

Doctor 1061

Chapter 1061: Fire Essence Iron

"A draw? Heh..."

Fang Bai noticed that when Hong Qitian spoke, his gaze flickered, clearly indicating that those few words of showing weakness weren't coming from his heart. The corners of Fang Bai's mouth twitched slightly, revealing a mocking smile. "You come at me with killing intent, chasing me like a madman, and you expect me to believe you just want to make peace?"

Of course, Hong Qitian didn't actually intend to show weakness to Fang Bai. He simply wasn't confident he could defeat Fang Bai and wanted to stabilize the situation until he could return to Purple Flame City. There, he planned to secretly coordinate with a few powerful friends to deal with Fang Bai.

"Brother Bai jokes. In truth, I chased you here just to find a secluded place to discuss some matters with you..."

Despite Fang Bai's mockery, Hong Qitian's expression didn't change; he put on a full-faced smile and said, "Without reservation, Brother Bai, my name is Hong Qitian, an Elder of Tribute of the Purple Flame Sect. Today I heard that our Purple Flame City had been graced by a Pill Master quite skilled in alchemy, so I couldn't help but come over to see... Haha, those harsh words before were just a little joke between us, Brother Bai. You shouldn't take them seriously..."

Fang Bai crossed his arms over his chest, watching Hong Qitian's poor act with a smile but not believing a word he said.

"So, Elder Hong isn't planning to make me 'roll out' of Purple Flame City anymore?"

Fang Bai replied with a mocking tone after Hong Qitian had finished speaking.

Hong Qitian let out an awkward laugh, saying, "Just jokes... Just jokes... There are over a million martial artists in Purple Flame City, but Pill Masters and Artifact Refiners are extremely rare. Personally, I very much welcome Pill Masters like Brother Bai to come and do business in Purple Flame City. Your reputation has already spread throughout Purple Flame City, and I believe that soon enough, our Sect

Master of the Purple Flame Sect will personally come to the Martial Artists Trading Market to invite Brother Bai..."

"Sect Master Zu Tiangang of the Purple Flame Sect?"

Fang Bai slightly furrowed his brow. "What does he want with me?"

The Purple Flame Sect was the foremost powerful sect in Thousand Lakes Country, and its Sect Master, Zu Tiangang, was the most powerful individual in the country, having achieved Vast Level Perfection. When the martial artists of Thousand Lakes Country mentioned Zu Tiangang, they always respectfully called him "Sect Master Zu" or "Ancestor Zu" with great reverence. However, Fang Bai didn't just call him by his name but also referred to him as "he" without any hint of respect. It was extremely arrogant and if any disciples of the Purple Flame Sect were to hear it, they would certainly be enraged.

Hong Qitian was secretly pleased, thinking that upon his return to the Purple Flame Sect, he could use this incident as leverage. Although Sect Master Zu Tiangang was desperately in need of talents and treated Alchemists and Artifact Refiners courteously, he wouldn't allow someone who showed no respect to enter the Purple Flame Sect.

As long as Fang Bai didn't get involved with the Purple Flame Sect, then Hong Qitian had many ways to deal with him, to the point of driving him out of Purple Flame City, or even erasing him from this world.

"Brother Bai is skilled in the art of alchemy, so naturally our Ancestor Sect Master invites you to become an Elder of Tribute. Brother Bai surely knows that our Purple Flame Sect is the strongest sect in Thousand Lakes Country and also one of the third-rank sects in the True Martial Realm. If Brother Bai joined the Purple Flame Sect, you would certainly be treated with great courtesy and receive generous compensation. However..."

Here, Hong Qitian changed his tune, "However, Brother Bai, you're quite young, and if you were to become an Elder of Tribute, I'm afraid some disciples in the Purple Flame Sect might not take kindly to it. Therefore, I worry that if you were to enter the Purple Flame Sect, some disciples might treat you with hostility..."

"Have I ever said I wanted to join the Purple Flame Sect?"

Fang Bai dismissed Hong Qitian's obvious provocation with a disdainful glance and chuckled lightly, "A mere third-grade sect can hardly excite me. So, I have absolutely no interest in joining the Purple Flame Sect!"

"Kid, you're quite arrogant! But the more arrogant you are, the worse your end will be!"

Hong Qitian was pleased again, thinking that once he returned to the Purple Flame Sect, as long as he recounted Fang Bai's words to the Sect Master and the other disciples, not only would the Sect Master feel annoyed, but the other disciples would also be riled up. Then, without needing to lift a finger himself, other disciples from the Purple Flame Sect would seek out Fang Bai to make trouble for him, making it impossible for Fang Bai to set foot in Purple Flame City.

"The Purple Flame Sect is the number one sect in Thousand Lakes Country, with numerous disciples and strong prowess. It also controls the vast majority of the country's cultivation resources, and many martial artists take pride in joining the Purple Flame Sect. If Brother Bai, you reject the invitation from Ancestor Sect Master, he will definitely be displeased. And if Ancestor Sect Master is unhappy, you will have a tough time in the Purple Flame Sect! So, I advise Brother Bai to be sensible and agree to join the Purple Flame Sect if the Ancestor Sect Master invites you!"

Hong Qitian continued, seemingly giving advice to Fang Bai, but in reality, he saw Fang Bai's arrogance and intentionally tried to provoke Fang Bai's rebellious spirit.

Fang Bai chuckled unconcernedly, "I can earn cultivation resources myself! As for whether your Ancestor Sect Master is happy or not, what does that have to do with me? I refine pills and artifacts for people in the Martial Artists Trading Market, without offending or provoking anyone. If someone comes looking for trouble, these fists of mine won't agree!"

With a smile that was not quite a smile, he said to Hong Qitian, "Elder Hong, are we going to fight or not? If we are fighting, I'll be happy to oblige; if not, I'm heading back to Purple Flame City!"

Hong Qitian thought that the arrogant words Fang Bai had just said would be enough to land him in deep trouble, and that there would be disciples from the Purple Flame Sect to handle him, so why would he personally spar with him? He quickly said, "It was just a joke, Brother Bai, don't take it to heart! I have some matters to attend to and must take my leave first! Farewell! Farewell!"

With that, he turned and left, his figure flashing rapidly, disappearing into a grove on the north side of Fire Lake in the blink of an eye.

Fang Bai extended his Divine Sense to survey the surrounding area, seeing that Hong Qitian had gone far and no one was approaching, he turned around to face the Fire Lake before him.

The lake water was like fire, boiling tumultuously with waves of intense heat.

Several withered leaves were swept up by the wind and drifted above the Fire Lake before gently falling. Less than ten feet above the water's surface, they turned into wisps of smoke and vanished, indicating the extreme temperature being emitted from the lake.

Fang Bai's Divine Sense spread out, permeating the water, to find that the lake was extremely deep and the deeper it went, the hotter the water became. At three hundred meters deep, the temperature was so terrifying that even a Vast Level Martial Artist could not bear it and would not dare to dive further.

"Huh? I didn't expect to find high-grade Fire Essence Iron in the True Martial Realm! This is indeed quite rare!"

When Fang Bai's Divine Sense reached four hundred meters below the lake, he finally saw the bottom. There lay a millstone-sized piece of Fire Essence Iron, nestled in the mud, emitting a wildly hot aura. The color of the entire lake was dyed a reddish hue by that piece of Fire Essence Iron.

Moreover, the temperature of the lake water around the Fire Essence Iron was even more alarmingly high, such that even a Vast Level Perfection Martial Artist, if not born with a fire-attribute body attuned to fire, could not get close to the Fire Essence Iron.

Chapter 1062: Ziyi Girl

Fang Bai deduced that the piece of Fire Essence Iron at the bottom of Fire Lake must have existed for a long time and that Martial Artists must have known about the possibility of treasures in Fire Lake. However, because the Fire Essence Iron itself was too hot, no Martial Artist dared to touch it. They could only sigh longingly, which is why the Fire Essence Iron was preserved till now.

Fire Essence Iron is the main material for refining Fire Spirit Weapons. The higher the quality of Fire Essence Iron, the more powerful the Spiritual Artifacts that are refined from it. Fang Bai had originally

thought that in these Three Thousand Minor Worlds, the best refining material was only of medium quality. He didn't expect to find a sizable piece of high-quality Fire Essence Iron here. It was quite unexpected and a pleasant surprise.

High-quality Fire Essence Iron, combined with other auxiliary materials, can forge high-quality Spiritual Artifacts. Martial Artists using high-quality Spiritual Artifacts would see their combat power greatly enhanced.

However, for Fang Bai, his Spatial Ring contained the Five Elements Needles, Blood-Drinking Mad Blade, Origin Qi Cauldron, and Houyi Bow. Each Spiritual Artifact was extremely powerful. Up to now, Fang Bai hadn't been able to effectively harness these artifacts or unleash their full power, which showed how high their grades were.

Therefore, upon discovering the high-quality Fire Essence Iron at the bottom of the lake, Fang Bai only felt a minor surprise and was far from overwhelmingly excited.

Fang Bai planned to take this piece of Fire Essence Iron and, when he found the time, forge several Fire Spirit Weapons to give to his friends and close ones in the future.

When Fang Bai first arrived in the True Martial Realm through the Teleportation Array, an anomaly occurred en route, causing him to be separated from his friends and family. He didn't know where they were, but he always believed that one day he would be reunited with them.

Fang Bai withdrew his Divine Sense and circulated his Fire-based Technique, Nine Revolutions True Fire Art. His body's Fire Primordial Qi flowed rapidly, forming a ruddy Qi Shield around him before he dived into Fire Lake.

Despite the high-quality Fire Essence Iron containing temperatures that even a Vast Level Martial Artist would find terrifying, it posed no threat to Fang Bai, who possessed a Chaos True Body.

After entering the lake, Fang Bai faced the high temperatures capable of melting solid rock and dived straight to the bottom, hovering above the Fire Essence Iron.

The Fire Essence Iron, about the size of a grinding stone, resembled a fireball. It emitted a red light and scorching temperatures, dazzling and radiant. Rich and scorching Fire Primordial Qi diffused into the surroundings, causing the entire lake's water to "gurggle" and boil.

Fang Bai glanced down at the Fire Essence Iron a few times. With a swift motion, he stretched out his right palm, his fingers spread wide. With a sudden grasp, the grinding-stone-sized piece of Fire Essence Iron, weighing thousands of pounds, was slowly lifted from the lake's muddy bottom up to his face, under the strong suction force emanating from his palm.

Fang Bai stretched out his hand, touched the Fire Essence Iron, felt the scorching Fire Primordial Qi flowing from his palm into his body, and a faint smile appeared on his lips. He casually stored the Fire Essence Iron into his Spatial Ring.

Without the Fire Essence Iron "stirring havoc," the boiling lake water immediately returned to tranquility. The water color also turned into a clear, verdant green, looking no different from the vast lakes elsewhere.

"Hmm? Who is this woman? She's quite young, yet her strength is impressive!"

As Fang Bai surfaced to the lake, he sensed an aura of a Desolate Level Perfection Martial Artist. Extending his Divine Sense towards the source of this Martial Artist Aura, he saw a young girl in her twenties wearing purple clothing speeding towards him.

This purple-dressed young lady had snow-white skin and large eyes, with a slender waist and long legs. She was quite beautiful. In her left hand, she wielded a three-foot-long Willow Leaf Saber. The outer sheath was made of dark-red Fire Python skin, with strands and wisps of Fire Primordial Qi spilling out from the sheath, indicating that the Willow Leaf Saber was indeed a Fire Spirit Weapon used for attacks.

The young girl had several red clouds embroidered on the chest of her garments, clearly indicating her affiliation to a Sect, and her status was not low.

The purple-clad young girl wasn't very old, yet she possessed an Innate Fire Spirit Root, and her Cultivation Level had reached Desolate Level Perfection. From this, it was clear that she must have been at least a disciple of a third-grade Sect.

However, the only third-grade Sect in Thousand Lakes Country was the Purple Flame Sect, and moreover, the attire of the disciples of the Purple Flame Sect was not like this, so she is likely a disciple from some Sect who came here for training.

At this moment, the purple-clad young girl was employing her movement technique, flying towards Fire Lake, excitement painted across her delicate face as she muttered to herself, "Such rich Fire Primordial Qi, there must be a treasure over there... definitely treasure... Huh? Why did it suddenly disappear?"

During her flight towards Fire Lake, Fang Bai—who was at the bottom of the lake—had stored the Fire Essence Iron in the Spatial Ring and then moved towards the lake's surface, and Ziyi, who could no longer sense the Fire Primordial Qi, had her expression slightly change and sped towards the lake, wanting to see what exactly was happening.

"Whoosh—"

Fang Bai bolted upwards from the bottom of the lake, breaking through the water, then lightly stepping through the air to land gracefully on the lake shore.

From entering the water to emerging from it, Fire Primordial Qi always enveloped Fang Bai's body, thus not even a bit of his clothes were wet.

Fang Bai planted his feet firmly on the ground and looked towards the woods on the eastern side of the lake, catching a glimpse of that purple-clad young girl's graceful figure turning into a streak of purple light rapidly heading towards him, then stopping by the lake.

"Hey, who are you?"

The purple-clad young girl stood by the lake observing for a while, unable to sense the unusually dense Fire Primordial Qi from before; she felt both weird and dejected. Her beautiful eyes shifted and spotted Fang Bai, who was standing on the northern shore and smiling at her. With her brows slightly furrowed, she swiftly walked over to Fang Bai and after scrutinizing him briefly, she asked.

The purple-clad young girl walked briskly and spoke in a tone devoid of any politeness, clearly indicating she wasn't a gentle and quiet lady.

Fang Bai smiled while watching her. Seeing her eyes—clearly defined in black and white, and extremely pure—he thought that this young girl must certainly be a novice disciple from some Sect, inexperienced in worldly affairs and human relationships, not having undergone much hardship or deceit, and a naive girl who speaks bluntly without much consideration, often offending others without knowing.

Had it been another Martial Artist, facing this purple-clad young girl's impolite inquiry, they might have felt disgusted and ignored her, or even angrily scolded her for disrespecting her elders. However, Fang Bai was always tolerant and simply couldn't bring himself to dislike this bright-eyed, pearly-toothed girl, pointing to his own nose, he laughingly asked, "Little girl, are you talking to me?"

The purple-clad young girl pouted and said, "Aside from me, there's only you here, who else could I be talking to? Hey, I'm asking you..."

Fang Bai chuckled and said, "Little girl, my name isn't 'Hey'."

The purple-clad young girl blinked with her big eyes, looking adorably confused for a moment before bursting into laughter and asking after she finally got it, "Then what is your name?"

Fang Bai replied, "My surname is Bai, and I have a single name: Fang."

"Oh, Bai Fang, right? Okay, I wanted to ask you, did you sense a very strong Fire Primordial Qi just now? I guess it must have been some kind of Fire Attribute Treasure emitting it... Ah, have you already taken that treasure?"

The purple-clad young girl pointed at Fang Bai as she asked.

Chapter 1063: Zhuge Lian

The Ziyi girl, in just a few brief sentences, had unwittingly exposed her innocent and pure nature.

In the Martial Dao World, where human hearts are unfathomable, the likes of such a character, if venturing alone, without formidable strength to protect oneself, could face extreme danger.

Especially since Ziyi girl possessed an Innate Spiritual Root, if some ill-intentioned male Martial Artists stronger than her took notice, the consequences were unimaginable.

Because male Martial Artists of the True Martial Realm were aware that cultivating together with a Female Martial Artist who had an Innate Spiritual Root could yield better results than any Essence Stone Elixirs in the world, which was enough to drive many male Martial Artists mad.

Ziyi girl's Cultivation Level was only at Desolate Level Perfection. Although this strength could contend with leaders of fourth-rank Sects, if she encountered higher-ups from third-rank Sects or Loose Cultivators with Vast Level Cultivation or above, she was no match.

However, judging from the style of Ziyi girl's clothing and the embroidered pattern on her chest, she was definitely a disciple of a major Sect, presumably under the protection of a Sect's powerhouse.

Nevertheless, Bai Fang, whose Divine Sense Diffusion spanned over two thousand meters, detected no Martial Artist's presence nearby, which made him wonder secretly if Ziyi girl had left her Sect and sneaked out alone.

Based on Bai Fang's experiences in his previous life, he judged that since Ziyi girl was new to the world, unaware of the height of the sky and the dangers of the world, it was very likely that she had sneaked out without her fellow disciples knowing. It was unlikely she'd escape unscathed.

Thinking of this, Bai Fang couldn't help asking, "Young lady, which Sect's disciple are you?"

"Hey, hey, hey, Brother Bai Fang, I asked you first," she hadn't answered me yet, why are you turning the questions on me? There's an order to things, don't you know the rules?"

Ziyi girl, seeing Bai Fang's counter-question, got a bit upset, holding her Willow Leaf Saber in one hand and placing the other on her slender, soft waist, she said irritably.

Bai Fang uttered "Oh," then pretending to look baffled, he said, "This Fire Primordial Qi you talked about, I haven't sensed it; this Fire Attributed Treasure, I have not seen it; and that I took some treasures, that's simply framing me!"

Ziyi girl's gaze was fixed on Bai Fang's face, seeing that he didn't seem to be lying, she furrowed her pretty brows and mumbled, "Could I be wrong? Impossible... My senses have always been sharp, I clearly sensed a strong Fire Primordial Qi here just now..."

"Young lady, is it your turn to answer my question now?"

Bai Fang asked with a smile.

"Don't call me young lady!"

Ziyi girl was clearly particular about being called "young lady," she said dissatisfied, "I have a name, it's Zhuge Lian... Lian as in cherish... you can call me Xiao Lian, or Lian'er, that's what my Sect mates call me. I am a Direct Disciple of the Xuannv Sect..."

Zhuge Lian's voice, clear and crisp like oriole, chattered away incessantly like a string of firecrackers, revealing her identity without any reservation, seemingly unconcerned if Bai Fang might have ulterior motives.

"Meeting me, a stranger, yet having no guard up... Truly an innocent young lady devoid of cunning and guile! Such a girl, who could bear to harm her?"

Looking at Zhuge Lian before him, Bai Fang was reminded of Shi Xiaolian, a little girl from Shigong Village in the Secular World.

Zhuge Lian and Shi Xiaolian both had the character "Lian" in their names, similarly innocent as a blank sheet of paper, endearing and too heartbreaking to harm.

"Wait, your name is Zhuge Lian?"

Fang Bai's mind suddenly flashed with brightness, and his hands reached out, grabbing Zhuge Lian's shoulders as he asked anxiously, "Is your name really Zhuge Lian?"

"What are you doing? Men and women shouldn't touch each other, let go of me now! Also, you're hurting me! Ow... Bai Fang, let go!"

Zhuge Lian was caught off guard when Fang Bai grabbed her shoulders, causing her cheeks to flush slightly. Then, the pain from her shoulders made her cry out in a tender voice.

Fang Bai then realized he had gotten a bit too excited, and quickly released the grip on Zhuge Lian's shoulders. He carefully examined Zhuge Lian's facial features, comparing them in his mind with someone else, and indeed, found a few similarities between their features.

Years ago in the secular world, Fang Bai had teamed up with the Daoist Wu De to find the tomb of an innate expert. At that tomb, a testament revealed that the expert's name was Zhuge Dingtian, a loose cultivator from a minor world.

From Zhuge Dingtian, Fang Bai had obtained numerous cultivation resources and a Blood-Drinking Mad Blade. Out of gratitude, he had made a promise in front of Zhuge Dingtian's remains that, if given the opportunity to go to the minor world, he would find Zhuge Dingtian's pregnant wife and inform her of his demise.

Fang Bai still remembered that, according to Zhuge Dingtian's last words, his wife was named Zhou Yuruo, the daughter of Zhou Ruoshui, the Ruoshui Palace Master from an innate sect within the True Martial Realm.

Zhou Yuruo and Zhuge Dingtian were deeply in love and had pledged their lives to each other, but faced fierce opposition from her mother, Zhou Ruoshui. Eventually, the couple had no choice but to elope, and Zhou became pregnant during their escape.

Zhou Ruoshui believed that Zhuge Dingtian had tricked her daughter with sweet words and kidnapped her, and in her fury, she sent disciples from her palace to kill him. For the safety of his wife and unborn child, Zhuge Dingtian had revealed himself to distract the assassins from the Ruoshui Palace and had named his unborn daughter Zhuge Lian before leaving.

Later, by a strange twist of fate, Zhuge Dingtian entered the secular world. Although he evaded the pursuing disciples of the Ruoshui Palace, he eventually deviated in his cultivation and died, never getting

the chance to reunite with his wife and daughter. Thus, he left his last words in his tomb, hoping that a destined person would fulfill his final wish.

Fang Bai was a man who valued his promises; whether Zhuge Dingtian was dead or alive, since he had made a promise, he would definitely try his best to fulfill it.

Upon suddenly hearing the name "Zhuge Lian," Fang Bai instantly thought of Zhuge Dingtian, which had caused his emotional outburst.

Back when Zhuge Dingtian had died, although his body was surrounded by a large amount of spiritual medicine, the Essence Energy released from the spiritual medicine had preserved his corpse, making his facial features look lifelike, a vision Fang Bai remembered vividly.

Now, looking at Zhuge Lian again, Fang Bai found that between the features of her and Zhuge Dingtian, there indeed was about a fifty to sixty percent resemblance, making it quite possible that she was indeed Zhuge Dingtian's daughter.

"Zhuge Lian, what are your mother's and father's names?"

To ensure he wasn't mistaken, Fang Bai asked further.

"Why are you asking this? Why should I tell you?"

Zhuce Lian, seeing Fang Bai's anxious demeanor, felt weird and a bit cautious.

Fang Bai took a deep breath, his gaze fixed on Zhuge Lian, and said seriously, "Your mother is called Zhou Yuruo, and your father is Zhuge Dingtian, right?"

Zhuce Lian's eyes suddenly widened, her tender lips half-open, her face showing utter disbelief.

Chapter 1064: Death News

Zhuce Lian had never seen her father since she was born; she only knew his name, Zhuge Dingtian, from her mother when she was four years old, a man who stood tall and proud.

From that moment on, Zhuge Lian had firmly remembered her father's name and painted a perfect image of him in her mind.

Later, Zhuge Lian's mother, Zhou Yuruo, went out to look for her husband, Zhuge Dingtian, but disappeared without a trace and never returned to Zhuge Lian's side.

When Zhou Yuruo was pregnant, she and her husband Zhuge Dingtian avoided the pursuers from Ruoshui Palace, her husband drawing the assassins away while Zhou Yuruo ended up at Xuannv Sect by chance, where she was taken in, and where Zhuge Lian was born.

Before Zhou Yuruo left to find her husband, she entrusted her daughter, Zhuge Lian, to the care of Xuannv Sect. After her departure, Zhuge Lian naturally became a disciple of Xuannv Sect.

Zhuce Lian was exceptionally intelligent and possessed an Innate Fire Spirit Root; at a very young age, she showed extraordinary talent. At sixteen, she had already reached the Desolate Level Perfection, becoming the youngest personal transmission disciple in the history of Xuannv Sect, considered the most outstanding genius in nearly a thousand years.

During the years of devoted cultivation at Xuannv Sect, as she grew older, Zhuge Lian's longing for her mother not only did not fade but grew stronger, and she was also full of longing for the father she had never met.

Although many said that Zhuge Lian's parents might have both perished, Zhuge Lian stubbornly believed they were still alive, just trapped somewhere, temporarily unable to meet with her.

Although Purple Flame Sect and Xuannv Sect were thousands of miles apart, they had always had a connection. It was said that the founding ancestors of both sects were a pair of brother and sister disciples who had good relations. In subsequent generations, disciples from the two sects intermarried and formed a military alliance agreeing to share fortunes and misfortunes alike.

At every sect convention held by Thousand Lakes Country, Purple Flame Sect, as the host, would invite high ranks and some disciples from Xuannv Sect as observation guests, and this time was no exception.

This time, the high-ranking member sent by Xuannv Sect was an elder named Han Xingyu, who possessed mid-Vast Level cultivation, along with nine disciples including Zhuge Lian.

This was the first time Zhuge Lian had left Xuannv Sect. She heard that after the sect convention at Purple Flame Sect, the sect's disciples would follow Elder Han to other places for experience to broaden their horizons and temper their minds. She was secretly delighted, thinking she could take the opportunity to inquire about her parents during her travels.

The disciples of Xuannv Sect arrived at Purple Flame Sect two days before those from Bitao Martial Academy, staying in the accommodations provided by Purple Flame Sect. Bored in the courtyard, Zhuge Lian sneaked out alone without telling her fellow disciples, wandered around the city for a while, and then headed outside the city.

Zhuge Lian also had an extremely keen perception; near Lake Hua outside the city, she sensed dense Fire Primordial Qi and thought there might be treasures, so she excitedly rushed to the shore of Fire Lake, where she encountered Fang Bai.

Zhuge Lian had always kept her parents' names in mind, so when Fang Bai asked, "Is your mother Zhou Yuruo, and your father Zhuge Dingtian?" she was struck as if by lightning, her delicate body trembling uncontrollably.

In Zhuge Lian's view, Fang Bai mentioning her parents' names implied that he had crossed paths with them and might know their whereabouts. How could this not excite Zhuge Lian immensely?

"You... who exactly are you? How do you know my parents? Where are they?"

Zhuge Lian's eyes, clear as water and distinctly black and white, stared unblinkingly at Fang Bai, her voice trembling as she spoke.

Zhuge Lian bore a vague resemblance to Zhuge Dingtian. The strong reaction she had at the mention of the names "Zhuge Dingtian" and "Zhou Yuruo" led Fang Bai to conclusively determine that she was indeed the daughter of Zhuge Dingtian.

Originally, Fang Bai had promised in front of the remains of Zhuge Dingtian that if he had the chance to go to the Minor World, he would find Zhuge Dingtian's wife and child, inform them of his death, and offer them protection as best as he could. Now, having met the daughter of Zhuge Dingtian, he had fulfilled half of his promise, and his mood greatly improved.

"This is a long story... Little Lian, right? Let's sit over there and talk slowly!"

Fang Bai decided to tell Zhuge Lian about Zhuge Dingtian's matters, so he pointed to a nearby patch of grass and then started walking towards it.

Zhuce Lian was still unsure whether Fang Bai was a friend or foe of her parents and, sensing that she couldn't detect any Martial Artist Aura from Fang Bai and knew that he was much stronger than herself, she followed behind him with clenched fists, a look of caution on her face.

The two sat down on the smooth grass, deliberately keeping some distance between them. Zhuge Lian asked, "Hey... Bai Fang... Senior Bai, can you now answer the question I just asked?"

In front of Zhuge Lian, a naive and simple girl devoid of any scheming, Fang Bai had no intention of concealing his identity. He wiped his hand over his face, quickly revealing his true appearance.

"This is my real face. I had changed my appearance to make it easier to handle certain matters."

Facing Zhuge Lian's surprised and puzzled gaze, Fang Bai smiled faintly and then solemnly said, "I come from the Secular World, and I am currently a disciple of the Bitao Martial Academy. My name is Fang Bai. If you encounter any difficulties in the future, you can come to the Bitao Martial Academy to find me, and I will do my best to help you. Regarding your parents... I actually didn't know them personally, but I saw your father's last words in a tomb in the Secular World..."

When Fang Bai mentioned the words "last words," he distinctly felt Zhuge Lian's body tremble violently. He turned to look at her pale face, feeling deeply sympathetic, knowing that she was struggling to cope with her father's death, and he sighed softly before continuing.

"My father is dead... That's impossible... I remember my mother telling me that my father was a remarkable and very powerful man, someone who could hold up the heavens. How could he possibly die? How is it possible?"

As Fang Bai finished recounting the events, Zhuge Lian's gaze became vacant and despairing; she shook her head weakly, muttering to herself.

"Little Lian, your father fell in the Secular World. This is absolutely true. I have here a Blood-Drinking Mad Blade, one of your father's relics. Once we find your mother, she should recognize this blade that your father once used. Then you will know whether what I'm telling you is true or false."

Fang Bai spoke earnestly to Zhuge Lian.

Zhuce Lian partly believed what Fang Bai said, but she was unwilling to accept the truth of her father's death. Her eyes reddened, she bent her legs, tightly hugged her knees, buried her head in her arms, and suddenly burst into loud sobs.

Chapter 1065: You Must Help Me!

All this time, no matter what anyone said, Zhuge Lian refused to believe that her father had passed away.

But now, Fang Bai's words struck her like a heavy hammer, shattering the belief Zhuge Lian had always held dear and delivering a crushing blow that made her collapse and weep uncontrollably.

The identities of Zhuge Lian's parents were mysterious; aside from Zhuge Lian and the Xuannv Sect Master, no one knew their names. Yet Fang Bai could not only name them, but also describe Zhuge Dingtian's appearance, which closely matched the description Zhuge Lian had heard from her mother during her childhood, so Zhuge Lian deeply trusted what Fang Bai said.

Upon learning of her father's death, Zhuge Lian was heartbroken, burying her head and sobbing.

Watching Zhuge Lian's shoulders heave continuously and listening to her heartbreaking cries, Fang Bai did not step forward to console her, letting her vent her grief.

Only when Zhuge Lian's crying had subsided a bit did Fang Bai let out a soft sigh and slowly said, "Do you know what your father's greatest wish was?"

"What?"

Zhuce Lian stopped crying instantly, her eyes teary as she looked at Fang Bai and asked in a slightly hoarse voice.

Fang Bai seriously said, "He hoped that his wife and child would not sorrow over his death but would live strong, happy, and fortunate lives. Otherwise, he could not rest in peace even in death. So..."

"I understand!"

Zhuce Lian suddenly stood up, vigorously wiped the tears from her face, sniffled, and said, "From now on, I won't cry anymore! Once I find my mother, I will persuade her not to be sad too. We both will live well, so even though father has left us, he can rest in peace."

"That's good to hear."

Fang Bai also stood up, smiling at Zhuce Lian and said, "I hope you find your mother soon, and you both can reunite."

He paused for a moment, then added, "If there's anything you need help with, just tell me directly; no need to be polite."

Zhuce Lian turned to the side and scrutinized Fang Bai carefully. She felt that this young Fang Bai, with his sword-like eyebrows, starry eyes, and rosy lips, looked much more pleasing than the rough middle-aged man she had first met.

"Fang Bai, are you a Vast Level Martial Artist? I remember that Bitao Martial Academy is just a fourth-rate small sect. How could they have an incredible disciple like you?"

Zhuge Lian asked, batting her eyes. From the first moment she saw Fang Bai, she was unable to sense any Martial Artist Aura from him and knew that this man, who was only a few years older than herself, was far stronger than her, at least a Vast Level Martial Artist.

But, with a sect like Bitao Martial Academy that lacked both cultivation resources and powerful Martial Arts Techniques, how could it be possible to train a Vast Level Martial Artist?

Therefore, despite everything, Zhuge Lian still harbored some doubts about whether Fang Bai was really a disciple of the Bitao Martial Academy.

Fang Bai said with a smile, "As I mentioned earlier, I come from the Secular World and don't know much about this world, which is why I joined the Bitao Martial Academy. Firstly, to look out for two friends there, and secondly, to learn more about this world more quickly and comprehensively. At Bitao Martial Academy, I constantly suppressed my power; otherwise, I definitely couldn't have stayed..."

Fang Bai then relayed how he had come to attend the Sect Conference with the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy and concluded, "After altering my appearance, I worked in the Martial Artists Trading Market in Purple Flame City, refining pills and artifacts for others, purely to earn some cultivation resources. I didn't want anyone to discover my true identity. So, Xiao Lian, I hope you can keep this secret for me. Can you do that?"

"Yes!"

Zhuge Lian nodded vigorously, her face serious as she said, "Fang Bai, the fact that you've confided your secret to me shows how much you trust me. Rest assured, I will keep it completely confidential, and I won't tell anyone... including my fellow sect members!"

Then, with a tone full of admiration, she added, "So it turns out you really are a Vast Level Expert! You're only a few years older than me; how did you become so powerful? And here you are, a Vast Level Expert resigning yourself to being a disciple in a fourth-tier Sect; you really keep a low profile! What kind of expressions would your sect members have if they knew your true strength?"

Fang Bai smiled faintly and replied, "They might be quite surprised!"

However, he thought to himself that when the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy eventually discovered his great strength, they would surely be utterly dumbfounded and astounded, and even the higher-ups of the Academy, including Sect Master Ren Jingbo, would seem like the younger generation before him.

Imagining the solemn and respectful expressions of the Bitao Martial Academy's high-ranking officials as they bowed to him filled Fang Bai with a sense of melancholy.

Because Fang Bai knew that the day his identity was revealed would be the day he would leave Bitao Martial Academy.

After all, one main reason Fang Bai had initially joined Bitao Martial Academy was to support Liu Qingqing and Liu Liehu. Even if his real strength wasn't exposed, he planned to leave once the siblings' abilities improved to the point where they could protect themselves. He would then travel the True Martial Realm, seeking challenges and fortune and searching for his lost relatives and friends.

Fang Bai, who in a past life had been a pinnacle Immortal Emperor in the Immortal Realm, was now reincarnated with a firm resolve to return to the Immortal Realm and clear his previous disgrace. No one could stop him, nor would he allow himself to be confined by a mere fourth-tier sect in one of the three thousand Minor Worlds.

Even if it were solely to enhance his personal strength, Fang Bai couldn't possibly stay at Bitao Martial Academy for long; he was bound to leave sooner or later.

Moreover, once Fang Bai revealed his true strength, his status in Bitao Martial Academy would inevitably be extraordinary, leaving figures like Ren Jingbo and other high-ranking martial artists unsure how to behave around him.

Thus, leaving Bitao Martial Academy was a very wise and correct decision.

"Fang Bai... oh right, you're a few years older than me; I should call you Brother Fang!"

Zhuge Lian suddenly remembered something, grabbed Fang Bai's sleeve, and said loudly, "Brother Fang, there's a favor I must ask of you! If you don't help me, I'll be really miserable!"

After finishing her speech, she realized that grabbing Fang Bai's sleeve was quite inappropriate and quickly let go.

Fang Bai, however, remained calm and smiled at Zhuge Lian, saying, "You're really not shy about asking for help so soon... Tell me, what do you want me to do? I'm no specialist in grandiose deeds, but I'm quite skilled in things like petty theft, murder and arson!"

Zhuge Lian was amused by Fang Bai's words and chuckled, but then her expression turned worried as she sighed, "Our Xuannv Sect and the Purple Flame Sect have a tradition of intermarriage. Over thousands of years, countless female disciples from our sect have married male disciples from theirs, which has brought our sects closer..."

"I heard from the Sect Master that there's a Male Direct Disciple in Purple Flame City who really likes me; he specifically asked to marry me... Pah, he hasn't even met me and he says he likes me? That's clearly nonsense! But now I've come to visit the Purple Flame Sect with other disciples of Xuannv Sect, and out of politeness and respect, I still have to meet this Direct Disciple..."

Chapter 1066: Choose One of the Two

Zhuge Lian's voice was crisp, like pearls falling onto a jade plate, pleasant and melodious.

From Zhuge Lian's words, Fang Bai sensed her immense dissatisfaction with her sect's arrangement for her to have a "blind date" with a disciple from the Purple Flame Sect. Yet the sect's orders were hard to disobey, and she felt powerless to resist; she could only accept her fate.

The thought of meeting that direct male disciple from Purple Flame City soon and even marrying him one day stir up great irritation in Zhuge Lian's heart, and her feelings extended to a dislike for all the disciples of the Purple Flame Sect.

Sometimes Zhuge Lian thought about running away, but since she had grown up in the Xuannv Sect, she had long considered it her home and couldn't bear to leave.

Additionally, she worried that if her mother suddenly returned to the Xuannv Sect one day, she would not be able to find her.

For Zhuge Lian, her mother was her greatest weakness. Her deep longing for her mother and the hope of her return held back Zhuge Lian from the thought of running away. She stayed obediently in the Xuannv Sect, accepting everything her sect arranged for her.

This time the Xuannv Sect's visit to the Purple Flame Sect was meant for the higher-ups of both major sects to initiate another marriage alliance to further strengthen their bond.

As for the individuals concerned in this marriage, the woman was Zhuge Lian from the Xuannv Sect and the man was Zu Yu from the Purple Flame Sect.

At twenty-seven years old, Zu Yu was the adopted son taken in by Sect Master Zu Tiangang of the Purple Flame Sect and one of the Sect's direct disciples. He possessed a water attribute Innate Spiritual Root. His strength was comparable to that of Zhuge Lian, and he was seen as the successor to the next Sect Master of the Purple Flame Sect.

Zhuge Lian learned from several of her sect's high-ranking members that Zu Yu had met her once when he accompanied an Elder of the Purple Flame Sect on a visit to the Xuannv Sect last year. At that time, he had been attracted to Zhuge Lian and had spoken of it to Sect Master Zu Tiangang upon his return. Subsequently, Zu Tiangang made a marriage proposal to the Xuannv Sect.

Both Zhuge Lian and Zu Yu were very young, handsome and beautiful, and were the martial arts geniuses of their respective sects. The upper echelons felt that their union would be a perfect match, a joining of two fine families, better than they could have hoped for.

Although the disciples of both the Purple Flame Sect and the Xuannv Sect were quite optimistic about the marriage alliance, Zhuge Lian, as one of the parties involved, had no interest at all. Although she said nothing outwardly, inside she felt exceptionally averse and filled with reluctance.

So when Fang Bai asked Zhuge Lian if there was anything he could help with, Zhuge Lian, troubled by the marriage arrangement, wanted Fang Bai to think of a way to sabotage it.

"This matter is easy to deal with. Since you don't want to marry Zu Yu, I will take care of him for you by killing him," Fang Bai said, rubbing his fists and palms together with a fierce killing intent.

Zhuge Lian was taken aback and frowned, "Killing Zu Yu... Is that really a good idea? After all, I have no grudge against Zu Yu, and our Xuannv Sect has always had a good relationship with the Purple Flame Sect..."

Fang Bai pondered then said, "If killing him won't do... how about I ruin his appearance for you? With his looks destroyed and turned into a monster, he won't be a match for you. Then you can use this as an excuse to back out of the marriage."

"Is that so..."

Zhuge Lian's eyes lit up, clapping her hands, "That does sound like a good plan... But isn't it a bit too cruel to ruin someone's appearance just for this?"

Zhuge Lian had never done such a thing before and felt a bit guilty.

Fang Bai rolled his eyes and said, "Then what do you suggest we do?"

Zhuge Lian tilted her head and thought for a long while, then shook it, "I don't know... Brother Fang, do you have any other ideas?"

"No!" Fang Bai said irritably, "I have two options: Kill him or disfigure him, I must choose one or the other!"

"Then let's choose the latter! Disfiguring his face is better than killing him. At least it leaves him alive..." Zhuge Lian sighed softly.

"Alright, that's settled then! I'll go back and prepare!" Fang Bai said as he turned and strode in the direction of Purple Flame City.

Zhuge Lian quickly followed him for a few steps, walking beside Fang Bai, tilting her head to ask, "When can this be done?"

Fang Bai glanced at her with a smile and asked, "You're in such a hurry to have me disfigure Zu Yu's face? It seems you really detest him!"

Zhuge Lian pouted and said, "My life is not something I want others to control! As for that Zu Yu, whether it's their Purple Flame Sect or our Xuannv Sect, almost everyone is singing his praises... Hmph, the more they talk about how great Zu Yu is, the more I detest him!"

Fang Bai knew that youths at Zhuge Lian's age often have some rebelliousness, where if someone pushes them to do something they dislike, it only ignites their spirit of resistance.

And that was probably Zhuge Lian's state of mind right now.

Zu Yu might not be a bad person, but when Fang Bai was in the Secular World, he had made a promise in front of Zhuge Dingtian's remains to look after Zhuge Dingtian's wife and children in the True Martial Realm. Now that Zhuge Lian was asking him to sabotage the marriage between Xuannv Sect and Purple Flame Sect, how could Fang Bai refuse?

Moreover, Fang Bai had previously been ambushed in the Soul Severing Valley of the Blizzard Mountain Range. Although the assailants were the Elder of the Fiery Sect, the Elder of the Cloud Feather Sect, and a traitor from the Bitao Martial Academy, Fang Bai was well aware that the Purple Flame Sect was definitely involved.

As the only third-grade major sect of Thousand Lakes Country, in order to maintain its dominant position and protect its interests, the Purple Flame Sect often suppressed other fourth-grade sects by forcing them to pay a hefty sum of cultivation resources as "protection fees," which left those sects even more deficient in cultivation resources and unable to produce truly talented disciples who could threaten the status of the Purple Flame Sect.

Fang Bai harbored no good feelings towards the Purple Flame Sect. Driven by his animosity, he naturally had no affection for the disciples of the Purple Flame Sect. He thought to himself, "Zu Yu, oh Zu Yu, I'm the one who will disfigure you, don't blame me. If you must blame anyone, blame your own bad luck!"

After walking side by side for a while, Fang Bai suddenly turned to ask, "Xiao Lian, when are you scheduled to meet that Zu Yu?"

Zhuge Lian replied, "It should be before the Sect Conference of Thousand Lakes Country is convened."

Fang Bai nodded and said, "That's in two days then. Well, there's still plenty of time... Don't worry, Xiao Lian, when you see Zu Yu again, I think he'll have turned into an ugly freak."

A hint of a smile tugged at the corners of Zhuge Lian's mouth as she nodded and said, "I hope so."

Then something suddenly occurred to her, and she asked Fang Bai, "By the way, have you ever seen Zu Yu?"

Fang Bai shook his head and said, "This is my first visit to Purple Flame City; I've never met any disciples from the Purple Flame Sect!"

Zhuge Lian anxiously said, "If you don't know Zu Yu, how can you disfigure him? Wait, tomorrow the Purple Flame Sect will be holding a welcome banquet for the various sects attending the Sect Conference. At the banquet, I'll point out Zu Yu to you. Once you've recognized his face, you'll be able to make your move!"

Chapter 1067: Let Me Be a Shield?

The moonlight shimmered like water, and a gentle breeze wafted through the air.

At night, Purple Flame City bustled with activity, the streets swarmed with people, and the illuminating glow of lanterns outshone the daylight, adding an extra touch of vibrancy and excitement.

A couple, seemingly oblivious to those around them, weaved through the crowded, bustling broad streets, whispering to each other every now and then.

They maintained about a foot of distance between them, looking not like lovers but rather like good friends who got along quite well.

These two figures were none other than Fang Bai and Zhuge Lian, who had returned from the shore of Fire Lake at the city's edge.

Fang Bai had traded his white garment for the signature blue shirt of a Bitao Martial Academy disciple, while Zhuge Lian still donned her purple attire.

One stood tall and imposing, a picture of striking handsomeness; the other exquisite and lovely, her beauty beyond compare.

Such a handsome man and beautiful woman strolling through the streets of Purple Flame City was not an uncommon sight, yet the extraordinary aura of an Innate Spiritual Root Martial Artist that both Fang Bai and Zhuge Lian exuded was something many martial artists lacked. Hence, they drew the eyes of many passersby on their way.

Fang Bai's Bitao Martial Academy and Zhuge Lian's Xuannv Sect were both accommodated by arrangements from the Purple Flame Sect, and their lodgings were not far apart, which is why they chose to walk together on the way back.

As they walked, they spoke in hushed tones, discussing how to sabotage the impending marriage alliance between the Purple Flame Sect and Xuannv Sect.

After some discussion, they decided to identify Zu Yu at tomorrow's welcoming banquet first, and then take action discreetly.

In Zhuge Lian's view, Zu Yu, like herself, had reached the realm of Desolate Level Perfection. Fang Bai, however, was a mighty beginner at the Vast Level. The gap in their cultivation levels was substantial, and it would be easy for Fang Bai to deal with Zu Yu once he was alone and without the protection of Purple Flame Sect's experts.

As they conversed, they naturally drew closer to prevent others from overhearing them, which made them appear to be in a very close relationship to the onlookers.

"Brother Master, quickly look, it's Zhuge Lian from the Xuannv Sect!"

Within the nearby crowd, a burly martial artist in his forties pointed toward Zhuge Lian and spoke to a young male martial artist in his mid-twenties who was by his side.

"Oh?"

Upon hearing the name "Zhuge Lian," the young martial artist's spirits lifted instantly. He followed the direction pointed out by the burly man and indeed saw a transcendent, fairy-like beauty. It was the genius female disciple of Xuannv Sect he had seen once before at the sect and could not forget ever since.

"It's really her!"

The young martial artist's eyes lit up, his face filled with surprise and excitement as he muttered, "Ever since our last parting at Xuannv Sect last year, she has been in my thoughts day and night, unforgettable. And now, I finally see her again..."

He began to move, making his way through the people standing in front of him and striding towards Zhuge Lian.

The two burly male martial artists walking with him exchanged a glance and then quickly followed suit.

Fang Bai sensed three Desolate Level Perfection martial artist auras rapidly approaching, his brows knitting together as he looked over at the three young men striding towards them. Realizing their target was Zhuge Lian, he whispered to her, "Those three Desolate Level Perfection martial artists seem to recognize you and are heading this way. Given their attire and the strength they possess, they must be direct disciples of the Purple Flame Sect... Hmm, the guy in the lead, the way he looks at you is filled with joy and infatuation. Could he be the Zu Yu you mentioned?"

Upon hearing him, Zhuge Lian looked up and saw the face of the young male martial artist she found so repulsive, her brow furrowing immediately. She snorted and said, "You guessed right, that guy is Zu Yu."

Fang Bai sized up Zu Yu a few times and said with a smile, "That fellow seems quite charming and fair-skinned, looks pretty good! Why do you dislike him?"

"I heard from a senior in my sect that Zu Yu is all glitter and no gold; he looks upright and righteous, but his character is problematic. It is said that when he went out for experiences in the past, he had more

than just one affair with female martial artists and abandoned them afterward. When a few of those female martial artists went to the Purple Flame Sect to find him, he refused to acknowledge them. At best, he would coldly send them away, and at worst, he would secretly have them killed. So when I see that hypocritical face of his, I feel an urge to slap him! Ah... he's coming over! Brother Fang, can you do me a favor..."

As Zu Yu and the two male martial artists drew closer, Zhuge Lian hastily tugged on Fang Bai's sleeve, imploring him in a low voice, "I can't afford to have a fallout with him right now, but I also can't be bothered to speak to him. Can you help me get rid of him?"

"You want me to be your shield? Alright... but you'll have to play along with me!"

Fang Bai smiled wryly and nodded, thinking that it was not his first or second time acting as a shield; he had done it plenty of times in the secular world and was quite experienced at it.

The sight of the two whispering and conversing in low voices was not missed by Zu Yu, who approached. His expression darkened, and a flicker of murderous intent vanished from his eyes as quickly as it had appeared.

"Who is that man with Zhuge Lian?"

Zu Yu halted his steps, motioned with his mouth towards Fang Bai, and asked thoughtfully.

The woman he fancied was walking with another man under the cover of night, and this man was even more outstanding than him. This was something he could not accept, and his hatred for Fang Bai grew more intense.

"Looking at his attire, he seems to be a core disciple of the Bitao Martial Academy! Hmph, daring to vie with Brother Zu for a woman, he must be sick of living! Brother Zu, let me teach him a lesson!"

The burly male martial artist standing on Zu Yu's left said angrily.

The other burly martial artist too clenched and unclenched his fists, eager to try.

The Purple Flame Sect was the true ruler of the Thousand Lakes Country, and Purple Flame City was its headquarters. Thus, in Purple Flame City, the disciples of the Purple Flame Sect, who were like local tyrants, acted arrogantly and with impunity, and no one dared to provoke them.

The Bitao Martial Academy was merely a fourth-rank sect, and its core disciples had cultivation levels no higher than high-rank Heaven Level. However, Zu Yu and his companions were direct disciples of the Purple Flame Sect, possessing Desolate Level Perfection real, significantly stronger than Fang Bai by an entire major realm and more. In their eyes, Fang Bai was no more than a tiny ant, easily crushed out of existence with a flick of their wrists.

"Wait!"

Zu Yu hushed his two junior brothers in a low voice, then took a deep breath and said seriously, "The sect meeting is about to commence, and the Sect Master specifically instructed us to behave and not stir up trouble. A mere core disciple of a fourth-rank sect is not worth our effort. Otherwise, if word gets out, people might view us as using our power to bully the weak, wrongly tarnishing the reputation of our Purple Flame Sect."

After a pause, his gaze swiftly swept over Fang Bai, his expression tinged with a touch of scorn, and he continued, "Moreover, the Bitao Martial Academy is also a member of the sect meeting. They are guests who have traveled from afar, and as hosts, we should treat them with courtesy. You all just wait here; I will go and speak with Zhuge Lian."

Zu Yu's somber expression was quickly replaced by a smile, his gaze fixated on Zhuge Lian as he strode towards her, while Fang Bai at her side was ignored as if he were but air.

Chapter 1068: Are We That Familiar?

"Junior Sister Zhuge, since the last time we parted at the Xuannv Sect, it has been more than a year. To be able to see you here today is truly a joyous occasion!"

Zu Yu walked up to Zhuge Lian and stood still in front of her, gazing at her beautiful, flower-like face. He smiled and cupped his fists, saying.

"Who are you? Do I know you?"

Zhuge Lian looked at Zu Yu, feigning complete confusion as she asked.

Fang Bai saw the smile on Zu Yu's face freeze, becoming somewhat awkward, and couldn't help but chuckle secretly. He hadn't expected this naive young girl to be quite the actress, with Zu Yu unable to detect any flaw in her demeanor.

"Junior Sister Zhuge, I'm Zu Yu... Zu Yu from the Purple Flame Sect!"

Zu Yu saw Zhuge Lian's bewildered look and obviously didn't have any impression of him. He felt as if a bucket of cold water had been poured over his head, his enthusiasm instantly dissipated, and he hurriedly continued, "A year ago, I accompanied Elder Zhu Hongyan on a visit to your Xuannv Sect. I even greeted you at that time! Junior Sister Zhuge, you really don't remember me? Take a look at me, think carefully..."

"Oh, let me think..."

Zhuge Lian acted as if it were her first time seeing Zu Yu, examined him for a moment, then tilted her head and pondered for a short while before her expression turned into a look of sudden realization, she said, "Oh, I remember now... You're the direct disciple from the Purple Flame Sect with a cultivation level similar to mine. When Elder Zhu was introducing you, our Sect Master Yang also praised you a few times, right?"

"Yes! Yes!"

Zu Yu saw Zhuge Lian finally remember these events and a delighted smile returned to his face as he said, "Both of us are endowed with Innate Spiritual Roots, and both are direct disciples of our respective sects. We're quite fated... By the way, Junior Sister Zhuge, I heard that your Xuannv Sect arrived in Purple Flame City two days ago and have been staying at the guest residence provided by our sect. Are you satisfied with the accommodation? If there's anything you need, just tell me, and I will do my best to assist."

As he spoke, his gaze never left Zhuge Lian's pretty face. He saw that her eyes were large, her eyelashes long, her figure graceful and voluptuous, her skin white as snow and pure as frost. She was exactly his type of beauty.

Moreover, Zu Yu knew that with the Xuannv Sect visiting the Purple Flame Sect, the elders from both sides would discuss an alliance through marriage again. If successful, Zhuge Lian would soon become his companion in the Martial Dao.

Zhuge Lian had an Innate Fire Spirit Root, and Zu Yu possessed an Innate Water Spirit Root. If the two were to become martial companions, their combined cultivation during joint practice, with water and fire blending and Yin and Yang complementing each other, would be immensely beneficial for both of their cultivations.

In other words, Zhuge Lian's body was like a never-depleting treasure trove of cultivation resources. The advantages of obtaining her were self-evident.

Thinking of this, Zu Yu felt an irrepressible eagerness and added, "If you have some free time in the coming days, I will visit your residence, and we can discuss and exchange ideas on Martial Dao..."

"Stop!"

Zhuge Lian cut Zu Yu off mid-sentence with a wave of her hand.

"It's better if you don't visit. You see, I'm usually busy with cultivation and I like quietude, so I don't have time to engage in any discussions or exchanges with you... Well, I must be going now!"

Zhuge Lian already had a poor impression of Zu Yu, and from his words just now, she detected his ulterior motives. His concept of discussing and exchanging ideas was clearly an excuse to get closer to her.

With these thoughts in mind, Zhuge Lian felt an even stronger sense of revulsion toward Zu Yu, and she couldn't bother to engage in further conversation with him. She just wanted to leave this street as soon as possible and return to her residence.

"Brother Fang, let's go!"

Zhuge Lian suddenly took Fang Bai's hand, bypassing Zu Yu who was blocking their path, and continued forward.

Seeing Zhuge Lian leave without a second thought, completely disregarding his presence, Zu Yu felt an inner surge of annoyance.

If it had been any other sect maiden, Zu Yu might have compelled her to submit by force after taking a liking to her. However, when it came to Zhuge Lian, Zu Yu dared not offend her.

The Xuannv Sect was on par with the Purple Flame Sect, both being third-tier sects with considerable overall strength, and the two sects had always maintained a good relationship. If Zu Yu dared to lay a finger on Zhuge Lian, it would certainly displease the Xuannv Sect and earn him punishment from the higher echelons of the Purple Flame Sect.

"This brother seems unfamiliar. May I inquire as to your esteemed name and which sect you hail from?"

Zu Yu managed to suppress the rage in his heart and blocked their way again, but this time he turned his attention to Fang Bai.

Zu Yu knew Fang Bai was from the Bitao Martial Academy. He couldn't afford to provoke the Xuannv Sect, but reprimanding a disciple from a fourth-tier sect like the Bitao Martial Academy was nothing to him.

On this bustling street crowded with pedestrians, Zhuge Lian daring to hold hands with Fang Bai in public made it clear that their relationship was extraordinary. Zu Yu felt a jealousy burning inside him as if his own woman had been taken from him.

Fang Bai glanced at Zu Yu and said indifferently, "Are we familiar? Why should I have to tell you my name or sect?"

"You..."

Zu Yu had been bottling up his anger, and encountering yet another snub from Fang Bai was infuriating. If Zhuge Lian hadn't been standing by, eyeing him with wide eyes, he would have erupted like a volcano, making Fang Bai regret provoking him.

"I have something to discuss with Junior Sister Zhuge, move aside!"

Zu Yu glanced at Fang Bai and Zhuge Lian's clasped hands. His face grew even darker and his gaze brimmed with intense killing Qi. The pressure of a Desolate Level Perfection Martial Artist quietly enshrouded Fang Bai.

Zu Yu was a direct disciple of the third-tier Purple Flame Sect, possessing the strength of Desolate Level Perfection. In contrast, Fang Bai was merely a core disciple of a fourth-tier sect. The gap between their strengths was immense, making them incomparable.

Confidently, Zu Yu believed that just the release of his Martial Artist's pressure would be enough to crush Fang Bai, forcing him to flee. Then he could take Fang Bai's place, walking hand in hand with Zhuge Lian and strolling through the lively street.

As Zu Yu released his invisible pressure, he cast a quick glance at Zhuge Lian, curious to see her reaction.

To Zu Yu's surprise, there was no trace of nervousness on Zhuge Lian's face. Instead, she appeared completely at ease, as confident as if she knew Fang Bai would be unaffected.

Even more so, Zhuge Lian occasionally looked at him with a gaze that Zu Yu could only interpret as contemptuous and disdainful, clearly directed at him.

Enveloped in this invisible Essence Energy pressure, Fang Bai seemed to be merely standing in a breeze, his clothes rustling, hair fluttering, showing no sign of disturbance. It was as if the Martial Dao pressure that could overwhelm any Desolate Level Martial Artist was ineffective against him.

"This young man is hiding his true capabilities! If he can so easily withstand my pressure, his strength is not weaker than mine. At this year's Sect Conference's Martial Dao competition, he could very well emerge as a dark horse!"

Zu Yu watched Fang Bai, who remained composed, with a secret sense of shock.

Chapter 1069: Maintenance

"Zu Yu, what are you doing?"

Standing beside Fang Bai, Zhuge Lian sensed the pressure emanating from Zu Yu. Her beautiful eyes widened as she cried out sharply.

At the same time, she stepped forward, positioning herself in front of Fang Bai to face Zu Yu alone, releasing her own Martial Artist Aura to counter Zu Yu's.

The two were equally matched, both being Desolate Level Perfection Martial Artists with Innate Spiritual Roots, and the Martial Pressure they released collided like two invisible giant waves in the space before them.

Martial Pressure is the manifestation of a Martial Artist's mental and combat will, an invisible and intangible force. Unlike the dazzling brilliance produced when True Yuan collides, causing earth-shaking disturbances, it was like the surging undercurrents deep in the ocean—silent yet containing tremendous energy.

At that moment, if one looked closely, they would notice the space in front of Zu Yu and Zhuge Lian slightly distorting and deforming due to the clash of their pressures.

A few leaves, lifted by the night wind from the ground, fell into the distorted space and were instantly crushed by the pressure.

Because of Zhuge Lian's intervention, the pressure Zu Yu applied to Fang Bai was completely neutralized.

"Junior Sister Zhuge, you... you're actually protecting him?"

Zu Yu's Purple Flame Sect and Zhuge Lian's Xuannv Sect had always been close allies. Zu Yu couldn't believe that Zhuge Lian, for the sake of a mere fourth-grade Sect disciple, would disregard the friendly relations maintained between their Sects for thousands of years and confront him in front of everyone.

Moreover, judging by Zhuge Lian's stance, if he continued to act against that Bitao Martial Academy disciple, she might even fight him to protect the man.

A woman protecting a man in such a way spoke volumes.

"To fight with me over an external Sect disciple, you are breaking the friendly relationship between our two Sects! If your Sect finds out about this, you will definitely be punished. Junior Sister Zhuge, think carefully before you act!"

The more Zhuge Lian defended Fang Bai, the more jealous and infuriated Zu Yu became.

"Brother Fang is my friend, and yet you attempt to harm him, which is clearly a contempt and provocation towards me. Humph! You are the one destroying the friendly relationship between our Sects!"

Zhuge Lian retorted righteously.

Zhuge Lian was a simple-minded young girl. Having trusted Fang Bai, she considered him a close friend, and with some disgust for Zu Yu, she naturally wouldn't just stand by and watch Zu Yu harm Fang Bai.

Even though Zhuge Lian knew that Zu Yu was no match for Fang Bai, she still stood in front of Fang Bai. In her view, standing up for Fang Bai was the natural thing to do.

Although Zu Yu hated Fang Bai, he knew that with Zhuge Lian there, he couldn't do anything to Fang Bai today. Looking around and seeing more and more onlookers gathering, he reluctantly began to consider retreating.

As a direct disciple of a prestigious third-rank sect, being seen openly competing with a core disciple from a fourth-rank sect for affection would surely become a laughingstock if word got out. This would reflect poorly not only on Zu Yu himself but also on the Purple Flame Sect.

"Kid, I'd advise you to stay away from Junior Sister Zhuge from now on, or I'll make sure you regret it!"

Zu Yu's gaze, filled with killing intent, passed over Zhuge Lian and settled on Fang Bai as he spoke menacingly.

Zu Yu knew of the planned marriage alliance between the Xuannv Sect and the Purple Flame Sect, and his union with Zhuge Lian as martial companions was almost set in stone. Thus, he already viewed Zhuge Lian as his woman and would not tolerate anyone else touching her, especially not some disciple from a mere fourth-rank sect.

Seeing the close relationship between Fang Bai and Zhuge Lian, Zu Yu had already developed a murderous intent towards Fang Bai. After issuing his warning, if Fang Bai continued to interact with Zhuge Lian, he would not be lenient.

In Purple Flame City, offending a disciple of the Purple Flame Sect never ended well. As the most promising talented disciple of the Purple Flame Sect, Zu Yu had numerous ways and means to make a fourth-rank sect disciple disappear without a trace.

If Zu Yu indeed killed Fang Bai, even if Bitao Martial Academy eventually found out, they would be powerless, and the Purple Flame Sect would not severely punish their own direct disciple—worst case, they might compensate Bitao Martial Academy with some cultivation resources.

Zhuge Lian found Zu Yu's warning somewhat amusing, thinking if he knew Fang Bai's true strength, he wouldn't dare make such bold claims.

What was even more laughable was that Zu Yu had even attempted to attack Fang Bai without reckoning his own strength. If Zhuge Lian hadn't stepped in to protect Fang Bai beforehand, Zu Yu might have already been severely injured and lying on the ground by now.

Of course, Zu Yu had no idea that it was Zhuge Lian who had saved him. He not only despised Fang Bai but also harbored resentment towards Zhuge Lian for not siding with him and instead protecting another man. He saw this as a betrayal and an insult to himself by Zhuge Lian, who was soon to become his martial companion.

Fang Bai, having experienced similar individuals in his past life, simply ignored Zu Yu. He did not take his warnings or threats seriously and merely responded with a faint smile.

"Junior Sister Zhuge, I'll see you at the welcome banquet tomorrow!"

After issuing his threat to Fang Bai, Zu Yu managed a forced smile towards Zhuge Lian, who was rolling her eyes at him, and left with two fellow sect members.

"I now understand why you dislike that guy!" Fang Bai said to Zhuge Lian, watching Zu Yu's departing figure with a bitter smile.

Zhuge Lian pouted and responded, "I used to just be a bit annoyed by him, but now I find him utterly disgusting! Narrow-minded, petty, vengeful... No woman could genuinely like such a man!"

Sighing, she noticed that the bystanders had dispersed. She whispered, "It's a pity that the higher-ups in our Xuannv Sect are charmed by his appearance and are blinded by the benefits of the marriage alliance between the two sects. They disregard my feelings entirely... Brother Fang, you've seen Zu Yu for yourself; you must find a way to break this marriage arrangement! If you help me, I'll be grateful for the rest of my life!"

Fang Bai nodded, pondered for a moment, then said resolutely, "I'll surprise you at tomorrow's welcome banquet!"

Knowing that Fang Bai was planning to implement a "disfigurement plan" against Zu Yu before the banquet, Zhuge Lian felt a mix of anticipation and nervousness, "Brother Fang, although you are a Vast Level Expert, the Purple Flame Sect is also filled with strong individuals. Please be extremely careful when you act. If it's not feasible, prioritize your safety—I won't blame you... truly!"

Fang Bai nodded in response, "I value my life and will act within my capacities."

Chapter 1070: Ge Feng's Concerns

Fang Bai's current strength was already formidable enough to sweep through any expert in the Vast Level Realm, and he could even contend with the more powerful early-stage experts of the Cosmic Level. The Purple Flame Sect, being merely a third-rate sect, boasted several Vast Level Experts; however, the strongest among them only reached the Cultivation Level of Vast Level Perfection, posing no real threat to Fang Bai.

However, Zhuge Lian was not aware of Fang Bai's true strength. She speculated that his Cultivation Level must be at the early stage of the Vast Level, equivalent to the steward of the Purple Flame Sect.

Having early-stage Vast Level strength among the younger generation of disciples in various sects in the Thousand Lakes Country was truly unparalleled, but using such power to infiltrate the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters to deal with Zu Yu was somewhat risky.

Zhuge Lian calculated briefly; from the steward to the Sect Master, including an Elder of Tribute, the Purple Flame Sect had a total of sixteen Vast Level Experts. This was definitely a force not to be underestimated.

Should Fang Bai be exposed during his infiltration into the Purple Flame Sect, it was highly likely he would be ambushed by all the sect's powerful experts, making escape very difficult.

Considering Fang Bai a trustworthy friend, Zhuge Lian could not help but worry about him. On their way back to the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters, she continually cautioned him to be careful and to simply abandon the method of disfiguring as a way to deal with Zu Yu if it proved too dangerous.

In any case, Zhuge Lian was resolved not to become martial companions with Zu Yu, no matter what.

After entering the main gate of the Purple Flame Sect Headquarters, the two bid each other farewell and returned to their respective accommodations, agreeing to meet again at the welcome banquet the next day.

When Fang Bai returned to the residential courtyard of the Bitao Martial Academy disciples, he found everyone sitting around a large stone table in the yard, chatting.

"Fang Bai, come over here and sit."

Elder Ge turned his head, saw Fang Bai coming in, and waved at him with a laughter-filled gesture.

Fang Bai walked to the stone table, smiled, and greeted Elder Ge and the others before sitting on a stone bench opposite Elder Ge.

"You're back so late, where did you go to have fun?"

After Fang Bai sat down, Elder Ge asked with a smile.

"Oh, I first went around the Martial Artists Trading Market, and then I walked inside and outside of Purple Flame City, so I got back a bit late."

Naturally, Fang Bai would not reveal that he had been earning Cultivation Resources in the Martial Artists Trading Market in disguise, or the conflict he had with the Elder of Tribute of the Purple Flame Sect, Hong Qitian, nor would he talk about meeting Zhuge Lian, a Direct Disciple of the Xuannv Sect, and agreeing to help her sabotage the arranged marriage between Purple Flame Sect and the Xuannv Sect.

Fang Bai knew that each of these issues, for the Bitao Martial Academy disciples present, would be incredibly astonishing, and even if he told them, they probably wouldn't believe him right away.

Moreover, Fang Bai was aware that if these words reached the ears of the Purple Flame Sect disciples, he would be immediately embroiled in trouble.

Fang Bai, with his formidable strength, naturally feared nothing, but if these troubles affected the other disciples of the Bitao Martial Academy, he couldn't manage everything alone.

Thus, some things were better kept buried in his heart as his own secrets.

Elder Ge took Fang Bai's words for truth, nodded, and didn't inquire further.

"Today, a sensation swept through the Martial Artists Trading Market in Purple Flame City, have you all heard about it?"

Elder Ge looked around at the disciples and asked, stroking his beard.

"We've heard."

Yulin, as the head among the disciples of the Bitao Martial Academy, spoke first, "It's said that there was a Senior Bai skilled in both Alchemy and Artifact Refining at the Market, who not only held dual positions but was also of the middle-grade quality. His success rate in refining was a staggering fifty percent. In the entire True Martial Realm, this is extremely rare."

She sighed and continued with a look of disappointment, "I also went to line up at Senior Bai's stall, hoping to refine some elixirs, but unfortunately, there were too many people. By the time the market was about to close, it still wasn't my turn, so I could only come back. I planned to go again early tomorrow, but then I heard that Senior Bai had a conflict with Elder Hong Qitian, an Elder of Tribute from the Purple Flame Sect, and it seems that they went outside the city to duel. I don't know what the outcome was..."

"I was there as well," Elder Ge said, his face displaying a helpless wry smile. "When I got to the market, I intended to do as before—ask Wu Biao and Wu Mei, two Pill Masters, to refine a batch of elixirs for our academy, but then I heard that this new Senior Bai was extremely good at Alchemy and decided to try my luck in line, but unfortunately, I didn't get a turn either..."

"There's nothing to worry about," Huang Miao chimed in. "We can just go earlier tomorrow and line up, we'll definitely get a turn then."

Elder Ge waved his hand and shook his head with a somber look, "There's an old saying, 'Fellow practitioners are rivals.' What worries me the most now is, we used to ask Wu Biao and Wu Mei to refine for us at the Bitao Martial Academy, and if they knew I had lined up at Senior Bai's stall, outraged, they might refuse to refine for us in the future..."

"That shouldn't happen, right? We have always provided them with Cultivation Resources when asking them to refine elixirs, why would they refuse to take it?"

Yulin said unconvinced.

"It's hard to tell!"

Elder Ge shook his head, sighing, "There are many Martial Artists who request their Alchemy services, and they wouldn't be lacking the bit of Cultivation Resources from us."

He paused, then added, "Moreover, the conflict that happened between that Senior Bai, who is both an Alchemist and an Artifact Refiner, and Elder Hong Qitian, an Elder of Tribute from the Purple Flame Sect, suggests some deep-seated grudges. If Hong Qitian learns that we once sought to hire Senior Bai for Alchemy, would he also direct his anger at us? The consequences of offending him could be far worse than offending Wu Biao and Wu Mei! Ah, just thinking about this makes me even more uneasy!"

After hearing this, Yulin and the others also felt disheartened.

The Wu siblings have been working as Alchemists in Purple Flame City for many years, have numerous friends, and a wide network of connections, and are well-informed.

And Hong Qitian, being an Elder of Tribute in the Purple Flame Sect and a middle-grade Pill Master, holds tremendous power.

If these three Alchemists were so inclined, to deal with those who had lined up at Senior Bai's stall, they could easily use their extensive network of connections to track down people like Elder Ge and Yulin.

What worried Elder Ge and others was, once these three Alchemists decided to retaliate by refusing to refine for the disciples of Bitao Martial Academy, then in the future the disciples would have to go to even farther places to find new Alchemists to refine their elixirs.

"Elder Ge needn't worry about this."

Fang Bai gave a mysterious smile and slowly said, "When I was wandering outside Purple Flame City today, I was fortunate enough to meet Senior Bai. Seeing that I have dual attributes Innate Spiritual Root, suitable for an Alchemist, he chatted with me for a bit and even offered to teach me the Alchemy Technique. I didn't dare accept immediately and said I would consult with you, Elder Ge. Before leaving, Senior Bai mentioned that if I wanted to refine elixirs or Spiritual Artifacts in the future, I could seek him out..."