whose expression was cold and detached, his gaze filled with suppressed anger. After a while, his face flushed red and then turned pale, he gritted his teeth and said:

"Fine, I will let it go!"

Having said that, Zhang Quan, pointing at Mo Hua, said:

"But he must return what he stole from me!"

Mo Hua continued to feign ignorance, "I don't remember stealing anything from you."

Zhang Quan, infuriated and itching to retaliate, said, "The altar's!"

"Oh," Mo Hua blinked, "those things were yours, huh? I saw no one wanted them, so I just took them. Even if they are trash, they shouldn't be wasted, right?"

Zhang Quan's breath got caught in his throat, unable to speak.

Lu Chengyun, somewhat exasperated, said, "Little gentleman, stop provoking him."

So Mo Hua stopped talking.

Lu Chengyun heaved a sigh and continued:

"It appears to be a misunderstanding. Why not return the items to their original owner and let bygones be bygones? Little gentleman, what do you say?"

Mo Hua hesitated for a moment, then nodded and said to Zhang Quan:

"Alright, I will do so in the face of the Lu Family Head."

Mo Hua began to look through his storage bag, finding the disassembled parts of the Corpse Controlling Bell scattered in a corner of the bag.

The Corpse Controlling Bell, after being taken apart by his junior sister, was never put back together.

Since there were no good Formation Patterns inside, Mo Hua had forgotten about it.

Mo Hua took these fragments of the Corpse Controlling Bell and, with a rustling sound, presented them with both hands, scattering them on the table.

Zhang Quan was dumbfounded at the sight.

"This is... my Corpse Controlling Bell?"

The blood cord, exotic Patterns, bell body, clapper... all disassembled, as if it had been "dismembered."

Zhang Quan glared at Mo Hua and demanded:

"Why did you disassemble it?"

Mo Hua thought to himself that it was not him but his junior sister who had taken it apart.

But what his junior sister disassembled was almost the same as if he had done it himself.

So Mo Hua said, "I found it amusing, just took it apart to study it a bit..."

Zhang Quan felt numbness creeping up his scalp.

After a long while, he regained his composure and said word by word:

"And... my Ancestral Master Picture!"

Upon hearing this, Lu Chengyun's expression also stiffened, and his gaze betrayed a hint of desire.

Mo Hua was somewhat reluctant but knew that he could not afford to jeopardize the larger picture at this time, so with reluctance, he took out the wad of the Ancestral Master Picture.

Zhang Quan felt both guilty and ecstatic.

Guilty for having, in a moment of carelessness, lost his ancestor, dishonoring his forebears.

Ecstatic because now, having regained what was lost, he could finally appease the spirits of his ancestors in heaven.

Zhang Quan immediately snatched the Ancestral Master Picture, unfurled it for a look, and a broad smile spread across his face.

There was no mistaking it, it was his Ancestral Master Picture.

But as he kept looking, the smile on his face froze.

Something was wrong...

Why did it seem like there were fewer people in the picture?

Where are they?

Where did they go?

Zhang Quan looked at Mo Hua in disbelief, "Where are my Zhang Family ancestors?"

Mo Hua pointed at the picture in his hands, "Aren't they sitting right there in the picture?"

Zhang Quan angrily demanded, "Why are there fewer figures?"

Mo Hua shrugged, "How should I know?"

Zhang Quan, filled with rage, pressed on, "The picture was in your hands, how could you not know?"

Mo Hua pondered for a moment, then said, "Perhaps they've gone visiting..."

Zhang Quan's mouth fell open, "Visiting... visiting?"

"Mhmm," Mo Hua nodded, as if it were the most natural thing, "After staying put for so long, they'd want to move around a bit, right?"

"It's just that, the Cultivation World is quite dangerous. If you go visiting, you might not come back. If you run into danger and get eaten by some 'nasty thing,' that's also possible..."