

Immortal 1041

Chapter 1041: Encircled

Zu An immediately focused his attention when he heard that. Looks like this trip was worth making after all.

Unfortunately, the voice was a bit hoarse and strange, as if that person were intentionally altering his voice.

“Would any of you here be able to feel at ease if Zuo Su weren’t dead?” The black-robed individual sitting farthest out spoke up just then in a slightly mocking tone.

Zu An frowned. He really couldn't understand why these individuals would cover themselves up that way, even modifying their voice. Don't tell me these people can't even distinguish between each other here?

But upon closer inspection, he still saw some differences. Even though they wore black robes, the patterns on their sleeves and collars were different.

The decorative designs on the one seated farthest away were white. The designs on the one to his left were orange, and the designs on the person to his left were red. The other two individuals' decorative designs were blue and yellow.

What do these colors represent? Zu An wondered.

But what made his expression become even more grave were those people's cultivations. Even though it was hard to determine their exact cultivations, there were at least two master rank cultivators, as well as two who were at the peak of the ninth rank. Even the weakest one was around the mid stage of the ninth rank. That was ignoring the fact that all of them had their own unique skills and abilities.

Had all of Cloudcenter Commandery's most powerful experts gathered today or something?

Zu An thought sarcastically, I better not set up random flags here, or else I might just end up losing my life here.

The room entered an awkward silence. It was clear that they were merely showing hypocritical concern toward Zuo Su's death. They didn't really care.

A while later, the yellow-patterned man who had his back to Zu An spoke out to smooth things over. “Enough, enough. None of us wanted such a thing to happen. Right now, our highest priority should be to think about what we do now that Zuo Su has died. What do we do about the power vacuum in the Civil Affairs Manor?”

The red-patterned man spoke. “Hmph, Xu Yu has now taken control over the Civil Affairs Manor. The power vacuum has long been filled in already.”

Zu An thought to himself, Looks like Xu Yu wasn't with these guys after all. There was at least someone he could trust in Cloudcenter Commandery, at least for now.

"It doesn't matter. Xu Yu isn't someone too skilled at social interaction. He doesn't have many people directly under him either. He isn't too big of a threat to us," the blue-patterned man said. His voice sounded aged, clearly not belonging to a youngster.

The orange-patterned man also added, "Xu Yu came from a poor background. He doesn't have any powers behind him, so there's no cause for worry."

Zu An was stunned. That person's posture was straight and upright, making him seem familiar. However, he couldn't think of who that person was at all.

The white-patterned man tapped on the table and said, "Find a chance to try and rope in Xu Yu. It's best if we can make him one of us."

The blue-patterned man released a forced chuckle and said, "That guy is smug and self-righteous. It's not as if we've never tried to rope him in before, but unfortunately, it went right over his head."

"That means the method was wrong. If he's human, he has a weakness. A more direct method might suit him more. For example, wasn't Zuo Su also stubborn at first? But in the end, he was convinced by us all the same." The white-patterned man harrumphed.

"What you say makes sense. I'll think about it more," The yellow-patterned man replied in a low muffled voice.

"Compared to roping in Xu Yu, there's another issue I'm more concerned about." The white-patterned man slowly rotated his body, as if he were looking at everyone present. "Why was Zuo Su captured? Furthermore, the Imperial Envoy clearly didn't capture him for no reason. They also sent out men to capture some related officials. Why does the Imperial Envoy know such detailed information?"

After some hesitation, the yellow-patterned man said, "The second in command of the imperial envoy, Zu An, visited Zhenyuan Bank and fetched a chest someone else stored there previously. Soon afterward, Sang Hong decided to start arresting people. I fear something might have been recorded in that chest."

The others' attention turned to him when they heard that. The red-patterned man said sinisterly, "So in the end, it was your people who leaked out this secret?"

Zu An was alarmed. He hadn't expected them to actually talk about him! It seemed this yellow patterned black robed man was someone from the Zhenyuan Merchant Group. The question now was who. Judging from the current situation, even if he wasn't the leader, he was definitely one of the highest-ranked members of the merchant group.

The yellow-patterned man waved his hand and said, "Of course not. If it really had been us who leaked it out, why would I dare to say that here? That chest was something someone stored in our bank a while ago. Our bank's rules are that we never peek at our customers' belongings. That's why this ended up happening."

"Who was the one who deposited that chest?" the orange-patterned man asked.

"I've already sent someone to look into it. It was a little beggar who came to store it with us..." The yellow-patterned man was cut off by several people before he even finished his sentence.

"A beggar came to store something precious in your bank and you didn't even think of it as suspicious?" The others stared at him, clearly blaming him for what had happened.

The yellow-patterned man said with a forced smile, "The things that are stored in our bank all more or less have some dark history. It's a common occurrence to have some beggars help people store certain things. After all, we only care about the key, not the person who deposits the items.

"We've looked into it these past two days, and we finally found out who that little beggar was. According to the descriptions, the one who deposited that chest with us should be Chen Zhou."

"Chen Zhou!" The others released hushed cries of alarm. They clearly all knew the person.

Chen Zhou was just an ordinary guard, and yet so many big shots knew about him. That was something unprecedented.

"I didn't expect him to have left behind this trump card!" The white-patterned man slammed the table. He suddenly added, surprised, "The Imperial Envoy was carrying out a bunch of arrests yesterday; the related individuals were all promptly dealt with. Which one of you did that?"

The others were about to reply when a light suddenly appeared in the center of the round table.

Zu An thought to himself, Not good!

It had originally been a cloudy night with low visibility, making it an excellent day to remain undercover. But just then, for some reason, the clouds had ended up scattering, revealing the moon behind them.

Moonlight scattered down. Zu An worried that his silhouette would be exposed by the window and instinctively crouched down. But everything had happened too suddenly, and he had forgotten that the hole he had secretly made in the window was still there. The moonlight was shining straight through that hole.

The reason why the people there were acting all mysterious was precisely to avoid having their identities exposed. That was why even though they were already having a meeting indoors, there had been no lights, and they had remained in the darkness. How could they not know what had happened when they saw the streak of light?

There's someone here!

Zu An knew that he couldn't continue hiding. He kicked off and tried to leave. However, a vicious streak of sword energy flew out, and the window and door instantly shattered into pieces. A flying sword had already begun homing in on his waist.

"Han Fengqiu!" Zu An had fought with that person before and immediately recognized the sword. He brandished his palm, striking the flying sword away. Then, he summoned Grandgale to instantly move a large distance.

He could deal with a single master rank cultivator, but encountering two master ranks and so many other powerful cultivators together, together with the Zhenyuan Merchant Group's security that might arrive at any time, was a situation he had no choice but to flee from.

He debated using the imperial edict to bring forth the emperor's power and obliterate the group. However, even though the emperor's imperial edict was powerful, it also took a long time to prepare.

When he was being escorted to the capital by the Embroidered Envoy, the Embroidered Envoy Huang Huihong had died before he could even use his imperial edict.

The people in the room were all experts among experts. They definitely wouldn't give Zu An the time to use the emperor's power.

The trees in front of Zu An suddenly grew crazily, turning into thick brambles that rushed upward, blocking his path. He had no choice but to stop. There was a flaw in his instantaneous movement technique, which was that it couldn't disregard spatial interruptions.

The plants and flowers on the ground began to wrap around him. The leaves that were usually smooth and sleek were now full of spiky thorns, stabbing at Zu An's body. Under the moonlight's illumination, he could see that the thorns were gleaming blue. They were clearly poisonous.

Unfortunately, Zu An's body was tough, and he was immune to poison anyway. He smashed straight through the thorns and charged through.

Just then, a massive golden brick appeared right in front of him, above his head, slamming down with the weight of a mountain. Anyone hit by the brick would be instantly crushed into a bloody paste.

Zu An quickly evaded off to the side, but a pair of multicolored eyes suddenly appeared in front of him. His body instantly went rigid. It was probably the fiend race cultivator Kong Qing's work!

Zu An immediately knew it was a spiritual attack. Pei You had most likely been controlled by the same skill before. Huh? Why is the power not as great as I imagined it to be? he thought. But he still didn't dare to treat it carelessly. He summoned Hundredwarble to retaliate.

Meanwhile, the black-robed person's eyes shone. He was about to use his power to destroy his target's mind when he suddenly sensed that the other person's body had also begun flickering with a multicolored glow.

"Huh? The lord's aura?" the man exclaimed. His momentary hesitation made it so that before he could even deliver the killing blow, the other party's Hundredwarble retaliation arrived. He couldn't help but groan, cursing, "This brat has no sense of honor!"

The white-patterned man looked at him with a frown, clearly confused as to why he had failed. However, he didn't dare to delay his own attacks. His hands immediately rose upward.

Zu An evaded off to the side after using Hundredwarble to retaliate. The giant golden brick instantly crashed down on his previous position. A massive rumbling noise echoed through the place. All of the Zhenyuan Merchant Group's houses began to sway back and forth. The golden brick had smashed open a huge crater in the ground.

Zu An was about to leave, but he found that the air around him had suddenly become incredibly cold. A layer of frost instantly covered his entire body. In the blink of an eye, he was frozen in a block of ice.

Chapter 1042: Completely Trapped

The other black robed individuals all looked at that white patterned black robed individual when they saw this scene. After all, everyone else's methods failed, yet he succeeded as soon as he attacked.

That white patterned black robed man had his hands behind his back. There was immediately a feeling of proudness that surged within him.

He was just about to say something when his expression changed a bit. He suddenly raised his head towards that frozen ice chunk.

A trace of redness suddenly appeared from that entirely white chunk of ice. Then, that ice's surface began to crack. A blazing flame erupted from inside, instantly blasting that ice to pieces. Then, it shot into the heavens, illuminating the dark night.

Everyone's eyes were subconsciously drawn to those flames. However, soon afterwards, they discovered that there was no one within the flames.

"We were duped!"

Those black clad individuals quickly lowered their heads. They saw that person's figure disappear around the bend of a distant corner.

"Chase after him! We cannot let this person escape!" The white patterned black robed man said coldly.

Their conversation earlier was way too important. Once news of it got out, the consequences would be too horrible to imagine.

The others understood this and quickly chased after Zu An.

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Zu An ran with everything he had. Unfortunately, his pursuers never left his tail. Those two master rank cultivators in particular flew into the air to survey the entire scene, forcing him to hide his whereabouts with the buildings and preventing him from running crazily at full speed.

The entire Zhenyuan Merchant Group was now starting to move. Countless guards rushed out from all directions in search of the intruder.

In this type of situation, the jade badge's radar didn't really help much. There were guards everywhere, so it was useless even if he knew they were coming ahead of time.

Zu An only managed to barely evade the first few waves of guard before he ran into a squad of guards head on. There were still those black robed experts on his tail behind him.

He knew that continuing like this wasn't a solution. He kicked off and landed on the second floor with a flip, charging straight through a window.

"Little Chan, what is happening outside? Why is it so loud?" There was steam everywhere, as well as the smell of petals. Turns out a young lady was currently bathing here.

She seemed to have heard the activity and stood up from inside the bath. She wiped herself down with a towel while looking outside.

As a result, she just happened to stare straight into Zu An's eyes.

Zu An was getting a huge headache too. How could he have expected this type of coincidence to happen? That a random room he ran into had a girl taking a bath inside?

Huh? Why does this girl look a bit familiar?

But without her clothes on, he couldn't really recognize her.

He didn't have time to think more about it either. If she screamed and drew the guards here, then he was done for.

His toes tapped against the ground, and then he was already at the young lady's side. He covered her mouth with his hand and said, "Don't scream, I won't harm you."

Unfortunately, which girl would trust him in this type of situation?

She began to struggle frantically.

You have successfully trolled Tang Tian'er for +555 +555 +555...

Zu An jumped in fright when he saw this name. He gave her a good look. Since she was taking a bath and her hair was draped over her shoulders, her appearance was a bit different from what he was used to, so he didn't recognize her immediately.

Now that he examined her up close and saw her familiar brows and eyes, especially the charming dimple by her lips, he finally reacted. "Miss Tang?"

He quickly removed his mask. "It's me!"

"Mmm!" Tang Tian'er immediately widened her eyes when she saw who it was. However, she still subconsciously stopped her struggle.

Seeing that she recognized him, Zu An felt a bit embarrassed. "I accidentally barged in because I was trying to evade my pursuers. I didn't do it on purpose, I have to ask the miss for forgiveness. Please do not scream when I let go. If you agree, blink your eyes."

In his opinion, the other party ate his 'Pill of Alteration', so she probably wouldn't do anything rash.

But how could he have known that the other party already knew that his pill was a fake?

Tang Tian'er gave him a wronged look, but she still blinked her eyes in the end.

Zu An thus let go. Tang Tian'er harrumphed angrily. "Why are you here?"

"That's a really long story..." Zu An was about to explain when his eyes subconsciously scanned her body.

Um... maybe it's because she just took a bath, but her skin really is fair with a nice rosy tint.

When he met her in the Hub of Freedom, the other party was dressed in a chinese dress. Her figure was absolutely enchanting. Only now did he realize that it was her who was beautiful, and not the clothes.

Tang Tian'er finally snapped out of her daze too. She lowered her head and saw that she was currently standing in her bathtub. Half of her body was already exposed above the water. She almost fainted on the spot.

She subconsciously opened her mouth to scream, but she remembered something and quickly covered her own mouth.

Zu An saw that she was about to scream and was about to stop her, but she ended up covering her own mouth. He immediately stopped and said, "Thank you, young miss!"

Tang Tian'er immediately squatted down, immersing herself in the water again. Only her head was exposed above the water.

"Are you still going to stare?" Tang Tian'er thought that she was really going to faint. Did I owe this guy in my last life or something? Why do I keep suffering because of him?! And it's always in the worst way possible!

Zu An subconsciously turned around. "The lady doesn't need to mind. I actually didn't see much just now."

Tang Tian'er was speechless.

Hello? Is that something a human with a conscience would say?

You already freaking saw everything! Are you blind?!

But with things how they were, she could only show that she 'trusts' what he said was the truth.

She was taken advantage of, yet she still had to play along with his lies?

What the hell is wrong with the world?!

You have successfully trolled Tang Tian'er for +233 +233 +233...

Suddenly, there was a knocking sound that came from outside. "Young miss, young miss, there was a formidable thief who came into our merchant group. The guards are all searching for him right now. You should hurry and finish, or else you might be in danger later."

"I got it." Tang Tian'er rolled her eyes. She thought to herself, you're telling me way too late! I wanted to get out and change into my clothes, but that only allowed him to take advantage of me!

Suddenly, there was a voice that sounded outside. "Who is inside?"

Zu An was alarmed. This was Han Fengqiu's voice!

Even though he didn't fear Han Fengqiu, he wasn't an opponent he could deal with quickly. If they started fighting and he brought over the other experts, he would have nowhere left to run.

"It is our young miss." That maid was clearly the 'Little Chan' Tang Tian'er mentioned before.

"We chased that thief all the way here. He disappeared near this place, so we need to conduct a search." Han Fengqiu said.

"You cannot, the first miss is currently bathing!" Little Chan immediately panicked. She spread her arms and blocked the entrance.

The two people inside of the room were also shocked when they heard this. Zu An quickly said to Tang Tian'er, "I'm going to leave first."

But suddenly, Tang Tian'er grabbed his arm. "Are there many people chasing you?"

Zu An nodded. He began to quickly think about what he was going to do from now on.

"There are guards everywhere outside, where would you even go?" Tang Tian'er bit her lips. "Just hide over here, this is where it is the safest."

Zu An looked around him. "What if he comes in? I have nowhere to hide here."

There were some wardrobes and screens here, but if the other party really searched this place thoroughly, these places wouldn't be able to hide him at all.

Tang Tian'er shook her head. "Don't worry. With me here, they wouldn't be able to come in."

Zu An was stunned. He couldn't help but give the other party a look. Judging from her tone, it sounded as if she was some incredible figure or something.

Isn't she just the hostess of the Hub of Freedom?

Why did she come all the way to Zhenyuan Merchant Group?

What kind of a relationship does she have with Zhenyuan Merchant Group?

While he was thinking these things inside, there were already sounds of dispute outside. Han Fengqiu clearly didn't want to back off here. "Today's matter is too important. If we let that thief go, no one will be able to handle the consequences. I do not care who it is inside, I have to search this room!"

"No! Our young miss' status is special. She is bathing. How can we let stinky men like you all go in?" Little Chan stared angrily at the other party.

The others came when they saw the disturbance here.

"What is going on?" The other black robed individuals rushed over when they heard the commotion.

"The thief disappeared around here. I want to search this room, but this maid won't let me." Han Fengqiu looked at the yellow patterned black robed man. "This is your domain, so say something."

That person said with an awkward manner, "It is one of my distinguished guests who is staying here. It wouldn't be too good to disturb her."

Zu An looked at Tang Tian'er in shock. What the heck is this? Even that yellow patterned black robed man was calling her a distinguished guest?

But Tang Tian'er was sitting in the bathtub with her arms wrapped around herself right now, looking really wronged. It was really hard to associate her with someone formidable.

Another person spoke up. "That person heard too many secrets, we must capture him. Furthermore, since the person inside is a distinguished guest of your merchant group, wouldn't it be bad if that thief sneaked in and harmed your guest?"

That yellow patterned black robed man hesitated a bit when he heard him say this. "This..."

Another member already pushed open the door. "We'll take a look inside first."

Little Chan wanted to stop them, but unfortunately, just a bit of aura from these big shots was enough to prevent her from speaking. How could she possibly stop them?

Chapter 1043: A Cat Has Nine Lives

Apart from the white patterned black robed man who continued to monitor the situation from the air, the other black robed individuals quickly entered the room.

But they immediately cried out in alarm when they took just a few steps in.

That yellow patterned black robed man also saw Tang Tian'er currently bathing. He closed the door in fright and gestured for the others to not go inside.

"Who let you all in?!" Tang Tian'er screamed in fury. She wrapped her arms around her chest tightly, hiding her body underwater. Only her head was exposed as she stared at everyone.

The yellow patterned black robed man said with a forced smile, "Young miss, there was a thief who heard too many secrets, so we have to find him. Furthermore, he is currently nearby, so it would be bad if he disturbed the young miss. It's not a bad idea for us to inspect this place and make sure that it is safe."

Tang Tian'er said with a sneer, "I didn't see any thief come in here and instead only saw you all."

The yellow patterned black robed man replied, "That person excels in stealth. We didn't even notice him at first. That is why the young miss must not be careless."

The others already didn't care about Tang Tian'er at all. They quickly searched the room.

The room wasn't too large. With their cultivation, they quickly examined all of the different areas.

They shook their heads towards each other, clearly not finding anything.

Tang Tian'er suddenly felt her body tremble slightly. Her face became completely red.

The blue patterned black robed man walked closer and said with a low and muffled voice. "Why is your face so red? Why is your heart beating so fast?"

With their cultivation, it wasn't difficult for them to hear Tang Tian'er's heartbeat at all.

"I am taking a bath, yet you idiots barged in. How can my face not be red, how can my heart not be beating fast?!" Tang Tian'er immediately screamed out.

But who would've thought that the blue patterned black robed man didn't believe her. He instead walked closer to the bath and looked inside.

But there was a layer of flower petals on the surface, so he couldn't see inside.

In order to smell better after their shower, noble ladies would often bathe with flower petals sprinkled into the water. However, sprinkling so many of them was a bit too much.

"What are you doing?" Tang Tian'er became nervous. She moved further and further inside the bath, the water already about to touch her lips.

That blue patterned black robed man wore a cloak and a mask. Tang Tian'er couldn't see the other party's real appearance at all.

That blue patterned black robed man didn't reply. He instead slowly reached out his hand, as if he was going to brush aside the flower petals.

Tang Tian'er said with a cold voice. "Is that thief you are talking about male or female?"

The blue patterned elder was stunned, clearly not expecting her to ask this. He subconsciously replied. "Male."

Tang Tian'er harrumphed. "Then don't tell me that you think I'll be hiding a man in the waters with how I am right now, right?"

The blue patterned black robed man hesitated. This indeed didn't make sense.

Tang Tian'er then said, "To me, it looks like you are trying to take advantage of me using this chance. How old are you, yet you are still full of lust? Disgusting!"

The others looked at that blue patterned black robed man with strange expressions too. This young lady was currently taking a bath, the flower petals at least hid her body.

But if there weren't any flower petals, with their powerful sight, wouldn't they see everything?

"Damn brat!" The blue patterned black robed man immediately panicked. He definitely didn't want this type of reputation associated with him.

The yellow patterned black robed man stepped forward and blocked in front of the bathtub. "We've already searched this place. Our top priority should be finding that thief. Let's not waste any more time here."

This was the territory of the Zhenyuan Merchant Group after all, so they had to give him at least this level of respect. They quickly walked out, and even the most unwilling blue patterned black robed man didn't say anything else.

"We've disturbed you." That yellow patterned black robed man nodded towards Tang Tian'er, and then he helped her close the door behind him.

Sounds of them leaving sounded soon afterwards. That maid called Little Chan ran over in alarm.

"Young miss, young miss, are you okay?"

Tang Tian'er gave her a furious look. "How could I be okay when all those men came in?"

"Ah?" Little Chan was so shocked she began to stutter. "Young miss, they... they..."

Tang Tian'er said impatiently, "What are you thinking? I was just a bit startled when so many people barged in while I was taking a bath."

Her face turned red as she talked more and more. "Get out already and make sure no one else comes in! If anyone else comes in, I'm going to sell you to Jasper Lane!"

"Ah, no, young miss!" Little Chan was scared badly.

"Why are you still standing there?" Tang Tian'er shot her a look. If it wasn't because she heard the maid do her best to stop those individuals, she really might have punished her harshly after what just happened.

Only when Little Chan went outside, did Tang Tian'er lean backwards a bit. She lowered her head and said, "You can come out now."

There was a splash sound, and then Zu An came out from the water. He wiped the water from his face, and then said with his hands cupped, "Thank you, young miss, for saving me."

Tang Tian'er nudged her head to the side. Her voice was incredibly soft. "If you really are thankful, then stop looking at me already."

Only now did Zu An react. His face couldn't help but heat up. He quickly jumped out of the bath and turned around. "Sorry!"

He used his ki as he spoke. He had natural affinity with water by using Blue Mallard, so there wasn't much water that actually touched his body. His clothes were soon completely dry again.

It was precisely because of the Blue Mallard skill that his sight wasn't affected at all when he was hiding in the water. He saw everything he should and shouldn't see.

The other party's skin really is fair! It was fair to the point where there wasn't even the slightest blemish.

By her lower abdomen was a red design that was a bit like a flame, but also like a flower. It was quite exquisite, unknown if it was naturally produced or if it was something imprinted there.

That scene really was just too shocking. Even though he was always trying to keep it out of his mind, that scene still appeared in his head clearly.

Sigh, she might just kill me if she knew what I was thinking, right?

It would be embarrassing for everyone if he talked about it, so he only continued to remain silent.

Water splashing and rustling noises sounded behind him. This was clearly Tang Tian'er getting dressed.

For the sake of hiding his awkwardness, he took out a pill and handed it backwards. "This is for you."

"What is this? Are you trying to feed me poison again?" Tang Tian'er said angrily. She was still upset about how he forced her to eat that 'Pill of Alteration'.

"It was my fault last time and I shouldn't have forced the young miss to ingest poison. I am indebted to you for disregarding your former hatred, so I am giving you the antidote." Zu An said sincerely. The poison was fake, so this antidote was obviously fake too. It was just a normal nourishing medicine.

However, in order to help the other party feel at ease, he had to give her this antidote.

“An antidote?” Tang Tian’er adjusted her waist while looking at the pill with an ambiguous smile. This guy still doesn’t know that I already know his Pill of Alteration is fake, huh?

He still wants to trick me?!

But she didn’t expose him and just stored that pill away. “I guess you at least have some conscience.”

Zu An sighed in relief. When he turned around, he saw that she was dressed in a loose white robe. Since she had just taken a shower, her skin was fair with a rosy tint, her drenched hair casually draped over her shoulders. She really was as beautiful as a lotus flower.

“Are you still going to keep staring? Haven’t you already seen enough?” Tang Tian’er grumbled. She subconsciously tightened her clothes.

Zu An coughed lightly and quickly changed the topic. “Right, it looks like Zhenyuan Merchant Group’s people respect you quite a bit. Just what kind of status do you really have?”

He absolutely refused to believe that a normal Hub of Freedom hostess could receive this level of treatment.

Tang Tian’er replied, “They treat me that way because Zhenyuan Merchant Group was started by my family.”

Zu An: “???”

Even though he had his own suspicions, he never expected to hear this type of answer.

“Your family?”

“Yup.”

Zu An needed a moment to completely digest this information. After all, he seemed to have heard the people here call first miss. Furthermore, that yellow patterned black robed man’s respect for her was definitely not faked.

“Then why in the world would you go to the Hub of Freedom to be a hostess?” This was what Zu An couldn’t understand the most.

Tang Tian’er harrumphed. She turned around, letting her dress twirl around her, and then she sat down in a confident manner. “I hate managing my clan’s matters, so I like to travel and pretend to be all types of different people, experiencing what life is like for others. Aren’t I amazing?”

“Yeah, you’re pretty amazing.” But inside, Zu An thought, you don’t want to live your life as a first miss, but instead want to be a servant somewhere else? Doesn’t that mean that there’s something wrong with your head?

“What about you? Why are you here?” Tang Tian’er picked up some fruits that had been prepared beforehand and ate them. At the same time, she pushed the plate of fruits towards Zu An. “According to what they were saying, you seem to have heard some secrets?”

Zu An was obviously not in the mood to eat anything. After some hesitation, he still said, "I was investigating a case. I received some intelligence that stated the killer might be in Zhenyuan Merchant Group, so I came for a look. I didn't expect to just happen to run into their meeting. Sure enough, the killer was among them, but there were just too many experts. That was why I had to remain hidden."

Tang Tian'er smiled. "They really are pretty formidable. The fact that you were able to keep your life under their joint search is quite the rare feat as well."

Zu An was stunned. "You know who they are?"

Chapter 1044: Poisonous

Tang Tian'er shook her head and replied, "I don't even pay attention to my clan's matters, so I don't know who they are. But even if I did, of course I wouldn't tell you."

Zu An figured that made sense as well. He hadn't told her the truth when he was at Yi Commandery either. That was why he didn't pursue the matter either.

Tang Tian'er continued, "However, I heard some rumors in the clan, saying Sir Magistrate was colluding with the fiend races, that he was smuggling ki stones and restricted goods or something. Whether or not Sir Magistrate did those things is something I don't know about, but our Zhenyuan Merchant Group hasn't participated in that matter. I hope the young master can understand that."

"Didn't participate in that?" Zu An had a strange expression. "Then why did these people gather at the Zhenyuan Merchant Group headquarters? Furthermore, even the perpetrators involved were here."

Tang Tian'er sighed and replied, "The Zhenyuan Merchant Group wouldn't have been able to get to where we were today without relying on some people for their protection. That's an extremely common arrangement."

Zu An laughed and said, "For better or for worse, I'm a member of the imperial envoy. Are you not scared that your merchant group will get into trouble if you tell me this?"

Tang Tian'er harrumphed and said, "I trust that you're not the kind of person to forget favors and violate your authority."

Zu An remembered how she had helped him out. It would indeed not be too good for him to turn his back on her like that. When he remembered what had just happened, that shocking image reappeared in his mind. He felt his nose heat up.

Tang Tian'er was confused when she saw him stare at her belly with a strange expression. She asked, "What's wrong?"

"It's nothing." Zu An's face heated up and he quickly changed the topic. "Who was the yellow-patterned man who just came in?"

Tang Tian'er replied, "He's one of my uncles. But as for who he is exactly, forgive me for not being able to tell you."

Zu An understood. However, he didn't fully believe what she had told him previously. According to the conversation he had heard, he could tell that the Zhenyuan Merchant Group was clearly involved in this

matter. After all, they were one of the parties in Cloudcenter Commandery who had the most to gain. They were definitely not innocent and pure white lotuses.

Tang Tian'er asked curiously, "Right, where did you get your information from? That there was a perpetrator in our Zhenyuan Merchant Group?"

"I got the information from a friend. As for who he is, forgive me for not being able to tell you," Zu An quickly replied the same way she had.

"Actually, I know who it was, even if you won't tell me." Tang Tian'er smiled. "It was probably the Pegasus Merchant Group's people who leaked out the information. The Pegasus Merchant Group has always been competing with us over these years, trying to overtake us, committing all manner of crimes. You might just find what you're looking for if you carry out a public investigation on them."

Zu An was surprised. He had been investigating Pegasus Merchant Group during the day, discovering that Cassia Moon Restaurant was supported by the Pegasus Merchant Group. Then, when he was investigating Rouge Spice, he had suddenly run into Qiu Honglei. Was that really just a coincidence?

Suddenly, there was a clamor outside. The two of them subconsciously looked outside. They could see a large expanse of dark red even through the window.

"Little Chan, what's happening?" Tang Tian'er asked.

The maid replied, "Young miss, I think some parts of the merchant group area have caught on fire, and the flames are hard to control. Everyone is rushing out to put out the fire, and many guards seem to be heading in that direction too."

Tang Tian'er harrumphed and replied, "We've had quite a bit of snowfall these past few days, and there's snow accumulated everywhere. How could it be that easy for a building to catch on fire, let alone for the flames to get so big? It's clearly someone causing trouble."

Zu An was shocked. He had almost forgotten that Qiu Honglei was still waiting for him outside while he was chatting leisurely inside. She probably saw that something happened inside and realized that I was being chased, so she started that fire to draw their attention.

Zu An couldn't sit still any longer when he thought of that. He quickly got up and said, "Thank you, Lady Tang, for helping me out today. I'll repay this favor another day..."

He was interrupted before he could finish his sentence. Tang Tian'er leaned into her seat and looked at him with an ambiguous smile, asking, "And how exactly do you plan to repay me?"

Zu An was speechless. He had always been the one teasing others, and yet today, he was instead the one being teased by this young lady?

But he reacted quickly too and immediately replied with a smile, "A life saving grace naturally needs to be repaid with my entire body."

Tang Tian'er harrumphed and said, "Hmph, who wants something like that." She frequently stayed in places like the Hub of Freedom, so she obviously wouldn't get angry at that mild provocation.

"Is the person who started the fire your companion?" Tang Tian'er looked in the direction of the flames. Zu An nodded. There was no need to hide it.

"Judging from how much of a rush you are in to leave, it seems your companion is a woman." Tang Tian'er narrowed her eyes a bit. Her smile seemed a bit dangerous.

Zu An gave her a look and asked, "Why is the lady so concerned with this matter? Could it be that you're jealous?"

"Hmph, why would I be jealous?" Tang Tian'er waved her hand and said, "Get out, get out. But you guys burned down so many buildings. That friend of yours has to compensate me properly next time."

Zu An opened the window. Before he left, he turned around and said with a smile, "Next time, I'll help you treat your injuries a few times." He kicked off after saying that, and he quickly disappeared into the darkness.

Tang Tian'er's heart began to beat crazily when she heard the words 'treat your injuries'. When she recalled that feeling when Zu An's strange ki had entered her, she really couldn't help but want more.

After her injuries had been treated last time, their relationship had become strangely closer. If it weren't because of that, how could she possibly have let him hide in her bathtub? Forget about hiding there, just the other party seeing her naked was something she would've normally ordered an immediate painful execution for.

"Sigh, I feel like I've been cheated somehow." Tang Tian'er covered her face. The more she thought about it, the more embarrassing it was. She grabbed the blanket nearby and buried her head in it, then rolled back and forth in bed. Her two smooth legs kicked around in the air.

...

Meanwhile, Qiu Honglei had been waiting anxiously outside the city walls. It was still alright at first, but as time went on, suddenly, she heard loud shouting coming out from inside. Then, a streak of fire had shot into the sky.

She had seen the Flame Blade before when Zu An saved her in the Imperial Palace, so she was familiar with that fire.

If such a big commotion had broken out, Zu An had definitely run into some trouble. She had subconsciously thought about going in to help him, but she had immediately sensed terrifying ki fluctuations. The energies were all at least at the ninth rank, with some even at the master rank.

As a candidate for the Devil Sect's Saintess, she naturally wasn't stupid. She quickly deduced that she wouldn't be able to offer much help even if she went over and would instead just cause more trouble for Zu An.

She suddenly had another idea. She rushed over to the Zhenyuan Merchant Group's warehouse to start a fire. Any goods that would be stored in the merchant group's general headquarters were obviously precious.

Such a place would normally be heavily guarded, but after Zu An's disturbance, many of the guards had rushed over to encircle him. The guards around the warehouse had ended up having a gap in their defense. Together with Qiu Honglei's cultivation, defeating those individuals was easy.

The only problem was the recent snowfall. Together with the various fire prevention measures installed, she had to use up a lot of effort to get a fire going. When she thought about how much time she had used up, she worried that something might have already happened on Zu An's side. As such, she didn't dare to leave and continued to start more fires, hoping to divert some attention that way.

As time went on, a furious roar exclaimed, "Who dares to do such a thing?!"

A massive golden brick smashed down from the heavens in her direction. She felt as if her body had been completely locked down by the other party's aura. She didn't even know where to evade.

She bit her red lips tightly and summoned a soft yellow lantern above her head, forming a faint barrier of light.

The incoming brick seemed to freeze in midair when it made contact with the barrier. It continued to hum with noise, but it wasn't able to break through its defenses.

The yellow-patterned man's expression changed. He exclaimed, "The Little Empress Lantern?" The golden brick returned into his sleeves with a wave of his hand.

Even though the other party was masked, he had already recognized Qiu Honglei. He didn't dare to truly kill her. If anything happened to the Saintess and Yun Jianyue went on a rampage, he wouldn't be able to handle the consequences.

Suddenly, a teasing voice called out, "Tsk tsk, did your skills become rusty after being a businessman for so long? You can't even deal with a junior like this?" The blue-patterned man appeared on a nearby rooftop as soon as he spoke

The yellow-patterned man cursed that person inwardly for being a fool. The other party wasn't someone from the world of warriors; he had never experienced the terror of Yun Jianyue's wrath. But he didn't bother explaining and decided to let the other party have a taste of bitterness first, saying, "Why don't you give it a try then, if you're so capable."

"Don't mind if I do." The blue-patterned man harrumphed. He reached out his hand, and the ground around Qiu Honglei began to quake. Then, massive tree roots tore out from underground. Large thorns covered their surface, quickly forming a prison of thistles and thorns.

Qiu Honglei was alarmed. She was confined again. Even though she did her best to avoid it, she was still pricked by the roots.

An intense pain tore through her body, and she groaned. Then, she felt numbness and dizziness overtake her. Her expression changed as she exclaimed, "It's poisonous!"

Chapter 1045: Like Hell I Care Who You Are

A breeze brushed past just then, and the white-patterned man appeared in midair. The yellow-patterned man glanced over to the side, but he didn't see anyone else arrive.

The white-patterned man spoke up. "That bastard has unknown origins; we don't know if he has more backup. Red Pattern's status is special, so I had him leave first. Orange Pattern doesn't want to get involved too deeply, so he left too."

The yellow-patterned man frowned. He wasn't surprised at all that the red-patterned man had left. Things would be really really troublesome if his identity ended up being exposed. But he was a bit peeved that the orange-patterned fellow had left. Why the hell had that guy left so quickly?

The white-patterned man looked over the situation. He asked gloomily, "Why didn't you attack that person?"

"That person seems to be Yun Jianyue's disciple, the Devil Sect's Saintess." The yellow-patterned man only said a single sentence, but that was already enough to explain his misgivings.

The white-patterned man also became quiet for a long time when he heard the. A while later, he said, "Today's matter is way too important. We have no idea where that bastard ran off to either. This woman was just here to distract us and is probably his comrade. We'll capture her to force that bastard out. We'll be fine as long as there's no danger to her life."

The yellow-patterned man hesitated and said, "It doesn't seem too appropriate for us to harm her."

The martial world had rules.

If the older generation fought with the older generation, or the juniors fought against other juniors, no one would say anything about victory or defeat. But if a senior targeted someone of the younger generation, it was definitely bullying. No matter how talented a junior was, there was no way they could be better than an old monster who had cultivated for decades, or even more than a century.

The problem was that if one attacked another junior, one also had one's own juniors! The other party might just abandon all morals and attack one's juniors. On top of all of that, everyone in the martial world would approve of and support it.

He could only say, "Let's leave it to Blue Pattern then. It should be fine for him."

They always called each other their code names. They didn't know the others' true identities.

Qiu Honglei was trapped within the prison of thorns. Furthermore, the prison was quickly getting smaller and smaller, making it so she couldn't move around at all.

The blue-patterned man smirked. He was about to say something when the woman raised her lamp.

She removed the cover, then blew gently. A wave of flames rushed out and the surrounding thistles and thorns were instantly set ablaze. The young lady quickly broke free from the prison.

The white-patterned man harrumphed. The others were clearly dissatisfied by their comrade's incompetence. How can you fail to even restrain a little girl?

He raised his finger, and a streak of frigid light fired at the young lady. The beam of light was so fast that only a few could even see it clearly. It was a shard of extremely thin ice.

The yellow-patterned man knew full well that the shard of ice looked as if it might shatter on touch, but it was extremely powerful. If one were hit by the ice shard, one's ki flow would be ruthlessly interrupted, and one would be frozen solid.

Of course, the attack wasn't lethal either. He was still holding back out of apprehension toward Yun Jianyue. Tsk, that guy sounded all smug earlier, but isn't he holding back too?

Qiu Honglei had just freed herself from the prison of thorns. She was still poisoned, feeling extremely dizzy. How could she evade the attack of a master rank cultivator? I'm done for! She felt her heart turn completely cold when the streak of frigid light arrived in front of her. Her only thought, however, was about whether Zu An had managed to escape successfully.

However, the pain she expected never came. On the contrary, a clear and sharp sound rang out as the shard of ice was shattered to pieces. Meanwhile, she herself was taken up in a warm embrace.

"Ah Zu!" Qiu Honglei was shocked and overjoyed. She was extremely familiar with his scent and aura. She could recognize him even without opening her eyes.

Zu An wrapped his arm around her waist and guarded her with his body, saying, "Don't be scared; I'm here." At the same time, he sighed inwardly. Thank goodness I made it in time.

The blue-patterned man roared with laughter and said, "Looks like they were together after all. We almost let you escape just now. It won't be so easy this time."

His palms moved as soon as he spoke. The trees and plants all around him began to rustle. Soon afterward, the leaves began to fall. They rotated rapidly, then launched themselves at the pair of lovebirds.

Some birds were alerted by the battle and took flight, ending up in the leaves' way. They instantly exploded into a blast of bloody mist. Just then, every single leaf was like a sharp blade. The leaves were everywhere in the sky, creating what resembled a large meat grinder.

"Please show restraint!" The yellow-patterned man was alarmed. All of them would probably suffer bitterly if Yun Jianyue's disciple were chopped up into countless pieces. Unfortunately, those leaves were too fast. They appeared around the pair in a flash. It would be too late even if anyone wanted to interfere.

Zu An released a cold snort and a loud phoenix cry resounded. A phoenix-shaped flame surged, instantly setting the leaves ablaze. The blue-patterned man couldn't control them anymore. Zu An took possession of the burning leaves, transforming into a flaming meteor and charging forward.

The yellow-patterned man had only planned to watch everything from the side and see what happened. How could he have expected that the other party would charge at him? He cursed and the golden brick quickly increased in size, smashing toward the other party.

The white-patterned man in the air also saw the burning leaves surrounding the enemy. But all of a sudden, the leaves shot at him like burning feathers. He harrumphed and said, "You overestimate your abilities." He reached out his hand, and a small scale blizzard formed around him at once. All of the flames were extinguished.

But he didn't have any time to feel proud of that. Instead, he voiced his alarm. The enemy had disappeared without a trace!

Goosebumps formed all over his body. He quickly summoned a blizzard to surround his entire body, as if to guard against any possible attacks. Unfortunately, though, the attack he anticipated never came. It was as if the other party had simply vanished into thin air.

The yellow-patterned man and the others shared the same feeling. The golden brick looked as if it had hit its target, but he didn't feel as if he had hit anything at all. Such an empty feeling really was bizarre. He also thought that the enemy was using a feint, and immediately increased his vigilance toward incoming attacks.

While the other two felt as if they were facing a great enemy, the blue-patterned man instead narrowed his eyes. He sensed broiling flames rushing at him. He quickly crossed his hands in front of his chest, and a massive shield appeared in front of him.

Even though the shield was made of wood and was naturally countered by the fire element, his defensive skill was special. At the very least, it could hold on for a bit and buy him some time. By then, his companions would be able to come to his aid. The three of them would then work together, and that would definitely be enough to kill the bastard.

But when he looked around him out of the corners of his eyes, he saw that the other two also appeared to be facing the flame user. He was alarmed, exclaiming, "Why are there three identical enemies?"

Just then, a bloody mist exploded from his chest, and an intense pain came from his back. He knew he had been ambushed by the opponent.

He didn't even have time to think about how the other party had gotten behind him. He quickly grabbed backward to seize the hand that thrust at his back. Countless vines tangled around the other party's body. At the same time, his vines' sharp thorns stabbed in, pouring their poison into that person.

"Is that all?" Zu An tilted his head a bit. He flexed his muscles, and the vines instantly broke apart inch by inch. Meanwhile, there were only some white spots on his skin. Those thorns couldn't even penetrate his skin!

The blue-patterned man was stunned. Meanwhile, the white and yellow-patterned men finally reacted, and both slaughtered their way over.

Zu An kicked off the ground, and instantly reappeared back at Qiu Hongei's side. His other hand gripped the blue-patterned elder's shoulder. He said coldly, "Don't move, or else your companion here will pay the price."

He secretly rejoiced that the other master rank wasn't present. Han Fengqiu seemed to have left. Just now, he had used the Sunflower Phantasm to divide into three copies to attack the three at the same time. That was why they had been caught off guard.

The white and yellow-patterned individuals stopped as expected, clearly second-guessing their actions.

That blue-patterned man finally reacted and berated him, exclaiming, "Damn brat, you better know what's best for you and let me go! Then, perhaps we can spare your life."

“What if I don’t let you go?” Zu An replied calmly.

The elder roared with laughter and said, “Hmph, look how bold you are. With us here, we won’t tolerate the existence of any other outstanding individuals in Cloudcenter Commandery. Do you know who I am...”

Zu An’s fingers tightened around the man’s shoulder before he even finished his sentence. A wave of strength immediately erupted from his palm.

Crack crack!

“Ahhhh!” The blue-patterned man screamed miserably. He had no idea just how many of his bones had just broken. All of his body’s blood vessels were also a mess. Even if he retained his life, he might have to live the rest of his life as a cripple.

He was shocked and furious. Never had he expected the other party to cross that line! “You little bastard, you actually dare to treat me like this? I’m going to have you chopped into a thous... wurghfdiao...”

You have successfully trolled Yu Xuantao for +888 +888 +888...

He roared at Zu An. Unfortunately, his jaw unhinged halfway through his sentence, so he couldn't say what he wanted to say anymore. He could only mumble inaudibly.

“Like hell I care who you are!” Zu An exclaimed indifferently.

This guy had almost taken advantage of Tang Tian’er just now, and he had attacked Qiu Honglei so viciously. Zu An obviously wouldn’t show him any mercy. He was also someone from the Yu clan. As expected, the Yu clan was up to no good.

Chapter 1046: What a Fast Sword!

The white and yellow-patterned men exchanged a look. They both saw the shock in each other’s eyes. They had never expected the other person to be so decisive!

“Do you know the repercussions of your actions?” the white-patterned man asked icily.

“The results are that you two can now talk to me properly without any worries.” Zu An laughed and shrugged with his hands.

The white and yellow-patterned men were speechless.

You have successfully trolled Jian Taiding for +244 +244 +244...

You have successfully trolled Zhuang Hetong for +133 +133 +133...

There is actually someone this arrogant in this world?

Zu An almost laughed out loud from joy. He had just been having a headache over the fact that he didn’t know their identities because they were wrapped up in black robes and masks. Now, their identities had been completely revealed!

He hadn't expected the white patterned black robed man to be Jian Taiding! As for Zhuang Hetong, he had to be someone from the Zhenyuan Merchant Group.

"You're courting death!" Jian Taiding finally couldn't hold back anymore. He instantly closed the gap and arrived in front of Zu An. In his hand was a longsword. After being tricked just then, he didn't dare to face his opponent empty-handed.

Zu An tossed Yu Xuantaotoward Qiu Honglei's feet as if he were a sack of dirt and said, "Help me keep an eye on him." Then, he summoned the Tai'e Sword and thrust it at his opponent.

The two exchanged more than ten moves. Zu An discovered that no matter how he changed his attacks, the other party would always evade, as if he knew what Zu An was going to do beforehand. Then, he would swiftly counterattack. If not for the fact that Zu An's movement technique was ingenious, he might have already been done for.

Don't tell me this is the master rank's so-called soul ability? Zu An knew that apart from being able to fly, master rank cultivators also cultivated the soul. When they fought, they almost all had foresight abilities. That was why actually landing attacks on such cultivators was extremely difficult.

Jian Taiding was no less shocked than Zu An at all. He could clearly sense that the other party's cultivation hadn't reached the master rank yet. Previously, he had almost always easily overwhelmed anyone who wasn't at the master rank yet. Sometimes, he didn't even have to really fight. Just his overwhelming power alone would completely dominate his opponents.

And yet, when he faced this opponent, not only had he not held back at all, he had even attacked with the intent to kill several times. However, the other party's bizarre movement technique always avoided it somehow.

Where did this crazy demon come from? Jian Taiding thought. He could sense that his opponent's movement technique was exquisite. He thought to himself, Your cultivation is beneath mine, so that's why you're resorting to these kinds of avoidance tactics.

But who could have expected that when he fought against this opponent in close quarters, the surging and domineering force of the world he gathered, the power that should have been able to seriously injure his opponent, would instead be sucked into what felt like a black hole, disappearing without a trace?

When the other party retaliated, the counterattack's power was much stronger. Its berserk power was clearly the power Jian Taiding had just summoned, now returned to him.

This guy can absorb my power and use it against me? Jian Taiding was blasted by the counterattack's force until his blood and ki surged inside of him. Only after some time did he readjust his aura.

"Hmph, I want to see just how much you can absorb!" He didn't dare to fight against the other party in close combat anymore, and he returned to the sky once more. His hands slowly rose upward. The sword in his hands floated in front of him, then began to vibrate with noise. A wave of overwhelming power spread in all directions.

Zhuang Hetong cursed inwardly. Are you trying to completely destroy our merchant group?! He quickly used his ki to protect the buildings and the merchant group's staff behind him.

The air seemed to have become extremely cold. The snow that had previously already stopped seemed to have returned again, this time with frigid winds roaring. The cold winds and snow instantly merged together, forming two massive snowstorms. They rushed at Zu An, one from the left and one from the right.

Roofs and tiles flew in all directions wherever the snowstorms went. Countless massive trees were crushed to pieces. Even the limestone floors of the merchant group's area were swept into the air.

Zhuang Hetong controlled his golden brick to limit the blast waves of the blizzards, not allowing the merchant group's area to suffer greater damage. Inwardly, however, he was confused.

The attack was indeed extremely powerful, and it was normally used on the battlefield to deal with a huge army. Wherever it passed, an elite army of a thousand men would be completely annihilated. But there was only a single target, and that target's movement technique was brilliant. He could dodge quickly too. The attack might not necessarily even land on him.

However, his eyes quickly narrowed. He saw that the snowstorms appeared to be aimed at Zu An, but they were actually sweeping toward Qiu Honglei. He immediately realized Jian Taiding's real plan. Since the target was good at evasion, Jian Taiding would attack a target he had to save to prevent him from escaping.

Such a move really was a bit despicable. Forget about how Jian Taiding was bullying the weak as a senior, he was even using a junior as a hostage.

But Zhuang Hetong also knew that the move was extremely useful. It was a completely overt plot that had pretty much no counterplay.

However, if Qiu Honglei really were done in, wasn't Jian Taiding scared of Yun Jianyue's retaliation at all?

...

Meanwhile, Zu An didn't have the leisure to think about all of those things. When he saw the target of the snowstorm was Qiu Honglei, there wasn't even a single ripple of emotion within him. All was fair in war; unscrupulous methods were unavoidable. Even though the other party was his enemy, he actually inwardly praised the brilliance of the move.

Qiu Honglei also reacted to what was happening. She quickly raised the Little Empress Lantern to protect herself. However, the difference in cultivation between her and Jian Taiding was too great. There was no way it would be able to stop the incoming blizzards.

Zu An's figure flickered, and he instantly reappeared in front of her. He gripped his sword in both hands. With the sword as the fulcrum, a phoenix-shaped flame surged, rushing at the vicious snowstorm.

The snowstorm and flame phoenix released a huge explosion when they met. The surrounding soldiers were knocked off balance by the blast waves. Even Zhuang Hetong found it a bit hard to hold on, continuously backing up to avoid the brunt of the blast.

All of the buildings within a radius of several zhang immediately came crashing down under the violent blast waves. If it weren't because Zhuang Hetong had bitterly tried to protect the place, close to half of Zhenyuan Merchant Group might have been completely destroyed by the attack.

Zu An, who was at the very center of the explosion, was having an even harder time. After all, he wasn't a master rank, while Jian Taiding wasn't someone who had just reached the master rank. How could Jian Taiding's ultimate move be so easily neutralized?

That flame phoenix quickly grew smaller and smaller, eventually shrinking to just three feet in length. The cold and raw sword energy of the blizzard was already starting to leave behind countless scars on Zu An's body. However, Zu An still didn't take even a single step back. He stood firmly in front of Qiu Honglei.

"Ah Zu!" Tears reflected in Qiu Honglei's eyes. She wanted to help him, but she knew this wasn't a battle she could interfere with at all. As such, she kicked off the ground, bringing Yu Xuanta with her off to the side. As long as she evaded the attack, Ah Zu wouldn't have to face the enemy's ultimate move head-on anymore.

Zu An sighed in relief. He was about to withdraw when a cold glint suddenly appeared in the blizzard, and Jian Taiding's longsword thrust out from within. The blizzard obstructed Zu An's vision, and by the time he saw the attack, it was already too late to evade.

Spurt!

The longsword instantly passed through the flames and stabbed into Zu An's chest.

"Ah Zu!" Qiu Honglei felt as if her eye sockets were splitting when she saw that. Unfortunately, she had just evaded and couldn't save him.

Jian Taiding exclaimed with a snort, "Little bastard, you shouldn't live too arrogantly!"

But halfway through his sentence, he was stunned. He noticed that there was no look of alarm on the other party's face. Instead, the opponent only looked at him calmly. Furthermore, there was a slight grin on the corners of his lips, as if his plan had succeeded.

Jian Taiding's soul was warning him crazily. The scene of a sword piercing through his body appeared in his mind. He quickly backed up, but the longsword was gripped tightly in the other party's hand. He couldn't pull it out at all.

This person is so seriously injured! Why doesn't it seem to have affected him at all? Jian Taiding was horrified. He couldn't be bothered to think too much. He was about to retract his sword, but he suddenly felt a stinging pain in his head. It was as if he had seen a strange big bird charging at his head.

"Ahhhh!" Jian Taiding screamed miserably. Even though his mind didn't collapse from the attack, in that split second, his mind went blank. He knew that something really bad was going to happen. He quickly shifted his body to the side.

How could Zu An give up such a good chance? His sword flashed out.

Pfft!

A white magical imprint flickered across Jian Taiding's body. Some kind of life-saving treasure had clearly been activated.

But unfortunately, how could it stop Zu An's well prepared attack?! With a loud crack, Jian Taiding's magical artifact shattered to pieces.

Then, a large burst of bloody mist spurted out from Jian Taiding's chest. The intense pain finally brought him to reality. He immediately used a secret skill to retreat several dozen zhang into the distance. He finished retreating backward faster than the first time he had ever finished in bed!

There was a giant scar that ran all the way from his shoulder down to his waist. If it weren't for his life-saving treasure, he might have been cleaved in half.

Zu An didn't stop in the slightest. His figure flickered, and he chased after the other party again. He wasn't going to let his advantage go!

He was well aware that he wasn't a master rank cultivator. Even though he was strong, the other party could anticipate his attacks. Furthermore, the other party could just choose to fly through the air. That kind of situation would be much more difficult for Zu An to deal with. That was why he had deliberately left an 'opening', choosing to fight while trading wounds.

After experiencing the Primordial Origin Sutra's reforging several times, his body was already incredibly tough. He had powerful regeneration abilities too. That was why the same level of injury wouldn't affect him too much, but that was definitely not the case for Jian Taiding!

Chapter 1047: My Fate Is Mine Alone

Zhuang Hetong was shocked. Just a second ago, his master rank companion seemed to have been bullying a junior, seizing the absolute advantage.

But why had the situation completely reversed in just a split second? Furthermore, from the looks of it, the white-patterned man's life even seemed to be in danger!

He didn't have the time to think too much about those things. He sent his brick flying toward Zu An's back. He couldn't just do nothing and watch his companion die, could he?

When he sensed the giant golden brick rushing towards his back, Zu An clenched his teeth and just faced it head on. However, he summoned his Blue Luan above Zhuang Hetong's head.

The brick's power was extremely great. He could withstand a hit or two, but if it continued, even if Zu An didn't die, he would be seriously injured. That was why he had to seriously wound the other party within the shortest amount of time possible. Only then could he focus on dealing with Jian Taiding. Otherwise, he would be in danger if the two joined forces.

Zhuang Hetong was brandishing his golden brick when he suddenly felt goosebumps cover his body. At that moment, he sensed the fear of death. He quickly brought back the golden brick. At the same time, he sent all kinds of magical treasures above his head to protect it.

Endless penetrating sword ki fell from the sky, rushing down like a rain of arrows. It penetrated the defensive magical treasures completely after just a few seconds. A large amount of the sword ki stabbed into his body.

“Pfft!” Blood trickled out from all over Zhuang Hetong’s body. Fortunately, the golden brick had already made it back in time and floated in front of him, blocking all of the remaining sword ki. Even so, he was still seriously injured. He staggered, then collapsed. Several figures rushed out and pulled him back.

Zu An saw it all through the corner of his eye, and recognized one of them to be Tang Tian’er. After a moment of hesitation, he decided not to attack Zhuang Hetong anymore. He instead focused all of his strength on Jian Taiding.

Jian Taiding clenched his teeth. His entire body erupted with white light. Then, ice and snow surrounded him, instantly covering his body in layers of thick ice. Usually, he used the move to freeze his enemies into ice sculptures. He had never expected that today, he would have to freeze himself as a protective measure! He felt incredibly sullen and alarmed.

You have successfully trolled Jian Taiding for +777 +777 +777...

Zu An’s brow furrowed. It really was tricky now that Jian Taiding had shrunk back into his tortoiseshell.

But he didn’t dare to give him a chance to breathe. The Tai’e Sword erupted with phoenix flames. Then, with a flick of his wrist, the sword rotated rapidly. It slammed into the frozen shell like a drill.

Even after so many defensive measures, the ice that had originally been as tough as black steel began to crack apart. The Tai’e Sword pressed forward inch by inch.

Jian Taiding’s eyes narrowed. Why wasn’t even his most powerful defensive skill enough to defend against the enemy’s sword?! Normally, the flames of any fire element cultivator would be instantly destroyed the moment they made contact with his frigid ice. They wouldn’t be able to injure him at all. And yet this sword was closing in bit by bit! Even though it was extremely slow, it would break through his defense eventually.

He thought, Just what kind of crazy fire is this?! He couldn’t retreat at all at the moment. He could only continuously use his ki to strengthen his own defenses and see who would break down first.

Unfortunately, the injury the sword had inflicted on him previously was too great. His flesh had been cleaved apart, and even his bones were visible. Several of his bones had been snapped by the sword ki, and even his internal organs had been seriously injured. His clothes were already completely drenched in blood. Furthermore, because he was frantically using ki, blood continued to trickle out from his wounds.

Any normal cultivator would have already perished from such a level of injury. However, as a master rank cultivator, the sturdiness of his body and his regeneration abilities were much stronger than those of others.

But the regeneration speed of cultivators would always have a limit. They had to slowly recover in seclusion, and only after more than half a year would they be able to recover from such an injury. And yet he was still fighting, and with his life on the line no less. In that kind of situation, his regeneration speed might not even be able to keep up with the speed of his blood loss.

He felt waves of dizziness. For the first time, he felt the threat of death.

He was a glorious, newly risen duke of Cloudcenter Commandery, the great Commander-In-Chief of the Military Affairs Manor. He possessed all of the authority in the northwest. He was someone who could do almost anything he wanted in Cloudcenter Commandery! And yet he was actually going to die because of this mysterious bastard? Furthermore, the other person wasn't even at the master rank yet!

He felt ashamed and perplexed when he thought about all those things. Was there something wrong with the world all of a sudden?

But his survival instincts forced him to gather what little he had left of his ki to protect himself. Even so, as that fiery red drill got closer and closer, he finally felt despair. He tried to speak up to negotiate with the other party, to advise the other party to stop because of his identity. At the same time, he was willing to pay any price to preserve his life.

But he was becoming weaker and weaker. It was to the point that he didn't even have the strength to speak anymore. If he spoke, ki would leak out, and his defenses would collapse. At that instant, the enemy's sword would pierce through his heart. What meaning would there be left in pleading for mercy at that point?

Zu An was just about to send the sword in with a last spurt of strength when an ice crystal suddenly flew from the side, striking his Tai'e Sword. Its speed was so fast, he couldn't react to it at all.

Clang!

The sharp sound of a collision, mixed with the vibrations of a sword, rang out. The others present all clutched their ears, feeling the ki and blood within them surge chaotically. The tough frozen shell around Jian Taiding was also completely shattered by the high-pitched frequency.

Meanwhile, Zu An bore the brunt of the force, and almost lost his grip on his longsword. He was blown backward. He felt his insides surge chaotically, and only after spitting out a mouthful of blood did he feel a bit better. Since he hadn't let go of his sword, his fingers were also drenched in blood.

"Ah Zu!" Qiu Honglei quickly came to Zu An's side to check his injuries. She also held his hand, sending in her own ki to help him recover.

"I'm fine." Zu An said reassuringly. With his body's toughness and regeneration ability, even though he was injured, there was no threat to his life. He turned to look at the roof, and he saw a white-robed woman there.

The woman had beautiful features. Her skin was snow-white, and her lips scarlet. Her figure was wonderful, and even as she stood at the very tip of the roof, her posture was elegant.

As her robes fluttered around, she almost looked as if she had come from beyond the secular world. There wasn't even a hint of worldliness about her, and just a single glance toward her could make one feel apologetic.

Her sparkling jade complexion didn't carry the slightest blemish, but her expression was a bit too cold. She gave off a natural feeling of pressure.

"Who is that woman?" Zu An was baffled. Judging from her aura, she seemed to be a grandmaster!

Jian Taiding was clearly moved when he saw the woman. He exclaimed "Senior sister!"

“Senior sister?” Zu An’s expression became strange. This woman was actually Jian Taiding’s senior sister? It seemed he was going to be done for today.

He had already had to go all out against a master rank and a few others at the peak of the ninth rank. If a grandmaster joined the fray, like hell he was going to keep fighting.

“Shut up! You are making a fool out of yourself!” The daoist nun-like woman released a cold snort. She clearly didn’t treat Jian Taiding with much importance. Jian Taiding lowered his head. There was a hint of resentment in his eyes, but he didn’t dare to retort in the slightest.

At the moment, Zu An felt an extremely strange sensation. The daoist nun actually gave him an extremely familiar feeling. It wasn’t that she looked familiar, but rather that the aura coming out of her made him feel a mysterious sense of familiarity and intimacy. He thought, What is wrong with me? Why am I getting this kind of feeling right now?

Jian Taiding spoke up again. “Senior sister, this person stole confidential intelligence from us. I must trouble senior sister to help me get rid of him.”

The exceptionally beautiful daoist nun said indifferently, “You are a powerful master rank cultivator, and yet you were almost killed by someone of a lower cultivation rank. Now, you are even asking for my help. Do you have no shame?”

Jian Taiding’s face heated up. He quickly said, “I know that I have brought shame to our sect, but this matter is too important. If news gets out, the sect will also suffer irreparable damage. I hope senior sister can consider the greater situation.”

Zu An was alarmed. Don’t tell me Jian Taiding has another huge power backing him up?

The beautiful nun remained silent for a moment. Then, she turned to look at Zu An, saying, “Youngster, I will only use one move. Whether you live or die will depend on the will of heaven.”

Zu An felt a powerful aura locking down on him when she said that. All of his fine hairs immediately stood on end.

What kind of a concept was that of a grandmaster rank cultivator? Even though she had said she would only use a single move, the move would definitely possess devastating power!

But even so, he didn’t feel any fear. He raised his hand in front of him and exclaimed with a loud laugh, “My fate is my own, and does not belong to the heavens. Old nun, it’s still far too early for you to kill me.”

No matter how powerful the other party was, they were still just a grandmaster. He had even stood his ground against an earth immortal in the past, and he had even met people who were on par with the emperor, if not even stronger. There was no way he would be that scared of a grandmaster.

Furthermore, he had said that deliberately to anger his opponent and check her background.

Sure enough, even the most aloof and otherworldly woman would be triggered by the title ‘old nun’.

“What an arrogant brat! All dao originates from nothingness and the natural; who in this world can claim that fate belongs to themselves and not the heavens? Absolutely preposterous!”

You have successfully trolled Yan Xuehen for +122 +122 +122...

Zu An frowned. Yan Xuehen? He had never heard of that name before. He had to ask Xiao Jianren about that name later. That guy was always around the Embroidered Envoy database and should know something about it.

Seeing that the daoist nun was about to attack, Qiu Honglei quickly spread her arms and stood in front of Zu An. She exclaimed, "Sect Master Yan, you are a senior with virtue and prestige. How can you attack a junior?!"

Chapter 1048: Heavens, Please Stop Messing With Me Already!

Zu An was stunned. He asked, "You know who she is?"

Qiu Honglei replied. "She's the sect master of White Jade Sect, a senior among the martial arts circles, a legendary figure. Why would she attack juniors like us?" She intentionally raised her voice somewhat, almost as if she wanted all those present to hear it.

Zu An was stupefied. The White Jade Sect? Then isn't she Chuyan's sect master?

No wonder he had felt a bit strange when he fought against Jian Taiding before, and that mysteriously familiar aura had been coming from that daoist nun. It was because it was similar to Chu Chuyan's aura! No wonder he had subconsciously felt a sense of intimacy.

He had long since been wondering when the next time he could meet Chu Chuyan again would be. He had wanted to leave her sect master and seniors with a good impression the next time he met them.

And yet, their first meeting had actually been in such a situation? Not only were they going to fight against each other, but he had even cursed her as an old nun? I really hope she isn't Chuyan's master. That way, there would at least still be hope.

The beautiful daoist nun calmly said, "Qiu Honglei? It is true that you are my junior, but this person has just won against my junior brother. His aura is exceptional. How can he possibly be my junior?"

"Why can't he be?" Qiu Honglei panicked. She quickly grabbed Zu An's arm, exclaiming, "His age is around the same as mine, and he's my lover! Of course he's your junior!"

"Um..." When Zu An felt the warm feeling coming from his arm, even though it was normally something he found extremely comfortable, he felt really awkward doing so in front of his wife's senior.

Thank goodness I'm wearing a mask so no one can recognize me... he thought silently to himself.

"Oh?" The daoist nun named Yan Xuehen looked surprised. She gave Zu An another look and said, "There was actually someone so outstanding in this world?"

If he was around the same age as Qiu Honglei, wouldn't that make him around twenty years old? And yet, he had been able to beat up a master rank cultivator like a dog at the age of twenty? The disciple she was most proud of was already extremely formidable, but compared to him, she was still far off!

But she quickly noticed something suspicious. She gave Qiu Honglei a look and asked, "Are you not going to cultivate your Heavenly Devil's Temptation anymore?"

Qiu Honglei blushed and said, "Of course I am."

"Then how can you still be in a romantic relationship with a man?" Yan Xuehen seemed to be somewhat upset. "Next year is supposed to be when the deciding match between you and Chuyan will be held. I do not wish for Chuyan to win against a cripple."

An explosion went off in Zu An's head. This woman was Chuyan's master after all! Like hell fate was his own to control; at that moment he was begging the heavens to stop messing with him.

Qiu Honglei grabbed Zu An's arm and said, "The master allowed me to leave to experience the ways of the world, then forget about my feelings. Only then can I reach the highest level of Heavenly Devil Temptation. If I didn't even experience the romance of the secular world, and yet claimed to be completely indifferent, wouldn't I be way too bold?"

Yan Xuehen's brow furrowed slightly. This girl isn't trying to lecture me, is she?

"The Devil Sect's way of doing things is strange after all." She harrumphed. "Step aside; this is between him and me. Out of respect for your master, I will spare you your life."

"No!" Qiu Honglei was like a hen protecting her chicks, standing right in front of Zu An. "If you hurt him, you'll regret it!"

This was a grandmaster they were facing! If they really fought, how could Ah Zu possibly stop her?

"I will regret it?" Yan Xuehen laughed. She clearly didn't understand why she would feel any regret. But she wasn't the type to get too worked up. She didn't bother arguing.

"He is Chu... mmm..." Qiu Honglei panicked. She couldn't be bothered with the repercussions. She was just about to tell the other party about Zu An's relationship with Chu Chuyan. As the other party's master, this is like a half son-in-law of yours, so you probably won't attack then, right?

But surprisingly, Zu An covered her mouth and stopped her from saying what she wanted to. He said, "Don't worry, I can handle it."

Are you kidding me? Won't I be finished for good if this nun knows about my relationship with Chuyan?

Not only did I call her an old nun, I'm even all lovey-dovey with another girl! Won't this grandmaster get so mad that she just rips me to shreds? Her actions would even be justifiable!

Qiu Honglei blinked. She really couldn't understand how Zu An was going to face a grandmaster. But since that was what Zu An had said, she chose to trust him.

Zu An coughed lightly. He raised his head to look at the nun, saying, "Senior, I feel the condition you offered for me to take a single hit is unfair."

"Are you scared?" Yan Xuehen had a mocking sneer as she remarked, "Were you not acting pretty confident just a moment ago?"

"I'm confident, but not stupid," Zu An said calmly. "Senior is a grandmaster, and furthermore a well-known figure in the martial world. You're facing a junior like me, and yet you're acting first. Isn't this a bit inappropriate?"

Yan Xuehen remained silent for a moment. To be honest, if it weren't for Jian Taiding's request, she wouldn't have been willing to interfere with this matter at all. Attacking a junior was indeed inglorious.

"What do you want then?" Yan Xuehen looked at him coldly.

Even though the situation was a bit disgraceful, a grandmaster's will was steady. There was no way she would be so easily swayed by a few words. She was definitely going to see this through! Still, she could listen to what he had to say first.

Zu An then said, "I think Sect Master Yan should first take an attack from me, to see if you can receive it."

"Receive a move from you?" Yan Xuehen had a strange expression. It was almost as if she had heard some bad joke.

"What's wrong? Could it be that Sect Master Yan is scared?" Zu An carefully examined the other party. He had to admit that the woman was indeed pretty. But why did a cultivator need to be so pretty anyway?

"There is no need for you to provoke me." Yan Xuehen blinked gently and said, "Fine, this one can take an attack from you if that will convince you."

Zu An was a bit hesitant and said, "But this attack of mine takes a bit of time; if you attack me during the process..."

"Hmph, you have no need to worry about that. If I say I will take an attack from you, I will. I will not interrupt you before then." Yan Xuehen had her own pride. She obviously wouldn't attack beforehand.

Jian Taiding, who was off to the side, began panicking. He exclaimed, "Senior sister, this brat is incredibly cunning! Don't fall for his tricks!"

Yan Xuehen gave him an indifferent look and asked, "Are you saying that I cannot receive a move from him?"

Jian Taiding's breath stopped. Even though he felt that the mysterious intruder had tricks up his sleeves, no matter what he did, it wouldn't work against a grandmaster rank cultivator! His mouth opened, but he still didn't say anything else in the end.

Yan Xuehen wasn't stupid either. She obviously knew that Zu An was playing some trick. However, due to her great strength she didn't need to think about such things at all. Regardless of what the other party did, she would just cut right through it with her sword.

She turned around and looked at Zu An, saying, "Make your move."

Zu An raised his sword, but then after performing two slashes, he suddenly stopped. He asked, "But what if sect master cannot handle this attack, then comes after me out of anger?"

This is a grandmaster we're talking about! Things will become really troublesome if she becomes dead set on coming after me...

Yan Xuehen was speechless.

The others all had strange expressions on their faces. They had all been waiting to see what would happen already, and yet this brat kept stopping here and there, just refusing to do it. It really was annoying. Even Qiu Honglei felt that Zu An was playing with fire, let alone the others.

“Are you stalling for time?” Yan Xuehen’s expression grew cold.

“I’m not. But I have to be prepared just in case, right? I don’t want to win against the sect master, but then have you come after me when this is over,” Zu An said with a bashful smile.

Yan Xuehen harrumphed. This junior really overestimates his abilities. He actually vainly wishes to win against me?

“Do not worry; I am not the type who cannot take a loss. If I really lose, I definitely will not cause trouble for you.” She suddenly felt something wasn’t right after she said that, so she added. “However, you cannot continue to stall for time like this. You cannot use any despicable methods either.”

Even though she didn’t think the other party could win against her even if he used any despicable means, she still said so just in case. The brat was quite strange, and not even she felt she could see through him.

“The sect master must be joking. Your respected self is a goddess-like existence; how could I use despicable methods against you?” The other party was Chuyan’s master after all, so Zu An wasn’t too stingy with his praise.

Yan Xuehen remained expressionless, but she still approved of those words inwardly. She said, “Then just hurry and make your move.”

Zu An nodded. Suddenly, a voice transmission from Tang Tian’er reached his ears. “Young master, can you really handle this? Should I help you out and plead for mercy?”

There was a bit of worry on her face. With her knowledge and experience, she really couldn’t understand how the other party could win against a powerful grandmaster. He was going to be completely overwhelmed!

She merely treated his tactics as stalling for time. She worried that he was already at his wit’s end, which was why she couldn’t help but ask.

Zu An laughed and secretly replied, “The lady really treats me well.”

Tang Tian’er harrumphed. What kind of situation are you already in? Yet you’re still trying to take advantage of me?

Zu An put away his smile and replied, “Don’t worry, I can do it.” After saying that, he looked towards the roof where Yan Xuehen stood.

Tang Tian’er was stunned. Zu An’s confident and free smile was infectious. It almost seemed as if he weren’t facing a critical moment of life and death.

No wonder even the Saintess of the Devil Sect admires him... She gave the worried Qiu Honglei a look, then thought to herself, You better not die here.

Chapter 1049: Did I Come at a Bad Time?

Zu An took out something from inside his clothes just then. Yan Xuehen didn't think too much of it.

It was completely natural for cultivators to have their own personal magic artifacts, such as Zhuang Hetong's golden brick. By refining it for oneself and engraving special runes, those magic artifacts would be able to display great strength.

But Zu An wasn't even at the master rank. Just then, both he and Jian Taiding had suffered from their battle. What could he possibly do even if he had a magic weapon?

Just then, Zu An took out the yellow scroll. His expression grew solemn, and he chanted in a clear voice, "I make a dedication to the heavens, accepting its mandate. The emperor's imperial order states..."

As his voice rang out, clouds began to gather in the skies above. A mysterious pressure began to vaguely gather.

Yan Xuehen, Jian Taiding, Qiu Honglei, and Tang Tian'er were stunned. The others present were speechless.

There were quite a few of them who were experienced and knowledgeable. They obviously knew what an imperial decree was and just how terrifying its power was!

When she felt the pressure grow stronger and stronger around her, Yan Xuehen subconsciously thought of stopping Zu An's incantation. However, she quickly remembered her promise to him just a moment before that she wouldn't stop him. She finally knew why he had brought up so many conditions with her!

If it had been anyone else, they might have immediately attacked, but she had always been someone who cared a lot about her identity and status. How could she do something as shameful as going back on her word?

But she didn't have confidence in just standing there and taking on the emperor's full-powered attack either. As such, she kicked off, then quickly flew into the distance.

Meanwhile, Jian Taiding and Yu Xuanta, who had been half beaten to death, were swept up by an icy storm, quickly vanishing into the distance.

"Damn brat, we can say you got me today!"

You have successfully trolled Yan Xuehen for +666 +666 +666...

When he saw the other party disappear, Zu An put away the imperial decree again. He sighed inwardly in relief.

He was thankful that Yan Xuehen came from a famous and prestigious sect, and that she was someone who honored her promises too. Otherwise, with her grandmaster rank cultivation, there was no way he would have been able to use the imperial decree. The imperial decree's flaws were extremely obvious. Its power was unmatched, but the cast time was way too long.

Even so, normally speaking, there would be the Imperial Envoy and guards protecting him while he read the imperial decree. In that kind of situation, he could just read it calmly. It didn't matter much even if there was a cast time. After all, the emperor hadn't thought he would use it in this kind of solitary situation either.

Since the other party had run, there was no need for him to continue summoning the emperor's power. The thing was like a nuclear weapon; its threat was far greater than its actual use.

...

Just then, in the Imperial Palace ten thousand li away, the emperor suddenly opened his eyes. He sensed that someone had been summoning his power, but it seemed to have been canceled. His expression grew dark. He called over Eunuch Wen and ordered, "Go and investigate what exactly happened in Cloudcenter Commandery!"

During the mission in Brightmoon City, Huang Huihong's group of Embroidered Envoys hadn't been able to use the imperial decree before they were killed. If something similar happened again, what dignity would the imperial court have left?

"Understood; this servant will go and investigate right now." Eunuch Wen bowed respectfully when he sensed the other party's anger.

The emperor waved his hand. He walked over to the window and looked toward the northwest, and his face darkened.

...

Just then, in the Palace of Peace, the beautiful empress called in Eunuch Lu. She asked, "Was there some strange disturbance in the world just now?"

A hint of passion flashed through Eunuch Lu's eyes when he saw her intoxicating curves. However, it quickly disappeared. He lowered his head and replied, "Indeed; someone seemed to have summoned his majesty's power just now."

"Oh?" The empress immediately straightened up. Her chest area was so full it looked as if her clothes were going to burst at a moment's notice. She mused, "Could it be that something happened to Zu An?"

Eunuch Lu was a little jealous. He replied, "Zu An is someone crafty and quick-witted; his cultivation isn't bad either. Together with his identity as the Imperial Envoy, I don't think anything will happen to him. Furthermore, his majesty didn't do anything just now, so I don't believe the power was truly summoned over in Cloudcenter Commandery."

The empress sighed and said, "I hope that's the case."

Eunuch Lu said enviously, "Your highness seems to care a lot about that Zu An."

The empress caressed her long, gemstone-embedded fingernail covers. She harrumphed lightly and said, "I'm just worried that there won't be anyone to treat me if that fellow dies."

"This empress has spent this time cultivating, and yet even after cultivating for so long, the effects aren't even as good as a single night with him. It really is infuriating."

"That guy's constitution is a bit too strange," Eunuch Lu said. Even though he already knew about that, he still felt upset about it. However, he didn't show it on the surface and instead said considerately, "Your highness, don't worry. Once he comes back, this old servant will bring him over to treat your injuries."

"Little Lu, look at how considerate you are." The empress felt her teeth ache when she recalled what had happened the last time she sought Zu An out. "He actually used all sorts of excuses to avoid me the last few times I sought him out! Could it be that this empress isn't pretty enough, that my status isn't great enough?"

Eunuch Lu bent down and said with an apologetic smile, "Your highness is worried about too much. You're the prettiest and most noble woman in the world."

The empress harrumphed and asked, "Then tell me, why does he keep avoiding me?"

"He's probably scared that his majesty will find out," Eunuch Lu explained.

The empress thought to herself for a moment. "Then we'll find some nearby royal family property to stay in for a period of time, then call him over. That way, he can just go at it with leisure, right?"

"Your highness is wise and brilliant." Eunuch Lu felt incredibly jealous, but his breathing quickened as he added, "If your highness leaves for a few days from time to time, it won't draw any attention later even if you leave the palace."

The empress replied, "It's still you who considers the bigger picture. I'll leave these matters for you to handle then."

She indeed rarely left the palace these years. That was why she had to make some preparations ahead of time.

"Understood. This servant will definitely take care of this matter." Eunuch Lu slowly withdrew after a bow.

...

Inside the Eastern Palace, Bi Linglong stood by her window, staring into the horizon in a daze.

Her maid Rong Mo quickly brought over a woven wool cloak to cover her, exclaiming, "Crown princess, it is so cold outside. Be careful, or else you might catch a cold!"

Bi Linglong subconsciously asked, "Isn't it even colder right now over in Cloudcenter Commandery?"

Rong Mo's expression was strange. She asked, "Is the crown princess worried about Sir Zu?"

Bi Linglong was surprised; only then did she realize that she had spoken out of place. However, she reacted quickly. Her expression quickly returned to normal as she said, "Sir Zu represents our Eastern Palace, after all. It would be unfavorable for the crown prince if he failed his mission."

Rong Mo felt relieved when she heard that. She said, "Crown princess, you don't need to worry too much. Sir Zu's cultivation is high, and he also has the Imperial Envoy with him. How could anything happen to him?"

"But I just sensed that something was happening in the sky... Someone was using the imperial decree to summon his majesty's power, but it didn't end up going through." Bi Linglong looked a bit worried and added, "I wonder if they gave up on using it or if the enemy interrupted its usage."

"The crown princess worries too much. Cloudcenter Commandery is part of the court's domain; who dares to do anything to the Imperial Envoy?" Rong Mo replied in consolation.

"I hope that's the case." Bi Linglong turned around and returned to her bed. She added, "Right, gather some information from the Embroidered Envoy and Imperial Secretariat tomorrow. See if there are any new developments from Cloudcenter Commandery."

"Understood. Crown princess, please get some rest." Rong Mo helped Bi Linglong pull up her covers. After she withdrew, she thought to herself, Why do I suddenly feel like the crown princess is bigger than before? I'll have to find a chance to ask her about that later. I want to make some progress too!

...

Meanwhile, Bi Linglong was tossing and turning in bed, unable to fall asleep. Zu An, that idiot. He didn't even send a single letter back after so long!

Even though their status was sensitive, at least he could write a letter to the crown prince, right? He really is a dummy!

...

"Achoo!"

Just then, at the Zhenyuan Merchant Group compound, Zu An sneezed.

"Ah Zu, what's wrong?" Qiu Honglei quickly rushed over to support him.

"I'm fine. Maybe someone is thinking about me," Zu An said with a chuckle.

Qiu Honglei had a worried expression as she looked at his blood-soaked clothes. She replied, "Your injuries are so serious; how can you be fine?" She took out some medicine and helped him take it.

"Thank you." Zu An couldn't help but grab her hand. There was no way he would forget about how she had stood in front of him earlier with her life on the line.

"Why do we still need to say things like that between us?" Qiu Honglei smiled. Then, she carefully helped him bandage up his wounds. Even though she knew his body was special, when she saw that his stab wounds were already about to close, she still jumped in fright.

"Ahem!" Someone coughed lightly nearby.

Qiu Honglei's entire body trembled. She quickly turned around and exclaimed, "Master!"

Zu An was alarmed. He followed the source of the sound and saw a beautiful woman with hair that reached all the way down to her waist standing on a treetop. It was already deep into winter, so the trees were completely bare. The branch she stood on was incredibly thin, to the extent that it would sway back and forth if even a bird were to rest on it. However, as she stood there, the branch didn't tremble in the slightest.

With the moon hanging from the sky as an elegant background, she really looked as if she had arrived from the moon.

“Did I come at a bad time, disturbing your lovey-dovey time?” Even though Yun Jianyue was smiling, there was a dangerous look in her eyes.

“Not at all...” Qiu Honglei jumped in fright. She quickly jumped away from Zu An and said, “I just happened to run into Ah Zu.”

Yun Jianyue harrumphed. Then, her gaze landed on Zu An and she said, “You know the method she cultivates, that she cannot let her emotions cloud her judgment. Why do you still insist on being around her?”

“Um...” For some reason, now that he was facing Yun Jianyue, Zu An didn’t feel as scared as when he had faced Yan Xuehen. He said, “We only carry feelings for each other and know where to draw the line; we aren’t really tangled around each other.”

Yun Jianyue knew that he was a mischievous person and didn’t bother arguing with him about that. She looked into the distance and said, “I seem to have sensed Yan Xuehen’s aura. Where did she go?”

Chapter 1050: Came at the Perfect Time

“Sect Master Yan left,” Zu An replied.

“She left?” Yun Jianyue was a bit dissatisfied. “Could it be that she knew I was coming? Is that why she ran so quickly?”

Qiu Honglei said, “Ah Zu took out the imperial decree just now and scared her away.”

Yun Jianyue harrumphed. “Hmph, just a trifling imperial decree was enough to scare that hag away? Just the incantation time alone would be enough for her to kill you dozens of times over.”

Zu An chuckled in embarrassment. What she said was indeed the case. If a grandmaster really did insist on attacking him, he wouldn’t have the time to finish the chant at all.

Qiu Honglei explained, “That was because Ah Zu was incredibly smart, making Sect Master Yan promise that she couldn’t interfere ahead of time...” She gave her master a rough recount of what had happened.

Yun Jianyue didn’t approve of what she heard, saying, “Great warriors need to be crafty as well. Only a wooden plank for a brain like her would agree to something so unreasonable.”

Qiu Honglei had a strange expression as she said, “Fortunately, Ah Zu was able to scare off Sect Master Yan. Otherwise, master is still injured, so you might not be able to win against her.”

Yun Jianyue was speechless. She exclaimed, “Stupid girl, do you have no loyalty toward your master at all?!”

Qiu Honglei shrunk backward and muttered, “I wasn’t being serious...”

Yun Jianyue grabbed her collar, then flew into the distance as if she were carrying a small chick. She said, “Follow me back and cultivate well so you don’t get beaten up by that woman’s disciple next year.”

Zu An was stunned. He quickly shouted, “Big Sis Yun, are you really going to just take her away like that? What about me?”

Yun Jianyue harrumphed. “Who’s your big sis? I’m going to let you go today because of Honglei. I’m going to break your third leg if I see you hanging around her again in the future.” Her voice lingered in the air, but she had already vanished without a trace.

Zu An was speechless. This woman really was fickle! That wasn’t how she had treated him when they were back in the Imperial Palace at all.

...

Off to the side, Tang Tian’er was speechless. His relationship with the Devil Sect Master is that good? He can even chat with her like that?

Who was Yun Jianyue? She was a cold-blooded monster, infamous throughout the mountains and rivers! If she saw anyone she didn’t find pleasant, she might just erase them from this world.

Yet she actually said she’d break Zu An’s third leg...

Why does this sound like a joke between friends?

Just then, Zu An’s figure rocked unsteadily. Even though his body was tough, his injuries weren’t light. He was feeling quite weak at the moment too. Once Yun Jianyue left, he finally found it a bit hard to keep up his tough facade.

“Young master, what’s wrong?” Tang Tian’er asked as she ran over to support him.

“I’m fine. I just need a moment to catch my breath.” Zu An nodded toward her. At the same time, he looked behind her. He didn’t see Zhuang Hetong there anymore.

Tang Tian’er also realized something. She pleaded weakly, “Young master, can you let my uncle go as a favor to me?”

Zu An had to admit that this woman really was naturally gifted in communication. She had clearly already hidden Zhuang Hetong beforehand, so he wouldn’t be able to find him even if he wanted to. Furthermore, he was in the Zhenyuan Merchant Group compound. If there really were any more fighting, it was hard to say who would come out on top.

And yet, even in that situation, Tang Tian’er still looked at him with that pleading look, giving him face. She really could hold the hearts of men within her palm.

Zu An chuckled and replied, “Miss Tang is too polite. You even saved me once earlier, so how can I not do you this favor?”

Suddenly, a burst of densely packed footsteps rang out. Xu Yu and Gao Ying had rushed over with the commandery’s troops when they heard the activity.

Tang Tian’er quickly said, “Young master, it’s not convenient for me to show myself with my identity. I’ll be leaving first.” She then quickly sprinted away.

But after a few steps, she stopped and said with a voice as soft as a mosquito's buzz, "Just now in that room... If it had been anyone else, there's no way I would have saved them." With reddened ears, she quickly ran away after saying that.

Zu An couldn't help but laugh. This woman really was good at pushing her advantages. It was hard for others to tell if her words were real or fake, and yet no one would ever get upset at her over it.

Xu Yu and the others quickly arrived with their troops. Xu Yu asked, "What happened here? A large flame shot into the heavens just now, and there seemed to be powerful cultivators fighting as well."

Their expressions couldn't help but change when they saw the scene that seemed as if it had just experienced a crazy storm. Eventually, their eyes fell onto Zu An.

Zu An removed his mask and said, "Sir Xu, Brother Gao, it's me."

"Sir Zu?"

"Brother Zu!"

Xu Yu and Gao Ying immediately walked over to support him to his feet.

"Brother Zu, how did you end up like this?" Gao Ying asked. Zu An opened his mouth to speak, but in the end, his head tilted to the side, and he fainted in Gao Ying's arms.

Naturally, he hadn't really fainted. He just didn't want those from Cloudcenter Commandery to know the true state of his wounds.

After all, he had just fought against a master rank cultivator and several ninth ranked experts. Not only had he seized total victory, he had even scared off a grandmaster! If he weren't injured in the slightest after all of that, that would be way too shocking. Furthermore, he had another plan that was just starting to take form. He needed those 'injuries' to help him cover it up.

"Brother Zu!" Gao Ying obviously didn't know about all of that. He was alarmed when he saw Zu An's condition and quickly fed him some medicine. At the same time, he had some men call over a physician.

Xu Yu sealed off the area, then he detained some Zhenyuan Merchant Group members for interrogation.

However, the battle just then was so intense that those from the merchant group had stayed far away to avoid the blast waves. The experts who were aware of what was actually going on had already left in advance under Tang Tian'er's guidance. That was why even after their questioning, the troops were only able to gain a rough idea of what had happened.

When he heard that Zu An had fought against a few master rank experts, Xu Yu couldn't help but become alarmed. Even though Zu An's injuries were extremely severe, such battle accomplishments were world-shocking!

...

Two hours later, Zu An was brought back to the Imperial Envoy's temporary residence. Compared to the doctors of the Civil Affairs Manor, Gao Ying trusted the ones at the temporary residence more.

When he learned of Zu An's critical condition, Sang Hong rushed over in alarm. He was nowhere near as calm as he normally seemed.

Zu An felt warm inside when he saw that. Looks like ever since that night, he really did start treating me as one of his own.

When everyone else left, Zu An pretended to have become a bit more clear-headed. Sang Hong, Pei You, and the others quickly rushed over to check up on him, asking, "How do you feel?"

"I won't die. However, I might have to rest for a while," Zu An said 'weakly'.

Sang Hong could no longer suppress his curiosity and urgently asked, "Just what happened? Why did it all end up like this?"

Zu An thus gave them a rough summary of what had just happened in the Zhenyuan Merchant Group area.

"Absolutely preposterous! Zuo Su was colluding with Jian Taiding after all. Not even death can wipe away their crimes!" Sang Hong was enraged. After all, Zuo Su was supposed to be someone from their own side, a capable helper who would assist in bringing down Jian Taiding. But now, they had discovered that all of Cloudcenter Commandery's officials had long since colluded together!

"Jian Taiding is seriously injured right now. Is there a way to arrest him right now?" Zu An asked. He added regretfully, "It's a pity that he got away just now."

Pei You said from off to the side, "Brother Zu, you're just too crazy! You defeated a freaking master rank cultivator, and yet you're not bragging about it, but are instead sad that you weren't able to capture him?"

"It was just through a fluke," Zu An said humbly. He didn't want to reveal too much of his strength.

"Even if it was just a fluke, that would be shocking in itself." Sang Hong gave him a complicated look. I was still a bit hesitant over tacitly approving of his relationship with my daughter and daughter-in-law. Now, it seems it was definitely worth it.

My grandson is going to have a man like this as his father! How blessed of a thing is that?

Sang Hong quickly gathered his thoughts and continued, "Ah Zu, there is no need for you to blame yourself too much. Even if you captured Jian Taiding just now, we would have no way of convicting him. On the contrary, his trusted aides back in the Military Affairs Manor might take a risk out of desperation instead and make things even more unfavorable."

"What do you mean?" Zu An frowned.

Sang Hong explained, "We do not have any proof right now. The matter of colluding with the fiend races only mentioned Zuo Su. Jian Taiding's name was not there.

"Furthermore, the fact that they were the ones who killed Zuo Su is something only you alone heard in person. There is nothing we could do if they refused to admit it.

“That is, unless you can capture that fiend race master and all of the others together in one go. But with that fiend race master rank individual there, it would be too dangerous for you.”

Zu An agreed with all of that. The reason why he had been able to seriously wound Jian Taiding was also because the other party hadn't expected his body to be so sturdy, nor had he expected that Zu An would choose to trade blow for blow.

If that fiend race cultivator had been there as well, Zu An might have been the one who died. After all, the fiend race cultivator wasn't someone who cared much about virtue like Yan Xuehen. He would just completely overwhelm Zu An.

When he thought of that, Zu An couldn't help but say, “The White Jade Sect seems to be involved here too. With a grandmaster here, I fear this matter is beyond our power.”

Sang Hong shook his head. “In my opinion, White Jade Sect is a top-level sect in the martial world; they have always considered themselves upright. It is unlikely for them to have participated in this collusion with the fiend races. The reason why she interfered was most likely because Jian Taiding was one of their sect members.”

Pei You couldn't help but say, “In that case, can we ask Sect Master Yan to clean up the actions of her own sect members?”

Sang Hong looked at him as if he were stupid. He replied, “How could it be that easy? The court has acted powerfully over the years, taking in most cultivators to use as national power. This has incurred the dissatisfaction of many sects. The smaller sects' eradication is one thing, but a large sect like White Jade Sect decided to seal off their mountain. They have already been dissatisfied with the court for a long time; why would they help us with anything, let alone to deal with one of their own members?

“Furthermore, if I am not mistaken, Jian Taiding must have offered up much wealth and many gifts to the sect. They will definitely keep him alive if it is within their power.”

“Then what do we do now?” Zu An was getting a bit of a headache.

Sang Hong replied seriously, “Have the Civil Affairs Manor order the arrest of the fiend race master Kong Qing immediately. Whether it is the Civil or Martial Affairs Manor, neither of them should have any reason to oppose that. Pei You, you are to lead your men to find the Yu clan's Yu Xuantao. Hmph, we cannot do anything to Jian Taiding, but do you think we cannot do anything to Yu Xuantao?!”

“Understood!” Pei You left excitedly. He thought to himself, This time, I should be able to finally meet the legendary Yu Yanluo, right?

Zu An wasn't so optimistic. He said, “Kong Qing is a powerful master rank cultivator. What will ordering his arrest do for us?”

“It is merely a stance to test the waters.” Sang Hong continued, “Furthermore, I will contact the court with the recording mirror tomorrow morning and ask for reinforcements.”

They had naturally brought recording mirrors on a mission as important as this. It was just that each use would consume a lot of materials, so they wouldn't use them unless they had to. It was already such an essential time.

“You should take care of yourself first. You do not have to worry about anything else.” Sang Hong left in a serious mood after speaking.

Zu An lay in his room, secretly transferring his primordial ki to mend his wounds. Even though his injuries weren’t as serious as they looked, they definitely weren’t light.

However, he suddenly noticed something and opened his eyes. He saw a white-clothed woman standing quietly by the window, looking at him. Who else could it be but Yan Xuehen?!