

Doctor 1361

Chapter 1361: I Hate Women Who Are Prettier Than Me

The stars flicker like fireflies, and the moon hangs high in the sky.

In the blink of an eye, it is already midnight.

The martial artists in the lake have all returned to the shore by now, each sitting cross-legged in cultivation, restoring energy and preparing to investigate the lake again at dawn.

Standing on the shore of Linghu Lake, anxiously waiting for Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou to emerge, Wu De and Xia Chenyu stared at the shimmering waves under the moonlight—one furrowed her elegant brow, the other let out long sighs.

"It's been two, maybe even three hours already. Why are they still silent down there? Could they... have encountered trouble?"

Letting out those long sighs was Wu De, who murmured to himself while rubbing his hands together nervously, pacing back and forth along the lake's edge.

Several times, Wu De considered diving into the lake to check on Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou, but on one hand, he hesitated to leave Xia Chenyu alone on the shore, and on the other, his apprehension toward the spirit beasts lurking underwater made him waver.

Though Xia Chenyu was somewhat concerned, she and Fang Bai shared a mutual connection—she would feel restless and uneasy if Fang Bai were in danger. Since she was currently calm, it indicated that Fang Bai was safe beneath the lake.

Where Fang Bai was unharmed, Li Chenzhou would naturally be so as well.

"Taoist Priest Wu, please don't worry. Let's wait a little longer... mhm, they should be fine."

Seeing Wu De pacing nervously like an ant on a hot pan, Xia Chenyu quietly comforted him.

Wu De sighed and said, "Chenyu, there are ferocious and formidable spirit beasts beneath the lake—strong enough to rival Brother Fang and Brother Li. They've been down there for such a long time without coming up. How can I not be worried?"

After pausing for a moment, he stomped his foot and declared, "Alright, we'll wait for two more hours. If they still don't come out, I'll... I'll go down myself to check!"

Xia Chenyu nodded and said, "I'll go with you!"

Wu De was about to respond when suddenly an intense wave of heat surged from behind. Turning to look, he saw a woman dressed in a flowing pink skirt approaching them slowly.

Following closely behind the woman in pink were four powerful Innate Perfection martial artists clad in black robes.

"You... you... why is it you?"

Wu De gasped sharply as if he had seen a ghost, pointing at the woman in pink, his voice trembling, his face filled with horror.

Xia Chenyu also saw the woman in pink; her delicate face turned pale, and she murmured, "She broke Fang Bai's formation so quickly... What should we do now?"

The woman in pink was none other than Zu Hanjiao.

The formation Fang Bai had set up should normally have been capable of containing Zu Hanjiao for one or two days.

But unexpectedly, shortly after Fang Bai had left, Zu Hanjiao, unable to break free from the array, released several tamed ant bees.

Ant bees are a type of miniature spirit beast. While they lack combat power, they possess extraordinary speed in flight and remarkable stealth. Many loose cultivators or disciples from sects and prominent clans specifically tame ant bees to use for communication in emergencies.

After releasing the ant bees, Zu Hanjiao's subordinates in Spirit Lake City quickly received the signals. Soon, her four most powerful Innate Perfection followers gathered and made their way to the Yin Yang Soul-Snatching Array to lend their aid.

When martial artists are trapped within an elaborate formation, there are only two ways to escape.

One is to locate the Array Eye and destroy it, causing the formation to collapse automatically.

The other is to rely on overwhelming strength to forcibly shatter the array and break free.

Though the Yin Yang Soul-Snatching Array was formidable, Fang Bai knew it could only hold Zu Hanjiao for one or two days at most.

When Zu Hanjiao's four Innate Perfection subordinates arrived and coordinated with her from inside and out, their combined forces unleashed a destructive assault that finally obliterated the Yin Yang Soul-Snatching Array.

After breaking free from the array, Zu Hanjiao was burning with rage and hatred for Fang Bai. With her four subordinates in tow, she followed Fang Bai's trail and tracked it all the way to the shore of Linghu Lake.

Upon seeing Wu De and Xia Chenyu, Zu Hanjiao instantly deduced that Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou must be diving in Linghu Lake to find treasures.

Knowing that Xia Chenyu was someone very important to Fang Bai, Zu Hanjiao, in Fang Bai's absence, decided to channel all her fury onto Xia Chenyu. She resolved to capture this woman first and use her to force Fang Bai's submission.

"Surprised to see me? Heh..."

Zu Hanjiao stopped in front of Wu De and Xia Chenyu, glaring coldly at their drastically changed expressions. She sneered, "If Fang Bai had trapped me with his formation and fled with you both immediately, you might have had a slim chance of survival. But now, there's no escape for any of you!"

As she spoke, her aura unfurled, and Wu De and Xia Chenyu felt as though they were weighed down by thousands of kilograms. Their chests became stifled, their bodies trembled, and they could barely keep themselves upright.

"I'm warning you—don't you dare harm Chenyu! Otherwise, my Brother Fang will never let you go!"

Seeing Zu Hanjiao's murderous gaze fixed on Xia Chenyu, Wu De's heart sank. He gritted his teeth, stepped forward, puffed up his chest, and stood protectively in front of Xia Chenyu, shouting loudly.

Zu Hanjiao let out a disdainful laugh and said, "That Fang Bai can barely protect himself—how is he supposed to save this woman? But don't worry, this woman will be useful to me, so I won't kill her for now!"

Xia Chenyu, wise and perceptive, quickly surmised that Zu Hanjiao intended to use her against Fang Bai. Her will steeled; she raised the Dragon and Phoenix Twin Swords across her chest in a defensive stance. Her cold gaze fixed on Zu Hanjiao, her demeanor resolute and unyielding.

"Do you know what I detest the most?"

Zu Hanjiao's gaze swept over Xia Chenyu's near-perfect face, her jealousy evident as she spoke with venom, "It's women who are more beautiful than me! So... I'm going to destroy that face of yours!"

A chilling gleam appeared in Zu Hanjiao's eyes as her right hand spread wide, striking toward Xia Chenyu's face like lightning.

Having spent time in the True Martial Realm, Xia Chenyu's knowledge and experience had grown significantly. She saw the faint crimson glow emanating from the tips of Zu Hanjiao's fingers, mixed with traces of dark green, and realized there was strong toxicity embedded in her nails.

Should Zu Hanjiao's venomous fingers pierce her skin, even the most stunning of appearances would be utterly destroyed in an instant—left beyond repair.

Though Xia Chenyu treasured her appearance as any woman might, she became overwhelmed with terror at the thought of it being ruined.

She attempted with all her strength to avoid the strike, yet her body was immobilized as if bound by invisible forces—unable to move, unable to evade.

Zu Hanjiao's claw came closer and closer to Xia Chenyu's cheek. Even before it struck, she could already feel the piercing Essence Energy cutting into her left cheek as if sliced by a blade—its sting sharp and foreboding.

"Stop, you fiend!"

Wu De saw that Xia Chenyu was mere moments away from injury. He clenched his teeth, let out a furious roar, and attacked Zu Hanjiao in an attempt to force her hand away.

However, the gap between Wu De and Zu Hanjiao's powers was far too vast. Zu Hanjiao didn't even bother to look at him; with a casual flick of her right hand, Wu De was sent flying as though struck by tremendous force, his body soaring through the air before plunging "splash" into the waters of Linghu Lake.

"Boom!"

At the exact moment Wu De crashed into the lake, two massive waves rose in the distance. Two figures surged from the lake's depths, hovering above its surface.

Chapter 1362: Rumors Become Reality

A thunderous noise erupted from above the lake surface, attracting the attention of numerous martial artists by the shore.

Even Zu Hanjiao paused slightly in surprise, her attack momentarily halted.

Xia Chenyu's figure retreated backward, the corner of her eye catching the two figures surging up from underwater. Recognizing them as Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou, her heart filled with joy.

"Swish!"

A black longsword shot out from Fang Bai's hand in the lake, its tip aiming straight for Zu Hanjiao.

At the same time, Wind Essence Qi flowed around Fang Bai, forming a pair of Wind Wings behind him. He followed the trajectory of his sword, swiftly moving toward the lakeshore.

A fierce and ominous aura enveloped Fang Bai, killing intent permeating his chest.

The moment he emerged from the water and saw Zu Hanjiao knock Wu De into the lake while attempting to attack Xia Chenyu, Fang Bai's anger surged to its peak.

"The Ink Jade Sword has yet to taste blood—today, I will use your blood to consecrate it!"

With a thought, Fang Bai summoned the Ink Jade Sword from the Spatial Ring. The sword soared into the air three feet above the lake surface, thrusting fiercely toward Zu Hanjiao.

The Ink Jade Sword, charged with a razor-sharp flow of Essence Energy, emitted a dragon-like roar as it streaked forward, leaving behind a long black trail of light. The space within several feet of its blade quivered slightly, and the lake water it passed through was cleaved into a deep trench several feet deep.

"That's... a Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact!"

Zu Hanjiao, once a Foundation Establishment Expert, instantly recognized the Ink Jade Sword as a Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact, and she was shocked.

She understood the potency of Holy Grade Spiritual Artifacts. If her cultivation level were still at the Foundation Establishment Stage, she might have been able to withstand its attack. However, her cultivation had severely diminished, leaving her utterly incapable of facing it.

But having been locked onto by Sword Intent, evasion was no longer an option.

"Go!"

In desperation, Zu Hanjiao retaliated cruelly. As she retreated, she grabbed one of her nearby subordinates and hurled him forward to intercept the oncoming Ink Jade Sword.

The subordinate never imagined he would be used as cannon fodder. Before he could even curse, the Ink Jade Sword pierced through his body.

Despite possessing Innate-level cultivation at perfection, the subordinate was helpless against the sword's power. His body exploded in midair with a resounding "boom," collapsing into a pile of flesh and blood that fell to the ground.

The other three Innate-level experts accompanying Zu Hanjiao were terrified they might share the same fate. They immediately formed True Essence Wings and fled toward distant mountaintops.

After killing the subordinate, the Ink Jade Sword lost much of its momentum, no longer posing a threat to Zu Hanjiao.

However, Zu Hanjiao knew that Holy Grade Spiritual Artifacts were controlled by their wielder's mind, capable of launching an attack at any moment. Not daring to linger, she cast a hateful glance at Fang Bai, summoned True Essence Wings behind her, and soared toward a distant peak.

Though Fang Bai's raw cultivation level was still slightly inferior to Zu Hanjiao's, the Ink Jade Sword's power shifted the balance, forcing Zu Hanjiao into retreat.

"That kid actually possesses a Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact... It seems the rumors about Martial Artist Remnants beneath Linghu Lake are true!"

As she fled, Zu Hanjiao's thoughts lingered on Fang Bai's acquisition of the Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact, her greed growing increasingly intense.

Zu Hanjiao had explored Linghu Lake herself upon hearing of remnants from Foundation Establishment Experts, but returned empty-handed, thinking the rumors were false. Since then, she had not ventured back.

Now, witnessing Fang Bai obtain a Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact from the lake, she realized the rumors were indeed true.

Regret and jealousy overwhelmed Zu Hanjiao.

She thought further: with the Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact aiding Fang Bai, she couldn't defeat him directly now. But next time, if she launched an attack swiftly enough to prevent him from summoning the artifact, she might succeed in killing him and seizing the treasures he took from the Martial Artist Remnants.

The appearance of Zu Hanjiao's group attacking Wu De and Xia Chenyu, the emergence of Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou from underwater, Fang Bai's control of the Ink Jade Sword to strike at Zu Hanjiao, the moment when an Innate expert was pierced and exploded, Zu Hanjiao and her subordinates fleeing—

All of this unfolded in a blink, shocking nearby martial artists into speechlessness.

To those martial artists, Innate-level experts were already among the highest-tier beings in the world and rarely seen. They couldn't have imagined seeing seven such figures tonight, making for an extraordinary spectacle.

Zu Hanjiao's act of throwing a subordinate forward demonstrated her overwhelming strength, leaving the onlookers astonished by her abilities, far surpassing typical Innate-level perfection.

However, the subsequent scene, in which Fang Bai killed an Innate perfection expert with a single strike, caused everyone's jaws to drop further.

No one had expected the seemingly twenty-something martial artist to surpass the bewitchingly powerful woman in combat prowess.

Although Fang Bai could likely catch up to Zu Hanjiao if he pursued her now, his concern for Xia Chenyu led him to forgo the chase.

Fang Bai deduced Zu Hanjiao's lair must be in Spirit Lake City. Her unwilling expression prior to fleeing confirmed she wouldn't flee far, so he deemed it unnecessary to rush after her immediately.

"Chenyu, are you all right?"

Fang Bai landed before Xia Chenyu, withdrew his Wind Wings, supported her shoulders, and asked with concern.

"I'm fine."

Xia Chenyu had only been frightened and not physically hurt. She replied with a smile: "That woman didn't intend to harm me. She wanted to capture me to threaten you."

Seeing the Ink Jade Sword still floating in the air, radiating its immense power, she exclaimed with delight, "That sword... you obtained it from the lake?"

"Yes, it's a Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact... far superior to High Grade ones!"

Fang Bai nodded, extended his left hand, and the Ink Jade Sword descended to his palm.

Xia Chenyu's beautiful eyes glittered as she examined the sword, her hand lightly stroking its blade, her gaze full of joy.

Fang Bai playfully flicked her nose and said with a smile, "Stop admiring it—it's a Water Attribute artifact, unsuitable for you. When I find a superior Fire Attribute artifact, I'll gift it to you."

With that, he stored the Ink Jade Sword back into the Spatial Ring.

Xia Chenyu pouted slightly in disappointment but then chuckled mischievously, her phoenix-like eyes glimmering: "Rushi, Mingyue, Qian Jiao, and Baimei—they all practice Water System Techniques, right? You only have one Water Attribute artifact—how do you plan to decide who gets it? Be careful not to incite jealousy!"

Fang Bai laughed heartily: "That's simple: I'll craft one for each of them in the future!"

"Brother Fang, what about mine?"

At that moment, Li Chenzhou landed on the shore, and Wu De also climbed out of the lake. Hearing Fang Bai's words, both were invigorated and spoke in unison.

Wu De's mouth still bore traces of blood, evidence of the injury inflicted on him earlier by Zu Hanjiao's attack.

Fang Bai saw Wu De's injuries were not severe and would heal with some recovery time. He said, "Of course you two will have one. But they'll come after Chenyu and the others get theirs first."

"Why must ours come later? You're clearly prioritizing women over your brothers..."

Wu De rolled his eyes and muttered under his breath.

Li Chenzhou laughed: "I don't mind waiting, as long as I eventually get one! Holy Grade Spiritual Artifacts—they're truly something to look forward to!"

Chapter 1363: Fight? Or Leave?

As Fang Bai and the three others conversed by the side of Linghu Lake, numerous warriors who came to the lake seeking treasure gradually gathered towards them.

Under the cover of night, the warriors appeared as a dense mass, numbering at least a thousand, among whom were many Innate Experts.

The looks in those warriors' eyes revealed envy, jealousy, greed, and fanaticism, like hungry wolves under a moonlit night, ready to pounce on Fang Bai and his companions at any moment.

Just now, Fang Bai had rushed out from the lake bottom, using the Ink Jade Sword to slay a Perfect Innate Expert and scare off Zu Hanjiao and others, this caused great shock among the watching warriors, while also making them conclude that the Ink Jade Sword in Fang Bai's hand might very well have been obtained from the Martial Artist Remnants at the bottom of Linghu Lake.

For over a hundred years, countless warriors have flocked to the bank of Linghu Lake, searching for the legendary Martial Artist Remnants, yet no one has been able to find them.

But now, with Fang Bai emerging carrying what likely was a treasure from the Martial Artist Remnants, how could those warriors who had searched Linghu Lake in vain for days not feel envious and jealous?

Many warriors in this world are sometimes willing to pay any price to fight or grab a treasure for cultivation, even wagering their own lives.

Though Fang Bai had just killed a Perfect Innate Expert with a single strike, displaying great power, it also stirred covetousness among those warriors.

In their eyes, if Fang Bai found the Martial Artist Remnants at the lake bottom, he surely obtained more than just a formidable Spiritual Artifact; there must be other treasures too.

"How could the treasure at the lake bottom be left for him alone to take?"

Thousands of warriors thought with reddened eyes.

However, those warriors were self-aware, knowing that in a solo fight, they were definitely not a match for Fang Bai. Thus, though everyone craved the treasure Fang Bai acquired, no one dared approach him at the moment.

"Those people have thoughts of seizing but lack the courage! Ha..."

Fang Bai watched the nearby warriors whose eyes were burning with desire, sneered aloud.

"It's not wise to stay here long, we better leave quickly!"

Wu De, feeling uneasy being stared by a thousand eyes, urged softly.

"Let's go!"

Li Chenzhou agreed.

"Go? Ha... Afraid there are people who don't want us to leave!"

Fang Bai's gaze fell on an elder among the distant crowd, his eyes narrowing slightly.

The elder wore a purple robe, had a slightly chubby physique, round face with small eyes, and a face full of healthy-red glow, looking like a shrewd businessman who prospers through friendliness.

Fang Bai paid attention to this person because, not only did he possess the aura of a Perfect Innate Expert, but this aura was similar to Zu Hanjiao and others from before.

This implied that the purple-robed elder practiced the same cultivation techniques as Zu Hanjiao and his group, likely being in league with them.

While Zu Hanjiao and others fled, this person remained, and upon careful thought, Fang Bai understood the reason behind it.

The purple-robed elder, seemingly hearing the conversation between Wu De and others, knew they wanted to leave. His eyes shone brilliantly, stepping forward, he waved his arm mightily, and said in a loud voice: "We have a crowd of a thousand, with nearly a hundred Innate Experts among us. If we join forces, why should we fear those four? Anyone with guts, come at me, if we slay those four, the treasures will be shared equally, I will not break my word!"

His words caused an immediate commotion among the thousand warriors.

Fang Bai's group of four, though having two Perfect Innate Experts, the other two were not of concern.

While they had a thousand warriors, with nearly a hundred Innate Experts, if they truly joined forces, Fang Bai's group did not stand a chance, and escape would be impossible.

With the elder in purple taking the lead, other warriors gained courage. Some Innate Experts, each holding a Spiritual Artifact, stood by the elder's side and began to slowly press forward towards Fang Bai's group.

"They intend to overwhelm with numbers? How shameless! How utterly brazen!"

Seeing warriors like a tidal wave pouring in from east, west, and north, Wu De felt a bit faint-hearted and cursed loudly.

The swarm of a thousand warriors was indeed intimidating, making Xia Chenyu's heart hang high, she unconsciously edged closer to Fang Bai's side.

"Fight or retreat?"

Li Chenzhou's face showed no worry as he turned to ask Fang Bai.

In Li Chenzhou's view, though the opponents were many, the strongest among them was just a Perfect Innate Expert, and both Fang Bai and himself could manifest the True Essence Wings. If they wanted to leave, no one could stop them.

"Getting entangled with these people is meaningless... we're heading to Spirit Lake City to settle the score with Zu Hanjiao!"

As Fang Bai spoke, he wrapped his arm around Xia Chenyu's slender waist, manifesting True Yuan Wind Wings behind him. With a strong beat of his wings, he ascended into the sky, taking Xia Chenyu directly towards the heavens.

"Let's go too!"

Li Chenzhou also manifested Wind Wings, grabbing Wu De by the collar and flying upwards, following after Fang Bai.

"This guy! Actually pulling Taoist Master's collar... Damn it!"

Wu De was grabbed by Li Chenzhou and flown through the air, feeling utterly uncomfortable, yet dared not voice his displeasure, fearing that Li Chenzhou might let go in anger and drop him.

With Wu De's current cultivation level, he could not manifest True Yuan Wings for flight; should he be dropped from a thousand meters up, he would be severely injured, if not killed.

"They are fleeing towards Spirit Lake City! Anybody who wants the treasure, follow me in pursuit!"

The elder in purple looked upwards as Fang Bai's group disappeared into the distant sky, stomped his foot in frustration, and then also manifested True Yuan Wings, flying in the direction of Spirit Lake City.

The remaining near-thousand warriors, holding Spiritual Artifacts, rallied their friends and charged towards Spirit Lake City with fervor.

Unable to manifest True Yuan Wings due to their lack of Perfect Innate cultivation, they could only rely on their legs to head to Spirit Lake City, exerting all their strength, each fearing that falling behind would cost them their share of the treasures.

In the deep night of Spirit Lake City, there was no trace of anyone in the streets and alleys, appearing exceptionally quiet. Tens of thousands of warriors either resting their minds or concentrating on cultivation, creating a stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of the daytime.

The "Yuezhi Inn" situated at the center of Spirit Lake City was ordinarily more serene than other places, but as Zu Hanjiao and his four companions descended from the sky, the atmosphere suddenly grew tense.

Standing in front of the inn's rear-most, antique-style stone house was where Zu Hanjiao resided.

Zu Hanjiao landed nimbly in front of the stone house and let out a soft whistle.

Whiz!

Whiz!

Whiz!

...

Within just a few breaths, the sound of clothes fluttering through the air kept echoing as dozens of black-robed warriors shot in from all directions, gathering around the stone house.

The cultivation levels of these black-robed warriors were all within the Innate Realm, ranging from the initial to High Rank Innate stages.

"A strong enemy is about to invade, everyone prepare for battle! Listen well, anyone who can slay the enemy will be assisted by me to advance to Perfect Innate Realm!"

Zu Hanjiao's gaze swept over the dozens of Innate Experts around, her words came out in a sweet voice.

These Innate Experts, being limited by their own aptitude, had reached a bottleneck in their cultivation. Advancing to the Perfect Innate Realm was a dream for all of them, and now Zu Hanjiao gave them hope, so naturally, their eyes shone brightly, and their spirits were lifted.

Chapter 1364: The Howl in the Night Sky of Spirit Lake City

As one of the most renowned cities in the True Martial Realm, Spirit Lake City is filled with numerous Innate Experts.

The perception of Innate Experts is extremely sharp.

When Zu Hanjiao gathered dozens of her subordinates around her stone house, the fluctuations of their innate auras immediately alerted many Innate Experts residing in Spirit Lake City.

These Innate Experts left their rooms one after another, leaping onto nearby high-rises and palace rooftops. Under the starlight and moonlight, they gazed towards Zu Hanjiao's stone house, speculating on what might be going on there.

Moments later, a shadow approached from afar, flying in rapidly from outside the city.

From a distance, the shadow resembled a giant bird.

Up close, however, it was an Innate Expert at the level of perfect mastery, flying with True Essence Wings.

The shadow turned out to be an elder draped in a purple robe who had flown over from Linghu Lake. He descended above Zu Hanjiao's stone house, retracting his True Essence Wings, and landed in front of her. Bowing deeply in reverence, he said respectfully, "Master..."

"Lei Hong, why have you returned? What about Fang Bai and the others?"

Zu Hanjiao shot the purple-robed elder a cold glance, her voice icy.

The purple-robed elder was one of Zu Hanjiao's hidden pieces stationed by Linghu Lake. After she and three of her subordinates were forced by Fang Bai into fleeing back to Spirit Lake City, she thought that with him stationed at Linghu Lake, she could grasp Fang Bai and his team's movements at any time. Yet now, the elder had also returned, which enraged Zu Hanjiao greatly.

"Master..."

Feeling Zu Hanjiao's fury, the purple-robed elder trembled in fear and replied carefully, "Fang Bai and the others returned to Spirit Lake City ahead of me. They said... they wanted to... settle accounts with Master!"

Upon hearing this, the elder had braced himself for an explosive rage from Zu Hanjiao. Yet unexpectedly, she had seemingly anticipated this outcome and sneered coldly, "If I obtained some powerful treasure, I too would seize the advantage and pursue... Hah, let them come—we'll wait right here for them!"

After a pause, she added, "Lei Hong, when Fang Bai shows up, all of you will join forces to trap him. I'll strike from the shadows and strive to kill him in one blow!"

"What about the other three?"

The purple-robed elder asked.

Zu Hanjiao replied, "The other three are of no concern; just capture them!"

After finishing her instructions, she turned and entered the stone house.

The purple-robed elder was named Lei Hong and served as the owner of the Yuezhi Inn.

Upon arriving in the True Martial Realm, the first Martial Artist Zu Hanjiao subdued was Lei Hong. She later directed him to establish the Yuezhi Inn.

Zu Hanjiao's primary purpose in opening the Yuezhi Inn was to gather information about the True Martial Realm from its guests. If she learned of any rare cultivation resources or sightings of treasures, she would strike and seize them for herself.

Over the years, Zu Hanjiao amassed a vast collection of cultivation resources and treasures—possessions that far exceeded the heritage of even the most venerable Innate Sects spanning millennia.

Nonetheless, Zu Hanjiao had not treated Lei Hong poorly. She shared a portion of the cultivation resources and treasures she obtained with him, and she also provided him guidance on the Martial Dao, benefiting him greatly.

As a result, Lei Hong was unwavering in his loyalty to Zu Hanjiao and became one of her most trusted lieutenants.

Fang Bai's decision to pursue Zu Hanjiao to Spirit Lake City stemmed from the belief that this woman, being highly powerful and commanding a group of Innate Experts, must have plundered plenty of cultivation resources, and that he might secure some benefits from her.

"Strange... Fang Bai and the others obviously arrived ahead of me, so why haven't they revealed themselves yet?"

Lei Hong gazed upward, puzzling over the situation.

"No matter when you show up, the moment you dare to appear, I'll ensure you won't leave alive!"

Lei Hong's eyes gleamed coldly as he gripped his Spiritual Artifact, gesturing toward the dozens of Innate Experts gathered around him.

At his signal, the dozens of Innate Experts concealed themselves in the dark around the stone house's vicinity. The moment Fang Bai and his team appeared, they planned to strike all at once, trapping them within and leaving no chance for escape.

In Lei Hong's mind, even though Fang Bai's team had obtained the Martial Artist's relic from the lake's depths, they had now become the target of countless pursuers.

Besides their own forces preparing to deal with Fang Bai, there were over a thousand Martial Artists who had chased them from the banks of Linghu Lake. Once these forces arrived, no matter how extraordinary Fang Bai's abilities were, he was bound to meet his end in Spirit Lake City.

Though the dozens of Innate Experts had shifted into the shadows, they were acutely aware of the impending battle, each holding their breath and suppressing their energy as they heightened their alertness, creating an atmosphere of palpable tension and repression.

After dozens of breaths passed, the silent night sky suddenly echoed with a long cry.

Along with the howl, two shadows flew into the airspace above the Yuezhi Inn and descended to the empty ground before Zu Hanjiao's stone house.

The cry reverberated intensely and majestically, akin to a dragon's roar, shaking the entirety of Spirit Lake City and stirring millions of Martial Artists.

However, the area within several miles surrounding Zu Hanjiao's stone house was enveloped by a fierce, murderous aura. Martial Artists beneath the Innate Realm dared not approach.

Thus, while the millions of startled Martial Artists were brimming with curiosity, wanting to uncover what was unfolding, only a small fraction of Innate Experts dared to come somewhat closer. The remaining onlookers had to observe from miles away.

"Who dares to cause trouble at the Yuezhi Inn?"

The nearby Innate Experts knew that the Yuezhi Inn's behind-the-scenes boss was a highly formidable Innate Expert at the level of perfection. Since the inn's establishment, no Martial Artist had ever dared stir up trouble within its premises. The sudden appearance of these two shadows, seemingly targeting the Yuezhi Inn, piqued their intense interest.

They stared at the figures descending before the stone house, speculating quietly about their identities.

The two figures were none other than Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou.

When their team had flown to the outskirts of Spirit Lake City, Fang Bai instructed Wu De and Xia Chenyu to wait at a hidden location outside the city, while he and Li Chenzhou headed to the Yuezhi Inn.

Wu De and Xia Chenyu were comparatively weaker in strength, and bringing them into the city would only serve as a liability. Wu De and Xia Chenyu understood this themselves, so they raised no objections.

With Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou, two Innate Experts of flawless mastery, working in tandem, they could retreat unscathed even in the face of the strongest of foes, ensuring they wouldn't fall into a dangerous predicament.

This, however, was unknown to Lei Hong and his ilk.

Lei Hong and the others brimming with confidence believed that with the dozens of Innate Experts on their side, combined with Zu Hanjiao lurking in the shadows, ready to strike at the opportune moment, they could slay Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou on the spot.

"They actually dared come... Fools courting death!"

Lei Hong gazed pityingly at Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou as they descended from the air towards the ground. A cold smile curled at his lips, as though he could already envision their tragic end.

"Attack!"

When Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou's feet touched the ground and their True Essence Wings were retracted, Lei Hong, standing alone before the stone house, bellowed. Instantly, shadows began to shift and stir—Zu Hanjiao's dozens of subordinates sprang out from the darkness.

To entrap Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou, Lei Hong and his team had already divided their ranks strategically: one faction of Martial Artists occupied the highest points of nearby buildings within several hundred meters, another group stationed themselves atop the Yuezhi Inn, while the remainder encircled Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou in the center.

This formation split the dozens of Innate Experts into three layers—high, middle, and low—completely sealing off all avenues of escape for Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou.

Chapter 1365: The Great War Begins

"That woman put up quite the display to deal with us!"

"Does she think that can stop us? Ha... it's destined to be a futile effort!"

Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou coldly surveyed the dozens of innate experts surrounding them. Under such immense pressure, they showed no fear, merely letting out mocking laughs.

"The thousand martial artists pursuing us from Linghu Lake will arrive soon. While we're not afraid, once they catch up, it'll indeed be troublesome! So..."

As Fang Bai spoke, he extended his right hand forward. A flash of crimson light burst forth, and the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade was already gripped in his hand. Pointing toward the stone house, he sternly declared, "We must finish this quickly!"

Before his words faded, his figure shot forward at high speed. In a lightning-fast instant, he stood before Lei Hong.

"Die!"

Fang Bai's voice, soft yet thunderous, exploded by Lei Hong's ear, sending a piercing pain through his eardrums and causing his head to buzz, rendering him momentarily stunned.

In a clash between experts, even a moment's lapse can determine victory or defeat.

Or even life and death!

Before Lei Hong could recover, Fang Bai's Blood-Drinking Mad Blade had already slashed out.

Whoosh—

The cutting sound of the blade tearing through the air resounded, and a dazzling blade arc swept across Lei Hong's neck.

Before losing consciousness, Lei Hong saw a jet of blood spurting from his own neck.

From Fang Bai's rapid advance, the shouted declaration, the sweeping blade, to Lei Hong's neck spouting blood, his head flying, and his body collapsing heavily... it all happened in an instant.

The dozens of innate experts surrounding them could not believe that Lei Hong, mightier than any of them and second only to their master Zu Hanjiao, would fall to a single strike from Fang Bai!

"How is this possible?"

The dozens of innate experts stared in shock at Lei Hong's severed body.

The scene lapsed into a brief, deathly silence.

"Haha... that was satisfying!"

Li Chenzhou laughed heartily and rushed to Fang Bai's side, brandishing a spear as long as a man's height. Pointing the tip skyward, he said to Fang Bai, "Leave the woman inside to you, and I'll handle the outside! But I can only hold them off for fifty breaths! Whether you can finish her off within that time is up to you!"

"Why need fifty breaths? Ten breaths are enough!"

Fang Bai let out a long howl, lightly stepping off with his feet, charging toward the stone house.

At the same time, the dozens of innate experts who had recovered from their stupor roared furiously, wielding their spiritual artifacts as they launched attacks toward Fang Bai, attempting to prevent his approach to the stone house.

"Want to save your master? You have to get past me first!"

Li Chenzhou shouted mightily, rising three feet into the air. His spear twisted crazily in his hands, conjuring fiery blossoms of lotus that bloomed in the night sky, dazzling and enchanting.

Lotus Flame Spear!

Li Chenzhou's most powerful martial art attack.

Lei Hong was Zu Hanjiao's strongest subordinate, yet even he wasn't a match for Li Chenzhou. Now that Lei Hong was dead, none of the others could be Li Chenzhou's foe.

That move, the Lotus Flame Spear, displayed Li Chenzhou's battle prowess to the utmost. Its power far exceeded that of a typical innate perfection expert.

Four of the first innate experts who charged over collided into the flaming lotuses, where they were instantly shredded, blood spraying the skies as they met tragic ends.

One spear took down four enemies!

The dozens of innate experts who charged afterward, witnessing their companions' bodies shatter and blood splatter, were filled with dread and retreated.

"Haha... hahahaha..."

Li Chenzhou gazed at the dozens of pale faces, feeling elated, and laughed grandly. Pointing his spear at the martial artists, he looked down on them with contempt and boldly declared, "Who dares come next?"

"Boom!"

Just as Li Chenzhou's voice fell, a booming sound came from behind.

Turning to look, he saw that Fang Bai had reached the stone house, and the mad blade flashed like lightning, slicing the extremely sturdy stone house into pieces.

Amid the swirling dust, the interior of the stone house appeared, revealing a bed, a table, and a person.

The bed was a stone bed, but not an ordinary stone bed. It was carved from a single piece of Fire Elemental Stone, emanating scorching Essence Energy. Within a five-foot radius, apart from Fang Bai, no other martial artist dared to approach.

The table, a stone table, was likewise crafted from a solid piece of Fire Elemental Stone.

The person naturally was Zu Hanjiao.

On the stone table lay a sword, its blade engraved with an image of a fire bat extending its wings.

The long sword engraved with the fire bat seemed like a peerless expert, exuding an aura so intimidating that even Fang Bai felt uneasy.

"Another Holy Grade Spirit Stone... this must be the spiritual artifact Zu Hanjiao used during her time as a Foundation Establishment expert!"

Fang Bai glanced at the fire bat sword, feeling a surge of excitement.

"Fang Bai, you're strong... stronger than I imagined..."

Zu Hanjiao looked at Fang Bai, then at the Blood-Drinking Mad Blade in his hand, realizing that both the blood-colored weapon and Fang Bai himself were profound and unfathomable, their true grade impossible to discern.

Zu Hanjiao could be confident that the blood-colored long blade in Fang Bai's hand exceeded the existence of Holy Grade spirits.

"While you are strong, however..."

Zu Hanjiao's expression turned stern as she picked up the fire bat sword, her face expressionless as she said, "Your strength relies on the augmentation of a Holy Grade spirit, but I also possess a Holy Grade spirit. If we fight, it's still unclear who will emerge victorious..."

"No no no, if we fight, the one who will surely die is you!"

Fang Bai, smiling, looked at Zu Hanjiao, pointing to the fire bat sword in her hand, and said, "Just right, I have a friend with an innate Fire Spirit Root. This fire attribute spiritual artifact is suitable for her. Once I've killed you, the sword will be mine."

He pointed again to the stone table and bed, saying, "This table and bed, both forged from Holy Grade Spirit Stone, are extremely rare cultivation resources in the True Martial Realm. Soon, they'll be mine as well."

"Heh..."

Zu Hanjiao's eyes flashed with sharpness as she forcibly suppressed the fury in her chest, sneering, "Are you so sure you can kill me? If truly pushed, I can burn blood essence to ignite my potential and die fighting you."

Fang Bai's eyes were filled with disdain as he taunted, "Fight? Come on! I'm afraid you lack the courage and guts!"

"You..."

Zu Hanjiao, brimming with rage, gripped the fire bat sword tighter, slowly revealing her intent to kill.

"Let's discuss terms then..."

Ultimately, Zu Hanjiao abandoned the strong urge to battle Fang Bai, as she truly had no confidence in winning and said indifferently, "I think there's no need for us to fight to the death. If it comes to mutual destruction, what good does that do you or me?"

Fang Bai smiled, raising two fingers in a gesture of victory, saying, "I have two conditions. If you agree, we'll cease hostilities. Otherwise... you know..."

"Speak your terms."

Zu Hanjiao replied with patience, also glancing over to where Li Chenzhou was struggling. Seeing that Li Chenzhou was now bound in battle and had no energy to intervene, she felt a spark of joy.

In Zu Hanjiao's mind, without Li Chenzhou's help, Fang Bai essentially lost a major ally. Together with her dozens of innate expert subordinates, there was hope of slaying Fang Bai.

Chapter 1366: The Killing Intent in the Spear

"First, hand over all your cultivation resources. Second, reveal your identity and origins. Obey me honestly, and I might give you a chance to live."

Fang Bai said slowly.

"Heh..."

Zu Hanjiao sneered coldly, her expression carrying a hint of disdain and mockery. She spoke word by word, "You? You don't have what it takes!"

Fang Bai's gaze turned icy as well, and he sighed, "It seems... we have no choice but to fight!"

The brief exchange between Fang Bai and Zu Hanjiao lasted over twenty breaths of time.

Meanwhile, within those twenty breaths, dozens of Innate Experts gathered around began launching ferocious attacks on Li Chenzhou at any cost.

To those Innate Experts, Zu Hanjiao must not die; not even the slightest injury was acceptable.

These Innate Experts had all been subjugated by Zu Hanjiao's powerful methods back in the day, then forced to swallow the poisonous pills "bestowed" by her.

The poison pill, called "Heart-Eroding Pill," was an exclusive elixir refined by the sect Zu Hanjiao belonged to. Once consumed, no one but Zu Hanjiao could provide the antidote.

In other words, the lives and deaths of those dozens of Innate Experts were entirely in Zu Hanjiao's hands.

If Zu Hanjiao were to fall, those Innate Experts would have no antidote and could only face death.

Therefore, for their own survival, those Innate Experts could only do everything in their power to protect Zu Hanjiao's safety.

As for Zu Hanjiao, she was a capricious person. If she were injured by Fang Bai's attack, she might vent her anger on them and kill a few of them—it wasn't impossible.

Martial artists may not fear death, but who would willingly die in vain?

So protecting Zu Hanjiao and ensuring she did not suffer even the slightest harm became the most critical task for those Innate Experts.

Although Fang Bai had already slain Lei Hong, Zu Hanjiao's most powerful subordinate, the dozens of remaining Innate Experts working together still posed a threat far beyond what Li Chenzhou could counter.

Li Chenzhou's earlier feat of killing four Innate Experts with a single strike was not because they were weak, but because they had underestimated him and failed to act in unison.

Now, however, dozens of Innate Experts advanced simultaneously, launching attacks on Li Chenzhou from the east, south, and west directions. Dozens of streams of True Yuan surged towards Li Chenzhou like an overwhelming tidal wave, immediately forcing him into a dire situation.

At this moment, let alone attacking, even defending was becoming increasingly difficult for Li Chenzhou.

In just a few breaths, Li Chenzhou was beset with dangers on all sides.

"I'm retreating!"

Li Chenzhou swung his spear like a staff, sweeping away some of the pressure while using the momentum to leap back, almost shoulder-to-shoulder with Fang Bai.

"Brother Fang, stop chattering and make your move already! You boasted just now that you'd deal with that woman in ten breaths, but it's been twenty... Oh, or are you feeling pity for her?"

Li Chenzhou shouted loudly without turning his head.

Fang Bai snorted, "An old woman like her? I wouldn't be interested in the slightest! If you like her, I can capture her alive and gift her to you—how about that?"

Li Chenzhou widened his eyes and replied, "I'm even less interested... How about gifting her to the Fat Taoist instead?"

Li Chenzhou, having grown close to Wu De, knew that Fang Bai had once given him the nickname "Fat Taoist" in secular society, so he referred to him as such too.

Fang Bai burst into laughter, saying, "The Fat Taoist only has interest in martial arts techniques and cultivation resources. If I handed this old woman to him, he'd sell her at the Martial Artists Trading Market to exchange for cultivation resources without a second thought—do you doubt me?"

Li Chenzhou roared with laughter as well, adding, "This old woman does have some charm. She might find a martial artist interested in her at the Trading Market."

The two exchanged banter and let out hearty laughter.

"You're courting death!"

Zu Hanjiao, upon hearing them repeatedly calling her "old woman," turned pale with fury. Her eyes gleamed with killing intent as she shouted angrily at the dozens of Innate Experts, "All of you listen! If either of these two escapes today, not one of you will be spared!"

Seeing Zu Hanjiao's crazed demeanor, the Innate Experts, knowing she meant what she said, were filled with dread and launched even fiercer attacks on Li Chenzhou.

Finally, Zu Hanjiao herself made a move.

Her target was Fang Bai.

Gripping the Fire Bat Sword from the stone table, her form became a blur as she shot out from the ruins of the collapsed stone house, stabbing towards Fang Bai's chest.

Before the sword tip reached Fang Bai, fire bats formed from Fire Primordial Qi surged forward from the blade's tip. With overwhelming heat waves and Zu Hanjiao's seething hatred, they closed in on Fang Bai with a thunderous roar.

With the strength of a Half-Step Foundation Establishment Expert and the enhancement of a Holy Grade Spirit Artifact, this strike from Zu Hanjiao was nearly on par with that of a true Foundation Establishment Expert.

At almost the exact moment, Zu Hanjiao and her dozens of Innate Experts launched a coordinated assault on both Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou—this time, their attacks were twice as ferocious as before.

"If you want to get past me, you'll have to pay the price!"

Li Chenzhou's eyes gleamed with sharp light as he thrust his spear forward. In the void, it moved like a phoenix nodding its head, striking three times rapidly.

Chirp!

Chirp!

Chirp!

Three bursts of killing intent, exceeding Li Chenzhou's own strength, shot out from the spear tip like arrows of light, shattering the True Essence Protective Barriers of three Innate Experts in front of him and piercing through their chests effortlessly.

Before their bodies hit the ground, those three Innate Experts were already lifeless, falling to the earth with a thud as they met their end.

"Haha... Exhilarating! Brother Fang, you're incredible!"

Li Chenzhou's eyes shone brightly as he looked at the three slain experts, his face full of delight.

The killing intent infused within Li Chenzhou's spear had been specially stored by Fang Bai when he reforged the spirit artifact for him. It was meant to bolster Li Chenzhou's power and serve as a means of protection in dire situations. Unexpectedly, it was now being put to use.

The force of this killing intent equaled Fang Bai's full-strength strike, far surpassing the might of Li Chenzhou's own attacks.

Li Chenzhou's confidence in holding the line for fifty breaths to buy time for Fang Bai stemmed from exactly this preparation.

However, the spear could only store six bursts of killing intent due to the limitations of Fang Bai's cultivation level and the artifact's grade. With three already unleashed, only three remained.

Li Chenzhou had felled seven foes with two sweeps of his spear, intimidating his opponents even further, causing their assault to momentarily falter.

Then, they grew even more frenzied in their attacks.

The stronger Li Chenzhou's power, the greater the perceived threat to Zu Hanjiao. Only by saving Zu Hanjiao could they ensure their own survival.

Li Chenzhou's cold, piercing gaze flashed like lightning. His white robes were dotted with specks of crimson blood. Combined with his Life-Snatching Spear and towering killing intent, he resembled a veritable god of death.

Li Chenzhou knew that every breath he held out would earn Fang Bai another moment to deal with Zu Hanjiao.

Thus, he unleashed the final three bursts of killing intent stored within his spear with no reservations whatsoever.

Chapter 1367: Fighting Fire with Fire

Pfft!

Pfft!

Pfft!

The intent to kill emerges, blood splatters.

In an instant, three more Innate Experts let out agonized screams, falling under Li Chenzhou's spear.

At the same time, the Fire Bat Sword in Zu Hanjiao's hand darted forward like a venomous serpent, closing within three feet of Fang Bai's chest.

This strike carried Zu Hanjiao's full strength—sharp and swift, it was undoubtedly the most formidable sword technique she could currently execute.

Zu Hanjiao understood that while Fang Bai's cultivation level might not rival hers, the Ink Jade Sword in his hand, a Holy Grade Spiritual Artifact, likely surpassed her Fire Bat Sword in rank.

Previously at the bank of Linghu Lake, Fang Bai braved all to rescue Xia Chenyu, delivering a breathtaking sword strike that even compelled Zu Hanjiao to back down and avoid the confrontation.

This proved that with the Ink Jade Sword's empowerment, Fang Bai's combat capability already rivaled hers.

However, Zu Hanjiao, once a Foundation Establishment Expert, remained proud and confident. She believed that even with equal combat strength, her vast experience accumulated in the Three Thousand Great Worlds would allow her to defeat Fang Bai and secure victory in this duel.

Zu Hanjiao placed immense faith in this sword strike. Even if it didn't kill Fang Bai outright, she was certain it would deal him a heavy blow.

Yet to her surprise, Fang Bai's figure suddenly blurred as a fierce gust of wind surged forth, narrowly evading her Fire Bat Sword. Only a corner of his garment caught the blade's energy, shattering into snow-like scraps that fluttered in the air.

"You... you have an Innate Wind Spirit Root? You're a Dual Attribute Innate Spiritual Root?"

Zu Hanjiao exclaimed in disbelief, her face etched with astonishment.

Fang Bai ignored her inquiry and said in a deep tone, "Reconsider the two conditions I proposed earlier. This is your last chance—whether you live or die all depends on your choice!"

Zu Hanjiao was a martial artist from the Three Thousand Great Worlds. Fang Bai desired information about those worlds from her, which was why he wished to avoid killing her.

However, if Zu Hanjiao obstinately refused to cooperate, Fang Bai wouldn't hesitate to eliminate her to prevent future troubles.

"Die!"

Zu Hanjiao lashed out sharply, answering Fang Bai with an onslaught.

The Fire Bat Sword danced like the wind, its blade engulfed in Fire Primordial Qi, appearing as if swathed in roaring flames. Countless fire bats, each the size of a washbasin, surged forth from the flames, spewing streams of fire as they swarmed toward Fang Bai, enclosing him in an infernal sea.

The temperature within a radius of ten-plus meters skyrocketed. Fang Bai's figure vanished amidst the flames.

Fire Bat Soul Burning!

This was Zu Hanjiao's ultimate technique—a formidable ability that consumed significant True Yuan. She rarely deployed it unless facing an especially troublesome foe.

"Let's see if you survive this time!"

Zu Hanjiao muttered through gritted teeth, watching Fang Bai engulfed in flames.

Her cultivation technique was of Holy Grade Martial Arts, and the fire generated by her Fire Primordial Qi possessed exceedingly high temperatures and unparalleled destructive power. Even a mere touch of these flames could strip flesh to bone, leaving near-irremediable wounds.

But Zu Hanjiao had underestimated her foe once again.

After subduing the "Red Silkworm Spirit Fire" in the Eternal Death Zone, Fang Bai's body underwent rigorous tempering by flames. Since then, fire had become the least of his fears.

For Fang Bai, the fiery sea surrounding him felt like soaking in a warm spring, not only harmless but surprisingly refreshing.

However, due to the obstruction of flames, Zu Hanjiao could only catch glimpses of Fang Bai's silhouette, unable to discern his actual state.

Dozens of Innate Experts battling fiercely with Li Chenzhou couldn't withstand the scorching temperatures and retreated tens of meters, pausing their combat to turn and observe the scene by the fiery sea, their reactions mixed.

Most Innate Experts believed Fang Bai's death was imminent and breathed out in relief, thinking Zu Hanjiao's safety ensured their survival.

Li Chenzhou, on the other hand, burst into hearty laughter, looking at Zu Hanjiao as if she were a fool. "Haha... You old woman, using fire against Fang Bai... Haha!"

Li Chenzhou was aware of Fang Bai's mastery over the "Red Silkworm Spirit Fire." Every time he saw that terrifying little flame on Fang Bai's fingertip, it filled him with dread.

The "Red Silkworm Spirit Fire," though small, had created an Eternal Death Zone spanning a thousand miles and nurtured an Essence Stone Vein with an astonishing reserve.

Now that this fearsome flame was under Fang Bai's control, even if Fang Bai couldn't unleash its full potential, it was still lethal enough to decimate Innate Experts like Li Chenzhou himself.

In Li Chenzhou's view, despite Zu Hanjiao's superior cultivation level, her imposing flames were nothing compared to Fang Bai's fire, a contest of triviality versus magnificence.

Moments later, Zu Hanjiao finally realized something was amiss.

Within the fire, Fang Bai's aura hadn't diminished but instead grew stronger.

This indicated that Fang Bai wasn't harmed by the flames but was drawing strength from them.

"This... how is this possible?"

Zu Hanjiao stared in disbelief, her expression as though she'd seen a ghost.

Just then, the surrounding blaze began visibly dissipating, retracting rapidly.

When the fire's range contracted to less than ten feet, all the martial artists present, including Zu Hanjiao, finally saw what had happened to the vanishing Fire Primordial Qi—it was being absorbed by Fang Bai's body.

Zu Hanjiao gasped, stiffened with shock. What she saw defied everything she had ever encountered in her Martial Dao journey.

"You... you..."

As Fang Bai's figure came into sharp focus, Zu Hanjiao saw him entirely unscathed. Her vision darkened as fear overwhelmed her.

To absorb massive amounts of Fire Primordial Qi released by her attack—this was an achievement unlike anything she'd imagined, even beyond the reach of a true Foundation Establishment Expert.

Zu Hanjiao couldn't fathom what unparalleled physique or Qi Sea Fang Bai possessed to endure such a deluge of flames.

"I've sampled your fire, now taste mine!"

Fang Bai's lips curved into a faint smile. His eyes sparked with brilliance, resembling twin blazing flames.

He extended his left palm, where a tiny flame, no larger than a finger, flickered and rose.

"That woman... is finished..."

Li Chenzhou shuddered involuntarily, muttering as he watched the "Red Silkworm Spirit Fire" dance in Fang Bai's palm.

"Spirit... Spirit Fire..."

Zu Hanjiao, worldly and well-informed from the Three Thousand Great Worlds, knew of Spirit Fires through legend alone—renowned remnants of pure, devastating fire essence she had only heard of but never seen.

She knew that even the lowest-grade Spirit Fire could leave a Foundation Establishment Expert gravely wounded and utterly vulnerable.

At her current Half-Step Foundation Establishment cultivation level, she couldn't possibly withstand the might of the Spirit Fire flickering in Fang Bai's palm.

At that moment, the faint smile on Fang Bai's face seemed to Zu Hanjiao like the grin of a looming demon.

And this demon now held dominion over her fate.

Zu Hanjiao's body began to tremble, her complexion turned deathly pale, and despair consumed her heart.

Chapter 1368: From Beauty to Skeleton

"I already gave you a chance, but you failed to grasp it. You can't blame me for what happens next!"

Fang Bai withdrew his smile, locking his gaze directly on Zu Hanjiao. The Red Silkworm Spirit Fire flickered faintly in the palm of his hand, then suddenly blazed with intense light.

Zu Hanjiao felt a sharp pain in her eyes. Instinctively sensing danger, she shut them tightly and retreated at full force.

The terrifying heat released by the Red Silkworm Spirit Fire spread wildly in all directions at an alarming speed, instantly covering an area of several dozen meters.

Despite Zu Hanjiao's quick retreat, she still failed to escape the fiery domain of the Red Silkworm Spirit Fire.

"Ah..."

A piercing, anguished scream echoed as Zu Hanjiao's eyebrows and long hair were reduced to nothing under the scorching heat, her skin feeling like it was being pierced by thousands of needles — an unbearable agony.

"Spare... spare me! I'll tell you everything..."

Terrified, Zu Hanjiao realized her life hung by a thread, completely at Fang Bai's mercy. She discarded the Fire Bat Sword from her hand, dropped to her knees, and kowtowed repeatedly as she begged for her life in a trembling voice.

"It's already too late!"

Fang Bai replied coldly, devoid of any expression. "Whatever I want to know, I will take directly from your mind... It's just a little more troublesome, that's all. Zu Hanjiao, look at me!"

Zu Hanjiao froze, her first instinct to avoid casting her gaze toward Fang Bai. But those last three words were like a demonic chant, compelling her to look into Fang Bai's eyes against her will.

As their eyes met, Zu Hanjiao felt as though Fang Bai's deep, fathomless gaze was a vortex as vast as the ocean or a black hole amidst the vastness of the stars. Just one look left her head spinning, her consciousness rapidly fading.

Despite their cultivation levels being similar, Fang Bai's mastery of the Soul Capturing Heart Refining Technique allowed him to briefly control Zu Hanjiao's consciousness and extract any information he desired.

While Fang Bai probed Zu Hanjiao's mind for matters concerning the Three Thousand Worlds, the dozens of Innate Martial Artists who had retreated to watch from afar paled visibly, their hearts sinking in despair.

These Innate Experts sensed something amiss from Zu Hanjiao's dazed expression and condition. Though they wished to intervene, the oppressive heat of the Red Silkworm Spirit Fire prevented them from taking even a single step forward.

From the moment Fang Bai and Zu Hanjiao clashed, none among the dozen or so Innate Martial Artists had believed Zu Hanjiao would lose to Fang Bai.

But the scene before their eyes shattered those beliefs, leaving them utterly disheartened and near hopeless.

Zu Hanjiao and Fang Bai stood only a short distance apart; her gaze empty, her fighting spirit completely extinguished. There was no trace of the cunning and commanding demeanor she had displayed in the past.

At this moment, Zu Hanjiao was clearly powerless, a fighter with no battle left in her. Any one of the Innate Experts could have easily finished her off.

However, if Zu Hanjiao were to die, the Innate Experts who had consumed the "Heart-Eroding Pill" would inevitably perish alongside her.

These Innate Experts had all been subdued by Zu Hanjiao through coercive methods. While they harbored intense hatred for her, their desire to survive still forced them to abide by her commands.

Now, seeing Zu Hanjiao completely subdued by Fang Bai, a sense of impending doom descended upon them all.

With their lives hanging in the balance, the dozens of Innate Experts exchanged nervous glances. Then, as if guided by an unspoken agreement, they collectively dropped to their knees before Fang Bai.

"Senior, please spare us!"

The Innate Experts collectively wailed, their voices trembling as they kowtowed vehemently.

Although martial artists are unafraid of death, most of the Innate Experts had over a century of longevity ahead. There was always the possibility that they could advance further along the Martial Dao.

With greater cultivation, they wouldn't just gain more power but also extend their lifespans.

To die now would be a bitter waste, wouldn't it?

Besides, as martial artists, wouldn't they rather die gloriously in battle than succumb to a poison pill and perish helplessly?

Such an end would be disgraceful, wouldn't it?

Right now, the only chance of salvation lay in Fang Bai.

If Fang Bai spared Zu Hanjiao, it would mean sparing their lives as well.

Though Fang Bai was young, his ability to overpower Zu Hanjiao made him worthy of being addressed as "Senior" by the Innate Experts.

A scene of dozens of Innate Experts kneeling before one man was a rare sight in the True Martial Realm. Even Li Chenzhou, who once proclaimed himself invincible, had never received such an honor.

Li Chenzhou watched the dozens of kneeling Innate Experts and couldn't help feeling an unexpected sense of pride, his heart surging with excitement.

Fang Bai, deeply focused on controlling Zu Hanjiao with the Soul Capturing Heart Refining Technique, paid no attention to the Innate Experts and ignored their pleading.

Moments later, Fang Bai gleaned much of the information he desired from Zu Hanjiao's mind.

"Don't blame me for being ruthless. If I let you go, the day you return to the Three Thousand Worlds, you'll undoubtedly bring endless trouble. So, you'll remain here in the Minor World for eternity!"

Fang Bai gazed coldly at the dazed and stupefied Zu Hanjiao. As his thoughts shifted, a thread of Fire Primordial Qi split from the Red Silkworm Spirit Fire and coalesced into a blazing flame, enveloping her entirely.

For Fang Bai, Zu Hanjiao had lost all value. Moreover, from the information he extracted, she turned out to be a disciple of a sect in the Three Thousand Worlds — a sect with many Foundation Establishment Experts and tremendous overall strength.

Fang Bai had no intention of courting future trouble if he ever entered the Three Thousand Worlds and faced pursuit from her sect.

With this in mind, Fang Bai decided to eliminate Zu Hanjiao, eradicating the threat in its budding stage.

Before Zu Hanjiao's consciousness could recover, the Fire Primordial Qi released by the Red Silkworm Spirit Fire consumed her entirely. In the blink of an eye, her body was incinerated to mere ashes by the scorching Spiritual Fire.

"A former Foundation Establishment Expert, reduced to ashes instantaneously... Such a small wisp of Spiritual Fire, yet its power is this astonishing! Fang Bai wields the Spiritual Fire — is there anyone in the world who can stand against him?"

Witnessing Zu Hanjiao's obliteration, Li Chenzhou couldn't help but gasp in shock, his scalp tingling.

"Dead... Zu Hanjiao is dead..."

"With Zu Hanjiao gone, we're doomed as well..."

"Perhaps death is a kind of release..."

"But my cultivation hasn't yet reached Innate perfection. To die like this is truly unsatisfying!"

"We've begged profusely, yet this man remains indifferent. How hateful!"

"If this man hadn't killed Zu Hanjiao, causing us to lose the antidote to the 'Heart-Eroding Pill,' would we be dying now? He deserves to die!"

"Agreed! If death is inevitable, let us join forces and drag him down to accompany us in the grave!"

...

With Zu Hanjiao's death, the dozens of kneeling Innate Martial Artists felt despair turn to rage, rising one after another and glaring angrily at Fang Bai.

United in hostility, the dozens of Innate Experts gathered their collective energy into a single overwhelming wave, pressing toward Fang Bai.

"Who said the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' has no antidote?"

Though Fang Bai wasn't afraid of facing dozens of Innate Martial Artists together, he had no intention of exhausting his True Yuan in direct conflict. After retracting the Red Silkworm Spirit Fire, he fixed his gaze intensely on the group and spoke with calm confidence: "I can neutralize the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' in your systems!"

His words left the dozens of Innate Martial Artists stunned, their faces painted with disbelief.

Chapter 1369: Senior, Save My Life

"The poison of the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' flares up every six months, and each attack feels as if ten thousand ants are devouring the heart, causing unbearable agony."

Decades ago, those dozens of Innate Experts were forced to consume Zu Hanjiao's 'Heart-Eroding Pill.' Unwilling to let their fates be controlled by her, they secretly took various elixirs in hopes of curing the poison. Yet, their efforts yielded no results whatsoever.

After numerous attempts, the dozens of Innate Experts finally fell into despair, giving up on detoxification and resigning themselves to becoming Zu Hanjiao's subordinates, obeying her commands and directives.

Zu Hanjiao had once boasted that the poison of her 'Heart-Eroding Pill' was utterly incurable within the True Martial Realm, and the dozens of Innate Experts had come to believe this deeply.

Thus, when Fang Bai killed Zu Hanjiao, it was tantamount to indirectly stripping those dozens of Innate Experts of their lives. Enraged, they immediately resolved to fight Fang Bai to the death.

However, Fang Bai's single statement—"I can cure the poison of the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' plaguing you"—was akin to a clap of thunder, shaking the dozens of Innate Experts to their core. Although difficult to believe, even the slimmest thread of hope was something they desperately wished to seize.

"If the senior can cure the poison of our 'Heart-Eroding Pill', you will become our benefactor. From this day forth, we are willing to follow your lead and heed your commands. But..."

A white-haired elder, whose cultivation reached the high rank of the Innate Realm, stepped forward from the group, glaring at Fang Bai with eyes bloodshot and bellowing fiercely, "If the senior deceives us, even if it costs our lives, we will fight you to the very end!"

"Heh..."

Fang Bai naturally paid no mind to the white-haired elder's threats. He smiled faintly and said, "It's merely the poison of the 'Heart-Eroding Pill.' How difficult is it to cure?"

"My Brother Fang here is an incredibly formidable alchemist!"

Li Chenzhou suddenly interjected with this remark.

Upon hearing the term "alchemist," the eyes of the dozens of Innate Experts lit up, and the faint flicker of hope in their hearts grew stronger.

"Senior is able... able to refine high-grade elixirs?"

The white-haired elder, who had spoken earlier, asked Fang Bai tremulously, his hostility toward Fang Bai significantly diminished and his attitude far more respectful than before.

The other dozens of Innate Experts also fixed their gazes on Fang Bai, their eyes brimming with hope.

Earlier, Fang Bai had effortlessly slain Lei Hong, showcasing his immense strength. If he were truly an alchemist, his rank must be exceptionally high, providing a glimmer that he might indeed be capable of refining an antidote for the 'Heart-Eroding Pill.'

Li Chenzhou chuckled and said, "High-grade elixirs? Mere trifles! My Brother Fang is none other than the greatest alchemist under heaven. When he refines pills, they're exceptional; when he doesn't, well—oh wait, here, let me show you something!"

Li Chenzhou retrieved a jade bottle from his Spatial Ring, pouring out a few elixirs onto his palm.

"See this? This bottle of high-grade, superior Fire Yuan Pills was recently refined by Brother Fang himself!"

Li Chenzhou proudly displayed the Fire Yuan Pills to the dozens of Innate Experts.

After devouring the Red Silkworm Spirit Fire at the core of the Eternal Death Zone, Fang Bai's alchemical abilities had soared. Subsequently, he used fire-attribute spirit medicines obtained from the Eternal Death Zone to refine numerous Fire Yuan Pills.

As Li Chenzhou said, Fang Bai's pill refinement was unparalleled; not only were the pills high-grade and superior, but they also had a remarkably high success rate. Even the occasional "waste pills" that emerged were of considerable grade.

Given Fang Bai's current level of alchemical expertise, if he possessed Holy Grade Spirit Medicines with an age of five thousand years, he could even refine Holy Grade elixirs.

Moments earlier, Fang Bai had swept his Divine Sense over the bodies of the dozens of Innate Experts, confirming the poison they bore from the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' was crafted as a high-grade, superior poison elixir.

The failure to neutralize the elixir's poison stemmed from two factors: the rarity of alchemists capable of refining high-grade, superior elixirs, and the scarcity of spirit medicines suitable for antidote refinement.

Yet, Fang Bai met both conditions.

Within Fang Bai's Spatial Ring were abundant high-grade spirit medicines, some of which had detoxifying properties that could cure all poisons. Hence, cleansing the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' poison was naturally no great challenge.

"They truly are high-grade, superior elixirs... Truly..."

The white-haired elder stepped up to Li Chenzhou, sensing the Essence Energy fluctuating within the elixirs in his palm with an emotional trembling, his excitement growing.

"Thud!"

Just then, a mid-tier Innate Martial Artist from among the group rushed forward urgently, kneeling before Fang Bai and repeatedly kowtowing, shouting, "I, Yu Wei, swear here and now: if the senior saves my life, I will follow every call to action, whether climbing a mountain of blades or braving an ocean of fire—never hesitating! Should I break this vow, may I be pierced by ten thousand swords and die a wretched death! Please, senior, save my life!"

The mid-tier Innate Martial Artist Yu Wei, clad in a black robe, was slender and appeared to be about sixty years of age. As he spoke, his pupils reddened, his face showed signs of anguish, his features twisted grotesquely, and his voice quivered.

"Yu Wei, is your pill's poison... starting to flare?"

The white-haired elder glimpsed Yu Wei's agonized appearance and recognized it as the prelude to the 'Heart-Eroding Pill's' flare-up. Thinking of the excruciating, life-destructive pain it brought, he couldn't help but let out a cold gasp.

Then, recalling his own poison's flare was closely timed to Yu Wei's, the white-haired elder shuddered involuntarily.

"It's... It's starting to flare..."

Yu Wei gritted his teeth tightly, beads of sweat pouring from his forehead as he desperately resisted the mounting pain, his body trembling like a leaf in the wind.

"Brother Zhao, I need to ask a favor: if I perish, please deliver my Spatial Ring to my wife and children."

Trembling, Yu Wei removed the Spatial Ring from his finger and handed it over to the white-haired elder.

The white-haired elder and the other dozens of Innate Experts, hearing Yu Wei's request, knew he was making arrangements in light of potential misfortunes, hoping to avoid suffering for his family in the aftermath of his demise. Their hearts were deeply burdened, feeling a shared sense of sorrow.

After all, when the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' poison flared, without timely antidotes, death followed, accompanied by pain unbearable even to immortals or deities.

To the Innate Experts, refining a batch of elixirs would take at least one to two days, at most ten days to half a month. Even if Fang Bai could refine an antidote for the 'Heart-Eroding Pill,' they feared Yu Wei wouldn't survive long enough to see it, a lamentable reality.

Seizing the moment while his mind was still clear, Yu Wei busied himself with arranging his affairs, lest his family suffer due to his untimely demise.

"Brother Yu, you've entrusted the wrong man!"

The white-haired elder did not take the Spatial Ring Yu Wei handed over but instead remarked bitterly, "Don't forget, all of us consumed the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' around the same time, and the intervals between its flares are extremely brief. Once you're gone, I'll be next."

Yu Wei's eyes reddened, large beads of tears pouring forth as he clutched his head and cried out in sorrow, "My death is insignificant, but my wife and children haven't reached the Innate Realm in their cultivation. They might suffer harm and humiliation in the future..."

After crying for a while, his body abruptly convulsed violently. Clutching his chest, he writhed and rolled across the ground, letting out blood-curdling wails of anguish.

Chapter 1370: Lending a Helping Hand

The dozens of Innate Experts present watched as Yu Wei writhed and rolled on the ground, screaming and crying out incessantly, imagining the agony of ten thousand ants devouring his heart at this moment. Each of them turned pale, overcome by fear.

They all knew that the poison of the "Heart-Eroding Pill" inside Yu Wei's body had begun to rapidly take effect. Within the next hundred breaths, Yu Wei's suffering would multiply exponentially until death claimed him.

And before long, the poison of the "Heart-Eroding Pill" within their own bodies would also begin to act, and their pain would be no less torturous than Yu Wei's.

"Sigh..."

The white-haired elder let out a long sigh, shutting his eyes tightly, unable to bear seeing Yu Wei's pained expression any longer.

The other Innate Experts also looked dejected, turning their heads away in succession.

However, unexpectedly, after only a dozen breaths, Yu Wei's screams did not grow louder but gradually weakened and ultimately ceased altogether.

Perplexed, the white-haired elder turned abruptly to see Fang Bai standing next to Yu Wei at some point. Yu Wei, on the other hand, sat cross-legged, his expression serene, his breathing steady—like an old monk in meditation.

At this moment, not a trace of suffering could be seen on Yu Wei's face. He appeared as normal as any ordinary person, a stark contrast to the agony that had possessed him earlier.

"This..."

The white-haired elder and the dozens of Innate Experts behind him gaped at Yu Wei in sheer disbelief.

In the past, the white-haired elder and the others had personally witnessed Zu Hanjiao punishing several subordinates for their incompetence. When the poison of the "Heart-Eroding Pill" erupted without an antidote, those subordinates all succumbed to their deaths in utter torment.

They had thought Yu Wei was doomed this time, that the eruption of the "Heart-Eroding Pill" poison would leave him with no chance of survival. But judging from his current condition, he seemed completely unscathed.

"Could it be that he saved Yu Wei?"

Gazing at Fang Bai standing beside Yu Wei, the white-haired elder and the others felt their hearts stir, their gazes growing eager.

Under the intense scrutiny of dozens of fervent eyes, Fang Bai smiled faintly and said, "I fed him a high-grade Superior Rejuvenation Pill. As long as he regulates his breath for a moment, the poison of the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' in his body will be completely purged."

The main purpose of the "Rejuvenation Pill" is to expel and ward off toxins. However, the primary ingredients for this pill generally grow in areas inhabited by poisonous creatures, making them extremely rare and exceedingly valuable.

"Rejuvenation Pill?"

The white-haired elder and others murmured to themselves, their faces blank, clearly unfamiliar with such an elixir.

"The Rejuvenation Pill can cure almost all extraordinary poisons in the world, and the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' is no exception. You people—all of you who could have met your end today—are truly fortunate to have encountered my brother Fang!"

Before Fang Bai could speak, Li Chenzhou eagerly interjected.

At that moment, Yu Wei, who was meditating cross-legged, suddenly let out a long breath and slowly opened his eyes.

"Yu Wei, how are you feeling right now? Has the poison of the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' truly been purged?"

The white-haired elder rushed over to Yu Wei, gripping his shoulders tightly and asking with urgency.

"Ah?"

Yu Wei, too, was bewildered, not understanding what had happened.

When the poison of the "Heart-Eroding Pill" erupted in his body earlier, he was in unbearable pain and nearly unconscious. Then, someone patted him lightly, causing him to open his mouth involuntarily. A pill was stuffed into his mouth.

That pill melted instantly upon entry, with its medicinal power spreading directly to his heart. Yu Wei's pain quickly subsided, his consciousness became clearer, and a voice rang in his ears instructing him to circulate his cultivation technique and meditate.

Yu Wei almost instinctively followed the instructions.

Even now, he wore an expression of confusion and had no idea who had transmitted the instructions to him.

Hearing the white-haired elder's question, Yu Wei hesitated briefly, then recalled that the voice had seemed faintly familiar. Suddenly, he turned his head towards Fang Bai.

"Senior, was it you who saved me?"

Seeing Fang Bai smiling serenely at him, Yu Wei nearly confirmed that the person who had fed him the pill and transmitted the instructions to him must have been Fang Bai.

Fang Bai did not deny it, nodding with a smile, and said to Yu Wei, "The poison of the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' in your body has been entirely cleared. Congratulations, you are now free."

"I..."

Having been under the control of Zu Hanjiao's poison pills for years, Yu Wei had lived in both physical and emotional torment. Upon suddenly being told that the poison of the "Heart-Eroding Pill" had been completely purged and that he was finally free, he froze in place, unable to believe it.

"Yu Wei, have you forgotten that each time the poison of the 'Heart-Eroding Pill' erupted in the past, we would only experience increasing agony? If we failed to get the antidote in time, we would perish within a hundred breaths while tormented by pain. Now you're standing here perfectly fine, looking just like any other healthy person. This proves Senior Fang was right—your 'Heart-Eroding Pill' poison has indeed been cleared... Haha... Hahaha..."

The white-haired elder spoke loudly, shaking with excitement, even laughing and crying simultaneously like a madman.

The other dozens of Innate Experts were also visibly overwhelmed with agitation, unable to contain themselves.

From the moment Yu Wei's "Heart-Eroding Pill" poison erupted up until now, nearly as long as one hundred breaths had passed. Not only had Yu Wei's pain not intensified, but it had disappeared altogether—this fact alone explained everything.

Yu Wei performed a self-check and found no abnormalities in his body. Finally, he believed it: the nightmare of the "Heart-Eroding Pill" that had plagued him for years had finally been broken.

Yu Wei began crying once more.

This time, the tears were due to joy.

Facing Fang Bai, he dropped to his knees, his expression brimming with gratitude as he kowtowed multiple times, then raised one hand to the sky and solemnly swore: "I, Yu Wei, always keep my word! The Senior has saved my life. From this day forward, whatever my senior commands, I will devote myself entirely to fulfilling it!"

Fang Bai gazed at Yu Wei intently for a moment, then asked, "Your cultivation level is now at the high rank of the Innate realm, but you've reached a bottleneck. Do you find it difficult to advance no matter how much you cultivate?"

"Yes... yes..."

Yu Wei nodded repeatedly.

"Well then... Would you like to elevate your cultivation to the realm of perfection within the Innate rank—or even beyond?"

Fang Bai asked with a smile.

"I would... I would..."

Yu Wei nodded again, sensing faintly where this conversation was leading. His heart pounded with excitement.

Fang Bai nodded and said, "Very well. As long as you are willing to join the Huaxia Sect, I guarantee that within one year, your cultivation will reach the perfection stage of the Innate realm."

"Huaxia Sect?"

Yu Wei froze for a moment, racking his brain but unable to recall any Innate Sect by that name in the True Martial Realm.

In Yu Wei's understanding, given Fang Bai's extraordinary strength, if he hailed from the Huaxia Sect, then the Huaxia Sect must undoubtedly be an Innate Sect. Yet, as far as Yu Wei was familiar with Innate Sects in the True Martial Realm, there was no record of a "Huaxia Sect."

Yu Wei, being a Loose Cultivator Martial Artist, originally harbored strong aversions to joining any sect. However, Fang Bai had saved his life and even promised to help him achieve perfection in the Innate realm, which greatly tempted him.

"Senior, we are willing to join the Huaxia Sect! Please take us in!"

Before Yu Wei could respond, the white-haired elder and the dozens of Innate Experts rushed forward eagerly, voicing their pledges