

Timescape 201

Chapter 201: I'm in Charge!

"Xu Qing," the Captain said angrily, "you've become even greedier than me nowadays!" At the same time, he rushed forward and helped Xu Qing chop away at the octopus' tentacle.

The Gold Core octopus was clearly enraged, but it couldn't stop Xu Qing from removing a small tip of one of its tentacles, about three meters in length. Throwing it over his shoulder, Xu Qing left with the Captain.

A short while later, the force of suppression vanished, and the octopus let loose a howl of fury. Then, just as it seemed it was about to rise up to its full height, it collapsed onto the ground.

And that was because, out of nowhere, a middle-aged man had appeared in front of it. The man's face was a mask of bitterness as he slowly walked forward, drinking alcohol out of a gourd bottle.

He was none other than Master Sixth, the peaklord of the Sixth Peak. Long ago, Master Sixth had been like Master Seventh, a chosen member of the sect. In fact, he had joined the sect along with Master Seventh. However, years later, he experienced tragedy. His daoist partner died a horrible death, leaving behind him and his only son. In his grief, he had focused all of his love and attention on his son. And his son didn't let him down.

As the years passed, his son became an outstanding figure in Seven Blood Eyes. But one day he went out to sea for training and never returned. His life slip in the sect even shattered. It caused a huge stir in the sect. However, his killer was never identified, and the matter became a source of unending torment for Master Sixth. After that, the peaklord was never seen without a bottle of alcohol. [1]

Taking another drink from the bottle gourd, Master Sixth came to a stop in front of the octopus. "I'm crafting a magical device that could use two eyes. Yours. Give them to me."

The octopus shivered, and without hesitation, reached two tentacles up to its two eyes. Gripping the eyes, it ripped them out of its head, causing blood to spray everywhere. Then, it respectfully offered the eyes to Master Sixth.

"Now screw off and wait outside for your owner." Master Sixth tossed the eyes into his bottle gourd, then turned and headed back toward the Sixth Peak.

The octopus kept its head bowed until Master Sixth was gone. Then, trembling, it returned to the ocean and sank into the water. After it was some distance away from the sect, light glittered around it as it turned into a burly man.

His eyes had been gouged out, yet the flesh on his forehead wriggled and twitched, and then opened up, revealing a third eye. As he looked at Seven Blood Eyes, his expression was one of fear and trepidation.

Seven Blood Eyes has grown a lot more confident now that Sir Bloodsmelter achieved his breakthrough. From the outside, they still seem like a subsidiary branch of the Seven Sect Coalition from the Revered Ancient mainland. But actually, over recent years, Seven Blood Eyes... has come very close to being an independent sect.

Low-level recruits are venomous bugs in a jar. Their mid-level disciples are set free to do whatever they want. But once a disciple gets into the echelon and becomes truly high-level, Seven Blood Eyes takes care of them!

Years ago, the Seven Sect Coalition came to realize that trying to alternate patriarchs and peaklords didn't do much. Sir Bloodsmelter has always been around keeping an eye on things, and even when the peaklords are forced to rotate back into service in the Seven Sect Coalition, their hearts always stay with Seven Blood Eyes.

This is exactly what you expect to see when a sect rises to prominence!

The trepidation in the burly man's eyes grew deeper.

Xu Qing and the Captain parted ways. Once Xu Qing was back on his dharmaskiff, he took out his bamboo slip and added a name.

Yanyan.

This time, he scratched a circle around the name, indicating that he couldn't kill this person in public. He needed to find her outside of Seven Blood Eyes and get rid of her in secret. Otherwise, there would be too much trouble.

Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior was very excited when he saw the new name being added to the list.

Another one! YES!

After finishing carving the name, Xu Qing was about to put the bamboo slip away when he noticed the iron skewer trembling off to the side. After thinking about how hard the patriarch had been working lately, he went to 'Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior' and scratched another line through the name.

When the patriarch saw that, his heart filled with unprecedented excitement and appreciation. The trembling of the skewer became even more pronounced. All of his hard work was worth it! Completely worth it!

Appearing in projected form, he clasped hands and bowed, trembling from head to toe.

"Many thanks... milord!!"

He really had been working hard lately. And that was even more the case after some of the successes the shadow had experienced. On more than a few occasions, he had come close to developing inner devils during cultivation, thanks to always wondering if he was going to be discarded. But now, seeing Xu Qing scratch that line through his name, many of his doubts simply vanished.

What Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior didn't notice was that, behind Xu Qing, his shadow had opened an eye and was paying very close attention to the patriarch. Clearly, it was trying to learn something.

Seeing how excited the patriarch was, Xu Qing offered a few encouraging words, then put away the bamboo slip, walked out of the cabin, and sat on the deck looking off into the distance. He was waiting for someone.

Before long, a rotund figure appeared off in the distance, swaying through the night. He was none other than Huang Yan. He had obviously been drinking, as he couldn't walk straight. He looked depressed. And this time, instead of sitting down off to the side, he jumped right onto the dharmaskiff. Plopping down next to Xu Qing, he let loose a long sigh.

“Brother Xu Qing, I owe you for today. I'm really, really sorry. I had no idea my Elder Sister's bestie was such a loon!”

Huang Yan pulled out a bag of holding and solemnly offered it to Xu Qing.

“I don't have much on me, Brother Xu Qing. That's 200,000 spirit stones. It's the thought that counts, right?”

Xu Qing didn't immediately take the bag of holding. Looking at Huang Yan, he said, “What do you plan on doing about it?”

Huang Yan sighed. “Why does love have to be such torment? I have it so rough! Xu Qing, did you know that I came to Seven Blood Eyes specifically for Elder Sister? That year... I caught sight of her from a distance. Just one glance. From that moment on, I couldn't stop thinking about her. So I decided to join Seven Blood Eyes so that I could make her my daoist partner.”

Huang Yan was in a very different mood today than he ever had been in the past. Lifting his bottle of alcohol, he took a drink. Then he produced a second bottle and offered it to Xu Qing.

Xu Qing accepted it and took a drink.

“I never would have guessed that her bestie would also be competition!! You know what? After that shrew showed up today, she wouldn't leave my Elder Sister alone. And thus, Elder Sister hasn't had any time for me. And when I went looking for her, she told me to leave! She looked guilty about it, but still!!

“I could tell something strange was going on, so after I had a bit to drink I went and eavesdropped. And guess what? The shrew is trying to steal Elder Sister from me!” Huang Yan ground his teeth. “Why did this have to happen now? If it had happened a few months ago, I would have crushed her with a single breath.”

Huang Yan seemed to be getting very worked up.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing seemed confused. He wasn't really sure what Huang Yan was talking about, and had never experienced anything like this. Given he didn't understand the situation, he wasn't sure how to comfort Huang Yan. In the end, he just raised his bottle of alcohol.

Huang Yan saw that, sighed, and then clinked bottles and drank.

“You're too young to—” Suddenly, Huang Yan's identity medallion vibrated in his bag of holding. Eyes flickering, he took it out. After reading the message that had just come in, he frowned in displeasure.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing's identity medallion also vibrated. Sending some dharma force into it, he saw a long message.

“A quarter of an hour ago, our Celestial Bureau received a request for backup from the Patrol Division. A Foundation Establishment cultivator from outside the sect attacked the Pilot Assistance Division. Many disciples were injured. When Patrol responded, the commanding officer was injured and all the constables were taken captive.

“Celestial Bureau provided backup, but were unable to stop the outside cultivator, and everyone was taken captive.

“The perpetrator demands Huang Yan come over from Harbor 176, immediately.

“This matter surpasses our ability, so we request that the deputy director decide what to do next.”

Xu Qing looked up at Huang Yan, who was doing the exact same thing, his expression unsightly and apologetic. Then Huang Yan stood and rushed in the direction of the Pilot Assistance Division.

Xu Qing suddenly thought back to what happened that day in the Sixth Peak shop. Then he looked down at the bag of holding, which Huang Yan had surreptitiously placed off to the side after Xu Qing refused to take it. [2]

Huang Yan really does stick by his friends.

Xu Qing stood and also went toward the Pilot Assistance Division. He could move much faster than Huang Yan, so it didn't take long before he caught up.

When Huang Yan saw him, he smiled. “You're coming too?”

Xu Qing also smiled. “Pilot Assistance reported the incident. So of course I'm going to go.”

“There's something special about you, Xu Qing. I've been in Seven Blood Eyes for years, and you're actually the first friend I've made. After years of caring only about Elder Sister, now I have you at my side. I don't have very many friends....” Huang Yan took a deep breath, but instead of saying anything further, he started running even faster. Xu Qing kept pace as they got closer to Pilot Assistance.

The Pilot Assistance Division in Harbor 176 looked like a giant sailboat. As they neared, an astonishing shockwave suddenly erupted from within it.

The sailboat exploded, sending pieces flying out everywhere. At the same time, a black figure shot out from inside, heading toward Huang Yan with astounding speed.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing entered the profound radiance state and stepped in front of Huang Yan. Viciously thrusting his hand out, he sent black fire streaming out, which the incoming figure slammed into.

A boom echoed out as the figure was shoved backward into a nearby rock. At that point, it became clear that the person who had clashed with Xu Qing was none other than Yanyan.

“What are you doing here?” she said, glaring at him.

Xu Qing's eyes shifted from her to the wreckage of the Pilot Assistance Division. At least three hundred disciples were visible, scattered about randomly.

All of them were seriously injured, but none were dead. Among them was the Mute.

Xu Qing took everything in, his expression grim.

"You don't need to look at all of them," Yanyan said. "Given who I am, I didn't kill anyone. But even if I did, so what? Do you think anyone would bother to help Offpeak bugs in a jar like this? From the moment I arrived here until now, not one person showed up to stop me." Looking at Xu Qing's face, she licked her lips. "I had no idea that you were actually in the Seven Blood Eyes' echelon. I guess that's going to make things difficult."

"Wrong," Xu Qing said quietly. "The reason the sect didn't do anything to stop you is that this matter falls under the jurisdiction of the Violent Crimes Division. Until I escalate this matter to my superiors, I'm the one in charge here."

With that, Xu Qing held up a jade signal slip, then crushed it. Instantly, a bright stream of light shot up into the night sky, creating a multicolored glow that read 'Violent Crimes.'

"According to Section 7 of sect law, outside cultivators who cause trouble in the capital city shall be arrested on sight. All constables from the Celestial Bureau, heed my command: lock down Harbor 176 and arrest this criminal!"

Chapter 202: So, What Is the Echelon Like?

"Arrest?" black-garbed Yanyan said, laughing. However, before her laughter could cease, countless voices rang out from all corners of Harbor 176.

"Yes, Deputy Director!"

Along with the voices, numerous figures appeared in the harbor, over a thousand of them, blocking all entrances and exits.

"You think a bunch of Qi Condensation cultivators can stop me?" Yanyan said. "How about I kill a few so you can see what I can do?" Her eyes glittered with killing intent as she lit her life flames. Three of them burned bright, erupting with power as she flew up in the air and then shot toward the nearest Violent Crimes Division constables.

Looking at her coldly, Xu Qing lifted his identity medallion high over his head and said, "I, Deputy Director Xu Qing of the Violent Crimes Division, hereby request that the sect's grand spell formation lock down the airspace over Harbor 176 and prevent all non-sect cultivators from flying!"

The moment the words left his mouth, a bell rang, its sound echoing left and right as the Seven Blood Eyes Formation's power filled Harbor 176.

Yanyan's face fell as the formation's power swept over her, forcing her to the ground and causing her life flames to flicker wildly.

“What outrageous gall!” she growled. Despite the pressure weighing down on her, the killing intent in her eyes didn’t soften. Instead, it grew more intense as her rage burned.

Xu Qing hadn’t been lying. The reason why Yanyan had been able to run amok without him present was that the chain of command was always strictly respected in Seven Blood Eyes. Unless a matter was officially reported to a superior officer, the higher-ranking members wouldn’t do anything. That was just how the rules operated in Seven Blood Eyes, and there were few exceptions.

Staring with cold fury at Yanyan, Xu Qing continued, “Restrict all non-sect cultivators in Harbor 176, preventing them from lighting more than one life flame!”

He actually didn’t need to do much to deal with this young woman. Given his authority in the Violent Crimes Division, and his status as an echelon cultivator, he basically was the law. One reason for him doing things this way was that too many eyes were focused on him right now, and he didn’t want to reveal any of his secrets.

The moment the words left his mouth, the Seven Blood Eyes Formation rumbled, and invisible power settled down on the harbor.

Yanyan’s face flickered dramatically as her third life flame instantly went out! Only a moment later, her second flame also went dark!

As for her remaining life flame, her first, the pressure weighing down on it created a backlash of power that forced blood to spray out of her mouth. Veins bulging on her forehead, she glared at Xu Qing with raging killing intent. She looked like she was about to explode with mad fury.

Finally, Xu Qing took action. Keeping his life lamp concealed with his shadow, he lit both of his two life flames and entered the profound radiance state. Moving with shocking speed, he pierced through the air and appeared right in front of Yanyan. Then he smacked her on the side of the face.

A boom rang out as she slammed into a nearby building, her face already swollen. She also coughed up a huge mouthful of blood, within which were a handful of teeth.

Xu Qing took a step forward, arriving right in front of her again. He stomped down.

Glittering light sprang up around her, its source being a pendant around her neck. It was a defensive item that created a shield around her, upon which Xu Qing’s foot landed with a boom.

Yanyan leaped to her feet, a vicious expression on her face and madness in her eyes. Then she ripped the pendant off of her neck.

Voice cool, Xu Qing said, “Prevent all non-sect cultivators in Harbor 176 from using any types of magical devices or magical treasures.”

Yet again, the spell formation rumbled to life.

Yanyan’s defensive shield collapsed. She was bleeding profusely and her hair was disheveled, yet she glared defiantly at Xu Qing and said, “If you’ve got what it takes, fight me fair and square!”

“Fool.” Xu Qing shot forward and slapped her again. She flew to the side, more teeth flying out of her mouth. After righting herself, she pulled out a jade slip and crushed it, causing teleportation power to swell.

“Prevent all non-sect cultivators from teleporting out of Harbor 176,” Xu Qing said calmly.

Yet again, power swept forth from the Seven Blood Eyes Formation, crushing all teleportations. Yanyan’s eyes burned with fury and humiliation, and she was about to say something further when Xu Qing again stepped toward her and slapped her.

A boom rang out as Yanyan coughed up blood like mad. She was visibly weak, yet her expression was no less vicious than before. In fact, it seemed like she would rather die than surrender.

Xu Qing looked at her deeply. His own personal rule was to kill anyone who could pose a threat to him. But he also wasn’t an idiot. If he did that in front of all these witnesses, it would lead to more trouble and danger for himself. In other words, killing her now would be pure foolishness.

Reining in his killing intent, he smacked her on the top of the head. Blood spilled out of her mouth as her final remaining life flame flickered out, and then she lapsed into unconsciousness. Her injuries were about the same as all the disciples she herself had knocked out.

With that accomplished, Xu Qing reached down and grabbed her by the hair.

“Bring me some dharma shackles!”

Numerous Violent Crimes Division constables raced toward him. The first to arrive produced a pair of handcuffs that he placed on Yanyan’s forearms. Moments later, her eyes opened and she howled in fury, causing the dharma shackles to collapse. Then she laughed madly. “I’m not going to forget this, Xu Qing! No one has ever dared to treat me this rudely! You’re the first!”

Face completely expressionless, Xu Qing stepped forward and slapped her yet again.

A thud rang out as her head hit the ground, and she again passed out.

“Put ten dharma shackles on her,” Xu Qing said calmly.

These shackles had been designed specifically for use on non-sect Foundation Establishment cultivators. Two of them could suppress a single life flame, while ten could completely negate the power of three life flames.

They were the same shackles the old director of Violent Crimes had used when arresting Night Dove operatives.

Before long, ten shackles had been placed on Yanyan.

“Lock her up in the Celestial Bureau,” Xu Qing said. “Without orders from me, do not set her free!”

The surrounding constables dragged Yanyan away.

Around then, a voice echoed out through Harbor 176. “Junior Brother Xu Qing, can you show some leniency here?”

Xu Qing looked up and saw Second Highness flying toward him. It was possible to detect the lingering traces of a restrictive spell on her; obviously Yanyan had bound her up, making it impossible for her to interfere.

“Well met, Second Highness,” Xu Qing said, clasping hands respectfully. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Huang Yan standing nearby.

Huang Yan looked at Second Highness and said, “Elder Sister, Xu Qing was helping me out.”

Second Highness seemed like she wanted to say something, but held back for a moment. Looking at Huang Yan, and then glancing at Yanyan being dragged off into the distance, she hesitated again. Finally, she said, “Junior Brother Xu Qing, if she dies, it’s going to cause problems for the patriarch.”

There was no threat in her words. Just apprehension. She was obviously giving him a well-intentioned warning.

“She broke the rules of our sect,” Xu Qing said. Lowering his voice, he continued, “But she didn’t kill anyone and thus doesn’t deserve the death penalty. However, according to sect rules, she must be imprisoned.”

Second Highness nodded. “As long as she doesn’t die. Truth be told, she pissed me off tonight as well. I owe you thanks, Junior Brother Xu Qing.”

She looked at Huang Yan, and her gaze softened. She turned and left.

Xu Qing looked at the two of them, then turned away.

The injured were already being tended to. Eventually, Huang Yan clasped hands and left. Harbor 176 was already quiet again.

Xu Qing remained in place, waiting. He had taken action this night, not only to help Huang Yan, but also because Yanyan had intentionally provoked him. Furthermore, he had been interested to see how safe he was in Seven Blood Eyes now that he was an echelon cultivator.

Some time passed, and then an old man appeared up above. He wore a blue daoist robe, and emanated the fluctuations of the Gold Core level, causing immense pressure to weigh down everywhere.

Averting his gaze, Xu Qing clasped hands and bowed.

“Well met, Elder.”

Xu Qing didn’t know this person. But given the type of daoist robe he wore, and the pressure he let off, he had to be an elder.

As the elder hovered in midair, he looked Xu Qing up and down, and his eyes glittered with approval. “Xu Qing, I come with a question from Master Sixth. How do you intend to wrap up this matter?”

“Can I execute her?” Xu Qing asked.

“No. The lass might be domineering, but she mustn’t die. Her grandmother is personal friends with the patriarch.” [1]

Xu Qing nodded. “According to the sect rules, she should have her cultivation base crippled and then be confined in the Bone-Scorching Cavern for three years.”

The elder smiled. He obviously knew what Xu Qing was thinking, and was aware the girl had instigated the matter. If Xu Qing wasn't in the echelon, the sect's official stance on the matter would have been different. Except, he was in the echelon, which meant that he was important to the future of Seven Blood Eyes. People in the echelon weren't to be casually insulted, and were obviously in the favor of the patriarch. Beyond all that, Xu Qing was also an envoy disciple. Even the patriarch would get angry if someone caused problems for an envoy disciple right in the middle of the sect.

“Do what you have to do. But don't cripple her.”

With that, the Gold Core elder turned and left.

Xu Qing clasped hands respectfully, then walked back to his berth, all the while thinking about the ramifications of the night's events. For one thing, he would now have to deal with Yanyan trying to get revenge. And he might have to worry about her friends or family. Other than that, there didn't seem to be any downsides. The upsides were numerous. Of course, he had helped Huang Yan. And he had also been able to test out what it meant to be an echelon cultivator in Seven Blood Eyes.

It seems the sect is a lot more tolerant of echelon cultivators, and also treats them very well.

Given everything he had experienced recently, he thought back to the things Zhang Yunshi had told him when he finally qualified for Onpeak life. For example, he'd said that Offpeak disciples were venomous bugs in a jar, while Onpeak disciples were like lone wolves. Perhaps because of Zhang Yunshi's status in the sect, he wasn't very familiar with the echelon. Based on what Xu Qing knew, it seemed to him that echelon cultivators were more like conclave disciples than the actual conclave disciples.

As long as I don't directly break the rules of the sect, I should be quite safe in Seven Blood Eyes. Of course, the biggest downside was that he was now tied even more deeply to the sect.

That didn't necessarily make him care about the sect more, but it did mean that in terms of status, and also in the view of outsiders, he was now an even more important part of the sect.

Chapter 203: Another Promotion

Seven days passed.

Yanyan from Eastnether Isle was now locked up in the Celestial Bureau. Despite being constrained with ten dharma shackles, she hadn't shown any signs of submission. In fact, she constantly came up with all sorts of inventive curses, all of them directed at Xu Qing. Of course, her voice couldn't penetrate through the walls of the prison to the outside. But she was full of energy. After the week passed, and it became obvious Seven Blood Eyes wasn't going to free her, she seemed to go mad.

When Xu Qing heard what was happening, he issued orders to add ten more shackles to her. However, the increased force of suppression just seemed to drive her even more insane with fury. That said, her energy eventually waned, and her cursing grew more infrequent.

Xu Qing didn't personally go to see her. He just scanned the reports about her, then moved on to other matters. He wasn't in a hurry to free her. The sect's attitude about the whole thing was intriguing. Other than the instructions on the day of the incident, there hadn't been a single request made about her. For the time being, they really were letting him have full authority on the matter. It was Xu Qing's first time experiencing something like that.

Is it because I'm in the echelon?

That said, he knew his place, and wouldn't do anything foolish like kill her. That would have to wait until she was free and he could do it without anyone realizing what happened.

Therefore, his plan was to wait until the sect notified him of what to do next. There was no way the matter was over. After all, Seven Blood Eyes was in the right, and wouldn't allow any losses in face. That was especially true during wartime.

Xu Qing was confident in that assessment; all he had to do was maintain the status quo to convey that he was in agreement with the sect.

During the week that passed, Xu Qing had to carry out envoy disciple duties twice by welcoming delegates from other species into the sect. He was becoming more and more well-known, although not necessarily because of his status as an envoy disciple.

There were some occasions in which the visiting nonhuman women would specifically ask the Captain to bring Xu Qing along so they could get a look at him. And every single time, they were stunned at how breathtaking he was.

Species were different in physical appearance, but everyone knew that humans had once been the sovereigns of Revered Ancient. Though the human species had declined since then, the lasting impression humans had made on the aesthetics and preferences of nonhumans still lingered.

Because of that, Xu Qing's bag of holding was full of gifts. Ding Xue and Gu Muqing were very aware of that, and were keeping a close eye on everything. The envoy disciple arrangement had originally annoyed Xu Qing, but now he was warming up to it considering how valuable all the gifts were.

However, good things never last. The craze over the zombie ancestor's nose eventually reached an apex, and then it started dying down, and the nonhuman visitors started leaving.

Eventually, only a few random allies, including the Seastars, remained to do business. The young Seastar princess seemed particularly interested in Xu Qing, and came to visit him on multiple occasions. However, she only gave him a gift on the first meeting. She didn't bring gifts on subsequent occasions. And when she did come, she innocently asked all sorts of random questions about him. It really seemed like she wanted to get to know him personally.

Xu Qing eventually refused to see her.

Around this time, both Xu Qing and the Captain got new assignments as part of their award. As for Xu Qing, he was promoted. No longer was he a deputy director in the Violent Crimes Division. Instead, he was the full director!

He was now in charge of the entire Seventh Peak Violent Crimes Division!

As for the Captain, according to the normal process of promotions, he should have been appointed as the deputy minister of the Violent Crimes Ministry. In Seven Blood Eyes, there was a big difference between a division and a ministry. All of the seven peaks had a Violent Crimes Division, but above them was the Violent Crimes Ministry, which oversaw all seven of the divisions. However, for whatever reason, the Captain didn't take that promotion. Instead, he transferred to the Seventh Peak's Intelligence Division, where he would serve as the director.

On his first day as the director of the Intelligence Division, the Captain called Zhang San over to Xu Qing's place for drinks. They gathered on the shore by his dharmaskiff.

“Only an idiot would choose to work in one of the ministries,” the Captain said. “The Intelligence Division is going to be great! I’ve been dreaming about working there for a long time. I’ll basically be omniscient! I’ll be assigning missions to spies outside the sect, running counterintelligence against traitors within the sect, gathering information about nonhumans, et cetera. I’m an expert in all those things! This is going to lead to some really good opportunities!”

Zhang San was happy to see that Xu Qing and the Captain had been promoted, but at the same time, was slightly annoyed.

“Next time the two of you go do something crazy,” he said, trying to sound casual, “don’t forget about me. Am I right, Captain? At the very least, if you lose half your body again, I’ll be there to carry you on my back.”

Taking a bite of an apple, the Captain slapped Zhang San’s shoulder. “Don’t get jealous, Lil’ Third. Big bro still loves you!” The Captain then looked at Xu Qing, who seemed lost in thought. Suddenly curious, he asked, “What’s up, Lil’ Second?”

Xu Qing looked at the Captain, then glanced at Zhang San. “Well, Erniu, I’m thinking about how to improve my poisons. I want them to be dangerous even to Gold Core cultivators.”

Xu Qing had been pondering this issue for a while, and was inclined to start working more on his black beetles. During his fight with Yanyan, he had used almost his entire stockpile. Thankfully, he had managed to save some. Unfortunately, they just seemed too weak. He was getting the sense he hadn’t fully unlocked the potential of the little beetles. After all... they had been created by a Gold Core expert, so it didn’t make sense for them to be so ineffective when he recreated them. After all, they didn’t even seem capable of crushing a three-flame cultivator.

Upon hearing Xu Qing’s words, Zhang San inhaled sharply. To him, Xu Qing was obviously very different from before. He was already starting to think about fighting Gold Core experts! Then Zhang San thought about Xu Qing’s poisons, and he instinctively edged a bit further away from Xu Qing.

As for the Captain, his eyes went wide. As far as he was concerned, Xu Qing’s statement was brilliant. They were the type of words uttered by someone who wanted to stand out without making a fuss, and the Captain immediately committed them to memory. At the same time, he cleared his throat, then consumed a few medicinal pills just to be safe.

“Just take your time doing your research,” the Captain said. “Now, let’s get down to business. I’m the new director of the Intelligence Division, and you, Xu Qing, are the director of the Violent Crimes Division. In the past, those two divisions didn’t work very well together. But now, we’re one big family.

“I have a plan I’m working on, and the fact that we run both divisions plays right into it. We need to accomplish something really big, and do it before the war is over. We need to use our positions in our departments to dominate the Seventh Peak! We need to get everyone to stop thinking they need the peaklords for everything!

“That way, once the old man and the others are back from the war, they won’t be able to do anything about us. At least not quickly. The two of us need to become real cultivators and accomplish big things!”

Xu Qing frowned slightly. “Captain, I was planning to go into seclusion to research poisons.”

“Researching poisons costs money, doesn’t it?” the Captain said.

“I have plenty of money,” Xu Qing said, shaking his head.

The Captain obviously wasn’t ready to give up. Taking out an apple, he continued, “Don’t you need people to experiment on? You’re always looking for test subjects, right?”

“I have plenty,” Xu Qing said, shaking his head.

The Captain was starting to feel a bit discouraged at how difficult it was to hoodwink Xu Qing. Xu Qing was definitely not like he was back in the early days, when the Captain could dupe him with ease. The Captain’s mind raced as he tried to think of a better idea to drag Xu Qing into his plan, when Xu Qing’s eyes suddenly glittered. He had just thought of a great way to improve his black beetles.

Getting to his feet, he said, “Captain. Elder Brother Zhang San. I need to take my leave now. Let’s meet up again later.”

Clasping hands and bowing, he hurried onto his dharmaskiff. Once inside the cabin, he activated the defenses, sat down cross-legged, and took out a large amount of medicinal plants, as well as his bottle of black beetles. Then he started working according to the idea he’d just been struck with.

Meanwhile, Zhang San and the Captain exchanged glances.

“Captain, I think we need to get out of here,” Zhang San said. “I’m not sure if it’s safe.”

“What the hell are you scared of? I don’t—”

He was interrupted by a muffled boom from inside Xu Qing’s dharmaskiff. Then, a cloud of poison gas billowed out of the cabin. Thankfully, the dharmaskiff’s defenses prevented it from escaping.

The Captain sat there silently for a few breaths’ worth of time. Then he stood, laughing heartily. “Come on, Zhang San, let’s move along. I haven’t been to the Transportation Division for a long time. Let’s keep drinking there instead of here.”

Zhang San stood, and the two of them hurried away.

Not long after they left, more booms rang out from the cabin.

The black beetles were the only thing Xu Qing had that could pose a threat to Gold Core cultivators. He had hoped they would be a trump card, but they had proven disappointing in his fight with Yanyan. He worked the whole night, using all sorts of medicinal plants and poison elements to try to catalyze the potential of the beetles. Nothing really worked, although the flesh of the Gold Core octopus did seem to make the black beetles slightly stronger.

If the only way to improve them is to feed them Gold Core flesh and blood, then they’re worthless. They can’t hurt Gold Core experts, and can only eat, not attack. Useless! I need something that I

can use as a trump card to threaten a Gold Core enemy. That said... I feel like it's because I haven't explored the right direction.

With that, he took out the old medicinal codex Grandmaster Bai had given him so long ago. He had always treasured that book, and had studied it on many occasions. In fact, the pages were so well-worn that many were starting to fall apart, forcing him to be very careful when leafing through it.

That book was a gift from Grandmaster Bai, and was a physical reminder of how thankful he was to his teacher. Grandmaster Bai was his first true Master. He had introduced Xu Qing to the dao of plants and vegetation, which led to his exploration of the dao of poison, both of which were crucially important to him. Without Grandmaster Bai, Xu Qing wouldn't know anything about plants and vegetation, and would not have his poisons, which were one of his biggest assets.

"I wonder how Grandmaster Bai is doing nowadays," he murmured.

After reaching Foundation Establishment, Xu Qing had looked into Grandmaster Bai. However, the grandmaster was always traveling, and only stayed in the Violet Lands for short periods of time.

Dragging himself out of his memories, Xu Qing started leafing through the medicinal codex, hoping to find something to stir up some inspiration.

Grandmaster Bai once mentioned that although the dao of alchemy and the dao of bugs seem different, they're built on the same foundation, and actually complement each other....

Eventually, one particular medicinal plant description caught his attention.

"Duskthorn lily?" he murmured, looking thoughtful. It was a medicinal plant favored by vicious beasts, but generally useless to cultivators. When unintelligent beasts consumed it, they would gain a measure of intelligence. They were also a key ingredient in shapeshifting pills.

This might work!

Xu Qing left his dharmaskiff and went to one of the medicinal shops in Harbor 176. Of course, he attracted quite a bit of attention when he walked in. The shopkeeper reverentially asked how he could help, and then immediately prepared the items Xu Qing asked for. Before long, Xu Qing left with a bag of holding, looking a bit regretful.

These things are expensive!

He didn't just have the duskthorn lily. He also had all sorts of medicinal plants required for raising animals, as well as a whole host of poisonous plants. Some were cheap, others were expensive.

Xu Qing wasn't going to let himself worry about money. He really needed something that could pose a threat to a Gold Core cultivator. Back at his dharmaskiff, he started doing more research and experimentation.

Seven more days passed.

During that time, all of the divisions in Seven Blood Eyes were on edge. That was because Chen Erniu, the new director of the Intelligence Division, made it his priority to root out traitors in the sect. The Patrol Division provided the muscle. And all the other divisions were required to do a full audit of all their members, even those in the Foundation Establishment level. All of a sudden, the

Captain seemed like a wild dog. However, he had such a high status that all other disciples were forced to bow their heads and submit to the investigation.

During the seven days that passed, Xu Qing bought even more medicinal plants to experiment with. Eventually, he identified seven types of plants that would stimulate growth in the black beetles.

Not even that was enough, though. Xu Qing finally realized... that if he wanted to raise these black beetles, and also make them stronger, he needed to feed them meat!

Thankfully, as long as I add the right medicinal plants into the food, I don't need to give them Gold Core flesh....

Xu Qing's eyes shone brightly as he stepped out into the evening and headed toward the cell block in the Celestial Bureau.

Back when the Captain asked if he had enough people to experiment on, Xu Qing had said he had plenty. And what he was thinking of at the time were all those inmates. The people locked up in that prison were those guilty of the most monstrous crimes. For example, the Night Dove criminals were incarcerated there. The prisoners included many Foundation Establishment cultivators, and were made up of both humans and nonhumans.

What a pity Violent Crimes doesn't have any Gold Core prisoners locked up. If I have the opportunity, I'll have to arrest a few.

The mere thought of doing something so audacious caused his heart to beat a bit faster.

Chapter 204: Killing a Goat, Scaring a Lass

Wrapped up in his thoughts, Xu Qing headed to Harbor 176's Violent Crimes Division headquarters.

It was getting late, and because of all the activity related to the Intelligence Division, people were on edge. That, in turn, had caused business to dip at the brothels and gambling halls, as many people weren't in the mood for partying.

Because of how the rules worked in Seven Blood Eyes, traitors... were relatively common. Qi Condensation disciples were like venomous bugs in a jar, and thus didn't have any sense of belonging. Truth be told, the sect didn't care about providing a sense of belonging, as everything revolved around profit. Add in the fact that Foundation Establishment cultivators were like lone wolves, also motivated by profit, and it was little wonder that there were always people ready to sell information for the right price.

Xu Qing wasn't thinking about such things as he made his way through the city. Nor was he worried about the fact that the Mute was following him.

Eventually, he reached the Violent Crimes Division.

There were two constables on duty at the main entrance, and when they caught sight of him, their eyes lit up with passion, and then dropped down to kowtow.

"Well met, Director!"

To them, Xu Qing was already something of a legend. He had started out as an ordinary constable in the Violent Crimes Division, but had quickly risen to prominence. He reached Foundation

Establishment in a year, took only a few months to ignite his first life flame, and in less than two years, was already a two-flame cultivator. And then there was that spectacular event with the Seazombies. He was the one who had crushed the junior princess from Eastnether Isle, who was now locked up in the Celestial Bureau. Because of that, Xu Qing was now an object of admiration among countless disciples.

Expression the same as ever, Xu Qing nodded at the constables then headed directly toward the underground cell block.

All prisoners were kept together, including those in Qi Condensation and Foundation Establishment, as well as other special types of cultivators. There were over a hundred cells, with restrictive spell formations built into their metal bars. The atmosphere was vile. The subterranean environment created a noxious stench, which combined with the odor of feces and urine into something that provoked the urge to vomit.

Most of the cells were filled with nonhuman criminals, none of which Xu Qing had personally arrested. After all, Xu Qing usually didn't arrest people. He took their heads.

He attracted the attention of the nonhuman cultivators as soon as he stepped inside. Some bared their teeth, some smiled ingratiatingly, some spat at him, and some whistled at him in a vulgar fashion. They weren't the least bit afraid of him. Being locked in here away from the light of day, they didn't fear death.

Within the shouting, Xu Qing detected the sound of black-garbed Yanyan off in the distance.

"Xu Qing! You're gonna die a horrible death! Once I'm out of here I'll slice your heart out of your chest and eat it right in front of you!!"

Xu Qing's face remained expressionless as he ignored the nonhuman cultivators, and instead turned to the Mute.

"No matter what you hear, don't come in and disturb me."

The Mute nodded, and the other constables on guard duty suddenly looked very somber.

Without another word, Xu Qing closed the main door. When that happened, things got even more raucous.

"So, it's a human girly boy? Hahaha! I love that kind of thing. I'm getting turned on just looking!"

"Come over here, little human. I'm in the mood for a massage!"

"Foundation Establishment? Like hell! If you've got what it takes, just kill me!"

"Don't listen to them, Senior! Help me out, sir! I know a big secret!"

Meanwhile, Yanyan grabbed the bars of her cell, ignoring how the spell formation caused them to hiss and smoke. Eyes full of madness, she glared at Xu Qing and cackled loudly. "Xu Qing, I've already cursed you 273,856 times!"

Xu Qing looked around at the cells until his gaze came to rest on a cultivator with the head of a goat, who was gyrating his hips suggestively. The goat-headed cultivator was a member of Night

Dove. Obviously nonhuman, he had black fur, and appeared to be in the Foundation Establishment level. His cultivation base had been sealed, but he had vigorous life force. Upon seeing Xu Qing look his way, he licked his lips.

“Me? Oh yeah! Come on, pick me! I’ve eaten quite a few humans over the years. Given how pretty you are, I’m curious how you taste! Hahaha!”

Xu Qing nodded and waved his right hand. Instantly, the prison’s spell formation activated, opening the cell door, wrapping around the goat-headed cultivator and dragging him out.

As the nonhuman hovered in midair, he laughed loudly, eyes gleaming with madness. Then, just as he was about to say something, Xu Qing waved his hand again, sending out some poison powder that covered the goat-headed cultivator and then seeped into his body.

“Poison? Are you kidding me, fool? I don’t—” Suddenly, he twitched, and then twitched again. A vicious grin appeared on his face. “Feels great!”

Xu Qing studied him for a time, watching as the goat-headed cultivator twitched even more. Then blood started to ooze out of his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Finally, Xu Qing took out a bottle of black beetles and released some of them.

The beetles rushed toward the goat-headed cultivator and burrowed into his skin. The pain caused the cultivator’s eyes to turn red, but the insane look on his face didn’t change. That said, deep within his eyes flickered a bit of terror. Then, a moment later, he began to wither. Black beetles flew out from him, which Xu Qing grabbed and studied closely. Finally, the goat-headed cultivator dropped to the ground, trembling. And yet, the insanity on his face remained.

“That’s all?”

Turning a deaf ear to the goat-headed cultivator, Xu Qing continued to study the beetles. As it turned out, their aura seemed a bit stronger, although only by a small amount.

That left him a bit puzzled. Based on his previous research, he had been certain that by adding those seven medicinal plants into their food, it would result in the black beetles getting a lot stronger. But this result was definitely not matching up to his expectations.

I need to figure out what’s going wrong.

He waved his hand, causing the goat-headed cultivator to fly up to him. The cultivator was about to make some sarcastic comments when Xu Qing produced a dagger, slashed it across the cultivator’s abdomen, then observed the wound closely.

A bloodcurdling scream echoed out, which then faded into a moan of terror and agony.

The surrounding jail cells went silent as the prisoners looked fearfully at Xu Qing experimenting on the goat-headed cultivator.

Sometime later, after Xu Qing had fully vivisected the goat-headed cultivator, he sat there quietly thinking for a time. Then he took another prisoner out of his cell, one of the ones who had spit at him earlier.

This one was a merman. His eyes shone with terror and he was panting. Before he could even say a word, Xu Qing scattered another batch of medicinal powder on him, then released the black beetles for another test.

More screams erupted as a similar scene played out as before. Then Xu Qing went to work with his dagger.

Time passed. The prisoners in the cells no longer shouted and yelled at Xu Qing. They just waited, terror in their eyes.

They might not fear death, but the idea of being sliced open in an experiment was something none of them had even considered possible. And given they were all watching it happen over and over again, it was only possible to imagine how it was affecting them mentally.

As Xu Qing methodically grabbed new prisoners, experimented on them, then sliced them open, the ground became covered with blood.

Eventually, the remaining prisoners couldn't handle the pressure, and huddled into the corners of their cells, watching Xu Qing with incomparable terror and shock.

As for Yanyan, by the time Xu Qing finished working on the thirty-fourth prisoner, she wasn't cursing him anymore. Instead, she trembled in terror.

The night passed.

At dawn, Xu Qing left.

He had learned a lot, and now had a lot of ideas. After he was gone, and the Violent Crimes Division constables went back into the cell block, their faces drained of blood.

It looked like a scene of bloody slaughter. After exchanging glances, they decided not to clean up. After all... these nonhuman prisoners didn't deserve their compassion. Every single one of them had killed countless innocent people. Raping and plundering was their bread and butter, and they were particularly brutal to humans. Some of them had even kept human prisoners just for food. In fact, they were already doomed to die. Whenever the sect needed some cannon fodder, prisoners like this would be the first ones onto the battlefield.

After leaving the Violent Crimes Division, Xu Qing went to the medicine shop and got some more medicinal and poisonous plants. Then he went back to his dharmaskiff to do some more research. The next night, he was back at the prison.

This time, there was no raucous behavior when he walked into the cell block. The prisoners all trembled in terror at the asura-like Xu Qing.

Xu Qing strolled past the cells until he stopped at the one next to Yanyan's cell. Inside was a three-eyed nonhuman cultivator with a big scar on his neck.

To Xu Qing's surprise, this cultivator looked familiar. It seemed he was from Night Dove, but Xu Qing couldn't exactly identify why he seemed familiar. Dragging the man screaming out of his cage, Xu Qing showered him with medicinal powder, then released the black beetles.

The night passed in the same way as the previous night.

Eventually, three days had gone by.

The Celestial Bureau constables had started spreading word of how terrifying Xu Qing was. The prisoners were all dead, with the exception of black-garbed Yanyan, who now looked at Xu Qing with even more terror than before.

“Have the Terrestrial Bureau send their prisoners over here,” Xu Qing ordered. And the process continued.

All imprisoned nonhumans, who had once been so deranged and arrogant, were now trembling in despair.

Meanwhile, Xu Qing was making progress with his black beetles. He eventually added zombie poison, which not only helped the beetles proliferate faster, but also made them more dangerous. Now, the beetles would almost instantly transform any given prisoner into nothing but a pile of bones, having sucked them dry of flesh and blood.

But Xu Qing still wasn't satisfied.

If they eat from the outside in, then they can be blocked. I need them to be like a true poison. They need to take effect secretly.

After some thought, he sent word for the Earth Bureau to send their prisoners to him.

All of this was affecting Yanyan deeply on a psychological level. Before meeting Xu Qing, she didn't even know what fear was. But after the days of watching his experiments, and observing his cold, calculating expression while he sliced open his subjects, she finally understood.

When the Earth Bureau prisoners were brought in, she looked at Xu Qing waving his hand and sending at a cloud of black powder. At that point, she trembled, and within the terror in her eyes appeared something else. Something very unusual. Looking at Xu Qing's profile, she suddenly bit her own finger until it bled, then stretched it out toward him as if offering him something to eat.

When she realized Xu Qing was ignoring her, she pulled her trembling hand back and sucked the blood from her finger.

A moment later, she said in a trembling voice, “Big Bro Xu Qing... is there anything I can do to help?”

Chapter 205: True Kindness Remains Forever in Souls and Dreams

Xu Qing ignored Yanyan. His research into the black beetles had still not yielded the results he sought. The way they ate the target from the outside in was definitely not what he wanted.

I think I need to pick between two possible directions of research. One is big beetles, and the other is small ones....

After some thought, he picked the latter.

That would be the key to killing silently. After making some adjustments to his methods, he continued with his work. He felt good about the decision. It was like he was a scholar doing research, constantly adjusting his methods as he sought the answer to the question.

In addition to zombie poison, he added other types of poisons he had created over the past two years. Although those poisons seemed ordinary in nature, when the beetles ate them, they gave them a powerful ability to resist poisons.

If this works, then I'm going to have created a truly unique new kind of poison. A living poison. Compared with all the other poisons he had invented already, this one definitely stacked up on top. Of course, as time passed, Xu Qing went through spirit stones like crazy, and that didn't make him happy. He had purchased numerous medicinal plants in his efforts, including some that were very expensive. In the end, he focused on poison plants, which he fed to the little black beetles. At the same time, his constant experimentation allowed him to identify certain plants that caused the black beetles to grow smaller.

Unfortunately his methods weren't perfect. Because he constantly had to adjust dosages, he also constantly needed subjects to experiment on. The Earth Bureau prisoners were all dead, and Xu Qing had the feeling the Heaven Bureau prisoners wouldn't keep him going for very long. It was frustrating, because he was reaching a critical point in the process.

I wonder if I should go out to sea....

After some thought, he gave up on that idea, and instead took out his identity medallion to post some missions for the Violent Crimes Division.

Shortly thereafter, the constables in the Seventh Peak's Violent Crimes Division went mad in the Port District, arresting people left and right.

Whatever criminals were still in the Port District were scared out of their minds. Almost overnight, countless criminals were caught, which resulted in the Port District suddenly becoming a much safer place.

Upon seeing how well Xu Qing was doing, the Captain, not wanting to be outdone, sent the Intelligence Division into overdrive to root out traitors. When it came to the small fish who hadn't done much, the Captain just punished them and gave them a warning. He was more interested in the big fish. But as a result, the Port District was really becoming an orderly place.

Almost overnight, Xu Qing and the Captain had become even more famous than before. That said, the Captain was famous for being like a mad dog, while Xu Qing... was a fiend! Word had gotten out about him using the criminals for experimentation, and thus, Xu Qing was feared much more than the Captain was.

Despite that, Xu Qing still wasn't done with his experiments, and therefore, he set his sights on the Violent Crimes Divisions from the other peaks in the sect. Unfortunately, most of them refused to cooperate.

It was only the First Peak's Violent Crimes Division that agreed to send him some prisoners. Because of that, Xu Qing finally had to send his subordinates into other districts to look for criminals.

Operating out of one's jurisdiction was generally considered taboo, but Xu Qing couldn't worry about that. Seeing that Xu Qing was going out of his jurisdiction, the Captain decided to do the same thing.

Because of that, the Intelligence Divisions and Violent Crimes Divisions in the other six peaks started to get irritated, and thus started similar activities of their own. All of Seven Blood Eyes was now wrapped up in the spirit of competition.

Another half a month went by, and the Seven Blood Eyes' main army finally reached the Seazombies' main island. The end of the war was approaching. At that point, the Intelligence Divisions and Violent Crimes Divisions finally started to calm down. The biggest reason was that Xu Qing finally decided he had enough prisoners to work with. As for his research with the black beetles, it had reached the point where he was now feeding them black boluses.

Now, instead of a single bottle of beetles, he had five bottles of them. Each bottle was filled with what appeared to be a black liquid, but was in reality a host of small beetles. These ones were even smaller than the original beetles Xu Qing had acquired. On an individual basis, they were too small to see with the naked eye. But their fundamental nature hadn't changed. They were still black, and when they congregated together, they resembled a black cloud.

Most important was that they were deadly. After plenty of testing, Xu Qing had confirmed that they would proliferate inside a victim, then eat them from the inside out. During the process, they would release large amounts of mutagen and poison.

They were very difficult to get rid of, as once inside someone, they would burrow deep into their bones.

In fact, Xu Qing was certain that, if he had used these beetles during his fight with Yanyan, she would have died in agony within the space of a few breaths of time.

With an asset like this, Xu Qing felt confident that he could pose a threat to a Gold Core cultivator.

Unfortunately, he didn't have any Gold Core prisoners to experiment on, so he couldn't be absolutely sure of how effective the beetles would be. But Xu Qing was very pleased that spending so much money on medicinal plants had ended with this result.

I'm certain that these little black beetles can progress even further. I hope that one of these days I can find a Gold Core cultivator to test my beetles on.

His eyes glittered coldly at the thought, as he knew that doing so would require putting his life on the line.

Xu Qing had also fed some of his blood to the little beetles, which would allow him to directly control them.

The beetles would poison opponents, but Xu Qing had poisoned the beetles! The beetles would need to occasionally feed on a bit of his blood, otherwise they would die violently. Because of that, despite the fact that the beetles weren't really intelligent, they would instinctively protect Xu Qing. After all, if Xu Qing didn't stay alive, neither would they.

The beetles also need to eat large amounts of medicinal and poisonous plants. That was a big drain on Xu Qing's finances. Before, he had thought of himself as being quite rich, but now, it wouldn't be long before he went broke.

That said, he had picked up another asset in all of this, and that was Yanyan.

She no longer cursed him, and instead sat quietly in the cell block in the Celestial Bureau. When new prisoners came for Xu Qing to experiment on, she would watch him, and that strange look in her eyes grew more intense.

On numerous occasions, she offered to help Xu Qing, and it was obvious from her expression that she was serious.

Xu Qing wasn't sure what to make of that. In any case, as his spirit stones dwindled, he started to get more and more nervous. Zhang San still needed more time to fully develop their harbor, and thus, it would be a while before Xu Qing got a split of the profit.

That got Xu Qing thinking about the magical devices that Patriarch Golden Vajra Warrior only absorbed in part. What remained behind were defective magical devices, and now Xu Qing was contemplating trying to sell them on the black market.

However, even as he was weighing that possibility, a bright red jade slip flew from the battlefield into the Seventh Peak's Intelligence Division.

When a jade slip was red, it indicated it contained information about an urgent matter. Only peaklords could send messages like that, and even when they were sent from the distant battlefield, they would arrive at the sect only moments later.

To date, only three other red jade slips had been sent from the battlefield, and they were always related to monumental war issues that required action in the sect.

But this time... the message had nothing to do with the war. It had been sent by Master Seventh, and after the Captain read the message, his face fell. After a long moment of thought, he put down his apple, and got to his feet to find Xu Qing. But then he hesitated. A long moment passed. Finally, he sighed, left the Intelligence Division, and made his way to Xu Qing's dharmaskiff.

When the Captain arrived, Xu Qing was organizing his collection of magical devices, and was just getting ready to leave.

At first, Xu Qing didn't find the Captain's sudden arrival very noteworthy. But then he saw the uncharacteristically serious look on the Captain's face.

"Captain?"

"Xu Qing." The Captain hesitated, looking at Xu Qing as if he wanted to say something, but couldn't find the words.

Xu Qing's eyes narrowed. He was starting to get the sense something was wrong.

"Xu Qing, the old man gave me a mission to assign to someone." The Captain didn't say anything for a few breaths of time. Then his eyes hardened with determination, and he lowered his voice.

"The mission requires leaving Seven Blood Eyes and going to the Violet Lands. It's a very urgent mission. The old man is stuck on the battlefield, otherwise he would go. He told me to ask you first, and see if you would personally handle the matter."

Xu Qing's expression was grim. He obviously knew who the Captain meant when he mentioned 'the old man.'

"There's no need to beat around the bush, Captain. What's going on?"

The Captain gave Xu Qing a long look, then handed him the red jade slip.

Xu Qing took it, sent some dharma force inside, and then studied the message.

“My dear friend Grandmaster Bai was assassinated today in the Violet Lands...”

Xu Qing suddenly felt like the whole world was spinning, and he staggered backward. His face drained of blood, and veins bulged out on his head and neck. As he stood there holding the jade slip, his hands trembled. He was clearly trying hard to stay in control, yet his breath came harsh and ragged.

Deep inside, he felt like this couldn't be happening. It seemed so unreal that he closed his eyes. Within that darkness, he suddenly saw a tent, and heard a raspy voice coming from inside.

“Kid, you answer!”

“From now on, don't stand outside the tent. And don't bring those random medicinal plants either. Henceforth, you'll be attending class inside.”

“Remember this.... The world is a tavern for living beings. And the timescape is an old guest. As long as we don't die, we'll meet again. I hope that when we do, you'll have made something of yourself.”

Within that darkness, the tent ripped to shreds and dissolved into ashes. It was gone, but the voice would still echo in his mind for all eternity.

“As long we don't die, we'll meet again,” Xu Qing murmured. The words almost stuck in his mouth. He opened his eyes.

In the truest sense possible, Grandmaster Bai was his very first teacher, who had changed his life forever.

Chapter 206: Tracking Down the Killer in the Violet Lands

It was noontime, and it was a bright day. But there was nothing bright as far as Xu Qing was concerned.

All of the hustle and bustle of Harbor 176 faded away. All Xu Qing could hear was silence. The sensation of unreality grew stronger, until he wondered if this was all some kind of joke. He saw people walking in the distance. Birds flying in the air. Waves crashing against the boats and ships. But it all seemed disconnected.

It was as if there were two worlds. In one of them, everything else existed. In the other... there was only him.

This was too sudden.

When news like this came, most people wouldn't be able to accept it. Most people would be unable to react.

Xu Qing staggered back further until he reached the dharmaskiff railing. He grabbed it tightly. The wind blew at his hair, but it couldn't dispel the heaviness in his chest. He wanted to yell. To scream. To howl.

Xu Qing was the kind of person who cared deeply about kindness shown to him by others.

Will we actually meet again...?

He thought about life in the scavenger basecamp, and about the lifespan flower. He thought about that tent. About Grandmaster Bai looking deeply at him. He thought about showing up with random medicinal plants, and about guiltily eavesdropping. And finally, he thought about watching the caravan leave, and Grandmaster Bai sitting on the cart, a smile on his old face as he nodded at Xu Qing.

Now all of that was gone forever.

Sergeant Thunder felt like family to Xu Qing. Grandmaster Bai had shown immense kindness to him. After the god's eyes opened, creating a blood rain that turned Xu Qing's world into hell, those two old men had been the ones to bring him back into the world of the living.

But now, heaven and earth seemed heartless again. The chaotic world was full of brutality. In this world, life wasn't worth much.

After joining Seven Blood Eyes, he had seen a lot. None of it had been like the constant misery of the scavenger basecamp. Things had changed. But that didn't mean the reality of the outside world had changed.

People went hungry and died from starvation. People brutally slaughtered each other. In the world that the broken god face had brought about, such things happened all the time.

Killing intent burned in Xu Qing's heart, like a sharp blade that sought to burst out of him and slash heaven and earth to bits. He was shaking. However, after a very long time passed, he managed to take a deep breath and look up at the Captain, who seemed very worried. When Xu Qing spoke, his voice was hoarse and very quiet.

"I'm fine."

Lifting the red jade slip up again, he forced himself to seem calm as he examined the rest of the message. Master Seventh had a vast network of contacts, and thus, the jade slip didn't just explain that Grandmaster Bai had been killed. It also contained clues that had already been dug up by the investigation in the Violet Lands.

The cause of death was unknown. However, the jade slip did explain that after Grandmaster Bai died, nothing had been taken from his body or his residence. Except for one thing. It was the second half of a pill formula for something called a supreme yin chosen assimilation pill. It was an item that had been found in a wish box many years ago. It came from a different epoch, and was inscribed on animal hide. As for the pill description, it was utterly heartless and completely evil.

Chosen cultivators were the primary ingredient for supreme yin chosen assimilation pills. It took three chosen to make one packet of ingredients, and it took six packets to create one of the pills. Whoever consumed that pill would undergo a heaven-defying transformation and turn into a chosen cultivator.

Upon encountering the second half of the formula, Grandmaster Bai had decided it was too evil to exist, and wanted to destroy it. However, part of him also realized that it could contain important medicinal theories, so he hid it and kept it a secret.

The mastermind had not yet been identified, so Master Seventh didn't have much information in that regard. However, his network of informants in the Violet Lands had dug up some clues. The

killer wasn't human. They were from a very rare species of grue from the Forbidden Sea called the Grueglooms. They were known as 'the species that can't die,' although the name was a bit of an exaggeration. Such grues had a special ability that made it very difficult for others to capture or kill them. Specifically, they could target another living creature, and upon dying, would be resurrected inside of that being. Every time they came back to life in such a way, they ended up weaker than before, and needed time to get stronger again.

The fact that the killer was a Gruegloom made things difficult for the Violet Lands. Furthermore... things were generally complicated there. There were various clans there that were always fighting against each other for supremacy.

Grandmaster Bai had been an important person who helped a lot of people. However, he wasn't a cultivator. He was a mortal human, and had been an old man nearing death already. To the people of the Violet Lands, especially to the royals, it didn't matter how important a mortal was, they were still lower class.

Tools to be used.

Therefore, though many people in the Violet Lands were angry about Grandmaster Bai's death, and though they did investigate the matter, they didn't put forth much effort. In fact, even many of the people Grandmaster Bai had helped didn't do much.

As the saying goes, the tea gets cold when people leave. Now that Grandmaster Bai was gone, few people cared about him. That was just how things worked in this brutal world.

That said, the teleportation portals in the Violet Lands had been temporarily locked down, and notices had been sent to the Church of Departure, Words of Truth, and Seven Blood Eyes, who all did the same.

What seemed most important to the Violet Lands was the pill formula that had been taken from Grandmaster Bai. Even the Bai Clan was split on the matter. Some factions in the clan wanted revenge, others were interested in the pill formula.

That was how the Violet Lands worked.

The reason for this was that the Violet Lands were the remnants of the true original inhabitants of the continent of South Phoenix. But because of their deep-rooted obstinacy and isolationism, they were only one of a handful of powerful organizations.

Master Seventh couldn't look into the matter himself, so he had delegated authority to the Captain. After all, in all of South Phoenix, nobody knew the Forbidden Sea better than the Seventh Peak. There was no better choice when it came to tracking down a nonhuman from the sea.

"Usually," the Captain said softly, "assassinations like this aren't carried out by large groups. Given how Grueglooms usually operate, there's probably only one killer. I doubt they have a Gold Core cultivation base.

"The Violet Lands' grand spell formation restricts and suppresses outside Gold Core cultivators. And they've prohibited Gold Core cultivators from going to investigate this matter. However, the formation doesn't pay close attention to Foundation Establishment. If I were to go, I would start by searching for mutagen with the aura

of the Forbidden Sea. Combine that with the use of special magical devices, it should only take a bit of time to find the killer. That said, there's no telling how long the Violet Lands will stay under lockdown.

"After all... there are a lot of clans there, and the Bai Clan is only one of them."

"I'll go," Xu Qing said quietly.

His voice didn't contain even the slightest hint of emotion. However, the Captain could sense that there was something explosive brewing in him.

"Xu Qing, I have a teleportation portal set up over there that you can use to get back here easily. Find the killer and bring him back. Remember, people hire assassins because..." He trailed off. "The point is we need to find out who the real culprit is!"

Xu Qing rose up into the air, collected up his dharmaskiff, then flew toward the sect's teleportation portals. The teleportation portals were about to be locked down, but with the jade slip from Master Seventh, he would be able to leave the sect.

His heart was filled with both anxiety and killing intent, and they merged together into something extremely heavy. That, in turn, caused him to move with all haste. Anyone in the Seven Blood Eyes capital city who saw him speeding along felt alarm in their heart. He soon arrived, and without any hesitation, stepped onto one of the teleportation portals.

"Violet Lands capital city," he said, his face completely expressionless.

When the disciples in charge of the portal realized who he was, they made the adjustments to the formation. Then, after only three breaths of time had passed, Xu Qing was surrounded by glittering light, and then faded from view.

As the fluctuations of the teleportation rolled out, the Captain arrived. Standing there looking at the light fade away, he sighed.

After becoming the director of the Intelligence Division, he had read Xu Qing's file, and knew about his relationship with Grandmaster Bai. And it was also obvious the old man had suggested to give Xu Qing the mission for that very reason. After all, Grandmaster Bai had uncharacteristically approved of Xu Qing.

Because of that, the Captain knew that he needed to stand aside and let Xu Qing handle the matter. Xu Qing wouldn't want others involved.

Something like this happened to me years ago. And when it did... I also wanted to handle it alone. Thinking about that event, the Captain suddenly felt sorrow in his heart. A moment later, he shoved such feelings away.

Looking around, he grinned and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Intelligence Division is commandeering this portal."

A buzz of activity resulted as agents from the Intelligence Division arrived to take over the portal. Meanwhile, the Captain looked up into the sky.

“As the third-ranking echelon cultivator in Seven Blood Eyes, as the highest-ranking apprentice of the Seventh Peak, and as the director of the Seven Blood Eyes’ Intelligence Division, I hereby request that the grand spell formation lock down all teleportations in Seven Blood Eyes. I also request that the port be locked down. No nonhuman watercraft shall be permitted to enter or exit the port.”

In response to his words, the Seven Blood Eyes Formation rumbled to life. A moment later, a stream of divine will reached the Captain from the Sixth Peak.

Turning to the Sixth Peak, the Captain clasped hands and bowed. “Sect Uncle Sixth, I have certain evidence and speculations that might solve Elder Brother Chen’s murder. I hereby request that you allow me to lock down the sect!”

The Sixth Peak suddenly erupted with loud rumbling noises, causing wild colors to flash in heaven and earth. Then, a moment later, a deep voice rang out from the peak.

“Request granted!”

The Captain clasped hands and bowed deeply.

I’ve done all that I can do, little Ah Qing. I hope you can get to the bottom of things quickly. I’m getting the feeling... that this is not a simple matter. Supreme yin chosen assimilation pill? A lot of chosen have gone missing at sea over the years.... Quite a lot.... [1]

The Captain narrowed his eyes thoughtfully.

Chapter 207: Scattering Alcohol on a Grave; Reciting a Classic

In Seven Blood Eyes, it was still considered the depths of autumn, but the cold of winter had already reached the Violet Lands. Wind carried the snow far and wide over the ancient capital city.

Crimson palaces and halls rose up, like a sea of jewels surrounded by pure white. The snow fell in flurries. Not many pedestrians were about, and those who were on the streets wore heavy jerkins. They didn’t bother sweeping the snow off, and thus it gathered on their heads and shoulders. The falling snow and the numb expressions on the faces of the pedestrians filled the city with a pervading sense of torpor and depression.

This place embodied the spirit of the Violet Lands. It had once been the imperial capital of the entire continent of South Phoenix. Many millennia ago, there had been only one royal dynasty in South Phoenix, and it had been called the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan. It had unified South Phoenix, and had taken Flame Phoenix as its totem. Unfortunately, it wasn’t able to survive the world’s descent into chaos and brutality.

When civil unrest struck, the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan became a thing of the past. The royal clan and its wealth was divided among the rebel factions, and its bloodline fractured and declined. The dividing of the royal clan resulted in eight new powerful clans that occupied what was now called the Violet Lands. Even now, they still used Flame Phoenix as their totem, who they worshiped as a god.

The Violet Lands’ royal capital was larger than the Seven Blood Eyes capital city, by three times over. And it was divided into eight districts, each of which was controlled by one of the eight great

clans. Each district had its own royal palace, which was considered the ancestral home of its respective clan.

Some of those royal palaces stood in the middle of green, duckweed-covered lakes. The buildings had overhanging eaves carved with lifelike dragons and phoenixes with scales and feathers of gold.

Other royal palaces had golden roof tiles that glittered dazzlingly in the winter sunlight. From a distance, their dramatic architecture was reminiscent of royal glory.

This place had a very different style than Seven Blood Eyes.

The Violet Lands were like a stubborn old man in resplendent clothing. Everything revolved around traditions and bloodlines. This was their way of surviving in a chaotic world. It was different from Seven Blood Eyes, and it was impossible to say if one way was superior to the other.

However, Seven Blood Eyes was a subsidiary of the Seven Sect Coalition, and because of that, at its inception, it couldn't measure up to the Violet Lands. But over the years, the two had come to stand on equal footing.

In fact, now that the sect's patriarch Sir Bloodsmelter had broken through, Seven Blood Eyes had even dared to wage full-scale war on a nonhuman species.

The Violet Lands were not like that. They preferred to isolate themselves, and did not like interference from outsiders. Like the broken face in the sky that they gazed upon from below, they looked down on everyone else in the world. They didn't even respect the Revered Ancient mainland. They believed their blood to be the most respectable, and did not think of their nation as a frog in a well.

In this place, people who didn't have the right bloodline didn't have any future. Such people lacked vigor, and the mindset of being a servant was so ingrained in their souls that it was passed on from generation to generation.

Throughout the milleniums-long history of the Violet Lands, there had been few people like Grandmaster Bai. He was the first who wanted to break the ancient traditions of his people, and seek friends and allies among foreign humans. He had paid a steep price for having ideas that ran counter to the ways of the Violet Lands. He had become a mortal. But that didn't daunt him. Relying on his outstanding talent, and his understanding of plants and vegetation, he had carved out a new dao for himself despite his limited lifespan. Relying on pill formulas alone, he, a mere mortal, had surpassed any cultivator when it came to the dao of plants and vegetation.

In some respects, he was the top figure in the dao of alchemy in all of South Phoenix.

Even the peaklord of the Second Peak in Seven Blood Eyes, who was a Nascent Soul cultivator, also respected and admired Grandmaster Bai. And even someone like Master Seventh didn't hesitate to address him as 'Grandmaster.'

From all of that, it was obvious that Grandmaster Bai's achievements in the dao of alchemy had reached the highest of heights. Despite that, when he was in the Violet Lands, he was still tied down by countless rules and traditions. There were many things he simply couldn't do. And it was because of his bloodline. Grandmaster Bai was not in the direct bloodline of the Bai Clan, but rather, came from a subsidiary bloodline.

The snow fell even harder than before.

In a public graveyard in the Bai Clan, a group of a few dozen people had gathered in front of a crystal coffin, within which lay Grandmaster Bai. He had a wound on his forehead, but it had been dressed and covered. His body had been augmented with dharma force and then sealed in the crystal coffin. Despite that, his corpse was already starting to decompose. The black marks on his skin were evidence of a powerful poison that was accelerating the decomposition process. The corpse wouldn't last for long. By this very evening, the coffin would need to be put under the ground.

Because of his substandard bloodline, Grandmaster Bai didn't qualify to be interred in the clan's royal mausoleum. That said, Grandmaster Bai had always disdained such matters, and had made it clear years ago that he wanted to be buried in the public graveyard.

Among the group standing silently by the coffin was Bai Yundong. [1]

The people gathered were younger relatives of Grandmaster Bai, as well as people who had a good relationship with him. There weren't many. That said, in this world, most people didn't need a lot of friends. Four or five was usually sufficient.

As the coffin was lowered into the ground, the atmosphere grew heavier. One young woman finally couldn't restrain her emotions and started weeping.

She was none other than Tingyu. Two years had passed, and she had grown up in that time. She was slender and elegant, and was normally as carefree and light-hearted as she had been in the past. But when Grandmaster Bai died, her world fell apart. As she knelt in front of the grave, tears of grief spilled down her face. [2]

Next to her was a young man of about seventeen or eighteen years old. He stood tall, making him seem dignified and imposing. His gown was extravagant, and he had a jade pendant at his waist that glittered with the light of a magical device. He was none other than Chen Feiyuan. [3]

He was the highest-ranking son of the youngest generation of the Chen Clan. After Grandmaster Bai was killed, he was the one who had used his authority to call for the lockdown on teleportations. Right now he stood there with his hands clenched into fists, killing intent burning in his eyes. Because of his grief and anger, he didn't notice that there was a middle-aged man standing quietly in an alleyway nearby, gazing at the graveyard.

The man wore a rough hemp robe, and had forgettable facial features and sallow skin. His eyes, however, contained endless grief, and he trembled as he stood there, his hand clenched so tightly against the wall next to him that he had already dug a chunk of the bricks out.

Evening fell, and as the darkness spread, the group gathered by Grandmaster Bai's grave quietly dispersed. The last to leave were Tingyu and Chen Feiyuan, along with some of Chen Feiyuan's attendants.

That was when the middle-aged man finally approached, walking through the departing crowd and past Chen Feiyuan and Tingyu.

As Chen Feiyuan helped support the weeping Tingyu with his forearm, he noticed the man, but in his own grief, didn't pay much attention to him. After all, grieving individuals would visit the graveyard all the time. That thought made Chen Feiyuan even angrier. How could it be that his own Master ended up buried in a place like this? Sadly, there was nothing Chen Feiyuan could do about it.

“Do you think he’ll come...?” Tingyu asked quietly, wiping the tears from her eyes.

Chen Feiyuan didn’t need to wonder who Tingyu was talking about. Grinding his teeth, he said, “Him? Hmph. If he was going to come he’d be here already. Considering he hasn’t, I’d say he’s just like everyone else. A thankless wretch!”

Tingyu didn’t respond.

The middle-aged man had already passed them and now stood in front of the grave, his eyes bloodshot.

“Teacher...” he murmured, his voice hoarse as he dropped to his knees.

This middle-aged man was, of course, Xu Qing!

The first thing he did after arriving in the Violet Lands was to determine where Grandmaster Bai was being buried. Of course, he had known that his Seven Blood Eyes daoist robe would attract attention, and would in turn make it harder to find the killer. Thus, he had disguised himself in this manner.

As he looked at the grave, pain filled his heart and spread to the rest of his body.

This was the second time he had knelt in front of a grave. The first was Sergeant Thunder’s grave. And now, he knelt in front of Grandmaster Bai’s grave.

“Teacher,” he whispered, “I’m going to catch your killer, and the mastermind behind it all.” After kowtowing, he took out a gourd of alcohol. “Sergeant Thunder told me you like to drink, Teacher. So let’s drink together.” He took a drink from the gourd then scattered the rest of the alcohol over the grave. He put the gourd down.

“Teacher, before you left, you gave me the Classic of Plants and Vegetation. I memorized the whole thing. Sir, allow me to recite it for you.

“In the dao of plants and vegetation, a myriad phenomena combine into one, and can be considered a great dao. Understand plants, grasp heaven’s law.

“First plant. Golden twistgrass, also known as three-leaf pearls or cold-dispelling grass, is a sedge plant known by the common name short-leaved kyllinga, and is useful from root to tip. It’s a perennial herb that grows in forested mountains and damp wilderness regions. In South Phoenix, it can be found in the southern prefectures of Rising Nether and Widespirit.

“Second plant. Rhino-fire blossom, also known as cloudydream silk, is a soulflame plant with a perennial soul form. It is useful in diffusing the lungs and relieving coughing, can clear heat and resolve toxins, dissipate blood stasis and reduce swelling, and can be used to treat venomous snakebites as well as injuries from falls, fractures, contusions, and strains....”

“One hundred and thirty-seventh plant. Meltsoul mist, also known as heaven closes its eyes, is a mutated spirit plant that exists in misty conditions. It can be used to melt markings left on the soul, and is very difficult to detect or extrude. It is a primary ingredient in twenty-four-hour rot-dispelling pills.”

Xu Qing could envision Grandmaster Bai sitting in front of him, sipping alcohol and smiling approvingly.

“Nightcorpse morning glory, also known as toxic mountain rootmottle, refers to the stalk and root of feverfew veined turtledove chrysanthemums. It is a woody vine-type plant found in ravines of the Corpse Mountains, usually in chilly streams or jungle thickets. It’s astringent but feels warm in the mouth. It also imparts a sensation of decay. It’s particularly useful in protecting against drafts and inducing perspiration. That said, it’s extremely toxic, and is a typical example of the polarity of yin and yang in medicinal plants.” [4]

The snow blew in the wind as Xu Qing’s voice drifted out over Grandmaster Bai’s grave. Eventually, darkness fell, and then his shadow suddenly quivered.

It seemed to be telling Xu Qing: I found it!

Xu Qing suddenly looked up at the gravestone. After kowtowing three times, he stood and disappeared into the night, his eyes burning with killing intent.

Shortly after he left, a group of people arrived. In the lead was Tingyu, and behind her was Chen Feiyuan and his attendants.

“You were seeing things, Tingyu,” Chen Feiyuan said. “He’s a bigshot in Seven Blood Eyes now. How could he possibly remember Teacher?”

“I wasn’t seeing things. I recognized his eyes. I just didn’t realize it until I got home. It was definitely him!”

Chapter 208: Grue v. Grue

“There’s no way that brat even remembers Teacher,” Chen Feiyuan said. “I refuse to believe it.”

Tingyu stopped in front of Grandmaster Bai’s grave. No one was there.

“Told you,” Chen Feiyuan said. “He couldn’t possibly be here.” Despite his words, Chen Feiyuan’s eyes darted left and right as he scanned the area.

“He’s here,” Tingyu said softly, looking at the gravestone.

Surprised, Chen Feiyuan looked at the gravestone and noted the fragrance of alcohol. He suddenly looked thoughtful. Obviously, someone had come to visit the grave once they were gone. After some thought, he sighed. “We don’t know for certain it was him. It could have been anyone. And even if it was him, what does it matter...?”

Tingyu bit her lip, as if she wanted to say something, but couldn't find the words.

"He's in Seven Blood Eyes now," Chen Feiyuan continued, "a glorious member of their echelon. But if he doesn't show complete and utter loyalty to his Master Seventh, then he'll be nothing.... There's not much he could do about Teacher's death, so there's no point in deluding ourselves. Besides, maybe you were wrong, and it wasn't him. Maybe that thankless wretch didn't come here at all. If we want to get revenge for Teacher's death, we'll have to do it ourselves!"

With that, Chen Feiyuan led the crestfallen Tingyu out of the graveyard and back to her residence. After seeing her inside, his face became incomparably solemn.

On the way back to the Chen Clan, one of his three attendants, who looked to be the same age as him, said, "Young Master, the thankless wretch you mentioned, is it that Xu Qing who everyone's talking about nowadays?"

Suddenly, Chen Feiyuan spun in place, his eyes cold as he viciously slapped his attendant in the face.

The attendant was thrown to the side and smacked into the ground, but immediately scrambled into a kneeling position.

"If I want to call him a thankless wretch, that's my business!" Chen Feiyuan snapped. "But he's my Elder Brother. Maybe I don't like him, but Teacher approved of him, therefore, so do I. Who the hell are you to talk about him like that in front of me?"

The trembling attendant started knocking his head against the ground.

"Considering how long you've served me, I'll give you a proper burial." The attendant began frantically begging for his life, but only a moment later, the other two attendants grabbed him and broke his neck. Everything went quiet.

Chen Feiyuan didn't pay any attention to the commotion. After frowning for a moment, he said, "Activate all my deep-cover spies. I want to know what the Gold Core experts in all eight clans are up to. I don't care how much this costs. Pay it."

"You want all of them activated?" one of the attendants asked. They both looked surprised.

"All of them."

The attendants immediately began to make the arrangements.

Meanwhile, Chen Feiyuan frowned. I don't know what that thankless wretch Xu Qing is up to right now, but I have the feeling he's going to get involved in this thing. If he sticks his head in the wrong place, he could end up in big trouble.

He did the right thing by not coming to see us. Tingyu is a simple girl who cares only about studying medicine. She's not built for this kind of intrigue. If she slipped up and leaked word that he's here, the Seazombie bounty alone would be too tempting for people to resist.

In fact, it's possible that someone killed Teacher just to lure out Xu Qing. Kill two birds with one stone. Or maybe there's an even more complicated plot afoot! I just hope I'm overthinking things.

Xu Qing wasn't the only one who had changed in the past two years. After Chen Feiyuan returned home and became sucked into clan power struggles, he had transformed dramatically. For one thing, he became much more focused mentally. At the same time, his time spent with Grandmaster Bai affected him deeply, imbuing him with a profound hatred for the politicking of the Violet Lands.

He looked at his two attendants. "Did you make the arrangements?"

The attendants nodded. Then, only a moment later, their faces turned dark and blood sprayed out of their mouths. They dropped dead.

I had no choice. I can't even trust the two of you. Now that you've done your job, there was no other option but to see you on your way.

Previously, the only people Chen Feiyuan had trusted in the Violet Lands were his teacher and Tingyu. With his teacher gone, the only person he trusted now was Tingyu.

I suppose I can trust the thankless wretch also. I wonder if he noticed the evidence of the twenty-four-hour rot-dispelling pill.... Given his skill in plants and vegetation, he should be able to pick up on the clues left behind by the poison in Teacher's body.

Frowning, Chen Feiyuan got rid of the corpses and left.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the Violet Lands' capital city, Xu Qing stalked through the shadows, not revealing a scrap of his aura. His eyes were cold as he moved along.

The reason he hadn't made contact with Tingyu and Chen Feiyuan was that he feared it could cause further complications. Xu Qing knew how much money was on his own head, and it wasn't lost on him that someone might have set this whole thing up as a trap. Besides, even if it was a trap, it was probably ancillary to the actual murder. The fact that the supreme yin chosen assimilation pill formula was missing showed that there was a larger plot.

If someone is trying to use this to get at me, it's probably someone from the Violet Lands. Maybe I'm thinking too much into it, but regardless, I need to be on my guard and ready for anything.

Eyes narrowing, Xu Qing dusted himself with poison powder and made sure his aura was completely hidden, then continued on his way.

He had already identified the clues he needed to track down the killer. Master Seventh's red jade slip had explained the special characteristics of the culprit. Considering the killer was a Gruegloom, it was going to be difficult to catch. The Captain had offered some advice, but Xu Qing already had his own methods.

Anything that used mutagen in cultivation could be detected by his shadow. After all, mutagen was food for the shadow.

The Violet Lands capital city was a place where good people and villains rubbed shoulders, and had a lot of people with strong mutagen. But when you added in the aura of the Forbidden Sea, then it narrowed down the range of targets.

Because of that, a matter that would be difficult for most people wasn't very hard for Xu Qing. All he needed was to provide his shadow with a few key pieces of evidence, and he could easily track down the killer.

What was more, Xu Qing knew that, given his teacher's skill in the dao of alchemy, there was no way he wouldn't leave behind some clues. After all, even Xu Qing, with his inferior skill, could leave behind clues if he ended up being killed.

Therefore, Xu Qing had taken time to observe the corpse from afar, and had also cast his senses into the soil when he grieved in front of the gravestone. Because of that, he knew for certain that his teacher had been poisoned with a twenty-four-hour rot-dispelling pill.

Such pills could actually have a beneficial effect when taken regularly over a long period of time, especially on mortals. However, there was an unusual side-effect; someone who consumed such a pill, then died afterward, would start decomposing at a rapid rate. In fact, they would usually turn into a sludge within twenty-four hours.

It was a unique type of pill that Grandmaster Bai would only concoct when he had free time. However, there was more to the pill that average people wouldn't know about. Only Grandmaster Bai's students would know that the primary ingredient in twenty-four-hour rot-dispelling pills was meltsoul mist.

Meltsoul mist, also known as heaven closes its eyes, is a mutated spirit plant that exists in misty conditions. It can be used to melt markings left on the soul, and is very difficult to detect or extrude. It is a primary ingredient in twenty-four-hour rot-dispelling pills.

That was the clue Grandmaster Bai had left behind. It all made sense. The killer's soul had been infected with a minute trace of meltsoul mist, and Xu Qing knew exactly how to identify it.

And thus, he sped through the night, following his shadow to check on three possible suspects. The first one was staying at an inn. Once he was close, Xu Qing personally inspected their aura, then immediately turned and left.

It's not this one.

Taking advantage of the darkness of night, he headed to the second possible suspect. This one lived in an ordinary citizen's house, and didn't emit any cultivation base fluctuations or even any traces of mutagen. However, they couldn't evade detection by Xu Qing's shadow.

Upon nearing, Xu Qing stopped moving. Then his eyes glittered with cold light, and he slipped inside the residence.

An old man lay asleep inside, but the moment Xu Qing entered, he opened his eyes. Looking in shock at Xu Qing, he opened his mouth to speak, but before he could, a black iron skewer thrummed toward him.

A tremor passed through the man, and though he didn't emit any cultivation base fluctuations, he seemed to have entered the profound radiance state. Dodging the skewer, he appeared right in front of Xu Qing.

“So, you found me? My disguise was perfect! Let’s see who you are.” As the words left his mouth, he reached toward Xu Qing’s face as if to dispel the magical technique he had used to disguise himself.

But then, Xu Qing’s eyes glittered coldly, and the old man’s face fell. Overwhelmed by a sense of intense danger, he shot backward.

He moved too slowly. Xu Qing suddenly thrummed with spectacular power, as if he were burning on the inside, and then his knee flew through the air. A boom rang out as Xu Qing’s knee smashed into the old man’s chest. It collapsed in a mass of blood and bone, and before the old man could begin to fight, Xu Qing stepped forward and unleashed balefire. However, his opponent didn’t have a soul, so without the slightest change of facial expression, he tapped into Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits.

The man shivered as he turned into a mass of energy and blood that Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits absorbed. What was left behind was empty skin that flopped to the ground.

This didn’t surprise Xu Qing at all. His shadow immediately stretched out and covered over the empty skin, then sent some information to Xu Qing.

“Lead the way!” Xu Qing said. He gathered the items he had placed in the area to conceal any fluctuations from the fighting, then sped after the shadow.

He knew full well that Grueglooms were difficult to truly kill. But he didn’t care. He would kill it over and over again, however many times it took. After all, it had no way to teleport out of the city. The only thing Xu Qing regretted was that the Gruegloom had died so quickly that Golden Crow Assimilates Myriad Spirits had only managed to take a tiny sliver of its essence.

I couldn’t get much Gruegloom essence because of how quickly it died. But it doesn’t matter. Intense emotions can stir one’s spirit... once it gets terrified, it’ll be much easier.

Somewhere else in the capital city, in the district controlled by the Zhou Clan, a sleeping servant suddenly opened his eyes. Sitting up, he took in a few deep breaths and looked around in a panic.

Who was that guy? Not only was he able to find me, but also, his cultivation base was terrifying. He crushed me in an instant. I was in that body for a long time, and it could unleash three-flame battle prowess!

Unfortunately, thanks to natural limitations, I can only resurrect myself and take over mortals. And it takes time to get used to the new body and unleash its potential. Otherwise, it would be a lot easier to get out of here. Dammit! This mission was supposed to be easy, but then they locked down teleportations. Well, they can’t lock things down forever. That said, why did they have to send a grue cultivator after me?

The servant’s eyes gleamed wickedly as he looked around, then started chuckling coldly.

This is just a minor hiccup. This particular person I marked for resurrection is a Zhou Clan servant, and now I’m in the royal palace. Unless that guy is working with someone in the Zhou Clan, he’ll end up dead for sure if he tries to come in here!

Despite his confidence, he stayed on the alert the entire night. The next morning at dawn, as the sun's rays entered the royal palace, a burly man with a scar and a Qi Condensation cultivation base opened the door to the servants' room.

When the other servants saw that scarred face, their expression flickered and they quickly got to their feet. None of them dared to move slowly. This scarred fellow was a trusted aide to the Zhou Clan leaders, and he had a short temper. In the past, he had even beaten servants to death. The lives of servants weren't worth much, and no one cared if they died.

The scarred man spat onto the ground, snorted coldly, and then strode past servant after servant until he was in front of the one that had been possessed by a Gruegloom.

The Gruegloom servant shivered nervously as the scarred man measured him up. Then the scarred man pulled out a knife and plunged it into the servant's heart, before slashing it through his throat!

It happened so quickly the Gruegloom servant could do nothing other than open his eyes wide and stare in shock at the blood pouring out. He was stunned, and had no idea what was going on.

Meanwhile, the scarred man grinned, and then, in front of all the shocked servants, plunged the knife into his own belly and sliced it open. Pulling out his intestines, he wrapped them around the Gruegloom's neck, tightened them, and whispered, "My lord and master wanted me to say hi, and tell you... the game has just begun."

Chapter 209: Without a Trace

The Gruegloom cultivator's eyes went wide as he slipped away into death.

Moments later, in the Bai Clan's district of the city, seven or eight vagrants huddled in a narrow alley. One of them, a gaunt young man with scars crisscrossing his body, suddenly opened his eyes. Out of instinct, his hands shot to his neck. Eyes shining with terror, he looked around, then relaxed and forced himself to steady his breathing. That said, the alarm within his heart was not something he could dispel easily.

What's going on? That man just now....

This young man was none other than the Gruegloom cultivator. The fact that Xu Qing figured out his first identity wasn't very surprising. But he had felt very confident about his second identity in the Zhou Clan. Only someone deeply connected with that clan should have been able to reach him, or even identify him.

He had already come up with a new escape plan that would let him turn the tables on the person hunting him, and show them the true terrifying nature of Grueglooms. He had a teleportation portal hidden outside of the city, but at the moment, he wasn't desperate enough to use it. The current state of affairs... couldn't last for long. Based on his analysis, the city would be opened up within about three days, or five at the most. Once that happened, no one would ever be able to find him. Whether it was a Gold Core cultivator or Nascent Soul expert, they could kill him once, but then he would be gone.

He had been in situations like this before. However, there was something about the current set of circumstances that felt off. The person hunting him was able to track him down very quickly. Furthermore, the person who had confronted his second identity had also seemed gruish.

What was more, the way the man had wrapped his intestines around the Gruegloom's throat, and then spoke those final words... was completely terrifying.

"My lord and master wanted me to say hi, and tell you... the game has just begun."

"The game has just begun...?" the Gruegloom murmured. Then he shivered. He got the sense things were going to get difficult. This new opponent was strong, and obviously had some very unique abilities.

I wonder if I should activate that body....

The Gruegloom cultivator thought about it for a while, then decided against it. The body he was referring to was located outside the city, and he could activate it at any time. But he only planned to do that when he was ready to leave the Violet Lands capital city and never come back. He was hesitant to do that, and still wanted to wait in hiding until the lockdown ended.

Maybe that second time was just a coincidence!

Looking up, he saw that the sky was turning bright. Around him, the other vagrants were starting to awaken. The Gruegloom stood and left the alley.

With each step he took, he felt sluggish. Although his innate ability was impressive, whenever he possessed a new body, it was as if he consumed the host. In some respects, the host was actually a corpse. He was like the turtledove occupying the magpie's nest. And at first, he was always weak. Only after warming up the host body was he able to restore some battle prowess.

He had the ability to infuse a host with his innate ability beforehand, but that was very draining, and thus, he saved all of the energy for the body outside the city.

As he started to pick up speed walking, a thousand thoughts ran through his mind.

Dammit, I'm usually the one lurking in the shadows, preying on those in the light. But this time the roles are reversed. Who is this guy? I've never heard of any grue that can do something like this. He can control other people? That can't be it. Controlling someone else would involve a release of energy. The only exception would be a divine will possession, but only Nascent Soul cultivators can do something like that. This guy definitely isn't a Nascent Soul expert. I really get the sense that I'm dealing with a grue.

As he analyzed the situation, the Gruegloom walked out of the alley, keeping his guard up and heading in the direction of the city's teleportation portal complex. His current plan was to stay in that area and wait until the lockdown lifted. In the meantime, he would see if this annoyingly mysterious person was able to track him down again.

After he had been walking along for only about an hour, a hand suddenly stretched out from an alley he was walking past. The hand clamped down on his mouth, and then fingers worked their way through his lips, parting his teeth and making it impossible for him to bite his own tongue off to commit suicide. It happened quickly, and though the Gruegloom was able to react, this new body was just too slow. Then, he felt himself being dragged forcefully into the alley.

Whimpering sounds escaped his mouth as he opened his eyes wide in the hopes of catching a glimpse of his pursuer. Unfortunately, he couldn't see anything. Then, a moment later, he was dragged into a room and thrown onto the floor.

At long last he was able to see who he was dealing with. It was the very same middle-aged cultivator who had killed his first body the previous day.

The man's eyes were as cold as ice, and looking into them caused the Gruegloom cultivator's heart to pound in his chest. Suddenly, he felt his jaw being broken, and the pain caused veins to bulge out on his face.

Thanks to the broken jaw, he couldn't bite his tongue to commit suicide. And because he had no cultivation base or battle prowess in this new body yet, there was no other way to kill himself.

As the Gruegloom whimpered, Xu Qing extended his hand and scattered some poison powder onto the Gruegloom cultivator.

It wasn't a very deadly poison. Instead, it was a concoction Xu Qing had devised that made the body more sensitive to pain. After watching the powder fall onto the Gruegloom and seep into his body, Xu Qing expressionlessly reached out and started breaking his fingers.

Pop. Pop.

One after another.

The pain caused the Gruegloom to tremble. And the poison made it all worse. It became a tempest in his mind that erupted in the form of a bloodcurdling scream. And because of his broken jaw, his scream caused even more pain. But he couldn't hold back.

Xu Qing heard the sound, but didn't react. He just kept working until the Gruegloom cultivator's hand was a mangled mess. Then he fed him a medicinal pill to keep him conscious.

The process continued, for though the Gruegloom cultivator screamed, his eyes did not contain one particular emotion that Xu Qing was familiar with: terror.

From beginning to end, he screamed and screamed. But despite the pain, he wasn't afraid!

As a result, Xu Qing's eyes grew colder. Eventually, the Gruegloom's entire arm was mangled, so Xu Qing moved on to the other arm, starting with the fingers.

After that, he took out a dagger. The Gruegloom's screams had begun to weaken at that point, but he started on the legs nonetheless, not letting a square inch of flesh go untouched.

There was blood everywhere, but the Gruegloom wasn't dead, thanks to the medicinal pills Xu Qing kept giving him. The entire time, despite all the screaming, the Gruegloom cultivator's eyes shone with defiance and provocation.

Suddenly, the Gruegloom spoke by means of divine will. "Want to know why I'm screaming? Because you're not the first person to do this to me, nor will you be the last. And I've long since mastered an ability to vent pain by means of sound."

The voice spoke to Xu Qing even while he was screaming, almost as if he were two different people.

"I know that you don't dare to truly kill me. Are you here to avenge Grandmaster Bai? When the old fogey died, he was writing a letter. Who knows, maybe it was a letter to you. I don't know how you keep finding me, but I bet you want to know who hired

me. You want to figure out who the mastermind is. Well, I know who it is. And if you want to know... too bad. I'm not going to tell you."

Eyes bloodshot, the Gruegloom continued to scream. That is, until Xu Qing punched him so hard his jaw completely shattered, making it impossible for the screams to leave his body.

But then, the Gruegloom started laughing maniacally, deep in his chest.

"Wanna know how I killed the old man? Hahaha! I originally planned to possess that girl Tingyu. But that didn't seem very fun. So guess who I went with in the end?"

Xu Qing suddenly stopped moving and looked at the Gruegloom, his eyes narrowed as he pulsed with terrifying fluctuations.

The Gruegloom cultivator was shocked by this. The reality was that he hadn't been completely truthful. Although he wasn't afraid of dying, and had become used to torture, it was Xu Qing's ruthlessness that left him feeling astonished. That was especially true considering that, during this entire time, Xu Qing hadn't said a single thing.

It was like he didn't care about anything other than the torment. He seemed to have done this before, and what was more, he wasn't showing any signs of letting up. For example, he hadn't cut any major blood vessels. In fact, it all led the Gruegloom to the conclusion that this person... had done this kind of thing countless times in the past.

He's a psycho! A degenerate!!

He had been hoping to rile this person up and provoke his own death. Though each body he possessed had a built-in death time, on this occasion, he wanted to die early.

The totem tattoo on Xu Qing's back flared to life, and black flames erupted into the shape of a golden crow. It converged on Xu Qing's right hand, which he then pressed onto the Gruegloom's forehead.

Massive force erupted out, causing the Gruegloom cultivator's eyes to go wide as his body withered. Massive amounts of energy and blood flowed into Xu Qing's palm, and thanks to the unsteady emotions, more of the essence mist appeared than before.

That mist contained the Gruegloom's essence power.

On their initial encounter, Xu Qing hadn't been able to absorb much essence. But this time, thanks to the emotions riled up by the torment, the golden crow was able to take a lot.

In the last moment before the Gruegloom died, Xu Qing quietly spoke for the first time.

"This isn't over. See you soon."

Chapter 210: A Bird in a Cage

The room was quiet now. No screams echoed within it.

Xu Qing closed his eyes as he sensed the unique essence the golden crow had absorbed. There wasn't enough of it to use the ability, but it could at least be used to get a fix on the next location even faster.

I bet... he'll be terrified when he resurrects again. But not terrified enough. I'll probably need to kill him a few dozen times before it gets strong enough.

Xu Qing opened his eyes and looked at his shadow.

The shadow was currently stretched out through the blood to the corpse. After a few breaths of time passed, the shadow returned, then sent pulses of emotions to indicate a new direction to follow. It also included a request.

“Pursuit... I'm skilled... bring prisoner...”

There were three reasons why the most recent kill lasted so long. One was that Xu Qing couldn't dispel the ruthless fury in his heart. The second was that the golden crow needed time to absorb the essence. And the third was that the shadow needed time to consume the other party's shadow, and thus get a solid fix on where to go next.

This time around, given the amount of essence Xu Qing had absorbed, the shadow could now identify where the Gruegloom was with precise accuracy.

In response to the shadow's request, Xu Qing nodded.

The shadow immediately released fluctuations of happiness and excitement.

Face expressionless, Xu Qing left the room.

In the two days that had passed, he had come to realize that someone was watching him. As time passed, the feeling grew stronger. Given that he didn't want any attention in the Violet Lands, he was now trying even harder to be stealthy.

About an hour later, outside the city's east gate, people were lined up to leave the city. Most people were in caravans, and there were plenty of cultivators present.

Among them was a young man in nice clothing. He clearly didn't come from an average family, but wasn't important enough to skip the line. That indicated he wasn't from a very impressive bloodline. As he stood there in line, his face suddenly turned pale, and he started panting and looking around surreptitiously. This young man was now... the Gruegloom.

He still wasn't ready to activate his body outside the city. Once he did, he wouldn't be able to get back into the city, and if he was being chased, that could be a problem. His innate ability only worked in a limited range. To him, places with high populations were the most ideal, so he didn't want to leave the city unless absolutely necessary. After all, if that body were to be killed, it would be far more harmful to him than when he possessed someone.

He was hoping to use this most recent body to lure his pursuer out into the open, then leapfrog back into the city. After all, if this body died, it wouldn't be a very big deal to him.

Given that he had been tracked down three times in a row, he knew his pursuer had a way to find him. What that method was, he didn't know, and thus couldn't guard against it. He was feeling more and more uneasy, especially because of the final words his pursuer had spoken. Those words had chilled him to the core.

Of even greater significance was the fact that, after this latest resurrection, he got the feeling he had lost something very, very important. In turn, that caused a sensation of deadly crisis to build within him.

This guy is depraved! That said, I refuse to believe that, given what I'm capable of, he can truly get the best of me!

Given how distracted he was, he didn't notice that, within the cast shadow of one of the city guards at the gate, was an eye.

As the Gruegloom got closer to the gate, a mosquito flew over and silently landed on his neck. The Gruegloom didn't even notice when the mosquito plunged its proboscis into his skin. A moment later, a voice reached his ears via divine will.

"My lord and master wanted me to say hi."

The mosquito then exploded, a host of tiny black beetles erupting from inside. They instantly burrowed into the Gruegloom cultivator.

The Gruegloom cultivator's new body trembled, and he released a miserable shriek. The alarmed people in the crowd moved away from him as he toppled onto the ground with a thud, then melted into a pool of blood.

A moment later, one of the city guards shivered, closed his eyes, then opened them as a different person.

Taking advantage of the chaos, he immediately turned to walk out of the city. But then, he suddenly felt unable to move. Eyes shining with disbelief, he tried to look down at himself but was unable. In fact, he even started talking in a bizarre voice.

"Aha! I did it! I got you."

The guard slowly turned, smiled and called a greeting to one of the other guards, then quickly walked off. As he hurried away, eyes emerged from the shadows of all the nearby guards, flew over, and disappeared into the shadow of the walking guard.

Astonishingly, all of the guards had shadow eyes, and had been simply waiting for the Gruegloom to show his face.

The Gruegloom had miscalculated, and fell prey to Xu Qing's shadow.

The Gruegloom's eyes were now full of terror. Never in his life had he ever encountered anything like this, and his emotions were so unstable he felt like he might collapse. As of this moment, he was well and truly afraid. He had finally run into another grue that was actually more terrifying than himself!

And thus, the delighted shadow sent the city guard skipping down the street, before eventually turning into an alley and entering an abandoned house. There were a lot of abandoned houses in the Violet Lands' capital city, and it wasn't unusual for bodies to be found in them.

Upon entering the house, the Gruegloom saw Xu Qing sitting there, calmly waiting.

After looking at Xu Qing, the Gruegloom fell to the ground into a kneeling position, then started slapping himself over and over again on the face.

Ignoring him, Xu Qing looked toward the door. "Since you're here, come on in."

The shadow stopped the Gruegloom from slapping himself for a moment, then resumed.

Meanwhile, the air outside the door rippled as a young man appeared. He wore a beautiful garment, as well as a jade pendant that glowed with soft light. He was handsome, but had mixed emotions in his eyes. He was none other than... Chen Feiyuan.

Xu Qing looked at him and sensed a strange aura. His cultivation base fluctuations weren't very strong, but Xu Qing still got a sense of danger from him. At the same time, his aura seemed incredibly weak. That was one reason why not even Xu Qing's shadow had noticed him.

Chen Feiyuan entered the house, sat down, and looked at the Gruegloom cultivator slapping himself.

Then Xu Qing realized what was happening. Chen Feiyuan was only in the Qi Condensation level, yet his blood emanated a sensation of ancient time. It was as if there were some object contained within him.

"Did you become a living treasure?" Xu Qing asked.

"No, not a living treasure," Chen Feiyuan replied. "In the Violet Lands, members of the direct bloodline of each of the eight clans can form a symbiotic relationship with their clan's sole magical treasure. When I returned home last time, I started the process. It isn't complete yet. This is one of the reasons the clan chiefs in the Violet Lands have such amazing battle prowess. Although our cultivation is important, as well as our cultivation base, our blood is even more important."

"It's a very gruish cultivation method," Xu Qing said softly.

"The royal clan of the Sovereign Kingdom of Violet and Cyan were very gruish. This was their innate ability. They were able to form symbiotic relationships with any magical treasure. Later, the eight clans stole that ability from them. Then, thanks to our isolationism and inbreeding, that innate ability finally reappeared in our blood." Chen Feiyuan shrugged. Looking at Xu Qing, he continued, "Congratulations on your rise to prominence in Seven Blood Eyes."

"You've changed a lot," Xu Qing replied, sounding very serious. The Chen Feiyuan he remembered wasn't like this. Truth be told, he had known for days that someone was watching him. Following him. But until today, he hadn't been sure who it was.

"Some of it is growing up. Some of it is because of Teacher's influence. And some of it is because of the magical treasure." Chen Feiyuan shook his head. "Besides, you've changed a lot too. I never thought that wimpy brat from the scavenger basecamp would end up in the Seven Blood Eyes echelon." Chen Feiyuan looked back at the Gruegloom slapping himself, and his eyes filled with killing intent. "Is this him?"

Xu Qing nodded. "Yes. At least, one of his bodies."

"I visited the last place you went. There was a lot of blood. This time... let me have a go." His eyes filled with ruthless madness, as well as deep hatred.

Xu Qing nodded, stood, and walked out. His shadow came with him. And as the shadow released the Gruegloom, bloodcurdling screams and agonized shrieks rang out in the house. They only lasted for the time it takes an incense stick to burn. The level of torment didn't come close to what Xu Qing had unleashed.

Eventually, Chen Feiyuan walked out, still trembling, and still filled with madness. His eyes were bloodshot as he stopped next to Xu Qing and took a deep breath.

"Tingyu was sure you would come. I told her you wouldn't. Xu Qing, the great clans in the Violet Lands have no idea you're here. I made sure they didn't find out. For now. There are limits to what I can do. I can't keep the city locked down for very long. Avenge Teacher's death, and then get out of here. As fast as you can. Otherwise you'll be in danger. There are some old codgers in the great clans who'll do anything to avoid death. Anything. To them, that Seazombie bounty is very attractive. You're on your own now, Xu Qing. Take care." With that, Chen Feiyuan walked away.

Xu Qing could sense a bit of Grandmaster Bai on Chen Feiyuan, and could tell how much he hated the Violet Lands, but at the same time, wanted to change them.

"Take care, Elder Brother," he said.

Chen Feiyuan stopped walking, but didn't look back. A moment passed and he started walking again, looking more determined with each step. Finally, he disappeared.